

Why scripture scholars and theological ethicists need one another: Exegeting and interpreting the Beatitudes as a scripted script for ethical living

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WHY SCRIPTURE SCHOLARS AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICISTS NEED ONE
ANOTHER:
EXEGETING AND INTERPRETING THE BEATITUDES AS A SCRIPTED SCRIPT
FOR ETHICAL LIVING

a dissertation

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WHY SCRIPTURE SCHOLARS AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICISTS NEED ONE
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AS A SCRIPTED SCRIPT FOR ETHICAL LIVING

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For a variety of reasons, in the field of biblical ethics, Scripture scholars do not use much ethical theory, while theological ethicists do little actual exegesis. Even those recent attempts to bridge better Scripture with Christian ethics have either stressed the importance of the scriptural text or the importance of ethical hermeneutics.

Throughout this entire work I advocate for a more integrated approach for a Scripture-based Christian theological ethics. In so doing I first propose using Allen Verhey's distinction of Scripture as 'scripted' and 'script': The former refers to exegesis and the latter to admonitions for ethical living. A more integrated approach will therefore treat Scripture as both 'scripted' *and* 'script', taking exegesis seriously and interpreting the text by using a sound hermeneutical framework. Subsequently, we can both acquire a more accurate understanding of the original meaning of the text and obtain a more complete and consistent interpretation of the text for today.

From the perspective of Christian ethics, I further suggest virtue ethics as a worthy hermeneutical tool in treating Scripture as 'script'. Virtue ethics complements principle-based ethical theories by emphasizing practices and the importance of

exemplary models. It also attends to the character formation and identity of both individuals and the moral community. Moreover, as I argue, there exists an explicit link between Scripture and virtue. Both the biblical link and the uniqueness of virtue ethics make it suitable as the hermeneutical tool for doing Scripture-based Christian ethics.

In order to demonstrate concretely how the methodological shift into a more integrated scriptural ethics as such leads to actual benefits and improvements, I offer a three-step illustration. I begin with treating the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 as first ‘scripted’; that is, I exegete the text. Then I look at the text as ‘script’ through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics. I identify a new set of core virtues (and corresponding practices) not just for personal formation but also for the formation of the community and the larger society.

Third, I then bring the fruits of this treatment forward by exploring the possible reception of the Beatitudes and its core virtues by the Confucian tradition.

Methodologically speaking, Confucianism goes to its own texts in its search of ethical teachings; and Confucian ethics is primarily the fruit of careful interpretation of their ‘sacred’ texts. In other words, it is both text-based and interpretative, and shares a common methodological approach with the Scripture-based Christian ethics proposed here. Subsequently, we find significant parallel virtues in Confucian texts although dissimilarities (such as worldview) exist between the two traditions.

As a whole, the proposed methodological shift into a Scripture-based Christian ethics produces a more accurate, complete and consistent interpretation of the biblical

text for our contemporary audience and makes Christian ethics more explicable to Confucian society and more supportive of cross-cultural dialogue with Confucian ethics.

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Introduction

Traditionally, the use of Scripture¹ as the sole authority for Christian ethics has been one of the fundamental differences between Protestant and Catholic scholars. Luke Timothy Johnson, for example, from a historical point of view, notes that “the Nicene Creed (325 CE) has no statement about Scripture...in contrast, virtually every profession of faith from the Reformation contained extensive statements on the authority of Scripture over human tradition.”² Charles Curran also comments that since the time of Patristic period the Fathers of the Church had always insisted that Scripture is not the only source of Christian ethical wisdom and knowledge.³ Curran further points out that between the Councils of Trent and of Vatican II Catholic moral theology was separated from dogmatic and spiritual theology, human reason was the primary source of moral wisdom, and Scripture was often used by manualists in an uncritical way primarily as proof texts.⁴ These manualists perceived the goal of training priests as simply “judges in the sacrament of penance, with an accompanying minimalistic and legalistic approach concerned primarily with sinfulness of particular acts.”⁵ They usually began their argument “from the magisterial teaching then in place, and worked backward to illustrate

¹ In this work, the term ‘Scripture’ is used interchangeably with ‘Bible’ and is referred to those writings that the Church has declared to be her canon.

² Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 62.

³ Charles E. Curran, “The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology,” in *Readings in Moral Theology No.4. The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 179.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 180; Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 49.

⁵ Curran, “The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology,” 180.

how [a] particular doctrine was originally expressed in Scripture and then how [it] was subsequently developed.”⁶ Scripture was thus used “primarily as a source for proof-texts...and simply marshaled to ‘confirm’ or embellish an argument or moral judgment.”⁷ A concrete example is Gerald Kelly’s use of the story of Onan in his 1950s book *Medico-Morals*. As Richard Gula comments, “Only after these forms of arguments [i.e., natural law and papal teaching] have been used does he then turn uncritically to the evidence of scripture in Onan’s story of Genesis 38:8-10 to give biblical warrants for prohibition.”⁸

During the 17th and 18th centuries, as noted by Curran, there was a call for a more biblical approach to moral theology although “the attempts along this line failed because they were entwined in the polemic of the rigorists and probabiliorists against the laxists and probabilists.”⁹ And since the middle of the twentieth century, it is observed that Catholic theologians began to ‘catch up’.¹⁰ Writing in 1953, Philippe Delhaye, for example, called for a “more positive science of moral based on Scripture and Tradition.”¹¹ Around the same time, famous Roman Catholic manualist, Bernard Häring, as Curran recalls, also proposed a more biblically centered approach in his groundbreaking work on moral theology, *The Law of Christ*.¹²

Nevertheless, the impact of the Second Vatican Council on integrating Scripture and moral theology needs to be recognized. In fact, in light of this Council, many

⁶ James T. Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World. Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 19.

⁷ Ibid..

⁸ Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 116.

⁹ Curran, “The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology,” 180.

¹⁰ Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World*, 90.

¹¹ John C. Ford and Gerald Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology*, vol. 1, Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1964), 47-48.

¹² Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis*, 49.

Catholic moral theologians quoted the following statement to demonstrate the Magisterium's effort to emphasize the biblical-theological foundations of Catholic moral theology:¹³

Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture...¹⁴ (*Optatam Totius* 16)

The late Catholic ethicist William Spohn thus comments that the Vatican statement was welcomed by both Scripture scholars and theological ethicists within Catholic circles and, as a result, a Scripture-based Christian ethics began to develop among these theologians with a growing view that "exegesis has an ethical direction that needs to be acknowledged..."¹⁵

And over forty years after the publication of this document, the Pontifical Biblical Commission publishes a new document entitled *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct*.¹⁶ Rooted in the spirit of Vatican II, it aims at situating Christian morality in the larger context of biblical morality and of anthropology; and showing that the Bible does provide some methodological criteria for moral progress.¹⁷ In other words, the Commission is concerned with a Scripture-based morality, and stresses that methodological criteria are necessary in order to allow us to refer to Scripture in moral

¹³ Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics. Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2002), xiii.

¹⁴ Vatican II, *Optatam Totius*, October 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html (accessed April 16, 2009).

¹⁵ William C. Spohn, "Scripture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, eds. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93.

¹⁶ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

issues.¹⁸ Two subsequent fundamental criteria for judging moral actions are thus proposed, namely, the conformity with the biblical concept of human beings and conformity with the example of Jesus. The Decalogue (Exodus 20: 2-17) and the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew (5:1-12) are chosen to illustrate these two criteria, based on the conviction that they are the characteristic expressions of biblical morality found in the Old and New Testaments respectively, and the latter radicalizes the values promoted by the former.¹⁹

Still, the two branches, Scripture and moral theology, as Daniel Harrington rightly observes, continue to operate separately without much cooperation, and that the integration of Scripture and theological ethics is far from satisfactory: Moral theologians do not read much what biblical scholars write while few biblical scholars have interest in conversing with moral theologians.²⁰ Thomas Ogletree of Yale University, however, perceives the gap as “not an indication of a lack of interest in substantive exchanges between the two specialties” but rather as “a function of a growing complexity in the two fields” in terms of materials treated and methodologies devised.²¹ Ogletree explains that it is difficult enough for a Christian ethics specialist to be lively connected with theological foundations of ethics, “let alone to assess the respective merits of tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and literary criticism in the study of biblical texts.”²² Robert Daly and others further comment that “not all Christians who are doing ethics are

¹⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹⁹ Ibid., 132, 138.

²⁰ Harrington and Keenan, 13.

²¹ Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics: A Constructive Essay* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), xi.

²² Ibid..

even attempting, let alone succeeding, to integrate the Bible into their work;” hence they conclude that Christian biblical ethicists are those “who are at home not just in biblical studies but in practically all the other theological sciences as well.”²³

Such growing complexity in the two fields points to the concrete issues of training and communication that lead to the limited influence of Scripture on moral theology.

With regards to training in each other’s field, James Gustafson rightly observes, “Those who are specialists in ethics generally lack the intensive and proper training in biblical studies, and those who are specialists in biblical studies often lack sophistication in ethical thought.”²⁴ Regarding the lack of communication Canadian Jesuit Edouard Hamel points out that both Christian ethicists and Scripture scholars are responsible: On the one hand, moralists (and the magisterium) were preoccupied with natural law; on the other hand, biblical scholars “had not as yet demonstrated to the moralists the possibilities for using Scripture in moral theology.”²⁵ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, for instance, recalls the frustration of the late Richard McCormick, S.J., one of the moral theologians who have enthusiastically embraced the Vatican’s call for a more scripturally informed moral theology: “I try to keep in dialogue with Scripture scholars....However, I’ve found some Scripture scholars frustrating...They’re not telling us everything they know!”²⁶ Another concrete example is cited by biblical scholar PHEME PERKINS who recalls that her

²³ Robert J. Daly, James A. Fisher, Terence J. Keegan, and Anthony J. Tambasco, *Christian Biblical Ethics: From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 114.

²⁴ James M. Gustafson, “The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study” *Interpretation*, 24, no. 4 (October 1970): 430.

²⁵ Edouard Hamel, “Scripture, the Soul of Moral Theology?” in Curran and McCormick, *Readings in Moral Theology*, 120-21.

²⁶ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 159-60.

colleague at Boston College, ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill, upon knowing her new project, has persistently asked her to “make all this New Testament exegesis available for the reflection of the Christian ethicist.”²⁷ Perkins thus admits that “exegetes all need to be blasted out of the ‘biblical world’ occasionally!”²⁸

McCormick’s frustration, as Odozor understands, apart from the possible reluctance of biblical scholars to move from their biblical world, is due to the disagreements about “the authorization for moving from Scripture to moral norms.”²⁹ In other words, “there is no general agreement about exactly how the Bible should be used in a systematic moral theology.”³⁰

Another related issue, as identified by Daly and others, is the problem of language in interdisciplinary exercise. By using the discussion of the normativity of the Bible and the subsequent use of terms like norms and *parenesis* as an example, they point out that “exegetes and ethicists neither speak the same language nor operate in the same conceptual world. More often than not, exegetes and ethicists simply talk past each other.”³¹

Despite full awareness of these concrete difficulties and the gap between the two fields, Ogletree insists that fruitful connections between the two fields need to be developed, for such development can only enrich and deepen both.³² He rightly says,

²⁷ PHEME PERKINS, *Love Commands in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), *A Note to the Reader*.

²⁸ Ibid..

²⁹ ODOZOR, *Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal*, 160.

³⁰ CHARLES E. CURRAN, and RICHARD A. MCCORMICK, eds., *Readings in Moral Theology No.4. The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), vii.

³¹ DALY, JAMES A. FISHER, TERENCE J. KEEGAN, and ANTHONY J. TAMBASCO, 74.

³² OGLETREE, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics: A Constructive Essay*, xii-xiii.

“Biblical studies cannot retain their pertinence if they are unable to inform contemporary questions about the good life...Christian ethics soon loses its distinctive power if it cuts itself off from its biblical foundations.”³³ In concrete terms, Ogletree notes that, for example, form and tradition-historical criticisms of the biblical scholarship “permit us to thematize and bring explicitly into view” the social, economic, and political foundations of our worldly experience, and hence help appropriate biblical understandings into Christian ethics.³⁴

Perkins, from the viewpoint of biblical scholarship, likewise comments that both exegetes and ethicists are needed “since one must not only have an appropriate image of the first century but also an image of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.”³⁵ Catholic biblical scholar Sandra Schneiders, though not addressing ethicists in particular, takes a step further to call for greater responsibilities on the part of biblical scholars to attend to the contemporary meaning of the text, and invites theologians to “become sufficiently able in the biblical disciplines that they can enter into the process of interpretation of the biblical scholars and not just pick up the latters’ conclusions.”³⁶

These illuminating insights of the 1980s regarding the development of a genuine integration between biblical studies and moral theology are best summarized in the words of Harrington and Catholic ethicist James Keenan: “What is needed especially is cooperation at the level of interpretation or hermeneutics. Biblical scholars must try to

³³ Ibid., xii.

³⁴ Ibid., 6, 10.

³⁵ Pheme Perkins, “New Testament Ethics: Questions and Contexts,” *Religious Studies Review* 10 (October 1984): 325.

³⁶ Sandra M. Schneiders, “From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture,” *Horizons: Journal of the College Theology Society* 8 (Spring 1981): 39.

learn the language and conceptuality of moral theology, and moral theologians need to learn the language and conceptuality of biblical studies (exegesis and biblical theology). Such cooperation can help rescue biblical exegesis from falling into antiquarianism and irrelevancy, and can at the same time help to enrich and enliven moral theology precisely as a Christian theological discipline.”³⁷

Since the 1980s we began to see different attempts among scholars to better bridge Scripture with Christian ethics. Still, the progress within academics has been slow. For instance, in the past two decades, the Society of Christian Ethics and the Society of Biblical Literature published fewer than fifteen and twenty related articles and essays respectively in their journals.³⁸ Even though both societies set up unit/interest groups in the annual conference to study both the relationship between Scripture and ethics and how biblical interpretation and hermeneutics intersect with the concerns of ethics and engage in interdisciplinary conversations, concrete measures to integrate the two fields are still needed to be done.

However, some of these scholars have taken the challenge a step further and work hand in hand with colleagues of the other field. One of the earlier joint efforts is biblical scholar Bruce C. Birch and Christian ethicist Larry L. Rasmussen’s co-authored work *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life*, first published in 1976 and later revised in 1988. In

³⁷ Harrington and Keenan, 13.

³⁸ See [http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=34&hid=5&sid=768eada4-39f3-417e-9d86-0943f0811de7%40sessionmgr4&bquery=\(SO+\(society+of+christian+ethics\)\)+and+\(scripture\)&bdata=JmRiPW9haCZkYj1yZm9mZGI9dmFoJmRiPXJ2aCZkYj1qcGmZGI9cGhsJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRIPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d](http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=34&hid=5&sid=768eada4-39f3-417e-9d86-0943f0811de7%40sessionmgr4&bquery=(SO+(society+of+christian+ethics))+and+(scripture)&bdata=JmRiPW9haCZkYj1yZm9mZGI9dmFoJmRiPXJ2aCZkYj1qcGmZGI9cGhsJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRIPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d); [http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=17&hid=5&sid=768eada4-39f3-417e-9d86-0943f0811de7%40sessionmgr4&bquery=\(SO+\(journal+of+biblical+literature\)\)+and+\(SU+\(ethics\)\)&bdata=JmRiPW9haCZkYj1yZm9mZGI9dmFoJmRiPXJ2aCZkYj1qcGmZGI9cGhsJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRIPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d](http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=17&hid=5&sid=768eada4-39f3-417e-9d86-0943f0811de7%40sessionmgr4&bquery=(SO+(journal+of+biblical+literature))+and+(SU+(ethics))&bdata=JmRiPW9haCZkYj1yZm9mZGI9dmFoJmRiPXJ2aCZkYj1qcGmZGI9cGhsJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRIPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d) (accessed on September 11, 2009).

this work they attempt to “bridge the gap between biblical studies and Christian ethics” and to “address the relationship of Scripture and ethics.”³⁹ Birch and Rasmussen point out that both Christian ethics and biblical scholarship “are called upon most directly to aid the faith community in traversing the distance between the primal documents of the faith—its Scriptures—and expressions of the faith in daily life.”⁴⁰ Although their pioneer work is primarily a book about moral life—especially about character formation, virtue and moral agency—and only the last two chapters (excluding the concluding chapter) are dedicated to the discussion of the role of the Bible in moral life, what is most valuable in their attempt is the methodological proposal that encourages interdisciplinary work.⁴¹

A more recent attempt along this direction is the works of Harrington and Keenan.⁴² They have been trying to build a bridge between the two camps through their joint writings and teaching in the past decade. Both Harrington and Keenan are interested in listening to what the other says and try to accommodate what is heard into their own framework and reflection. In their co-authored book *Jesus and Virtue Ethics* Harrington and Keenan set out a common framework that is built upon certain ethical themes: Harrington offers his insights from the biblical exegetical perspective that is normally

³⁹ Bruce C. Birch, and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 7-8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9-10, 141-88.

⁴² In fact, Spohn had been in team teaching with New Testament scholar John R. Donahue four times since the 80s. They taught five courses on New Testament and Ethics. See William C. Spohn “Teaching Scripture and Ethics” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1990): 277. However, their approach was quite different from that of Harrington and Keenan. For instance, in their “The New Testament and Christian Ethics” course offered in 1990, they began with a canonical description of New Testament ethics and then discussed the various interpretive methods employed by contemporary theologians. In other words, they were not engaged in demonstrating how biblical scholarship and ethical reflection are interacted in concrete situation. See John R. Donahue and William C. Spohn, “The New Testament and Christian Ethics” (NTCE 4301 syllabus, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, Spring 1990)

followed by Keenan's moral theological reflections. For instance, in the theme of 'love as the primary virtue,' Harrington first offers an exposition on the love of God and neighbor in Matthew 22:34-40; it is then followed by Keenan's reflection on the primacy of charity proposed by Gerard Gillean.⁴³ At the time of writing this work, they have co-taught 'Paul and Virtue Ethics' a couple of times and a corresponding book will be published in near future. These projects illuminate their commitment to bridging the gap and better integrating Scripture and Christian ethics.

However, the joint effort of Harrington and Keenan remains experimental. While acknowledging that some other Scripture scholars and theological ethicists have also shown similar efforts from their own individual works, this work aims at advancing a more integrated scriptural ethics that is built upon the fruit of these theologians. In simple terms, theological ethicists need to build upon the works/findings of Scripture scholars and vice versa. Subsequently, the first and primary purpose of this work is a methodological one, though I also will be doing textual studies. I will first examine the fundamental presuppositions of some of the major contributors in the area of scriptural ethics in the past twenty five years: Those from biblical theology and those from theological ethics. The purpose is to ground my work on concrete developments within the disciplines concerned. I believe that only through careful observation of the contributions and limitations of these scholars that we can identify specific methodological insights that will rightfully shape the future of a Scripture-based ethics.

⁴³ Harrington and Keenan, 77ff.

Moreover, in order to be comprehensive and culturally sensitive, the authors I choose are not only the most important and influential in their field but also that some of them are specifically aware of the relevance of local culture as well as the significance of contemporary theologies. Such diversity is important to our investigation: The diverse backgrounds among these selected scholars reflect the reality of social change within the disciplines—we note that women, non European, and Third World international figures begin to come into play. This social change signifies the shift of our theological concerns from not just personal guidance to communal practices but more importantly, from communal to the global awareness as well. The latter in turn becomes a means to engage in dialogue with one's own background.

Still, here I must note a caveat: This is a study from the vantage point of theological ethics and not—primarily—biblical studies or Scripture. I am writing as a Catholic theological ethicist who does ethics by working with scriptural texts. As Leslie Houlden rightly notes, New Testament ethics is often “studied in connection with moral theology rather than New Testament studies” although this hints that at times it poses difficulty in finding a way to understand New Testament's ethical teaching without doing violence to the insights and methods of New Testament study.⁴⁴

Finally, I am from Hong Kong, a place deeply affected by Confucianism. Our ethical values are usually taught and acquired by referring to particular texts. Throughout my work, in arguing for greater attentiveness to scriptural texts, I am sure that my own Confucian background prompts me in this direction. For this reason, at the end of the

⁴⁴ J. Leslie Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), *introduction*.

work I return to my background and ask if scriptural texts are constitutive of a Catholic theological ethics, and if Confucian texts are constitutive of a Confucian ethics, then doing a cross-cultural ethics begins not with analogous generalities but very specific texts.

The Structure of the Work

Part One deals with current attempts at constructing Scripture-based ethics. In the first chapter, I will offer an overview of the tasks of biblical scholars and theological ethicists in relation to Scripture and ethics. The subsequent two chapters will review some current attempts by contemporary Scripture scholars and theological ethicists at constructing scriptural ethics. Using Verhey's terminology, Scripture is both 'script' and 'scripted':⁴⁵ As 'script', it means that Scripture is like a script to be performed by an actor and the performance itself becomes the interpretation of the script. In the context of a Christian community, Scripture directs us to what is repeatedly performed and practiced, especially in the community's worship and ethics. Thus its focal point lies on the performance/practices and characters of the community. As 'scripted', it means that Scripture is a written text produced at a particular time by certain writers; it is an object to the readers and its focal point is the text itself. Therefore, the exegetical work of scriptural ethics pertains to the scripted text; while the interpretative work emerges from the text as a script. Nevertheless, Scripture scholars and theological ethicists, within their own expertise, employ different methodologies and approaches in their attempts to deal

⁴⁵ Allen Verhey, "Scripture as Script and as Scripted: The Beatitudes," in *Character Ethics and the New Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 19-25.

with Scripture and ethics. Three Scripture scholars from Europe and North America are important to examine: Wolfgang Schrage, Richard Hays and Frank Matera. Apart from these three major New Testament ethics scholars, feminist and non-western scripture scholars also attempt to study ethics in Scripture from their specific context and perspective. Two of them to be reviewed are Sandra Schneiders and Rasiah Sugirtharajah. In the case of theological ethics, I will similarly look at the works of some major Christian ethicists who are representatives of their own contexts and perspectives, namely, post Vatican II manualist Bernard Häring, liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, and the late Catholic ethicist William Spohn.

In sum, the above attempts by these Scripture scholars and theological ethicists are innovative in their own regards. But do they pay enough attention to the importance of the scriptural text and the importance of the hermeneutics of ethics at the same time? Thus, in the last chapter of this first part, I will explore the works of Scripture scholar Richard Burridge and ethicist Allen Verhey, who seem to have demonstrated certain balance in their own investigations and point in the right direction in constructing a more integrated scriptural ethics that attends to both the importance of the text and the hermeneutics of ethics.

I have argued that any interpretation of exegeted texts requires an ethical framework for bringing our findings to ethical expression. For me a hermeneutics of virtue ethics seems a very worthy method. Why? First, in the past few decades, virtue ethics began to resurge and has become a prominent alternative to principle-based

ethics.⁴⁶ Alasdair McIntyre, one of the most influential figures in advocating virtue ethics, even perceives its resurgence as a reaction against the post-World War II moral philosophy.⁴⁷ It departs from principle-based ethics in that it deals with the character of individuals and their communities, and the practices that both develop those characteristics and in turn express them.⁴⁸ Second, as ethicists like Spohn explain, it is a matter of necessity to select one form of ethics, for it is not possible to explore Christian moral life without it being built upon some form of moral philosophy.⁴⁹ By comparison with other approaches to ethics, virtue ethics is one of the oldest approaches and provides, I believe, a very appropriate avenue to approach Scripture. Thus, in Part Two I first review the hermeneutics of virtue ethics, with special attention to its development and revival, its contemporary understanding, and the yields of virtue, especially 1) character formation, 2) practices, 3) exemplar, and 4) community and communal identity. Within the theological context, Christian virtue ethicists remind us that such formation and transformation of character is effected by grace. We rely on God's grace so as to make our effort and moral growth possible.⁵⁰ Therefore, the role of the Holy Spirit and grace will be discussed briefly.

In the second half of this part, I will look at how two virtue ethicists read the Scriptures through their hermeneutics of virtue ethics. The first virtue ethicist is

⁴⁶ Edmund Pellegrino and David Thomasma, *The Christian Virtues in Medical Practice* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 14-15.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15. Pellegrino and Thomasma cite Alasdair McIntyre, "The Return to Virtue Ethics," in *The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Vatican II: A Look Back and a Look Ahead*, ed. Russell Smith (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1990), 239-49.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 27-28.

⁵⁰ Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 169.

Mennonite Joseph Kotva who has made a Christian case for virtue ethics. Kotva establishes a link between the New Testament and virtue theory by pointing out that a virtue perspective allows us to “see the Bible’s collections of rules as encapsulating the guidance and wisdom of some who went before us in faith.”⁵¹ Such perspective also helps to identify how the Scriptures can be useful for shaping our understanding of the human good, of our community and of the appropriate virtues that would foster both.⁵² The second ethicist to be explored is Spohn who offered his attempts to integrate Scripture and ethics through a hermeneutic of virtue ethics. For Spohn, ethics is a means to Christian transformation. Scripture as a whole is the story of a people called and led by God to be a distinctive community and a particular sort of person.⁵³ Thus, the story of Jesus in the New Testament is perceived as a paradigm for moral perception, disposition and identity, and a means to guide how we act and form “who we are in the community of faith.”⁵⁴ In other words, Spohn understands the Scriptures as offering more than specific moral rules but “shap[ing] the dispositions and identity of Christians.”⁵⁵ As a result, Spohn argues that the New Testament should converge with both virtue ethics and spirituality so as to shape Christian ethics. In sum, Spohn points out that the New Testament “gives content to the formal patterns of virtue ethics” by spelling out concrete transformative habits.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid., 173.

⁵² Ibid..

⁵³ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 12-13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

In Part Three I aim at demonstrating a more integrated Scripture-based theological ethics in the concrete. In doing so, I will exegete the scriptural text of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and then through a hermeneutic of virtue ethics interpret the text for Christian moral living. The choice of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 is primarily based on three reasons. First, it is a matter of popularity. In his *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* Jeffrey Siker observes that many of those theological ethicists who are representative in the field, from H. Richard Niebuhr to Stanley Hauerwas, from liberation theologians to feminist theologians, or from Catholic to ethnic theologians, employ the Sermon on the Mount in their writings.⁵⁷ As we will note later, almost all biblical scholars and theological ethicists surveyed in chapters Two and Three treat the Matthew's version of the Sermon and the Beatitudes in one way or another. Therefore, their unique ways of understanding and using the text will be briefly explored.

This popularity points to the second reason of my choice: The importance of the Beatitudes in theological ethics, and virtue ethics in particular. Curran, for instance, notes that the Sermon on the Mount is generally understood by many as "either an ideal or a realizable morality for life in this world."⁵⁸ Within the discipline of biblical scholarship, the contemporary and growing use of social historical criticism helps us to recognize that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes in particular concerns not only the

⁵⁷ See Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics. Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). In the latest three issues of *Studies in Christian Ethics*, for instance, over 12 articles are written on the Sermon on the Mount. See *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1-3 (2009).

⁵⁸ Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis*, 51-52. Curran cites Siker, 203-10. Dr. Susan Parsons, the editor of *Studies in Christian Ethics*, also points out that in recent years many theological ethicists are interested in seeing "how [the Sermon] might come alive once more in teaching the discipline of Christian ethics." The U.K. based Society for the Study of Christian Ethics, for instance, thus made the Sermon on the Mount the theme of their 2008 Annual Conference, and subsequently dedicated two issues of their journal on this theme. See Susan F. Parsons, "Editorial," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2009): 6.

individual moral life but also the relevance of communities of discipleship as well as social justice. All these are important to the quest for the meaning of the kingdom of God—which is the presupposition of our entire Christian life. In addition, the Beatitudes is often understood by ethicists as a source for discussion of Christian virtues demanded by Jesus Christ. As seen above, even the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s latest document, though it rejects the reduction of morality into a sum of virtues, still it perceives the Beatitudes as a significant characteristic expression of biblical morality found in the New Testament and specially stresses the fundamental dispositions and virtues found in them.⁵⁹

Third, being a Catholic of a Confucian Chinese society where prosperity is crucial to the life of its people, I note that the whole concept and saying of ‘blessed’ in Matthew 5 could be a platform for engaging dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism.

From the standpoint of a virtue ethicist, I note that the Beatitudes has been approached by theologians and ethicists of the past and present in different ways. Still, most of them are more interested in the interpretation than the text itself and seem to treat the Beatitudes more as ‘script’ than ‘scripted’ (or as ‘script’ alone). A more integrated approach proposed here, however, treats the Beatitudes as ‘scripted script’. Therefore, the main focus of this chapter is to exegete and to interpret the Beatitudes using the latter approach. In doing so, I first offer an exegesis of the text with the help of contemporary biblical scholars from both Catholic and Protestant circles. What follows the exegesis is the interpretation of the exegeted text through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics, focusing

⁵⁹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, 13-14, 70-71.

on issues of character formation, practices, exemplar, and community, and adopting the three foundational questions (based on the threefold structure of contemporary virtue theory) as the basis.

So far I have focused on the methodological argument for a more integrated scriptural ethics. Still, how does it lead to actual benefits and improvements? In this last part, I would like to see if a more integrated scriptural ethics—a virtue ethics that understands Scripture as ‘scripted script’—as such can be helpful to make Christian ethics more explicable to Confucian society and more supportive of cross-cultural dialogue with Confucian ethics. For while I am interested in bridging the gap between Scripture and theological ethics, being a Christian ethicist from a Confucian society, I am also interested in bringing Christian ethics and Confucian ethics closer to each other. In a Confucian society like Hong Kong where Christianity and Confucianism encounter each other in many different ways, if similarities or congruence—beyond the level of practice—are found between their ethical systems, it can further enrich the understanding of the ethics of the other.

Therefore, by way of demonstration, I will explore how the Beatitudes as ‘scripted script’ can be similar to specific Confucian texts, especially the writings of classical Confucian thinkers like Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi. It is because, methodologically speaking, Confucianism goes to the texts in its search of ethical teachings, for the core values of Confucian tradition are embodied in their ‘sacred’ texts. That means, Confucian ethics is primarily the fruit of careful interpretation of their ‘sacred’ texts. Therefore, whenever Confucians encounter another tradition, they are first

interested in the texts from that tradition. In so doing, I will explore the conception of virtue found in these classical writings. Based on the ‘sacred’ texts of these classical Confucian figures, I will explore the possible Confucian understanding of certain key ideas fundamental to the Beatitudes so as to provide a platform for the discussion of Confucian engagement of the Beatitudes. These key ideas include ‘next life’, ‘rewards’, and ‘blessed’. Then, in concrete terms, I explore how the Beatitudes as ‘scripted script’ can be comparable to Confucian texts and what precautions should be noted.

In sum, from the exploration of the Confucian understanding of virtues, we may expect to find a possible connection between Confucian ethics and Christian virtue ethics. In fact, not a few contemporary theological ethicists have begun to draw comparisons between major Confucian figures and patristic and scholastic virtue ethicists. However, comparative work by Christian ethicists generally goes to ‘script’ treatment of Christian and Confucian ethics and often ignores the texts. But comparative work needs to be both text-based and interpretative. Thus, I am convinced that a more integrated Scripture-based theological ethics as proposed in the previous chapters can further reinforce this connection. Moreover, by examining certain key ideas that ground the Beatitudes but that appear also in the Confucian context, I hope to provide an opportunity to demonstrate the possible benefit resulting from the methodological shift into a more integrated scriptural ethics and one that is more capable of cross-cultural exchange.

Part One: Current Attempts at Constructing Scriptural Ethics

The first part of this work is made up of four stages. The first stage is an overview of the steps taken up by Scripture scholars and theological ethicists in relation to the construction of scriptural ethics. The second stage surveys how contemporary Scripture scholars try to construct a methodological framework for scriptural ethics that are built upon their particular perspectives. Likewise, the third stage of this part surveys how theological ethicists try to construct a Scripture-based ethics compatible with contemporary challenges in ethics. The fourth and last stage explores the two scholars whose works I think point in the right direction, namely, an integrated scriptural ethics that attends to both the importance of the text and the hermeneutics of ethics.

For various reasons these two surveys are important building blocks upon which I construct my work: First, this work is not grounded in pure innovation but concrete developments within the disciplines concerned. Second, it is through careful observation of the contributions and limitations of these scholars that we can identify specific methodological insights that will rightfully shape the future of a Scripture-based ethics. Third, these specific insights are found sometimes in more than one author and constitute the actual developments toward a more integrated scriptural ethics. Fourth, in proximate terms, these surveys set the stage for the discussion that follows. Although they are not a thorough historical account, they introduce to us the specific, representative works of important biblical scholars and theological ethicists.

In sum, I believe that it is only through engagement with these insights and developments that a more integrated scriptural ethics can be properly constructed.

Chapter One: Foundations: The Tasks of Scripture Scholars and Theological Ethicists

With regards to relating biblical studies to theological ethics, Spohn succinctly points out that Scripture scholars and theological ethicists are basically dealing with two fundamental tasks according to their own perspectives, namely, the study of ethics in Scripture and the use of Scripture in ethics respectively.⁶⁰

Thus, in this first chapter, I offer an overview of the two above-stated fundamental tasks of biblical scholars and Christian ethicists. Readers should note that this chapter is foundational, heuristic but not exhaustive or historical. Although the state of the question of certain issues covered here (such as the question of authority) might have changed as time passes, these issues remain foundational to our overall discussion for they are essential to understand how scholars treat Scripture in ethical reflection. Later I provide a study of the specific contributions of both Scripture scholars and theological ethicists in order to show the actual developments in the past two decades.

1.1 The Study of Ethics in Scripture

New Testament Ethics

Within biblical circles, the study of ethics in Scripture can be divided into Old Testament ethics and New Testament ethics. The case of New Testament ethics, for

⁶⁰ William C. Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* Fully revised and expanded ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 5.

instance, technically refers to “what modern New Testament exegetes and biblical theologians have made out of the ethical teachings of the New Testament.”⁶¹ It is based on the careful study of written texts; thus, textual interpretation (i.e., biblical exegesis) “is foundational for all aspects of New Testament ethics.”⁶² Hamel, for example, identifies three types of moral law from the New Testament as a result of exegesis.⁶³ The first type of New Testament morality is that of eschatological moral law found in the Synoptic gospels. The second, categorical type is developed in Pauline writings that “establish continuity between Christian and non Christian moral law in the area of categorical precepts.”⁶⁴ The third type is found in Johannine writings that emphasize a return to the transcendental and essentials.

In this work, I limit my study to New Testament ethics. As Richard Hays rightly points out, while not perceiving New Testament ethics as an alternative to biblical ethics, it is necessary to start somewhere.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Christian church has often claimed that the Old Testament is “to be read through the hermeneutical lens of the New...the normative ethical witness of the OT is dependent upon a prior construal of the gospel, as attested by the NT witnesses.”⁶⁶ Finally, the discipline of New Testament theology itself has gone through certain developments in the past few decades.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Harrington and Keenan, 9.

⁶² Ibid., 18.

⁶³ Hamel, 118.

⁶⁴ Ibid..

⁶⁵ Richard B. Hays, “New Testament Ethics. A Theological Task,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995): 100.

⁶⁶ Ibid..

⁶⁷ Kavin Rowe, “New Testament Theology: The Revival of a Discipline,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 393-410. Another reason is the fact that, as an experimental work, and while not ignoring the Old Testament, I acknowledge that there are foreseeable difficulties in dealing with Old Testament ethics. John Barton summarizes succinctly some of the problems that scholars of Old Testament ethics face: “First,

Harrington succinctly summarizes its development from the beginning: New Testament ethics arose as part of historical criticism in the late 19th Century when (predominantly) liberal Protestant biblical scholars, such as German church historian Adolph von Harnack and Social Gospel Movement pioneer Walter Rauschenbusch of the United States, began to appreciate more “the historical distance between the biblical writings and the present.”⁶⁸ These liberal Protestants, for instance, perceived Jesus as a model of virtue and good character whose teaching involves certain ideals like love and sacrifice, and focused on the search for the internalization of these values.⁶⁹ It then entered a new phase in the 20th Century when scholars began to discuss “the centrality of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching and [its] eschatological nature.”⁷⁰

These developments cannot be under-estimated. For while this discipline has been pursued by Protestant scholars for centuries,⁷¹ many scholars have thought that “since [Rudolf] Bultmann’s monumental *Theology of the New Testament* New Testament Theology (NTT) has become a sterile discipline.”⁷² Only in the past decade or so has there been “a determined attempt to move forward.”⁷³ One advance has been “the scholarly necessity to respect the diversity and individuality of the NT compositions” and “[the] emerging consensus that for a work to count as an actual NTT it must address the

ordinary readers, not inured to these [OT] stories by constant attention as biblical scholars are, notice...that they are often far from morally edifying...Second...it is often not easy to decide what is being commended [or] deplored...” See John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 2-3.

⁶⁸ Harrington and Keenan, 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid..

⁷⁰ Ibid..

⁷¹ Frank J. Matera, “New Testament Theology: History, Method, and Identity,” *CBQ* 67 no. 1 (January 2005): 5.

⁷² C. Kavin Rowe, “New Testament Theology: The Revival of a Discipline,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 393.

⁷³ Ibid..

problem of the NT's unity."⁷⁴ This key area, as seen later, has an impact on our understanding of Scripture as authoritative and a source for Christian ethics. Another development that is more explicitly relevant to ethics is the claim of Heikki Räisänen in his recent work *Beyond New Testament Theology*: "New Testament theology should be replaced with two different projects: 'the history of early Christian thought' and 'critical, philosophical, ethical and/or theological reflection on the New Testament, as well as on its influence on our history and its significance for contemporary life.'"⁷⁵

In other words, these two major developments within New Testament theology have been the connection between a text and the entire corpus, and the influence of Scripture in historically shaping our communities of faith. For instance, Stephen Barton claims that the New Testament neither presents "abstract reflection of a philosophical kind on the nature and grounds of moral action" nor is it "a compendium of systematic reflection on the good" but rather "the story of Israel in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus" that invites us to a new way of life.⁷⁶ Harrington comments that the New Testament helps shape a person and a community and provides important insights about human conduct.⁷⁷ It also constantly reminds us of "the religious context in which Christian ethical teachings took form and are practiced."⁷⁸ The text is concerned with the relationship with God and others and begins with the person of Jesus in history; thus,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 407-08.

⁷⁵ Matera, "New Testament Theology: History, Method, and Identity," 5. Matera quotes Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 8.

⁷⁶ Stephen Barton, "The Epistles and Christian Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63.

⁷⁷ Harrington and Keenan, 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid..

Harrington concludes that New Testament ethics is primarily a religious, relational and historical ethics.⁷⁹

German New Testament scholar Eduard Lohse, though taking a different path and acknowledging that the term ‘ethics’ is not found in the New Testament, further uses the oldest New Testament writing (1 Thessalonians) to argue that the New Testament does “know the task of reflecting on the nature of the moral life, and sometimes indicates what corresponding action should be.”⁸⁰ In particular, he points out from the same New Testament writing (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12) that our Christian faith and conducts are related in the sense that “the confession of Jesus as Lord is to be validated to ‘outsiders’ by the credible conduct of Christians.”⁸¹

Developments in scriptural theology have in turn specifically affected Catholic moral theology. As Curran notes, “Scriptures were taken as the soul of theology and the starting point for systematic reflection on the Christian life.”⁸² He offers three instances of Scripture’s influence.⁸³ In the first place, earlier under the influence of Karl Barth scriptural renewal has emphasized the primacy of the relationality and responsibility motif as a replacement of the more philosophical teleological/deontological motifs in moral theology. Second, it contributes to the promotion of the call to perfection and the ideas of growth and development of our Christian life. Third, it emphasizes the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁰ Eduard Lohse, *Theological Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 2.

⁸¹ Ibid..

⁸² Curran, “The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology,” 186-87.

⁸³ Ibid., 182-86.

importance of historicity and interiority and totality of each person rather than that of individual, external acts.

Methodology

Regarding how to proceed in the study of New Testament ethics, it has been customary to begin with a historical order—that is, beginning with “the preaching of Jesus or the kerygma of the early church, then to advance to the great theological figures of the New Testament...and to conclude with the so-called later writings.”⁸⁴ Another way of proceeding attempts to organize the ethical contents thematically. Each of these two ways has certain advantages and disadvantages:⁸⁵ For instance, a chronological study can pursue a theological course of development but may fail to identify clearly all those fundamental and systematic motifs of early Christian instruction. A thematic study, in contrast, may sacrifice those distinctive characters of individual witnesses.

Harrington notes that a wide spectrum of methods and perspectives—from strictly historical to descriptive to normative—are pursued.⁸⁶ Wayne Meeks, for example, employs a strictly historical approach which leads him to conclude that “almost all the moral teachings in the New Testament are paralleled in form and content by writings from the Greco-Roman world.”⁸⁷ Perkins also identifies some other methods employed by exegetes: Scholars like Bultmann and Johnson turn to existentialist or phenomenological analyses that “transcend the peculiar religious language and context of

⁸⁴ Lohse, 4-5.

⁸⁵ Ibid..

⁸⁶ Harrington and Keenan, 20-3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 20.

the first century.”⁸⁸ Others employ a socio-political approach that reflects on the community embodiment of the Bible.⁸⁹ However, Perkins herself is convinced that the historical-critical study of the New Testament best “highlights the difference in ethical and cultural presuppositions between the first century and [the contemporary world]” and offers important understanding of the New Testament’s ethical context.⁹⁰

Christian ethicists have their methodological concerns too. Spohn is convinced that the most adequate approach is that of character and virtue ethics, for the Christian way of life is not a set of ideals/principles that cannot capture the relationships to God and others.⁹¹ Cahill, however, is decisively interested in historical-critical method while using social history and sociology to interpret and “understand the communities that produce the Bible and to clarify what impact biblical portrayals of God might have had in their original settings.”⁹² Harrington and Keenan agree with Cahill: One of the most commonly adopted approaches nowadays in the study of New Testament ethics combines both historical and hermeneutical concerns—“how Scripture provides a language of doing Christian ethics and how it shapes a person and a community that reasons morally and acts appropriately.”⁹³ The historical-hermeneutical approach thus “seeks to place the New Testament texts in their historical setting...highlights the differences between that world and the world of the reader today, and challenges the reader to apply the principles

⁸⁸ Perkins, “New Testament Ethics: Questions and Contexts,” 323.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 324-25.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 322, 325.

⁹¹ Spohn, “Scripture,” 94.

⁹² Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The Bible and Christian Moral practices,” in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill and James Childress (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1996), 5.

⁹³ Harrington and Keenan, 11.

of hermeneutical theory of the biblical text.”⁹⁴ We will explore this in greater details in the chapter on attempts by Scripture scholars.

The Contents of New Testament Ethics

As we have seen, research requires not only looking at the particular biblical text, but also seeing how it is incorporated into the whole of Scripture. Furthermore, the New Testament canon is a collection of diverse writings over a long period of time. The ethical contents of these writings could then be equally diverse and hence a few biblical scholars reject the discussion of the unity of New Testament ethics.⁹⁵ However, most scholars continue to discuss this issue in their writings on New Testament ethics.

The way in which the contents of New Testament ethics are expressed is similarly diverse. Lohse points out that although the ethical teachings found in the New Testament generally appear in the mode of preaching and teaching/instruction that aims at responding to specific questions or criticizing certain behaviors (as in the case of 1 Corinthians), these ethical statements take various forms such as instruction, prohibitions, proverbs and rules of wisdom, and parables and metaphorical expressions.⁹⁶ And he agrees with Perkins’s observation that many of these ethical teachings draw “heavily on the ethical traditions of the Old Testament, of common wisdom traditions, and of the Hellenistic ethical codes generally to address concrete situations.”⁹⁷ Lohse hence proposes that one specific task of New Testament ethics is to “indicate how traditional

⁹⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁵ Robert J. Daly, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Theological Studies* 50, no.1 (March 1989): 173.

⁹⁶ Lohse, 3-4.

⁹⁷ Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, 1.

content not only received a new grounding by being related to the gospel, but in essential parts also had its intrinsic meaning apprehended in a new way.”⁹⁸

This diversity of forms and resources leads Gustafson and others to raise concerns about the study of biblical ethics.⁹⁹ Besides the different forms of moral discourse, they note that the content of concrete moral teachings of the scriptures, such as the biblical notions of justice and peace are treated differently in different texts. Harrington, in a similar manner, reminds us that we cannot overlook the historical and literary contexts and the theological significance of the text.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, various themes emerge from the contents. Cahill identifies five ‘distinctive’ (but not unique) ones:¹⁰¹ First, the kingdom of God is the presupposition of our entire Christian life, for its eschatological and already-but-not-yet nature enables ethical action. The second theme is the reversal of worldly values (such as honor and shame). The third one is the love of one’s neighbor that includes those who are seen as outcasts and enemies. The fourth theme is the reality of suffering resulted from such ethical life. The fifth and last one is the formation of communal identity.

Perkins, from a biblical viewpoint, makes similar observations: She observes that both the eschatological language of the New Testament and the presence of the Holy Spirit point to the renewal/building of a new community.¹⁰² And the New Testament’s ethical vision is closely tied to “its vision of how God acts” which is the symbolic and

⁹⁸ Lohse, 4.

⁹⁹ Gustafson, “The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study,” 431.

¹⁰⁰ Harrington and Keenan, 17-18.

¹⁰¹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Gender and Strategies of Goodness: The New Testament and Ethics,” *The Journal of Religion* 80, no. 3 (July 2000): 446-50.

¹⁰² Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, 4-6.

inclusive love.¹⁰³ Hence New Testament ethics has a different style of teaching that aims at showing us what is happening in human behavior and offering a religious view of evil rather than a legal view.¹⁰⁴

These writings then lead us to recognize some agreement. While looking at the ethical content of particular texts, we must see how they relate to the rest of the Scriptures; appreciate the actual historical context out of which the text arose; and study the impact the texts have had on the community.

In sum, there are a number of concrete questions that one may ask in studying New Testament ethics:¹⁰⁵ What was the climate of thought within which these writers live? What were the determining factors in their consideration of ethical questions? What were their standpoints? What solutions did they give to the Christian communities of their time? And what use are their ideas and solutions to our present time Christians? But Houlden observes that New Testament ethics is often “studied in connection with moral theology rather than New Testament studies.”¹⁰⁶ Here he raises the concern that New Testament ethics at times poses difficulty in finding a way to understand New Testament’s ethical teaching without doing violence to the insights and methods of New Testament study.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Perkins cites Houlden, 18-20.

¹⁰⁴ Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, 6-8.

¹⁰⁵ Houlden, *introduction*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid..

¹⁰⁷ Ibid..

1.2 The Use of Scripture in Ethics

As far as Christian ethicists are concerned, the employment of Scripture in ethical reflection has gone through changes and developments too. Some note that in the past forty years the state of the question has shifted from debates about norms and the authority of the Bible in establishing norms, etc. to the role of Scripture in forming vision/values and communities of discipleship and its relevance in social justice. Still, it must be noted that the discussions and claims made then (such as the problem of diversity and the relationship with other sources) are foundational to the overall quest and deserve our attention here. Some of them, as will be seen later in Chapter Three, continue to be addressed among scholars. Those developments and shifts observed in more recent time, however, will be treated in later chapter.

How is the Bible Used in Ethics?

Although Protestant ethicists have always used the Bible for ethics, their use of Scripture differs widely throughout history and among confessional approaches. The way one “conceives of Scripture and its authority for the life of the believers...determine[s] how this text is employed in moral and ethical reflection.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ James T. Bretzke, comp., *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics* (Lewiston ME: E. Mellen Press, 1997), 3.

In Catholic circles, Kenneth Himes enunciated four separate and yet related tasks in using Scripture in ethics—namely, exegetical, hermeneutical, methodological and theological tasks.¹⁰⁹ I will briefly review these four tasks in relation to ethics below.

The exegetical task determines the meaning of the text as found in the Bible. According to Birch and Rasmussen, exegesis and ethics have the common ground of seeking “to discern the disclosure of God’s will for the people of faith.”¹¹⁰ The former strives “to interpret the biblical record of God’s self-disclosure to the communities of Israel and the early church in such a way that it illuminates the church’s understanding of God’s activity” while the latter seeks “to read the signs of God’s activity and to discern the divine will for the present.”¹¹¹ They are convinced that exegesis is important if the Bible is to serve as an ethical resource, for the Bible is not a self-interpreting but complex document; hence they claim that “without careful exegesis...the biblical witness is not fully heard.”¹¹²

The task of hermeneutics determines the meaning of the text for today and thus concerns the issue of interpretation. The issue of interpretation is inevitable for the Bible is historically conditioned and new questions emerge from each generation. These new questions can in turn “unearth dimensions of the text [such as liberation] that had been

¹⁰⁹ See Kenneth Himes, “Scripture and Ethics: A Review Essay,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (1985): 65-73; William C. Spohn, “The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology,” *Theological Studies* 47, no.1 (1986): 88-102. These four tasks somehow echo the four major aspects identified by Curran and McCormick: 1) The determination of the meaning of the particular scriptural text; 2) the meaning of the text for today’s diverse historical, cultural, and sociological reality; 3) the different approaches within Christian ethics itself; and 4) the relationship between Scripture and other sources of moral theology. See Curran and McCormick, vii-viii.

¹¹⁰ Birch and Rasmussen, 150.

¹¹¹ Ibid..

¹¹² Ibid., 166, 170.

ignored.”¹¹³ In procedural terms, this task requires a fusion of two very different horizons—that is, the horizon of the text in its historical setting and that of the interpreter here and now—as well as the acknowledgment of the reader’s pre-understandings or prejudices.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the work of interpretation has to deal with certain theological questions such as the meaning of the kingdom of God and the issue of eschatology.¹¹⁵

The methodological task asks how one employs Scripture within the various levels of moral reflection. Spohn points out that “a theologian’s estimate of the nature of ethics will significantly influence his or her use of Scripture, as well as provide some justification for that usage.”¹¹⁶ For example, those who focus on the moral agent will probably select biblical texts that deal with moral development and formation of characters and their communities. In these instances, these scholars often turn to narratives wherein moral dispositions are conveyed.¹¹⁷

The fourth and last task—theological task—mainly concerns meta-ethical questions, such as: What is the relationship between the Bible and other sources of moral wisdom? What kind of authority does Scripture have in moral guidance? These questions often lead to the core debate on the distinctiveness of Christian ethics.

Of the four tasks Gustafson highlights the methodological one. He notes that how a Christian ethicist uses Scripture is determined by how one defines the task of Christian ethics: One who focuses on the structure of moral arguments about specific acts uses

¹¹³ Spohn, “The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology,” 92.

¹¹⁴ Harrington and Keenan, 20. Harrington cites Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 263ff.

¹¹⁵ Himes, 67.

¹¹⁶ Spohn, “The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology,” 96.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96-99.

Scripture very different from one who is concerned about the formation of the moral agent.¹¹⁸ Gustafson further points out that Christian ethicists' use of Scripture depends also on the theological and ethical principles which one uses so as to bring coherence to the meaning of the text.¹¹⁹

Moreover, Gustafson believes two fundamental understandings of the Bible distinguish the methods we use: Bible as 'revealed morality' and as 'revealed reality'. The former understands the Bible as the revealed will of God and thus employs deontological language and image in its ethics.¹²⁰ It emphasizes the 'moral use' of Scripture and in this way one would make moral judgment "in accordance with moral laws, precepts, and commands given in Scripture."¹²¹ Subsequently, one way of using Scripture is applying moral laws (such as the Decalogue) found in Scripture to the moral issue. Another way is judging the moral act according to the moral ideals (such as the love command) given in Scripture. A third way of using Scripture is by means of analogy between biblical narratives and present day reality (e.g., the narrative of Exodus is often used to evaluate Latin America's situation). A fourth and loose way is to perceive Scripture as one of the informing sources for moral judgments that contains various forms of moral values/norms/principles and moral themes (e.g., Paul's writing on fallen human condition in Romans 1:19-32).¹²² This last way of employing Scripture, as is preferred by Gustafson, "[does] provide the basic orientation toward particular judgments,...deeply informs these judgments" and hence is a better way of using

¹¹⁸ Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," 432.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 439.

¹²⁰ Curran, "The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology," 181-82.

¹²¹ Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," 439.

¹²² Ibid., 441-45.

Scripture in ethics, for “the vocation of the Christian community is to discern what God is enabling and requiring man to be and to do in a particular natural, historical, and social circumstances.”¹²³

‘Revealed reality’, on the contrary, perceives the Bible as the revelation of God’s activity. It is not like revealed morality in focusing on specific laws or norms or prohibitions but rather in disclosing God’s love to humankind. In return, it calls for our response to God’s act in us and thus perceives the ‘relationality and responsibility’ motif as its primary model for understanding of Christian ethics.¹²⁴ It tends to focus on Scripture’s theological importance rather than its ethical content: When using Scripture one focuses on who this God is, on what God does, and who humanity is in the light of God’s revelation as expressed in narratives. Therefore, God’s love and covenant with humankind is foundational to Christian ethics while the law is of secondary importance in Christian life.

The Authority of Scripture in Ethics

David Kelsey notes that the Bible’s authority is expressed in its doctrinal and conceptual content and that it is the source of symbolic and imagistic expression of the salvific event.¹²⁵ But he adds that Scripture is “authoritative for theology only in the context of Christian praxis, that is, only in the context of the intentional activities of individual persons and communities who understand themselves to be having their

¹²³ Ibid., 455.

¹²⁴ Curran, “The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology,” 182.

¹²⁵ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 37ff.

identities shaped in distinctively Christian ways.”¹²⁶ In other words, for Kelsey biblical authority is dependent on the tradition.¹²⁷

Moreover, Kelsey identifies two types of authority in Scripture:¹²⁸ The first is Scripture’s *de facto* authority—based on how Scripture actually shapes individual and communal life and authors new identities in the common life of the Christian community. For instance, Scripture authorizes indirectly theological proposals like those about Christian claims’ truthfulness. The second authority is Scripture’s *de jure* authority that derives from the end to which it is used and is grounded in God’s relation to it—that is, being the word of God.

What about the issue of the authority of Scripture in the context of ethics? Birch and Rasmussen point out that the discussion of biblical authority in matters of ethics depends on “the nature and degree of influence to be given to the Bible in shaping Christian character and conduct.”¹²⁹ They note that traditionally the authority of Scripture is rooted in the understanding of the Bible as inspired in content and its function in the community to shape and transform individual and communal life.¹³⁰

Verhey, however, reminds us that one must first distinguish ‘authority’ from ‘authorization’.¹³¹ The former focuses on whether Scripture is a source for moral discernment while the latter asks what this source provides or how it functions as a

¹²⁶ David H. Kelsey, “The Bible and Christian Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 3 (1980): 386.

¹²⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The Bible and Ethics: Hermeneutical Dilemmas,” in *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 23.

¹²⁸ Kelsey, “The Bible and Christian Theology,” 392-96.

¹²⁹ Birch and Rasmussen, 142-43.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 146-47, 152.

¹³¹ Verhey, “The Use of Scripture in Ethics,” *Religious Studies Review* 4 (January 1978): 28.

norm—“in spite of the agreement that Scripture is an authority, there are wide disagreements about the authorization for moving from Scripture to moral claims.”¹³²

James Childress, in a similar manner, emphasizes the distinction between biblical authority and the authorizations that Scripture gives for moral claims, and rightly points out there are various views regarding the scope of authorizations that Scripture gives.¹³³

Many scholars argue that Scripture is authoritative for Christian ethics because of its normativity.¹³⁴ Daly and others, for instance, argue that since one gains access to Christ from and through the Bible and since Christ is the ultimate norm of Christian ethics; the Bible is “at least inceptively normative for Christian ethics.”¹³⁵ Birch and Rasmussen also claim that the authority of Scripture lies on the fact that it is normative for the life of the Christian community even though Christian ethics is not synonymous with biblical ethics.¹³⁶ Gareth Jones recalls a quick, traditional argument: Scripture “has the authority of ethical decisions because it is the Word of God.”¹³⁷ As such, the authority of Scripture is normative for all church and ethical teaching.¹³⁸ But Jones adds, “If one sees it as something complete and separate, monumental and eternal (Word of God), then its authority is absolute...If, however, one sees it as something to be read and understood and embraced within one’s own world, and that one’s own world must always be a part

¹³² Ibid..

¹³³ James F. Childress, “Scripture and Christian Ethics: Some Reflections on the Role of Scripture in Moral Deliberation and Justification,” *Interpretation* 34 no. 4 (October 1980): 375-76.

¹³⁴ Stanley Hauerwas would not perceive the Bible as normative for he understands normativity as what is arisen from within a community. See Gareth Jones, “The Authority of Scripture and Christian Ethics,” in Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, 19.

¹³⁵ Daly and others, 74.

¹³⁶ Birch and Rasmussen, 141-46.

¹³⁷ Jones, 17.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 22.

of that reading, then one sees the Bible, and its authority, in a different light.”¹³⁹

Moreover, Hamel points out from *Dei Verbum* (#81) that the Bible can correct, confirm, support, protect, and guide human reason (which can be fallible or clouded over by other factors like passion) to the right path.¹⁴⁰

Verhey does not want to say that Scripture’s authority derives from its authorizations. He is convinced that the authority of Scripture is a necessary affirmation for ethicists, for the acknowledgement of biblical authority “commits the ethicist to self-conscious reflection and candor about the authorizations for moving from Scripture to moral claims.”¹⁴¹ Its authority affects our perspective; this biblical perspective “limits, corroborates, and transforms appeals to natural morality [and other sources] on other levels of moral discourse.”¹⁴²

Odozor observes that attitudes toward biblical authority range from those who are convinced of scriptural authority and the unity of the canon (such as Raymond Brown) to those who proposed ‘a canon within the canon’ (such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza). The former normally argues that Scripture is inspired by God and thus enjoys ‘biblical inerrancy’ (broadly understood) as well as integrity; the latter argues that there are different levels of biblical authority and thus biblical texts need to be qualified.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴⁰ Hamel, 110. See also Vatican, *Dei Verbum*, November 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (accessed June 25, 2009).

¹⁴¹ Verhey, “The Use of Scripture in Ethics,” 35.

¹⁴² Ibid..

¹⁴³ Odozor, 136-38, 142; Cahill, “The Bible and Ethics: Hermeneutical Dilemmas,” 19-21.

Few think however of the Bible as the only source for Christian ethics to “the point of making ethical decisions for us.”¹⁴⁴ Its authority is neither absolute nor exclusive but relational (or even hierarchical) to other non-biblical authorities.¹⁴⁵ James Bretzke claims: “The highest and definitive revelation is not found in the bible as a sacred text, but rather in the person of Jesus Christ...[who is] the ultimate norming norm...of our lives.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, “only insofar as that biblical claim corresponds to an overall sound vision of God and God’s definitive revelation of God’s self in Jesus Christ” can we insist on the authority of Scripture.¹⁴⁷

Echoing Kelsey’s insight on tradition Stanley Hauerwas claims that Scripture is an authority because “the traditions of Scripture provide the means for our community to find new life.”¹⁴⁸ He goes so far as to claim that “the Bible has no authority apart from the community of believers.”¹⁴⁹ Johnson seems to agree that the Bible’s authority is ‘for and in the Church’ in the sense that its authority is not absolute but drawn from the decision of the community, and it pertains only to the life and practice of the church.¹⁵⁰ He further comments that biblical authority is the least powerful for Christian ethical discernment for “it is at this level that Scripture is most diverse and most constrained by its historical circumstances and literary forms and theological perspectives.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Birch and Rasmussen, 141.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 143.

¹⁴⁶ Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World*, 81.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid..

¹⁴⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering,” in Curran and McCormick, *Readings in Moral Theology*, 260.

¹⁴⁹ Jones, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” 63.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 69-70.

Cahill is more nuanced. She notes that it is a ‘faith’ decision when one uses Scripture as an authority, for it involves “a commitment to the reliability of that authority, a commitment grounded in one’s experience within the community shaped by Scripture.”¹⁵² She holds that biblical authority needs to be understood as “authoritative pattern, structure, or form [instead of]...‘substantive canonical authority,’ or the attempt to require that the canon as a whole functions in the ‘authorization’ of particular moral conclusions.”¹⁵³ But just as she notes its impact she is concerned about how particular texts must be interpreted through the broader canon.

The diverse views toward the authority of Scripture in the matter of ethics raise further issues on the practical level. Many raise the question about its authority against other authorities like experience, social context, etc., and wonder if they are equally authoritative as the Bible, or if they have any impact on biblical authority.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, the matter of freedom from coercion is crucial to the relationship between the Bible and Christian ethics; thus, biblical authority cannot be coercive but rather is one of ‘non-coercive reconciliation’.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, when we receive a biblical authoritative claim does it have permanent value or not?¹⁵⁶ Finally, the emergence of historical criticism in biblical studies as well as liberation and feminist theologies and their corresponding hermeneutics have challenged us to rethink the authority of the Bible, since these approaches are so shaped by particular social and cultural concerns.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Cahill, “The Bible and Ethics: Hermeneutical Dilemmas,” 23.

¹⁵³ Ibid..

¹⁵⁴ Jones, 22; Cahill, “The Bible and Ethics: Hermeneutical Dilemmas,” 15-16.

¹⁵⁵ Jones, 25-26.

¹⁵⁶ Himes, 72.

¹⁵⁷ Birch and Rasmussen, 146-47; Cahill, “The Bible and Ethics: Hermeneutical Dilemmas,” 15.

To conclude our discussion on the authority of Scripture in theological ethics, I recall the reflections of Cahill and Himes which I find helpful and realistic:¹⁵⁸ Cahill sees the New Testament as an authority—though not the sole authority—for Christian ethics and understands the New Testament’s historical circumstances as compatible with its authority. She also argues that historical analogues and parallels in other traditions are compatible with biblical authority and useful to understand biblical texts better. Furthermore, although the contents and forms of the New Testament are often pluralistic and diverse, the New Testament still consists of a common allegiance to Jesus who inaugurates the kingdom of God and calls us to obedience and love of neighbor.

From a different angle Himes points out that acknowledging the Bible as authoritative does not mean it functions in an authoritarian way; rather it only means Scripture is an essential source for moral discernment. Thus, he concludes that the discussion on biblical authority naturally moves to the issue of understanding the Bible as a source for morality and to “the relationship of the Bible to other sources of moral insight.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, I now turn to the issue of Scripture as a source for Christian ethics.

The Bible as a Source for Ethics

Nowadays more and more scholars, Catholics and Protestants alike, would quote and/or employ Methodist John Wesley’s ‘quadrilateral’ in their own framework and discussion regarding the Bible as one of the sources of Christian ethics: Scripture,

¹⁵⁸ Cahill, “Gender and Strategies of Goodness: The New Testament and Ethics,” 443-45; Himes, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Himes, 71.

tradition, human reason and experience.¹⁶⁰ Still, in practical terms, these sources are in tension and hence scholars offer different proposals including prioritization.¹⁶¹ There is no consensus here, and in fact, there are two extreme views:¹⁶² Other sources are irrelevant or ethics is wholly an autonomous morality and the Bible is only a corroboration of what one has come to know. Still, there are many who hold a middle ground and “call for some form of dialogue between Scripture and other sources.”¹⁶³

With regard to the relationship between Scripture and the other three sources, Hays points out the history of this important question being confronted:¹⁶⁴ During the Reformation period, it was the confrontation between Scripture and tradition; in the time of the Enlightenment, it was the wrestling between reason and Scripture; and since the twentieth century it has been the debate between Scripture and human experience as emphasized by liberation and feminist theologies.

Johnson proposes a dialogical relationship that seems helpful: First, tradition “encompasses all the authentic realizations of Christian life based in Scripture and all the profound interpretations of Christian life by theologians grounded in the interpretation of Scripture.”¹⁶⁵ Second, reason must be free, rigorous and critical, informed by contemporary sciences and in accord with the deepest significance and point of Scripture.

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” 65; Daly and others, 67-68.

¹⁶¹ Daly and others, 67-68.

¹⁶² Himes, 71.

¹⁶³ Verhey, “The Use of Scripture in Ethics,” 34.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Hays, “Scripture-shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics,” *Interpretation* 44, no. 1 (January 1990): 50-51.

¹⁶⁵ Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” 65.

Third, the Church is called to discern in its reading and interpretation of Scripture “the experience of God at work in human lives.”¹⁶⁶

Cahill, in addition, points out that due to the diverse and overlapping identities including cultural, social and political identities among the believers, the Bible as a source thus cannot be used independent of other sources.¹⁶⁷ Rather, one may profit from “sensitive and nuanced incorporation of insights” from other sources, including other religious traditions.¹⁶⁸ Cahill later notes that Scripture and other sources “are [in fact] not even fully distinguishable from one another...that all these shaping factors are ‘already’ at work when explicit reference to any one is made.”¹⁶⁹

However, Daly and others argue that some sort of prioritization is needed and propose that the first priority among these sources is Scripture for it is more “encompassing of the reality of an integral Christian life.”¹⁷⁰ Birch and Rasmussen also suggest that the primacy of the Bible lies on its function in the church and its uniqueness due to its role as the historical origin of the community and its influences on the community; thus, for them Scripture is a necessary, unique and constant source for Christian ethics.¹⁷¹

Finally, being a source of ethical authority, Scripture can be used as a shaper of Christian identity and a source of virtues and values (e.g. the value of inclusiveness and renewal), a giver of moral imperatives (e.g. the love of neighbor), a provider of

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶⁷ Cahill, “The Bible and Christian Moral practices,” 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The New Testament and Ethics: Communities of Social Change,” *Interpretation* 44, no. 4 (October 1990): 384.

¹⁷⁰ Daly and others, 68.

¹⁷¹ Birch and Rasmussen, 153-55.

theological perspectives for our ethical responses (e.g. the theology of liberation), a resource for identifying creative tension that leads to responsible decision making (e.g. the use of force).¹⁷²

The Problems of Using Scripture in Ethics

While Scripture is a resource for solving moral issues, it is also “a source of moral problems.”¹⁷³ Catholics and Protestants alike have raised certain concerns with regards to the use of Scripture in ethics, such as the authority of the canon and the tension between universality (of human condition) and the particularity of biblical stories.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the problem of using Scripture has changed over time. In the seventies the issue was about the relevance of the Bible: “Literalists insisted on taking every moral directive from the text into contemporary life without any interpretation [while] liberals doubted that the Bible had any lasting relevance.”¹⁷⁵ Since the early nineties the problem has been an issue of diversity, as highlighted by Hays: Which of the diverse voices in the text is authoritative and which of the diverse perspectives of readers should one take? In other words, the problem of employing the Bible is directed to whether there is any definite meaning at all in the text.¹⁷⁶

The problems of diversity can be summarized as follows. First, we must recognize that the Bible is “comprised of many different books written in different historical and

¹⁷² Ibid., 181-88.

¹⁷³ Childress, 380.

¹⁷⁴ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Canon, Authority, Norms? Recent Studies in Biblical Ethics,” review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, by Allen Verhey, *Interpretation* 40, no. 4 (October 1986): 414.

¹⁷⁵ William C. Spohn, “Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics?” review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Richard Hays. *Christian Century* 114, no. 17 (May 1997): 525.

¹⁷⁶ Spohn, “Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics,” 525.

cultural circumstances over a long period of time.”¹⁷⁷ There exist diverse perspectives among which inconsistencies and even contradictions are found. A typical example is the lack of harmony between “Paul’s directives to respect and cooperate with the Roman Empire (see Romans 13:1-7) and the scathing critique of Roman officialdom and of the emperor cult in the [b]ook of *Revelation*.”¹⁷⁸ Still, as we saw from Cahill earlier, “some efforts at generalization are necessary in order to bring some priorities of biblical morality into focus.”¹⁷⁹ Second, these various perspectives and teachings are further manifested via different literary forms (such as narratives and commands) that are historically and culturally conditioned and hence these moral teachings and perspectives cannot be treated as free-floating principles.¹⁸⁰ Third, even some of these historically and culturally conditioned meanings could be erroneous, as in the case of the household codes today challenged by feminists.¹⁸¹ Fourth, Scripture speaks neither clearly nor directly to and cannot deal with the new issues that are peculiar (and/or important) to our contemporary world, such as reproductive technologies.¹⁸² Finally, not a few ethicists point out the problem of eschatology as central to the use of Scripture.¹⁸³ For instance, Ogletree identifies two types of eschatology that call for different ethical modes:¹⁸⁴ A futurist eschatology (found especially in Old Testament prophetic literature), for example, calls for an ethics of hope and patience; and a dialectical eschatology (as in the New

¹⁷⁷ Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis*, 49.

¹⁷⁸ Harrington and Keenan, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Gustafson, “The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study,” 444.

¹⁸⁰ Harrington and Keenan, 12.

¹⁸¹ Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis*, 50.

¹⁸² Ibid., 49-50; Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” 68.

¹⁸³ Himes, 67. Himes quotes Ogletree, 177.

¹⁸⁴ Ogletree, 177-79.

Testament) asserts an already-but-not-yet position and thus calls for working out new alternatives.

Apart from these major problems, other minor issues are also identified by both biblical scholars and ethicists. First, there exists a practical tension of providing moral wisdom from a single Scripture for people of divergent historical and cultural backgrounds.¹⁸⁵ Second, while “moral theology is scientific, synthetic, and critical study, Scripture is primarily a narrative.”¹⁸⁶ Third, the Bible speaks in ancient languages only partly grasped by contemporary readers and addresses situations mostly obscure to them.¹⁸⁷ Fourth, the Bible presents a religious ethic that makes its application to secular debates difficult.¹⁸⁸ Finally, as Himes notes, few theologians have acquired the skill to do sophisticated biblical exegesis and thus suggests that ethicists should at least learn to depend on biblical scholars for exegetical task.¹⁸⁹

Despite the challenges of these identified problems of using Scripture in ethics, many ethicists, based on their own background and perspectives attempt to propose various ways of employing biblical texts in ethical discussions. Some even try to offer step by step practical procedures:¹⁹⁰ Identify and specify the actual moral issue at stake (and pay attention to the audience being addressed); select a text; exegete the text, with special attention paid to its context and the source of ethical tradition it might have; and do the work of hermeneutics and interpretation.

¹⁸⁵ Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis*, 50.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸⁷ Johnson, “The Bible’s Authority for and in the Church,” 68.

¹⁸⁸ Harrington and Keenan, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Himes, 66.

¹⁹⁰ See James T. Bretzke, “Scripture and Ethics: Core, Context, and Coherence,” in *Moral Theology: New Directions in Fundamental Issues*, ed. James Keating (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2004), 90-93.

1.3 Where are We Now?

In this chapter, I have offered an overview of certain foundational issues treated by biblical scholars and Christian ethicists in their respective disciplines in matters related to scriptural ethics. For biblical scholars their basic task is the study of ethics in Scripture, the New Testament in particular. The discussion mainly focuses on the methods and approaches employed in reading the text, and the ethical contents emerged from the text. Theological ethicists, on the other hand, deal with the task of employing scriptural text in their ethical reflection. They are concerned with foundational issues like the authority of the Bible and its relation with other recognized sources in ethical discernment. They are also interested in how the Bible can actually be used and the problems encountered in the process. Although the state of the question of some of these foundational issues has changed over time, others are continued to be treated by scholars in their own perspectives.

Against the background of these wide generalizations let me turn to certain contemporary biblical scholars' attempt to construct a New Testament ethics.

Chapter Two: The Attempt by Scripture Scholars

Since the seventies there has been a growing amount of literature on New Testament ethics.¹⁹¹ Some of them focus on the ethics of a particular figure (such as Jesus and Paul) or theme. For example, Perkins examines certain Pauline letters and points out that the ethics of Paul “presupposes that a new community of moral discernment has come into being in Christ” and *paraenesis* is a prominent feature of Paul’s letters.¹⁹² Elsewhere she identifies the love command as the core theme for New Testament ethics and from which she offers textual interpretation of selective New Testament passages.¹⁹³ Others, like Johnson, focus on a particular New Testament writer (e.g., the author of Luke-Acts) or write for a particular issue (e.g. economic issues) or from a particular perspective (e.g. feminist).¹⁹⁴

Still, many biblical authors attempt to write on New Testament ethics in a more comprehensive manner.¹⁹⁵ For instance, Houlden, in his *Ethics and the New Testament*, examines each of the four gospel writers as well as Paul and James. Houlden argues that contemporary Christians should not seek ‘specific’ ethical guidance from the New Testament but rather ask what we should do now based on what we know of God through Christ.¹⁹⁶ Jack Sanders’s *Ethics in the New Testament* further expands the examination to

¹⁹¹ See Bretzke, *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, 105-223.

¹⁹² Pheme Perkins, “Paul and Ethics,” *Interpretation* 38 (July 1984): 268-69.

¹⁹³ Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*.

¹⁹⁴ See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 39 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

¹⁹⁵ One of the earlier works written in a comprehensive style is Rudolf Schnackenburg’s *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, first published in German in 1962 and translated into English in 1965.

¹⁹⁶ Bretzke, *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, 127.

the later epistles outside the Pauline tradition and the Apocalypse. Sanders analyzes the basic ethical perspectives found in these New Testament writings and highlights that the ethical perspective of Jesus “is inseparably linked to his eschatological expectation of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God.”¹⁹⁷

However, both Houlden and Sanders’ works are rather brief in content or scope when compared to those written in the eighties and later. Therefore, one of the criteria for selecting biblical scholars for our review here is that their works are substantive enough. Another criterion is that their works have significant contribution to the discipline in their own regards. Finally, I look to diversity—in terms of geographical locations, Christian faith, gender, and economic status of the country from which they come—in order to provide a certain span to the work of New Testament ethics in the past two decades. In fact, such diversity reflects the reality of social change within the discipline: We note that women, non European, and Third World international figures begin to come into play. This social change also signifies the shift of our theological concerns from not just personal guidance to communal practices but more importantly, from communal to the global awareness as well. The New Testament scholars chosen thus include Wolfgang Schrager, Richard Hays, Frank Matera, Sandra Schneiders, and Rasiah Sugirtharajah.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 133.

2.1 Wolfgang Schrage

Wolfgang Schrage is a professor of New Testament at the University in Bonn, Germany.¹⁹⁸ He has written on various topics including commentary on *1 Corinthians*, Pauline studies, and comparative ethics.¹⁹⁹ His major work on New Testament ethics, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, was first published in 1982 and then translated into English in 1988.²⁰⁰ The book was in general welcomed by biblical scholars and was seen as a work that replaces Heinz-Dietrich Wendland's earlier work in this area.²⁰¹

Schrage is convinced that the Bible provides moral norms for Christian living:²⁰² It "must be taken as an absolute standard if the conduct required of Christians today is still to be Christian standard."²⁰³ Thus the subject matter of New Testament ethics is "the question of how life was lived in the earliest Christian communities: What were its foundations, the support for, and the criteria and principles for [its] way of acting and living."²⁰⁴ In other words, the key concerns of New Testament ethics are those guiding

¹⁹⁸ Edgar Krentz, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17, no.5 (October 1990): 395.

¹⁹⁹ Wolfgang Schrage, "Komparative Ethik im Neuen Testament," in *Neues Testament und Ethik. Für Rudolf Schnackenburg*, Herausgegeben von Helmut Merklein (Freiburg: Herder, 1989). See Bretzke, *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, 117.

²⁰⁰ Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988). James I. H. McDonald, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42, no. 4 (1989): 594.

²⁰¹ Robert J. Daly, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Theological Studies* 50, no.1 (March 1989): 172; Robin Scroggs, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Interpretation* 44, no. 2 (April 1990): 188.

²⁰² Paul D. Simmons, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Review & Expositor* 86, no.3 (Summer 1989): 440.

²⁰³ Schrage, 2.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

principles and motivating forces from which ethical expressions emerged.²⁰⁵ Schrage thus understands his work as primarily a study of theological ethics—“the theological motivation and justification of New Testament ethics.”²⁰⁶

However, Schrage does not deny that New Testament ethics needs to be understood in the context of specific situations.²⁰⁷ He is also concerned with the criteria and concrete substance of ethics, for the New Testament “does not aim solely at a new foundation or a transformation of basic attitudes...[but] also strives to shape Christian life and concrete conduct in detail.”²⁰⁸ Hence, for Schrage New Testament ethics is contextual and situational in nature, as in the case of the institution of slavery.²⁰⁹ And for this reason he also understands New Testament ethics as fragmentary.²¹⁰ Still, Schrage believes that New Testament ethics is generally prescriptive rather than descriptive with respect to practice.²¹¹

Since New Testament ethics is concrete, situational and fragmentary, he thus perceives that the proper methodology in New Testament ethics as “to see that each individual voice is heard, so that the various early Christian models are not forced into a single mold or submerged in an imaginary New Testament ethics.”²¹² Consequently, Schrage discusses in detail the ethical material found in individual books and insists that the plurality of ethical concepts found in individual biblical writings needs to be

²⁰⁵ Joel M. Quie, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Word & World* 9 (Winter 1989): 96.

²⁰⁶ Schrage, 4.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5. Schrage, however, does not perceive this as a sufficient criterion to explain the ethics. See McDonald, 595.

²⁰⁸ Schrage, 10.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

addressed.²¹³ He basically focuses on the issue of “how the ethical teachings fit in and flow from the various theological positions.”²¹⁴ And the exegetical method employed is primarily one of historical criticism.

Since Schrage perceives his work as an historical study rather than “a guidebook for contemporary life,”²¹⁵ he attends to “the traditional, cultural, social, and religious-historical background together with the ethical theory and practice of the ancient world [such as Judaism and the Hellenist culture].”²¹⁶ But he does deal with concrete precepts and commands (such as issues of marriage and wealth) and offers his own hermeneutics occasionally.

The presentation as a whole follows the order of the New Testament canon. However, Schrage explores first the eschatological ethics of Jesus and the ethics of the earliest congregations and only then discusses each of the major New Testament writings with corresponding themes. In other words, the way of proceeding is a combination of various styles though it is predominantly sequential.

The ethics of Jesus covers one-third of the book. Schrage begins with the problem of ethics and eschatology and argues that ethics and eschatology are closely related to each other and the eschatological message is a crucial motive for human conduct.²¹⁷ In the ethics of Jesus, its foundation and horizon is the imminent coming of the kingdom of

²¹³ Bretzke, *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, 6; Schrage, 3, 6-7.

²¹⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *America* 159, no. 476 (December 3, 1988): 476.

²¹⁵ Krentz, 396.

²¹⁶ Schrage, 8; Sharon H. Ringe, review of *The Ethics of the New Testament*, by Wolfgang Schrage, *Theology Today* 45, no. 3 (October 1988): 355.

²¹⁷ Schrage, 28-9.

God.²¹⁸ On the one hand, Jesus' invitation to the kingdom of God implies a responsibility and a demand: The new commandment of love that replaces the law.²¹⁹ On the other hand, Jesus does not simply preach personal ethics; rather, his teaching impinges on various social and political areas.²²⁰

The next two treatments, namely the ethics developed during the early Church and the writing of the Synoptics, are actually an expansion of the ethics of Jesus.²²¹ The Law was crucial to this expansion and development.²²² Still there is no coherent picture during the early church period since even the Synoptics are concerned with various themes—such as the theme of discipleship in Mark and better righteousness in Matthew.²²³

For Schrage the latter theme is rooted in the Sermon on the Mount (5:20):²²⁴ To be superior in righteousness means doing God's will (and not merely hearing it), loving our enemies, and reconciling with one another. In addition, he understands the Beatitudes functions not only as 'entrance requirements' but also "a recollection of the promise, intended to comfort and encourage the community."²²⁵ He further claims that the Matthaean additions to the Beatitudes tradition indicate that the Beatitudes is not a catalog of virtues or an exponent of spirituality. Rather, it refers to those "who hunger

²¹⁸ Ibid., 18; Scroggs, 188.

²¹⁹ Schrage, 40, 68.

²²⁰ Ibid., 91.

²²¹ Quie, 98.

²²² Ibid..

²²³ Schrage, 126-28, 138, 143, 153.

²²⁴ Ibid., 144-52.

²²⁵ Ibid., 151. Schrage cites Christoph Burchard, "Versuch, das Thema der Bergpredigt zu finden," in *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie* (Festschrift Hans Conzelmann), ed. G. Strecker (Tübingen: Mohr, 1975), 418.

and thirst for the realization of God's righteousness and justice throughout all the earth."²²⁶

The second major treatment of the work is the ethics of Paul. James McDonald describes this section as the most substantial part of the book.²²⁷ Schrage highlights that Pauline ethics is so integrated into his theology and hence perceives Paul's ethics as Christological which permeates in his indicative-imperative structure and pneumatology.²²⁸ However, Schrage identifies a shift of this twofold structure in Paul's writing: "...there is a move from the imperative being shaped by the indicative of salvation to the imperative focusing on external dynamics."²²⁹ For instance, he points out that the love defined through Christ needs to be expressed via specific conduct and way of life (e.g., respect for institutions in Romans 13:1-7).²³⁰

In the remaining one-third of the book Schrage tries to treat the rest of the New Testament texts in five sections according to the themes emerged: The ethics of responsibility of those deuterio-Pauline materials; the parenesis of the *Epistle of James*; the commandment of brotherly love within the Johannine school; the exhortation to live as pilgrims in the *Letter to the Hebrews* and the eschatological exhortation in book of *Revelation*.

In sum, these findings reconfirm Schrage's claim that New Testament ethics is theological, historical, and diverse. Yet a central criterion is foundational for each of

²²⁶ Schrage, 152.

²²⁷ McDonald, 596.

²²⁸ Schrage, 167; Quie, 98 ; Schrage 177.

²²⁹ Quie, 98.

²³⁰ Schrage 211, 215.

these diverse approaches: Christologically defined love as expressed in “God’s saving act in Jesus Christ.”²³¹

Schrage’s *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* was widely welcomed as one of the important works in this discipline.²³² For our purposes I want to consider two of his contributions, namely, methodology and content.

First, Schrage is careful in presenting the theological and historical factors that influence the ethics of the New Testament writings.²³³ In so doing he adopts “the [historical] critical approach to texts while seeking indispensable norms [for Christian conduct].”²³⁴ Knowing that the work is still primarily exegetical in orientation and not so much a study of ethics, Schrage’s use of conventional methods is understandable.²³⁵ However, a couple of scholars comment that though he promised otherwise, there is no real discussion of hermeneutics connecting the exegetical to the ethics. Moreover, he omits sociological and anthropological inquiry/reflection that is needed to put his discovery into a larger context.²³⁶ While I think Schrage does open up some hermeneutical questions to our contemporary readers in his discussion of concrete precepts/issues, he does not work them out at the end.²³⁷

With regard to the use of resources, his work also gives mixed impressions. Schrage uses extensive resources, both biblical and modern extra-biblical literature.²³⁸

²³¹ Ringe, 355; Harrington, 477.

²³² Bretzke, *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, 5.

²³³ Quie, 98.

²³⁴ Simmons, 441.

²³⁵ McDonald, 596.

²³⁶ Ringe, 355; Scroggs, 190.

²³⁷ McDonald, 595.

²³⁸ Quie, 98; Krentz, 396.

Yet, he makes little reference to the methodological shift of his time and its related studies (e.g., the employment of socio-historical methods).²³⁹ As some scholars rightly point out, Schrage's resources are overwhelmingly European with a First World voice; he makes no reference to scholarship of different perspectives, such as liberation theology.²⁴⁰ Though certain ethical concepts such as virtue and casuistry are mentioned occasionally, there is no direct sustained reference to any ethical theory.²⁴¹

Second, I would agree with most of the commentators that *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* is a comprehensive survey of New Testament ethics, both in terms of breadth and depth.²⁴² However, he treats certain New Testament writings (e.g., 2 Peter and Jude) in a disproportionately brief manner.²⁴³ One wonders if these writings are of no or little ethical significance. Finally, aside from the Christological love, Schrage does not propose "a unity of New Testament ethics."²⁴⁴

Nevertheless, I agree that Schrage's exegetical presentation is a balanced one and can be described as a kind of "middle road position."²⁴⁵ While some commentators criticized it as unoriginal and uncreative,²⁴⁶ I believe that Schrage's comprehensive treatment of 'the ethics developed during the early church' is uncommon among other similar works.

²³⁹ Ringe, 355-56.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 356.

²⁴¹ See Schrage 188-89.

²⁴² Harrington, 476-77; Daly, 173; Ringe, 355; Scroggs, 188.

²⁴³ See Schrage, 278.

²⁴⁴ Daly, 173.

²⁴⁵ Scroggs, 190.

²⁴⁶ Simmons, 440; McDonald, 595.

In short, Schrage's *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* is, as Schnackenburg rightly notes, a 'standard work' done in a conventional manner.²⁴⁷ It is a careful analysis of the ethics of the New Testament in general and in particular, and has been foundational in the study of New Testament ethics among biblical scholars.

2.2 Richard B. Hays

Richard Hays, a Methodist and currently a professor of New Testament at Duke University Divinity School, is noted for his contributions in the field of New Testament ethics, particularly Paul.²⁴⁸ His *The Moral Vision of New Testament* has been a widely discussed work among biblical scholars and Christian ethicists. In fact, since the early eighties, Hays has been writing on New Testament ethics focusing on particular Pauline writings with relevant ethical issues. For instance, in *Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ*, Hays, by careful exegesis of the texts, demonstrates that Paul's ethical exhortations to the Galatians (Galatians 5 and 6) have a Christological ground in that the law of Christ is a paradigm for the life of individual believers and the Christian community.²⁴⁹

However, throughout the whole decade of the nineties, Hays has shifted his interest to the methodological discussion of New Testament ethics itself. Two related essays of this period are particularly noteworthy for they reveal Hays's own conviction

²⁴⁷ Daly, 172.

²⁴⁸ Richard A. Burridge, "A New Testament Ethics for South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 102 (November 1998): 72.

²⁴⁹ Richard Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (April 1987): 272-73.

regarding New Testament ethics, namely, that New Testament ethics as a normative theological discipline.²⁵⁰ And based on this conviction Hays proposes a multi-task framework in doing New Testament ethics. In the first essay, “Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics,” Hays suggests a threefold task in New Testament ethics that applies to the interpretation of texts, namely, the descriptive, synthetic, and hermeneutical tasks.²⁵¹ The need for a multifold task, Hays observes, is the fact that “critical exegesis exacerbates the hermeneutical problem rather than solving it” for it heightens both “our awareness of the theological diversity within Scripture and our historical distance from the original communities.”²⁵²

The first of the threefold task is the descriptive task—basically exegesis. However, Hays emphasizes the need of a thick description (by means of historical criticism, for example) for the moral teachings of the New Testament are found not only in those explicit teachings but also “in the stories, symbols, social structures, and practices that shape the community’s ethos.”²⁵³

The synthetic task aims at seeking possible coherence and unity of ethical perspective within the diverse New Testament writings. Hays explains that this task is a necessity if one has theological concerns in view in the pursuit of New Testament ethics.²⁵⁴ While he insists that we must confront the full range of canonical witnesses and

²⁵⁰ Hays, “Scripture-shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics,” 43; “New Testament Ethics. A Theological Task,” 103.

²⁵¹ Hays, “Scripture-shaped Community,” 43-44.

²⁵² Ibid., 43.

²⁵³ Ibid., 44.

²⁵⁴ Ibid..

let the tensions stand, still he acknowledges that a cluster of images emerges.²⁵⁵ These images are “capable of providing an interpretive framework that links and illumines the individual writings” and are needed to handle tensions among the diverse canon and to ground unity for New Testament’s moral vision.²⁵⁶ As a result, he proposes three governing images for guiding synthetic reflection: the church as a counter-cultural community of discipleship; Jesus’ death on the cross as a paradigm for being faithfulness to God in this world; and the proleptical presence of the new creation.²⁵⁷

The task of hermeneutics, in bridging the gap between the text and ourselves requires “an integrative act of the imagination”²⁵⁸—to place ourselves imaginatively within the text’s own world.

However, five years after the publication of this essay, in his address to the Society of Christian ethics Hays added a fourth task: the theological task. This addition was based on two beliefs. First, “Christian ethics is fundamentally a *hermeneutical* enterprise: [It] must begin and end in the interpretation and application of Scripture for the life of the community of faith.”²⁵⁹ Second, the *telos* of New Testament ethics is “the formation of communities seeking to live under the Word,”²⁶⁰ that is, the formation of an eschatological community that serves as a sign of God’s kingdom.²⁶¹

²⁵⁵ Ibid.. Hays later added a third guideline in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, namely, “Be attentive to the diverse literary genres.”

²⁵⁶ Hays, “Scripture-shaped Community,” 45.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 47-48.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 45-46.

²⁵⁹ Hays, “New Testament Ethics,” 102.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.. Hays cites Wayne A. Meeks, “A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 176-86.

²⁶¹ Hays, “New Testament Ethics,” 117.

The theological task is thus a pragmatic task that aims at shaping the Christian community into “living embodiments of the meaning of the NT texts.”²⁶² It also serves as tests for the capacity of the other three tasks in producing ‘good fruit’—individuals and communities whose character corresponds to Jesus Christ.²⁶³

Hays brings the fourfold task for New Testament ethics together with the three governing images in his significant book *The Moral Vision of New Testament*.²⁶⁴ As the title of the book may suggest, Hays focuses on the ‘ethical vision’ of the New Testament and illustrates how it ought to shape the values and practices of Christian community today.²⁶⁵ The book is thus divided into four inter-related parts corresponding to the fourfold task. In Part One, the descriptive task surveys the major New Testament writings that are chosen because of their substance and historic significance.²⁶⁶ For Hays, although exegesis itself does not offer concrete answers to our contemporary moral issues, when rightly interpreted, Scripture can provide authoritative guidance for moral decision-making.²⁶⁷ “The Bible’s perspective on moral issues is privileged and offers the best guidance in Christian decision-making.”²⁶⁸

Hays sketches “the distinctive moral visions embodied in each of these texts.”²⁶⁹ Among the Pauline writings, Hays identifies three theological motifs—eschatology, the

²⁶² Ibid., 106.

²⁶³ Ibid., 105.

²⁶⁴ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HaperCollins, 1996).

²⁶⁵ Donald Senior, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Bible Today* 36 (March 1998): 134.

²⁶⁶ Hays thinks that the descriptive task is only the starting point of his entire project. He thus clarifies that he is not interested in presenting an exhaustive account of the ethical contents. See Hays, 13.

²⁶⁷ James I. H. McDonald, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Studies in World Christianity* 4, no. 2 (1998): 277.

²⁶⁸ Harrington and Keenan, 22.

²⁶⁹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 158.

cross, and the new community in Christ—that provide the cosmic, apocalyptic framework for Paul’s moral vision of “*koinōnia* of Christ’s sufferings.”²⁷⁰

With regard to the gospels, he focuses on their Christology, ecclesiology and eschatological expectation: In the case of Matthew’s version of Sermon on the Mount (and the Beatitudes in particular), Hays points out that the Sermon portrays Jesus as an authoritative teacher whose authority goes beyond that of the Law.²⁷¹ These texts are Jesus’ basic training on discipleship and “call for a life of uncompromising rigor in discipleship...[through which] the character of community is sketched...[This community] is a contrast society...lives now in anticipation of ultimate restoration by God...[and] seeks to embody this eschatological vision of God’s righteousness.”²⁷²

The book of *Revelation* is identified as a political resistance document similar to that of the book of *Daniel*. Hays understands its moral vision of resistance as shaped by the apocalyptic eschatology that offers hope, consolation and warrants for obedience.²⁷³ In each treatment, Hays concludes with illustrations of “how these particular visions had concrete implications for the behavior and life of the early Church.”²⁷⁴

Regarding the approach used in this exegetical descriptive task, although Hays acknowledges the need to attend to the developmental history of moral teaching traditions, he defines his approach as predominantly literary—a method that emphasizes the shape

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 19, 26-27, 46.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 95.

²⁷² Ibid., 97-98, 321.

²⁷³ Ibid., 170, 179-80.

²⁷⁴ Senior, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 134.

of the whole work, as in his treatment of the Gospel of Mark.²⁷⁵ And the order of discussion is primarily historical rather than canonical: It begins with Pauline writings and then moves onto the evangelists' narratives and other epistles.

The second part of the book focuses on the discussion of the plausibility of a coherent normative New Testament ethics.²⁷⁶ He tries to identify the single moral vision of the New Testament which becomes a framework within which moral judgment takes place.²⁷⁷ Although Hays admits that a single unifying notion is inadequate, he is convinced that synthesis is possible and thus aims at articulating wherein the unity of moral visions lies.²⁷⁸ His approach is basically one of induction—by means of trial and error various metaphors and images are tested to see if they illuminate the whole New Testament.²⁷⁹ Hays restates those three governing images he identified earlier, namely, community, cross and new creation, as focal images and lenses in the discernment of what is fundamental in the ethical vision of New Testament as a whole.²⁸⁰ With regards to the use of images, Hays basically holds that “the unity and sense of Scripture can be grasped only through an act of metaphorical imagination that focuses the diverse contents of the texts in terms of a particular ‘imaginative characterization.’”²⁸¹

In Part Three, Hays offers hermeneutical proposals based on his examination of how selected theological ethicists (e.g., Karl Barth and Stanley Hauerwas) have used

²⁷⁵ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 74; David Herbert, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Modern Believing* 39, no. 3 (July 1998): 55.

²⁷⁶ Herbert, 56.

²⁷⁷ Richard Alan Young, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 1 (March 1999): 137.

²⁷⁸ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 191.

²⁷⁹ Spohn, “Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics,” 528.

²⁸⁰ James T. Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Theology Today* 55, no. 1 (April 1998): 97; Hays, 200.

²⁸¹ Hays, “New Testament Ethics,” 107.

Scripture. He first discusses four modes of moral discourse, i.e., rules, principles, paradigms, and symbolic worlds, in which contemporary ethicists appeal to Scripture as a basis for moral reflection.²⁸² He evaluates how Scripture is employed by those ethicists and how it is related to other sources.²⁸³

The last part of the book is a concrete elaboration of what Hays means by theological task. In it he applies his methodological framework onto some specific ethical issues, including violence and abortion, and offers plan of action. The issues chosen are based on the presumption that they require different ways of drawing upon the New Testament.²⁸⁴ In doing so, he follows the sequence of the fourfold task: 1) Reads the relevant texts carefully; 2) evaluates them in light of the three focal images; 3) reflects on the modes used in these texts; and 4) draws normative conclusions for each of these issues.²⁸⁵ For example, Hays selects parts of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 as the key text in his discussion of using violence in defense of justice.²⁸⁶ He first concludes from exegetical investigation that the normative teaching of the selected text (5:38-48) is nonviolent love of enemies. He then reads the text through the lenses of community, cross, and new creation, and concludes that Christian community is called to be a one of reconciliation that determines to suffer for its witness and yet will be vindicated by the resurrection of the dead. By reflecting upon various modes of appropriation he claims

²⁸² Freeman Sleeper, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Interpretation* 52, no. 2 (April 1998): 202.

²⁸³ As Freeman Sleeper summarizes, "Hays discusses moral judgment as an imaginative or metaphorical act, the need for any metaphor to be embodied in the church, and the use of the Old Testament." See Sleeper, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 202.

²⁸⁴ Gilbert Meilaender, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *First Things* 78 (December 1997): 64.

²⁸⁵ Young, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 137.

²⁸⁶ Hays, 317-44.

that all testify against the use of violence. Finally, he draws a normative conclusion that the Church is called to be a community of peace.

As a whole, Hays's project has been well received by both theological ethicists and biblical scholars as a significant resource for New Testament ethics.²⁸⁷ The work is applauded for its comprehensiveness and for being extra-ordinary: With the insertion of Part Three and Four, the book is able to take on the whole task from the descriptive to the normative, and from theory to practice.²⁸⁸ As Harrington succinctly points out, Hays goes beyond the level of description as other conventional biblical scholars did, such as Wolfgang Schrager.²⁸⁹

Unfortunately, some are concerned with the adequacy of Hays's discussion on the overarching content issues of Scripture and ethics themselves.²⁹⁰ For example, Johnson points out that there is no discussion of the relation of ethics to moral formation within the community, and that the approach remains act-oriented.²⁹¹ Above all the criticisms fell on Part One and Two.

With regards to the order of his exegetical descriptive task, Hays believes that New Testament ethics is contained not in a historical reconstruction of Jesus' teaching but in its canonical writings,²⁹² but the decision to treat the historical Jesus only briefly is

²⁸⁷ Frank J. Matera, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Theological Studies* 58 (September 1997): 537.

²⁸⁸ Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 98; Luke Timothy Johnson, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Commonweal* 124 (June 6 1997): 23.

²⁸⁹ Harrington and Keenan, 21.

²⁹⁰ Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 97; Johnson, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 25.

²⁹¹ Johnson, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 25. Bretzke is also concerned with the complaint that treatment of ethics is lacking. See Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 97.

²⁹² Matera, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 538.

somehow unconvincing. Second, I agree with the criticism that the content of the descriptive treatment itself is rather imbalanced or incomprehensive.²⁹³ For instance, Richard Burridge points out that many of the later/deutero Pauline writings (such as Colossians) and non-Pauline epistles are barely mentioned.²⁹⁴ James McDonald argues that the epistle of James, being the most ‘moral’ of all epistles with a moral tradition different from Pauline tradition should not be neglected.²⁹⁵

While scholars consider Part Two a unique contribution, some are concerned that the attempt to seek synthesis has the danger of neglecting voices that either do not fit the agenda or are already comprehended within the agenda.²⁹⁶ They perceive what is problematic is the fact that it “disrupts the narrative structure of the New Testament and may leave out essential elements.”²⁹⁷

For many the main concern seems to be the three proposed focal images. On the one hand, they question the adequacy of these three images—and in particular the image of ‘new community’—for embracing the diverse images in the New Testament.²⁹⁸ For instance, Burridge points out that since the lens of love is crucial in relation to Jesus’ ethics and is used far more often than ‘cross’ or ‘community’, he doubts “whether these images will serve his purpose.”²⁹⁹ Frank Matera argues that the three images are so similar to the categories Hays employs in his discussion of Pauline writings, he wonders

²⁹³ Spohn, “Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics?” 526; McDonald, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 278.

²⁹⁴ Burridge, “A New Testament Ethics for South Africa,” 72.

²⁹⁵ McDonald, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 278.

²⁹⁶ Herbert, 59; Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 97.

²⁹⁷ Young, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 137.

²⁹⁸ Sleeper, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 202; Spohn, “Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics,” 528; Burridge, “A New Testament Ethics for South Africa,” 73.

²⁹⁹ Burridge, “A New Testament Ethics for South Africa,” 73.

whether Paul's writing is the ultimate determination of Hays's understanding of the New Testament's moral vision.³⁰⁰ Richard Young thus suggests that Hays "is already engaged in synthesis during the descriptive task."³⁰¹

Harrington and Keenan's criticism deserves our attention. They comment that unlike feminists and liberation theologians, Hays fails to take into account "the social location of the one using these master lenses."³⁰² They argue that the discussion of the exegete's own social location is crucial for the agent's own understanding of Scripture.³⁰³ Keenan further claims that the ability to recognize the good in Scripture does not depend on 'impersonal' images/lenses. He counter proposes fundamental internal character traits needed for the individual and the community to understand Scripture.³⁰⁴ However, both Harrington and Keenan suggest that Hays's insight of searching for focal images is in tune with their own virtue ethics model in that those lenses correlate with certain virtues and both "serve to guide us more accurately in our biblical evaluations and syntheses."³⁰⁵ Not surprisingly, we can name the second part "the most creative and controversial aspect" of Hays's whole framework.³⁰⁶

Finally, regarding Hays's treatment of the last two tasks, that is, the analysis on how some ethicists have used Scripture and the application of the framework in ethical issues, some Catholic commentators are somehow disappointed that the choice of these ethicists lacks Catholic representation that may challenge Hays's perception of how

³⁰⁰ Matera, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 538.

³⁰¹ Young, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 137.

³⁰² Harrington and Keenan, 29.

³⁰³ Ibid..

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 29, 109, 198.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 29.

³⁰⁶ Spohn, "Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics?" 528.

Scripture is the privileged source.³⁰⁷ Others are disappointed that Hays's work still asserts that non-biblical sources—tradition, reason and experience—as subordinate to Scripture.³⁰⁸ However, some Catholics like Spohn praise Hays for “moving from text to life by appealing to metaphor, which is the creative coupling of unrelated terms that provokes new insight.”³⁰⁹ He adds that what stands out most is “the sophistication of Hays's method in moving from text to world.”³¹⁰

In sum, Hays's project is highly valuable in informing and shaping our ongoing discussion of the role of Scripture in ethics as well as the unity of New Testament ethics. Furthermore, the overall methodology of Hays's work can be applicable to Old Testament ethics.³¹¹

2.3 Frank J. Matera

Among those factors that invite commentators to compare the works of Hays and Matera is the fact that Matera's *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* was published in the same year as was Hays's work.³¹² Matera, a Catholic priest, is a professor of New Testament at Catholic University of America. He was trained in both Europe and America with a concentration on Pauline letters and New Testament

³⁰⁷ Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 98.

³⁰⁸ Walter J. Woods, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *America* 177 (August 16-23 1997): 27; Johnson, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 24.

³⁰⁹ Spohn, “Is There Such a Thing as New Testament Ethics,” 529.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 531; Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 98.

³¹¹ Bretzke, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 97.

³¹² Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996). Andrew T. Lincoln, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 120.

theology.³¹³ He is the author of not a few books, including *Galatians* in the *Sacra Pagina* series.³¹⁴ However, since the time of teaching in St. John Seminary in Boston (1982-87), Matera has published a number of exegetical articles with special interest on the Passion and Death of Jesus as recorded by the evangelists.³¹⁵ Like Hays, Matera also published an article on New Testament ethics—*Ethics for the Kingdom of God: The Gospel according to Mark*³¹⁶—prior to the publication of his *New Testament Ethics*. To a certain extent, as seen in the role played by Hays’s own articles, this article anticipates the kind of New Testament ethics to be found in the book. In it, Matera claims that narrative has an ethical dimension—it creates “a moral universe within which characters choose good and evil.”³¹⁷ And in the case of Mark’s narrative, it is the kingdom of God that structures its moral universe. The corresponding ethical response includes repentance and faith.³¹⁸ As a result, Matera argues that “a careful study of the narrative theology in Mark’s gospel can enrich Catholic moral theology by refocusing attention upon the kingdom of God as the essential foundation for Christian ethics.”³¹⁹ A fuller discussion of the ethics prescribed in each of the New Testament writings, however, is found in his *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* that is published in 1996.

³¹³ Frank J. Matera, “Christ in the Theologies of Paul and John,” *Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (June 2006): 237.

³¹⁴ See Frank J. Matera, “Galatians and the Development of Paul’s Teaching on Justification,” *Word & World* 20 no. 3 (Summer 2000): 239.

³¹⁵ See Frank J. Matera, “Matthew 27: 11-54,” *Interpretation* 38, no. 1 (January 1984): 55-59; “The Death of Jesus According to Luke: A Question of Sources,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (July 1985): 469-85; and “Responsibility for the Death of Jesus according to the Acts of the Apostles,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39 (June 1990): 77-93.

³¹⁶ Frank J. Matera, “Ethics for the Kingdom of God: The Gospel according to Mark,” *Louvain Studies* 20, no. 2-3 (Sum-Fall 1995): 187-200.

³¹⁷ Matera, “Ethics for the Kingdom of God: The Gospel according to Mark,” 188.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 195-200.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

New Testament Ethics is the second of his trilogy of New Testament studies.³²⁰

The goal of his second work is “to describe as accurately as possible the moral and ethical vision that a given writing proposes.”³²¹ This is based on the observation that New Testament writings are diverse, historically and culturally conditioned.³²² Matera is thus concerned that the traditional diachronic and synchronic methods used in New Testament ethics are inadequate in one way or another in handling the texts: Diachronic method, by focusing upon chronological development within New Testament ethics and digging through the layers of traditions to Jesus’ moral teaching, “fragments the New Testament witness and tends to devalue later New Testament writings;” while the synchronic approach, though preserving the integrity of the New Testament, “often mutes the individual voices.”³²³ Consequently, he proposes an approach that aims at revealing certain ethical principles that are consistently applied in the texts Matera examines.³²⁴

This approach is founded on the assumption that “the primary object of New Testament ethics should be the writings of the New Testament ...and [its] primary subject is the ethical teachings of these writings.”³²⁵ In other words, what is decisive in shaping the moral life of the Church is the New Testament writings themselves; and the approach to New Testament ethics should not be a historical reconstruction or theological

³²⁰ Chris McMahon, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Living Light* 36 (January, 2001): 71. The other two works of his trilogy are: *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies* (1986) and *New Testament Christology* (1999). In 2007, he publishes *New Testament Theology* that offers a better treatment of the Kingdom of God theme.

³²¹ McMahon, 71.

³²² Stephen Pattee, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (April 1998): 370.

³²³ Richard Alan Young, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (June 1999): 343; Matera, *New Testament Ethics*, 5.

³²⁴ Pattee, 370.

³²⁵ Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 7.

synthesis of the ethical teachings of Jesus and Paul.³²⁶ Rather, it should focus on the moral teaching ascribed to them.³²⁷ For this and other reasons, Matera does not provide a comprehensive study of New Testament ethics or recover the ethics of the historical Jesus but limits it only to the ethical ‘legacies’ of Jesus and Paul—the ethics of Jesus and Paul as portrayed or represented by relevant writings.³²⁸ He focuses on the literary, theological, and rhetorical character of individual writings and hence primarily employs literary and rhetorical methods in order to trace those major themes common to these writings.³²⁹ While he is aware of the historical and sociological aspects of these writings, such as the question of dating and sources, Matera’s work is basically descriptive rather than hermeneutical.³³⁰

Matera presents his findings in two parts, namely, the legacies of Jesus and Paul. The part on the legacy of Jesus is drawn from the Synoptic gospels as well as the Johannine writings. The order of discussion generally follows the canonical order.

Among the Synoptic gospels, Matera argues that they are focused on the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom and so the moral norm is one’s response to the coming for the kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, for instance, is perceived as a presentation of an ethics of the kingdom of God, namely, doing the greater

³²⁶ Lincoln, 119.

³²⁷ Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 8.

³²⁸ Ibid..

³²⁹ Ibid., 7; Freeman Sleeper, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Interpretation* 52, no. 2 (April 1998): 200.

³³⁰ Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 8; Sandra Hack Polaski, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Review & Expositor* 95, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 119.

righteousness.³³¹ The Beatitudes, specifically, is an introduction to the Sermon and identifies who the righteous ones are—they are the disciples who live in light of the coming kingdom of God.³³²

And in the Gospel of John, ethics becomes Christology and the subsequent moral norm is instead one's response to Jesus' commandment to love one another. Still, the distinctive themes identified in each gospel tradition converge back to Jesus. Thus, the common moral themes traced in the legacy of Jesus include the kingdom of God, repentance, faith, love, discipleship and judgment.³³³

Although each writing has a different emphasis and the interpretation of these themes varies,³³⁴ Matera points out that they all manifest a common origin—they are derived from Jesus' own teaching and hence reflect certain commonalities among them.³³⁵ The above-mentioned Matthaean Sermon and Beatitudes, therefore, is understood as Jesus' outstanding ethical teaching.

Regarding the moral teachings from the legacy of Paul, although it consists of the ethical instruction found especially in *Galatians* and *Romans*,³³⁶ Matera points out that no single Pauline writing can “represent a systematic development of ethical theory or a

³³¹ Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 44-45.

³³² *Ibid.*, 49-50.

³³³ Sleeper, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 200.

³³⁴ For example, Johannine writings contain many of the themes found in the Synoptics but they develop these themes in a new way.

³³⁵ John Topel, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Theological Studies* 58, no. 4 (December 1997): 723; Sleeper, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 201.

³³⁶ Brian K. Blount, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Bible Review* 13 no. 3 (June 1997): 20.

compendium of Paul's moral teaching."³³⁷ Hence Matera "relates each [Pauline and Deutero-Pauline] letter to its own background and shows the importance of themes such as election, the necessity to recognize and build up the church community by works of love, Paul as a trustworthy model of Christian living, justification by faith and the churches' needs of reliable teachers and sound teachings."³³⁸ He points out that these recurring themes are also manifested in the Pastorals despite their eschatological and ecclesiological orientations.³³⁹

What follows is a concluding chapter that offers a synthesis of the ethical legacies of Jesus and Paul. Although Matera does not offer any theological themes or focal images as Hays does, he identifies several general conclusions (or theses) about the shape of New Testament ethics:³⁴⁰ 1) The moral life of believers is a response to God's offer of salvation; 2) it is lived within a community of disciples; 3) their moral life is guided by the examples of Jesus and Paul; 4) it is directed towards God and towards the fulfillment of God's will; 5) it is manifested in our worship and our love towards others; and 6) our moral life is an ultimate expression of faith. Matera thus concludes that the overall ethical teaching of the New Testament "is inextricably bound up with the message of salvation,"³⁴¹ and the whole project is actually a first attempt toward a systematic presentation of New Testament ethics.³⁴²

³³⁷ Jozef Verheyden, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Louvain Studies* 23 no. 1 (Spring 1998): 80.

³³⁸ Walter J. Woods, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *America* 177 (August 16-23, 1997): 26.

³³⁹ Topel, 723.

³⁴⁰ Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 248-55.

³⁴¹ Young, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 342.

³⁴² Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 248.

Matera's work on New Testament ethics draws broad scholarly attention. Concrete evidence of this is the number of reviews written since the book is published.³⁴³ The general comment is positive, and the work is praised for the good amount of useful information and materials offered, as well as the provision of a concise, up-to-date analysis of the materials.³⁴⁴ In fact, the work is often compared with Hays's *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. For example, with regards to the quantitative aspect of Matera's work, one commentator writes: "Hays's first section covers similar ground to Matera's monograph...but in the material they have in common, Matera, not surprising, is frequently the more comprehensive...Matera provides a valuable alternative or supplement to Hays."³⁴⁵

Unfortunately, many commentators are concerned with the quality of the contents. Not a few scholars comment that the work reads more like a New Testament 'introduction' with ethical questions in the foreground than a volume that significantly advances our understanding of New Testament ethics.³⁴⁶ Moreover, the ethical claims of the study are rather modest and hence are "not exactly what one might expect from a study on ethics."³⁴⁷ They call for a more probing and critical analysis.³⁴⁸ For instance, apart from repentance and faith, what kind of relationships, values, and practices does the

³⁴³ There are over 20 reviews written in English and Spanish.

³⁴⁴ James L. Bailey, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 61; Lincoln, 119; Pattee, 371; David G. Horrell, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, by Frank J. Matera, *Theology* 100 no. 797 (September-October 1997): 383.

³⁴⁵ Lincoln, 120.

³⁴⁶ Polaski, 119; Bailey, 61; Pattee, 371.

³⁴⁷ Pattee, 371.

³⁴⁸ Horrell, review of *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 383.

kingdom of God demand?³⁴⁹ On the other hand, even though Matera makes it clear that his task is purely descriptive, not a few commentators still hope that he can move beyond mere description.³⁵⁰

Nevertheless, what is encouraging in Matera's work is his methodological orientation. He attempts to transcend the limitations of the historical-critical method in New Testament studies.³⁵¹ And his attempt toward a systematic presentation of New Testament ethics further demonstrates his effort to reconcile the two traditional (diachronic and synchronic) approaches.³⁵² Matera's new approach is not without puzzles, though, at least on the practical level. In the first place, how does he select and categorize the ethical contents of the writings? For instance, his chapter headings disclose his own biases: One may ask why 'election', instead of 'suffering' is highlighted in the treatment of the *Letters to the Thessalonians*.³⁵³ Second, some scholars wonder on what grounds Matera omits the *Letter to the Hebrews*, *Philemon* and the book of *Revelation*.³⁵⁴ Third and last, there is a fundamental issue of the connection between the legacy of Jesus and that of Paul.³⁵⁵ Matera seems to take this connection for granted.

Moreover, although Matera insists that his work is purely descriptive, a trace of a hermeneutic stance can be found. For example, one reviewer notes that in his treatment of

³⁴⁹ Ibid..

³⁵⁰ Blount, 20.

³⁵¹ McMahon, 72.

³⁵² Verheyden, 80.

³⁵³ Bailey, 61.

³⁵⁴ Lincoln, 119. Pattee explains that the issue of slavery in *Philemon* is treated as part of the household code of *Ephesians* and *Colossians*. See Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 122, 226; Pattee, 370. However, the treatment is extremely brief.

³⁵⁵ McMahon, 72.

homosexuality in Romans 1 Matera adds a footnote saying, “Paul, I suspect, would find the contemporary understanding of homosexuality as an orientation quite puzzling.”³⁵⁶

All in all, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* and its new, ‘middle course’ approach provide valuable insight for methodological discussion of New Testament ethics.³⁵⁷ The Catholic perspective which Matera brings in offers additional contribution to this discussion. Now I turn to another biblical scholar who offers a different perspective, namely, the feminist perspective, in her discussion of New Testament studies.

2.4 Sandra M. Schneiders

Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., a member of a Roman Catholic women’s religious order,³⁵⁸ has been Professor of New Testament and Spirituality at Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley³⁵⁹ and the Graduate Theological Union for over thirty years. Schneiders acknowledges that since the time of writing her dissertation, her real interest in New Testament has been rooted in spirituality—the lived faith experience—and her feminist consciousness began to emerge at the same time.³⁶⁰ As she began her teaching career Schneiders started to pay special attention to the task of hermeneutics as well, for

³⁵⁶ Lincoln, 119. See Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 293n16. Another widely noted example is his treatment of the household codes in *Ephesians* and *Colossians*. See Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, 223-27.

³⁵⁷ Verheyden, 80; McMahon, 72.

³⁵⁸ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 4.

³⁵⁹ Starting from Fall 2010 JSTB will be affiliated to Santa Clara University.

³⁶⁰ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 2.

she was convinced that an interpretation that “adequately takes into account the complex nature and multiple dimensions of the text and the reader”³⁶¹—is crucial to biblical scholarship. All these personal reflections have led her to attempt to construct “an interdisciplinary theory of biblical hermeneutics that can ground a coherent methodological pluralism.”³⁶² Schneiders thus has written quite a number of scholarly essays to bring these issues—hermeneutics, spirituality and feminist perspective—to the biblical enterprise. For instance, in a series of articles³⁶³ she carefully discusses the task of hermeneutics in order to reconcile the unnecessary antagonism between scholars and believers and to advocate a model of biblical interpretation that is “at once intellectually responsible and spiritually fruitful.”³⁶⁴

In these articles, Schneiders notes the growing awareness among biblical scholars—the recognition that there is no pure objectivity in exegesis and the importance of treating the Bible as literature first and only secondly history.³⁶⁵ She also points out the developments of biblical-theology movement and of redaction criticism that led to the view that the literal sense of the text does not only contain historical but also

³⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

³⁶² Ibid., 4.

³⁶³ See Sandra M. Schneiders, “Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture,” *Theological Studies* 39, no. 4 (December 1978): 719-36; “From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture,” *Horizons: Journal of the College Theology Society* 8 (Spring 1981): 23-39; “The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Interpretation,” *Theological Studies* 43 (March 1982): 52-68. Schneiders has also explored the relationship between Scripture and feminist. See “John 20: 11-18: The Encounter of the Easter Jesus with Mary Magdalene—A Transformative Feminist Reading,” in *What is John? Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996).

³⁶⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, “Church and Biblical Scholarship in Dialogue,” *Theology Today* 42, no. 3 (October 1985): 353.

³⁶⁵ Schneiders, “Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture,” 722. Schneiders cites R. M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1963), chap. 15.

theological—as well as spiritual and moral—concerns.³⁶⁶ These developments further lead to the rise of ‘theological exegesis’, that tends to expand the understanding of a text’s literal sense to include the intention of the divine author as recognized by the faith community.³⁶⁷

Around the same period, according to Schneiders, Roman Catholic biblical scholarship has gone through two important and related phases of renewal: Pius XII’s encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) gave approval for the “unhampered use of modern methods of biblical criticism [such as historical and literary criticisms] by Roman Catholic exegetes.”³⁶⁸ Vatican II’s dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum* (1965) emphasized the Bible’s central role in church life. These developments brought about certain academic and pastoral consequences to Catholic biblical studies:³⁶⁹

- 1) A division of labor within theology that implies that exegetes need not deal with the theological and pastoral implications emerged from their findings;
- 2) the challenge of academic world that calls for multi- and inter-disciplinary interpretation of biblical texts;
- and 3) the growing role of the Bible as a theological source book that informs other theological disciplines, especially spirituality and pastoral morality.

Therefore, Schneiders is concerned about “how modern biblical scholarship can be responsibly incorporated into the thought and life of a Church,” especially in dealing

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 722-24.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 724-29. Schneiders notes that although the term can be understood in various ways the explicit faith attitude toward the text is common to all. Schneiders cites R.A.F. MacKenzie, “The Self-Understanding of the Exegete,” in *Theology, Exegesis, and Proclamation*, ed. R. Murphy (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 11-19.

³⁶⁸ Schneiders, “From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture,” 25. Schneiders cites *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, par. 11-48.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 27-28.

with pastoral moral issues such as homosexuality, divorce, and remarriage.³⁷⁰ She argues that Catholic biblical scholars can “no longer [be] immune from the theological and pastoral consequences of [their] work.”³⁷¹ This is very important. Earlier exegesis, unlike hermeneutics, was considered as objective, non-interpretive science. Anyone with training could exegete the same text as another and the exegesis would presumably be the same. The social location of the exegete was not important as it was for those in hermeneutics. But Schneiders contends against this position.

The exegetical task of biblical scholarship, as Schneiders understands, is important but not enough for it “does not produce a full and mature understanding of the text.”³⁷² Hence, based on the insights of contemporary philosophical hermeneutical theory such as Paul Ricoeur’s notion of ‘text’, Schneiders advocates for a hermeneutical model for biblical studies—one that would “include both the philosophical and the literary dimensions and within which historical-critical exegesis would be properly seen as an indispensable moment in the full interpretive process.”³⁷³ She notes,

The text becomes semantically independent of the intention of its author...[The] literary genre is not simply a useful device for classifying texts but is actually a code which shapes the material in a certain way and also determines in certain ways the interpretive activity of the reader...[A text] once written is no longer determined by the understanding of the original audience [but] open to whoever can read it...[and it] transcends what it says and is contemporaneous with every reader involved in the existential complexities of the human condition.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 24.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

³⁷² Ibid., 32, 38.

³⁷³ Schneiders, “The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Interpretation,” 58.

³⁷⁴ Schneiders, “From Exegesis to Hermeneutics,” 33-34.

For Schneiders, the ultimate object of biblical scholarship is the contemporary meaning of the text.³⁷⁵ Thus, she calls for greater responsibilities on the part of Catholic biblical scholars to go beyond seeking what the text meant alone.

A more mature and comprehensive presentation of her insights is found in her two rather recent books, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* and *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*.³⁷⁶

The Revelatory Text is basically a study in hermeneutics. Schneiders notes that contemporary New Testament scholarship lacks a developed hermeneutical theory.³⁷⁷ Thus she hopes “to elaborate a theory of interpretation that can ground a reading of the text that is unreservedly critical, on the one hand, and that interacts meaningfully with the personal and communal spiritual life of the believing reader...on the other.”³⁷⁸ For Schneiders a text is not simply a collection of words that has only a single meaning but “an experience which has the power to transform us in the encounter between the text and the interpreter.”³⁷⁹ She thus identifies such hermeneutical theory of biblical interpretation as the ‘integral’ or ‘transformative’ interpretation.

In so doing Schneiders begins with the discussion of the text itself: As Sacred Scripture the New Testament is a symbolic revelatory text and the Word of God. The Word in turn is a metaphorical concept and symbolic witness whose central symbol is

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 37.

³⁷⁶ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture; Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999).

³⁷⁷ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 21.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

³⁷⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, “New Testament Reflections on Peace and Nuclear Arms,” in *Catholics and Nuclear War: A Commentary on the Challenge of Peace, the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, ed. Philip J. Murnion (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1983), 94.

Jesus Christ and its truth as transcendent.³⁸⁰ The Tradition canonizes the New Testament “as its authentic and normative self-expression, and constitutes its integral and authoritative context of interpretation.”³⁸¹ Faith is therefore a necessity for interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture.

Schneiders draws upon the hermeneutical insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur in her discussion and construction of a threefold schema: ‘The world behind the text’, ‘the world of the text’, and ‘the world before the text’. The first of this threefold schema is concerned “with what gave rise to the text and with the relationship of these facts to the text itself.”³⁸² Historical criticism is normally employed in this phase. Yet, Schneiders exposes the limitations of employing historical criticism alone and points out that biblical exegesis is only a phase within the interpretive project.³⁸³

‘The world of the text’ focuses on the Bible as witness. It sees the text as a linguistic entity and hence uses literary critical methods to study the text itself. The last of the threefold schema tries to invite the reader to enter its world and thus leads to a transformative experience for the reader. As one commentator succinctly puts it, this schema “reflect ways of understanding the text in relation to the originating experience, to the dynamics within the written text, and, then, to the activity of the reader in the circumstances of today.”³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 60; William Baird, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Encounter* 54, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 93.

³⁸¹ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 90.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 101, 124.

³⁸⁴ Michael Cahill, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Theology Today* 49, no. 3 (October 1992): 415.

In her discussion of methodology Schneiders claims that since the content and form of the text are historical-theological and literary-historical respectively, a plurality of approaches and methods must be employed in the process.³⁸⁵ By referring to the ‘historical Jesus’ research as an example, Schneiders points out that ‘historical Jesus’ is only a symbolic medium while the ‘proclaimed Jesus’ (which is the ‘real Jesus’ and the object of our Christian faith) is “the construct of the Christian theological and spiritual imagination.”³⁸⁶ Thus, while historical criticism is essential, it is insufficient and hence other methodological approaches such as literary, sociological/psychological, and ideological criticisms are needed so as to probe into the theological, religious, and spiritual dimensions of the text.³⁸⁷ In particular, Schneiders highlights the importance of ideology criticism in forming an integral interpretation: Ideology criticism points out that there is an ideology in both the text and the interpreter. Schneiders uses it to criticize those ideologies “in respect to the oppressive distortion of reality...[and] to protect the text from a premature appropriation by the reader.”³⁸⁸ Schneiders then concludes this work with an application of this integral or transformative interpretation to her feminist analysis of a particular Johannine story (Jesus’ conversation with a Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42). Rightly she is praised for her investigations about “the nature of exegesis and the role of theological commitments in interpretation.”³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 114.

³⁸⁶ Mary C. Boys, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Cross Currents* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 249. For her fourfold distinction of Jesus, see Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, xxi-xxx.

³⁸⁷ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 127.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 120-21, 171.

³⁸⁹ Kathryn Greene-McCreight, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Journal of Religion* 74, no. 1 (January 1994): 93.

Written that You May Believe is published in the same year as *The Revelatory Text* is. The main section of this book is actually a collection of articles that Schneiders had written on the fourth gospel. However, as Schneiders points out, they represent a single, particular, and original approach to New Testament writings that she has been advocating elsewhere:³⁹⁰ An approach that “engage[s] the spirituality of the biblical text through rigorously critical study...[with an objective] to contribute both to the faith life of readers...and to the ongoing enterprise of biblical scholarship.”³⁹¹ Therefore, the book can be seen as an application (and continuation) of what Schneiders has attempted in *The Revelatory Text* by setting it in the context of the Fourth gospel: An integral or transformative hermeneutical methodology with a feminist perspective.³⁹²

Still, Schneiders restates clearly that the use of critical methods of biblical scholarship is needed for the sake of allowing the message and method of the biblical text to influence its readers.³⁹³ She explains that these methods, though not a primary or sufficient approach, help clarify what is unclear in the text for texts are historical artifacts in the first place.³⁹⁴ This emphasis reminds us that the hermeneutical task is by no means a substitute of the descriptive task in New Testament ethics. Rather, what is needed is an integration of historical questions and methods with contemporary concerns and methods.

³⁹⁰ Schneiders, *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 1.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 5. Unfortunately, in both works, the whole Old Testament and New Testament canon is employed to support her discussion of specific Johannine texts. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, for instance, was cited only once to point out that the Fourth gospel does not deal with any explicit moral commandments. See Schneiders, *Written that You May Believe*, 13.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178-79.

It echoes with Hays's argument for a multi-task in biblical interpretation that we reviewed in *The Moral Vision of New Testament*.

Schneiders's overall treatment of the Fourth gospel, therefore, involves the following four necessary (but of varying importance) operations.³⁹⁵ The first is the use of historical criticism to correctly investigate the historical world behind the Johannine text. The second is the use of literary criticism to construe the meaning of the text in all its literary specificity so as to be the 'script' that governs the interaction between the author and the reader. The third operation makes use of redaction criticism to analyze the theological content of the text that helps us to grasp its transformative meaning. The fourth and last operation is to engage the transformative potential of the text.

However, what adds to her insightful integral interpretation is that it is written from a feminist perspective. She notes that feminist criticism helps to "detect and expose gender bias in the text and/or the history of interpretation and to highlight the liberating potential of the text, especially when it has been blunted or veiled by patriarchal interpretation."³⁹⁶ The feminist 'suspicion' also "alerts the interpreter to the ignoring, neutralizing, distorting, or suppressing of women's experience and all that relates to it."³⁹⁷ Thus, from a feminist standpoint Schneiders concludes that women in John's gospel played unconventional roles, held remarkable original relationships with Jesus, and took extraordinary initiative within the community.³⁹⁸ They officially represent the community in confessing its faith, accepting salvation, witnessing the gospel. In other

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 21-22.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 124.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 113-14.

words, they hold important apostleship as the male disciples do. Or, as in the interpretation of John 3:1-15, a feminist perspective allows her to recognize in the Nicodemus episode the femininity of God that has long been suppressed by the male religious establishment.³⁹⁹

In fact, according to Schneiders, the beginning of feminist biblical criticism can be traced back to the 19th century scholars like Elizabeth Cady Stanton before its revival in the 1970s.⁴⁰⁰ Biblical scholars realized that many of the problems were integral to the biblical text itself—that is, the text is ideologically biased against women—and this realization raised a fundamental question that underlies feminist criticism, namely, whether the biblical text can continue to function as revelatory text once a reader's feminist consciousness has been raised?⁴⁰¹ While the basic assumption within feminist biblical criticism is that the text is never neutral and/or the interpreter ideologically unbiased, there are different reactions toward this question.⁴⁰² For Schneiders she objects to the elimination of all those biblical texts that abound with materials that can be perceived as morally reprehensible to women.⁴⁰³ She believes that a text can develop and come to mean something different from what it was originally intended.⁴⁰⁴ In other words, texts have a surplus of meaning that interacts with the historical consciousness of the people.⁴⁰⁵ Therefore, the meaning intended by New Testament authors is not the only

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 122-25.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 127-28.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 130.

⁴⁰³ Odozor, 144.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid..

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 145.

meaning; and the presence of certain immoral material “is not sufficient ground for repudiating Scripture as revelatory text” or for discounting its authority.⁴⁰⁶

Schneiders believes that a hermeneutics of retrieval—that moves beyond suspicion—is possible for feminist criticism.⁴⁰⁷ By using the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42 as an example, she illustrates some of the common feminist exegetical critical strategies employed in the hermeneutics of retrieval:⁴⁰⁸ 1) Challenging the translations (of Greek terms like *hoi huioi* in vv12-14 which was earlier understood as ‘his sons’); 2) focusing on ‘woman material’ found in the text (such as the fact that Jesus talks to a woman in v27); 3) making women visible and constitutive of terms like ‘the world’ in verse 2; 4) revealing what is overlooked in the text such as the fact that the main character is a woman; and 5) challenging possible misinterpretations (that the Samaritan woman is consistently perceived as a whore.) From this Schneiders concludes that the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42 is a case of inclusive discipleship.

As a whole, Schneiders’s works on hermeneutics are praised for going beyond biblical criticism (e.g., historical criticism and literary criticism, etc.) which concerns only the text. She guides us to see how the text leads us to the transformation of the reader and the understanding of the New Testament as revelatory text.⁴⁰⁹ Her integral use of different biblical approaches in exegesis as well as her demonstration with concrete examples also lead many to applaud her for being innovative and thorough, inclusive and

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid..

⁴⁰⁷ Schneiders, *Written that You May Believe*, 130-31.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 131-34. The whole discussion here appears also in *The Revelatory Text*. See *The Revelatory Text*, chpt. 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Baird, 92-93.

dialogical.⁴¹⁰ However, one commentator is concerned with the appropriateness of using ideology criticism to rid the Bible of all its ideologies for the sake of preserving its sacredness.⁴¹¹ In short, he thinks that her presuppositions from her faith are guiding her more than the texts are. Biblical scholar Donald Senior also comments that Schneiders has overstated biblical scholarship's emphasis on textual objectivity, while excluding the relevance of the audience in reading the text.⁴¹² Nonetheless, Schneiders's attempt to develop an updated hermeneutical theory is recognized as courageous, admirable and inspiring to those who are committed to biblical interpretation.⁴¹³

In addition, although Schneiders is not writing on New Testament ethics *per se* and her integral/transformational interpretation is only a preliminary sketch focusing on bridging "a historical-critical approach to the biblical text and the stance of the believing Christian who turns to the biblical text for spiritual sustenance,"⁴¹⁴ her works give light to the possibility and importance of formulating a kind of biblical interpretation that is helpful in bridging biblical scholarship and other theological disciplines, like theological ethics in our own quest here. In fact, as seen earlier, Schneiders's construction of an integral or transformational interpretation is also out of a deep pastoral *ethical* concern.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 92; Boys, 250; Lewis Seymour Mudge, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Christian Century* 109, no. 27 (September 23-30 1992): 848.

⁴¹¹ Cahill, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 415.

⁴¹² Donald Senior, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (July 1993): 610.

⁴¹³ Karen A. Barta, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Theological Studies* 54, no. 1 (March 1993): 166; Cahill, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 416; Greene-McCreight, 93; Anthony D. Hopkins, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, by Sandra M. Schneiders, *Review & Expositor* 90, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 137; Senior, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 610.

⁴¹⁴ Senior, review of *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 609.

Finally, she has actually applied the integral interpretation in her reflection on the question of peace and nuclear arms, where she interprets certain relevant New Testament visions of discipleship like Christian vocation to peace, Jesus' love commandment, and the ministry of reconciliation.⁴¹⁵

Last but not least, Schneiders's works have demonstrated to us the importance of searching for the meaning for the contemporary interpreter, especially from a feminist perspective, in addition to the meaning for the original audience. As one commentator rightly notes, this feminist approach complements and even challenges the traditional biblical scholarship by male authors like John Meier.⁴¹⁶ Thus, I now turn to another biblical scholar who employs a perspective in biblical hermeneutics that in some ways coincides with feminist perspective—their mutual resistance to any form of oppression.

2.5 Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah

The fifth and last biblical scholar to be reviewed is Rasiah Sugirtharajah, a native Indian who lives in England and is currently a professor of biblical hermeneutics at the University of Birmingham, England. Like Schneiders, Sugirtharajah is not writing on biblical ethics *per se*; still, he has offered an alternative perspective in biblical interpretation that can be illuminating for engaging scriptural ethics.

As a whole, Sugirtharajah's writings and projects are predominantly focused on biblical interpretation and hermeneutics from a particular perspective—a postcolonial,

⁴¹⁵ See Schneiders, "New Testament Reflections on Peace and Nuclear Arms," 91-105.

⁴¹⁶ Boys, 250.

Asian/Third world⁴¹⁷ perspective. The specific interest in the postcolonial Asia, apart from his own postcolonial Asian background, can be understood from the following explanation:⁴¹⁸ Sugirtharajah is concerned with the lack of a genuine, distinctive Asian mode of reading the Bible and hence attempts to work out an alternative indigenous Asian biblical hermeneutical theory. In concrete terms, Sugirtharajah hopes to search for a hermeneutical practice that makes use of Asia's cultural and social experiences to illuminate the biblical texts.⁴¹⁹ He laments that "when it comes to biblical interpretation and evolving reading practices, [Asian interpreters] are so unoriginal."⁴²⁰

According to Sugirtharajah, current Asian biblical interpretations can be divided into two basic types. The first, dominating, metropolitan type basically refers to the western hermeneutics that has attained general universality. He explains that though Asian interpreters come from diverse cultures, they share this collective hermeneutical experience—they are "introduced to standard exegetical procedures which include alleged objectivity, and the use of a wide variety of [methods]."⁴²¹ Even among some recent Asian exegetes, he continues, "in a very subtle manner they are based on and re-work western models...[Western] methodological and theoretical approaches are

⁴¹⁷ I follow Sugirtharajah in the use of the term 'Third World' in that it is used in a rehabilitated sense rather than in a negative or geographical sense. It is used as "a semantic metaphor to convey the power of imbalance between those who are politically, culturally, and economically strong, and those who are weak." See Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

⁴¹⁸ Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation* 2, no. 3 (1994): 251-63.

⁴¹⁹ Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," 255.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 251.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 252.

creatively put to use to meet Asian needs...[they] have not felt the need to transform them in a distinctively Asian direction.”⁴²²

The other and less advocated type of hermeneutics is the vernacular reading of the Bible that borrows its practice from Asia’s indigenous past. This is the first step to an inculturated biblical criticism. However, these hermeneutical attempts are likely to be dismissed for not conforming to western academics and for lacking in methodological rigor.⁴²³

Two particular attempts of biblical interpretation that belong to the first type are the ‘Orientalist’ mode that is promoted by Westerners and functions to awake the colony’s past which in turn enables the Christians to express Christianity in their native form and recasts their social identity;⁴²⁴ and the ‘Anglicist’ mode that emphasizes the total replacement of indigenous way of learning with Western modes of biblical investigation/techniques and theological themes.⁴²⁵ The third, ‘Nativist’ mode is an attempt by the natives who are under the burden of Western and native influences to animate their vernacular tradition. They insist that biblical hermeneutics must take place in specific culture and language which helps promote the awareness of often neglected native traditions and the use of native metaphors.⁴²⁶

⁴²² Ibid..

⁴²³ Ibid., 254.

⁴²⁴ Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 7.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

As colonial methods, however, all these modes/attempts have certain negative consequences.⁴²⁷ First, apart from the issues of origin, content and execution, they are used to reshape Asian minds. Second, they insist that the proper use of Western exegetical methods alone can yield a right reading of the Bible. Third, they try to convince the readers that their findings are universally valid and significant and can cover Asian concerns. Although Orientalist and Nativist modes help regain Asia's lost memory erased by Western discourse, they are still inadequate for a postcolonial Asian society that is multi-religious and situated within a complex web of relationships between global and local contexts.

Taking into account Asia's cultural and religious pluralistic contexts, Sugirtharajah further identifies two challenges faced by Asian Christian interpreters:⁴²⁸ First, they need to learn to appreciate and identify the differences within their multi-religious texts context. Second, Asian interpreters need to be aware of their identity and role in relation to the marginalized, the church, and the academy.⁴²⁹

Therefore, in discussing the proper methodology needed for Asian biblical interpretation, Sugirtharajah advocates the use of postcolonial criticism—a discourse generated by postcolonial critical theory.⁴³⁰ Historically speaking, the term 'postcolonial' was first used in 1959 by an English newspaper in reference to the independent India.⁴³¹ Since the 1960s 'postcolonialism' became a popular term to describe the period after the

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 125-28.

⁴²⁸ Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," 256-61.

⁴²⁹ Being a native Indian living in England, Sugirtharajah adds a fourth element, namely, their identity as diasporic, bicultural interpreters.

⁴³⁰ Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, ix.

⁴³¹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 2. Sugirtharajah cites *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, iii (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 691.

formal departure of European colonialists following the people's struggle for independence.⁴³² The advent of the corresponding critical theory or hermeneutics, as Sugirtharajah recalls, was triggered by three events in the 1980s:⁴³³ The failure of the socialist experiment, the rise of global capitalism, and the loss of political momentum among the Third World countries. Not unlike liberation hermeneutics this postcolonial criticism claims to represent minority voices.⁴³⁴

Yet, its introduction and use in the field of biblical/religious studies is rather recent—in the 1990s—mainly through the works of ‘diasporan’ Third World intellectuals like Kwok Pui-lan, Fernando Segovia, and even Sugirtharajah who lives outside Asia.⁴³⁵ According to Segovia, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a process of ‘liberation’ and ‘decolonization’ was developed in which

the universal, objective reader is gradually replaced by the interested, local, and perspectival reader...the field of biblical studies is no longer the monopoly of white, middle-class men. The addition of Western women, men and women from outside the West, as well as non-Western minorities in the West has resulted in a diversity of method and theory, an expansion of scope of inquiry, and an explosion of interpretive voices.⁴³⁶

Since then postcolonial criticism was advocated by its proponents as an alternative to traditional historical criticism in biblical interpretation, though its advocates do not reject the insights and contributions of the latter.⁴³⁷ Sugirtharajah, being one of the

⁴³² Ibid., 12. Throughout the discussion here, I adapt Sugirtharajah's interpretation that the prefix ‘post’ does not mean ‘after’ but rather designates a space of cultural contest and change.

⁴³³ Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: The Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 247.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 244.

⁴³⁵ Pui-lan Kwok, “Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 46.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 46. Kwok cites Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 121-22.

⁴³⁷ Ibid..

foremost proponents of postcolonial criticism, has advocated the use of postcolonial criticism in biblical interpretation in many of his writings, among which are *The Bible and the Third World: The Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, and *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, that discuss the hermeneutical theory in general and its application in biblical interpretation in the postcolonial Asia/Third World in particular. Some of the key findings are as follows.

First of all, as a discipline, postcolonial criticism is diverse in nature due to the lack of a monolithic foundation and the various sources (such as cultural studies) from which it draws. Yet, there exists a consensus in that it is “essentially a style of enquiry, an insight or a perspective, a catalyst, and a new way of life.”⁴³⁸ In particular, postcolonial criticism “introduces power and politics into the world of literary criticism in such a way as to expose how some literature, art, and drama were implicitly linked to European colonialism.”⁴³⁹ The Bible is no exception. In fact, when the European colonial period began, the Bible also arrived at the same time and was used as a colonial tool in that its interpretation was to inculcate European values and customs.⁴⁴⁰ However, in time the Bible emerged as an instrument to criticize and condemn colonial violence and other inhumane practices by the colonists.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴⁰ Bonnie Roos, review of *The Bible and the Third World*, by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 745-46.

⁴⁴¹ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, chpts. 3 and 4; Roos, 746.

Second, the subsequent discipline of biblical interpretation during the colonial, missionary period has gone through several stages of hermeneutical development:⁴⁴² 1) Dissident readings by sympathetic colonial reformers to ameliorate colonialism; 2) resistant readings by colonized reformers to turn the Bible against the colonizers; 3) heritagist readings by the colonized to retrieve their indigenous cultures/traditions; 4) nationalistic readings by the colonized after gaining their independence to highlight economic development; 5) liberationist readings, resulting from the failure of national development programs, turn to the ethical perspective in order to seek creation of new person and new society; and 6) dissentient readings by minorities left out of the earlier independence movements. However, while the scenario in the Western biblical interpretation has changed, the situation in the Third World since then remains the same where missionary influence in interpretation continues in the aftermath of colonialism. Thus, a different critical reading that places biblical studies in a less apologetical context is demanded.⁴⁴³

Third, although postcolonial criticism and biblical interpretation are two separate disciplines, postcolonial biblical criticism helps situate the former's concern (i.e. colonialism) at the centre of the latter.⁴⁴⁴ In turn, the two disciplines are able to cooperate and address various issues such as identity related topics (like slavery).⁴⁴⁵ As such, postcolonial biblical criticism has two fundamental interpretive tasks: "One is to interrogate the biblical narratives and the interpretations which legitimize and reinscribe

⁴⁴² Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, chpt 2.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 25-26.

colonial interests. The other is to engage in an emancipatory reading of the texts, informed by a hermeneutics yoked to postcolonial concerns.”⁴⁴⁶

These tasks can further be elaborated as follows:⁴⁴⁷ 1) It unveils those ideological and cultural assumptions of Bible critics by reconsidering the biblical narratives as emanating from colonial contacts. For instance, while historical critical method recognizes Esther was an advocate for the Jewish people, postcolonial criticism would consider Esther a Persian woman of a specific social class and interpret the book as one that encourages assimilation and conformity to the foreign power. 2) It engages in reconstructive readings of biblical texts. The story of Elijah’s confrontation with the Canaanite priests in 1 Kings 18, for example, is not to be read any longer as a theological conflict between two deities but a complex issue of intermingling communities. 3) It examines colonial and metropolitan interpretations, especially those found in commentaries. A postcolonial critical reading of the question of giving tribute-money in Mark 12:13-17, thus, challenges the usual understanding presented by Western interpreters that paying tax is unquestionable.

In concrete terms, postcolonial biblical criticism reads biblical texts via four different lenses:⁴⁴⁸ A hegemonic lens reveals those internal structures within biblical narratives that support colonialism (as in the throne-succession narrative in 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2). A professional lens focuses on what contributes to hegemonic authority (such as rules in the books of *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy* and household codes

⁴⁴⁶ Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 18-19.

⁴⁴⁷ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 250-57; Roos, 748.

⁴⁴⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 79-85. Sugirtharajah borrows the decoding scheme from Stuart Hall. See Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Birmingham: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973), 16-18.

in the New Testament). A negotiated lens pays attention to those acknowledged hegemonic elements that has adapted itself for new context (e.g., the Synoptic gospels that are written to meet different needs). An oppositional lens discerns the voice of the opposition or marginalized (e.g., the Israelite midwives' explanation given to Pharaoh in Exodus 1:15-19 is not an act of deception but of defiance by the subordinated).

Furthermore, such biblical criticism does not only read the text but also pays attention to the contemporary translation of the text for translation practices often are heavily biased and pay undue attention to what the translator thinks.⁴⁴⁹ In order to demonstrate this reality, Sugirtharajah turns to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. He points out that in a world of oppression, postcolonial biblical criticism would insist that Hebrew words like '*ani* (5:3) and/or and English words like meek (5:5) need to be translated into 'the poor and the vulnerable' and 'gentleness with strength' respectively.⁴⁵⁰

Fourth, in the case of New Testament studies, postcolonial biblical criticism bears in mind that both Jesus and Paul have experienced colonialism and reads the New Testament with certain characteristics:⁴⁵¹ Postcolonial criticism brings the marginal and oppositional voices to the front (through the fourth lens mentioned above) and reads the parable from their viewpoint—for instance, in contrast to the classic interpretation of the parable of the tenants in Luke 20:9-18 that focuses on the people's rejection of Jesus, postcolonial criticism pays attention to the reaction of the people (whose response is "God forbids") and reveals their concerns that they will be at the mercy of the new owner

⁴⁴⁹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 166.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 169-70.

⁴⁵¹ Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 21-23.

once the land is taken away from them. Moreover, a postcolonial reading will not romanticize or idealize the poor but reveals the system of domination, as in the interpretation of the widow's generous offering in Mark 12:41-44. The traditional view tends to portray the widow as an example of piety/generosity. Postcolonial criticism, however, views her as a woman manipulated by the political system. Finally, postcolonial biblical criticism will advocate for a broader hermeneutical agenda that interprets the texts within the intersecting histories which constitute them (such as Christian-Hindu) and within an inter- and multi-textual perspective.

Fifth, within a postcolonial Asian context, Sugirtharajah is convinced that postcolonial biblical criticism is a viable alternative to the other existing colonial modes of biblical interpretation that we saw earlier.

In order to illustrate these five points I turn to Sugirtharajah's own commentary on the three *Letters of John*. He basically uses a rhetorical approach to reconstruct the original recipients' situation and concerns. In so doing Sugirtharajah first identifies certain colonial discourses in the epistles:⁴⁵² 1) The author's intolerance of theological dissidence and the subsequent use of harsh language and tone such as 'antichrist' to denounce the opponents (1 John 2:18); 2) his appeal to one's own credibility to maintain hegemony (1 John 1:1-3); 3) the stress on the authenticity of his message for the fear of unscripted improvisations (2 John 9-11); 4) the legitimization of his power by conferring on those who are on his side the identity of God's elected people (1 John 4:6); 5) his

⁴⁵² Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, "The First, Second and Third Letters of John," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, eds. Fernando Segovia and Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 413-16.

projection of an 'imperial' Christ that tends to suppress other cultures and even religions (1 John 4:14); 6) the provision of hospitality and generosity only to those who agree with his position as a way to eliminate opponents (2 John 10); and 7) the use of threat and flattery to divide the community (1 John 4:4).

Then, he further points out two colonial frameworks within these epistles:⁴⁵³ The first is the use of ethical dualism (e.g., light/darkness in 1 John 2:7-11) to discredit the opponents and hence justify control and conversion. Another framework identified is the introduction of father-child relationship that promotes domination, discipline, inequality and conformity (1 John 2:18, 28). Finally, a postcolonial reading does not only identify those colonial discourses or frameworks but also offers new perceptions:⁴⁵⁴ It allows us to see connections and complementary theological influences with religions/cultures other than the Jewish/Greek milieu claimed by some Western scholars, such as the possible influence of Buddhism on the concept of God (1 John 4:8, 16) and the doctrine of indwelling (1 John 4:4, 15-16). Postcolonial criticism also calls for religious activism that has communitarian and ethical implications (1 John 2:29). Moreover, postcolonial reading of the epistles acknowledges the presence of postcolonial traits within the texts, such as textual coalitions and the author's equal emphasis on theorizing/exhortation and ethical engagement.

As a whole, Sugirtharajah is praised for making connection between religious/cultural imperialism and economic colonization.⁴⁵⁵ His works are salutary for

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 416-18.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 418-22.

⁴⁵⁵ Roos, 748.

offering an alternative framework to the predominant hegemonic biblical scholarship—a framework that attends to the impact of colonialism upon our interpretation.⁴⁵⁶ In particular, just as what liberation theology did to Latin America theology, Sugirtharajah’s framework challenges our Asian readers and scholars to reconsider their reading of the Bible.⁴⁵⁷ Moreover, his works have offered a concrete response to those who insist that postcolonial biblical criticism “should not be satisfied with simply exposing imperial tendencies in canonical texts and deconstructing them, but should go further to construct interpretations which have decolonizing effects in the contemporary world.”⁴⁵⁸

However, Sugirtharajah admits that one cannot simply employ postcolonial biblical criticism to any context, including Asian context, without caution or suspicion. In fact, Yeo Khiok-khng wonders if such a postcolonial criticism can really help Asian biblical scholars to know their identity and questions if it is only a transitional term.⁴⁵⁹ Other theologians also question if postcolonial hermeneutics is capable of offering remedies or even better solution than the hermeneutics of liberation theology.⁴⁶⁰

Nonetheless, Sugirtharajah and his postcolonial biblical criticism, not unlike the case of feminist theology and its hermeneutics, have raised serious methodological

⁴⁵⁶ Colin Morris, review of *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah. *Heythrop Journal* 42, no. 3 (July 2001): 355; Christopher Rowland, review of *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah. *Journal of Theological Studies* 52, no. 2 (October 2001): 864.

⁴⁵⁷ Khiok-khng Yeo, review of *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 no. 1 (January 2000): 168.

⁴⁵⁸ Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, “Introduction: Empires Old and New,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 67. Sugirtharajah cites Jon L. Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 78-95.

⁴⁵⁹ Yeo, review of *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 167.

⁴⁶⁰ George Pixley, review of *The Bible and the Third World*, by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 4 (December 2003): 975.

questions that have a strong impact on the whole enterprise of biblical studies, including the area of New Testament ethics. In particular, as Sugirtharajah himself claims, the purpose of postcolonial biblical criticism is not to rediscover the Bible as an alternative for a better world but “to puncture the Christian Bible’s Western protection and pretensions, and to help reposition it in relation to its oriental roots and Eastern heritage.”⁴⁶¹ In our own quest of New Testament ethics, it provides a “location for other voices, histories and experiences to be heard” so that new insights and methodology to the ethical teachings of the Bible may emerge.⁴⁶²

2.6 Where are We Now?

So far I have surveyed how Scripture scholars try to construct a methodological framework for scriptural ethics that is built upon their particular perspectives. Each of them has provided certain specific methodological insights in their dealing with New Testament ethics. Schrage points out that New Testament ethics is not simply a historical quest but a theological study. He reminds us of the necessity of attending to the voice of individual authors/writings without forcing upon us a unified and reductive view. Though conventional, his approach demonstrates what a comprehensive and careful analysis of the scriptural content is, and has laid down a good foundation for treating the scriptural text seriously. However, Schrage’s attempt remains on the exegetical and descriptive level and even the historical criticism that he employs identifies with a First World

⁴⁶¹ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 257-58.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 272.

perspective. The ethical contents thus tend to be general and standard. Moreover, there is no significant involvement of hermeneutics or direct, sustained reference to ethical theory.

Hays's work adds to our understanding of New Testament ethics that this theological discipline is normative as well. Therefore, obtaining unifying visions are possible through synthesis. What is very insightful in Hays's approach is that he goes two steps further than Schrage and others. The introduction of a synthetic task signals the need to go beyond exegesis in dealing with the text. Then there is the call for a hermeneutical task that connects exegetical to ethical. Unfortunately, in doing so he sacrifices the need for a comprehensive treatment of the texts and fails to pay attention to location/context of the interpreter.

Matera's attempt shows us the possibility of balancing between respecting individual voices and seeking unity of New Testament ethics. Like Schrage he also reminds us of the importance of dealing with the text comprehensively and carefully although he employs different critical methods (like literary and rhetorical criticisms) in his treatment. In a subtle way his Catholic background also offers us a perspective different from the other two scholars. However, like Schrage his approach remains descriptive and lacks hermeneutics or reference to any ethical framework/theory, which resulted in producing modest and general ethical claims.

Schneiders, in contrast, attends to the importance of hermeneutics and advocates a theory of hermeneutics that takes into account the multiple dimensions of the text. By calling for an integration and employment of various critical methods like ideological criticism, she reveals to us the existence of ideology and presupposition behind the text

and the interpreter. More insightful in her approach, still, is the claim that exegesis is not a pure objective science for we each bring to the text our own historical selves.

Furthermore, there is a dynamics within the text, and the text has the power to transform the reader. Therefore, Schneiders's approach, while confirming with Schrage and Hays that the discipline is a theological one, further highlights the relation with spirituality.

Finally, she goes beyond Matera in emphasizing and employing her feminist perspective in a straightforward manner. Thus, she demonstrates to us the importance of attending to one's unique social location in the process.

Sugirtharajah, like Schneiders, brings forth the unique social location of the interpreter. He also emphasizes the need of a more culturally sensitive hermeneutics in the study of the Bible. Yet, his approach differs and advances from Schneiders's approach in two ways: 1) Sugirtharajah hints that one's social location and cultural context is the starting point of hermeneutics: that is, more than even Schneiders, as a postcolonial scholar, he appreciates the originality of our point of departure. 2) The subsequent method employed is a direct product of one's context, and it breaks away from those traditional, First World methods completely. However, his unique postcolonial biblical criticism risks the danger of being too contextual.

Although these specific insights are found sometimes in more than one author, as a whole they constitute the actual developments toward a more integrated scriptural ethics. Their contributions can be summarized as follows. First, in constructing a Scripture-based ethics, we need to take the texts seriously. In other words, the scriptural text is important to our overall construction. Subsequently, we need to keep a balance

between seeking unified themes among the texts and respecting their diversity so as to be truthful to the texts. Likewise, the exegetical task needs both to go beyond traditional critical methods and to employ different approaches that attend to the social, cultural and religious background of the text and even the philosophical/ethical theory behind the text.

Second, scriptural ethics requires not just exegesis but more importantly an appropriate hermeneutics. In other words, it is concerned with the meaning of the text for the reader today. Hermeneutics is important for bringing about the interaction between the text and the reader so much so that the reader is transformed. The subsequent task of hermeneutics needs to acknowledge and be attentive to the interpreter's social location; hence, alternative hermeneutical methods relevant to one's perspective are needed.

Despite the recognition of their insights and contributions, we also see certain limitations in the attempts of these scholars that continue to challenge us to seek further development in constructing a more integrated Scripture-based ethics. I identify three related criticisms. The first criticism is that the ethical claims identified in their writings are, broadly speaking, rather modest, general and at times inconsistent or over-subjective. For instance, both Hays's focal images and Matera's theses on New Testament ethics are only general statements and sound more theological than ethical. There is also a lack of critical analysis of these claims.

A second criticism is the fact that there is almost no reference or consultation to the works of theological ethicists (ancient, medieval or contemporary) when making those ethical claims. For instance, when Schneiders adopts the insights of other scholars,

she was narrowly focusing on their contribution to philosophical or feminist discussion alone.

Following from this, the last and most foundational criticism is a methodological one: Their ethical claims either have no direct and sustained reference to or are not built upon major ethical theories like natural law theory. One wonders on what bases do their ethical claims ground? While they rightly call for the need of hermeneutics to bridge the text and today's readers, they fail to demonstrate this task on solid ground. As a result, it raises concerns about the overall accuracy of their ethical claims and the effectiveness of their overall methodological attempts.

In short, Scripture is still perceived by them more as 'scripted' than 'script'.

Chapter Three: The Attempt by Theological Ethicists

In the previous chapter, I reviewed some of the biblical scholars' attempts in the past two decades to develop a methodology in doing New Testament ethics. Their contributions and efforts, both individually and as a whole, confirm the actual development to construct a more adequate methodology in doing a Scripture-based ethics. In particular, they call for seriousness in dealing with the biblical texts and the use of relevant hermeneutics. However, the evaluation of their efforts and limitations also confirm that further development is really needed—in terms of discussing the ethical contents, dialoguing with Christian ethicists, and especially grounding their ethical claims on sustaining, sound ethical theories—if a more integrated Scripture-based ethics is to be constructed.

How about contemporary theological ethicists in their use of Scripture for ethical reflection? Have they also shown similar efforts and methodological development within their discipline in constructing an ethics that is integrated with Scripture? What could be their contributions and limitations? Based on the same criteria—in terms of the selection of ethicists and areas of evaluation—set out in the previous chapter, I will review the following Catholic theological ethicists in their use of Scripture in Christian ethics: Bernard Häring, Gustavo Gutierrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and William Spohn.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶³ In his *Scripture and Ethics. Twentieth-Century Portraits*, Siker poses hermeneutical questions related to the use of Scripture in ethics as a basis and explores how actually some significant contemporary Christian ethicists have made use of Scripture in their own areas of interest. Among them are Häring, Gutierrez, and Ruether. In this chapter, I am in debt to the work of Siker on these three particular Christian ethicists.

As said in the *Introduction* of this work, Delhayé called for a Scripture and Tradition-based moral theology in 1953. In fact, this was the same year when German Catholic moral theologian Fritz Tillmann, the pioneer in developing a Christian ethics based on Scripture, died. Tillmann, who was first a New Testament scholar by training, has been identified as one of the influential ‘moral theologians’ within the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century.⁴⁶⁴ Johannes Reiter, for instance, comments that the Christological accent in moral theology from 1933 to the Second Vatican Council, evidenced and exemplified in the work of Tillmann, influenced a series of subsequent German authors such as Johannes Steinberger and Bernard Häring.⁴⁶⁵ According to Pope Benedict XVI, writing in 2003 as the then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, when Tillmann’s scientific career as a Scripture scholar was brought to an end, he was “given the option of changing theological disciplines... and later became a top German moral theologian.”⁴⁶⁶

Since then, more and more moral theologians, such as Edward LeRoy Long and David Kelsey, began to advocate the use of Scripture and have written important articles on the use of the Bible in Christian ethics.⁴⁶⁷ When Pope John Paul II published his encyclical on moral theology, *Veritatis Splendor*, in 1993, he too employed Scripture in a major way and made it clear that “Scripture remains the living and fruitful source of the

⁴⁶⁴ Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 7.

⁴⁶⁵ Johannes Reiter, “Die Katholische Moraltheologie Zwischen den Beiden Vatikanischen Konzils,” in *Die Katholischtheologische Disziplinen in Deutschland 1870-1962. Ihre Geschichte, ihre Zeitbezug*, ed. Hubert Wolf (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999), 231-42.

⁴⁶⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Relationship between Magisterium and Exegetes,” *Pontifical Biblical Commission*, May 10, 2003, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030510_ratzinger-comm-bible_en.html (accessed on August 5, 2009).

⁴⁶⁷ Gustafson, “The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics,” 431.

Church's moral doctrine."⁴⁶⁸ Avery Dulles even commented that "previous popes and councils have not been inclined to have so much recourse to the Bible for their moral and social doctrine [as John Paul II did]."⁴⁶⁹

But this chapter is on contemporary moral theologians; still, I first turn to the works of Häring who has been very influential in the development of Catholic moral theology since the beginning of the Second Vatican Council.

3.1 Bernard Häring

Bernard Häring (1912-1998), a Tübingen trained German Redemptorist priest, is remembered by many as one of the most influential moral theologians of the twentieth century, especially in the reshaping of Catholic moral theology.⁴⁷⁰ His interest in moral theology, as one commentator points out, is greatly due to his personal experiences during World War II that "led him to question the moral theology he had learned as a seminary student."⁴⁷¹ Together with his post war pastoral and ecumenical experiences they provided the materials for his later contributions to the reform of Catholic moral theology.

⁴⁶⁸ Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*. Encyclical letter, August 6, 1993, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html (accessed on January 16, 2007), #5, #28.

⁴⁶⁹ Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 184.

⁴⁷⁰ Curran, "The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology," 180.

⁴⁷¹ Ann Agnew, "Bernard Häring." <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/haring.htm> (accessed on February 19, 2009). Agnew quotes Ron P. Hamel, "On Bernard Häring," *Second Opinion* 17, no. 2 (October 1991): 109.

Since the 1950s, Häring advocated for renewal and reform within the Roman Catholic Church. Although he was identified as a moral ‘manualist’, he brought many new ideas to Catholic moral theology prior to and during the Second Vatican Council through his writings and active participation in those conciliar commissions.⁴⁷² Among these new insights is the integration of Scriptural references into moral discussion and present human experiences, for Häring was convinced that the Bible is the central source of moral theology and that moral theologians are mediators of biblical messages and tradition.⁴⁷³ For instance, in the ‘Foreward’ to his multi-volume *The Law of Christ (Das Gesetz Christi)* that was published in 1954,⁴⁷⁴ Häring stated, “The present work attempts to expound the most central truths in the light of the inspired word of the Bible.”⁴⁷⁵ Elsewhere he also wrote that the presentation of the content and specific characteristics of New Testament law is “the task of moral theology as a whole.”⁴⁷⁶ As mediator of the biblical message moral theologians should be nourished by the word of God and learn from the work of biblical scholars so as to discern what helps us to know Christ and God’s salvific plan better.⁴⁷⁷ He said, “Moral theology, as I understand it...its basic task and purpose is to gain the right vision...we can gain the necessary vision of wholeness

⁴⁷² Ibid..

⁴⁷³ Ibid.. Agnew cites Kathleen A. Cahalan, “Still Spiritually Alive,” *America* 179, no. 4 (15 August 1988): 10.

⁴⁷⁴ Bernard Häring, *Das Gesetz Christi. Moralthologie für Priester und Laien* (Freiburg: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1954). *The Law of Christ*, 3 vols. trans. Edwin Kaiser (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961, 1963, 1966).

⁴⁷⁵ Häring, *The Law of Christ*, 1: viii.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 257.

⁴⁷⁷ Bernard Häring, “The Role of the Catholic Moral Theologian,” in *Moral Theology: Challenges for the Future*, ed. Richard A. McCormick, Charles E. Curran, and Walter J. Burghardt (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 32-33.

only by listening to the word of God.”⁴⁷⁸ Siker who writes on the biblical contributions of many theologians comments that this work “initiated changes that Vatican II sought to bring about a decade later.”⁴⁷⁹ Another instance was the important role Häring played during the Second Vatican Council in the drafting of earlier quoted *Optatam totius* as well as the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. He was even referred to as “the quasi-father of *Gaudium et Spes*.”⁴⁸⁰

In fact, Häring’s insights continued to influence Catholic moral theology even after the Second Vatican Council, especially through his writings such as the three-volume *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity* written twenty five years after the publication of *The Law of Christ*.

Although Häring advocated the integration of Scripture into moral theology, his more mature view of biblical authority in moral reflection grew only slowly over his career. For instance, in his earlier writings Häring made great distinction between the authority of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament, so much so that he perceived the former makes almost no claim in moral theology at all: For him the authority of the Old Testament—moral law or natural law—is completely transcended by the New Testament law and hence biblical authority is found solely in the new law of

⁴⁷⁸ Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*. 3 vols. (New York: Seabury Press/Crossroad, 1978, 1979, 1981), vol. 1, 6.

⁴⁷⁹ Siker, 59.

⁴⁸⁰ Charles E. Curran, “Bernard Häring: A Moral Theologian Whose Soul Matched His Scholarship,” *National Catholic Reporter* 34 (July 17, 1998): 11.

Christ as manifested in the New Testament.⁴⁸¹ Only much later did he assign a greater authority to the Old Testament as found in the creation stories and call narratives.⁴⁸²

Nevertheless, Häring claimed that normative statements (such as the theological virtues) alone are authoritative and binding although those concrete, time-bound passages (such as Paul's statements about women's veil in 1 Corinthians 11:33-36) can still be helpful as 'models' for dealing with particular traditions in our present time.⁴⁸³ In particular, he highlighted the normative and authoritative character of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, for it is "an ethics of attitude...the absolutely binding and liberating directive of the New Covenant."⁴⁸⁴ In other words, he perceived the Sermon as the new normative covenant law through which the concrete ideals of the inner law stressed by Jesus are expressed.

Moreover, what makes Christian morality distinctively Christian is the normative nature of the Bible. He said,

A moral theology of creative liberty and fidelity finds its distinctively Christian quality in the light of the dynamic dimensions and perspectives which we find in the Bible. Their normative value is quite different from any kind of norms fitting external controls. They are, however, binding—and at the same time liberating—guidelines, norms in a very broad but real sense. They depend thoroughly on faith and thus are distinctively Christian. This does not exclude that generous people not professing Christian faith might, in one way or the other, be guided by the same dynamics.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 68-69.

⁴⁸² Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:8.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 336.

⁴⁸⁴ Bernard Häring, "The Normative Value of the Sermon on the Mount," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967): 69.

⁴⁸⁵ Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:23-24.

Later on, he was convinced that Scripture does not only inform but also forms the community into one of a particular character, and it is in this sense that Scripture is authoritative.⁴⁸⁶ The Bible contains reflections and internal thought patterns (such as virtues) that can shed light upon our Christian life.⁴⁸⁷ Consequently, Häring perceived Scripture's significance for moral theology and Christian ethics as "providing a holistic vision of Christian life that gives general normative guidelines and examples of how faith is lived out in the world."⁴⁸⁸ He wrote, "We can gain the necessary vision of wholeness only by listening to the word of God and, in light of his word, searching the signs of the times."⁴⁸⁹ Such a perception allows freedom in the biblical witness and flexibility in how Christians pursue those commands in the Scriptures. It also has a strong impact on his subsequent use of Scripture.⁴⁹⁰

Siker believes that Häring has three fundamental uses of Scripture. In the first place, unity rather than diversity of the Bible is emphasized for a unified approach has the capacity to draw out dynamic responses of creative liberty and fidelity from the faithful.⁴⁹¹ Second, as noted earlier, he emphasized a great deal the authority of the New Testament (and the law of Christ in particular). This Christocentric approach explains his relatively little use of the Old Testament. Häring claimed, "Reader of the text needs scarcely be reminded that the point of departure in our study is not the decalog, but the

⁴⁸⁶ Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World*, 90.

⁴⁸⁷ Bernard Häring, "The Role of the Catholic Moral Theologian," 42.

⁴⁸⁸ Siker, 77.

⁴⁸⁹ Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:6.

⁴⁹⁰ The discussion on his use of Scripture will be limited to what is found in his two main works, *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ*.

⁴⁹¹ Siker, 76. Siker notes that the ethics of response permeates Häring's approach to both moral theology and Scripture.

life of Christ.”⁴⁹² Still, he did draw materials from the creation story, Exodus, wisdom literature, and a few prophetic writings (such as the Second Isaiah). Third, as for the New Testament, it is noted that in general the Gospel of John is mostly used. In specific, the farewell discourse and the high-priestly prayer in John 13-17 (as well as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7) are core to his works while certain Pauline writings (like Romans 5-8) and 1 John 1-5 are also frequently cited. However, Häring rarely referred to those synoptic narratives of Jesus although he understood that the life/death and ministry of Jesus are crucial to the understanding of Jesus’ moral teachings.⁴⁹³

Regarding *how* these biblical texts are actually treated by Häring, four basic ways are further identified. First, Häring did use the Bible for proof texting. For instance, Vincent MacNamara notes that Häring used Genesis 2:24 (“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh”⁴⁹⁴) to backup his argument for the indissolubility of marriage.⁴⁹⁵ Siker suggests that it is because of his identification with the manualist tradition that tends to employ Scripture to support conclusions that had been arrived at in the natural law tradition.⁴⁹⁶ In fact, Häring himself acknowledged the considerate use of proof texting in *The Law of Christ* and thus decided to use Scripture in a more responsible way in his later writings.⁴⁹⁷

Indeed, several Christian ethicists have recognized his insistence to go beyond this approach that is commonly used by pre-Vatican manualists: They note that Häring

⁴⁹² Häring, *The Law of Christ*, 1:xi.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 61-63.

⁴⁹⁴ All the biblical citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁴⁹⁵ Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1985), 34.

⁴⁹⁶ Siker, 64.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid..

was aware that Scripture contains many key themes and images that can be used for theological elaboration and development.⁴⁹⁸ Bretzke, for example, thus comments that Häring, like Gérard Gillemann, belongs to the model that seeks to find in their moral manuals key biblical themes that would help their moral approach stay focused.⁴⁹⁹

This leads to the second use of Scripture that was similar to those word studies employed among biblical scholars of the 1950s: One discusses certain theological themes or concepts such as sin and virtues by simply searching for relevant biblical texts.⁵⁰⁰ For example, in both *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ* Häring studied the biblical concept of conscience under the titles of “Conscience in Holy Scripture” and “The Biblical Vision of Conscience” respectively.⁵⁰¹

A third and related use is to treat the Bible as a source of textual examples so as to illustrate certain principles or as an analogy to interpret contemporary issues. For instance, he referred to the story of a Pharisee and a tax collector going up to pray (Luke 18) in order to illustrate the general principle of humility for genuine repentance.⁵⁰² In another occasion, Häring claimed that African polygamists could be temporarily tolerated based on the analogy of levirate marriage in Genesis 38. He explained, “[It] should not be excluded that the text might be a challenge to the Church when she prohibits the

⁴⁹⁸ Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World*, 90.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 88. Bretzke notes that Häring later replaced this theme with ‘freedom and creative fidelity in Christ’, which became the title of his 1979 work *Free and Faithful in Christ* (*Frei in Christus*).

⁵⁰⁰ Siker, 65.

⁵⁰¹ Häring, *The Law of Christ*, 1:137-39; *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:225-29.

⁵⁰² Häring, *The Law of Christ*, 1:423.

fulfillment of the levirate duty to African tribes who are, as much as were the sons of Abraham, convinced that this is their duty.”⁵⁰³

The fourth use of Scripture is called by Siker as the ‘illuminative’ use in that the cited texts appear to add insight to an argument. Siker notes that Häring often used them in clusters to ‘season’ his discussion.

Regarding the task of hermeneutics, it is noted that not until the publication of *Free and Faithful in Christ* did Häring discuss the issue.⁵⁰⁴ Yet, he talked only briefly about his hermeneutical principles:

Hermeneutics requires knowledge both of that time and our time, sharp awareness of the biblical horizon for understanding, including the time-bound worldview of the inspired writers, and of our own culturally conditioned way of approaching the problems.⁵⁰⁵

In other words, careful exegesis that takes the historical, social, and cultural contexts and literary forms of Scripture seriously is crucial to and a priori to applying what the Bible says to our contemporary moral issues. Still, Häring added that the Holy Spirit plays an important role in hermeneutics: “The Spirit introduces us not only to an understanding of the Bible but...to an understanding of ‘things that are coming.’”⁵⁰⁶

As a whole, Häring’s works are applauded for highlighting the importance of the Bible in Christian moral life and integrating Scripture into moral reflection. He has also rightly argued for an active role of Scripture in moral theology. His use of biblical texts is impressive in terms of quantity. In addition, he has demonstrated to us some of the

⁵⁰³ Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:307. See Siker, 66-67.

⁵⁰⁴ MacNamara, 35.

⁵⁰⁵ Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 1:334.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 331.

various uses of Scripture in moral theology. In short, Häring was an exemplar for the post-Vatican II theological ethicists in constructing a Scripture-based ethics.

Among the critical evaluations offered by Siker I find a couple of them noteworthy for our methodological reflection:⁵⁰⁷ First, against his own call for sensitivity Häring did not pay enough attention to those historical, social, or the literary contexts of the texts he employed. In fact, both his overly selective use of biblical texts and the lack of discussion of the various contexts in which the texts developed are recognized as “his way of ignoring those aspects of Scripture that are problematic [e.g., historical problems].”⁵⁰⁸ This raises the concerns regarding his exegetical work.

Therefore, the second criticism of Siker is that Häring rarely engaged in actual exegesis of the selected texts and did not incorporate the findings of biblical scholars into his discussion. Third, he was over-concerned about constructing a unified biblical vision of wholeness so much so that he ignored the diversity of approaches (such as prophetic approach) within Scripture. This double avoidance of the problematic texts and of the diverse approaches, as well as the lack of exegesis, reveal his inability or disinterest to confront those texts (e.g., those cruel acts found in the Old Testament and done in the name of the Decalogue) that may condone (or even exhort) behaviors that are against the kind of free and responsive loving act he identified in Christ.

Siker also finds his illuminative use slippery as Häring did not develop or comment on those cited texts at all but simply used them to ‘season’ his argument. Siker

⁵⁰⁷ Siker, 78-79.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 78.

hence understands this seemingly different use as simply homiletical and ornamental use of Scripture.⁵⁰⁹

However, what needs our recognition as theological ethicists is the fact that he was aware of the presence of text proofing in his earlier works and was open to seek more responsible ways of using Scripture in moral theology in his later works.

3.2 Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gustavo Gutiérrez is a Roman Catholic priest and theologian from Peru. His scholarship embraces diverse academic traditions from Europe, North America, and South America.⁵¹⁰ He has played an important role in the evolution of liberation theology through his writings and activities, especially through his active participation at the historical Medellín meeting in Columbia in 1968.⁵¹¹

Although Gutiérrez is not an ethicist or a moral theologian *per se*, his theological enquiry always has ethical implications. His seminal work, *A Theology of Liberation*⁵¹² (first published in 1973 as *Teología de la Liberación*), for example, does not only articulate many of the concerns of his contemporary Latin American theologians (such as the emphasis on history as a process of God's interaction with humanity) but also reveals

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁵¹⁰ Pierre Hegy, review of *A Theology of Liberation*, by Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13, no. 2 (June 1974): 243.

⁵¹¹ William B. Duncan, *The Political Philosophy of Peruvian Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez*, Toronto Studies in Theology Vol. 85 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 1, 71.

⁵¹² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagelson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

his ethical concerns.⁵¹³ One commentator notes that “on the theological level, he wants to show how God is present in the world, especially in human relationships. On the moral level, he seeks greater clarity on how God’s presence motivates the human heart and converts unjust social structures.”⁵¹⁴

Still, Gutiérrez’s theology is not only related to ethics but to Scripture as well. He says, “In my writings I try to do theology with a strong biblical basis... I have always thought it very important to be attentive to the role of challenger that [S]cripture plays when read in the church...”⁵¹⁵ As one researcher notes, although his earlier works made use of social sciences (such as critical theory) his later works (especially on politics) are guided by biblical exegesis.⁵¹⁶ One representative work is his *On Job*, a commentary on the book of *Job*.⁵¹⁷

In fact, Scripture scholar John Meier once commented that liberation theology is a concrete example in the contemporary world that “best exemplifies the promises and pitfalls of using the Scriptures as a source for theological reflection,”⁵¹⁸ for liberation theologians focus on the historical Jesus as the basis of their theology even though their use is not without flaws.⁵¹⁹

Nevertheless, his emphasis on Scripture is closely tied to his understanding of the task of theology: He insists that theology is “the critical reflection on the Christian praxis

⁵¹³ Duncan, 56; Thomas L. Schubeck, *Liberation Ethics: Sources, Models, and Norms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 151.

⁵¹⁴ Schubeck, 152.

⁵¹⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 47-48.

⁵¹⁶ Duncan, 57.

⁵¹⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁵¹⁸ John P. Meier, “The Bible as Source of Theology,” *CTSA Proceedings* 43 (1988): 1.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

in light of the word of God.”⁵²⁰ Gutiérrez perceives the Bible as basically this word of God which “provides a fundamental orientation for all Christian action and reflection” and has social and political significance.⁵²¹ The Bible is also “[a] collection of narratives that represents an ongoing process, unfinished, still a future possibility...[and] a spiritual history, a record of the historic evolution of the ‘people of God’, conscious of their status and committed to the realization of a truly human life for all.”⁵²² Thus, for Gutiérrez Scripture is an indispensable source revealing not just God but also humanity. In particular, it “mirrors God’s predilection for the weak and abused of human history.”⁵²³ It also “gives the whole process of liberation its deepest meaning and its complete and unforeseeable fulfillment.”⁵²⁴

For Gutiérrez Scripture as a source needs to be linked to other non-biblical sources in a complementary way, especially with Christian praxis and social analysis. He explains, “People engaged in a praxis confer an added meaning to the text, and a faithful reading of the text gives new meaning and direction to the praxis...[one reads] Scripture from within the context of [one’s] own praxis, but Scripture also reads [the person] by effecting change in [that person].”⁵²⁵ However, Gutiérrez is convinced that “the Bible speaks with the highest authority in theological and moral matters.”⁵²⁶ This conviction is built upon the presupposition that justice is rooted in God’s revelation that is

⁵²⁰ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxix.

⁵²¹ Siker, 126; Schubeck, 168.

⁵²² Duncan, 116.

⁵²³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxvii.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁵²⁵ Schubeck, 129, 131.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

authoritatively articulated in the Bible.⁵²⁷ Therefore, biblical authority is understood as challenging the oppressive authority (including ecclesial authority) and pointing toward a liberating authority—it authorizes the formation of a community that seeks to enact God’s preferential option for the oppressed.⁵²⁸ In other words, he regards the authority of the Bible as one from below.

Regarding his approach toward Scripture, Siker notes that Gutiérrez’s overall approach is a reaction to the pre-Vatican II European training he underwent that contradicted to his concrete experience in his home country in the 1960s.⁵²⁹ In particular, he is very suspicious and critical of the kind of exegesis, such as historical criticism, that is First World and Western oriented and unconsciously reinforces the status quo.⁵³⁰ “We cannot forget that in reality, the Bible was read and communicated from the dominating sectors and classes. This is what happens to a great deal of the exegesis considered to be scientific.”⁵³¹ Elsewhere Gutiérrez says, “Exegesis in the Christian churches of today is so closely tied in with [Western culture]... We have to remember that its purpose is the proclamation of the good news to the poor.”⁵³²

Thus, in general, his approach to Scripture is one that does not only pay attention to the biblical experts but also to what the community of faith says in light of its situation. In other words, he takes into account the authority of the interpreters (not just exegetes)

⁵²⁷ Ibid..

⁵²⁸ Siker, 137.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁵³⁰ Anthony J. Tambasco, “First and Third World Ethics,” in *Christian Biblical Ethics: From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis*, ed. Robert J. Daly, James A. Fisher, Terence J. Keegan, and Anthony J. Tambasco, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 139-42.

⁵³¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Freedom and Salvation,” in *Liberation and Change*, ed. R. H. Stone, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), 90.

⁵³² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Power of the Poor in History* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), 3-4.

seriously. In the arena of politics, he further advocates the use of other sources such as critical reason and creative imagination as key resources for relating Scripture to political matters; yet, he cautions against the direct application of biblical norms to these issues for it “fails to respect the complexities of politics and the nature of the Bible.”⁵³³

Gutiérrez uses both the Old Testament and the New Testament rather equally: Within the Old Testament canon, Exodus, Deuteronomy, the Psalms, Second Isaiah, Job, and passages that speak about the oppressed/poor (e.g., Jeremiah 20:7, 13) are frequently cited. In the New Testament, the gospels of Matthew and Luke are mostly used. And the single most important and frequently cited text is the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. Together with other similar passages (e.g., the reversal motifs in Luke 4:16-30) they highlight God’s preferential option for the poor and emphasize the need for concrete and material actions. Furthermore, Siker observes that the Passion narrative and Jesus’ death are not used much. He argues that for Gutiérrez the Passion and the cross symbolize God’s identification with human suffering rather than humanity’s identification with Jesus’ suffering—a view held by traditional exegetes who reinforce the status quo.⁵³⁴

Before we turn to the question of how he actually uses these texts, it is noteworthy to recall the specific role of Exodus in Gutiérrez’s theology. Many would agree that his theology is inspired by the biblical paradigm of Exodus. However, Gutiérrez himself claims that he makes only limited use of the Exodus story for he perceives other themes

⁵³³ Schubeck, 153-54.

⁵³⁴ Siker, 130.

such as poverty as more important than the theme of the exodus in the theology of liberation.⁵³⁵

Siker identifies four aspects of usage by Gutiérrez:⁵³⁶ First, Scripture is used in conjunction with human experiences—our ever-changing, communal experiences in particular—that shape our identity and self-understanding as believers. A concrete example is Gutiérrez’s use of and commentary on the book of *Job*: He first perceives the book as all about Job’s personal experience through which Job’s understanding of God and faith in God is reformulated and transformed. He then connects Job’s experience with his own experience among the poor.

Second, biblical texts are used to illustrate two guiding themes presented in the Bible, namely, creation/salvation and eschatology. In particular, he turns to the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25 and the Exodus experience to emphasize that the theme of eschatology “points to the consummation of the salvation already begun in creation...and is thus...the very key to understand the Christian faith.”⁵³⁷ He further employs these and other texts (such as Luke 4:21) to claim that the eschatological promises are not mere spiritual promises but also what is found in human history. Other related themes include the kingdom of God, resurrection, the transcendence of God, and the problem of evil and human suffering, that manifest the message that God’s mystery unfolds in human consciousness.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁵ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall make You Free*, 29.

⁵³⁶ Siker, 130-37. Siker’s survey examines a good number of Gutiérrez’s works. However, I will focus mainly on two major works: *A Theology of Liberation* and *On Job*.

⁵³⁷ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 93.

⁵³⁸ Duncan, 107; Gutiérrez, *On Job*, xviii.

Third, Scripture is used as a primary source to discern the genuine meaning(s) of poverty. He dedicates the last chapter of *A Theology of Liberation* to the discussion of poverty and solidarity and points out that it is in the Bible that the poor find their own story. Two types of poverty are revealed: A scandalous material poverty and spiritual poverty. The former is condemned by Scripture that also speaks about preventive measures. The latter type calls for complete availability to the Lord and joins Christ in protesting against poverty and expressing solidarity with the poor. Biblical texts subsequently employed include prophetic literature and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5.

Here, Gutiérrez uses the text only in light of Matthew 25 (the Last Judgment): He points out that the teachings of Jesus “begin with the blessing of the poor (Matt. 5); they end with the assertion that we meet Christ himself when we go out to the poor with concrete acts (Matt. 25).”⁵³⁹ Hence, blessed are the disciples who work for justice by love and life, and the so-called spiritual poverty in the Beatitudes must be interpreted as to be at the disposition of the Lord completely.⁵⁴⁰ Therefore, the Matthaean Beatitudes is used to frame the context of Jesus’ teachings.

Finally, the Bible is used to initiate a dialogue between the biblical writers’ foundational communities and those of the readers, so that new and unexpected experience/questions can be formed, which in turn lead to further dialogues. He says,

To read the Bible is to begin a dialogue between faith and faith, between the believers of the past and the believers of today...when believers read Scripture, they know that the Scriptures also challenge them...When the

⁵³⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Irruption of the Poor in Latin America and the Christian Communities of the Common People,” in *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*, ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 121.

⁵⁴⁰ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall make You Free*, 163; Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 169.

reading of the Bible is done as a community, as a church, it is always an unexpected experience.⁵⁴¹

While Siker's categories come from a Scripture scholar, within the discipline of ethics, Thomas Schubeck summarizes Gutiérrez's uses of the Bible as follows:⁵⁴² He first employs Scripture (e.g., the parable of the Last Judgment) to call for transformation of the moral agent into one who opts for the poor in concrete acts as an expression of the love for God. Gutiérrez also uses the same biblical text to provide criteria for ethical judgment. Another use of Scripture in ethics is found in his commentary *On Job* in which Gutiérrez uses the text to "criticize a theological-ethical system, and...to give a theological grounding to human goods."⁵⁴³ The complaints of Job analogously become the protesting word of Latin Americans against unjust systems (such as the doctrine of retribution). A fourth use is the employment of Scripture in the provision of theological basis for certain moral virtues. For instance, the transformed Job is an exemplar to demonstrate the virtues of love and justice.

Gutiérrez basically employs a kind of hermeneutical circle that constantly reinterprets the Bible based on social analysis of one's concrete life situation and historical praxis so as to construct new praxis. On the level of faith, he emphasizes that the point of departure for this hermeneutical circle is the historical person of Jesus who was born as a poor person among the oppressed people and hence is 'God become poor'. In other words, biblical hermeneutics is primarily Christological. Siker, however,

⁵⁴¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *God of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), xvi-xvii.

⁵⁴² Schubeck, 154-167.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 161.

understands Gutiérrez's hermeneutics as also communitarian, historical and militant.⁵⁴⁴

As communitarian Gutiérrez emphasizes the need to interpret the Bible in the context of faith communities; as historical he finds within biblical interpretation an interaction between the historical experiences of both the author and the reader; as militant he understands interpretation as starting with the struggles of the poor and calling for active commitment to the concrete service to the poor.

In short, he calls for a radical approach towards the interpretation of the Bible: It begins from the viewpoint of the contemporary world and one's personal experience, and then "goes to the roots of what the Bible actually is...to the essence of God's revelation in history and of God's judgment on it."⁵⁴⁵

As a whole, several commentators have praised him for his ability and skill as biblical scholar and interpreter for today's world, as demonstrated in his commentary on the book of *Job*.⁵⁴⁶ They find his use of Scripture appropriate and effective, especially in developing the principle of preferential option for the poor.⁵⁴⁷ In particular, he is noted for taking the scriptural text seriously and exegeting it with sensitivity. For instance, he is commended for offering a good treatment of chapters 16 and 19 regarding Job's desire for a witness and a redeemer.⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, he does not only use the Bible but also engages in actual exegesis occasionally in his other writings as well. For instance, in his discussion of the meaning of poverty in *A Theology of Liberation*, he examines the

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 141-44.

⁵⁴⁵ Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 4.

⁵⁴⁶ John W. de Gruchy, review of *A Theology of Liberation*, by Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 68 (Spring 1989): 119.

⁵⁴⁷ Schubeck, 170.

⁵⁴⁸ Paul R. Raabe, review of *A Theology of Liberation*, by Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Concordia Journal* 15, no. 2 (April 1989): 211-12.

various meanings found in the Old Testament and from which he concludes that poverty is an evil and a scandalous condition.⁵⁴⁹

Schubeck further praises him for integrating the Old Testament with the New Testament (such as relating the Psalms and Exodus to the death and resurrection of Jesus) smoothly, as well as seeking coherence in using Scripture, as in the case of reconciling ‘the just avenger’ image of God and ‘the merciful defender’ image of God in the book of *Job*.⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, he is in dialogue with contemporary biblical scholarship in his exegetical task. In the interpretation of the meaning of *go’el* (avenger) in the book of *Job*, for example, he first consults and then adopts the position of Robert Gordis that God is the defender for *Job*.⁵⁵¹

However, his use of Scripture also receives critics. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in particular, criticized him for selective re-reading of Scripture:⁵⁵²

He emphasizes the theme of Yahweh as the God of the poor as well as the theme of Matthew 25, but does not consider all the dimensions of evangelical poverty. He then proceeds to form a unity between the poor of the Bible and the exploited victims of the capitalist system. From this follows his justification of revolutionary commitment on behalf of the poor. This same selective reading highlights certain texts, which are given an exclusively political meaning. The exodus, considered as a political event, becomes a paradigm: liberation means political liberation. The Magnificat of Mary (Luke 2:46ff) is interpreted in the same way. Genesis is taken to mean a promethean glorification of liberating work.

⁵⁴⁹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 165-68.

⁵⁵⁰ Schubeck, 169.

⁵⁵¹ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 66n17.

⁵⁵² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez,” in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 348-50. The statement is first published in March 1983. The English text quoted here is translated by Hennelly from the French version that Hennelly obtained in 1984. Hennelly claims that the little publicity given to the statement by the Congregation implies that its interpretation of Gutiérrez’s theology is incorrect.

They also charged him for not examining the true meaning of the Beatitudes.⁵⁵³ In other words, Gutiérrez is criticized for insisting an over-political reading of the Bible (even though some readings are indeed more political than others). Although Siker disagrees with the Vatican's critics, he too is concerned that Gutiérrez wrongfully used the Exodus story to advocate a political paradigm that does not lead to conquest of others, for the common usage of Exodus leads to the conquest tradition that follows in Joshua.⁵⁵⁴ Both criticisms lead to the questions about his exegetical skill, his awareness of and dealing with problematic or 'bad' texts and narratives in the Bible such as those that promote violence. In the case of the conquest tradition in Exodus, for instance, Siker believes that Gutiérrez is aware of the problem (of conquest and violence) for he does not use them to advocate any conquest of others. However, like Häring he seems avoid any confrontation with these texts.

Finally, Gutiérrez is applauded for dialectically relating Scripture with Christian praxis and hence makes the Bible 'a book of life' for all. Yet, Siker notes a fundamental problem in Gutiérrez's approaches to Scripture: He seems to hold two contradictory approaches. On the one hand Gutiérrez's emphasis on the interpreter's experience or perspective implies relative subjectivity in the reading of the Bible; on the other hand, he seems to seek and use objective language of interpretation (such as the view that material poverty is evil) to evaluate other interpretations.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ Hennelly, 350.

⁵⁵⁴ Siker, 147.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid..

Despite the criticism by the hierarchy, Gutiérrez's overall emphasis on the interpreter's experience and the experience of the faith community in particular, could offer opportunities for seeking more truthful readings of the Bible. And his actual engagement with the texts and biblical scholarship reflects a development beyond the manualists' approach.

3.3 Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether is a Roman Catholic feminist theologian from the United States of America. She has been recognized as one of the founders of the modern feminist movement in religion along with Beverly Harrison and Letty Russell.⁵⁵⁶ She recalls that her feminist critique⁵⁵⁷ began when she was part of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s; and yet it was only when she was on sabbatical at Harvard University (1972-73) that her feminist theology really began to develop.⁵⁵⁸ Ruether aims at searching for a feminist religious revolution that "reaches forward to an alternative that can heal the splits between 'masculine' and 'feminine,' between mind and body, between males and females as gender groups, between society and nature, and between races and classes."⁵⁵⁹ Her subsequent feminist critical principle, like that of liberation theologians,

⁵⁵⁶ Rosalind F. Hinton, "A Legacy of Inclusion: An Interview with Rosemary Radford Ruether," *Cross Currents* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 28.

⁵⁵⁷ Ruether points out that her feminist critique embraces gender, class and race critiques, and thus is different from the works of other feminist scholars like Mary Daly. See Hinton, 32.

⁵⁵⁸ Hinton, 30.

⁵⁵⁹ Rebecca S. Chopp, "Seeing and Naming the World Anew: The Works of Rosemary Radford Ruether," *Religious Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1989): 11. Chopp quotes Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-*

is anthropocentric in focus: It is “the promotion of the full humanity of women.”⁵⁶⁰

However, her feminist vision is sometimes perceived as radical, particularly by those who attended the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in 1984 during which she claimed that feminist theology is “contending, not simply for a part of the pie, but for a new way of baking the pie itself, even to rewriting the basic recipe.”⁵⁶¹

Apart from being a well known feminist theologian, Ruether is also recognized as a prolific writer.⁵⁶² Her writings cover a wide range of inter-related subjects, from liberation theology to Roman Catholicism to contemporary Palestinian-Israeli relations to environmental ethics.⁵⁶³ Among them *Sexism and God-Talk* is seen as one of her most important books and is praised for offering a comprehensive critique of systematic theology from a feminist viewpoint.⁵⁶⁴

Strictly speaking, Ruether is not an ethicist. Yet, her ethical standpoint can be found among her many writings, such as her ethical analysis of socialist feminism in *Sexism and God-Talk*.⁵⁶⁵ Another and more detailed work on ethics is *Gaia and God* in

Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 3.

⁵⁶⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983), 18.

⁵⁶¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Future of Feminist Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (December 1985): 703-13.

⁵⁶² She has published 38 books and over 140 essays between 1964 and 2006. She is also a regular contributor to journals and magazines such as *Catholic National Reporter*. See <http://www.worldsreligionsafter911.com/pdf/Rosemary%20Ruether.pdf> (accessed on August 17, 2009).

⁵⁶³ See *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972); *Contemporary Roman Catholicism: Crises and Challenges* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1987); *The wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989); and *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

⁵⁶⁴ Regina Coll, review of *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Education* 79, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 135; James W. Fowler, review of *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christian Century* 100, no. 30 (October 19, 1983): 941.

⁵⁶⁵ In her analysis Ruether comments that “socialism at its best can only overcome women’s handicaps in work spheres; it cannot change the identity and constitution of those spheres themselves...As a result,

which she searches for an ethics of ‘eco-justice’.⁵⁶⁶ Likewise, although Ruether is not a biblical scholar, she understands Christianity as (at least partially) a ‘biblical religion’⁵⁶⁷ and thus turns to the Bible and offers a feminist critique of it. Elsewhere she also attempts a feminist interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, it is worthwhile to revisit her use of Scripture in feminist theology and in relation to Christian ethics.⁵⁶⁸

Due to the emphasis of historical criticism in biblical scholarship during her theological formation, Ruether has perceived the Bible from the start as “a product of human history, the record of various human experiences seeking to articulate visions of faithfulness to God.”⁵⁶⁹ In concrete terms, the Bible is thus a collection of writings “moved through many different stages and contexts...shaped by, dependent on, and yet responding to, the religious world around it.”⁵⁷⁰ However, Ruether’s feminist perspective leads her to recognize the incompleteness of the Scripture—that is, “what we know about women is sharply limited by what patriarchal men want us to know.”⁵⁷¹ And by means of

women generally have to accommodate themselves to a dualistic ‘world’ (public/private, labor/domesticity) structured by masculinist values.” See Angela V. Askew, review of *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 40, no. 3 (1985): 65.

⁵⁶⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 3.

⁵⁶⁷ This view is hinted in her discussion of the development of feminine religious imagery in ancient cultures. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977), 12.

⁵⁶⁸ Our quest here will focus on several of her important books (especially *Sexism and God-Talk*, *Gaia and God*, and *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church*) and those essays that are related to feminist hermeneutics.

⁵⁶⁹ Siker, 171.

⁵⁷⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 31.

⁵⁷¹ June O’Connor, review of *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Studies Review* 12, no. 3-4 (July-October 1986): 203.

ideological critique of the Bible she identifies two types of religions/traditions in Scripture that are in constant tension and dialectic relationship.⁵⁷²

The first type of biblical religion is one of sacred canopy/status quo within which social and ideological superstructures of patriarchy are maintained. A typical example is the sacralization of male domination and female subordination found in the creation/fall stories in Genesis 1-3, especially the idea of *imago dei* in Genesis 1:27-28:

The definition of God as patriarchal male is presumed to be a projection by patriarchal males of their own self-image and roles, in relation to women and lower nature, upon God. Thus it is not 'man' who is made in God's image, but God who has been made in man's image.⁵⁷³

Ruether claims that the ideologies that are found in religion and society and have been developed in biblical interpretation traditions conceal the liberating content of the Bible.⁵⁷⁴ They are destructive and need to be denounced.

The second type of religion is a constructive, dynamic prophetic faith through which those patriarchal ideologies can be constantly critiqued and discerned according to the contexts of the faithful. The corresponding critique is thus one of internal self-critique of the status quo.⁵⁷⁵ Ruether identifies this biblical self-critique as the 'prophetic critique' for it is rooted in the prophetic-liberating tradition.

Consequently, she perceives the Bible as containing both "religious sanctifications of a patriarchal social order...[and] resources for the critique of both

⁵⁷² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (Fall 1982): 56-65; Siker, 177.

⁵⁷³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics," in *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari Elizabeth Borresen (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), 277.

⁵⁷⁴ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 31.

⁵⁷⁵ Siker, 175.

patriarchy and the religious sanctifications of patriarchy.”⁵⁷⁶ She further perceives the prophetic-liberating tradition as the central tradition of the Bible, arguing that this claim is grounded in the general acceptance by biblical scholarship.⁵⁷⁷ Only that which is rooted in this tradition is normative for biblical faith.⁵⁷⁸ She identifies several themes within this prophetic-liberating tradition, among which is the perception of biblical interpretation as a critique of the dominant systems.⁵⁷⁹

Ruether then argues that the Bible is a source for feminist theology if and only if the prophetic principle “[implies] a rejection of every elevation of one social group against others as image and agent of God, [and] every use of God to justify social domination and subjugation.”⁵⁸⁰ In other words, many aspects of the Bible have to be set aside or rejected.⁵⁸¹ Subsequently, the Bible is authoritative to feminist theology only to the extent that its texts reflect this normative critical prophetic principle.⁵⁸² Still, Siker notes that for several other reasons Ruether finds no final authority within Scripture:⁵⁸³ First, it is human experience that provides the ultimate norm for biblical authority (while the Bible is only a codified collection of human experience). From the feminist perspective, women’s experience in particular is normative. Ruether writes, “It is often said that feminist hermeneutics starts with ‘experience,’ but what is left unsaid in this

⁵⁷⁶ Ruether, “Feminism and Patriarchal Religion,” 54.

⁵⁷⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 24.

⁵⁷⁸ Ruether, “Feminism and Patriarchal Religion,” 55.

⁵⁷⁹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 24.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*.

⁵⁸³ Siker, 190-95.

formula is that the experience that is assumed here is feminist experience.”⁵⁸⁴ Second, in order to make women’s experience visible, non-canonical texts are needed (since the canonized Scripture in its present form is designed to silence or erase women’s voice). Third, the Bible contains oppressive patriarchal texts that need rejection. Fourth, Scripture is only one of the sources among several.

Therefore, Ruether seems to suggest that we should not bind ourselves exclusively to the canonized Scriptures and that the Bible’s prophetic principle must operate with historical, religious, philosophical and traditional-theological principles found in other sources. They are used in conjunction with one another and offer critiques of the others. Ruether’s view on how these principles are used can be succinctly summarized as was by Reverend Angela Askew.

Ruether proposes useable feminist history and tradition in the marginalized, countercultural movements [e.g., Gnosticism] throughout the history of Christianity and recommends using traditional categories of classical theology [e.g., Orthodox tradition], interpreted to correct their androcentric (‘masculinist’) bias. From non-Christian religion and philosophy she seeks insights into divine-human relations which promote the full humanity of women. Finally, Ruether suggests drawing on the philosophies and ideologies of the post-Enlightenment Western world [e.g., liberalism, romanticism, and socialism].⁵⁸⁵

When Ruether cites Old Testament texts, they can be categorized into several groups, such as the creation/fall stories (in Genesis 1-3), and the prophetic literature (such as Isaiah 24, Amos 5, and Hosea 2).⁵⁸⁶ In the New Testament, those frequently used biblical texts are similarly categorized into different groups, including those traditions

⁵⁸⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience: The Case of the *Imago Dei* and Gender Equality,” in *Radical Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 101.

⁵⁸⁵ Askew, 61.

⁵⁸⁶ Siker, 171.

that show women's subordination to men (e.g., Ephesians 5) and the sayings of Jesus that stress servanthood and anti-establishment (e.g., Matthew 20 and 23).

With regards to how these texts are actually used, Ruether acknowledges that feminists face the dilemma of using Scripture to "critique tradition and suggest an alternative way of relating experience and tradition, including [S]cripture."⁵⁸⁷ Yet, she emphasizes that feminist theology is not repudiating the tradition but simply working to liberate it from patriarchy.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, Ruether makes use of several biblical traditions emerged from those selected texts to portray a renewable and liberating prophetic Christian faith that contains ethical responsibilities.⁵⁸⁹

The first is the covenant tradition in the Old Testament. She turns to the narratives of God's covenant with Abraham, sabbatical legislation, as well as prophetic literature to emphasize the call to reciprocity, partnership, justice, and mutuality. She then applies this tradition to the formation of faith communities for women and to the shaping of our relation with nature in terms of ethical (and legal) responsibilities. Together with two other Old Testament traditions that follow, they help the building and renewal of authentic human communities in which all live in loving relationships with God and with others.

The second is the exodus tradition. The Exodus experience of Israelites is used as a liberation model for women and the transformation of the institutional church

⁵⁸⁷ Ruether, "Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience," 96.

⁵⁸⁸ June O'Connor, review of *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christian Century* 100, no. 36 (November 30, 1983): 1116.

⁵⁸⁹ Siker, 178-98. I depend on the outline by Siker of the different traditions. In fact, a good number of these traditions are hinted in the titles of some of her writings, such as *The Liberating Bond. Covenants—Biblical and Contemporary*, and *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church*.

community. In concrete terms, this tradition encourages people to depart from exploitive and oppressive situations with the faith that God calls them to act so.

The third, jubilee tradition is grounded in the book of *Leviticus*. It calls for the renewal of covenant faithfulness and envisions the kind of redeemed society/nature intended by God. It thus reminds and provides a model for the contemporary world to continue to restore righteous and just relationships that empowers the powerless.

The fourth is the Marian tradition. Ruether claims that “Lucan Mariology suggests a real co-creatorship between God and humanity.”⁵⁹⁰ In other words, Mary the mother of Jesus represents what pure humanity is—one in its original goodness and anticipates the eschatological humanity—and symbolizes those independent and active agents who choose to cooperate with God freely. We are likewise called to have hope in God and cooperate with God actively and freely.

The fifth is the historical Jesus tradition in which Jesus is portrayed as an iconoclastic teacher and healer whose ministry is the climax of the prophetic critique of religion in the Old Testament—such as its triumphalistic messianism and the status quo of domination. Typical stances include Jesus’ emphasis on servanthood in Matthew 20:25-28 and his treatment of women as equals in Luke 10:38-42. Moreover, Jesus is seen as one who preaches on a this-worldly kingdom that undoes oppression, and whose praxis is paradigmatic and exemplary of God’s prophetic and redemptive act, as revealed in the Synoptic gospels. As a whole, in our Christian and moral life, Jesus is the model for rejecting domination and power, as well as identifying with and serving the poor.

⁵⁹⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 154.

Specifically, Ruether employs the Lukan Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-26) to highlight the socio-economic dimension of redemption and to discount the overly spiritualized meaning found in Matthew's version of the Beatitudes: "Luke does not minimize the socioeconomic dimension of redemption, as does Matthew with his spiritualization of the Beatitudes; in fact, he emphasizes it by adding the negative judgmental side of God's redemption as judgment on the rich."⁵⁹¹

The sixth is the Pauline tradition that bears both radical theology of Christ and social conservatism. By referring to the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 Ruether first highlights God's self-emptying (*kenosis*) that manifests the "*kenosis* of patriarchy."⁵⁹² Then she points to the baptismal formula in Galatians 3:28 to undermine the justification of domination. However, Ruether also reveals the social conservatism in Paul (as in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16), especially in the subordination of women. Nevertheless, the ethical implication of Pauline tradition is that when the powerful empty themselves of power in the service of the poor, reconciliation may take place.

The last tradition regards Mary Magdalene as portrayed in the empty tomb narrative in John 20:11-18. Ruether claims that Mary, being an unconventional woman, is a role model for faithful discipleship and for women.⁵⁹³ Thus, she finds in this tradition a call to challenge the Church's conventional perception of women and its deformation of Jesus' prophetic and liberating message into a new status quo of hierarchy.

⁵⁹¹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 156.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 137.

⁵⁹³ Ruether, *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church*, 40.

Finally, all the above uses are by definition finite as the texts are historically conditioned while the reader also operates within finite cultural contexts.⁵⁹⁴

The task of hermeneutics is understood by Ruether as a dialectical process through which the people of the historical past converse with those who seek to speak about God in present time.⁵⁹⁵ It is a circular task with human experience as its starting point and ending point. And human experience itself is in an interacting dialectic—it includes “experience of the divine and of one self, in relationship to society and the world.”⁵⁹⁶ From the feminist perspective, this experience refers particularly to women’s experiences as created by a male dominated society and culture. The awareness of this unique experience, as well as the self-affirmation as autonomous persons capable of self-determination in all relations, is crucial to a feminist hermeneutical method.⁵⁹⁷

Regarding feminist hermeneutics, she suggests that there is a *correlation* between the feminist critical principle and the biblical critical/prophetic principle.⁵⁹⁸ This correlation lies in several stances. First, use of both critical principles “examines structures of injustice toward women, unmask and denounces their cultural and religious sanctifications, and points toward an alternative humanity, an alternative society, capable of affirming the personhood of women.”⁵⁹⁹ Second, feminist critical principle is an expansion and thus a continuity of biblical critical principle in a new context. Third, both

⁵⁹⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Church against Itself* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 226; Siker, 173.

⁵⁹⁵ Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian*, 141; Siker, 173.

⁵⁹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985), 111.

⁵⁹⁷ Ruether, “Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience,” 101.

⁵⁹⁸ Ruether, “Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation,” 116-20.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

critical principles contain and acknowledge their limitations (such as insensitivity to other groups) and the process of deformation (in which the present criticism may become authoritative for a new establishment in another context).

She thus concludes that feminist hermeneutics is basically “the feminist radicalizing of the prophetic tradition,”⁶⁰⁰ “the feminist interpretation of prophetic critique [of Scripture]...in the context of new communities of critical consciousness.”⁶⁰¹

What is innovative in feminist hermeneutics, as she understands it, is

not the prophetic norm but rather feminist’s appropriation of this norm *for women*...By including women in the prophetic form, feminism sees what male prophetic thought generally had not seen: that once the prophetic norm is asserted to be central to Biblical faith, then patriarchy can no longer be maintained as authoritative.⁶⁰²

Last but not least, she points out that feminist hermeneutics differs from Catholic magisterial and classical Protestant views in that it perceives “all human constructs of thought [as] relative and fallible.”⁶⁰³ Even the feminist formulations “must be constantly tested by the ethical results of the appropriated theories for [their] experience.”⁶⁰⁴

This self-critique leads us to a critical evaluation of her use of Scripture.⁶⁰⁵ It can be divided into three areas: Selection of text, interpretation, and methodology. First, some find her selectivity with respect to Scripture well grounded in history.⁶⁰⁶ Others, however, find her use at times too selective. In the above discussion of the Pauline tradition where

⁶⁰⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 31.

⁶⁰¹ Ruether, “Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation,” 122.

⁶⁰² Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 24.

⁶⁰³ Ruether, “Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics,” 278.

⁶⁰⁴ Ruether, “Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience,” 103.

⁶⁰⁵ It is important to note that most commentators and reviewers have commented on her feminist theology rather than her use of Scripture. Also, those who have done so are mainly Christian feminist scholars, such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Carol Christ.

⁶⁰⁶ O’Connor, review of *Sexism and God-Talk* (July-October 1986): 203.

Ruether employs the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, for instance, she only appeals to the process of *kenosis* in the first half of the hymn and totally omits the second half that, in her perception, might suggest certain triumphalism.⁶⁰⁷ They also note that her suggestion that new texts need to be selected for a working canon so that women's experience could be visible is problematic: What are, for example, the criteria for the selection of these new texts? Or, how likely will one choose texts that are challenging "with the result that even new working canons will probably tend to sacralize the particular experiences and understandings of those choosing the texts."⁶⁰⁸

Second, with regards to the task of interpretation, many commend her for appropriating the prophetic tradition for women in particular. A concrete stance is the praise of her interpretation of the biblical condemnation of idolatry in *Sexism and God-Talk*: "For a definitively male God to declare 'Thou shalt have no other God before Me' is the very epitome of idolatry in that it takes literally an image of the divine, setting it up in place of reality. She has coined the term God/ess for divinity...as a term...to express the appropriation of female imagery for the divine...as another way of referring to the same God."⁶⁰⁹ Siker, however, gives contrary comments, especially concerning Ruether's portrayal of Jesus: He wonders if Ruether's interpretation of Jesus as an iconoclastic teacher/healer is shaped by her own iconoclastic self?⁶¹⁰

Third, two major concerns about Ruether's methodological construction in the prophetic-liberating tradition in the Bible are noted. The first concerns her claim that the

⁶⁰⁷ Siker, 186.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁰⁹ Winsome Munro, review of *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Education* 78, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 597.

⁶¹⁰ Siker, 201.

prophetic tradition is central to the Bible. It leads to a threefold question:⁶¹¹ 1) On what grounds does she reject other traditions such as covenant as the central tradition? 2) Though her claim of prophetic tradition is grounded on biblical scholarship, do most Scripture scholars take to mean the tradition in the same way as she does? 3) What would be the possible problems of making such a claim?

The second concern is raised by several feminist theologians who are concerned about the prophetic-liberating tradition itself. New Testament scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza criticizes her for idealizing the prophetic tradition and failing to identify the androcentric elements within the tradition.⁶¹² She thus concludes that Ruether has taken a ‘neo-orthodox’ approach to Scripture that “serves more to rescue biblical religion from its feminist critics than to develop a feminist historical hermeneutics that could incorporate...[a] feminist spiritual quest for women’s power.”⁶¹³

Theologian Carol Christ echoes Fiorenza’s criticism and points out some problematic natures of prophetic traditions:

[They reflect] a relatively comfortable, urban (and it should be added misogynist) priestly class... Though I too find some of the ethical injunctions of the prophets inspiring, I find them embedded in a patriarchal ‘Yahweh alone’ theology, which I find problematic... even the

⁶¹¹ Ibid..

⁶¹² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 19. In a response to Schüssler Fiorenza’s criticism, Ruether clarifies that she was simply describing “a certain liberating ‘dynamic’ which is expressed in the prophetic messianic tradition, and also, in secular form, in modern liberation movements, which have unacknowledged roots in biblical faith.” (Rosemary Radford Ruether, review of *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Horizons* 1, no. 2 (1984): 148). Ruether also states that she is aware of the limitations of the prophetic-liberating traditions. She writes, “But even when biblical texts are most clearly in this prophetic mode, not all dimensions of unjust relations may be discerned... Even at its best, prophetic insight has some limitations of the sociology of consciousness of its spokesmen (generic not intended).” (Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 33-34). In return, she is convinced that Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach is similar to her own.

⁶¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 19.

traditions Ruether cites as liberating are themselves part of an oppressive patriarchal theology and not themselves adequate models for feminist theology and spirituality.⁶¹⁴

Biblical scholar Elizabeth Achtemeier also comments that,

while Ruether finds biblical authority only in the critical judgment and transformation that lie at the base of the Jewish and Christian prophetic tradition...[she] “cannot deny that [feminist theology] learned this pattern of thought from biblical religion and that biblical religion taught this tradition to modern liberation movements. Thus while it repudiates the patriarchy of biblical religion, it nevertheless claims this underlying prophetic base of biblical religion.”⁶¹⁵

Rebecca Chopp, a former student of Ruether, further notes that the prophetic-liberating tradition lacks historical accuracy and the ability to identify practices of subversion and transformation that already exist.⁶¹⁶ She is concerned that it may “overlook the pleasure as well as pain that women have had in the daily practices of Christianity.”⁶¹⁷

Critics thus wonder if Ruether has elevated the prophetic principle into an ideology itself. In concrete terms, who criticizes the prophets and how do we know what the authentic voice is? I find these criticisms and questions both challenging and yet necessary.

As a whole, we can draw upon these concerns raised by her feminist colleagues and comment that Ruether, while overtly trying to counteract patriarchy in the Bible—both by showing it is not the core message of Jesus, and by bringing in the criterion of

⁶¹⁴ Carol P. Christ, “A Spirituality for Women,” in *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 62-63.

⁶¹⁵ Elizabeth Achtemeier, “The Impossible Possibility: Evaluating the Feminist Approach to Bible and Theology,” *Interpretation* 42, no. 1 (January 1988): 49. Achtemeier quotes *Christian Feminism*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 15.

⁶¹⁶ Chopp, 11.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*.

women's experience—still misses recognizing those androcentric elements in the texts she employed and the problem of the prophetic tradition she proposed. Methodologically speaking, it points to the question of her exegetical accuracy and how well she has achieved in her reading of the prophetic texts.

However, we still have to acknowledge that her feminist interpretation is rather impressive, partly because at times she turns to the expertise of biblical scholars for insight, as in the case of Gutiérrez. In the interpretation of Genesis 1:27 (“*imago*”), for instance, Ruether first consults Hebrew Scripture scholars before making the claim that “dominion over creation is the essential meaning of the term ‘image’ in this text,”⁶¹⁸ and that “the expression ‘male and female’ is not intended to modify the phrase ‘image of God.’”⁶¹⁹

In conclusion, although there are mixed comments regarding her approach to and use of Scripture, Siker rightly points out that Ruether's attempt uncovers those ‘fossilized texts’ and ‘fossilized interpretations’ in the Bible and hence calls for honest reflection on how and why the Bible is used as it is in the Church.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸ Ruether, “Imago Dei, Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics,” 262. Ruether cites Gunnlaugur Jónsson, *The Image of God: Gen. 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1988).

⁶¹⁹ Ruether, “Feminist Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, and Religious Experience,” 98. Ruether cites Phyllis Bird, “Male and Female, He Created Them: Gen. 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 128-59.

⁶²⁰ Siker, 202.

3.4 William C. Spohn

William Spohn (1944-2005) was a former member of the Society of Jesus and student of James Gustafson. He had been a professor of theological ethics since the late 1970s. As a Christian ethicist his approach towards ethics was basically one of virtue ethics. He believed that “virtue ethics provides the most comprehensive account of moral experience and that it stands closer to the issues of moral life. As such, it is superior to the other common ethical approaches, an ethics that focuses on obligation and one that emphasizes consequences.”⁶²¹ In particular, he paid special attention to character, narratives and the paradigmatic feature of virtue ethics.

However, as his former colleague and New Testament scholar John R. Donahue recalls, Spohn took the Second Vatican Council’s call to renew moral theology with Scripture seriously and thus perceived Scripture as an apt metaphor for his work.⁶²² One concrete demonstration of his commitment to Vatican II’s call is his great interest in engaging Scripture with ethics, both academically and religiously: As a Jesuit scholastic he was actively engaged with biblically based prayer groups.⁶²³ And since the publication of *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* in 1984, Spohn continued to write articles and present papers on Scripture and ethics, among them including the often cited “The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology.”⁶²⁴

⁶²¹ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 27.

⁶²² John R. Donahue, “Hearers and Doers of the Word. The Challenge of William C. Spohn to Scripture and Ethics,” *Explore* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 10.

⁶²³ Donahue, “Hearers and Doers of the Word,” 10.

⁶²⁴ Other publications include “Response to ‘The Ethics of the Septuagint Book of Proverbs’,” *Society of Biblical Literature* (Anaheim, 1985); “Scripture and Natural Law: Incommensurate Languages?” *Catholic*

This commitment, unsurprisingly, also leads to his disagreement with those who advocated an ethics of autonomy (like Josef Fuchs and Bruno Schüller) for he perceived this moral autonomy school “limited the role of Scripture to offering paraenesis and motivation for an ethical system based primarily on the natural law, seasoned with systematic theology.”⁶²⁵ In contrast, he was convinced that virtue ethics provides the most appropriate avenue for engaging Scripture, especially the story of Jesus in the New Testament.⁶²⁶

In his later academic life, he further integrated spirituality into his ethical quest and published several articles on spirituality and ethics, such as “The Need for Roots and Wings: Spirituality and Christian Ethics” and “Will Spirituality Take the Place of Ethics?”⁶²⁷ He noted that both virtue ethics and spirituality “share common ground in appreciating the formative role of habitual behavior” and the notion of practices is a key to linking the two disciplines.⁶²⁸ From there he proposed in his second major book, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, that the New Testament, virtue ethics and spirituality complement each other as sources for critical reflection of discipleship.⁶²⁹ He pointed out that “Jesus Christ is the paradigm for Christian moral life...[and makes the case

Theological Society of America (Boston, 1987); “Parable and Narrative in Christian Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 51, no. 1 (1990): 100-14; and “Scripture and Ethics in the Twentieth Century. Response to Jeffrey Siker’s Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth Century Portraits,” *Society of Biblical Literature* (New Orleans, November, 1996). See his curriculum vitae as posted on the internet by Santa Clara University in 2002. <http://www-relg-studies.scu.edu/facstaff/spohn/cv.pdf> (accessed on August 25, 2009).

⁶²⁵ Spohn, “The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology,” 99-101.

⁶²⁶ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 27-28. The relationship between virtue ethics and Scripture will be discussed in Part Two of this work.

⁶²⁷ William C. Spohn, “The Need for Roots and Wings: Spirituality and Christian Ethics,” *Theology Digest* 47, no. 4 (2000): 327-40; “Will Spirituality Take the Place of Ethics?” *Society of Christian Ethics* (Cincinnati, January, 1997). See <http://www-relg-studies.scu.edu/facstaff/spohn/cv.pdf> (accessed on August 25, 2009).

⁶²⁸ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 42.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

that]...the story of Jesus shapes Christian ethics through the convergence of...the New Testament, virtue ethics, and spirituality [whose practices are mandated by the New Testament]’.⁶³⁰

In fact, his integration of Scripture, ethics, and spirituality is closely related to his own faith journey. Christian ethicist Martha Stortz, Spohn’s wife, succinctly recalls, “The combination of the Charismatic Renewal and Jesuit spirituality drew him deeply into questions of Christian discipleship. Scripture and the life of Jesus anchored that journey.”⁶³¹

Although Spohn is not as prolific as Ruether, the two above-mentioned books on Scripture and ethics have been well known to many in both fields. In particular, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics* was fully revised and expanded ten years later. This new edition, Spohn claimed, “focuses on the problem of hermeneutics which has become central to the use of Scripture.”⁶³²

Nevertheless, Donahue notes that Scripture animated Spohn’s work “from the inside to external expression.”⁶³³ Therefore, our discussion will focus on his engagement with Scripture in ethics (rather than solely on the use of Scripture) and will largely be based on these two books and some of his related writings.

Scripture as a whole was perceived by Spohn as the story of a people called and led by God to be a distinctive community and a particular sort of person.⁶³⁴ It presents a

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 1-3, 186.

⁶³¹ Martha E. Stortz, “Follow the Friendships. The Work of William Spohn,” *Explore* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 8.

⁶³² Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 1.

⁶³³ Donahue, 11.

⁶³⁴ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 12-3.

new way of life for God's people to follow which is inseparable from the history that has revealed God.⁶³⁵ Thus, the use of Scripture in Christian ethics must be rooted in this history. With regards to its authority, he claimed that "unless the person perceives some resonance between the stories of Scripture and personal experience, it is unlikely that the stories will speak with authority."⁶³⁶ Elsewhere when he talked about Christian identity he claimed that "Scripture has authority over discernment but not the final word."⁶³⁷ In other words, he adopted the common view that Scripture is one of the four sources of Christian ethics. Still, he claimed that the other three indispensable sources "at least must be compatible with the basic patterns inherent in the story of Jesus" even if the story of Jesus is not the only norm.⁶³⁸ This stress is due to the fact that the story of Jesus emphasizes certain moral dispositions that other sources neglect, like the forgiveness of enemies.⁶³⁹ That said, he acknowledged that any coherent ethical argument must draw on these other sources in an integrated way. He thus said, "Our selection of biblical material must be justified by the other sources we use: Theological validity in the tradition, consistency with the normative portrait of the human person in ethics, and relevance to the factual situation as determined by the best empirical analysis available."⁶⁴⁰

Regarding what scriptural texts are used, Donahue notes that "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37) and "Only live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:27) are the two most crucial biblical texts in guiding Spohn's constructive

⁶³⁵ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 2.

⁶³⁶ Spohn, "Scripture," 101.

⁶³⁷ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 164.

⁶³⁸ Spohn, "Jesus and Christian Ethics," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 102.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁴⁰ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 121.

work.⁶⁴¹ Still, Spohn employed other texts from the New Testament witness, with special attention to the story of Jesus as found in the gospels. For instance, in *Go and Do Likewise*, one half of the cited texts are from the four gospels and two thirds of the remaining half are from the Pauline letters (and the book of *Revelation*). And among the Old Testament writings he mainly quoted the Psalms and Isaiah in his discussion of emotions and dispositions.

His particular focus on Jesus is partly because of the trend within the field. He himself commented, “Major recent works on New Testament ethics anchor these teachings in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The 1994 convention of the CTSA [Catholic Theological Society of America] addressed the theme of Jesus for the first time in its fifty-year history.”⁶⁴² This comment gives us a hint to his use of the name ‘Jesus’ in some of his subsequent writings, such as “Jesus and Ethics.”⁶⁴³

A second reason is based on his perception of the New Testament. For Spohn the New Testament presents a way of life—i.e., pattern of discipleship—through the story of Jesus.⁶⁴⁴ He understood Jesus’ parables, teaching and table fellowship (as manifested in the gospel narratives) as revealing the characteristics of the reign of God and hence setting the path for discipleship.⁶⁴⁵ In particular, he gave primacy to “the Synoptic

⁶⁴¹ Donahue, “Hearers and Doers of the Word,” 11.

⁶⁴² Spohn, “Jesus and Christian Ethics,” 92.

⁶⁴³ William C. Spohn, “Jesus and Ethics,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 49 (1994): 40-57. Other examples include “Jesus and Christian Ethics,” and “Jesus and Moral Theology,” in *Moral Theology: New Directions in Fundamental Issues*, ed. James Keating (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2004), 24-42.

⁶⁴⁴ Spohn, “Scripture,” 97.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*.

[g]ospels' portrayal of discipleship as configured by the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, in order to shape the character of Christians and their communities."⁶⁴⁶

A third and subsequent reason is his perception of the entire story of Jesus: He was aware of the dilemma (among ethicists) regarding the significance of Jesus' teaching for moral life and thus sought a middle road, proposing that Jesus is "normative for Christian ethics as its concrete universal."⁶⁴⁷ As concrete universal he meant that the particular life story of Jesus has a universal meaning and is morally relevant in every situation of the Christian life.⁶⁴⁸ In other words, Jesus is "the paradigm that normatively guides Christian living."⁶⁴⁹

His overall engagement with Scripture, as Donahue observes, takes various forms.⁶⁵⁰ First, he paid attention to literary genre and the contexts of the texts in order to advocate for a narrative theology. In doing so, he first moved away from the traditional emphasis on history. Spohn wrote: "There are many forms of literature in the Bible besides history: poetry...parable, wisdom, legal codes, exemplary fiction...etc. In fact, history in the modern sense is not the primary intention of the texts."⁶⁵¹

He then focused particularly on biblical narratives and pointed out that they guide moral reflection and action more directly than other literary forms in several ways:⁶⁵² 1)

Our Judeo-Christian faith responds to the depiction of God and other creations in the

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁴⁷ Spohn, "Jesus and Christian Ethics," 101-02; Frank J. Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, by William C. Spohn, *Theological Studies* 60 (September 1999): 542.

⁶⁴⁸ Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 543.

⁶⁴⁹ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 4.

⁶⁵⁰ Donahue, 11.

⁶⁵¹ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 6.

⁶⁵² William C. Spohn, "Parable and Narrative in Christian Ethics," *Theological Studies* 51, no. 1 (1990): 109-11.

form of narratives; 2) they serve as ‘lenses’ for interpreting our own experiences as analogous to those biblical paradigms and hence point to an analogous response; 3) biblical narratives interpreted in faith communities can inform and inspire moral dispositions/virtues (e.g., the narrative of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 informs us the call for both justice and mercy); and 4) ‘pictorial’ commands in narratives (such as turning the other cheek) offer guides to imagination and emotion. He was convinced that narrative theology “operates closer to the fabric of Christian moral experience than most speculative theologies...[and] can support a broader definition of ethics that recognizes the normative guidance that symbolic material brings to disposition and character.”⁶⁵³

Second, Spohn engaged Scripture in highlighting of “the paradigmatic role of certain themes and texts, such as the Exodus, the teaching of non-violence in the Sermon on the Mount, hospitality to the stranger and the vulnerable in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the enacted proclamation by Jesus at the Lord’s Supper.”⁶⁵⁴ In concrete terms, he employed various biblical texts to illustrate the transformation of character with respect to perception, dispositions, and identity.⁶⁵⁵

One particular text used by Spohn to illustrate this is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7:⁶⁵⁶ He first turned to Matthew 6 to show that the Bible corrects and sharpens our perception regarding fairness/justice and intercessory prayer. He then discussed how the Lord’s Prayer in 6:9-13 can “‘tutor the emotions’ to form deeper dispositions that

⁶⁵³ Spohn, “Parable and Narrative in Christian Ethics,” 113.

⁶⁵⁴ Donahue, 11-12.

⁶⁵⁵ Richard B. Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, by William C. Spohn, *Theology Today* 58, no. 4 (January 2002): 634.

⁶⁵⁶ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 105-6, 116-17, 176-79.

enable us to conform our lives to the pattern of Jesus' life."⁶⁵⁷ Finally, he turned to Matthew 5 and 6 to illustrate that our Christian identity is one of a forgiving community. For Spohn the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is the major collection of Jesus' explicit moral teaching in the New Testament in transforming our character and communal identity.⁶⁵⁸

Third, he engaged in the provision of directives for using Scripture for moral discourse. By comparing the Exodus narrative and the story of the holy war in the book of *Judges*, for example, Spohn demonstrated the following criteria: 1) The Exodus narrative is central to the canon and continues to serve as a source of revelation; 2) it conveys a theologically sound image of God as Redeemer; 3) it is in consistency with Jesus Christ of the New Testament who is the new Moses in liberating the people; 4) its image of God as healing judge (rather than dispenser of retributive justice) is appropriate to our situation and sheds light upon it; and 5) the corresponding action concurs with the standards of human morality.⁶⁵⁹

With regards to the task of hermeneutics, as mentioned earlier, Spohn dealt with the problem in his *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*.⁶⁶⁰ He realized that hermeneutics has become central to the use of Scripture and thus proposes a three-step analytical framework—namely, the selection, interpretation and application of the

⁶⁵⁷ Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 635.

⁶⁵⁸ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 121.

⁶⁵⁹ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 120-21.

⁶⁶⁰ Spohn identified the acknowledgement of presuppositions and specific interests that shape one's reading of Scripture as the first challenge. Another challenge is the move from hermeneutics to ethics. See Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 8-13.

selected texts—that analyzes ethical arguments that appeal to Scripture.⁶⁶¹ The framework basically deals with three corresponding questions: What biblical material is used or focused upon? Why is it interpreted in a particular fashion? How may it, so interpreted, be practically applied to contemporary life?

Famously, he identified five different ways/models of using Scripture emerging from various contemporary theological positions.⁶⁶² Among them he perceived the ‘responding love’ model as a more constructive approach: It supplements other approaches and “builds on the work of the narrative theologians but broadens the selection beyond story to include biblical symbols, mandates, and terms of address for God.”⁶⁶³ It understands that one is called not just to imitate the master but to participate in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. By focusing on the story of Jesus and his new commandment of love, Spohn was convinced that our responsive love is the reason for morality.

In addition, his hermeneutical approach is also one of ‘appreciation’—he argued that it is through ‘generosity’ rather than suspicion that the gap between Scripture’s world and ours can be bridged. Such generosity points to the cultivation of ‘analogical

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶² The first model focuses on the experience of a Divine call in answering the fundamental question of ‘what ought I to do?’ The second model suggests that Scripture functions as a reminder of morality that is integrally human. Theologians of this model are convinced that Scripture empowers us to flourish in a way God intended for human beings. The third model perceives Scripture as a call to liberation and thus uses Scripture to support a commitment to the oppressed. The fourth model focuses on the moral agent and is convinced that Scripture is used for the transformation of the agent’s identity and character. In other words, it shifts the focus from ‘doing’ to ‘being’. It uses narratives and parables to demonstrate that Scripture challenges the reader’s deepest identity and presuppositions. The fifth model perceives Scripture as a means through which we can discern God’s love for us in Christ.

⁶⁶³ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 95.

imagination'.⁶⁶⁴ Specifically, he argued that in our interpretation of the gospels analogical imagination⁶⁶⁵ helps bridge the moral reflection of Christians and the words and deeds of Jesus.⁶⁶⁶

Within the context of Christian moral reflection on Scripture, analogy points to the relationship between “the biblical text in relation to its world and today’s Christian community in relation to its world.”⁶⁶⁷ Spohn claimed that the story of Jesus is the prime ‘analogate’ for Christian moral life.⁶⁶⁸ Together with other analogies found in Scripture they guide our Christian imagination.⁶⁶⁹ This analogical imagination, as Spohn interpreted,

moves analogically from the classic patterns of his story to discover how to act faithfully in new situations. The basic command that Jesus gives at the end of the Good Samaritan story invites Christians to think analogically: “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). The mandate is not “Go and do whatever you want.” The term “likewise” implies that Christians should be faithful to the story of Jesus yet creative in applying it to their context.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁴ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 2; Andrew J. Goddard, review of *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, by William C. Spohn, *Modern Believing* 41, no. 2 (April 2000): 51. Spohn relies on the works of William Lynch and David Tracy in his discussion of analogical imagination. In particular, Spohn’s understanding is influenced by Tracy’s insights on ‘focal meaning’ that is needed for the subject to reflect analogically. See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 56-60; David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

⁶⁶⁵ The term ‘analogical’ stands in contrast to ‘univocal’ and ‘equivocal’ in that it bears both similarities and dissimilarities. By recognizing the similarities and dissimilarities one is able to move from a familiar, original paradigm to the unfamiliar, new experience within limitations. It entails actions that are congruent to the original paradigm (that functions as a prototype) and encourages creative and faithful adaptation of the prototype (which involves the imagination). See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 55; Spohn, “Scripture,” 100.

⁶⁶⁶ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 50.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁶⁹ William C. Spohn, “Teaching Scripture and Ethics,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1990): 278.

⁶⁷⁰ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 4.

That means, it discerns those paradigms and guiding images that connect the biblical story with our own situation so that they shape our action in such a way that we ‘go and do likewise’ what Jesus said and did.⁶⁷¹ For example, in the case of ‘turning the other cheek’, such imagination reveals that this pictorial ideal calls us not only to non-retaliation but also to seek a congruent response.⁶⁷²

Moreover, through faithful imagination the story of Jesus can become “paradigmatic for moral perception, disposition, and identity...[for] it enables us to recognize *which* features of experience are significant, guides *how* we act, and forms *who* we are in the community of faith.”⁶⁷³ Thus, for Spohn analogical imagination is “one of the most important ways in which the gospel influences action faithful to it.”⁶⁷⁴ He demonstrated how the analogical imagination is exercised by presenting expositions of several biblical narratives. In the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), for instance, he pointed out that the story captures “the pattern of the Christian moral life as a response to the surprising and undeserved gift of God’s acceptance of us.”⁶⁷⁵ Creative imagination then allows us to identify in Zacchaeus our own experience of lacking the power to do what is right. In the Johannine account of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (John 13), he pointed out that the new commandment of love as expressed in verse 34 (“Just as I have

⁶⁷¹ Goddard, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 51.

⁶⁷² Spohn, “Teaching Scripture and Ethics,” 278.

⁶⁷³ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 2.

⁶⁷⁴ Spohn, “Scripture,” 99.

⁶⁷⁵ William C. Spohn, “Jesus and Moral Theology,” in *Moral Theology: New Directions in Fundamental Issues*, ed. James Keating (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2004), 29.

loved you, you also should love one another”) echoes “go and do likewise” and hence our corresponding rituals should reenact rather than merely repeat the action.⁶⁷⁶

In short, analogical imagination reveals to each of us in a unique way what Christ’s invitation to discipleship is.⁶⁷⁷ And for Spohn the challenge of Christian ethics today is to think analogically—to be faithful and creative at the same time.

As a whole, Spohn’s effort in proposing a synthetic task for a Christian ethics informed by Scripture has drawn positive attention from both areas of theology. As Stortz recalls, she was impressed by his attempt to bring Scripture “to bear on issues [such as immigration and homosexuality] that had previously been treated within the narrow scope of moral norms and casuistry.”⁶⁷⁸ Another professor also commended him for challenging Christian ethicists to go beyond the descriptive results found in biblical scholarship to explain the moral and spiritual meaning of imitating Jesus.⁶⁷⁹ In addition, Spohn was also remembered for being sensitive to the flawed use of Scripture by others, such as Pope John Paul II’s *Veritatis Splendor* where Spohn faulted the encyclical on its selection, interpretation, and application of the biblical texts used.⁶⁸⁰

On the other hand, his *Go and Do Likewise*, though an exploratory work by nature, is particularly praised for correlating various disciplines in a constructive manner—the reconnection of the spiritual and moral life of the New Testament.⁶⁸¹ What is distinctive

⁶⁷⁶ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 51-54.

⁶⁷⁷ Spohn, “Jesus and Moral Theology,” 37.

⁶⁷⁸ Stortz, 8.

⁶⁷⁹ Michael G. Cartwright, review of *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, by William C. Spohn, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 679.

⁶⁸⁰ Donahue, 12.

⁶⁸¹ Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 543; Goddard, 51; Scott M. Lewis, review of *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, by William C. Spohn, *Review of Biblical Literature* 4 (2002): 353.

in this work is the focus on “the formation of the character of the moral agent through practices of spirituality.”⁶⁸² His methodological approach, namely, the analogical imagination, also received warm welcome. One ethicist even comments that the use of the concept of analogy is the most appropriate way to engage the reader and Scripture.⁶⁸³

Regarding his use of Scripture, two of the above reviewed biblical scholars, Hays and Matera, praise Spohn for highlighting the importance of biblical narratives for the moral life of believers.⁶⁸⁴ Yet they also express their concerns about his actual use of Scripture. First, they comment that he did not deal more fully with the gospel narratives.⁶⁸⁵ Second, Hays wonders whether Spohn had sufficiently taken into account the apocalyptic element of the gospels and the diversity of the New Testament writings in general.⁶⁸⁶ Third, it is further pointed out that Spohn could use and discuss the Pauline and pastoral epistles more for it is in them that much of our spiritual and moral tradition is rooted.⁶⁸⁷ For example, while he rightly quoted Ephesians 5:21 to challenge the male-dominated structure of marriage and suggests that one should “continue to push beyond patriarchal definitions of marriage relations,” he did not take this opportunity to deal with or confront those other Pauline texts that may condone a male-dominated structure of marriage.⁶⁸⁸ Therefore, like the other above-surveyed ethicists, he seemed remain silent to those problematic texts and/or unable to confront them even though he interpreted the Bible as a whole as opposing oppression and hierarchy.

⁶⁸² Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 634.

⁶⁸³ Bretzke, “Scripture and Ethics: Core, Context, and Coherence,” 103.

⁶⁸⁴ Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 543; Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 635.

⁶⁸⁵ Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 543.

⁶⁸⁶ Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 635.

⁶⁸⁷ Lewis, 353.

⁶⁸⁸ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 70.

Nevertheless, these biblical scholars praise Spohn's work for being well informed by contemporary biblical studies.⁶⁸⁹ For example, they point out that his discussion of Jesus' kingdom message is noticeably influenced by the work of New Testament scholar N. T. Wright.⁶⁹⁰

In sum, I think Spohn's commitment and contribution to Scripture and ethics can be best summarized in Donahue's remarks after his death: "Bill provided a guide to Catholic theology for the then largely unexplored territory of Scripture and moral theology."⁶⁹¹

3.5 Where are We Now?

In this chapter I have surveyed how certain Catholic/Christian ethicists integrate Scripture in their ethical framework that is built upon their particular perspectives. Like the situation we have seen among the biblical scholars, each of these examined ethicists has offered certain specific methodological insights into the use of Scripture in ethics. Häring, though a manualist, has contributed to the integration of Scripture and ethics by stressing the importance of Scripture in Christian moral life, and by being a pioneer in and advocate for employing Scripture in the field of moral theology during the Vatican II era. He has demonstrated to us this vision by his frequent use of biblical texts in his moral reflection and by his various ways of using Scripture. However, his theological formation

⁶⁸⁹ Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 543; Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 635.

⁶⁹⁰ Hays, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 635.

⁶⁹¹ Donahue, 11.

as a manualist also has certain negative impacts on his overall use of the Bible. His uses—both text-proofing and other attempts like word studies— remain superficial and immature and do not generate real engagement between the texts and the ethical reflection built upon his ethical framework. Also, he has failed to recognize the particular contexts and diversity of the texts used. The biblical texts employed are rather one sided with over-emphasis on the New Testament witness. There is no real exegetical task conducted or interaction with biblical scholarship, and hermeneutics is lacking. All these make his overall Scripture-based ethics at times unconvincing.

In the case of Gutiérrez, we note a positive development. Like Häring he recognizes the close bond between Scripture and theology, especially the important role played by Scripture in his liberation theology framework. Though he insists on the interpreter's experience and authority in reading Scripture, he does not reject the authority of the Bible. Also, he seems to take into consideration the expertise of biblical scholars in his understanding of the meanings of the texts. Moreover, he attempts to engage in the exegetical task prior to interpreting the text through his hermeneutical circle. Thus he goes beyond Häring by interacting with the texts and biblical scholarship. Unfortunately, the biblical texts employed in his works tend to be selective, and their uses are also rather narrow and limited. Although he turns to both the Old Testament and New Testament witnesses, certain texts such as the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25, the Exodus account and the story of Job seem to be used repeatedly for his various arguments, such as the preferential option for the poor. In specific, they are chosen and used in a way that fits into his univocal, liberation (and partial socio-political)

agenda/framework. Such way of proceeding tends to ignore other possible meanings of these texts and the core themes of the Bible as a whole.

Ruether likewise has set her own feminist agenda at the beginning. Yet, her use of Scripture reveals further advancement from that of Gutiérrez and Häring. In dealing with the biblical texts, for instance, she takes into account the historical aspect of the texts and hence puts her approach somewhat in line with that of the traditional biblical scholarship. Moreover, unlike Gutiérrez, Ruether recognizes those diverse traditions within the Bible other than the one she perceives as central. She is also able to correlate these various traditions with her feminist reflection. As a whole she demonstrates a better understanding of Scripture than the other two theologians. In addition, by correlating feminist critical principles and prophetic critical principles in the construction of a feminist hermeneutics, she demonstrates a certain degree of integration between two different disciplines. Finally, as in the case of Gutiérrez, she engages in dialogue with biblical scholarship through her exegetical attempts on certain biblical texts, which makes her interpretation more convincing. However, her use of Scripture also shares certain limitations found in Gutiérrez's case. Like Gutiérrez she is somehow bound by her theological agenda so much so that she over-focuses on a particular tradition (prophetic-liberating tradition) without sound justification. This only weakens her overall hermeneutical argument. Furthermore, her use of the Bible is also rather selective in that the texts are chosen to support her agenda and hence distort the original meanings of the texts.

Spohn's commitment to the call to integrate Scripture into moral theology exemplifies what Häring has advocated. Like Gutiérrez and Ruether he attempts to integrate Scripture into a solid ethical framework. He also searches for themes in his use of the Bible. All three of them also engage in dialogue with biblical scholarship. Yet he differs from Ruether in that his attention goes beyond the historical aspect of the texts to the literary genres and contexts of the texts. In addition, his affirmative hermeneutical approach contrasts to the feminist perspective and thus makes the Bible more compatible with the reader's ethical framework. Finally, he advances Gutiérrez and Ruether's use of Scripture in that he engages in the synthetic task although he involves himself much less in the exegetical task. However, as in the case of Häring, the attempt to seek a unity/synthesis of biblical texts risks the danger of neglecting the diversity within Scripture. Moreover, his over-emphasis on the story of Jesus seems to ignore other biblical traditions that are equally important for moral reflection. The over-reliance on the role of narratives is similarly narrow and contradicts his claims to be attentive to other literary genres.

Thus, as a whole, the advances and insights by these ethicists contribute to the development of a more integrated Scripture-based ethics in the following ways. First, they have demonstrated that there is a real need to interact with both the texts and biblical scholarship in order to produce a sound Scripture-based ethics. Second, the task of hermeneutics is necessary for not only bridging the two disciplines but also in the actual use of Scripture. In particular, one's ethical framework is crucial to how the biblical texts are used and interpreted. Thus, the attempts of these ethicists somehow reveal a stronger

interest in integrating Scripture into their ethical framework than biblical scholars show about the ethical theory by ethicists. Last but not least, their employment of Scripture in ethics confirms the development and shift from concern with norms and biblical authority to the role of Scripture in forming vision/values and practices of communities of discipleship and its relevance in equality and social justice.

In sum, since the time when Tillmann began to systematically employ Scripture in moral reflection, we witness a slow but positive development among theological ethicists in their use of Scripture. In the beginning, they were focusing on the advocacy of using Scripture in moral theology. Then they began to demonstrate the actual employment of the Bible within their own contexts and ethical perspectives such as liberation and feminist theologies. Various ways of using Scripture were identified. At the same time, Christian ethicists became aware of the role of hermeneutics in bridging the two disciplines. Until now, some of these ethicists like Spohn began to note that scriptural texts need to be employed properly should a genuine Scripture-based ethics be constructed.

However, their interest, commitment and contributions do not mean that they have achieved a more integrated Scripture-based ethics. Certain issues regarding the selection, textual interpretation, and methodology emerged. In the first place, the biblical texts employed are in general selective. The criteria of choosing the texts seem to depend on one's own agenda. The texts selected also tend to be limited to certain traditions or themes perceived by ethicists as helpful in advocating their particular agenda. In short,

these ethicists' use of Scripture, though goes beyond the text-proofing model, remains problematic.

Second, when some of these ethicists interact with biblical scholarship and even attempt to engage in the task of exegesis, the overall performance is unsatisfactory, either in terms of quantity or quality. They have either focused on certain selected texts or interacted with biblical scholars in a minimal, selective manner. Even in the case of Gutiérrez who seems to engage with biblical scholars more broadly, as mentioned earlier, Meier comments that, being a liberation theologian, his exegetical work is not without flaws.

These two points (selective use and insufficient exegesis) lead to a related and yet important issue—the approach towards problematic or ‘bad’ texts in the Bible. All these four ethicists somehow fail to deal with these texts either by avoidance during the process of selection or by not engaging them exegetically (and carefully). This issue, I think, deserves some attention here.

On the one hand, some ethicists have shown us that it is not impossible to handle and confront these problematic texts. Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, notes that certain arguments are often employed for the justification of patriarchal submission (like necessary adaptation, goodness of creation, and subversive subordination) in the *Haustafel* (household codes) trajectory in Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:22-6:9 (as well as other related texts).⁶⁹² She thus confronts the texts by employing a feminist

⁶⁹² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Discipleship and Patriarchy: Early Christian Ethos and Christian Ethics in a Feminist Theological Perspective,” in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, eds. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 38-51.

critical evaluative hermeneutics that challenges androcentric constructions in the texts and critically analyzes androcentric texts: “[This critical evaluative hermeneutics] call[s] patriarchal Biblical religion to personal and structural *metanoia* of feminist praxis...[and] highlight[s] that its patriarchal ethics was asserted over and against an ‘egalitarian’ Christian ethos.”⁶⁹³ She concludes that the early Christian ethos of co-equal discipleship in community can equally claim scriptural authority and canonicity as the patriarchal pattern of submission has done.⁶⁹⁴

On the other hand, biblical scholars also show us that it is through careful exegesis alone can we know whether a text is problematic, say anti-Semitism or supercessionism. For instance, Harrington and George Smiga treat in detail those possible problematic passages in the four gospels that seem anti-Jewish (e.g., Matthew 23:13-36, John 8:44). They show us that by placing the gospels in their original Jewish contexts, one will understand that the gospels are not anti-Jewish and those seemingly problematic texts may only have an anti-Jewish potential.⁶⁹⁵

Third, as a whole, when these scholars employ Scripture in their ethical reflection, they are still concerned more about interpreting the text’s meaning for contemporary world (i.e., hermeneutics) than with first examining its original meaning to see if the text can be rightly employed. In other words, they are more still more interested in the performance of the ‘script’ rather understanding the scripted text.

⁶⁹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, “Discipleship and Patriarchy,” 54-55.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁹⁵ See George M. Smiga, *The Gospel of John Set Free: Preaching Without Anti-Judaism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 3; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching Without Anti-Judaism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 1, 223.

In these two reviews of the development of an integrated Scripture-based ethics, we note that both biblical scholars and theological ethicists have either stressed the importance of the scriptural text or the importance of ethical hermeneutics. In other words, they see Scripture as either ‘script’ (to be performed/interpreted) or ‘scripted’ (to be exegeted). This observation struck me as revealing: A balanced view of Scripture as ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ seems to be the right direction toward constructing a more integrated scriptural ethics.

Chapter Four: The Importance of the Scriptural Text and of Ethical Hermeneutics, or the Scripture as ‘Scripted’ and ‘Script’

We note from the previous two chapters that in the past twenty years there have been positive developments within the two disciplines to construct an integrated Scripture-based ethics. Biblical scholars begin to go beyond the exegetical task to engage in hermeneutics; theological ethicists, similarly, start to pay attention to their use of Scripture in ethical reflection. These developments, however, reveal to us two contrasting realities. On the one hand, a more integrated Scripture-based ethics has not been achieved, for both biblical scholars and theological ethicists have either stressed the importance of the scriptural text or the importance of ethical hermeneutics. In other words, there is a lack of balance among these scholars in their corresponding approaches. On the part of biblical scholarship, such imbalance is manifested in their lack of ethical theories as a platform for ethical analysis. For theological ethicists, the sign of imbalance is the fact that Scripture is still not properly employed (and/or fully understood) but used in a way that simply perceives the Bible as a secondary support.

On the other hand, they point to us what the right direction toward constructing a more integrated scriptural ethics can be: It takes the Bible seriously and builds its findings upon a sound ethical theory or hermeneutics. That means, perceiving the Scripture as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ is a necessary step toward our goal.

Among the most recent scholars who have committed to this goal I note that New Testament scholar Richard Burridge and Christian ethicist Allen Verhey have tried to

maintain such a balance in their writings. I now turn to their works to seek a better understanding of what a balanced approach means.

4.1 Richard A. Burridge

Reverend Richard Burridge is an Anglican priest from England and is currently the Dean of King's College, University of London. He has been a professor of New Testament and biblical interpretation for over twenty years during which he taught courses on the gospels as well as New Testament ethics.⁶⁹⁶ Throughout his teaching career he has written a number of books on the relationship between the gospels and Jesus, such as *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* and *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*⁶⁹⁷ Because of his former academic training in the Classics, he is particularly interested in exploring the literary genre of the gospels. Specifically, he is known for advocating the view that literary genre of the gospels is one of ancient biography, as discussed in *What are the Gospels?*⁶⁹⁸

In this book Burridge examines certain ancient biographies as well as the four gospels in light of those features that serve as methodological criteria for examining

⁶⁹⁶ For further information on Richard Burridge's bibliography, see <http://kcl.ac.uk/about/structure/dean/profile.html> and <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/humanities/depts/trs/who/rb.html> (accessed on September 14, 2009).

⁶⁹⁷ Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, and Dearborn, MI: Dove Booksellers, 2004); *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁶⁹⁸ John Paul Heil, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard Burridge, *Theological Studies* 69, no. 4 (December 2008): 918.

ancient biographies.⁶⁹⁹ He corrects and builds upon the earlier attempts to understand the gospels as biography,⁷⁰⁰ and emphasizes that, as a genre, biography or biographical narrative (*βίος*) is a flexible, diverse genre that “nestles among neighboring genres such as historiography, rhetoric...and the novel.”⁷⁰¹ As a result, he is convinced that the four gospels have many features in common with *βίοι* and thus belong to the overall genre of ancient Graeco-Roman *βίοι*, counter to the mainstream view that the gospels are *sui generis*.⁷⁰²

Commentators in general agree that Burridge has made his case in defending the biographical character of the gospels. However, I find its subsequent implications for New Testament studies equally significant.⁷⁰³ The first one concerns the issue of hermeneutics. Burridge insists that genre plays a significant role in the interpretation of the texts. Thus, the diverse, flexible nature of *βίος* implies a flexible interpretation of the gospels in which one finds various materials such as didactic, apologetic, and polemic purposes/materials.

A second and subsequent implication is that the key to the interpretation of the text is the subject of the narrative. It is because a biographical interpretation of the texts invites us to focus on the subject: Jesus of Nazareth becomes the key to interpretation. Hence, a flexible interpretation of the narratives of Jesus would imply that it is not

⁶⁹⁹ These four features are: opening features (e.g., title), subject, external features (e.g., size/scale) and internal features (e.g., attitude/values). See Burridge, *What are the Gospels?* 107-23.

⁷⁰⁰ Burridge gives two related reasons for focusing on Graeco-Roman biographical genre: 1) This genre has been increasingly proposed for the gospels; and 2) it lacks proper scholarly basis and hence weakens its arguments. See Burridge, *What are the Gospels?* 24, 100-101.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 100-101, 252-53.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 247-50.

limited to an interpretation of the historical facts of Jesus of Nazareth but also open to a theological interpretation of the subject. Therefore, the gospels are “Christology in narrative form.”⁷⁰⁴

A third implication of the biographical hypothesis concerns the social setting and function of the gospels. Burrige points out that the biographical approach offers “a critique of too much community-based sociological analysis of the gospel audiences.”⁷⁰⁵ As *βίοι* the gospels are not written specifically for the hypothetical community that produced them but for a more general audience and with diverse social functions (like apologetic and polemic purposes). Their publication and delivery is likewise set for other groups across a broad geographical area.⁷⁰⁶ As a result, viewing the gospels as *βίοι* can “liberate us from the circularity of deducing the communities from the text and then interpreting the text in light of these (deduced) communities.”⁷⁰⁷

Last but not least, according to Burrige, ancient biographies “held together both words and deeds in portraying their central subject.”⁷⁰⁸ In other words, central to this genre is the emphasis that the words and deeds of the subject are inseparable. One cannot attend to the words alone or vice versa. Thus, a biographical approach to the gospels does not perceive the texts as merely a collection of sayings by Jesus but that Jesus’ narrated

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 289-90.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 296.

⁷⁰⁶ Such a view, however, could risk the danger of separating the gospels from their communities of origin for the gospels will still reflect the perspective and experience of those who produced them. Thus, one needs to distinguish the community-transcending elements from the community-specific elements and then discerns on what is important to communicate to the general audience.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., 299.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 305.

teachings are inseparable from his narrated deeds. Specifically, both his words and deeds are part of his proclamation of the kingdom of God.⁷⁰⁹

In fact, all these implications are applicable to the study of New Testament ethics as well. Still, a comprehensive and systematic study of New Testament ethics that is rooted in the biographical hypothesis is found in his recent major book *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* and a related article written in the same year.⁷¹⁰ This major work is generally perceived as an implication of what he pursued in *What are the Gospels?* for the understanding of New Testament ethics.⁷¹¹ It “looks at how New Testament ethics should be interpreted in the light of [the] argument that the gospels are essentially biographies of Jesus, using South African apartheid as a case study.”⁷¹²

The overall aim of this work is to offer an alternative approach to New Testament ethics that is grounded on his earlier findings. He is concerned that New Testament ethics today is still done in a way that either emphasizes the rigorous ethical teachings of Jesus or the open acceptance of all people found in Jesus’ deeds. In particular, Burridge

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 304-6.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 306n207; Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007). His “Being Biblical? Slavery, Sexuality, and the Inclusive Community,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 64, no. 1 (March 2008): 155-74, a reworked version of a lecture given in 2007, is a good preview of this major book on New Testament ethics. In this article he builds upon the discussion of apartheid to explore the ethical questions of slavery and sexuality within his faith community. My survey of Burridge’s approach to biblical ethics will be based on these two works.

⁷¹¹ David G. Horrell, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, <http://www.inclusivechurch2.net/Imitating-Jesus-by-Richard-Burridge-edf32f3> (accessed on February 19, 2009).

⁷¹² Richard A. Burridge, <http://kcl.ac.uk/about/structure/dean/profile.html> (accessed on September 14, 2009).

laments that the example of Jesus is either ignored or treated as tentative by scholars.⁷¹³ Thus, his proposal challenges the false dichotomy between being ‘biblical’ and being ‘inclusive’ and counter-proposes that “to be truly biblical is to be inclusive.”⁷¹⁴ Moreover, he is concerned that “the vast majority of works on New Testament ethics concentrate almost exclusively on the ethical material within the New Testament; any attempt to relate it to today may include a brief consideration of the problems in so doing and possible methodologies, but little by way of actual content or application.”⁷¹⁵ Thus, he also aims at promoting the theological/pragmatic task as Hays has done.

The approach to New Testament ethics, therefore, is biographical. As said earlier, the decision is rooted in his conviction that the literary genre is crucial to the interpretation of the texts. He claims, “In order to be [b]iblical, we have to interpret the gospels according to this [ancient biographical] genre.”⁷¹⁶ This methodological claim has certain implications for our study of New Testament ethics. First, as mentioned above, a biographical reading of the texts would emphasize that the subject’s words are inseparable from one’s actual deeds, for the narrative of the subject’s deeds provides the context for the sayings. In the context of New Testament ethics, therefore, it means that focusing on the sayings of Jesus alone is inadequate. Rather, “we must set Jesus’ rigorous ethical teaching in the context of the narrative of his deeds.”⁷¹⁷ For instance, the rigorous and demanding Sermon on the Mount must be interpreted in the context of Jesus’ radical

⁷¹³ Donald Senior, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Bible Today* 46, no. 2 (Mar-Apr 2008): 132. We should note that Burridge’s reference to New Testament ethics does not exhaust the scope of Christian ethics.

⁷¹⁴ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 409.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷¹⁶ Burridge, “Being Biblical?” 164.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

loving acceptance of others. Though the process of interpreting Jesus' words and deeds is a complex one, it should be the starting point.⁷¹⁸

Second, ancient biographies were often written to offer a portrait of the subject:⁷¹⁹

The ancients wanted to depict the subject's character with a portrait of them through a combination of their deeds and words, through anecdotes and stories as much as their sayings or speeches...often it will also reveal something further about the person's life, or bring the author's major themes to a climax.⁷²⁰

Thus, within the context of New Testament ethics, it points to the person of Jesus as the locus and the starting point of our ethical reflection. For Burridge the New Testament is "not an ethical manual, nor is it just about providing moral instructions; instead, it challenges the reader with its central Christological claim and the consequent call to follow Jesus in discipleship."⁷²¹ In other words, Christology is the key to ethical hermeneutics. Therefore, the study of New Testament ethics should focus on and begin with the ethics of Jesus.

The depiction of the subject's character by means of biographical narratives leads us to a third ethical proposition: *Mimesis*—the practice of imitation and of following the subject's virtues. Burridge notes that ancient biographies were written to provide an example for others to follow. This idea of imitation is not unlike the Jewish *ma'aseh* (precedence) where "the disciple is expected to observe and imitate his master as a way of imitating Torah and ultimately becoming holy as God is holy."⁷²² Therefore, the New Testament canon should be interpreted accordingly: "[They are] biographical narratives

⁷¹⁸ Senior, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, 132.

⁷¹⁹ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 28-29.

⁷²⁰ Burridge, "Being Biblical?" 169.

⁷²¹ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 391.

⁷²² Burridge, "Being Biblical?" 166.

which include ethics to help people follow and imitate Jesus.”⁷²³ In other words, ‘imitating Jesus’ is the core theme of the New Testament ethics.

The fourth proposition is built around all the previous three outcomes: The New Testament canon invites us to imitate Jesus’ radical loving acceptance of all people within an open and inclusive community.⁷²⁴ That means, the New Testament needs to be interpreted within an inclusive community. In fact, this inclusive approach is already hinted in the subtitle of his book.

With regards to the structure of this work, Burrridge presents and discusses the ethical contents and themes of the New Testament in less common manner: Although he begins the major part of his work with the ethics of the historical Jesus as Schrage did, he basically treats the rest of the New Testament canon in a chronological order (vis-à-vis Schrage’s canonical order). That means, he continues with Paul and then the writings of the four evangelists. What follows this major part of his work is the application of his inclusive approach to New Testament ethics—he discusses the debate of apartheid in South Africa and interprets the Bible through the lenses of ‘the imitation of Jesus’ and ‘an open, inclusive community’.⁷²⁵

In each of the discussions, Burrridge basically follows a particular structure that focuses on the above-mentioned propositions: He begins with certain Christological claims, followed by a discussion of the Law and love, and then identifies the ethical

⁷²³ Burrridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 31.

⁷²⁴ Burrridge, “Being Biblical?” 166.

⁷²⁵ Burrridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 408-9.

issues presented in the texts and concludes with reflections on the meaning of imitating Jesus. I will follow his order in the following pages.

In the exploration of the ethics of Jesus,⁷²⁶ Burridge first examines the words of the historical Jesus and clarifies that “the gospels do not portray Jesus as just a teacher of morality.”⁷²⁷ Rather, the proclamation of the kingdom of God is crucial to Jesus’ ethical teaching (Mark 1:14). Also, Jesus’ ethics is one of response—he calls us to repentance and discipleship (Mark 1:15-20; Matthew 4:18-22). In other words, Jesus’ ethical teaching is “not a separate body of moral instructions, but rather part of his preaching of the eschatological in-breaking of the reign of God, which demands a total and immediate response from his hearers.”⁷²⁸ Moreover, although those specific ethical teachings are rigorous and all-demanding, they aim at intensifying “the demands of the Law with an ethics of renunciation and self-denial.”⁷²⁹ The heart of Jesus’ teaching is still the double commandment of love.

Burridge later examines the real meaning of sinners, and Jesus’ attitude and actions towards them (as in his encounter with Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10), and concludes that Jesus’ deeds and examples of open acceptance of all are coherent with his strenuous commands. Finally, he understands that we are called to imitate Jesus’ merciful and loving acceptance of all. And our individual responses must be situated in the context of a new community of disciples.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 34-79.

⁷²⁷ Burridge, “Being Biblical?” 165.

⁷²⁸ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 48.

⁷²⁹ Burridge, “Being Biblical?” 166.

Regarding the ethics of Paul,⁷³⁰ Burridge points out that even though the genre of Pauline letters is not biographical narrative *per se*, the letters can still be interpreted in a similar manner, for Paul bases everything on the ‘Jesus event’.⁷³¹ Thus, by examining Paul’s theology and those contextual ethical imperatives (such as household codes), he claims that Paul’s ethics “is still supremely an ethics of response, even though the preaching of the kingdom has become the event of the King, with Christology being absolutely central for both Paul’s own new life and for his theology and ethics.”⁷³² Burridge also notes that the theme of imitation of Jesus’ inclusive love is found in Paul’s writings. Paul constantly appeals to his readers to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Specifically, they are not just to be humble and self-giving but also to bear the failings of the weak and to welcome them into the community (Romans 15:1-7).⁷³³ Thus, Paul’s ethics shares the same basic outline as that of Jesus, and one should read Paul “as following the creative complementarity of Jesus’ rigorous and demanding ethics together with his acceptance of sinners within his community.”⁷³⁴

In the case of the ethics found in the four gospels (and the rest of the New Testament), he basically argues that each of the four evangelists attempts to tell the story of Jesus “in such a way that readers will imitate his life in response.”⁷³⁵ Still, he recognizes the different ethical emphases by each of the gospel writers.

⁷³⁰ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 83-154.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 147; Heil, 918.

⁷³⁴ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 154.

⁷³⁵ David P. Gushee, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 185.

A biographical interpretation of Mark's gospel reveals a wealth of ethical possibilities:⁷³⁶ Both his Christology and understanding of the law and love points to the interim eschatological ethic in suffering. Also, Jesus' words and deeds as (especially) reported in chapter 10 touch many concrete ethical issues (e.g., the questions of divorce in vv2-12, of money/possessions in vv17-31, and of power/leadership in vv35-45) and are situated in his preaching of the kingdom of God. Moreover, the ethics of discipleship emphasized by Mark means following Jesus wholeheartedly, forming an open and inclusive community, and imitating Jesus to be friend of sinners (as depicted in his call of the disciples and the appointment of the Twelve in 1:16-20 and 3:13-19 respectively).

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Burridge points out that while it is true that Matthew narrates much more specific ethical teachings of Jesus than Mark does, the biographical approach challenges us not to miss the overall picture.⁷³⁷ First, Jesus is the new Moses and true righteous interpreter of the Law (chapter 23). Second, Jesus' words reveal that righteousness within the kingdom of God is central to his ethical teachings (as manifested in those parables of the kingdom in chapter 13). Third, the deeds of Jesus, such as healing (and plucking grain) on the Sabbath (12:1-14), also confirm that Jesus is the true interpreter of righteousness. Fourth, imitating the Matthean Jesus means learning to be teachers of the new righteousness (that is not based on the Law but on Jesus Christ) within an inclusive community of forgiving love.

Still, what is noteworthy is Burridge's unique understanding of the Sermon on the Mount (and the Beatitudes) through the lens of biographical interpretation. In various

⁷³⁶ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 160-85.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 203. See also 189-225.

places he reminds us that a biographical approach would read Matthew 5-7 as the first of the five balancing discourses (the other four are discourses on mission (10), the kingdom (13), the new community (18), and eschatology (24-25)). It should not be singled out as the essence of the Matthean Jesus' ethics.⁷³⁸ One reviewer thus comments that Burrridge is very concerned that the Sermon "is frequently privileged as the epitome of Jesus' ethics to the neglect of the ethics demonstrated by his deeds."⁷³⁹ For Burrridge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's conclusion best depicts the proper way of treating the Sermon: "The only proper response to this word which Jesus brings with him from eternity is simply to do it. Jesus has spoken: his is the word, ours the obedience."⁷⁴⁰

With regards to the Gospel of Luke, Burrridge notes that Jesus' universal mission is for all people, with special concerns for the disadvantaged.⁷⁴¹ As a result, both the words and deeds of Jesus as narrated by Luke focus not on "providing ethical teaching for the church while waiting for the eschaton" as some biblical scholars perceive.⁷⁴² Rather, they point to the concrete needs to care for the marginalized, as found in Jesus' inaugural speech in Nazareth (4:16-21), his encounter with women (7:36-50; 10:38-42), his cure of the possessed or the paralyzed (4:31-37; 5:17-26), and especially his association with sinners (7:33-34). Therefore, imitating the Lukan Jesus means being friends of the marginalized and sinners, and forming an inclusive community that embraces people of all paths.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., 188, 203, 206-9.

⁷³⁹ Heil, 919.

⁷⁴⁰ Burrridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 209. Burrridge quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 197.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 230-83.

⁷⁴² Ibid., 260.

Despite the fact that John's gospel presents a high theology, Burrridge states that it is still a biographical narrative in which Jesus continues to be the subject in the scene or in the discussion by others (e.g., after healing the man born blind in 9:1-12).⁷⁴³ By examining the 'book of signs' in 1:19-12:50 (that tells Jesus' deeds) and the 'book of glory' in 13:1-19:42 (that narrates his final words and Passion) he points out that Jesus is depicted as "the love of God, coming to dwell among human beings to bring them his divine truth."⁷⁴⁴ He also points out that, contrary to the common view, John's rich narrative of Jesus "has many ethical implications about how best to follow his example."⁷⁴⁵ The absence of specific ethical command is simply because "everything is now subordinated under the 'new commandment' to love one another as he has loved us."⁷⁴⁶ Finally, the call to imitate Jesus refers to following his self-sacrificial love within a mixed inclusive community.

In the final chapter Burrridge applies his biographical approach to analyze how the New Testament should be interpreted in the debate of apartheid in South Africa. In other words, he engages in ethical hermeneutics on a particular local and specific practice. Here, he first analyzes the use of Scripture by both sides of the apartheid debate (i.e., the proponents and the critics) to support (or to critique) apartheid. Studying their use of four particular modes of ethical material (or types of literary genres from the perspective of biblical scholarship), he examines how they looked for rules/commands, principles/universal values, paradigms/examples, and symbolic worldview in the biblical

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 292-346.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 346.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 330.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 346.

texts to justify their claims.⁷⁴⁷ He notes that both sides have used Scripture incorrectly in their search of ethical material from each aspect, especially those who tried to justify apartheid. He then concludes that none of these approaches could avoid abuse by either side and hence proposes the use of the biographical approach of which the imitation of Jesus is the ethical hermeneutical key.⁷⁴⁸ Only by imitating Jesus' words and deeds, and reading Scripture together within the context of an open and inclusive community, are we able to apply the moral teaching of the New Testament to the case of apartheid. Here, then, a contextual reading would emphasize the inclusion of the dissident voices of the South Africans by the community but not with their previous tendencies to abuse. Consequently, such a reading would judge that the pro-apartheid theology fails to imitate Jesus by not hearing and responding to the voice of South Africa's oppressed. Therefore, they need to listen to the voice(s) of protest and open up the community to include those who suffered under it. Moreover, the voice(s) of the ordinary people (such as the poor and the marginalized) need to be heard by the interpreting community.

As a whole, Burridge identifies a consistent pattern among the New Testament writings: "Jesus offers extraordinary rigorous moral teaching about important matters of everyday life, grounding all teachings in the love command; but he creates a mixed, inclusive community of quite flawed followers who respond as best they are able to this man and his demanding teachings."⁷⁴⁹ Our understanding of the New Testament ethics through the lens of biography must consider the overall depiction of Jesus' life, teaching

⁷⁴⁷ See Burridge, "Being Biblical?" 161-64; Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 363-88. These four types of ethical material are Hays's adaptation of Gustafson's own list. See Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 209.

⁷⁴⁸ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 389-90.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-86. Being inclusive is a general description that does not necessarily mean absolute inclusive of all.

and practices. And the unity of New Testament ethics subsequently lies on the core theme of imitation. In specific, the disciples are to imitate Jesus by forming open and inclusive communities that accept all people.

Burridge's *Imitating Jesus* is welcomed by many as a constructive, comprehensive, unique and important book about New Testament studies and New Testament ethics.⁷⁵⁰ He is praised for engaging in dialogue with New Testament scholarship (of both the past and the current) and other perspectives such as feminism and Judaism in his enquiry.⁷⁵¹ He is also noted for engaging in literature normally employed by ethicists (especially in his case study of apartheid).⁷⁵² In addition, he is commended for presenting the materials in a non-technical way that can benefit theological ethicists who are interested in Scripture-based ethics.⁷⁵³ However, many note that the work does not contain enough exegetical materials (as would be expected from a biblical scholar) and thus not a few scholars comment that it is basically a presentation of mainstream biblical scholarship.⁷⁵⁴ In other words, he does not engage in direct interpretation of the texts but simply summarizes the views of other scholars.

Regarding the content of his work, it is obvious that Burridge does not treat all the New Testament writings, such as the Catholic epistles and the book of *Revelation*.

Several commentators are thus concerned that he does not present the entire New

⁷⁵⁰ Frank J. Matera, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), back cover; Gushee, 185; Graydon F. Snyder, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Sewanee Theological Review* 51, no. 4 (2008): 470.

⁷⁵¹ Valerie Abrahamsen, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Christian Century* 125, no. 17 (August 26 2008): 39; Heil, 919.

⁷⁵² Gushee, 186.

⁷⁵³ Heil, 919.

⁷⁵⁴ Clarence DeWitt Agan III, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Presbyterian* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 119; Snyder, 470.

Testament ethics but only the ethics of the four gospels.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, he does not seem to offer concrete answers except some general exhortations to the contemporary ethical questions he raised. It gives the impression that while he rightly urges us to interpret the biblical text in a biographical and inclusive approach, he does not state clearly enough how to achieve the goal.⁷⁵⁶ One reviewer further notes that he does not clarify the issue of diversity within a unified New Testament ethics either.⁷⁵⁷ In addition, he often takes the positions of his colleagues for his own and hence does not offer much new insights in terms of ethical contents. For instance, he basically follows the general understanding among scholars (like Schrage, Hays and Matera) that Paul's ethics is grounded in his Christology.⁷⁵⁸ The idea that Jesus is a model for moral response is likewise already discussed by Matera and Hays.⁷⁵⁹ The only difference is that he sees New Testament ethics grounded in Christology more than other previously discussed biblical scholars do.

Despite these particular concerns by commentators regarding the content of his work, Burridge's methodology and approach to the interpretation of the texts has drawn positive comments. One commentator notes that the inclusive approach is similar to and hence can benefit from those who advocate for a contextual reading of the texts in that it attends to the cultural circumstances of the communities.⁷⁶⁰ Such an inclusive approach also avoids the limitations charged to feminist and liberation theologians (such as Schneiders) whose approaches risk the exclusion of certain groups.

⁷⁵⁵ Agan III, 118; Heil, 919.

⁷⁵⁶ Agan III, 119.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid..

⁷⁵⁸ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 89.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 184.

⁷⁶⁰ Angus Paddison, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 3 (2009): 383.

Furthermore, his approach challenges those who find ethical import from the words of Jesus only.⁷⁶¹ And Burridge not only demonstrates the ‘how to’ (as Hays does) but also challenges biblical scholars to go beyond exegetical task to consider contemporary applications.⁷⁶² In his case study of the apartheid situation in South Africa, he is further commended for turning to the literature of Christian ethics (especially the use of Scripture in ethics) in order to offer guidance in constructive application of Scripture to the problem.⁷⁶³

Still, some scholars find his approach too narrow, one that leads to a reductionistic treatment of the genre of the gospels into biography alone.⁷⁶⁴ They comment that although the gospels share many features with ancient Graeco-Roman *βίοι*, there are also certain features unique to the New Testament that are not explored or integrated into the argument. In addition, the emphasis on inclusiveness has several practical obstacles. A good number of scholars are concerned about whether there should be limits to such an inclusive community; and if yes, they need to know when and how to exclude.⁷⁶⁵ Also, they note that although Burridge acknowledges the existence and challenges of these limits (such as accepting sinners and those who hold different views), he does not provide much practical information on how the community could be maintained and how its ‘inclusive selection’ is determined.⁷⁶⁶ One Christian ethicist further raises the concern that “even inclusive communities will find ways to mess up the

⁷⁶¹ Gushee, 186.

⁷⁶² Agan III, 118.

⁷⁶³ Gushee, 186.

⁷⁶⁴ Charles H. Talbert, review of *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, by Richard A. Burridge, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 715; Agan III, 118.

⁷⁶⁵ Agan III, 119; Paddison, 384.

⁷⁶⁶ Agan III, 119.

reading of scripture.”⁷⁶⁷ Thus, one wonders if such emphasis is too loose a category for theological ethics.

Despite these criticisms and concerns, Burridge’s work as a whole demonstrates that a biographical genre could make a difference in the interpretation of the New Testament canon, especially in the area of New Testament ethics. The ethical implications emerging from a biographical reading of the texts reveal to us that such an approach is not simply a method/genre within literary criticisms. Its emphases on the person of Jesus (both his words and deeds) / Christology as the key to ethical hermeneutics, imitating Jesus, and forming open, inclusive communities converge to the point that such an approach is itself a solid platform for ethical analysis—as a concrete platform for ethical analysis it goes beyond narrative ethics or character ethics that focuses either on narratives or the community’s formation alone.⁷⁶⁸ In fact, a biographical, inclusive approach can be seen as a sum of these ethical theories and bears a trait of virtue ethics. As will be explored in the next part of this work, these emphases—especially the focus on the person, the call on imitation, the insistence on the community and its formation, and the goal of becoming an inclusive faith community—are closely related to the structure of virtue ethics and yields of virtues which entail practices, character, exemplar, and communal identity.

⁷⁶⁷ Gushee, 186.

⁷⁶⁸ Character ethics “refers to a way of thinking about and interpreting the moral life in terms of a particular vision of and a passion for life that is rooted in the nurture, formation, and socialization of a particular self-conscious community.” See Walter Brueggemann, “Foreward,” in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), vii.

Therefore, Burridge's work gives us the hint, from the perspective of biblical scholarship, what a more balanced and integrated Scripture-based ethics can be: It embraces the importance of ethical hermeneutics while paying attention to the importance of the text. And in doing so, one builds her/his findings upon a sound platform of ethical analysis or ethical theory/hermeneutics. To conclude my description of his contribution in constructing a more integrated Scripture-based ethics, I quote Matera's words that I think appropriate: "[It is] one of those rare studies that moves the discipline forward."⁷⁶⁹

4.2 Allen Verhey

Allen Verhey is a Dutch Reformed (Calvinism) Christian ethicist. He was the director of the Institute of Religion at the Texas Medical Center and served as the Biekkink professor of religion at Hope College, Holland, Michigan for over a decade before going to Duke Divinity School.⁷⁷⁰ He is known as a prolific writer and has regularly published articles, essays and books since the late 1970s. Although many of his publications are focused on medical ethics (and bioethics)⁷⁷¹ Verhey has written on a

⁷⁶⁹ Matera, review of *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, back cover.

⁷⁷⁰ Walter E. Pilgrim, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 32, no. 5 (October 2005): 385; Duke Divinity School, "Verhey, Allen," http://www.divinity.duke.edu/portal_memberdata/averhey (accessed September 27, 2009).

⁷⁷¹ See Allen Verhey, "Christian Community and Identity: What Difference should They Make to Patients and Physicians Finally?" *Linacre Quarterly* 52 (May 1985): 149-69; "Scripture and Medical Ethics: Psalm 51:10a, the Jarvik VII, and Psalm 50:9," in *Religious Methods and Resources in Bioethics*, ed. Paul F. Camenisch (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1994), 261-88; "The Good Samaritan and Scarce Medical Resources," *Christian Scholar's Review* 23, no. 3 (March 1994): 360-73; "Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Biblical and Reformed Perspective," in *Must We Suffer Our Way to Death?: Cultural and Theological Perspectives on Death by Choice*, eds. Ronald P. Hamel, and Edwin R. DuBose (Dallas, TX:

variety of topics ranging from anthropology to moral virtues/practices, from sexuality to communal discernment, from Calvinism to Scripture and ethics.⁷⁷²

However, there is a common feature among these writings: The employment of Scripture in theological reflections, especially on the applications of Christian ethics.⁷⁷³

Verhey explains that the interest in Scripture is rooted in his evangelical and Dutch Reformed formation since childhood.⁷⁷⁴ And his main academic interest is the relation of Scripture and Christian ethics.⁷⁷⁵ He recalls that his initial attempts at combining the two disciplines began during the theological training, first in Calvin Theological Seminary and then in Yale University.⁷⁷⁶ His first major work in exploring the relation between Scripture and ethics is his own dissertation which analyzed Walter Rauschenbusch's use of Scripture as a case for understanding the reasons for the diversity of uses.⁷⁷⁷ In

Southern Methodist University Press, 1996), 226-65; "The Practices of Piety and the Practice of Medicine: Prayer, Scripture, and Medical Ethics," in *Seeking Understanding. The Stob Lectures 1986-1998* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 191-250; "What Makes Christian Bioethics Christian? Bible, Story, and Communal Discernment," *Christian Bioethics* 11, no. 3 (December 2005): 297-315.

⁷⁷² See Allen Verhey, "Person as a Moral Agent," *Calvin Theological Journal* 13, no. 1 (April 1978): 5-15; "Hospitality: Remembering Jesus," *Reformed Review (Online)* 57, no. 2 (Winter 2003-2004): <http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/Verhey.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2009); "The Holy Bible and Sanctified Sexuality: An Evangelical Approach to Scripture and Sexual Ethics," *Interpretation* 49, no. 1 (January 1995): 31-45; "'Able to Instruct One Another': The Church as a Community of Moral Discourse," in *Community of the Word*, by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 146-70; "Calvin and the 'Stewardship of Love'," in *The Ten Commandments for Jews, Christians, and Others*, ed. Roger E. Van Harn, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 157-74; "Scripture and Ethics: Canon and Community," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58, no. 1-2 (2004): 13-32.

⁷⁷³ See Allen Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁷⁷⁴ Allen Verhey, "Authority and the Practice of Reading Scripture," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 122-23; "The Holy Bible and Sanctified Sexuality," 31.

⁷⁷⁵ Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, x.

⁷⁷⁶ Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), ix.

⁷⁷⁷ Allen Verhey, "The Use of Scripture in Moral Discourse: A Case Study of Walter Rauschenbusch" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1975).

subsequent years he continued to survey contemporary methodological resources for relating Scripture and ethics.⁷⁷⁸

At the same time, under the influence of certain important people, Verhey extended (and applied) his academic interest to ethical issues specifically related to medical practice.⁷⁷⁹ For instance, in his discussion of assisted suicide and euthanasia, he does not only explore the issues from his particular tradition but also from a biblical perspective (by interpreting Judas's suicide in Matthew 27:3-10).⁷⁸⁰ Later in his book *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, he demonstrates his use of Scripture to other medical, bioethical issues such as abortion and genetic interventions. As Andrew Lustig comments, Verhey "rejects simplistic readings of either Scripture or these difficult issues and instead explores, with a rich blend of insight, analysis, and exhortation, how attending to Scripture can challenge the 'strange' ethos of modern medicine."⁷⁸¹

Nevertheless, his knowledge of Scripture and its interpretation has been well received by Scripture scholars and biblical theologians, and some even recognize him as a New Testament scholar.⁷⁸² Concrete evidence of this is his widely read earlier work on

⁷⁷⁸ For example, see Verhey, "The Use of Scripture in Ethics," and "Scripture and Ethics: Canon and Community."

⁷⁷⁹ Verhey explains that his interest in medical ethics and bioethics is closely related to his wife Phyllis's career as a nurse, the technological development in medicine in the sixties, the influence of his teachers like James M. Gustafson, as well as the inadequacy of academic writing in this area. See Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, ix-xi.

⁷⁸⁰ See "Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Biblical and Reformed Perspective."

⁷⁸¹ Andrew Lustig, review of *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, by Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), back cover.

⁷⁸² Michael J. Gorman, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Interpretation* 57, no. 4 (October 2003): 434; James H. Burtness, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, by Allen Verhey, *Christian Century* 102, no. 19 (May 29, 1985): 562. In a personal conversation with Allen Verhey during the Annual Society of Christian Ethics Conference held in San Jose, California, on January 9, 2010, Verhey claims that such recognition is a compliment for he regards himself as an ethicist in the first place.

New Testament ethics, *The Great Reversal: Ethics of the New Testament* (1984) within the Protestant circles.⁷⁸³ Even Catholic scholars like Donald Senior and Lisa Sowle Cahill both are amazed by his command of biblical materials and exegetical skill.⁷⁸⁴ Still, his more recent work, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, has drawn fuller attention from the academia (especially within the Roman Catholic tradition). Some commentators perceive this work as a development and fulfillment of the insights of Verhey's 1984 study.⁷⁸⁵

Furthermore, between the publications of these two books Verhey developed a specific approach of doing Scripture-based ethics. This approach emphasizes the need of remembering Jesus, the role of the community, as well as the importance of practices and performances. Last but not least, Verhey sees Scripture as both 'scripted' and 'script'. This unique perception, I believe, concretely discloses to Christian ethicists what a more integrated Scripture-based ethics can be.

In the following pages, I turn to these and other writings in order to understand his model of Scripture-based theological ethics. It consists of three steps: First, I will look at his work as a biblical theologian in doing New Testament ethics. Second, I explore his work as an ethicist, that is, his use of Scripture in Christian ethics. Third, I conclude by exploring his perception of Scripture as both 'scripted' and 'script'.

⁷⁸³ Raymond F. Collins, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Horizons* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 326.

⁷⁸⁴ Donald Senior, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics of the New Testament*, by Allen Verhey, *Theological Studies* 46 (December 1985): 738; Cahill, "Canon, Authority, Norms? Recent Studies in Biblical Ethics," 417. In the same conversation on January 9, 2010, Verhey reveals the fact that during his time in Yale University, he first studied New Testament for two years and then shifted to the area of Christian ethics. This partially explains his command in biblical materials and skill in exegesis.

⁷⁸⁵ Collins, 326; Luke Timothy Johnson, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Modern Theology* 19, no. 4 (October 2003): 585.

Verhey as a Biblical Theologian

As just mentioned above, Verhey's talent as a biblical theologian is best demonstrated in his *The Great Reversal*. In this work, he aims at bridging the gulf that separates New Testament studies and Christian ethics from each other and from the life of the Christian community.⁷⁸⁶ He is convinced that only when the gulf is bridged will New Testament ethics be able to address the issues concerning the continuing church.⁷⁸⁷ In so doing he constructs the bridge from the side of the New Testament—that is, from the perspective of biblical scholarship. Therefore, in the first three chapters of this book he presents a standard, chronological, descriptive study of the moral teachings of the New Testament. He begins with the ethics of the historical Jesus, then moves on to the ethics of the early church remembering Jesus, and finally to the ethics of the New Testament writers (in canonical sequence). He then surveys certain methodological problems and resources for relating Scripture and contemporary ethics in the last chapter and offers his own proposal for the use of Scripture in Christian ethics.

With regards to the subsequent ethical contents, he notes that the ethics of Jesus (which seems to be centered on Mark) is grounded in Jesus' turning of the apocalyptic expectation of a 'great reversal' into one that brings transformation of values and good news to the poor. These reversed values include humility, confidence in God, generosity, non-judgmentalism, etc.⁷⁸⁸ The ethics of the early church in remembering Jesus and expecting his return, on the other hand, result from "the tradition that preserved and

⁷⁸⁶ Verhey, *The Great Reversal*, 5.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 197.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 15-21.

shaped the memory of Jesus' words and deeds" and the paraenetic tradition developed and handed down alongside.⁷⁸⁹ Verhey notes that there are diverse ethical emphases among the various forms of traditions. He thus concludes that the purpose of these different traditions is not merely for moral education but "to encourage and exhort Christians to the new life given and demanded by what God has done in Jesus Christ."⁷⁹⁰

In his probe of the ethics of the New Testament, he is aware of the diverse ethical contents among the New Testament writings addressing various communities and diverse moral problems:⁷⁹¹ For instance, Mark presents a heroic morality; Matthew calls for a surpassing righteousness; Luke presents an ethics of care and respect; and Paul urges Christians to discern a life that is appropriate to the new age. Despite this diversity of ethical contents he points out that they all converge into 'loyalty to the risen Lord'—who is remembered, whose words and deeds are taken as to be normative, and who continues to guide and speak to his faithful followers.⁷⁹²

In addition, his redactional understanding of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, especially his view on the Beatitudes, is noteworthy for it gives hints to the kind of ethical approach he has in mind for his own proposal—one that emphasizes character formation and virtues: He first argues that the Sermon depends on but is not identified with the ethics of Jesus; rather, it is the quintessence of the ethics of Matthew made for instructing catechumans.⁷⁹³ He then points out that

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 34, 61.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 72-121, 152.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 5, 51.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 85.

The beatitudes in Q source were an eschatological wisdom announcing the prudence of conforming to principles operating in the world...Matthew 'ethicizes' the tradition so that the emphasis falls on the exhortation to develop certain character traits in response to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom...With the beatitudes that Matthew adds, these constitute a catalogue of virtues. The additional beatitudes are, moreover, formulated with Matthew's Scripture (our Old Testament) always in view...The reign of God that Jesus is announcing and already manifesting [further] shapes and requires certain character traits.⁷⁹⁴

After surveying certain methodological problems and resources for relating Scripture and contemporary ethics, he turns to his 'modest' proposal:

We should refuse to license the movement in argument from the New Testament to either an autonomous principle or a moral rule. We should rather license the movement from the New Testament to claims about the reality within which we must respond, to claims about our moral identity as people loyal to God, and to claims about the dispositions and intentions that mark truthfulness to that reality and integrity with that identity.⁷⁹⁵

This proposal further makes clear to us the kind of ethical model Verhey undertakes: One that attends to the context, moral identity, and subsequent practices and dispositions. For instance, when he interprets the commandment of giving up one's possessions (Mark 10:29), he claims that it is "[a] statement of a moral posture that is freed from bondage to possessions for the practice of generosity and hospitality."⁷⁹⁶ Moreover, it is noted that the use of Scripture is valid only when one "acknowledges the authority of the risen Christ continuing to reveal God's word to the Christian community in its discernment of moral choices."⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁹⁷ Senior, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, 738.

The work as a whole is praised for combining the knowledge of New Testament criticism and contemporary methods of moral theology and moral philosophy.⁷⁹⁸ He pays close attention to the biblical texts and deals with them in detail and judiciously.⁷⁹⁹ The order of investigation is very close to that of Schrage's work. His description of the New Testament's ethics, however, is not without critics. One commentator judges his overall exegetical work as pedestrian:⁸⁰⁰ There is inadequate engagement with current biblical scholarship and he scarcely resolves exegetical impasses.

Despite this criticism I identify two related insights of Verhey's effort that can be helpful to our search for a more integrated Scripture-based ethics. First, Verhey reveals to us that even as Christian ethicists we have to take the biblical texts seriously and pay attention to the original meanings of these texts prior to employing them in our ethical reflections. Second, Verhey demonstrates to us that such a task is *possible*. While it is important to listen to what Scripture scholars say regarding the texts, Christian ethicists also need to take courage to step out from their own field into the biblical world. Verhey leads us—Christian ethicists in particular—to understand the importance of Scripture as 'scripted' for Scripture-based ethics by his very own example.

⁷⁹⁸ Joseph L. Allen, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, by Allen Verhey, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 179.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid..

⁸⁰⁰ Robert W. Wall, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, by Allen Verhey, *Theology Today* 42, no. 1 (April 1985): 128.

Verhey as a Christian Ethicist

As seen from his writings Verhey generally adapts MacIntyre's seminal notion of practice as a core element of his ethical framework.⁸⁰¹ For instance, in his treatment of the problem of scarcity of medical resources he identifies truthfulness, humility, justice, gratitude, compassion, and care as important standards of excellence, practices and virtues for the formation of good policy.⁸⁰² Some ethicists thus perceive him as a virtue ethicist and put him with Hauerwas and Yoder for building a virtue model of Christian ethics for mainstream Protestant (and Catholic) faith communities.⁸⁰³ Although others point out that he puts more emphasis on practice than virtue itself and understands Christian ethics as primarily a matter of communal practice,⁸⁰⁴ I would understand him as a virtue ethicist at least in a broad sense. It is because, as will be discussed in Part Two, both practices and communal identity are important yields of virtues. Moreover, when he claims that practices rather than choices characterize the community, his understanding of what Scripture is bears a trait of character ethics: The Bible is both the Word of God and the words of human writers.⁸⁰⁵ As the Word of God, Scripture does not only play the role

⁸⁰¹ William C. Spohn, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Theology Today* 59, no. 4 (January 2003): 652.

⁸⁰² Verhey, "The Good Samaritan and Scarce Medical Resources," 364; Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, 483.

⁸⁰³ Spohn, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, 652; Don Braxton, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Trinity Seminary Review* 25, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2004): 43.

⁸⁰⁴ Gorman, 436; Spohn, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, 654.

⁸⁰⁵ Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, 169. His argument is rooted in the Chalcedonian consensus.

of revealer but of sanctifier as well: Through Scripture God “renews life, transforms identities, and recreates and resurrects humankind.”⁸⁰⁶

Regarding the authority of Scripture, although there are various problems of Scripture, namely, its silence, strangeness, diversity, unfamiliarity, and abuse by the readers, Verhey is convinced that Scripture is still an authority for the Church’s faith and life, especially for its moral discourse and judgment.⁸⁰⁷ His Dutch Reformed tradition further leads him to point out that Scripture has authority in the very notion of church, for it is “the confession of the believing community and of the members of that community that their submission to God and to the cause of God will be guided and tested by attention to these writings.”⁸⁰⁸ One particular way that the Bible exercises its authority is through the practice of reading Scripture in a community. This understanding has certain related ethical implications: Practice, community, and the effects of reading the texts.

First, by retrieving Gustafson’s understanding of the church as a community of interpretation and action, Verhey underscores the importance of practices and performances of Scripture—which include praying, reading Scripture, and the practice of moral discourse—by particular communities.⁸⁰⁹ Second, it calls for greater attention given to community and context.⁸¹⁰ How Scripture is used in ethical reflection depends on the context of the religious community within which the authority of Scripture is

⁸⁰⁶ Wall, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, 126; Verhey, *The Great Reversal*, 180-81.

⁸⁰⁷ Verhey, “Authority and the Practice of Reading Scripture,” 125; Verhey, *The Great Reversal*, 4.

⁸⁰⁸ Verhey, “Authority and the Practice of Reading Scripture,” 123, 126.

⁸⁰⁹ Allen Verhey, “Scripture and Ethics: Practices, Performances, and Prescriptions,” in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill and James Childress (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996), 27-35.

⁸¹⁰ Verhey, “Scripture and Ethics: Canon and Community,” 31.

experienced.⁸¹¹ Within the church community, Scripture and the church are understood as correlative concepts: Scripture is the book of the church and thus would not exist if without the church, while the church preserves its identity and character and reforms its common life with the help of Scripture.⁸¹² Third, the practice of reading Scripture in Christian community helps remembering the Lord and cultivates certain standards of excellence: Holiness and sanctification; fidelity and creativity; discipline and discernment.⁸¹³ From an evangelical perspective, reading Scripture is also a practice of piety.⁸¹⁴ And reading Scripture within the church community implies that it must be read in light of the whole and as a continuing story.⁸¹⁵

This Reformed view thus understands Scripture as the best resource for the constant renewal of the church's life.⁸¹⁶ However, although Scripture exercises its authority within the church community, Verhey notes that the use of sources other than Scripture—such as natural science, natural morality, and human experiences—is necessary in Christian ethics even though at times one risks making Scripture a secondary source.⁸¹⁷

Another significant influence of his evangelical training is that he understands that Christian ethics takes on its task (of renewing the community) 'by way of reminder'

⁸¹¹ Verhey, "What Makes Christian Bioethics Christian?" 301.

⁸¹² Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 10; Verhey, "Scripture as Script and as Scripted," 23.

⁸¹³ Verhey, "Scripture and Ethics: Practices, Performances, and Prescriptions," 29-36; "Authority and the Practice of Reading Scripture," 127-29.

⁸¹⁴ Verhey, "The Holy Bible and Sanctified Sexuality," 35.

⁸¹⁵ Verhey, "Scripture as Script and as Scripted," 26-27.

⁸¹⁶ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 11.

⁸¹⁷ Verhey, "Scripture and Medical Ethics," 276-77.

(Romans 15:15).⁸¹⁸ In simple terms, it means remembering and telling the gospel of God. It is upon this understanding that Verhey constructs his hermeneutic of remembering and use of Scripture. Yet, Verhey points out that he is also motivated by the concerns that we risk forgetfulness in our contemporary world—when God is marginalized and one loses one’s identity—in both our public and personal lives due to over-emphasis on science and self-centeredness.⁸¹⁹ Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the use of remembrance is hardly remarkable: It has been found and used in Greek and Hebrew writings with terms like *anamnēsis* and *zākhar* respectively.⁸²⁰ And his emphasis on remembering is indebted to Hauerwas’s work, and can be traced back to one of Gustafson’s four aspects of internalization of Scripture emerging from a communal hermeneutic:⁸²¹

The third aspect of internalization is ‘memory,’ and Christian churches are communities of memory. The Bible tells the story of Israel, Christ, and the church, and that story is internalized, owned as ‘our’ story, in the continuing church...[It] is not the only ‘object’ to bear the possibilities of a common memory in the Christian community, and it does not bear the possibilities alone, but it is surely the critical document for church’s remembering.⁸²²

For Verhey, to remember means “to own a past as our own past in the continuing church, and to own it as constitutive of identity and determinative for discernment.”⁸²³ It often involves story-telling that has the shape of obedience. For example, in remembrance of the story of manna we are asked not to accumulate riches/lands but leave

⁸¹⁸ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 11.

⁸¹⁹ Verhey, “The Holy Bible and Sanctified Sexuality,” 35.

⁸²⁰ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 24.

⁸²¹ Verhey, “Authority and the Practice of Reading Scripture,” 126n11.

⁸²² Verhey, “Scripture and Ethics: Practices, Performances, and Prescriptions,” 28.

⁸²³ Verhey, “Authority and the Practice of Reading Scripture,” 126.

some for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10).⁸²⁴ When John Burgess challenges and insists that Scripture is something more than story—it is a sacramental word and poetry that engages imagination and invites one to construe the world—and that the risen Christ is not just remembered by the Church, Verhey defends that remembering is “itself more than recollection... [and] the real presence of Christ is mediated by our remembering Jesus, by attending to the story.”⁸²⁵

Specifically, Jesus of Nazareth who reveals God’s good nature to us and sanctifies us is for Verhey the center of the Gospel, and his resurrection is the key to Scripture.⁸²⁶ The memory of Jesus is thus “central to what the Church understands when it understands Scripture.”⁸²⁷ And reading the stories of Jesus is the starting point for using Scripture in ethics.⁸²⁸ Other stories of the New Testament are only parts of the whole story the evangelists tell in memory of Jesus.⁸²⁹ Consequently, remembering Jesus is crucial to Christian ethics. This whole hermeneutic of remembering Jesus is best demonstrated in his *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, as well as two subsequent essays on hospitality and healing.⁸³⁰

In the first part of this work, Verhey further develops his hermeneutical framework by highlighting the relationship among Christian community, Scripture, and the moral life. He begins with clarifying the tradition and vocation of early church

⁸²⁴ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 24.

⁸²⁵ Verhey, “Scripture and Ethics: Canon and Community,” 23.

⁸²⁶ Verhey, “Scripture and Medical Ethics,” 275.

⁸²⁷ Ibid..

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 278.

⁸²⁹ Verhey, “Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia,” 230.

⁸³⁰ See Verhey, “Hospitality: Remembering Jesus,”

<http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/Verhey.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2009); Allen Verhey, “Health and Healing in Memory of Jesus,” *Ex auditu* 21 (2005): 24-48.

communities found in the New Testament: They are communities of moral discourse, deliberation, and discernment by being communities of memory. In remembrance the early church preserves its identity and sustains a common life worthy of the Gospel. And our contemporary faith community is one that continues this tradition and vocation by remembering the early church remembering Jesus.⁸³¹ Based on specific texts found in certain New Testament writings—like the narrative of the empty tomb in Luke 24:6-8; the farewell discourse in John 14:26; and later epistles such as 2 Timothy 2:8—Verhey is convinced that the preservation and forming of a Christian community relies on remembering Jesus.⁸³² Actually, Verhey perceives each gospel as “a remembrance, a literary commemoration of the crucified and risen Lord, forming character and shaping conduct into something worthy of the gospel.”⁸³³ In order to remember him, Christians must “read and understand Scripture, where the memory of Jesus is found.”⁸³⁴

However, Verhey, as he did elsewhere, points out the problems encountered when turning to Scripture for moral instruction; hence, he insists that our remembrance “must also entail a reflection on the interpretation of Jesus’ teaching...in the counsel of the Church community today”⁸³⁵ and the use of Scripture must be tested and qualified by a communal discernment.⁸³⁶

⁸³¹ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 13, 15-39.

⁸³² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*.

⁸³⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *America* 186, no.8 (Mar 11, 2002): 26.

⁸³⁵ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 50; Senior, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Bible Today* 40, no. 3 (May-Jun 2002): 198.

⁸³⁶ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 73.

As a whole, this important introductory section provides a unique perspective for the rest of his discussion. The four remaining parts are subsequent applications of the hermeneutics of remembering in various moral contexts—sickness, sexuality, economy, and politics. Each of them is explored ‘by way of reminder’ and follows a similar pattern: 1) The contemporary situation is defined and reflected. 2) The life and teachings of Jesus regarding the topic is ‘remembered’. 3) The teaching of the early church remembering Jesus is ‘remembered’. 4) The insights emerging ‘by way of reminder’ are applied to the corresponding ethical issue faced by the Christian community today.

This particular pattern is also found in his later essay on hospitality where he first posts the challenge of being hospitable to strangers. He then turns to remember Jesus who shows hospitality and becomes a stranger himself. Next he looks at the early church community that remembers Jesus and practices hospitality to others (as recorded in Acts 2:45-46, 4:32-34, and Galatians 2). Finally he concludes that “in memory of Jesus and in hope for God’s grace, we must continue to test our traditions and performances of hospitality including our accounts of acceptable unity and diversity.”⁸³⁷

Regarding the scriptural texts used throughout his work, Verhey basically uses the Bible broadly and frequently, though with preference to the New Testament writings.⁸³⁸ He usually begins with Old Testament texts (such as Genesis) to highlight the contemporary issue/situation, then moves on to the teachings of Jesus, and finally that of the early church communities (related to Paul and other writers) that remember Jesus.

⁸³⁷ Verhey, “Hospitality: Remembering Jesus.”

⁸³⁸ There are over 1100 biblical citations are listed in *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*. Seven-tenths of them are from the New Testament.

Again, we see a similar way of using scriptural texts in the essay *Health and Healing in Memory of Jesus*. He first employs texts from the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Chronicles 16:12, Psalm 38:1-3, Job, and Sirach 38:1-2) to highlight the strange world of sickness. Then he turns to the story of Jesus who is remembered as one who heals, forgives sins, preaches the Good News, and suffers unto death.⁸³⁹

As a whole, Verhey's approach is one that "engages with biblical scholarship, the tradition of the Church and the realities of contemporary life."⁸⁴⁰ The study is praised for being substantial and informative.⁸⁴¹ And it goes beyond the kind of descriptive, chronological approach found in other New Testament ethics writings. The scriptural texts employed are plenty and appropriate. However, some commentators rightly note that certain important exegetical studies are either missing or simplified (such as the Pauline imperative and indicative).⁸⁴² And he seems fail to attend to certain methodological questions such as how to determine what the historical Jesus thought and did and how to identify the normative values of Jesus' life and teachings.⁸⁴³

Despite these drawbacks, Verhey treats Scripture as what he calls 'script' by building his work upon a hermeneutic of remembering and a sound ethical model that focuses on practices, community, character development and narrative.⁸⁴⁴ While he is interested in employing scriptural texts in his discussions, he does not forget the

⁸³⁹ Verhey, "Health and Healing in Memory of Jesus," 31-41; Verhey, "What Makes Christian Bioethics Christian?" 304-9.

⁸⁴⁰ David Lyall, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Expository Times* 114, no. 6 (March 2003): 210.

⁸⁴¹ Johnson, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, 585; Harrington, 25.

⁸⁴² Pilgrim, 386; James I. H. McDonald, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Journal of Theological Studies* 54, no. 1 (April 2003): 281.

⁸⁴³ Braxton, 44.

⁸⁴⁴ Pilgrim, 385-86.

importance of ethical hermeneutics. In each of the discussions he engages in descriptive, synthetic, hermeneutic and theological/pragmatic tasks. *Remembering Jesus*, as Spohn thus comments, complements Hays's work in the sense that it integrates Hays's four inter-related tasks into a whole.⁸⁴⁵

Scripture as 'Scripted' and 'Script'

What we have seen so far is Verhey's attempt and ambition to engage in both disciplines in his overall work on biblical ethics: On the one hand he takes seriously the meaning of the texts by his exegetical investigation of the New Testament texts; on the other hand, he carefully employs the texts for ethical reflection that is grounded in a solid ethical hermeneutics. Some thus suggest that Verhey's work "represents the best of a biblical theologian and Christian ethicist at work."⁸⁴⁶ However, his contribution lies not only on the quality of these major works; more importantly, he offers us a unique insight that illuminates our construction of a more integrated Scripture-based ethics.

As said in the introductory chapter, I cite Verhey's use of the terms 'scripted' and 'script' to describe Scripture and to construct an integrated biblical ethics. His overall argument begins with the general meanings of these terms. The written text as 'scripted' means that it was written at a particular time by certain authors.⁸⁴⁷ Today it is studied as such by scriptural exegetes. The text as 'script', on the other hand, can be compared to the script of a play and hence needs to be performed by the actress/actor. And the

⁸⁴⁵ Spohn, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, 652.

⁸⁴⁶ Pilgrim, 386.

⁸⁴⁷ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 60.

performance of any script is itself an interpretation of the script.⁸⁴⁸ It lays out the practices and performances that ethicists should convey.

He further highlights the distinction between ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ by adopting the distinction between ‘object’ and ‘instrument’.⁸⁴⁹ As ‘scripted’ the text is “an object to us, a given, the product of the activity of others.”⁸⁵⁰ And as an object it needs to be examined textually or literally so as to know what sort of writing it is.⁸⁵¹ As ‘script’ the text is, however, an instrument for and a vocation to activity for the reader.⁸⁵² These two terms cannot be separated: The written text is “both the effect of the action of writing texts and the instrument that we use to perform certain other actions.”⁸⁵³

Verhey then adopts these notions in the context of biblical ethics in order to understand the different tasks of biblical scholarship and Christian ethics and to highlight the relationship between them. As ‘scripted’ the biblical texts are studied by those exegetes within the church community who “bring their knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, or their training in the tools of historical, literary, or social investigation, not just to the texts but to the community.”⁸⁵⁴ As ‘script’ the Bible is to be performed repeatedly “in the rhetoric and practices of the churches, in their theology and in their worship, in their ethics and in their politics.”⁸⁵⁵ Thus ethicists looking to the Bible for moral guidance

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid..

⁸⁴⁹ Verhey, “Scripture as Script and as Scripted,” 31n2. Verhey cites Nicolas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 80. In fact, the notions of ‘object’ and ‘instrument’ were first employed in his discussion of Gustafson’s communal hermeneutic in 1996. See Verhey, “Scripture and Ethics: Practices, Performances, and Prescriptions,” 27.

⁸⁵⁰ Verhey, “Scripture as Script and as Scripted,” 20.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁵² Ibid., 19.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 31n2.

⁸⁵⁴ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 61.

⁸⁵⁵ Verhey, “Scripture as Script and as Scripted,” 19.

must look to Scripture for the ‘prompting’ toward appropriate practices, virtues and actions. Although the task of exegesis is conventionally assigned to biblical scholarship while the task of interpretation is assigned to moral theologians, he points out that they are related for it is the church community that canonized the Scripture that interprets and performs Scripture.⁸⁵⁶

Verhey developed these notions because of his conviction that the community of faith could not adequately understand the moral guidance of Scripture without the exegetes studying the texts as ‘scripted’ and the ethicists using it as ‘script’. He first introduced the notions and their distinction in his discussion of the relationship among Scripture, churches, and the moral life, especially in promoting the practice of reading Scripture as canon in Christian community.⁸⁵⁷ He urged the community to read Scripture with exegetical care and skill. Later in 2007 he dedicated an article to this conviction. There he further discussed the notions in greater detail and illustrated the relationship between ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ by reading the Beatitudes, though briefly.⁸⁵⁸

As a whole, this conviction points to the need to see Scripture as *both* ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. In other words, the two assignments are actually mutually related and required by anyone who engages in a Scripture-based ethics. He says,

Attention to Scripture as scripted finally *requires* attention to Scripture as a text appropriately read when it is...performed. And attention to Scripture as script to be performed is surely *enriched* by attention to Scripture as scripted.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁶ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 60.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 49-76.

⁸⁵⁸ See Verhey, “Scripture as Script and as Scripted.”

⁸⁵⁹ Verhey, “Scripture as Script and as Scripted,” 20.

He explains that when interpreting the text the interpreter has a responsibility “to make judgments about the sort of text it is, about the whole of which it is a part...about the interest appropriate to it, and about the appropriate use of this object as instrument, the performance of this text.”⁸⁶⁰ These judgments make a difference to how the text is read and used. For instance, shall we read the lament Psalm 22 as an ancient Near Eastern religious literature of complaint or part of the Christian canon? Subsequently, shall we use this same psalm for confirming/challenging certain generalizations about that literature or for revealing the complaint of pious Jews (especially Jesus) who made human cry his own cry.⁸⁶¹ This responsibility is, however, not purely personal: Since it is the community which owns the Bible as canon, one’s reading of the text is conditioned by (and therefore answerable to) the community to which one belongs.⁸⁶² The community “exercises interpretative discernment by asking how each part of Scripture as scripted fits the whole.”⁸⁶³

On the other hand, the performance of the script by Christian ethicists can be improved when one carefully attends to what the biblical authors did with the texts at their disposal. It is because different performances may emerge and yet none of them can capture the true meaning of the text/script definitely. Attending to the text can therefore function as a test for and guide to performance.⁸⁶⁴

Therefore, within our context of methodological enquiry, Verhey’s emphasis on Scripture as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ implies the need to pay equal attention to the

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid..

⁸⁶² Ibid., 22-23.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

importance of the scriptural text and of ethical hermeneutics in doing Scripture-based Christian ethics. This implication points us to the right direction of constructing a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics. Indeed, since his introduction of the notions ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ in understanding scriptural ethics, he continues to apply the proposal in subsequent writings—especially in his treatment of medical ethical (and bioethical) issues where both textual and performance interpretations of relevant biblical texts are offered⁸⁶⁵—and his attempt has thus offered a worthy model to us what such an integrated Scripture-based ethics can be.

4.3 Where are We now?

In the previous two chapters, we have noted certain developments among biblical scholars and Christian ethicists in constructing a methodological framework for scriptural ethics that is built upon their specific perspectives. We have also identified some limitations in their attempts. Among the biblical scholars that we have surveyed, they informed us about the importance of the text as well as the need of hermeneutics for our overall construction. Yet, the major criticism is that they fail to carry out the task of hermeneutics based on a solid ethical foundation. They still perceive Scripture more as ‘scripted’ than ‘script’.

Theological ethicists, on the other hand, contribute to our construction by demonstrating the need to interact with biblical scholars and to integrate Scripture into

⁸⁶⁵ See Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*; “What Makes Christian Bioethics Christian? Bible, Story, and Communal Discernment.”

their ethical framework. However, their contribution is greatly limited by their immature use and handling of the texts employed. Moreover, they are unaware of the necessity to first understand the original meaning of the texts prior to using them. They are more interested in the performance of Scripture as ‘script’.

As a result, we may conclude that these scholars have either stressed the importance of the scriptural text or the importance of ethical hermeneutics in doing biblical ethics. It seems that an equal emphasis on both the text and ethical hermeneutics may be the right direction toward constructing a more integrated scriptural ethics.

In this final chapter of survey on contemporary attempts, we note how a biblical scholar and a Christian ethicist have made further contributions through their works. They take the courage to move beyond what have been achieved by earlier attempts. Burridge, who comes from the discipline of biblical scholarship, does so by proposing a biographical reading of the scriptural texts. Such a biographical reading focuses on the person of Jesus as well as his role as exemplar, and emphasizes the need to interpret the text within an inclusive communal setting. A significant advantage of this approach is that it serves not just as a tool of exegetical (literary) criticism but also a sound hermeneutical lens for ethical analysis—one that attends to character, narrative, and community formation. It also surpasses the hermeneutics of narrative or character ethics alone by combining their strengths. Within the area of New Testament ethics, it gives priority to the person of Jesus and understands Christology as the key to ethical hermeneutics. As a result, Burridge’s biographical approach allows him to attend to the original meaning of the text and engage in sound ethical interpretation of the text for

contemporary issues at the same time, and hence makes the integration of the two disciplines smoother. BurrIDGE has demonstrated to us that a more integrated scriptural ethics, from the perspective of biblical scholarship, is possible and can be achieved by employing a sound ethical framework for hermeneutics.

Within the discipline of Christian ethics, Verhey, on the other hand, advances from a different direction. He not only employs Scripture as much and as broadly as other ethicists do, but is also able to overcome the limitations identified above. First, he takes the Bible seriously and makes great effort to acquire the knowledge of Scripture. He even attempts textual interpretation of the text in his New Testament ethics book just as his biblical counterparts do, though criticism regarding the quality of his exegetical skill is inevitable. All these efforts have demonstrated his awareness of the importance of the text in doing a Scripture-based ethics, as well as the possibility of achieving such a goal on the part of an ethicist. Second, along the line is the need to first establish the meaning of the texts prior to using them in contemporary ethical reflection. In fact, both the order/structure of *The Great Reversal* and the sequential publications of *Remembering Jesus* and *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, as well as his actual use of Scripture in these and other writings, reflect this particular line of thought. Third, he makes it clear that Scripture needs to be welcomed as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’, that is, as text to be understood and at the same time to be performed. This equal emphasis sheds light on our search for a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics. Verhey, therefore, as in the case of BurrIDGE, has demonstrated to us that a more integrated

scriptural ethics, from the perspective of Christian ethics, is possible and can be achieved by first taking the scriptural text seriously and interpreting the text carefully.

In conclusion, this lengthy survey of current attempts by both disciplines at constructing a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics has revealed to us that such a methodological goal is attainable and concrete advancements are found within each discipline. In the remaining parts of this work, I will proceed to demonstrate how such a more integrated Scripture-based ethics can be worked out in concrete. In doing so, I first employ virtue ethics as the framework for ethical hermeneutics. Then in Part Three, I focus on the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 which will be treated as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ by careful exegesis and interpretation through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics.

Part Two: The Hermeneutics of Virtue Ethics

I have surveyed in Part One current attempts at constructing a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics and concluded that both disciplines need to understand the scriptural texts as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. On the level of methodological quest, it means that biblical scholars and Christian ethicists, when doing scriptural ethics, need to read the written text with careful exegesis and at the same time interpret the text with the help of a sound ethical framework. Recent works by a biblical scholar and a Christian ethicist have shown us that it is a possible task. In the remaining parts of this work, I will demonstrate how such an integrated Scripture-based ethics works out in concrete by first suggesting a particular hermeneutics for our construction. I take virtue ethics as a worthy hermeneutical tool.⁸⁶⁶

There are several reasons for choosing virtue ethics. As said in the introductory chapter, it is a matter of necessity to select one form of ethics, for it is not possible to explore Christian moral life without it being built upon some form of moral philosophy.⁸⁶⁷ By comparison with other approaches to ethics, virtue ethics is one of the oldest approaches. Moreover, in the past few decades, virtue ethics began to resurge and has become a prominent alternative to principle-based ethics.⁸⁶⁸ It departs from principle-

⁸⁶⁶ I am not denying the possibility of employing other tools in doing scriptural ethics. German Catholic moral theologian Eberhard Schockenhoff, for instance, in confronting ethical relativism/pluralism and defending the relevance of natural law as the methodological approach in theological ethics, claims that the universal validity of moral precepts within a natural law framework “allows us to construct a systematic understanding of biblical ethics and of its universal claim.” See *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), x.

⁸⁶⁷ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 27-28.

⁸⁶⁸ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 14.

based ethics in that it deals with the character of individuals and their communities, and the practices that both develop those characteristics and in turn express them.⁸⁶⁹ William Mattison argues that a virtue ethics “provides a lens through which to examine the moral life in a richer way than approaches that concentrate solely on actions, rules, and contentious cases.”⁸⁷⁰

Within the context of biblical ethics, both Harrington and Keenan point out that virtue ethics is “true to both the New Testament emphasis on the human response to God’s gracious activity in Jesus Christ and to the ethical needs and desires of Christians.”⁸⁷¹ It is a comprehensive approach that goes beyond character formation alone.⁸⁷² In addition, as will be discussed later, the yields of virtue have certain advantages over other act or principle-based ethics in approaching biblical texts. Harrington and Keenan thus comment that virtue ethics can be a promising starting point “toward opening conversations at even deeper levels between specialists in biblical studies and moral theology.”⁸⁷³

Furthermore, I note that among the above-surveyed scholars who have attempted to build upon an ethical framework, not a few turn to virtues and practices for insights on hermeneutics, such as Spohn—and especially Burridge and Verhey who have made further advancement in our search. Burridge, for example, points out that the depiction of character is often implied within a biographical narrative. Although ethical instruction

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁷⁰ William C. Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 57.

⁸⁷¹ Harrington and Keenan, xiv.

⁸⁷² Ibid..

⁸⁷³ Ibid., xv.

may not be the primary concern of ancient biography, the idea of imitation in which one observes, follows and practices the subject's virtues, is common to much such literature.⁸⁷⁴ The case of Verhey, on the other hand, is rather self-evident. Apart from advocating certain virtues for Christian moral life, such as hospitality and justice, he perceives the notion of practice as a core element of Christian ethical framework and emphasizes that remembering Jesus requires participation in the practices of the church community (especially in reading Scripture and discernment).

In short, this brief description shows that virtue ethics is a very appropriate avenue for doing hermeneutics. In the following two chapters, I explore the hermeneutics of virtue ethics in constructing a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics. Chapter Five deals with this moral philosophy in general. It begins with an overview of the historical development of virtue ethics and then explores its recent resurgence among philosophical and theological ethicists. A discussion of the contemporary understanding of virtue ethics follows. In particular, the yields of virtues—namely, practices, character, exemplar, and community—will be probed. Within the theological context, such moral formation is effected by grace. We rely on God's grace so as to make our effort and moral growth possible.⁸⁷⁵ Therefore, the role of the Holy Spirit and grace in relation to virtue will also be discussed briefly.

Chapter Six focuses on relating Scripture with virtue ethics from the perspective of theological ethics. In doing so, I will look at how two virtue ethicists read the biblical

⁸⁷⁴ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 28-29.

⁸⁷⁵ Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 169.

texts through the lens of virtue. The first is Mennonite Joseph Kotva who is known for making a Christian case for virtue ethics. He establishes a link between the New Testament and virtue theory by pointing out that a virtue perspective allows us to “see the Bible’s collections of rules as encapsulating the guidance and wisdom of some who went before us in faith.”⁸⁷⁶ The second ethicist to be explored is William Spohn who, as surveyed earlier, has attempted to integrate Scripture and ethics through a hermeneutic of virtue ethics. He points out that the New Testament “gives content to the formal patterns of virtue ethics” by spelling out concrete transformative habits.⁸⁷⁷

In fact, by relating Scripture to the ethics of virtue, both Kotva and Spohn have contributed to the revival of virtue ethics and advocacy for a Christian model of virtue ethics within their own traditions. I now turn to the historical development of this particular moral theory and review its resurgence in the past two decades or so.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁷⁷ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 22.

Chapter Five: A Hermeneutic of Virtue Ethics

This chapter is about the hermeneutics of virtue ethics. In order to understand its appropriateness as a hermeneutical tool for my work here, I first provide an overview of its historical development and retrieval. More specifically, I explore its actual philosophical and theological revival. The views of some contemporary figures from theological ethics on virtue ethics are also presented. I then give the yields of virtue that help bring virtue into connection with some of the other reference points of ethics. I conclude with how Christian grace and the virtuous life are related.

However, prior to entering into detailed discussion of these areas, I need to briefly outline here several basic issues central to virtue theory that will emerge throughout the discussion. There are four of them, namely, the nature of virtue ethics, the issue of methodology, the question of cultural contextualization, and the question of theological relevance.

5.1 Some Basic Issues

Nature of Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is one of the oldest moral philosophies that has gone through development, decline, and revival in the past two millennia. Its proponents from both philosophy and theology may offer various readings and emphases of the theory. This is true among contemporary virtue ethicists. Some like MacIntyre and Hauerwas would

argue for a community-dependent virtue ethics. Others like Jean Porter would claim a Thomistic reading of virtue and yet argues for a ‘thick’, local understanding of virtues. For her, virtues are culturally bound and so different cultures will have different meanings of virtues. Still, others like Spohn examined the virtues as having more universal relevance. Despite these divergences, I identify certain fundamental nature of virtue ethics that deserve special attention.

First and foremost, virtue ethics is the kind of moral theory that claims ‘being’ precedes ‘doing’. In other words, it does not solely focus on ‘being’ as some non-virtue ethicists would comment. As will be seen below, the three basic questions rooted in MacIntyre’s tripolar structure of virtue ethics—namely, ‘Who am I?’ ‘Who ought I become?’ and ‘What ought I to do?’—do not only ask about the moral agent’s being but also the kind of action the moral agent needs to do. Subsequently, virtue ethics also attends to the human action and answers the third question by first ask who we should become. Moreover, virtues as practices point to human actions. Therefore, being a teleological ethics does not diminish its concerns for human action.

A second and related nature of virtue theory is that it is person-oriented rather than act-oriented. Again, we need to bear in mind that virtue ethics is not individualistic as some critics would suggest. As will be discussed later, for virtue ethicists the exercise of virtues and the formation of the moral agent are closely related to the life of the community as well. Virtues exist to form and improve the community and thus have social ramifications. However, certain proponents’ emphasis on the community as

‘closed’ draws concerns and challenges from non-virtue ethicists, especially those from the common good tradition.

Issue of Methodology

The second issue to be outlined here is about methodology. We see from both the historical development of virtue theory and its subsequent revival that, at the beginning of the revival of virtue ethics, some of its proponents tend to be aggressive in proving the superiority of virtue theory over and even rejecting other ethical theories like Kantian ethics of duty or consequence-based ethics. However, we also note that more and more virtue ethicists today are not interested in this aggressive task. Rather, they acknowledge the limitations of virtue theory and perceive virtue theory and other kinds of ethics as not mutually exclusive. All these forms of moral philosophy do not have to be separate. Some, like Porter, claim that the moralities of both rules and virtues need to be taken up by the virtue theory. Others, like Keenan, are convinced that virtue ethics is capable of generating principles and norms.⁸⁷⁸ The role of virtue ethics is therefore at least one of complementarity and inclusiveness and not competition. It provides needed correctives to what had been an excessive act-oriented, principle-oriented, and a decontextualization of ethics via Kant-type duty-oriented ethics. My choice of virtue ethics as the hermeneutical tool for this work likewise is grounded in this conviction.

⁸⁷⁸ Keenan, in particular, argues for “the historical rootedness and development of principles and norms in cultures promoting virtues.” See James F. Keenan, “Virtues, Principles and a Consistent Ethics of Life,” in *The Consistent Ethic of Life: Assessing its Reception and Relevance*, ed. Thomas Nairn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 50.

Question of Cultural Contextualization

Virtue ethicists' emphasis on the local community raises the concerns about cultural relativism. Indeed, proponents of virtue ethics generally believe that every culture has a class of virtues to help/guide its people to answer the question of who they should become as a community. Among them a few believe that each class of virtues is specific only to that particular culture. Many, however, believe that virtues from one culture can be analogously compared. That means, there are trans-cultural affinities between virtues of different cultures. Some even go so far as to argue that there are universal virtues or at least 'thin' virtues in all cultures. Therefore, there seems to be a spectrum of views, ranging from those who believe in cultural contextualization to those who want to transcend the boundary of local culture. I am more inclined to follow the more progressive side here—that means, though virtues are context sensitive, they are not ultimately relative to a limited context but remain open to revision in light of new circumstances.⁸⁷⁹ And it is based on this view that the later task of bringing a virtue-based reading of the Beatitudes into the Confucian society becomes possible. However, such a task further leads to a theological question that I now treat.

Question of Theological Relevance

The last issue to be brought up prior to entering into detailed discussion of virtue theory is the question of theological relevance. As will be brought up in the historical development of virtue ethics and the discussion of the relationship between virtue and

⁸⁷⁹ Nussbaum, 44-45.

grace, Aquinas categorizes virtues into two basic types, namely, theological virtues and cardinal virtues. Theological virtues are basically infused by God. Cardinal virtues, on the other hand, can be acquired by both Christians and non-believers. They have a certain naturalness about them. Still, the kind of inner-worldly virtuous acts done by Christians are sometimes distinguished from those by non-believers by relating the former's goal with the supernatural destiny and by the source of their virtue, grace.

However, are graced virtues outside the Church community possible? In other words, is it possible to find comparable infused theological virtues in non-Christian communities such as the Confucian society? Here we face the same issue that is found in the question of cultural contextualization: Are infused theological virtues specific only to the Christian community or can they be analogously compared? It is noted that, according to Karl Rahner, graced virtue is possible outside the Church community. Again, I follow the progressive side in approaching this issue: Although the virtues emerged from the Beatitudes are the result of Christian faith and have God's assistance as their source, they can still be engaged cross-culturally with the non-Christian Confucian society. A classical example is the virtue of hope.

Finally, as we shall see, virtue ethics is particularly relevant in finding the moral message in classic religious texts. These texts—usually narrative in form—find in virtue ethics a hermeneutical method that allows us not only to appreciate the text in itself but also see its relevance both for us today in our own culture as well as for others in theirs.

5.2 Historical Development

An Overview

According to Edmund Pellegrino and David Thomasma, who trace the history of virtue in moral thought, “the classical quest of ethics was to find, and teach, the good life and how to live it;” and was a common task among philosophers (such as Plato, Aristotle and even Confucius) although their reasoning might be different.⁸⁸⁰ One particular approach aims at the quest of the good person (and the good society) and develops an ethics that defines the kind of person one ought to be: The virtuous person who “habitually incline[s] to do the right and the good thing, no matter what the circumstances might be.”⁸⁸¹

The idea of virtue, in other words, has a long history.⁸⁸² In fact, by the end of the fifth century BCE, the Greeks had already discussed certain virtues (such as justice) that were significant to them.⁸⁸³ For instance, Socrates (as portrayed by his pupil Plato) tried to seek a more adequate conception of virtue by challenging the ideals of virtue cherished by his fellow-citizens: He held that “virtue is a kind of wisdom or

⁸⁸⁰ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 6-7.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸² Jean Porter has offered a succinct overview of the historical development of the theory of virtue. For this background (except the part on the Orthodox tradition) I rely on her two articles, “Virtue Ethics,” in Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, and “Virtue,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁸³ Benjamin W. Farley, *In praise of Virtue: An Exploration of the Biblical Virtues in a Christian Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 11.

knowledge...possession of which is the only genuine human happiness...all the virtues are forms of this wisdom...[and] expressions of one quality.”⁸⁸⁴

Nevertheless, most scholars would agree that Plato was the first to utilize virtues in order to identify the highest good that an individual (and the state) can attain.⁸⁸⁵ He also enunciated the classical list of cardinal virtues and asserted that virtue as knowledge or insight can be attained only through the perception of the ‘form’ of Beauty, Goodness, Justice and other ‘forms’.⁸⁸⁶ Still, when Glaucon replied (in the *Republic*) that a truly just person would be one “of true simplicity of character who...wants to be and not to seem good,”⁸⁸⁷ he implied that for Plato virtue is also a quality or excellence of character, and an attribute of a person’s very being.⁸⁸⁸

However, it was Aristotle who gave us the classic formulation of the ethics of virtue.⁸⁸⁹ He rejected Plato’s notion of ‘forms’ and rather classified virtue as “an activity of the soul in accordance with, or implying, a rational principle [or practical wisdom].”⁸⁹⁰ As an activity it requires correct judgments and involves appropriate human emotional responses to a specific situation.⁸⁹¹ Moreover, virtue is a disposition that “makes [a

⁸⁸⁴ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 97.

⁸⁸⁵ Farley, 11.

⁸⁸⁶ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 97.

⁸⁸⁷ Birch and Rasmussen, 43. Birch and Rasmussen quotes Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd rev. ed. (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1974), 107-8.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 42; Farley, 12. According to Martha Nussbaum, Aristotle employed his account of the virtues as a basis for criticizing existing social forms that neglect or hinder the development of certain important human virtues. See Martha C. Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in French, *Midwest Studies*, 33.

⁸⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 75-76.

⁸⁹¹ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 98.

person] good and causes [the person] to perform [her/his] function well.”⁸⁹² And all virtues are directed toward an end or *telos*—happiness in this life.

Later on, Aristotle added that one performs her/his function well only when the mean is observed. Based on this claim he developed the doctrine of the mean:

The equal part between excess and deficiency...in relation to the thing whatever is equidistant from the extremes, which is one and the same for everybody...[or] in relation to us that which is neither excessive nor deficient, and this is not one and the same for all.⁸⁹³

Thus, virtue is defined as “a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by which a prudent man would use to determine it.”⁸⁹⁴ For instance, a truly courageous person would make reasoned judgments regarding the kinds of risks which one should undertake while the rash person and the coward would not.⁸⁹⁵ Aristotle further placed virtue in the genus of habit—“a durable characteristic of the agent inclining to certain kinds of actions and emotional reactions, not the actions and reactions themselves. Acquired over time, habits grow to be ‘second nature’ for the individual.”⁸⁹⁶

In short, early Greek philosophical reflections on virtues “focused on those traits of character that are praiseworthy and not simply valuable.”⁸⁹⁷ They are concerned about not just the good of the individual but of the society as well.

⁸⁹² Aristotle, 40.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 100.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., 101-2.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 128-30.

⁸⁹⁶ Bonnie Kent, “Habits and Virtues (IaIIae, qq. 49-70),” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 116.

⁸⁹⁷ Porter, “Virtue,” 206. Porter cites Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47-134.

During the patristic period, Augustine of Hippo, though he followed the claims of Plato and the Stoics, offered a different reflection on the virtues.⁸⁹⁸ It has been noted that he seemed even to define virtue in different ways in his various writings.⁸⁹⁹ On the one hand, he insisted that “the seemingly virtues of the pagans cannot be true virtues, because they are not informed by knowledge and love of God, the only source of true goodness.”⁹⁰⁰ That means, all true virtues are basically different forms of charity and they point to happiness in the afterlife.⁹⁰¹ And charity is the ordering virtue for Christian life. On the other hand, he recognized the significant resemblance between pagan and true virtues and even encouraged one to imitate those pagan virtuous people.

This ambiguity of the language of the virtues, as Porter notes, had a great impact on subsequent Christian virtue ethics in that it has become an opportunity for Augustine later on to formulate the theological ambiguity between human goodness and the infinite Goodness, God.⁹⁰²

On the other hand, Joseph Woodhill notes that all the three major Eastern Church Fathers—namely, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and John Chrysostom—perceived the acquisition of virtue as central and fundamental to the believer’s life.⁹⁰³ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a widely studied work in Eastern Christendom by John Climacus of the seventh century, further influenced the Greek tradition’s understanding and emphasis of virtue by offering a complementary view of virtue and practical guidelines in acquiring

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 211.

⁸⁹⁹ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 19.

⁹⁰⁰ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 100.

⁹⁰¹ Kent, 117-18.

⁹⁰² Porter, “Virtue,” 212.

⁹⁰³ Joseph Woodhill, *The Fellowship of Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 31.

virtues.⁹⁰⁴ It sees God as the supreme good for humanity and Christian virtues complete the Greek counterparts by moving us toward that *telos*.⁹⁰⁵ Still, Climacus continued to follow the classical view that “virtue is an excellence that is peculiar to our being” and habit is the path to acquire virtue.⁹⁰⁶

During the medieval time, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae*⁹⁰⁷ (I.II. 55-70), offered his theory of virtue and addressed the earlier problem of ambiguity that emerged in Augustine’s understanding of virtue. He first followed Aristotle’s view that virtues are dispositions that incline one to act in particular ways (I.II. 55.1). These dispositions are necessary for any rational creature to be capable of action (I.II. 49.4). They are discovered by human reason and perfected by practice.

Yet, he accepted Peter Lombard’s definition that is approved by Augustine: “Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live rightly, of which no one makes bad use, which God works in us without us” (I.II 55.4).⁹⁰⁸ From this Aquinas stretched the ancient concept of habit “to cover God-given dispositions and described all habits as principally related to the will.”⁹⁰⁹ As Klaus Demmer puts, Aquinas has framed his discussion theologically.⁹¹⁰

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., 35-36. According to Climacus, there are thirty steps along the ladder of virtue and one has to cultivate virtues with much effort and difficulty. See Woodhill, 37.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁰⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948).

⁹⁰⁸ Kent, 119.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁹¹⁰ Andrew Flescher, *Heroes, Saints and Ordinary Morality* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 16. Flescher cites Klaus Demmer, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, ed. James F. Keenan, trans. Roberto Dell’Oro (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 53. Demmer also notes that an important contribution of Aquinas’s definition of virtue is that he sees virtue as *ultimum potentiae* (the final potency) which allows one’s moral commitment and attitude to reach its peak.

According to Aquinas, there are both intellectual and moral virtues. Intellectual virtues, such as knowledge and prudence, perfect the speculative intellect while moral virtues, like temperance, perfect the appetitive powers (that is, the passions and the will) (I.II. 57, 58). He followed Aristotle's view that the virtue of prudence is "the sole intellectual virtue inseparable from moral virtue"⁹¹¹ and that all virtues are connected (I.II. 58.4-5, 65.1). Aquinas further structured his theory around a twofold complex distinction "between infused and acquired virtues, on the one hand, and between virtues directed to God and those directed to the rational good, on the other."⁹¹² In other words, Aquinas understood that humankind has two ends (i.e., happiness in this life and the eternal life) and hence two types of virtues are needed, namely, theological and natural virtues.

From there he identified three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and four cardinal (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) virtues (I.II. 61-62). They differ from each other in that theological virtues have God as their object while the cardinal virtues are directed to certain human goods as grasped by reason (I.II. 62.2). However, Aquinas's infused virtues do not only include the theological virtues but also infused cardinal virtues (I.II. 63.3&4).⁹¹³ They differ from their acquired counterparts in that they are, though indirectly, aimed at the attainment of supernatural happiness, and that their objects are transformed accordingly (I.II. 63.4 ad1). In this sense, Aquinas would agree with Augustine that acquired virtues are virtues only in a qualified sense and

⁹¹¹ Kent, 121.

⁹¹² Porter, "Virtue," 214.

⁹¹³ Ibid., 215.

are insufficient for full human happiness (II.II. 23.7). Still, he did not imply that these virtues are tainted or corrupt as Augustine did.⁹¹⁴ In fact, Aquinas said that the acquired moral virtues are virtues though not perfect (they are made perfect by charity).⁹¹⁵

As a whole, although it is accustomed to regard Aquinas's theory as a restatement of that of Aristotle, Porter rightly claims that Aquinas's theory "was developed in a context of ongoing theological speculation on the virtues, within which Aristotelian and Augustinian elements had already been synthesized in complex ways."⁹¹⁶

However, for various reasons, interest in the virtues began to decline at the start of the modern period in the fifteenth century.⁹¹⁷ One commentator succinctly recalls some of the possible reasons: "A religiously motivated uneasiness about attributing goodness to human beings was augmented by another culturally dominant idea, the philosophical pursuit of objective truth, a pursuit for which the counsels of virtue are much too vague. Thus the topic of virtue was pushed to the margins of most discussions of morality."⁹¹⁸ Within the Catholic tradition, for instance, the manualists of the seventeenth century

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 218.

⁹¹⁵ He further expanded Aristotle's doctrine of the mean to include the infused theological and moral virtues (I.II. 64.1 ad3, 4).

⁹¹⁶ Porter, "Virtue," 213.

⁹¹⁷ Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 103-4. Porter later notes that the eighteenth century moral theorist David Hume's account of virtue—though it breaks away from that of the classical and medieval period—had a great impact among moral philosophers: He linked the motives for action with virtues and argued that the passions/desires that give rise to the virtues depend on reason only indirectly. Within the theological discipline, she also identifies Jonathan Edwards and Friedrich Schleiermacher as significant promoters of virtue theory during that time. See Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 104-5.

⁹¹⁸ Anthony Battaglia, review of *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*, by Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Horizons* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 183.

began to treat Aquinas's theological and moral virtues as "source of obligations rather than as the dynamics of moral living."⁹¹⁹

The general lack of interest in the virtues went on through the first half of the twentieth century. The natural law tradition continued to dominate Catholic moral theology while the critiques of Karl Barth and his contemporary orthodox theologians also challenged the emphasis on virtue in theology.⁹²⁰

However, a small number of Christian scholars during the first half of the twentieth century worked hard to rediscover the virtue tradition in their writings. Catholic philosophers and theologians such as Josef Pieper and our earlier surveyed manualist Bernard Häring, drew on Aquinas's theological virtues in their vision of Christian moral life: Pieper offered a contemporary understanding of the four cardinal virtues and noted that virtues are not mere character traits but point to the not-yet-attained fullness of human being.⁹²¹ Häring, grounding on the notion of fundamental option, perceived Christian virtues as part of the development of human fullness.⁹²² He further made his contribution distinctive by emphasizing on eschatological virtues rather than the four traditional cardinal virtues.⁹²³

In any event, the major effort to retrieve virtue ethics began only in the second half of the twentieth century, first with the discipline of philosophy, followed by

⁹¹⁹ William C. Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics," *Theological Studies* 53, no.1 (1992): 60. Spohn cites John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Present: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1990), 56-62.

⁹²⁰ Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 106.

⁹²¹ John W. Crossin, *What are They Saying about Virtue?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 14-15.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, 29. These Christian virtues involve a person's free choice and are "special attitudes in response to particular spheres of values...[which] manifest and promote wholeness and salvation to the extent that they are rooted in the fundamental option of faith." See Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 197.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

enquiries within theological and public sectors.⁹²⁴ In the pages that follow, I turn to the contribution of these philosophers and theological ethicists briefly. But prior to that, let's look at what leads to the revival of virtue theory.

Reasons for Returning to Virtue

Why then return to virtue? Gilbert Meilaender offers a straightforward answer: “This return suggests a widespread dissatisfaction with an understanding of the moral life which focuses primarily on duties, obligations, troubling moral dilemmas, and borderline cases.”⁹²⁵ Other ethicists likewise assert that virtue ethics is not an alternative theory but “a protest against certain modern assumptions concerning what ethical theory should look like as well as an attempt to return us to more realistic avenues of moral reflection.”⁹²⁶

Philosopher David Solomon, however, suggests that the revival is promoted by two positive views:⁹²⁷ 1) Virtue is a necessary component of any ethical theory; 2) the assessment of human character is more fundamental than that of the action (and/or its consequence) in a normative theory. Gregory Velazco y Trianosky, in a similar tone, claims that “no theory of the right can constitute a complete guide to action without being supplemented by a theory of virtue...[for] the rules themselves do not tell us how to

⁹²⁴ Lee H. Yearley, “Recent Work on Virtue,” *Religious Studies Review* 16, no.1 (January 1990): 1. The area of public philosophy, Yearley states, focuses on the role of virtue in a liberal, pluralistic, and democratic society.

⁹²⁵ Gilbert C. Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 4-5.

⁹²⁶ Spohn, “The Return of Virtue Ethics,” 64. Spohn quotes Robert B. Louden, “Virtue Ethics and Anti-Theory,” *Philosophia* 20 (1990): 94.

⁹²⁷ David Solomon, “Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics,” in French, *Midwest Studies*, 428-29.

apply them in specific situations, let alone how to apply them well...[also,] much of right conduct cannot be codified in rules or principles.”⁹²⁸

Nevertheless, virtue ethics is perceived by most of its proponents as offering a more comprehensive picture of moral experience and standing closer to ordinary life issues than other moral philosophies such as utilitarianism or neo-Kantianism.⁹²⁹ Keenan elaborates this point by comparing it with act-oriented ethics and duty-oriented ethics:

An act-oriented ethics considers only the value-bearing quality of particular acts...a duty ethics expands the calculus and requires consideration of the agent’s state in life, and...a virtue ethics further extends the area of concern to embrace the whole agent as an historical person...

In an act-oriented ethics, most moral actions are rather grave...a duty ethics entertains matter for moral consideration to the extent that one’s particular duties include them. But virtue ethics holds the Thomistic insight that every human act is a moral act.⁹³⁰

He further points out that virtue theory’s stress for establishing a *telos* has a unique significance for our society. He says, “Only in a virtue ethics, with its *telos*, can moral idealism can be found and maintained. Only in virtue ethics is a *telos* constitutive of the method; no other ethical system can make that claim.”⁹³¹

Keenan thus concludes that in the real world, only virtue ethics offers a complete vision—rather than a partial insight as act-oriented and duty-oriented ethics do—into the

⁹²⁸ Gregory Velazco y Trianosky, “What is Virtue Ethics All about?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (October 1990): 342.

⁹²⁹ Spohn, “The Return of Virtue Ethics,” 60.

⁹³⁰ James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” *Thought* 67 (1992): 123-24.

⁹³¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

complexity of moral and upright living.⁹³² Trianosky comments that this is “perhaps the most persuasive argument in favor of studying the virtues.”⁹³³

Mattison further explains the comprehensiveness of virtue ethics in terms of ‘habit’.⁹³⁴ The development of habits is a result of repeatedly acting on certain intentions. They represent one’s moral character, reflect who one is inside out, and are more than performing a good act frequently.

In sum, both the limitations of duty-oriented and consequence-oriented ethics and the unique offerings by virtue ethics have led to the resurgence of virtue theory in the second half of the twentieth century.

5.3 The Revival of Virtue Ethics

Attempts from Philosophical and Theological Sectors

As Gregory Pence notes, two decades prior to the publishing of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* in 1981, the revival of virtue theory had already begun when an efflorescence of works on virtues were witnessed.⁹³⁵ In fact, many philosophers trace the beginning of the revival to the well known article of Elizabeth Anscombe (“Modern Moral Philosophy”) in 1958 that called for “the restoration of Aristotelian notions of goodness, character, and virtue as central concerns of moral philosophy.”⁹³⁶ She challenged the Kantian claim that

⁹³² Ibid., 124.

⁹³³ Trianosky, 342.

⁹³⁴ Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology*, 60-64.

⁹³⁵ Gregory E. Pence, “Recent Work on Virtues,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1984): 281.

⁹³⁶ Justin Oakley, “Variety of Virtue Ethics,” *Ratio* 9, no. 2 (September 1996): 128.

basic moral judgments are categorical imperatives and suggested to live a life informed by virtue as held by Aristotle.⁹³⁷

Later throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, we saw an ever growing number of philosophers (such as William Frankena, Philippa Foot, James Wallace and Lester Hunt) discuss virtue theory in general as well as specific genera of virtues (like courage and sympathy).⁹³⁸ Two basic trends of revival can be identified: Those aiming at a religious-based theory (e.g. Thomism) and those looking for an alternative to deontology.⁹³⁹

Among the latter is Alasdair MacIntyre who (joined by other writers) claims that traditional deontological theory can be replaced by a good virtue theory.⁹⁴⁰ MacIntyre has been recognized as the most prominent advocate of virtue theory and his works have been frequently cited by virtue ethicists who explore recent work on virtues.⁹⁴¹ According to Pence, MacIntyre, in his much earlier work, has already criticized the Kantian deontology for leading to an individualistic morality and society that is overwhelmed with an unchecked moral pluralism.⁹⁴²

In *After Virtue* he continues this earlier theme and perceives the resurgence of virtue theory as a reaction against the salient post-World War II moral philosophy that focuses almost exclusively on moral rules that are universally binding and impersonal,

⁹³⁷ Trianosky, 336.

⁹³⁸ See Pence, 287-94.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., 281.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid..

⁹⁴¹ See Pence, "Recent Work on Virtues;" Yearley, "Recent Work on Virtue."

⁹⁴² Pence, 283.

and emphasizes what is right rather than what is good.⁹⁴³ He laments that the idea of human good disappeared and our current morality is in a state of crisis:⁹⁴⁴ On the one hand, rational justification for morality became impossible (for such justification relies on the acceptance of certain presuppositions about good that are beyond mere social construction.)⁹⁴⁵ On the other hand, the coherent relation to the human nature it guides is lost. What is left is an ethics of liberalism that stresses individuality and personal freedom.⁹⁴⁶ What needs to be done is thus “a new vision of the human good supporting a new conception of human virtues.”⁹⁴⁷

He is convinced that some kind of Aristotelian virtue theory alone can restore such rationality and intelligibility to our moral and social attitudes.⁹⁴⁸ He thus proposes a virtue theory that is within the Aristotelian tradition and emphasizes the unity of theory and practice.⁹⁴⁹ Basically MacIntyre’s theory focuses on a multi-stage logical development of the concept of virtue. He claims that each stage requires a corresponding background account—namely, practice, narrative unity, and tradition—through which the complex conception of virtue can be understood.⁹⁵⁰

Subsequently, virtue at the first stage is referred to as “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are

⁹⁴³ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 15. Pellegrino and Thomasma cite Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Return to Virtue Ethics,” in *The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Vatican II: A Look Back and a Look Ahead*, ed. Russell Smith (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1990), 239-49.

⁹⁴⁴ Jerome B. Schneewind, “Virtue, Narrative, and Community: MacIntyre and Morality,” *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 653.

⁹⁴⁵ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 15.

⁹⁴⁶ Schneewind, 654.

⁹⁴⁷ Pence, 283.

⁹⁴⁸ MacIntyre, 259.

⁹⁴⁹ Schneewind, 655.

⁹⁵⁰ MacIntyre, 186.

internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”⁹⁵¹ Virtue at the next stage, in contrast, is set in the background of “the narrative order of a single human life” which concerns the unity of one’s whole life.⁹⁵² Virtues in a whole life refer to “those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good.”⁹⁵³

In the third and last stage, virtues relate one’s individual life to that of the community. MacIntyre explains, “I am never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only *qua* individual...the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity...the possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide.”⁹⁵⁴ Hence, virtues at this stage are traits that sustain “those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context.”⁹⁵⁵

As a whole, MacIntyre is praised for providing a modern, detailed conception of virtue and opening up the space needed for ongoing discussion of virtue ethics in subsequent decades.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., 191.

⁹⁵² For MacIntyre the meaning of good with regards to the self points to “live out that unity and bring it to completion.” See MacIntyre, 218.

⁹⁵³ MacIntyre, 219. MacIntyre claims that since there is an unpredictability (as well as teleology) within all lived narratives, what is common to all lives is the quest for the good. See MacIntyre, 216.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., 220-21.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 223.

⁹⁵⁶ One particular incidence is the dedication to the discussion of character and virtue by the *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* in their 1988 volume. In this particular volume, we see nearly thirty leading scholars in the field of ethical theory (such as Martha Nussbaum and Joel Kupperman) contribute to the discussion by advocating virtue and character and by being critical of the movement. See Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein, eds. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

Among their theological counterparts, a similar growing reception and discussion to virtue ethics is observed. Keenan notes that, for instance, the very first issue of *The Journal of Religious Ethics* was focusing on the debate over virtue theory.⁹⁵⁷ Porter further notes that one particular occasion for the revival of virtue ethics among theologians is the growing interest in the recovering of Aquinas's theology, and his moral thought in particular.⁹⁵⁸

Nevertheless, various types of approaches are adopted by theologians.⁹⁵⁹ Among contemporary Protestant theological ethicists, Stanley Hauerwas's pioneer role in rediscovering virtues through his ethics of character is widely recognized. He is convinced that the concepts of character and virtue provide the most appropriate framework for Christians to reflect on their moral life.⁹⁶⁰ He first defines character as "the qualifications of man's self-agency through his beliefs, intentions, and actions, by which a man acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being."⁹⁶¹ In other words, character is inseparable from one's self-determination and is the decisive factor behind one's doing and becoming.⁹⁶² It is "not just the sum of all that we do as

⁹⁵⁷ Keenan, "Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age," 115.

⁹⁵⁸ Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 107. Her observation confirms the above-mentioned first trend noted by Pence. Some representatives of this strand include Porter and Keenan themselves although their views are quite different. See Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990); James F. Keenan, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992).

⁹⁵⁹ Yearley notes three different approaches: The first type, as represented by Stanley Hauerwas, focuses on the significance of narrative and particular (Christian) community for virtue. The second type, on the contrary, concerns the role of virtue in assessing the views of life the larger society creates. The third and less significant type is more interested in linking traditional Christian virtue with contemporary science (like psychology) than addressing theological questions. See Yearley, "Recent Work on Virtue," 3.

⁹⁶⁰ Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 107.

⁹⁶¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity Press, 1975), 11.

⁹⁶² Farley, 25-27.

agents, but rather...the particular direction our agency acquires by choosing to act in some ways rather than others.”⁹⁶³ Thus, the notion of character is fundamental to Hauerwas; still, he insists on focusing on virtues that enable one to live a truly Christian life.⁹⁶⁴

In addition, Hauerwas is well-known for arguing for the primacy and interrelatedness of community and narrative in any moral tradition.⁹⁶⁵ He transforms MacIntyre’s demand for tradition into the need of a believing community in which one cultivates the virtues—for “the community as the historical place...has a tradition which offers to the dynamic structure of virtue some rooted continuity.”⁹⁶⁶ In other words, the believing community as a moral community is a community of virtue; and virtues are acquired through involvement in “the embodiment of the story in the communities in which we are born.”⁹⁶⁷

As a whole, although Hauerwas returns to Aristotle and Aquinas for insights, his overall understanding of virtue within the notions of character and community is perceived by some as representing a different tradition of virtue theory.⁹⁶⁸

Other proponents of virtue ethics within Protestantism include Gilbert Meilaender and Joseph Kotva.⁹⁶⁹ Kotva is especially known for making a Christian case for virtue

⁹⁶³ Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 117.

⁹⁶⁴ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 107.

⁹⁶⁵ Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue*, 28.

⁹⁶⁶ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 122.

⁹⁶⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 148.

⁹⁶⁸ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 107.

⁹⁶⁹ See Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*; Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*. Jennifer Herdt, another younger scholar who is interested in classical and contemporary Protestant virtue ethics, in her most recent book, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*, traces how major

ethics. And his use of Scripture in constructing a Christian account of virtue ethics is equally noteworthy.⁹⁷⁰ Therefore, I will return to him in our discussion of relating Scripture with virtue. For now, I turn to the resurgence of virtue within the Catholic tradition.

Jean Porter and James Keenan are two of the proponents of virtue ethics from the Catholic circle. In her earlier work *The Recovery of Virtue*, Porter claims that her approach to virtue is one of Thomistic. She points out that despite fragmentation there is a common indebtedness to the Thomistic tradition among contemporary Christian ethicists, it is appropriate to return to Aquinas for constructive insights.⁹⁷¹ She basically claims that the moral theory of Aquinas is grounded in the general theory of goodness (and the theory of human good in particular) which forms the basis of a unified theory of virtues.⁹⁷² However, she also claims that Aquinas's approach to virtue theory is not one of dichotomy—that is, a theory of virtue vis-à-vis a theory of rules—but one that takes up the moralities of both rules and virtues. She explains,

Morally good kinds of actions are conceptually linked to the virtues, in that certain determinate kinds of actions are characteristic of particular virtues and tend to promote them in the individual...For this reason, we cannot form concepts of particular virtues without some idea of the kinds of actions that correspond to those virtues, even though it is also true that a

philosophical and theological figures inform contemporary reflection on virtue. In particular she explores “the influence of the evolving legacy of Augustine’s critique of the pagan virtues, and asserts the continuing impact of this legacy even on contemporary debates over virtue ethics, both theological and philosophical.” See Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting On Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.

⁹⁷⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, review of *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, by Joseph J. Kotva (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), back cover.

⁹⁷¹ Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue*, 13-16. Apart from focusing on Thomistic understanding of virtue, she has also written elsewhere on the historical development of virtue ethics within theological enquiry. See Porter, “Virtue Ethics;” “Virtue.”

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*, 32-33.

virtue cannot adequately be understood only as the tendency or capacity to perform a certain kind of action.⁹⁷³

Therefore, in the discussion of the order of love, she claims that “[while] true moral rectitude is necessarily grounded in the orientation of the whole personality that charity creates; and yet, charity cannot be exercised, or even exist, unless the moral rules generated by right reason are observed.”⁹⁷⁴

Like Porter, Keenan also follows the Thomistic approach to virtue although his view differs from that of Porter. He sees virtue ethics as a comprehensive system in that in the pursuit of virtues we generate norms: Virtue ethics offers guidelines and directives for acquiring the virtues we need although the kind of direction they give is heuristic and thus needs further definition.⁹⁷⁵ He thus argues that “a virtue based ethics that generates its own norms and principles is more capable of guiding us in action than a simple normative ethics.”⁹⁷⁶ Along this line he further argues that all normative ethics inevitably find their origins in a virtue ethics and concludes that “virtues promote not only virtues themselves but also the rules that we need.”⁹⁷⁷

Elsewhere Keenan points out that while the discussion of controversial actions (like abortion and gene therapy) has dominated contemporary ethics, virtue ethicists are simply interested in persons.⁹⁷⁸ In particular, he emphasizes that virtue theory is interested in ordinary Christian living. He shares, “I wanted to communicate with

⁹⁷³ Ibid., 105.

⁹⁷⁴ Spohn, “The Return of Virtue Ethics,” 74. Spohn quotes Jean Porter, “*De Ordine Caritatis*: Charity, Friendship, and Justice in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” *Thomist* 53 (1989): 213.

⁹⁷⁵ Keenan, “Virtues, Principles and a Consistent Ethics of Life,” 50-51.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., 50, 54.

⁹⁷⁸ James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Christian Ethics: An Introduction*, ed. Bernard Hoose (London: Chapman, 1997), 84.

somebody interested...in what could be foundational for our family and community lives. In theology today, there is a constant criticism that the virtues are soft, inexact, and lofty. Against that challenge I wanted to present them as concrete, practical, useful and necessary.”⁹⁷⁹ Thus, apart from writing on the traditional theological and cardinal virtues, he also proposes certain virtues important for Christians and helps them see these virtues as “the stuff that we should practice in order to realize [Christian] charity...[and] a new opportunity to strive to become fully alive human beings.”⁹⁸⁰

In particular, he points out that both contemporary challenges of espousing cardinal virtues—that is, the claims of culture and the uniqueness of individuals—and the inadequacy⁹⁸¹ of the traditional cardinal virtues demand a new set of cardinal virtues. He notes that individuals in every culture have similar fundamental relationships—toward the self, others, and the society—that are guided by the virtue of practical wisdom. He therefore proposes the virtues of justice, fidelity, self-care, and prudence that are based on these three levels of relationship, namely, general, specific, and unique relationship.⁹⁸² He then applies his proposal to other areas of ethics like sexual ethics and bioethics.⁹⁸³

⁹⁷⁹ James F. Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1996), vii.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁸¹ This inadequacy is grounded on two claims: 1) they are structured in a simple, distinguishable and uniform hierarchy that does not acknowledge the possibility of competing virtues; and 2) they are not in tune with the contemporary anthropological claim on relationality. See James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 715-23.

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, 723.

⁹⁸³ In the area of sexual ethics, for example, he first invites us to consider sexual ethics as a relational, person-based ethics rather than an action-based one. He then points out that the virtue of chastity advocated by the Catholic tradition needs to be supplemented by the four cardinal virtues he proposed elsewhere. See James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics,” *Louvain Studies* 30, no. 3 (2005): 183-203.

In the case of bioethics, he proposes a more proactive stance toward the technology of genetic enhancement and claims that an adequate virtue theory—that attends to the agent’s relational character and ongoing development—can prompt us away from the danger of perfectionism. With regards to the overall genetic advancement, he further suggests that the character of virtue ethics, in various ways—such as its teleological structure and its concerns for how moral actions affect the moral agent—can be helpful to

Last but not least, by taking the abortion debate in the United States as an example Keenan urges that we are in need of virtue ethics today. He says, “In our liberal society where individual rights have replaced the common good we need to rediscover community. That discovery is increasingly urgent.”⁹⁸⁴

On the other hand, Keenan also attempts to bring virtue ethics in dialogue not just with specific ethical areas but with other theological disciplines as well. He notes, “Christian ethicists are discovering, then, that virtue ethics can offer more resources than we ever imagined. It provides bridges between moral theology and a variety of other fields, such as spirituality, worship, church life and Scripture. In this way, virtue ethics unites fields of theology that have long been isolated from each other.”⁹⁸⁵ Among the Catholic ethicists who interact virtue ethics with other theological disciplines is William Spohn who attempts to bridge virtue ethics with Scripture and spirituality in particular. I will later return to his understanding of using virtue to read Scripture.

advance ethical discourse on genetics. He also argues that virtue ethics is particularly helpful to a consistent ethic of life (as advocated by late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin): Through it our understanding of respect for life will not be restricted for those in the womb or on death row but extended to the great suffering in the world. See James F. Keenan, “Whose Perfection is it Anyway? A Virtuous Consideration of Enhancement,” *Christian Bioethics* 5, no. 2 (1999): 110-12; “What does Virtue Ethics Bring to Genetic? in *Genetics, Theology and Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Conversation*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 105-9; “Virtues, Principles and a Consistent Ethics of Life,” 59.

Of course, Keenan is not the only one who attempts to bring virtue ethics to biomedical ethics. Others Christians (like Cates), philosophers (such as Rosalind Hursthouse), and even people from the medical field/healthcare sector (e.g., Edmund Pellegrino, David Thomasma, James Drane, and Jane Brody) have also considered virtue ethics as a better and practical model for bio-medical issues and subsequently propose specific virtues such as care and prudence for biomedical practitioners. See Diana Fritz Cates, “Caring for Girls and Women who are Considering Abortion: Rethinking Informed Consent,” in *Medicine and the Ethics of Care*, eds. Diana Fritz Cates and Paul Lauritzen (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 162-206; Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion,” in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel Statman (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 227-44; Pellegrino and Thomasma, *The Christian Virtues in Medical Practice*; James F. Drane, “Character and the Moral Life,” in *A Matter of Principles?* ed. Edwin Dubose (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), 284-309; and Jane Brody, “Virtue ethics, Caring, and Nursing,” *Scholarly Inquiry for Nursing Practice* 2, no. 2 (1988): 87-101.

⁹⁸⁴ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 123.

⁹⁸⁵ Harrington and Keenan, 24-25.

So far I have highlighted some of the recent revival of virtue ethics among philosophers and theologians. Yearley, however, reminds us that should such revival to be convincing certain central issues need to be addressed.⁹⁸⁶ While Yearley's reminder encourages the proponents of virtue ethics to further reflect on their agenda, there are scholars, however, who are rather critical of the theory of virtue.

Limitations and Criticism of Virtue Theory

Philosopher Robert Louden expresses two basic concerns regarding virtue ethics:⁹⁸⁷ First, the motivation of the revival seems more to criticize other approaches than to state clearly the content of its own alternative. Second, with regards to its strategy, virtue ethics bears a trait of 'conceptual reductionism' as its deontological competitors do and hence is not unique at all.⁹⁸⁸ From this he points out that conceptual commitment to the moral agent leads to several shortcomings, especially regarding the place of actions.⁹⁸⁹ In simple terms, he is concerned that virtue ethics is structurally incapable of saying much about what one ought to do—since virtue is concerned with persons, it

⁹⁸⁶ Two of the issues concern the connectedness (or unity) of virtues and the relationship of virtue to happiness and pleasure. The other two issues, namely, virtue's relationship with rules and principles on the one hand, and relationship to culture (and history) on the other, are already outlined in the beginning of this chapter. See Yearley, "Recent Work on Virtue," 5.

⁹⁸⁷ See Robert B. Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," in *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character*, eds. Robert B. Kruschwitz and Robert C. Roberts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987), 66-73.

⁹⁸⁸ 'Conceptual reductionism' refers to the fact that a theory begins with certain root concepts from which secondary concepts that are derived. In the case of virtue theory, the primitive concept is the morally good person from which it derives secondary concepts.

⁹⁸⁹ These shortcomings include: 1) It de-emphasizes concrete acts and thus is weak in the areas of casuistry and applied ethics; 2) it is not able to assess correctly those occasional tragic behaviors; 3) it cannot identify any absolutely prohibited acts; and 4) it is not able to offer any evaluation of the moral act either. See Louden, 68, 70-72.

cannot adequately deal with human action.⁹⁹⁰ Trianosky comments that this criticism is perhaps the most frequently heard objection.⁹⁹¹

Opponents further charge that such commitment to and focusing on the agent too much could lead to self-centeredness.⁹⁹² They also highlight the epistemological problem of identifying the virtuous person as well as the presence of a kind of over-optimism within virtue ethics regarding changing the complex society and overcoming social evils.⁹⁹³ Sarah Conly, in addition, challenges the use of the broad account of flourishing to construct a theory of virtue.⁹⁹⁴

Others make claims from a different perspective:⁹⁹⁵ Since virtue ethics relies on feelings that cannot be called upon at will they are irrelevant to morality that attends to voluntary moral acts. The term ‘disposition’ remains vague and impractical and thus needs to be guided by clear moral instructions. When compared to actions, it also lacks public accountability that morality demands. They also charge that the presence of such feelings or dispositions implies that one’s moral goodness is simply a matter of luck and contingency and hence moral character of a person will be outside one’s control at the moment of action.⁹⁹⁶

⁹⁹⁰ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” 90.

⁹⁹¹ Trianosky, 341. Trianosky quotes Robert B. Louden, “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics.”

⁹⁹² Solomon, 431. They also charge that virtue ethics does not offer means to monitor the change of character within a person and it risks overlooking occasional vicious acts and hence leads to moral backsliding. See Louden, 72-73.

⁹⁹³ Louden, 75-77.

⁹⁹⁴ She comments that the notion of flourishing is not capable of designating traits as virtues and vices. Therefore, it does not contribute to the idea of virtuous disposition; rather, it is in the ‘right-making characteristic of action’ that a virtuous character is able to produce right action. See Sarah Conly, “Flourishing and the Ethics of Virtue,” in French, *Midwest Studies*, 90, 94.

⁹⁹⁵ Spohn, “The Return of Virtue Ethics,” 63-64.

⁹⁹⁶ Solomon, 433.

Solomon attempts to respond to some of these charges:⁹⁹⁷ First, he points out that virtue ethics is not exclusively concerned with one's own well-being but also that of others, as in the virtue of justice. Second, with regard to those act-related charges, he claims that virtue theories do provide guidance for action through virtues.

Still, these concerns, charges, and objections have led Loudon to conclude that virtue ethics alone is inadequate for our complex society; rather, we need to acquire and coordinate both agent-oriented and act-oriented theories.⁹⁹⁸ Triantosky who seeks a middle way also claims that virtue theory is not a complete alternative to moral principles; rather, both are needed should ethics be *practical*: In the case of complementing moral principles, virtue can provide standards to the over-general moral principles and help determine what to do when rules cannot be applied.⁹⁹⁹

A similar conclusion is also drawn by Gregory Jones and Richard Vance:¹⁰⁰⁰ Virtue theory cannot simply be 'another' approach to rule-oriented ethics. On the contrary, obligations and virtues are correlative, compatible and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, what is needed is to articulate how they are interrelated in a particular tradition's conception of (a medical) ethics.

Criticisms are raised not only from philosophers alone but from theologians as well:¹⁰⁰¹ First, they charge that virtue ethics is inherently egoistic which does not coincide

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid., 434-41.

⁹⁹⁸ Loudon, 67.

⁹⁹⁹ Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics," 66. Spohn quotes Triantosky, 341-42.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Although they are focusing on medical ethical issues related to doctor-patient relations, their conclusion is insightful. See L. Gregory Jones, and Richard P. Vance, "Why Virtues are not Another Approach to Medical Ethics: Reconceiving the Place of Ethics in Contemporary Medicine," in *Religious Methods and Resources in Bioethics*, ed. Paul F. Camenisch (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 203-16.

¹⁰⁰¹ Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics," 61-63.

with Christian's call to certain moral obligations like self-sacrifice. Also, virtue theory's interest in human flourishing seems to undermine the call of duty. Second, others are concerned that the latent perfectionism in virtue ethics contradicts Christian obedience to God's commands. Third, virtue theory's understanding of human desires upon which it relies is distorted. It is thus doubtful if they can be dependable resources for morality. Consequently, a divine command ethics is preferred for our fallen state. Within the Protestant circles, a case is further made against a Christian virtue ethics: "Such approach encourages a false sense of one's own good and a reliance on that goodness rather than on God's grace."¹⁰⁰² Kotva further notes those criticisms regarding the lack of social aspect of virtue ethics.¹⁰⁰³

Finally, natural law theorists from the Catholic tradition, though for a different reason, also object the use of virtue ethics in Catholic moral theology:¹⁰⁰⁴ They perceive virtues as simply dispositions to observe the moral law. Strictly speaking, virtues as a whole should belong to the discipline of spirituality or mysticism rather than of morality.

In sum, Meilaender cautions us that while one might imagine return to virtue is a turn toward simplicity, the opposite may be the case in some ways.¹⁰⁰⁵ Interesting though,

¹⁰⁰² Porter, "Virtue," 205.

¹⁰⁰³ Kotva offers his own defense of virtue ethics: First, with regards to the criticism of being narcissistic and self-centered, he argues that many ethical theories implicitly share virtue ethics's concerns of the self and yet fail to acknowledge their dependence on virtue considerations. Second, virtue ethics is not incompatible with social justice as some opponents claimed. Rather, "a virtue conception of justice insists that we see ourselves as members of a community whose good we seek together," and the true excellence one aims at involves "reaching out to others in love." Third, regarding the claim that virtue theory entails social irresponsibility and withdrawal, he counter argues that virtue ethics is neither total nonparticipation nor uncritical participation; rather, it can encourage active participation in the larger society although its engagement is selective and discerning, making sure that its participation is not incompatible with the virtuous life understood by the community. See Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 143-59.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Porter, "Virtue," 206.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 5.

despite these criticisms reflections on the role of virtue ethics continue to flourish within contemporary Christianity.¹⁰⁰⁶ I now turn to the contemporary understanding of the theory of virtue itself.

5.4 Contemporary Understanding of Virtue Ethics

The Plurality of Virtue Ethics

Before we explore the contemporary understanding of virtue theory and the yield of virtue, we need to, as Justin Oakley rightly points out, be mindful of the fact that the revival of virtue ethics has produced a bewildering variety of claims made in the name of virtue ethics by philosophers.¹⁰⁰⁷ A pure virtue ethic, for example, would claim that “at least some judgments about virtue can be validated independently of any appeal to judgments about the rightness of actions...[and] it is this antecedent goodness of traits which ultimately makes any right act right.”¹⁰⁰⁸ In other words, the moral goodness of character traits does not depend on the rightness of actions but rather is the origin of it.¹⁰⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰⁶ Porter, “Virtue,” 206.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Oakley, 128. Oakley identifies these claims under the categories of consequential and non-consequential virtue ethics. The former treats rightness as what the agent promotes while the latter regards rightness as what the agent honors and exemplifies. See Oakley, 144-51. Gregory Velazco y Trianosky, on the other hand, divides virtue ethics into two types, namely, teleological ethics of virtue that aims at the good, and non-teleological virtue ethics that sees virtue as a constitutive element of the human good and strive for perfection. See Trianosky, 338.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Trianosky, 336.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid..

In the case of Christian virtue ethics, Porter similarly reminds us that we cannot simply assume that Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition is the only options for developing a Christian virtue ethics:

Christian virtue ethics comprises many different approaches. Similarly, theologians today are turning to virtue ethics out of a variety of different concerns. For this reason, it would be a mistake to assume that there is one definitive form of virtue ethics, or even that all virtue ethicists would agree about the meaning and implications of the concept of virtue.¹⁰¹⁰

Nevertheless, there are certain essential features shared by many proponents of virtue ethics. They differ from one another depending on which of these features they emphasize.¹⁰¹¹ Oakley, for instance, identifies six central features common to all forms of virtue theories:¹⁰¹² These features include the primacy of character, the priority of goodness over rightness, plurality of virtues, and the obligation to strive for excellence of the good relative to the norms which govern it. With these common features in mind I now acquire a contemporary understanding of virtue ethics.

Contemporary Understanding

In general, the ethics of virtue that is based on Aristotelian and Thomistic understanding of virtue is “an ethic premised on the notion of a true human nature with a determinate human good or end or *telos*.”¹⁰¹³ This *telos* or good is originally defined as “performing well whatever function or purpose or role is characteristic of X.”¹⁰¹⁴ Its evaluation thus lies on the function, purpose, or role played by X. When applied to

¹⁰¹⁰ Porter, “Virtue Ethics,” 107.

¹⁰¹¹ Oakley, 144.

¹⁰¹² See Oakley, 129-44.

¹⁰¹³ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 17.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

human person it implies that who we are and what we do can be evaluated against “our true nature or *telos*, against the excellent performance of the functions and purposes characteristics of human.”¹⁰¹⁵ Aristotle, for example, proposed that the ultimate human end is *eudaimonia* (happiness) in this life.¹⁰¹⁶

However, Kotva adds that in the case of human *telos* one needs also to know the sort of capacities, traits, and interests the person has that allows one to pursue the good.¹⁰¹⁷ He also points out that the human *telos* is not a narrowly defined or restrictive one but rather a comprehensive and inclusive one. While specific *telos* are needed for the provision of guidance for acquiring virtues, Kotva claims, it does not mean that one is guided by certain narrow visions of the human good only.¹⁰¹⁸

An ethical theory as such is concerned with not just who we are but also who we could become, and is thus a teleological ethics with a particular structure.¹⁰¹⁹ Keenan refines MacIntyre’s tri-polar structure of virtue ethics into three fundamental questions:¹⁰²⁰ First is the question of who one is—‘Who am I?’ In the language of virtue ethics, this question is equivalent to asking oneself how virtuous one is. The answer to this question lies in the standards of measurement as well as the fairness of such measurement. The former refers to the naming of the basic virtues (as Aristotle and Aquinas did) while the latter implies critical self-knowledge of one’s spontaneous actions.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰¹⁶ Aristotle, 3, 13.

¹⁰¹⁷ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 19. Kotva cites James D. Wallace, “Ethics and the Craft Analogy,” in French, *Midwest Studies*, 223.

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid., 17, 20.

¹⁰²⁰ I rely on James Keenan’s reflection in our discussion here. See Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 120-21; “Virtue Ethics,” 84-90.

The second question asks who one ought to become—‘Who ought I become?’ It points us to one’s vision and hence invites us to set our personal goals and articulate our *telos* by means of speculative reason. The key insight here is that one has to pursue them and seek improvement.

The third and last question asks what actions will move one from present self to future self—‘What ought I to do?’ In other words, it focuses on both the contrast/tension between ‘who we are’ and ‘who we could be’ and how we move from the former state to the latter.¹⁰²¹ It points to those transformative virtuous acts, i.e., practices, whose effectiveness depends on the virtue of prudence through which one not just articulates one’s realistic ends but also sets to attain them. Prudence, being a practical and realistic virtue, guides one to seek the mean to accomplish that end.

Furthermore, based on the important presupposition that “one becomes the agent of the actions one performs”—that is, the kind of person one will become tomorrow is shaped by one’s act today—Keenan argues that virtue ethics is historically dependent and has a dynamic structure.¹⁰²² He also insists that the real world one lives is a necessity for this tri-polar structure because “without it virtue ethics leads to narcissism: The ethical choice is to make one’s future no more than a reflection of oneself.”¹⁰²³

On the other hand, although different ethicists propose different understandings of the qualities of the human *telos*, it is noted that all agree that it is largely constituted by the exercise and practice of various virtues.¹⁰²⁴ However, virtues are not simply means or

¹⁰²¹ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 17.

¹⁰²² Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 119-20.

¹⁰²³ Ibid., 121.

¹⁰²⁴ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 20.

instruments to but also constituted elements and essential components of the human good.¹⁰²⁵ This twofold view of virtue can be understood as follows. A virtue is “an acquired human quality the possession of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”¹⁰²⁶ It is thus an instrument and means to the human good.¹⁰²⁷ Yet, it is also a constitutive element of the human *telos* because the values one seeks would characterize the way that one pursues them.¹⁰²⁸ Virtues, then, are human goods in themselves. We act hospitably, for instance, because it leads to the human good and is virtuous itself.

Moreover, virtues are acquired dispositions that include both “tendencies to react in characteristic ways in similar and related settings...[and] all those states of character or character traits that influence how we act and choose.”¹⁰²⁹ This understanding is drawn upon Aristotle’s eudaimonistic view:¹⁰³⁰ Virtues are character traits that are needed to live humanly flourishing lives. Certain virtues such as benevolence and justice feature among those intrinsic goods without which one cannot have a flourishing life. And the agent needs not only to act in a certain way but also to act out of certain dispositions and motives so as to attain right action (though not sufficiently¹⁰³¹). Subsequently, virtues are states of character that have long ranging impact in us. Virtue ethics, apart from giving

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid.; Triantosky, 338.

¹⁰²⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 190.

¹⁰²⁷ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 20.

¹⁰²⁸ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 43.

¹⁰²⁹ Kotva, 24.

¹⁰³⁰ Oakley, 133.

¹⁰³¹ Oakley points out that this insufficiency explains why good dispositions may still lead one to act wrongly. Nevertheless, virtues as regulative ideals can at least provide a standard for evaluating the act.

primacy to character, actually attends to the development of character and practices of the person and the community.

As seen in its tri-polar structure, virtue ethics is concerned with ‘who we ought to become’. However, it is important to remember that, virtue ethics, like any ethics recommends action, but first recommends the kind of persons we should become and then informs the choices and actions. Aristotle elsewhere taught, virtue makes persons good and causes them to act well.¹⁰³² In this sense virtue ethics gives priority of being over doing. Still, we become a more virtuous person only by performing intended virtuous actions. In other words, one’s being is formed in and through ‘doing’. Thus, Kotva comments that “‘being’ precedes ‘doing’, but ‘doing’ shapes ‘being’.”¹⁰³³

Kotva offers a good summary of the nature of the virtues.¹⁰³⁴ First, they need to be understood in relation to the human *telos*—they enable and contribute to the realization of the human good. Second, as a group the virtues include tendencies to react in certain characteristic ways, dispositions that seek certain ends, and capacities. Third, they imply stability and continuity with regards to one’s actions. Fourth, their corresponding actions are done because of their own values.

With regards to virtue theory’s moral reasoning, Keenan is convinced that the kind of taxonomical, practical reasoning found in casuistry—which finds comparative cases and derives guides through taxonomies—can be well translated into an ethics of virtue to provide a new way of understanding how virtues gives specific guidance.¹⁰³⁵ He

¹⁰³² Aristotle, 40.

¹⁰³³ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 30.

¹⁰³⁴ See Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 23-26.

¹⁰³⁵ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 119.

points out that while it is true that virtues bear different meanings in different societies/cultures, a taxonomical moral reasoning helps overcome the risk of cultural relativism:¹⁰³⁶ It locates the common concepts of virtues by demonstrating the trans-cultural similarities between what distinguishes one virtue from another. For instance, although hospitality in a Confucian society like Japan differs from hospitality in the United States of America, each culture distinguishes hospitality from any other virtue and hence the particular anthropological function of hospitality in the respective culture/society can be found.

Finally, virtue ethics's priority of 'being' over 'doing' involves a kind of perfectionism in the sense of "viewing all aspects of life as morally relevant and in calling everyone to growth in every area of life."¹⁰³⁷ Some thus claim that virtue ethics is a pro-active ethical system and encompasses one's entire life for each knowingly performed moral action affects the kind of moral person one becomes.¹⁰³⁸ Therefore, it engages the commonplace and concerns what is ordinary rather than those moral dilemmas. Keenan further points out that since virtues are teleological by nature, they are heuristic as well—they collectively aim for the right realization of human identity.¹⁰³⁹

Indeed, these characters of virtue make virtue theory attractive in being a hermeneutical tool. Still, we note that the yield of virtues can further be reference points to the task of hermeneutics. Moreover, it helps reject the earlier charge of being conceptual reductionism. It is because virtue ethics moves out from virtue to other

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid..

¹⁰³⁷ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 39.

¹⁰³⁸ Keenan, "Virtue Ethics," 88-89.

¹⁰³⁹ James F. Keenan, "Virtue and Identity," in *Creating Identity, Concilium* 2000/2, eds. Hermann Häring, Maureen Junker-Kenny, and Dietmar Mieth (London: SCM Press, 2000), 69.

reference points of ethics. For instance, virtue as ‘practices’ points to concrete actions and thus is quite capable of dealing with human action despite the claims of opponents. I now explore these yields in the pages that follow.

5.5 The Yield of Virtue

Four important yields of virtues can be identified based on our contemporary understanding of virtue theory and characters of virtues. They are ‘practices’, ‘character’, ‘exemplar’, and ‘community’.

The use of the term ‘yield’ refers then to the various goods that virtue produces so as to understand better the moral life. For instance, from among the four yields communal identity and exemplar are goods that prompt us to ask, do the virtues help us to appreciate better the fullness of the moral life? Do the virtues help us to look beyond the self to the community and to the saints and heroes? I say yes precisely because virtue ethics gives us these important yields—communal identity, exemplar, practices, and character formation. These four yields are the goods we receive by appropriating the hermeneutics of virtue ethics.

Practices and Habits

As said earlier, virtue ethics is interested in what is ordinary rather than only in those moral dilemmas or grave actions, and is concerned about what one ought to do in moving from ‘who I am’ to ‘what I ought to become’. These concerns and the

complexities of ordinary human life can best be handled by developing practices. The concept of ‘practice’ can be understood in light of MacIntyre’s definition:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.¹⁰⁴⁰

In other words, a practice is “[a] regular activity that shapes us in such a way that we develop dispositions to act in particular ways.”¹⁰⁴¹ Thus, MacIntyre claims that virtue belongs to the concept of practice.¹⁰⁴²

In ordinary life we are continuously adopting practices that later form habits which “in turn become deeply ingrained in and constitute particular dimensions of our lives...and make us who we are.”¹⁰⁴³ As Bonnie Kent notes, the term ‘habit’ and its Greek origin *hexis* (and Latin *habitus*), as quoted earlier, refer to “a durable characteristic of the agent inclining to certain kinds of actions and reactions themselves...[that] over time...grow to be ‘second nature’ for the individual.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Aquinas adopts this basic view and perceives habits as qualities or principles of action that employ the will and are in relation to the definition of virtue.¹⁰⁴⁵ In this sense, Aquinas seems to understand virtue as a habit (I.II. 55.4). Based on MacIntyre’s definition of practice, Spohn, however, argues that by treating virtues as practices rather than habit, one is able to “appreciate the social

¹⁰⁴⁰ MacIntyre, 187.

¹⁰⁴¹ Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*, 4.

¹⁰⁴² MacIntyre, 191.

¹⁰⁴³ Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*, 5.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Kent, 116.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 117-19. See *Summa Theologiae* I.II. 49.1-3.

formation of the virtues and enable [one] to consider the regulative internal norms [such as motive, roles and other virtues] of the virtues.”¹⁰⁴⁶

In any case, we acquire virtues by habitually acting virtuously. For example, if we want to become hospitable as a person and as a community, we have to act hospitably. At some point we so condition ourselves to this way of acting that we become hospitable. Once we acquire hospitality then, like a second nature, we act hospitably easily and almost naturally whenever we meet someone new. With the virtue of hospitality, we will more likely react positively to the stranger than one who has not practiced hospitality.

This interpretation, in one way or another, helps us understand Verhey’s emphasis on the notion of practice as a core element of Christian ethical framework, and that remembering Jesus requires participation in the practices of the church community. Indeed, practices both develop the characters of the moral agent and in turn express them.¹⁰⁴⁷ This function of practices points to a second yield of virtue—the formation of character.

Disposition and Character

Because of its primacy being given to character, virtue ethics at times is refined by some of its proponents as an ‘ethics of character’. They claim that character ethics “does not altogether neglect rules, but subordinates them to the development of moral character and view them instrumentally with reference to the end.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Rather, it simply

¹⁰⁴⁶ Spohn, “The Return of Virtue Ethics,” 67.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 15.

¹⁰⁴⁸ David L. Norton, “Moral Minimalist and the Development of Moral Character,” in French, *Midwest Studies*, 180-81.

refers to “a way of thinking about and interpreting the moral life in terms of a particular vision of and a passion for life that is rooted in the nurture, formation, and socialization of a particular self-conscious community.”¹⁰⁴⁹

Among them is Stanley Hauerwas whom I have already mentioned. He rediscovers virtues through his ethics of character. For him character is inseparable from one’s self-determination and is the decisive factor behind our doing and becoming.¹⁰⁵⁰ A virtuous person, therefore, is formed by “repeated acts of deliberative decisions.”¹⁰⁵¹

He further claims that “character is not just the sum of all that we do as agents, but rather it is the particular direction our agency acquires by choosing to act in some ways rather than others.”¹⁰⁵² It is thus noted that for Hauerwas character is fundamental and to which virtue is subordinate.¹⁰⁵³ Interestingly, this emphasis on character can be found in BurrIDGE’s own thinking: He points out that the depiction of character is often implied within a biographical narrative. In the case of the Bible, the gospels as biographical narrative aim to characterize Jesus by looking at his authority, integrity, and service of others.¹⁰⁵⁴

Nevertheless, for many virtue ethicists character formation is a yield of virtue. David Norton explains that in the case of classical virtue theory, the question of the good life leads directly to the development of moral character, because “any adequate description of a good human life will necessarily include attributes that are not manifest

¹⁰⁴⁹ Brueggemann, vii.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Farley, 25-27.

¹⁰⁵¹ Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 71.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid., 117.

¹⁰⁵³ Farley, 25.

¹⁰⁵⁴ BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus*, 161.

in persons in the beginning of their lives, but are developmental outcomes.”¹⁰⁵⁵ He notes that virtues are “excellences of character that are objective goods, of worth to others [and the self],” and their manifestation is the actualization of qualities that are originally potentialities within a person.¹⁰⁵⁶ In addition, since the ethics of virtue is concerned about ‘who we could become’ and the transition from ‘who we are’ to ‘who we could become’ (that is, the movement toward the human *telos*), it thus calls for continual growth in our character.

Kotva further points out that the acquisition and development of virtue demands our understanding of the self as a self-forming and determining agent as well as a means of shaping character:¹⁰⁵⁷ Our choices and actions help form our tendencies and dispositions (which, in turn help inform and direct our subsequent choices and actions) and hence one plays a role in the formation of one’s character. For example, the practice of hospitality makes us hospitable persons which in turn direct us to act hospitably. Norton adds that what is central to the development of moral character is the achievement of integrity—by which all the dimensions of a person, such as faculties, desires, dispositions, and roles contribute to the chosen end.¹⁰⁵⁸ Spohn thus comments that virtue ethics is all about moral formation.¹⁰⁵⁹

On the other hand, since a person’s character is “the integration of [one’s] life into a relatively coherent unity” and the identity of a person is formed when this integrated

¹⁰⁵⁵ Norton, 181.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid., 181-82.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Kotva, 26-28.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Norton, 185.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 29.

self is conscious, virtue ethics thus, as Spohn claims, inevitably considers identity.¹⁰⁶⁰ In line with Spohn's view Keenan further notes that there is interplay between virtues and anthropological vision of human identity: Virtues provide practical guides to the right realization of identity while the anthropological vision of human identity guides us in our pursuit of the virtues.¹⁰⁶¹

Exemplar

While attending to character, virtue theory also appreciates the role exemplary figures play in the development of virtue and formation of character. This appreciation is built upon the fundamental presupposition that virtue is teachable. Historically, as Meilaender notes, the Athenians did not seek technical expertise when pursuing their goals.¹⁰⁶² Socrates himself originally also claimed that virtue cannot be knowledge and thus cannot be taught: "There are no teachers of it—that is to say, none who can prove successful in transmitting moral excellence."¹⁰⁶³ However, it is noted that Socrates later on changed his mind and argued that virtue is knowledge and therefore must be teachable.

For Plato such knowledge refers to the knowledge of the good itself—Meilaender simply calls it the knowledge-that-is-virtue. As a result, Plato makes it clear that virtue could not be 'transmitted' by precept or example; rather it is only through "the telling of stories which transmit images and examples of moral virtue and in doing so begin to

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰⁶¹ Keenan, "Virtue and Identity," 69.

¹⁰⁶² The brief accounts on Socrates and Plato are based on Meilaender's own work. See Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 46-57.

¹⁰⁶³ Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 46.

shape character by awakening a love for what is good.”¹⁰⁶⁴ In other words, story-telling provides an ‘inborn affinity’ for the knowledge of the good (but not the knowledge itself). The only exception is the rare case of ‘divine dispensation’. This view explains the aim of his *Republic*: Outlining the education needed for cultivating true virtue. What is equally noteworthy of Plato’s educational scheme, however, is that the teaching of virtue can also be achieved by “the study not of ethics but of other disciplines in which a reasonable certitude seems possible and in which disinterestedness is necessary.”¹⁰⁶⁵ Meilaender understands this training in other disciplines as attention to the claims of goodness with one’s whole being.

Nevertheless, fourth century Eastern Church Father Athanasius claimed that “the practice of imitating the exemplars of the faith is fundamental to the acquisition of Christian virtue...[and] transformation by way of the imitation of the mentor’s life of virtue may result in communion, in a sharing of vision.”¹⁰⁶⁶ In his discussion of the genre of ancient biography, Burrige likewise points out that although ethical instruction may not be the primary concern of ancient biography, the idea of imitation in which one imitates, follows and practices the good example’s virtues, is common to much such

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid., 54-55.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ibid., 57. Interestingly, ancient Chinese philosophers also insist on the learning of art, music, and rituals for the moral formation of the person. Ritual propriety (*li*), for instance, has been a key concept in classical Confucianism since the time of Confucius. It was understood as both an important virtue and a means to form a good society based on good government and harmonious human relations. The sage created ritual principles and laid down regulations in order to reform, train and transform man’s nature. See Xunzi, “A Discussion of Rites,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Yiu Sing Luke Chan, “As West Meets East: Reading Xunzi’s ‘A Discussion of Rites’ – Through the Lens of Contemporary Western Ritual Theories,” in *Ahme nach, was du vollziehst.*

Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik. Studien zur Pastoralliturgie 22, ed. Martin Stuflesser and Stephan Winter (Regensburg, Germany: Friedrich Pustet KG, 2009), 101-20.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Woodhill, 31.

literature.¹⁰⁶⁷ In the context of New Testament ethics, he thus concludes that we are called to follow and imitate Jesus.¹⁰⁶⁸

In fact, the idea of imitation and the need and role of a mentor are closely related. Climacus pointed out in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* that a guide or a mentor who has struggled on the ladder of virtue and hence has the vision and critical discernment is needed even though virtue is within human reach.¹⁰⁶⁹ These mentors and guides are needed in two ways. First, they teach us by their own examples. Second, the virtues as skills need examples to show what they mean practically.¹⁰⁷⁰ Spohn explains,

[Virtues] have to be displayed concretely to convey their tactical meaning. In order to grasp, [for example,] how courage and integrity operate, we need accounts of persons who have shown these virtues in the tangle of circumstances. We are more likely to learn these lessons from literature than philosophy.¹⁰⁷¹

In the Old Testament, Judith, for example, has been viewed as a model for liberation and the virtue of courage; or the plot of Ruth and Naomi illustrates the values of loyalty and love of family.¹⁰⁷²

In our contemporary society, who are these exemplary, virtuous models? Andrew Flescher discusses two types of people found within the community that are exemplar in virtues.¹⁰⁷³ The first type is heroes such as rescuers. According to Flescher, heroes are “not mere moral paragons but exemplars, demonstrations of human beings living the best

¹⁰⁶⁷ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 28-29.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Woodhill, 51.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 32-33.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁷² Michael Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 32, 391.

¹⁰⁷³ See Flescher, 172.

kind of moral life.”¹⁰⁷⁴ Though they distinguish themselves by excelling, heroes represent and are (already) how we should become; and the life to which they have inhabited is “in principle accessible to anyone who becomes sufficiently virtuous.”¹⁰⁷⁵ And though they are ordinary persons, they are extraordinarily virtuous and we need to act as they do.¹⁰⁷⁶

Saints—the second type of exemplar, on the contrary, are extraordinary persons and thus differ from heroes in many ways, especially in that they “transcend their ‘exemplar’ status and come to embody a higher law.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Typical saints are distinctive moral agents who are extraordinarily virtuous, have no limits regarding what is morally required of them, see altruistic actions as part of their vocation, perform these altruistic actions without counting the cost or discarding their own self-fulfillment, visionary, and embody “an ideal of character that is not fully realizable by ordinary agents in the course of a life.”¹⁰⁷⁸

The difference between heroes and saints further highlights the two different senses of ‘exemplar’. According to John Stratton Hawley, the example of heroes “instantiates and thus clarifies general principles of morality and qualities of character that can be articulated as meaningful and understood as possible for all participants in a society or community.”¹⁰⁷⁹ The morality of saints is, in contrast, above ordinary morality

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid..

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid..

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid., 172, 219.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ibid., 211.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ibid., 219-20.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid., 177. Flescher quotes John Stratton Hawley, ed., “Introduction,” in *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), xvi.

and hence it is exemplary in the sense that it “motivates us from afar, as a future ideal that impinges on us in the present.”¹⁰⁸⁰

Susan Wolf, from a different perspective, defines a moral saint as someone whose every action is as morally good and worthy as possible, and one who commits to improving the welfare of others or the whole society.¹⁰⁸¹ She then differentiates two kinds of moral saints based on one’s commitment even though their difference is not obvious in public: Being a saint ‘out of love for others’ or ‘out of duty’.¹⁰⁸² For Wolf the ‘loving saint’ is not capable of loving certain things (other than the welfare of others) and hence lacks individuality, while the ‘rational saint’ is suspicious of having a pathological fear of damnation.¹⁰⁸³ Although both models of moral saints are unattractive, she points out that they may not be unsuitable ideals.¹⁰⁸⁴ All moral saints “will have the standard moral virtues to a non-standard degree”¹⁰⁸⁵ and will acquire *all* the moral virtues to an extreme degree. Still, she argues that “the ideal of moral sainthood should not be held as a standard against which any other ideal must be judged or justified...[and there is] reason not to aspire this ideal.”¹⁰⁸⁶ She claims, “A person may be *perfectly wonderful* without being *perfectly moral*.”¹⁰⁸⁷

Robert Adams, on the contrary, defends the concrete existence of sainthood—such as Gandhi and Mother Teresa—although they are not quite the same as moral

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰⁸¹ Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints,” in *The Virtues*, eds. Kruschwitz and Roberts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987), 137-38.

¹⁰⁸² Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., 149-50.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid., 149.

sainthood in Wolf's sense.¹⁰⁸⁸ He notes that the problem comes from Wolf's threefold conception of moral sainthood—one who does only morally good acts, whose perfection is dependent of the maximization of one's every single action, and one who exclusively focuses on others' good.¹⁰⁸⁹ For him saintliness is not perfectionism and sainthood is “an essentially religious phenomenon” in which moral concerns are only one form of human excellence interested by the deity.¹⁰⁹⁰ The religious character allows the saint to be self-giving without neglecting one's own condition.¹⁰⁹¹

On the other hand, though not all should aspire to be a particular saint, Adams claims that one should aspire to sainthood in general. It is because particular saints exemplify “only certain types of sainthood, and that other types may be compatible with quite different human excellences.”¹⁰⁹² In other words, Adams's understanding points to a broader sense of sainthood; and not unlike Flescher, Adams would perceive Martin Luther King and Dorothy Day as saints of our contemporary time.¹⁰⁹³

By looking at those great saints and heroes, however, Keenan notes that “no single portrait of a moral saint or hero has ever provided a definitive expression of what a human person ought to be.”¹⁰⁹⁴ Rather, one becomes a morally excellent person by being themselves; hence, a saint has always been an original and never an imitation.¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁸⁸ Robert Adams, “Saints,” in *The Virtues*, eds. Kruschwitz and Roberts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987), 154.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 154-55.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156-58.

¹⁰⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁹² *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰⁹³ *Ibid.*; Flescher, 184.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” 91.

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Ibid.*.

Nevertheless, Spohn rightly concludes that “we learn how to be virtuous by the example of others in the community when their witness inspires us to be virtuous.”¹⁰⁹⁶ We need such models in our society, who give us not just concrete guidance in the process of formation but at times “challenge us toward the *telos*, and toward fuller embodiment of the virtues.”¹⁰⁹⁷ In other words, it challenges us toward appreciating a neglected virtue or a forgotten way of being.

Community and Communal Identity

As mentioned earlier, virtue ethics has often been criticized as self-centered and virtues are simply subjective dispositions. However, many proponents of virtue ethics argue that there are important arguments for a communal aspect within virtue theory.

One group of arguments focuses on the roles of community in relation to virtues. First, as John Woodhill points out, other than mentors and guides, narratives and community facilitate the practice of virtue.¹⁰⁹⁸ Second, community plays an important role in the understanding of the virtues: It is the local community that determines our understanding of the virtues.¹⁰⁹⁹ In other words, the same virtue can be expressed differently in different places. As cited before, for example, hospitality in a Confucian society differs from hospitality in the United States of America. Third, Hauerwas, who builds upon MacIntyre’s emphasis on the need of a tradition, claims that the community, being a historical place that has a tradition, is the proper place that provides the context

¹⁰⁹⁶ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* 82.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Kotva, 28, 36-37.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Woodhill, 50.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” 91.

for the tri-polar structure of virtue ethics: It is in the community that the people can understand themselves and hear the *telos* revealed to the community, and articulate the virtues they need to develop.¹¹⁰⁰

Fourth, as said earlier, virtue ethics considers identity and there is interplay between virtues and anthropological vision of human identity. However, this identity is not just personal but also communal. It is because our human identity needs a story, a temporal framework that “synthesizes our diverse moments of experience into a coherent whole.”¹¹⁰¹ Personal identity “comes through a process of identification with [this] larger narrative framework—a story—and with a community that tries to live out this story.”¹¹⁰² In other words, our personal identity is shaped by certain narratives of community that define, set limits and configure personal identity through the ideals they present to us.¹¹⁰³ Thus, the individual finds her/his moral identity in and through her/his membership in a community.¹¹⁰⁴ Keenan warns us, however, that the community must be vigilant against becoming ‘closed’, for that will only lead to sectarianism.¹¹⁰⁵

The other group of arguments, on the other hand, lies on the nature of virtue itself. According to MacIntyre, virtue is a social quality and “always requires for its application the acceptance...of certain features of social and moral life.”¹¹⁰⁶ As a quality virtue is needed not only for the good that is internal to practices or for the good of a whole life

¹¹⁰⁰ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 122.

¹¹⁰¹ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 174; Spohn cites Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993) and others.

¹¹⁰² Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* 81-82.

¹¹⁰³ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 171.

¹¹⁰⁴ MacIntyre, 221.

¹¹⁰⁵ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 122-23.

¹¹⁰⁶ MacIntyre, 186. Actually, MacIntyre is known for advocating not just the revival of virtue theory but also the view that virtue is a social quality. See Pence, “Recent Work on Virtues;” Yearley, “Recent Work on Virtue.”

but also for “the pursuit of a good for human beings the conception of which is elaborated and possessed within an ongoing social tradition.”¹¹⁰⁷

Subsequently, some virtue ethicists would understand the human *telos* as flourishing of a social rather than solely individualistic nature.¹¹⁰⁸ This understanding somehow highlights that the nature of a human good is also corporate.¹¹⁰⁹ There are two major claims here. First, human good is not conceived singularly in individual terms:¹¹¹⁰ Moral education and improvement need the presence of others such as mentors and role models; we depend on each other for moral development; and the community provides important resource for moral growth of each of us. Second, the human *telos* and the journey toward this end are found in shared activities and relationships.¹¹¹¹ For Aristotle the good of a man is one and the same good as that of those others with whom one is bound in human community.¹¹¹² Therefore, a community is “a common project that brings about some good recognized as their shared good by all those engaging the project.”¹¹¹³ In other words, the central bond of a community is “the shared vision of and understanding of goods.”¹¹¹⁴

Moreover, the significance of certain virtues depends on social connections within a community:¹¹¹⁵ These social connections provide the ‘form and mode’ in which the human good is realized; that means, they give ‘point and purpose’ to these virtues.

¹¹⁰⁷ MacIntyre, 273.

¹¹⁰⁸ Yearly, “Recent Work on Virtue,” 2; Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 28.

¹¹⁰⁹ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 21.

¹¹¹⁰ Ibid., 21, 36-37, 108-109.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid., 21, 108.

¹¹¹² MacIntyre, 229.

¹¹¹³ Ibid., 151.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid., 258.

¹¹¹⁵ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 21, 108, 152.

Aristotle, thus, insists that virtues also find their place in the life of the *polis* (the city).¹¹¹⁶ And the virtue of friendship, for example, “arises within a relationship defined in terms of a common allegiance to and a common pursuit of goods.”¹¹¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of the virtue of justice is similarly social: General justice has the common good of the community as its object.¹¹¹⁸ Similarly, Pohl comments that the context of hospitality must be the community.¹¹¹⁹ Keenan likewise points out that the theological virtues and his own proposal of cardinal virtues (namely, justice, fidelity, and self-care) have enormous social ramifications—they perfect us in the different forms of social relationships that distinguish us.¹¹²⁰

Here we note that the relationship between virtue and community is not one-sided. Within the context of Christian community, for example, Hauerwas rightly points out that certain virtues are necessary should the faith community to sustain its existence.¹¹²¹ In particular, he highlights the virtues of patience, courage, hope and charity. He explains,

For without patience the church may be tempted to apocalyptic fantasy; without courage the church would fail to hold fast to the traditions from which it draws its life; without hope the church risks losing sight of its tasks; and without charity the church would not manifest the kind of life made possible by God. Each of these virtues, and there are others equally important, draws its meaning and form from the biblical narrative, is necessary if we are to continue to remember and to live faithful to that narrative.¹¹²²

¹¹¹⁶ MacIntyre, 150.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid., 156.

¹¹¹⁸ Jean Porter, “The Virtue of Justice,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 273.

¹¹¹⁹ Christine Pohl, “Hospitality from the Edge: The Significance of Marginality in the Practice of Welcome,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 15 (1995): 134.

¹¹²⁰ Keenan, “Virtues, Principles and a Consistent Ethics of Life,” 50-51.

¹¹²¹ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 68.

¹¹²² Ibid..

Keenan further recalls that since the time of Plato and Aristotle virtues “exist not primarily for private purpose, but to form and improve our communities.”¹¹²³ Insofar as our identity is not just personal but also communal and this communal aspect is a yield of virtues, our moral and character formation is equally communal. Thus, Kotva comments that we “seek not only to become virtuous individuals, but also to become a certain kind of community.”¹¹²⁴

By way of conclusion, Verhey’s advocacy of practices within the faith community illuminates us regarding the relationship of the community with Christian ethical life in general and virtue ethics in particular:

People facing choices and longing for wisdom and virtue are more likely to find help in such a community than in a book on Christian ethics. Precisely as a practical discipline Christian ethics depends upon such a community, relies upon its ‘goodness’ and ‘knowledge,’ and points to it to help people think and talk about their choices. The task of Christian ethics is to serve such communities and their moral discourse and discernment, not to attempt to be a substitute for them.¹¹²⁵

5.6 Virtue and Grace

As pointed out earlier, moral goodness conveys the agent as striving to realize right living; still, the degree of striving in one’s life depends not on oneself but the gifts one receives.¹¹²⁶ From a Christian point of view, it points to the gifts God gives each of

¹¹²³ Keenan, “Virtues, Principles and a Consistent Ethics of Life,” 50.

¹¹²⁴ Kotva, 34.

¹¹²⁵ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 6.

¹¹²⁶ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 122.

us. Within the Catholic tradition, the impact of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has been highlighted even if the Spirit was not directly mentioned.¹¹²⁷

Ronald Mercier thus argues that while theological ethicists rightly retrieved the Christological dimension of ethics in response to the emergence of modernity, a pneumatological dimension of ethics (that particularly deals with moral personhood) is needed in the current post-modern era.¹¹²⁸ He joins other theologians like Servais Pinckaers to claim that the Holy Spirit “remains always our fundamental resource for moral life.”¹¹²⁹ He also points out that although the focus upon the third person of the Trinity has developed slowly, the commonly employed language of grace is simply a short-hand for speaking of the Spirit.¹¹³⁰

In fact, Christian virtue ethicists would remind us that moral formation and transformation of character is effected by grace. We rely on God’s grace so as to make our effort and moral growth possible.¹¹³¹ Therefore, I turn to the notion of grace and other related ideas to see how they are relevant to virtues.

When proposing a Christian case for virtue ethics, Kotva begins his enterprise by exploring certain potential theological links between virtue theory and Christian convictions. First and foremost he turns to the notion of sanctification as Hauerwas

¹¹²⁷ Ronald A. Mercier, “The Holy Spirit and Ethics: A Personal Gift Making Persons,” in *Moral Theology: New Directions and Fundamental Issues*, ed. James Keating (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 44.

¹¹²⁸ Ibid., 45.

¹¹²⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹¹³⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹¹³¹ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 169.

did.¹¹³² He points out that many scholars would agree that sanctification is a teleological concept and a process that has ‘conformity with Christ’ as its goal, and requires transformation of one’s character and the development of certain virtues.¹¹³³

Subsequently, the notion of virtue is a concept tied to grace, for the whole process of sanctification, from its beginning to continuation, depends on, and is empowered by God’s grace (and yet does not negate one’s participation and responsibility for growth).¹¹³⁴ When grace “conspires with human development, so the believer becomes disposed, has a readiness, to see situations as calling for virtuous ways of acting.”¹¹³⁵

Burridge further points out that it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that produces the fruit of ‘conformity with Christ’ in our lives.¹¹³⁶ In other words, virtue as grace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Last but not least, Mattison argues that the notion of grace helps us understand the meaning, role, and importance of ‘infused cardinal virtues’ introduced by Thomas Aquinas:¹¹³⁷ Infused cardinal virtues have the goal of ‘supernatural destiny’. Therefore, one needs God’s assistance—grace—for achieving the overall goal (I.II. 63.3&4). And it is the presence of grace as source that distinguishes infused cardinal virtue from its counterpart, acquired cardinal virtue.

¹¹³² For Hauerwas it is impossible to pursue a virtuous life if without sanctification—which he defines as “the effect of the conformation of the self to God’s act” in Christ. See Farley, 27; Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 191.

¹¹³³ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 72.

¹¹³⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹¹³⁵ Spohn, “Scripture,” 102.

¹¹³⁶ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 391.

¹¹³⁷ Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology*, 327-30.

In fact, in his *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas has already offered a systematic view of how the Holy Spirit, virtues, and grace are related. He begins with a discussion of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (e.g., understanding, fear, counsel, and piety) in light of habit and in relation to virtue (I.II. 68-70). Certain characteristics of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are identified.

First, as ‘gifts’ it means that they are ‘unreturnable giving’ and are infused by God (I.II. 68.1 ad3). Second, they are “perfections of man, whereby he is disposed so as to be amenable to the promptings of God” (I.II. 68.2). Therefore, they are related to virtues and are virtues in this particular sense. Third, they are not simply perfections but “habitual dispositions of the soul, rendering it amenable to the motion of the Holy Ghost” (I.II. 68.3, II.II. 121.1). And they dispose not certain powers (such as appetitive power) but all the powers of the soul to the Divine (I.II. 68.8). Fourth, therefore, they are more perfect than the intellectual and moral virtues (that perfect reason itself, or other powers in relation to reason) and yet regulated and preceded by theological virtues (I.II. 68.8). In other words, they seem to link natural virtues with theological virtues and elevate them. Later in *Secunda Secundae*, when discussing each of the (theological and cardinal) virtues, Aquinas further points out that each has its own corresponding gifts. For instance, the virtue of faith contains the corresponding gifts of knowledge and understanding (II.II. 8, 9).

What is equally noteworthy is that Aquinas brings the Beatitudes into his discussion and points out that the beatitudes are perfect and excellent deeds and are assigned to the gifts rather than to the virtues (I.II. 70.2). Still, they differ from gifts (and

virtues) as act from habit (I.II. 69.1). The twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit (such as joy, peace, patience, and endurance), on the contrary, are virtuous acts in which one delights (I.II. 70.1, 2). Although they are acts as the beatitudes are, they are inferior to the beatitudes which are perfect acts.

Aquinas then examines the notion of grace (I.II. 109-114) and points out that grace is a gift bestowed on humankind by God to not just heal our corrupted nature but also perfect our nature so that we can carry out those meritorious works of supernatural virtue and to participate in the Divine good (I.II. 109.4, 110.1). Therefore, grace is supernatural, infused by God, and has a teleological dimension. Moreover, grace is gratuitous and produces certain effects: It elevates, justifies, sanctifies, and allows us to be moved by God to act virtuously. It is therefore prior to virtues (I.II. 110.4). However, grace differs from infused virtues in that the former is the participation of the Divine nature while the latter are derived from and are ordained to this light of grace (I.II. 110.3).

In the very last part of *Secunda Secundae* (II.II. 171-178) Aquinas further discusses grace as particular gifts (like the gift of tongues) of the Holy Spirit as pertain to certain people: Graces are given to certain people for the sake of the community and manifested within the communal context. For instance, the grace of prophecy is profitable to the faith community as through which the Church is edified and the unbelievers are convinced (II.II. 176.2).

In sum, we note that for Aquinas, virtue and grace are closely related and both are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Still, we are also reminded that our dependence on God's grace and the priority of God's grace in our transformation does not mean a passive dependence;

rather, God's grace calls for our responsibility and active participation with God in the process of transformation.¹¹³⁸

5.7 Conclusion

I have proposed the use of virtue ethics as a hermeneutical tool. In so doing, I have presented the case by exploring four related areas in this fifth chapter.

First, the historical development of virtue theory highlights that virtue ethics has been one of the oldest approaches: Since the time of ancient Greece, the notion of virtue has already been suggested and employed in the society. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle tried to seek a more adequate conception of virtue and to formulate an ethics of virtue, especially by developing the doctrine of the mean. Later during the patristic period, both Western and Eastern Church Fathers like Augustine and Athanasius offered their understandings of virtues and highlighted God as the ultimate *telos* for humanity. Thomas Aquinas then combined the insights of Aristotle and Augustine to formulate his own view of virtue. In particular, he presented to us a systematic classification of virtues from which theological, cardinal, infused, and acquired virtues are defined. Unfortunately, for various reasons—including the pursuit of objective truth and theological reasons—virtue theories were slowly replaced by principle and rule-oriented ethics in the centuries to come. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the retrieval of virtue ethics began to emerge from both the philosophical, theological, and public sectors.

¹¹³⁸Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 74-76.

Second, the revival of virtue ethics recalls the advantages of virtue ethics over other ethical theories that have dominated the field in the past few centuries. Although virtue ethics may not be an alternative to those dissatisfactory moral theories, it has the advantages of being comprehensive, focusing on the *telos*, providing a vision for moral life, and considering what is more stable and consistent. Within the discipline of philosophy, we note that MacIntyre's work has been most influential in the retrieval of virtue ethics. He has constructed a three-stage framework for the concept of virtue—practice, narrative unity, and tradition—and a tri-polar structure of the theory of virtue that leads to the foundational questions of 'Who am I?' 'What ought I become?' and 'What ought I to do?'

Theologians, likewise, engage themselves in the discussion of virtue theory and various schools of virtue theory emerged based on different traditions and emphases. Among the Protestant ethicists, Hauerwas is known for focusing on the notion of character and the role of community in moral formation. The Catholic counterparts are represented by Spohn, Porter and Keenan. Keenan, in particular, is noted for engaging virtue ethics with other areas of morality such as bio-medical ethics, and proposing a contemporary list of cardinal virtues for ordinary life. And with Spohn he also tries to bridge moral theology and other theological disciplines through virtue ethics.

However, reviewing the revival of virtue ethics also discloses this moral theory's limitations and criticisms—like being egoistic, perfectionism, impractical, and downplaying God's role—from its various opponents. Despite these drawbacks,

dialogues with opponents allow virtue ethicists to further reflect on what virtue ethics means in contemporary world.

Third, by reflecting on the contemporary understanding of virtue ethics I am able to locate those key features of virtue and the theory itself. In the first place, virtue theory is a teleological ethics that seeks to achieve certain human goods/ends. Second, it has a specific structure that concerns one's self-understanding, goals, and how one moves from the former state to the latter. It is thus a dynamic and historically dependent framework. Third, subsequently, virtue, being an acquired human quality with particular dispositions, is not simply a means but a constitutive element and essential component of the human good. It includes those character traits that influence how we act and choose. Therefore, virtue ethics as such pays attention to character and gives priority of being over doing. Fourth, it encompasses one's entire life and engages what is ordinary.

As a result, certain yields of virtue that can be helpful in the task of hermeneutics are extracted. First, the notion of virtue considers practices and habits which develop the characters of the moral agent and in turn express them. Second, it attends to the moral agent's character formation, which subsequently considers one's identity. Third, it recognizes the necessity and role of exemplary models in the community. Fourth, there is a communal aspect in our virtuous life. On the one hand, the community plays an important role in understanding and acquiring virtue; on the other hand, virtue has a social quality and is needed for the good and formation of the community.

Fourth and finally, within the context of Christianity, we note that traditionally, the concept of virtue has had a place in theology: It is relevant to the language of grace by

which moral formation and transformation of character is effected. Like grace, virtue can be understood as a gift bestowed on humankind by God for our perfection. Both virtue and grace are teleological in nature and for the good of the community. This perception of virtue contributes to making a Christian case for virtue ethics.

In short, even though it is not a necessary alternative to principle-based ethics and has its own limitations, the role of virtue ethics is at least one of complementarity and inclusiveness and not competition. It provides needed correctives to what had been an excessive act-oriented, principle-oriented, and a decontextualization of ethics via Kant-type duty-oriented ethics. I do agree with Kotva that virtue ethics is a promising way of understanding and guiding the moral life.¹¹³⁹ And it is encouraging to note that some ethicists have proposed a Christian adoption of virtue theory.¹¹⁴⁰ One specific area of adoption that concerns Christian ethicists is the relationship between Scripture and virtue ethics. In the next chapter, therefore, I survey how two contemporary Christian virtue ethicists construct such adoption by reading the Scriptures through the lens of virtue.

¹¹³⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹¹⁴⁰ Ibid.; Pellegrino and Thomasma, 29-41.

Chapter Six: Reading Scripture through the Lens of Virtue

In the previous chapter, I have presented an account of the hermeneutics of virtue ethics in its historical and philosophical dimensions. We note that our contemporary understanding of virtue ethics is grounded in its development throughout history promoted by both philosophers and theologians. This contemporary understanding of virtue theory has the following characteristics: It is a teleological ethics that is concerned about human good. It is interested in moral character and thus gives priority of being over doing. It also bears a kind of perfectionism that sees all aspects of life as morally relevant and urges one to moral growth. Subsequently, these characteristics pose three basic questions for the moral agent: ‘Who am I?’ ‘Who ought I to become?’ and ‘How do I get there?’ Four important yields of virtue—practices and habits, character and dispositions, exemplar, and communal identity—that help bring virtue into connection with some of the other reference points of ethics are then identified.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the relationship between virtue and grace that had been brought up by theologians of the past. This discussion, though brief, highlights the need to translate the philosophical language to a theological one, should this moral philosophy be employed as a hermeneutical tool for interpreting Scripture. In other words, we need to seek certain theological links at the outset.

Therefore, prior to relating Scripture with virtue ethics and exploring how two Christian ethicists read Scripture through the lens of virtue, and instead of assuming that

a philosophical language fits naturally into a theological enterprise, I briefly outline how the philosophical and theological settings can be bridged.

Kotva suggests three fundamental points of references for bridging the moral philosophy of ethics and theology.¹¹⁴¹ The first point of reference is the notion of Christian anthropology. It is noted that there are similarities between Christian anthropology and virtue theory's understanding of human agency and communal nature. Regarding human agency, both Christian accounts of human freedom and virtue ethics hold the view that "we are neither totally determined nor totally free."¹¹⁴² A virtue framework, as seen earlier, understands that 'being' informs 'doing' and 'doing' shapes 'being'. In other words, our choices and actions shape our character and play an important role in our character formation. Virtue theory therefore rejects both determinism and voluntarism. A Christian anthropological perspective, in a similar way, understands that human freedom is capable of choosing and intending the kind of person one becomes. Still, Christian anthropology would further understand that our freedom is limited as a result of our finiteness and 'sin', and hence grace is needed for our liberation.

On the other hand, Christian anthropology would affirm the importance of relationships and fellowships with (and service to) God and others. Our Christian journey and goal always involves shared activity and close relationships. This affirmation is in tune with virtue ethics's own interest and emphasis on community and communal identity.

¹¹⁴¹ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 69-93. In the following paragraphs, I basically adopt Kotva's findings. However, his order of discussion seems to begin from the theological perspective. In order to make his presentation flow more naturally in my current discussion, I rearrange his order as follows: Christian anthropology, sanctification, and Christology.

¹¹⁴² Ibid., 90.

With regards to the second point of reference, that is, the notion of sanctification, I have actually, though in a very brief manner, brought it up in the earlier discussion of the relationship between virtue and grace. Kotva basically points out that sanctification, like virtue itself, is a teleological process that involves “[the] transformation of the self and one’s character toward a partially determinate picture of the human good or end.”¹¹⁴³ In the theological enterprise, the Christian *telos* is one’s conformity with Christ. Its beginning, continuation, and completion radically depend on God’s grace. Therefore, the concept of virtue within a theological setting is tied to the notion of grace. In addition, the *telos* as an ideal and perfection is, in both settings, a goal beyond this world: Although we strive for a fuller realization of the human good, its completion is beyond this life.

The third point of reference, Christology, basically considers the Christian idea of Christ as the *telos*. It highlights that Jesus is the paradigmatic human person who embodies the true human *telos*. It is because Jesus’ humanity realizes our full human potential. Therefore, the historical Jesus offers us the content of our human *telos* and hence one is able to know something of one’s true end by turning to the person of Jesus. Subsequently, it implies that Jesus is the norm of humanity and thus is relevant to our construction of ethics. Moreover, a virtue framework affirms Jesus as normative humanity and challenges those who reduce this norm to principles and rules. On the other hand, Jesus’ call to discipleship finds similarities with the yield of virtue, especially the need and role of exemplary figures.

¹¹⁴³ Ibid., 69, 72.

Finally, although there are certain areas of the virtue framework (such as the notions of grace and hope) need to be altered or reformulated were it to be properly Christian or theological, these points of reference help bridge the linguistic and epistemological gap between virtue theory and theology. It provides a foundation for a theological virtue ethics that inevitably involves Scripture. Grounded in this understanding I turn to the issue of relating Scripture with virtue ethics.

6.1 Relating Scripture and Virtue Ethics

The concept of virtue can be found in Scripture, especially in those Hebrew wisdom literatures such as *Proverbs* and the book of *Sirach*.¹¹⁴⁴ For example, many see the following biblical text as a teaching on the virtue of justice: “If you pursue justice, you will attain it and wear it like a glorious robe. Birds roost with their own kind, so honesty comes home to those who practice it” (Sirach 27:8-9). Some further point out that the early church Father Athanasius had already announced that “the entire Holy Scripture is a teacher of virtues.”¹¹⁴⁵ Keenan thus claims that the moral agenda found in Scripture is written in terms of virtue.¹¹⁴⁶

Some scholars like Old Testament scholar John Barton think otherwise. They are reluctant to claim that Scripture supports virtue ethics (or vice versa). For instance, John

¹¹⁴⁴ Birch and Rasmussen, 42.

¹¹⁴⁵ Joseph Woodhill, *The Fellowship of Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 17. Woodhill quotes Athanasius, *The Life of Anthony* and *The Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg, *The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist, 1980), 112.

¹¹⁴⁶ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics: Making a Case as It Comes of Age,” 121. Keenan states that this virtue agenda has two forms in the New Testament: On the one hand, Jesus encourages those who fail to attain certain virtues (like Peter and the tax collector) to strive to overcome vices and acquire virtues; on the other hand, he attacks those rightly ordered Pharisees and Sadducees for their lack of goodness.

Crossin notes that the term virtue is not prominent in the Old and New Testaments.¹¹⁴⁷

Although the Old Testament is aware of human virtues, it does not have any specific term to express the general idea of virtue. Even in the New Testament, the term appears only a few times despite those instances occur in the lists of varied vices and virtues (e.g., Galatians 5:22-23). Barton, though focusing on the Old Testament, further argues that virtue theory is “not what the Bible is primarily about.”¹¹⁴⁸ In particular, he turns to the notion of ‘formation’—a key yield of virtue—to ground his argument: He argues that the term is a post-biblical concept and that there are good reasons to dismiss the presence of explicit idea of moral character formation in Scripture.¹¹⁴⁹ He claims that the Old Testament’s emphasis “lies on the divine lawgiver rather than on human moral character.”¹¹⁵⁰ The Old Testament’s ethical approach is thus at best described as deontological or consequential.

Most scholars who entertain the question of Scripture and ethics are, however, inclined to virtue. Calvinist biblical scholar Benjamin Farley insists that the entire Bible contains and commends virtues and character-building motifs.¹¹⁵¹ He even attempts to

¹¹⁴⁷ John W. Crossin, *What are They Saying about Virtue?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 9-10.

¹¹⁴⁸ Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 68.

¹¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*. He first notes that, for instance, the wisdom literature occupies itself with dividing people into two categories of moral characters, both being fixed, unchanging, and predestined. Second, moral decision making is not really on the agenda and ethical choice is at most a once-for-all affair. Third, although its overall purpose is the training of moral character, the idea of gradual learning and imitation of the wise is only implicit. Fourth, Hebrew culture “does not operate with any idea that one can grow in virtue but sees virtue as something one either has or lacks.” Fifth, the entire Bible talks about conversion and its effect rather than moral progress (even in the case of Pauline writings). Sixth, certain texts like Psalm 119, while can be used in moral formation, “do not themselves speak of the good for humankind as what flows from the right conduct of good people but rather as the explicitly expressed will of God.” See Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 66-69.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹⁵¹ However, Farley also suggests that theologians’ interest in virtue “is more a phenomenon of Christianity’s respect for the rational traditions of Western philosophy, than it is a movement indigenous to the soil of either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament.” See Farley, 3. From a Calvinist perspective, he

offer a comprehensive exploration of virtues, claiming that “no one has identified the full range of biblical virtues that support such an interest [in virtue ethics].”¹¹⁵² In so doing,

Farley first offers his understanding of virtue in Scripture:

[It] involves a positive response to God, and to what God has set in motion...It is an activity of the whole being in conformity with its highest end, which is to glorify God...[It] include[s] all those positive responses, attitudes, and moral habits that flow from a life that is open to the redemptive presence of God.¹¹⁵³

He is convinced that Scripture encourages believers to venture a biblical ethics of virtue. Based on this conviction he explores those virtues and character-building motifs that Scripture commends. In the Hebrew Bible, he notes that no definitive list of virtues is provided. Still, he identifies diverse, particular virtues among certain Hebrew figures of different historical periods:¹¹⁵⁴ For instance, Jacob’s determination and resoluteness (Genesis 32:26-28), Gideon’s virtue of sobriety (Judges 8:23), and Zechariah’s recommitment (Zechariah 1:3). Regarding the wisdom literatures that are characterized with the provision of numerous virtues, Farley particularly highlights those virtues that flow from cherishing the wisdom of the Torah, especially “industry, diligence, honesty, integrity, moral probity, faithfulness... civility, kindness, gentleness, honor, and above all loyalty to spouse and family.”¹¹⁵⁵

further highlights the primacy of God, and God’s grace in the provision of the fundamental metaphysics of any biblical virtue ethics.

¹¹⁵² Farley, 1.

¹¹⁵³ Ibid., 9-10.

¹¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 39-49, 64-87.

¹¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 88.

In the case of the New Testament, he notes that the opposite is true—there are extensive lists of virtues and character-molding motifs in the texts.¹¹⁵⁶ The Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, extols eight corresponding virtues that include meekness, mercy, and courage. The parables of the Synoptic gospels also point to a variety of virtues, like vigilance, accountability, and social consciousness (e.g., Mark 13:32-37). John’s gospel, on the other hand, highlights the virtues of constancy, perseverance, and endurance (e.g., 15:4-5). For Paul, all virtues are set within the context of salvation by grace through faith which frees us for a life indwelt by the Holy Spirit:¹¹⁵⁷ Apart from the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, Paul also calls for various virtues based on different communal contexts, such as self-control for the Galatians (5:22), renewal and humility for the Romans (12:2-3), reconciliation for the Corinthians (5:18-20), and mutual subordination/love for the Ephesians (5:21-32).

In sum, Farley has done us a favor by succinctly presenting to us an overview of the virtues found in the entire Scripture. However, Birch and Rasmussen point out that Scripture does not only reveal to us moral virtue, value, and vision, it actually promotes them. In particular, Scripture “helps form and name virtues...and creates and renews moral vision.”¹¹⁵⁸ This conclusion suggests that Scripture can be relevant to the yields of virtue.

¹¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 95, 103-117.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 129-46.

¹¹⁵⁸ Birch and Rasmussen, 64.

Scripture and Moral Character

How, then, is Scripture relevant to moral character and its formation in concrete terms? Crossin answers that both the Old and New Testaments' concrete list and discussion of virtues provides "a touchstone and a point of reference for theological discussions of virtues and Christian character."¹¹⁵⁹ It is because, as Cahill explains, Scripture orients the believers (on both individual and communal levels) around certain values, principles, and virtues—such as repentance, forgiveness, and compassion—that reflect God's self-revelation in Christ.¹¹⁶⁰

Moreover, Scripture is the witness of the early church (and of Israel) to their struggles to be God's faithful people (and community) and to their responses to God's revelation in concrete life experience. When individuals and the faith community reflect on these life experiences recorded in Scripture, their basic character is shaped.¹¹⁶¹ In simple terms, Scripture shapes the reader's character as well as the character of the reader's community. For example, those biblical stories that narrate Jesus' associations with the outcasts and sinners shape the followers of Christ and their faith community into an inclusive, renewing community.¹¹⁶²

Still, Scripture and its corresponding virtues do not only shape our character but also our character as distinctively Christian.¹¹⁶³ In fact, Scripture defines first the Christian virtues and thereby shapes one's character. The Judeo-Christian story provides

¹¹⁵⁹ Crossin, 10.

¹¹⁶⁰ Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values," in Brown, *Character and Scripture*, 10.

¹¹⁶¹ Birch and Rasmussen, 181.

¹¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 182.

¹¹⁶³ Farley, 160.

what is needed (such as metaphors and concepts) for the shaping of Judeo-Christian character. Some thus claim that “the use of the Bible in character-formation will be more important than its function in explicitly ethical discourse.”¹¹⁶⁴

In fact, Scripture also acts as a shaper of Christian identity in that it is the “prime source of the self-conscious identity of the community of faith, and...of those individuals who choose to identify themselves with the church and its faith tradition.”¹¹⁶⁵ Thus, Birch and Rasmussen rightly point out that “it is in relation to the Bible that moral agency becomes distinctively Christian.”¹¹⁶⁶

Scripture and Exemplar

During the exploration of the yields of virtue, I cited three Old Testament figures, namely, Judith, Ruth, and Naomi, as examples of role models for the virtues of courage, loyalty, and love of family respectively. Indeed, Scripture contains many ‘characters’ that play the role of modeling us to certain moral characters. Barton, though he hesitates to claim that Scripture has any explicit idea of virtue ethics, similarly acknowledges that biblical stories (and their characters) have exemplary moral value in presenting humankind in all their singularity.¹¹⁶⁷ The story of David, for instance, presents to us not just a flawed life but also an examined life that “manifests a concern for how one ought

¹¹⁶⁴ Cahill, “The New Testament and Ethics: Communities of Social Change,” 386. Cahill cites Bruce C. Birch, and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life* 1st ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1976)

¹¹⁶⁵ Birch and Rasmussen, 181.

¹¹⁶⁶ Ibid..

¹¹⁶⁷ Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 72-73.

to live even when this runs clearly counter to the character's own moral insight."¹¹⁶⁸ As a result, Scripture contributes to moral formation by telling the stories of those exemplary figures and of the community.

Sometimes the role of the biblical figures as exemplar for virtues is rather straightforward. For instance, in James 5:11 the author explicitly calls us to imitate Job in his virtue of patience and endurance in hard times.¹¹⁶⁹ Other times it is not. German New Testament scholar Jens Herzer defends that "the *lack* of explicit quotations does not necessarily mean that a certain Scripture passage or a religious idea is *not* relevant."¹¹⁷⁰ In other words, the biblical figures can play the exemplary role in an implicit manner. One particular example is virtue of hospitality exemplified in the Bible.

In the Hebrew Bible one can find detailed accounts of welcome (such as the welcoming of the three heavenly visitors by Abraham in Genesis 18 and of Elisha by a wealthy Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4) and inhospitality (such as the stories of the men of Sodom in Genesis 19 and of Gibeah in Judges 19) from certain key figures.¹¹⁷¹ In the New Testament, similarly we note that both the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and the person of Jesus are vivid models for practicing hospitality. However, I argue elsewhere that Old Testament figure Boaz—the husband of Ruth—in the book of *Ruth* is also an exemplary figure in cultivating the virtue of hospitality: Through his unusual and exemplary words and deeds of hospitality both the land and Ruth the Moabite are

¹¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹¹⁶⁹ Jens Herzer, "Paul, Job, and the New Quest for Justice," in Brawley, *Character Ethics and the New Testament*, 77.

¹¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁷¹ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MC: Eerdmans, 1999), 26.

redeemed.¹¹⁷² I conclude that the writer of *Ruth* is not simply describing a fictional, hospitable character; in creating such a character during the restoration period the postexilic writer seems to have a deeper motivation: The person of Boaz is a model of the virtue of hospitality not just for individual Israelites but also for a reformed postexilic Israelite community whose *telos* is being a hospitable community. Moreover, hospitality is being raised as an explicitly Israelite virtue and as an important one in the midst of a few.

In short, Scripture is a rich source for providing exemplary models—either explicitly or implicitly—for the cultivation of virtues and our moral formation as individuals and a faith community.

Scripture and Community

Since character is “a process of communal formation of individual identity,”¹¹⁷³ Scripture thus is not just relevant to individual character formation but also to another yield of virtue—community and communal identity. In fact, many would agree that “Scripture forms community as much as community informs the reading of Scripture.”¹¹⁷⁴

Old Testament scholar Patrick Miller, however, points out that the biblical texts “do not speak about a *general* understanding of community but of the formation of a *particular* community whose identity as a people is evoked by their inextricable

¹¹⁷² See Chan Yiu-sing Luke, “A Model of Hospitality for Our Times,” *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2006): 1-30.

¹¹⁷³ Cahill, “Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values,” 10.

¹¹⁷⁴ William P. Brown, ed. *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), xi.

relationship to the Lord.”¹¹⁷⁵ Cahill adds that these particular communities formed by Scripture are also diverse and historical over time.¹¹⁷⁶

Still, Scripture does not simply form particular, historical, and diverse communities but, more importantly, moral communities, for moral character are “inherent, constitutive of its being a community.”¹¹⁷⁷ Rasmussen thus comments that Scripture plays the role of generating and sustaining not just the community but its spiritual-moral formation as well.¹¹⁷⁸

For example, as I have just pointed out, the writer of *Ruth*, in creating the character Boaz during the restoration period, aims at reforming and rebuilding the Israelite community into a hospitable community. Biblical scholars agree that the main characters of this postexilic period were “dedicated to the task of reforming Israel...that she might become...nothing less than the covenant people of God.”¹¹⁷⁹ As a result, the narratives found in the books of the postexilic period are not meant merely to describe but to change the society to which the returnees belong.¹¹⁸⁰ The gospels, as Hauerwas notes, likewise “are not just the depiction of a man, but...are manuals for the training necessary to be part of the new community.”¹¹⁸¹

In sum, Scripture as narrative does not only describe the character (of God) but also “render[s] a community capable of ordering its existence [in a way] appropriate to

¹¹⁷⁵ Patrick D. Miller, “The Good Neighborhood,” in Brown, *Character and Scripture*, 58.

¹¹⁷⁶ Cahill, “Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values,” 8.

¹¹⁷⁷ Miller, “The Good Neighborhood,” 59.

¹¹⁷⁸ Larry L. Rasmussen, “Sighting of Primal Visions: Community and Ecology,” In Brown, *Character and Scripture*, 389.

¹¹⁷⁹ Raymond Foster, *The Restoration of Israel* (London: DLT, 1970), x.

¹¹⁸⁰ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* 55.

¹¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

such stories.”¹¹⁸² In other words, the narratives portray the kind of moral community to be formed and are addressed to the community.¹¹⁸³ They call for moral re-formation on the communal level. And this community becomes formative.

Last but not least, Cahill notes that by forming communities that are consistent with God’s revelation, Scripture gains its authority in morality.¹¹⁸⁴ The more faithful we are to the Bible, the more we recognize its authority.

In conclusion, this brief account reaffirms that Scripture supports the notion of virtue and offers a general view on how Scripture is related to virtue theory. Scripture exposes us to and advocates for certain virtues, forms virtues, shapes moral character and identity, provides exemplary models, and reforms the faith community. Based on this affirmation, I now proceed to see how two Christian virtue ethicists read Scripture through the lens of virtue. In order to recognize the diversity of traditions within Christianity, I look at the works of a Protestant and a Catholic ethicist. The ethicist representing the Protestant traditions is Joseph Kotva and the one representing the Catholic tradition is William Spohn. They are chosen because both of them are pioneers in and well known for advocating a Christian virtue ethics within their own traditions. Hence, I am convinced that they may offer better insights on reading Scripture through the lens of virtue. Furthermore, I begin with Kotva for he lays the ground for making such a reading possible and desirable. I then turn to Spohn who further demonstrates a

¹¹⁸² Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁸³ Mary Mills, *Biblical Morality, Moral Perspectives in Old Testament Narratives* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 2.

¹¹⁸⁴ Cahill, “Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values,” 9.

unique, practical way of reading Scripture through the lens of virtue that engages the reader and the biblical texts on the level of ethical practice.

6.2 Joseph Kotva, Jr.

Joseph Kotva is an Anabaptist Mennonite from the United States. Currently he is a faculty member of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Indiana and the executive director for Anabaptist Center for Health Care Ethics.¹¹⁸⁵ He anchors himself to the neo-Aristotelian (and Thomistic) tradition of virtue and proposes a Christian version of the theoretical ethics of virtue.¹¹⁸⁶ He has since then become known as a proponent of virtue ethics.¹¹⁸⁷

In order to understand how Kotva relates Scripture to virtue ethics, I turn to his *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*.¹¹⁸⁸ The motivation behind this work, as Kotva himself admits, is that “nobody has taken the time to argue why Christians *as* Christians

¹¹⁸⁵ See Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, “Kotva, Joseph,” <https://www.ambs.edu:442/about/staff-and-faculty/joe-kotva> (accessed on December 14, 2009).

¹¹⁸⁶ C. Norman Kraus, review of *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, by Joseph Kotva, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72, no. 1 (January 1998): 108.

¹¹⁸⁷ Being a virtue ethicist who advocates for a Christian adoption of virtue ethics, Kotva naturally applies virtue theory to other areas of Christian-related ethical enquiry, especially but not exclusively pastoral matters. For instance, in order to make clergy ethics more pastorally relevant he proposes a virtue reframing of clergy ethics—by highlighting those virtue-oriented themes such as humility and patience—that focuses on moral growth and day-to-day aspects of ministry rather than dilemmas. In his reflection of being hospitable to the mentally handicapped on the communal level, he likewise employs the language of *telos* to remind the readers: Christian *telos*, “that is, the kind of community we believe ourselves called to be by God—involves learning to love and regard the other as a gift, especially those we did not choose to love.” When commenting on Joseph Jensen’s *Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets*, he too would pay special attention to Jensen’s view on virtue and adopt a virtue ethics framework to evaluate his work. See Joseph J. Kotva, “The Formation of Pastors, Parishioners, and Problems: A Virtue Reframing of Clergy Ethics,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 17 (1997): 271-72; “Welcoming the Mentally Handicapped,” *Restoration Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1992): 231; review of *Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets*, by Joseph Jensen, *Theological Studies* 68, no. 4 (2007): 956.

¹¹⁸⁸ I basically follow the flow of discussion presented in his book.

ought to become virtue ethicists.”¹¹⁸⁹ This work, as a whole, is seen by some as the best attempt to construct a Christian version of virtue theory.¹¹⁹⁰ And many believe that Kotva basically has made his case successfully.¹¹⁹¹

His main thesis is that the teleological approach to ethical enquiry offers a very adequate framework for Christian ethics: It is “compatible with, readily amended to, and useful in expressing Christian convictions and modes of moral reasoning.”¹¹⁹² Other ethical theories like consequentialism are “inadequate for the rich moral vision suggested by theology and Scripture.”¹¹⁹³ Interestingly, one Mennonite scholar notes that this thesis “contrasts the predominant Mennonite deontological approach, which has emphasized the authoritative rules handed down by God.”¹¹⁹⁴

After justifying the need for a specifically Christian case for virtue theory, he then moves onto the theological and biblical arguments that form the major part of his work. He tries to show that both the Christian doctrines and biblical texts have important “points of similarity, contact and correlation” with virtue theory.¹¹⁹⁵ It is important to note here that for Kotva correlation does not mean merging theological elements into theoretical virtue theory but that the philosophical and theological insights correct each

¹¹⁸⁹ Kent Reames, review of *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, by Joseph Kotva, *Journal of Religion* 80, no. 2 (April 2000): 353.

¹¹⁹⁰ William Edgar, review of *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, by Joseph Kotva. *Westminster Theological Journal* 60, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 342.

¹¹⁹¹ Kraus, 108.

¹¹⁹² Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 1.

¹¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁹⁴ Kraus, 108.

¹¹⁹⁵ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 69, 103.

other, bear in mind that there is common ground between the two.¹¹⁹⁶ Thus, he rightly reminds us that we should not simply presume a fit between Christian convictions and virtue theory.

What is particularly important to our own enquiry here is his dealing with the biblical materials throughout this argument. He shows us in concrete terms how Scripture and virtue ethics can be compatible and connected. Kotva first looks at the notion of human *telos*. He argues that, on the one hand, “the *telos* governs the main concerns of biblical theology;”¹¹⁹⁷ on the other hand, there are biblical convictions about the human good.¹¹⁹⁸ For instance, Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 14:12-14 can be helpful to grasp a particular aspect of the vision of human good, namely, ‘welcoming’ the least among us.

He then focuses on correlating concretely and specifically the ethics of Matthew and Paul with virtue theory. Kotva cites two reasons for this choice:¹¹⁹⁹ First, they are representatives of the two main genres (namely, gospels and epistles) in the New Testament. Second, they both seem to be incompatible with virtue ethics at the first glance. He believes that a successful case with these two texts will make the overall case more convincing. As a whole, he argues that “their concerns, themes, patterns of moral reasoning, and uses of language fit well with the basic virtue framework.”¹²⁰⁰

With regards to the Gospel of Matthew, Kotva notes that the gospel is usually read as “supporting either a law-based ethics (5:17-18) or an ethic based on the principle

¹¹⁹⁶ Reames, 353. One example brought up by Kotva is the view on transformation. Christians understand it as result of God’s power and aimed for the next life; virtue ethics, in contrast, sees life as transformative of our very selves. See Reames, 353.

¹¹⁹⁷ Edgar, 343.

¹¹⁹⁸ Kotva, “Welcoming the Mentally Handicapped,” 231.

¹¹⁹⁹ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 103.

¹²⁰⁰ Ibid..

of love (22:36-40).”¹²⁰¹ Still, he systematically shows us that reading the gospel through the lens of virtue is not just possible but also compatible.¹²⁰²

First, Matthew is concerned with not just external actions but also the internal qualities of human actions (like feelings and dispositions) as virtue theory is. Kotva is especially interested in highlighting this connection. One significant example is the Sermon on the Mount—in particular, the Beatitudes (5:3-10) and the antitheses (5:21-48). These blessings do not only depict the kind of action but also the kind of people that will be received into God’s kingdom. That means, the beatitudes are concerned with not only what they do but also who they are. They also “commend a posture reflecting certain attitudes and feelings [such as mercy and integrity].”¹²⁰³ Similarly, some of the antitheses focus on internal feelings (such as anger and lust) rather than acts. Kotva then turns to two non-virtue ethicists to support his argument: He notes that they both reject the language of law and favor terms like character and attitudes when examining the ethics of Jesus.¹²⁰⁴

Moreover, by referring to the parables of good and evil fruits (e.g., 3:8, 10; 7:16-20; 12:33) as well as Jesus’ compassionate acts (e.g., 14:14; 15:32), he notes that Matthew “presumes a connection between the internal and the external...[and] one’s conduct (the external) flows from and reflects one’s inner character (the internal).”¹²⁰⁵ He then claims that both the connection and priority of the internal over the external are

¹²⁰¹ Ibid..

¹²⁰² The following is a summary of his discussion on Matthew. See Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 104-19.

¹²⁰³ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁰⁴ Ibid., 132n14. Kotva cites George Ladd, *A Theology of New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 129. Kotva also cites Ogletree, 111.

¹²⁰⁵ Ibid., 105.

found in virtue theory's near circular relationship between being and doing, and between character states and action.

Second, Matthew manifests a particular kind of perfectionist thrust: Both the rigorous teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' teaching on discipleship (e.g., 5:48; 10:35-39; 28:20) summon us to have righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees and seek perfection. However, Kotva insists that Matthew is not thinking of the kind of unrealistically idealistic perfection. Rather, Matthew's perfectionism/ideal is to be understood as the norm and guide for discipleship. Moreover, the gospel writer is aware of the difficulties in achieving the ideal and therefore never idealizes the disciples—they are portrayed as men of little faith instead (8:26). It is thus in this sense that the ethics of Matthew is a perfectionist ethic as virtue ethics is. However, although Matthew is not expecting a full realization of such ideal here and now, it does not mean that one needs not to strive for the ideal.¹²⁰⁶

Third, Matthew's portrayal of master-disciple, instructive relationship between Jesus and his disciples (e.g., 10:24-25) is comparable to the kind of exemplary model suggested by virtue ethics.¹²⁰⁷ Both of them imply "a relationship that shapes not only through explicit teaching but also through the associations and activities of daily life."¹²⁰⁸ The only difference, as Kotva notes, is that the relationship between Jesus and his disciples is deeper and more demanding than the relationship between the exemplar and the imitator within the virtue framework.

¹²⁰⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹²⁰⁷ An explicit example that Kotva does not mention and yet highlights the call to learn and imitate from the role model is Jesus' call to learn from him in 11:29.

¹²⁰⁸ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 108.

Fourth, the kind of communal/corporate nature found in virtue theory is also present in the ethics of Matthew. Matthew's ethics involves both relationships (like the above-mentioned master-disciple relationship) and corporate activities. In particular, Matthew's concerns for community life in chapter 18 (e.g., issues of status-seeking and scandal) parallel virtue ethics's emphasis that the individual's moral life is found in the communal context and that virtues have a social quality. One significant incidence is the process for church discipline. Here both the wrongdoings ('sins') and their moral discernment are never simply personal matters. They affect the community and are of concern to the community (vv15-17). Furthermore, the underlying qualities/virtues of humility and forgiveness (vv4, 21-35)—that are crucial to the community's unity and maintenance—point to the fact that both Matthean ethics and virtue ethics assume a link between relationships and virtues: As said earlier, the importance of certain virtues is only found in relationships and communal activities. Still, the concern for individuals is obvious in Matthew, such as Jesus' call to specific, concrete individuals.

Fifth, Matthew does not only portray Jesus as a master; he also depicts and discusses those character traits through the portrayal of Jesus and various characters in his narratives, such as the centurion in 8:5-13. This mechanism of focusing on character and character traits provides another connection with virtue theory.

By far Kotva has shown us that both the moral reasoning and yields of virtue—like priority of being over doing, perfectionistic, exemplar, community, and character—are also found in the ethics of Matthew. Still, he skillfully turns the common view that Matthean ethics is one of law-based or love-centered into another potential link: While

not denying the important role played by the law of love in the first gospel, Kotva challenges the kind of reductionistic view that the ethics of Matthew can be reduced to this law of love alone.¹²⁰⁹

He first turns to the claim that love is the key. He notes that there are many types of ethical material in Matthew other than the command to love, such as eschatological warnings, parables, and the call to discipleship. Thus, the ethics of Matthew is also one of mercy (9:13), cross-bearing (10:38), and justice (12:18), and cannot be adequately or solely summarized by the command to love. Kotva then points out the problems regarding the form and content of love: Love understood by Matthew has diverse meanings—such as praying for one’s enemies (5:44)—and can be known clearly only within particular contexts/narratives. In addition, he turns to the law language employed by Matthew and argues that Matthean ethics is not simply an affirmation/fulfillment of the Mosaic Law; rather, the authority depends on Jesus who is the norm.

On the other hand, Kotva insists that while rules and laws play a vital role in the gospel, they are not a comprehensive set of commands but “exemplar[s]...pointers to the kind of life expected in the community...paradigms...descriptions of behavior suitable to the coming kingdom...[and] specifications of who we are to become.”¹²¹⁰ Therefore, the laws have an educative value in that they are not an end in itself but “a language that educates us to the ways of Christ, which are centered on the virtues.”¹²¹¹ He concludes that this view is comparable to virtue theory’s perception of rules as “guides in shaping

¹²⁰⁹ Kotva clarifies and acknowledges that love is the “epitome of the law’s moral demands.” See *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 114.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid., 116-17. Kotva quotes Wayne Meeks, *Moral World of First Christians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 140; Ogletree, 90.

¹²¹¹ Edgar, 343.

character for those who do not yet possess practical wisdom.”¹²¹² Furthermore, both Matthew’s ethics and virtue ethics call for discernment in applying rules (for some commands are greater than others (e.g., 22:37-40)). In the language of virtue theory, it points to the virtue of practical wisdom or prudence.

As a whole, Kotva is convinced that the ethics of Matthew is compatible to and therefore served by virtue ethics in many significant aspects.

Regarding the ethics of Paul, Kotva is aware of the general understanding that Paul is “preoccupied with grace and faith [and] leaves little room for ethics, let alone an ethic focusing on the formation of virtuous people.”¹²¹³ Nevertheless, he demonstrates to us that those compatible links between Matthew’s ethics and virtue ethics are also present in Paul’s ethics.¹²¹⁴

First, Paul’s appropriation of those ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ lists¹²¹⁵ (e.g., Galatians 5:22-23 and Romans 1:29-31) reveals his concerns for internal qualities as Matthew does: He “depicts or portrays both the kind of people Christians are called to be and the kinds of actions appropriate to those people.”¹²¹⁶ Moreover, his desire for our inner conversion and transformation (e.g., 2 Corinthians 7:1 and Galatians 4:6) further manifests the concerns for certain internal qualities like attitudes.

Second, although Paul does not portray particular characters in detail as Matthew does, his frequent call to imitate him who imitates Christ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1)

¹²¹² Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 117.

¹²¹³ Ibid., 103.

¹²¹⁴ The following is a summary of his discussion on Paul although I do not completely follow his order of presentation. See Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 119-30.

¹²¹⁵ They are referred by Paul as fruits of the Holy Spirit and works of the flesh.

¹²¹⁶ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 120.

or other worthy examples (like the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15) is equally comparable to virtue ethics's demand of exemplary models.

Third, like Matthew, Paul also envisions the Christian life in terms of individual and communal identity. Apart from explicit instructions on unity and mutual concern within the community (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), Paul's use of the body image (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) as well as teachings on excommunication and supporting the weak (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:14) reflect his emphasis on corporation and interdependence. Still, Paul does not neglect individual efforts and responsibilities—he often reminds the people that they will be judged by God according to their works (Romans 2:6).

Fourth, Paul too highlights the need for discernment and practical wisdom as Matthew does. For instance, the communities are challenged to test and discern everything together (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and 1 Corinthians 14:29). In particular, Paul himself exercises prudence when dealing with concrete pastoral situations, such as divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-16) and conflict between the weak and the strong (Romans 14:1-15:13).

Apart from these identifiable links, Kotva remarkably notes two additional, unique aspects of Paul's ethics that are potentially compatible to virtue theory. The first one is his rather frequent employment of images of moral growth and progress, such as 'walking', 'race', 'goal', and 'transforming' (in Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 3:12-16; and 2 Corinthians 3:18 respectively). In other words, Paul's overall vision on Christian life is not one of a static state but of progress and increase (in areas

like faith, love, and spiritual maturity). This vision of moral progression—or let us call it, ‘moral growth’, together with the emphasis on continuity and patterns of behavior, can become a connection point with virtue ethics.

The second one is the famous indicative-imperative modes found in Paul’s many writings. Kotva suggests that, on the one hand, their relationship assumes a link between being and doing—the indicative mode signifies ‘who we are as Christians’ and the imperative mode signifies the kind of actions that follow naturally from what Paul says in the indicative mode. Like virtue theory’s priority of being over doing, Paul also seems to assume the priority of what is said in the indicative statement. On the other hand, within Paul’s eschatological framework they are comparable to the tri-polar structure of virtue theory—the indicative mode signifies both ‘who we are’ and ‘who we ought to become’ while the imperative mode signifies those habits and actions that respond to the question of how to get there.¹²¹⁷ Kotva further claims that Paul’s encouragement and advice implies resemblance with virtue theory’s structure—the imperative is derived from the difference between ‘who we are now’ and ‘who we ought to become’ in the indicative. For Paul, ‘who we are now’ is ‘redeemed by Christ’. Still, being redeemed does not mean that every dimension of our personality has been rightly realized. For redeemed Christians we can always grow. Kotva thus explains that we do not fully embrace our call yet; we need to strive forward on the road of sanctification.

¹²¹⁷ The question of ‘who I am’ is found in “those actions and attitudes that make the imperative sections necessary.” See Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 128.

These characteristics of Paul's ethics, as Kotva concludes, allow us to make connections with virtue ethics. Yet, like the case of Matthew, these similarities, compatibilities, and links with virtue ethics do not imply that the two are equivalent.

By far Kotva has shown us that Scripture (although he looks into the New Testament alone) and virtue ethics are compatible with each other in many aspects: Both are interested in 'internal' qualities, appealing to exemplary models, and individual and corporate. In addition, the ethics of particular New Testament writings have specific areas of concerns and patterns that are similar to that of virtue theory, such as perfection and moral growth in Matthew and Paul respectively. Still, Kotva insightfully suggests that Scripture and virtue ethics can complement and mutually edify each other as well:¹²¹⁸ Virtue ethics explores concerns and themes (e.g., the moral role of friendship¹²¹⁹) that are not fully treated in Scripture and hence enrich (and expand) our Christian moral vision. In particular, a virtue framework informs our reading and use of Scripture in morality—such as the understanding of biblical laws as guides in our discernment.

Scripture, in return, can help illustrate the human good and shape our understanding of particular virtues by means of its narratives. In sum, Scripture offers “vital resources for correcting, refining, and developing a virtue framework,” such as the centrality of the person of Jesus and the need of grace.¹²²⁰

Kotva's groundbreaking attempt to seek links between Scripture and virtue theory, however, is not without technical criticism. Some, for example, find his interpretation of

¹²¹⁸ Ibid., 3, 172-73.

¹²¹⁹ Kotva notes that many virtue ethicists emphasize the moral significance of friendships because the discussion of the shared human good requires the exploration of various relationships that are grouped under the label of 'friendship'. See Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 3, 172.

¹²²⁰ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 3.

virtue and law language in Matthew unconvincing:¹²²¹ They argue that Kotva seems fail to show why and how a virtue ethics interpretation of the law language is better than the Kantian one. Spohn, on the contrary, finds his treatments of these biblical texts particularly insightful in that they “display the advantages of a virtue interpretation and the points where they correct and advance the framework.”¹²²² In any case, we have to bear in mind that Kotva’s work is only an introductory attempt to make a Christian model of virtue ethics sensible to Christians. I now turn to Spohn’s own reading of Scripture through the lens of virtue for additional insights.

6.3 William C. Spohn

As we saw in Chapter Three, William Spohn is an ethicist from the Catholic tradition. He has shown great interest in engaging Scripture with ethics, both academically and religiously. In particular, he proposes the use of virtue theory as the hermeneutical tool for reading Scripture. For instance, in his earlier work *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, when he claims that the model of ‘responsive love’ best represents his view (in comparison to other approaches) of using and reading Scripture, he explains that this model “spells out the implications of character and virtue ethics.”¹²²³ It focuses on the moral agent and guides the agent to respond to the question of ‘What ought I to do?’ Virtue ethics, he adds, is capable of raising “the imaginative and

¹²²¹ They argue that for Kotva the law exists to help shape Christian character in accordance to the virtues. Kantians, on the contrary, perceive virtue’s role as enabling us to obey the moral law. See Reames, 354.

¹²²² William C. Spohn, review of *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, by Joseph Kotva, *Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (June 1997): 398.

¹²²³ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 123.

affective dimensions of moral experience to critical reflection to show how rich the moral life is and how pervasive the guidance of Scripture can be in the mature Christian and the authentic Christian community.”¹²²⁴

Later in *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, Spohn further presents three arguments for the appropriateness of virtue ethics in reading Scripture.¹²²⁵ First and foremost, he turns to the comprehensive moral category of character and narrative. He points out that since virtue ethics attends to one’s character while Scripture discloses the character of God, virtue theory is an appropriate way to approach Scripture. Moreover, since narrative sets the structure of the Bible and characters are defined over the course of the story, the use of the moral category of character helps us to grasp the ethical import of scriptural texts that relate to a person’s life story. In the case of the New Testament, we note that it is the character of Jesus that is revealed through the story of his life.

Second, both virtue ethics and Scripture are concerned about the ‘heart’ of the matter: Biblical writers emphasize the ‘heart’—“the personal center that infuses acts with meaning”—and “probe the motivations and intentions behind action and the basic orientation of life.”¹²²⁶ In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, for instance, Jesus “seeks a more radical ‘righteousness’ in the heart [rather than] offer[s] a detailed code of conduct.”¹²²⁷ Virtue theory, likewise, focuses on those inner dynamics of dispositions, habits and emotions that are the sources of one’s personal moral life. In addition, virtue

¹²²⁴ Ibid..

¹²²⁵ See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 28-33.

¹²²⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹²²⁷ Ibid., 31.

theory's attention to moral psychology supports the biblical practice of moral discernment as well.

Third, both virtue theory and Scripture (the gospels in particular) stress the importance of moral paradigms for guidance. Spohn takes on Hays's view that "paradigms are the most basic vehicle for moral teaching in the New Testament" through which the moral norms are specified.¹²²⁸ That means, they exercise a normative role in moral reflection. For instance, the parable of Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 demonstrates to us the normative command to love. In particular, Spohn perceives the life of Jesus spelled out in the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 as the most fundamental paradigm for Christians. In a similar manner virtue ethics "appreciates the role that paradigmatic stories and exemplary figures play in defining particular virtues."¹²²⁹

On the other hand, Spohn points out that when looking at the story of Jesus through the lens of virtue ethics (especially through faithful imagination), we become aware that Jesus as the fundamental paradigm challenges us to transform our perception, dispositions, and identity—the three phases of Christian moral experience.¹²³⁰ In other words, virtue ethics challenges us to engage with the reality of Jesus on the levels of vision, emotion, and character.¹²³¹

¹²²⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹²²⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹²³⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹²³¹ Ibid., 186. In his review of Spohn's work, Verhey summarizes these three arguments succinctly: Virtue ethics "fits the narrative form of the New Testament" and underscores how the story of Jesus forms character. Virtue ethics is "suited to the New Testament's emphasis on the 'heart'" and attends to the importance of convictions, emotions and commitments. It fits the New Testament invocation of the story of Jesus as a paradigm to shape and direct perception, dispositions and identity. See Allen Verhey, review of

In his later writings Spohn makes his claim in even stronger terms. He insists that an ethics of virtue and character that “reshapes the fundamental identity and dynamics of the person” is the most appropriate approach to Scripture.¹²³² It is also the most adequate approach to Scripture since it captures the relationships to Christ, God, and others that constitute the Christian way of life.¹²³³

However, like Kotva, Spohn admits that Scripture plays a role in virtue ethics in return.¹²³⁴ Scripture does not only exemplify the insights of virtue ethics but also brings out certain issues that are beyond the scope of philosophical ethics, which only deepens the significance of virtue ethics as a worthy hermeneutics. Thus, human sinfulness, the need of God’s grace, and subsequent radical transformation (or conversion), illustrate not only the affinity between virtue ethics and Scripture but more importantly between a theologically based virtue ethics and Scripture. For example, the writers of the Synoptic gospels depict the long, gradual process of the disciple’s transformation from resisting to accepting the radical call of Jesus. Paul, in addition, emphasizes the need of God’s grace in the framework of sanctification for radical conversion and moral growth. In other words, the New Testament “gives content to the formal patterns of virtue ethics” by spelling out concrete transformative habits.¹²³⁵ Furthermore, Spohn claims that “when the resources of character and virtue ethics are brought to bear on biblical material, it can

Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics, by William C. Spohn. *Christian Century* 116, no. 16 (May 19-26, 1999): 565.

¹²³² Spohn, “Scripture,” 94-95.

¹²³³ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹²³⁴ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 29-30. We note that some of these issues, such as the need of grace, are also brought up by Kotva.

¹²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

yield a more ethically sophisticated account of Christian experience than spirituality can offer by itself.”¹²³⁶

After exploring Spohn’s arguments for reading Scripture through the lens of virtue, I now turn to his reading of the New Testament through virtue ethics. In so doing, I first offer three methodological remarks. Then I illustrate how Spohn reads certain biblical texts.¹²³⁷

The first remark is that Spohn does not handle the biblical texts in the same way as Kotva does. Although Spohn, like Kotva, points out at times certain common grounds between the gospels and virtue ethics—for example, they share the concern for moral sight and blindness, he does not offer a comparative, cross-examination of the two to highlight their potential compatibility and connectedness.¹²³⁸ And despite occasional identification of particular virtues from the texts—for instance, the parable of the unjust steward in Matthew 18:21-35 is perceived as an illustration of the virtue of gratitude and a link between grace received and service to others—he does not present to us a list of virtues either.¹²³⁹

The second remark is that his reading of Scripture by a hermeneutics of virtue ethics points to the employment of analogical imagination.¹²⁴⁰ Spohn claims that analogical imagination helps bridge the moral reflection of Christians and the words and

¹²³⁶ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 123.

¹²³⁷ Some of these cases are already briefly mentioned earlier during the discussion of his overall use of Scripture.

¹²³⁸ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 92.

¹²³⁹ Spohn, *What are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*, 111.

¹²⁴⁰ I hereby elaborate and supplement what have been said about analogical imagination in Chapter Three. As mentioned earlier, Spohn’s understanding of analogical imagination is influenced by David Tracy’s work. See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 50-71; “Scripture,” 99-103.

deeds of Jesus especially by providing reasons and ideas (or what he calls “cognitive content”¹²⁴¹) for obeying Jesus’ command to discover new ways of acting faithfully and creatively.

Analogy, broadly speaking, is “the repetition of the same fundamental pattern in two different contexts.”¹²⁴² It implies actions and living patterns that are congruent to the prototype and hence has a normative value. In other words, the notion of analogy refers to “[moving] from a familiar pattern to new experience [and] looking for similarities and dissimilarities [between the prototype and the problematic situation].”¹²⁴³ It thus requires the presence of various cases like the recognition case and problem case. Among them Spohn argues that the paradigm case is the most important for understanding analogy, for “it is not just an interesting comparison but a model for action.”¹²⁴⁴ Moreover, he is convinced that all biblical literature promotes analogical reflection—even biblical rules and principles have an analogical aspect. The Good Samaritan, for instance, is a classic paradigm of perception and blindness.¹²⁴⁵ Still, he notes that without personal recognition (the recognition case) the story will not speak with authority.¹²⁴⁶

When one discerns what to do, one engages in imagination. Imagination “spots patterns and discovers how they transfer to new contexts.”¹²⁴⁷ In particular, Spohn notes that those conjunctions like ‘likewise’ and ‘just as’ are the ‘copula of the imagination’ that call for appropriate/fitting, imaginative actions. Again, he employs the story of the

¹²⁴¹ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 50.

¹²⁴² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²⁴³ Spohn, “Scripture,” 99-100.

¹²⁴⁴ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 64.

¹²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹²⁴⁶ Spohn, “Scripture,” 101.

¹²⁴⁷ Spohn, “Jesus and Moral Theology,” 36.

Good Samaritan in which Jesus challenges his disciples to use their imagination to make his case.

He finds evidence in Paul's words, too. In the *Letter to the Romans* (6:1-12), he notes that "Paul urges the Romans to use their imaginations to recognize the analogy between the dying and rising of Christ and their dying to old ways and living the new moral existence."¹²⁴⁸ Or, in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* (8:9) he sees Paul's plea to the community to be generous in contribution by appealing to the generosity of Christ a demonstration of the kind of analogical reasoning needed. In short, imagination "gives us access to Jesus as the concrete universal of Christian ethics."¹²⁴⁹

However, Spohn also notes that the New Testament provides the pattern—such as metaphorical frameworks, parables, and narratives of the historical Jesus—that grounds the analogical imagination.¹²⁵⁰ As a whole, he is convinced that analogical imagination is important to Christian ethics because "Christian discipleship is grounded in a particular person conveyed to us through the particular shape of the Gospel story."¹²⁵¹ Consequently, he insists that contemporary disciples of Jesus "must make use of the analogical imagination to discern the contemporary moral significance of the biblical text."¹²⁵²

The third remark is that Spohn focuses on the New Testament story of Jesus. He points out that the gospels and some materials from Paul "vividly present the story of

¹²⁴⁸ Spohn, "Scripture," 97.

¹²⁴⁹ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 4.

¹²⁵⁰ Ibid..

¹²⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

¹²⁵² Matera, review of *Go and Do Likewise*, 543.

Jesus as the norm for Christian life.”¹²⁵³ In particular, he perceives Paul’s *Letter to the Philippians* as offering us a glimpse of how the life of Jesus affects the Christian.¹²⁵⁴ He further claims that the cross and resurrection of Jesus “epitomizes [his] life and integrates the disparate sayings and happenings related to the gospels.”¹²⁵⁵

These remarks ground his subsequent reading of certain New Testament texts that follows.

In his discussion of the Johannine account of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-20) Spohn first reminds us that Jesus’ act of washing cannot be taken merely literally.¹²⁵⁶ Rather, Jesus’ action is an example and a demonstration that points graphically to a distinctive way of loving service. The scene in the story acts as the prime ‘analogate’ while our action/response is the analogue. There are different degrees of analogical imagination in one’s response—from simple reenactment of the narrative to focusing on one’s responsibility to having solidarity with the poor—depending on the interpreter. And a rich constellation of aspects such as reversal of roles and humble service embodied in the account are reproduced. The image of foot-washing thus becomes a springboard and guide for appropriate dispositions and actions depending on the situation. However, Spohn reminds us that the image as a guide is not totally open-ended to those incompatible actions such as domination or promoting privilege.

¹²⁵³ Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 23.

¹²⁵⁴ Ibid..

¹²⁵⁵ Spohn, “Scripture,” 103.

¹²⁵⁶ See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 51-56.

Philippians 2 and Romans 6, on the other hand, are two Pauline texts that capture the overall life story of Jesus.¹²⁵⁷ In particular, the cross and resurrection of Jesus highlighted in these two texts is seen as the paradigm for Christian life that shapes Christian discipleship and guides the practice of discernment.

Subsequently, analogical imagination spots that the logic of Christian imitation stands out throughout the *Letter to the Philippians*: 1) The community imitates Paul who imitates Christ—out of deep emotions and affections (like loyalty and gratitude) for the other. 2) Imitating Christ is to be understood as the criterion for moral discernment. 3) And the call to imitation leads one to intimacy—one becomes more like Christ. On the other hand, since Paul's own journey is analogous to the paradigm of Christ's 'descent-ascent' pattern (i.e., death on the cross and resurrection as expressed in the Christological hymn) which is the standard for regaining unity, the community should look to Paul as well as others in the community who imitate the paradigm.

In Romans 6, the same teaching to embrace the exemplary paradigm of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection is found. Paul specifically identifies the practice of baptism as the recapitulation of this paradigm: Baptism recurs in our daily Christian moral life (in other words, every moral act is for Paul a baptismal act). It connects sin and cross on the one side and morality and resurrection on the other. From there Spohn further notes that there is an analogy in the paradigm that graphs those indicative-imperative tensions, such as: "The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life

¹²⁵⁷ Ibid., 142-52.

he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:10-11).

In the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Spohn notes that an exercise of analogical imagination will first identify the following cases needed for reflection:¹²⁵⁸ “Jesus’ welcome to Zacchaeus” as the paradigm case; “Jesus welcomes me” as the recognition case; and that “I ought to welcome the outcasts accordingly” as the problem case. However, analogical reflection does not simply identify these theoretical cases in the story but also reveals how Christ takes initiative and calls us to recognize the pattern of gift and response, especially “the pattern of the Christian moral life as a response to the surprising and undeserved gift of God’s acceptance of us.”¹²⁵⁹ Analogical imagination further allows us to see the story as “not just about the characters mentioned but also about us...[and to] discover something about our own experience.”¹²⁶⁰ In specific, it provides clues for recognizing Christ’s work in our own lives and invites us to identify ourselves with the tax collector—as someone who lacks the power to do the right thing. It reveals to us what obstacles are in each of us in responding to Jesus’ call and thus guides us to understand that the call to discipleship “is tailored to each person as a unique individual with particular capacities and obstacles to responding.”¹²⁶¹

Finally, Spohn notes that an analogous imaginative reading of the story of Jesus as a whole points to the shaping of the character of individual Christians and their

¹²⁵⁸ See Spohn, “Jesus and Moral Theology,” 29-37; “Scripture,” 100-101.

¹²⁵⁹ Spohn, “Jesus and Moral Theology,” 29.

¹²⁶⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁶¹ Ibid., 37.

communities.¹²⁶² On the level of shaping individual character, he points out that “Jesus’ characteristic virtues [such as compassion and fidelity] are ingredients in the gospel stories that define them.”¹²⁶³ When reading stories like Jesus and Zacchaeus or parables like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) we do not just appreciate what Jesus did but also look into how he acted, and the attitude and stance he took toward others. Analogical discernment helps to seek ways of acting that harmonize with the story. Over time, these readings will enter into dispositional pattern of certain virtues (such as hospitality and compassion). One’s action inspired by these stories then leads to habitual dispositions in the heart and hence defines one’s character. Furthermore, the parables of Jesus “are meant to evoke strong emotions”—such as hope, courage, and mercy—which are qualities of character.¹²⁶⁴

On the level of shaping the character of the community, Spohn points out that “the New Testament’s preferred location of moral reflection is the community of faith, not the isolated conscience; the subject of moral development is not the individual but the faithful community.”¹²⁶⁵ And New Testament practices—such as hospitality, forgiveness, and solidarity with the poor—form the normative basis for evaluating communal moral discernment, for they are meant to build up the Body of Christ. Though incomplete and are given different priorities, these virtues and practices are necessary for the faith community.

¹²⁶² See Spohn, “Scripture,” 96-107.

¹²⁶³ Spohn, “Scripture,” 99.

¹²⁶⁴ See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 4.

¹²⁶⁵ Spohn, “Scripture,” 104. Spohn cites L. T. Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983).

On the other hand, Spohn notes that reading the life of Jesus as depicted by Paul (as in the *Letter to the Philippians*) through the lens of virtue points to Paul's emphasis on the transformation of identity (the conscious dimension of character):¹²⁶⁶ Paul's own radical change of identity in Damascus as recounted in Philippians 3, for example, has led him to have new perception of the self, such as "seeing what counted as gain as loss," and "dying to the old self and coming to life in Christ." It also reveals that Paul's logic of argument runs along a chain of identity: The Philippians are commanded to be guided by the same call Paul received; to acquire the same mind of Christ that is in Christ; and to follow Paul's analogous example. In short, "Christ has identified with our human condition, Christians can identify with him."¹²⁶⁷

In sum, reading the New Testament story of Jesus by means of analogical imagination invites us to take up the challenge to see the world as Jesus saw it; to look behind vision into the inner dynamics of the moral life (i.e., dispositions); and to attend to the Christian identity (both individual and communal) that is the root of Christian life. These challenges to one's moral psychology echo those yields of virtue that we identified earlier. Indeed, although Spohn did not seek to provide a list of virtues from Scripture or focus on those (potential) similarities or connections between Scripture and virtue theory, he has insightfully demonstrated a unique way of reading Scripture through the lens of virtue that engages the reader and the biblical texts on the level of ethical practice.

¹²⁶⁶ See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 24-26.

¹²⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

6.4 Conclusion

This short chapter focuses on reading Scripture through the lens of virtue. I first reaffirm that Scripture supports the notion of virtue. In fact, Scripture does not only reveal to us these virtues but also advocates for their acquisition and formation. This further points to Scripture's relevance to those earlier identified yields of virtue.

I then succinctly surveyed how two representative Christian virtue ethicists read Scripture through the lens of virtue. In the case of Kotva, he attempts to seek similarities and potential links between Scripture and virtue theory within his larger project of making a Christian version of virtue ethics. In so doing, he turns to the Gospel of Matthew and certain Pauline letters as test cases.

Subsequently, he finds in the Gospel of Matthew moral reasoning and qualities parallel to that of the virtue theory and the yields of virtue: Both Matthean ethics and virtue ethics are concerned with not just external action but also the internal qualities of human actions; they manifest a particular kind of perfectionist thrust; the kind of master-disciple relationship is comparable (and even superior) to the exemplary model suggested by virtue ethics; their common concerns for both individuals and the community; and their interest in the formation of character and character traits. However, Kotva is able to find some unique potential connections between Matthean ethics and virtue ethics. In particular, he suggests that the laws and rules in Matthew also have an educative, formative value.

Regarding the ethics of Paul, Kotva identifies similar parallels: Those ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ lists do not only depict the needed external actions but also the kind of Christians we are called to be; hence they are concerned with internal qualities. The call for imitation is comparable to virtue theory’s demand of exemplary models. Moreover, Paul’s instructions and writings care for both individual and communal growth as virtue theory does. Still, as in case of the Gospel of Matthew, Kotva also notes certain possible compatibilities unique to Pauline ethics: He finds that Paul’s specific use of images points to a dynamic and progressive vision of Christian life that emphasizes continuity, patterns, and formation of the self. He also suggests that Paul’s famous indicative-imperative sayings can be interpreted by and compared to virtue theory’s tri-polar structure.

Kotva’s overall conclusion is that there are within Scripture important points of similarity, contact and correlation with virtue theory. His reading of the selected New Testament writings through the lens of virtue has demonstrated to us that Scripture and virtue ethics are not just compatible but also complementary. In particular, he has shown us the advantages of a virtue-based interpretation of Scripture and the points where Scripture corrects and advances the framework.

Spohn, on the other hand, begins with the argument that virtue ethics is very appropriate and adequate for reading and interpreting Scripture. He then turns to the New Testament story of Jesus and points out that Jesus is the fundamental paradigm for the transformation of our moral psychology.

Analogical imagination is the proposed method through which Spohn offers a virtue-based reading of the story of Jesus. Subsequently, Spohn focuses on those New Testament passages that explicitly depict the life story of Jesus as test cases. In the Johannine account of washing the disciples' feet, analogical imagination would read the image of foot-washing as a springboard and guide for appropriate dispositions and actions depending on the situation. An analogical reading of the story of Zacchaeus would further invite us to identify ourselves with the tax collector, reveal to us what our obstacles are, and guide us to understand each one's specific call to discipleship. Moreover, an analogical imaginative reading of the *Letter to the Philippians* and the *Letter to the Romans* would perceive the cross and resurrection as the paradigm for Christian life, and that, among others, the practice of baptism is the recapitulation of this paradigm.

Still, analogical imagination would further read the overall story of Jesus as shaping the character of individual Christians and their communities. New Testament practices identified in the texts are also seen as forming the normative basis for evaluating communal moral discernment. Furthermore, we become more aware of Paul's emphasis on the transformation of identity.

In sum, reading the New Testament story of Jesus by means of analogical imagination invites us to take up the challenges that touch certain yields of virtue like dispositions and communal identity. And Spohn has further demonstrated to us a unique way of reading Scripture through the lens of virtue that engages the reader and the biblical texts.

In conclusion, these two virtue ethicists' readings of certain New Testament writings, on the one hand, have convinced us that the theory of virtue is compatible with Scripture and the hermeneutics of virtue ethics is appropriate for interpreting Scripture. Their test cases, however limited they are, on the other hand, have demonstrated what the interpretation of Scripture would look like in concrete from a virtue perspective. This conviction and demonstration has laid a solid ground for our treatment of Scripture as 'script'.

In the next part, I carry this conclusion over to the interpretation of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. However, I have been arguing throughout this work that a more integrated Scripture-based ethics would perceive scriptural texts as both 'scripted' and 'script'. Therefore, prior to carrying out the task of hermeneutics through the lens of virtue, we need first to treat the text as 'scripted', that is, to interpret the text 'textually' or 'exegetically'. In other words, understanding what the Beatitudes meant to the original readers in Matthew's community is a crucial and necessary step to our appropriation of the texts in contemporary society.

Part Three: Exegeting and Interpreting the Text—The Beatitudes as Scripted Script

In Part One I proposed a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics that treats the scriptural text as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. By surveying how contemporary biblical scholars and Christian ethicists construct their own Scripture-based theological ethics, I argued that concrete advancements are found within each discipline and that such a methodological goal is attainable.

In Part Two, I then proceeded to demonstrate how such a proposal can be worked out in the concrete. In so doing, I proposed the employment of virtue ethics as a worthy hermeneutical tool for approaching Scripture. I pointed out that certain important yields of virtue can provide points of reference to the task of hermeneutics and bring virtue into connection with some of the other reference points of ethics. Christian virtue ethicists have demonstrated to us that the philosophical language of virtue theory can be translated into a theological one by identifying and establishing theological links. However, what is crucial to the employment of virtue ethics as a hermeneutical tool for interpreting Scripture is the presence of biblical links. A couple of Christian virtue ethics proponents, as we have seen, have done us a favor by searching for such links and relating Scripture and virtue ethics through reading scriptural texts through the lens of virtue. They have shown us that virtue ethics is an appropriate tool for the task of hermeneutics.

After presenting the case for the use of virtue ethics as a hermeneutical tool, in this third part of my work, I continue to concretize what has been proposed in Part One by focusing on a particular biblical text, namely, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. I first treat

the text as ‘scripted’ by means of careful exegesis (Chapter 7) and then employ the hermeneutics of virtue ethics to interpret the exegeted text as ‘script’ (Chapter 8).

But why the Beatitudes in Matthew 5? As explained in the *Introduction*, the choice of the Beatitudes is based on several reasons. The first and immediate reason is its popularity (both as an individual text and as a part of the Sermon on the Mount) throughout history, including many ancient Christian works.¹²⁶⁸ This popularity is partly related to the fact that it is part of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount which is widely recognized as the “most celebrated discourse by Jesus of Nazareth.”¹²⁶⁹ Indeed, Matthew 5-7 has been “continually the subject of re-interpretation by Christians throughout the ages...[and] one can even speak of a ‘history of interpretation’ of the Sermon.”¹²⁷⁰ Hans Dieter Betz even claims that neither a complete history of interpretation nor a complete bibliography on Matthew 5-7 is possible.¹²⁷¹ Harrington, in a similar way, comments that “the history of the sermon’s interpretation is a miniature history of Christianity.”¹²⁷²

Still, as far as the Beatitudes is concerned,¹²⁷³ Betz points out that the Beatitudes is “historically the best-known and most-valued portion of the Sermon.”¹²⁷⁴ And its

¹²⁶⁸ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 10-11.

¹²⁶⁹ Timothy Larsen, introduction to *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Ages*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007). For various reasons Matthew’s Sermon traditionally has drawn more attention than that of Luke’s. See Jan Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985), 20.

¹²⁷⁰ Lambrecht, 20.

¹²⁷¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 3.

¹²⁷² Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 76.

¹²⁷³ When talking about the pericope ‘the Beatitudes’, I use third person singular. When I talk about the beatitudes as several macarisms, I use third person plural.

¹²⁷⁴ Cahill, “Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values,” 15. Lisa Sowle Cahill, however, seems to disagree with this view and claims that, prior to the development of historical criticism in the nineteenth century, the Beatitudes has been of secondary ethical interest. See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 26.

popularity is also found among contemporary Christian ethicists who turn to the Bible for ethical insights. It is observed, for example, that many theological ethicists from Richard Niebuhr to Stanley Hauerwas, from liberation theologians to feminist theologians, and from Catholic to Protestant theologians, have either employed the text in their writings or actually examined the ethical teaching of the text.¹²⁷⁵ Indeed, almost all biblical scholars and theological ethicists surveyed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three also treat the Matthew's Beatitudes in one way or another.

For example, Bernard Häring is convinced that Christian life is “essentially a manifestation of the beatitudes.”¹²⁷⁶ Thus, he offers a meditation guide based on the Beatitudes and invites the readers to reflect on its personal and social implications. In fact, both Häring and Servais Pinckaers note that the Beatitudes has been employed by non-Christians like Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi as a major source for spiritual renewal.¹²⁷⁷ Moreover, scholars also turn to the Beatitudes for inspiration in writings related to Christian spirituality.¹²⁷⁸

Secondly, the Matthean Beatitudes has long been an important text in both biblical theology and Christian ethics.¹²⁷⁹ Many theologians have produced their own

¹²⁷⁵ In the latest three issues of *Studies in Christian Ethics*, over 12 articles are written on the Sermon on the Mount. See Bretzke, *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, 138-51; *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 22, no. 1-3 (2009). See also Siker, 203-8.

¹²⁷⁶ Bernard Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications* (Slough: St. Paul's Publications, 1976), 2.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid.; Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1995), 135.

¹²⁷⁸ See Max Oliva, *Beatitudes for the Workplace* (Toronto, ON: Novalis Publishing, 2009). For example, Capuchin-Franciscan Michael H. Crosby approaches the Beatitudes through the lens of spirituality based on the belief that their vision grounds our Christian life. See Michael H. Crosby, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes: Matthew's Vision for the Church in an Unjust World*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).

¹²⁷⁹ John Meier points out an issue related to popularity, namely, the familiarity of the Beatitudes. And he rightly expresses his concerns that such familiarity could be dangerous in that we are no longer challenged

commentaries on the text. For example, Gregory of Nyssa, who lived in Cappadocia in Asia Minor around 380 CE, is noted as one of the first to contemplate on the Beatitudes among the church Fathers.¹²⁸⁰ He interpreted the eight beatitudes as “stages in the ascent of the soul...constituting the steps of the mystical ladder.”¹²⁸¹ Later, John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople and a contemporary of Augustine from the East, produced an exposition of the Beatitudes as part of his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.¹²⁸² He understood the text (and the overall Sermon on the Mount) “as the foundational speech...that constitutes the life of all Christians” and provides the building blocks for a life of virtue.¹²⁸³

Among the Scholastics Aquinas also perceived the Beatitudes as “the touchstone of Christ’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount” just as the Decalogue contains “the essence of the moral precepts of the Mosaic Law.”¹²⁸⁴ He wrote, “Just as Moses first set down the commandments, and afterwards said many things which were all referred back

by those hard thoughts but simply lean back and savor the pretty words. See John P. Meier, “Matthew 5:3-12,” *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 281.

¹²⁸⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord’s Prayer and The Beatitudes*, *Ancient Christian Writers*, trans. Hilda C. Graef (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1954). He offered eight short homilies on the Beatitudes.

¹²⁸¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108. Betz cites Jean Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” *RSR* 29 (1955):372.

¹²⁸² Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount as Message and as Model in Augustine*, 67. In particular, Homily 15 is dedicated to the Beatitudes. See St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 15 on Matthew*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200115.htm> (accessed on January 13, 2010).

¹²⁸³ Margaret M. Mitchell, “John Chrysostom,” in *The Sermon on the Mount through the Ages*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 22, 35. See also John Chrysostom, *Homily 15 on Matthew*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200115.htm> (accessed on January 13, 2010).

¹²⁸⁴ Jeremy Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura in Matthaeum*,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating and John P. Yocum (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 79-80.

to the commandments he had set down, so Christ in His teaching sets out these beatitudes, to which all the other things are referred back.”¹²⁸⁵

As far as virtue ethicists are concerned, the Beatitudes is likewise an important scriptural text in that it is a specific source for discussion of Christian virtues demanded by Jesus Christ. Benjamin Farley points out that the Beatitudes extols eight corresponding virtues for Christian moral life. Even the Pontifical Biblical Commission perceives the Beatitudes as a significant characteristic expression of biblical morality found in the New Testament and thus specifically stresses the fundamental dispositions and virtues found in them.¹²⁸⁶

The third and final reason for the employment of the Beatitudes for illustration is a cultural one. As shared in the beginning of this work, I am writing from a Christian ethics perspective. Still, being an Asian of a Confucian Chinese society, I note that the whole concept of ‘blessed’ (or ‘happy’) in these verses could be a platform for engaging cross-cultural dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism. While William Mattison argues that the Beatitudes can be appropriately understood in the context of classical Christian ethical reflection on happiness, prosperity (and happiness) is closely related to the moral values of Confucian society.¹²⁸⁷ Moreover, Confucian ethics is more and more widely accepted as a virtue-based ethics “because of its emphasis on cultivating the natural human capacity for virtue.”¹²⁸⁸ There exists a possible Confucian connection with

¹²⁸⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁸⁶ Pontifical Biblical Commission, 13-14, 70-71.

¹²⁸⁷ William C. Mattison III, “The Beatitudes and Christian Ethics: A Virtue Perspective” (Paper, Annual Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, San Jose, CA, January 4-7, 2010); 馬振鐸, «善惡觀», *中國傳統人生哲學縱橫談*, 紫竹 編 (濟南:齊魯書社出版, 1992), 234.

¹²⁸⁸ John Renard, *Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), 75.

Christian virtue ethics. An interpretation of the Beatitudes through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics thus may broaden the platform for engaging the two traditions and bring the Beatitudes into conversation with the Confucian society.¹²⁸⁹

Before offering a reading of the text as ‘scripted’ and ‘script’, I suggest that we take a quick look of how some theologians and ethicists (of the past and present) have actually approached the Beatitudes, in their own ways.¹²⁹⁰ It is worthwhile to see if their particular approaches could add any insights to what I have been proposing here.

Several Approaches

Augustine’s interpretation of the Beatitudes can be found in his commentary on *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*.¹²⁹¹ It was one of his very first pastoral and exegetical works as a priest—delivered as a homily to the people of Hippo—and had pastoral,

¹²⁸⁹ In a recent book on the virtues of the Beatitudes, Albert Randall studies and compares these Christian virtues with their counterparts found in Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. However, the author does not offer any comparison with Confucianism. In this sense, my attempt here may supplement what is lacking in this book. See Albert B. Randall, *Strangers on the Shore: The Beatitudes in World Religions* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006).

¹²⁹⁰ Servais Pinckaers, William Davies, and Dale Allison observe that a spectrum of interpretations has been evoked by different traditions throughout history, ranging from exclusive, spiritual counsels to imaginary ideal to interim morality to socio-political program. For instance, some claim that Matthew 5-7 is concerned with not only the individual moral life but also the relevance of communities of discipleship as well as social justice, while others emphasize an ethics of peace. They are important to the quest for the meaning of the kingdom of God—which is the presupposition of our entire Christian life. See Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 136-39. See also William D. Davies, and Dale Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44, no. 3 (1991): 283-309.

¹²⁹¹ Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John James Jepsen (New York: Newman Press, 1948). It contains several theological insights, among them is the view that the Sermon as a whole is the perfect model for the Christian life: It holds “all the precepts needed for our guidance in the Christian life” and thus has a “complete, perfect teaching on Christian morality.” It is intended for all followers of Christ although some of the imperatives can be kept by some followers only. See Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 136.

theological and exegetical dimensions.¹²⁹² In particular, he held fast to the biblical language, for Augustine was convinced that the biblical language is “more resonant, more affective, more enduring....richer in spiritual and moral, content, and more edifying than any local idiom.”¹²⁹³ Moreover, Augustine is known for interpreting Scripture with Scripture; he almost never interpreted a text without citing another text.¹²⁹⁴ For example, apart from appealing to the symbolism of the perfect number ‘seven’, he turned to Isaiah 11 to make it clear that there are seven beatitudes, just as there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁹⁵ Elsewhere, in the interpretation of the fourth beatitude, Augustine cited John 4:14 to point out that the food/drink for which the inner self hungers/thirsts is Christ himself.

Moreover, he evoked personal experience in his interpretation of the text, and perceived the Beatitudes as a description of his own journey of conversion.¹²⁹⁶ Thereafter,

¹²⁹² See Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 136, 141-42; Robert Louis Wilken, “Augustine,” in *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Ages*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 45; Augustine, 3. In fact, from the Patristic period up to the Scholastics period, there was no separation of exegetical and hermeneutical tasks. All commentaries were a mix of both. For instance, it is noted that John Chrysostom’s interpretative style was both rhetoric, polemic (especially against excessive allegorical view of the text), and exegetical as that of Augustine. One scholar even claims that Chrysostom’s interpretation of the text should be understood as “sermons of his own” rather than commentary akin to modern critical commentaries. See Pelikan, 74-77; Margaret M. Mitchell, “John Chrysostom,” in *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Ages*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 19.

¹²⁹³ Wilken, 49.

¹²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52, 56; Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 143; Augustine, 6-8, 15.

¹²⁹⁵ In order to make connection between the beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Augustine reversed the order of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. He appealed to the theological idea that the New Law is the ‘law of the Spirit of life’ for further justification. Augustine was convinced that the beatitudes as the gifts of the Holy Spirit “direct our course toward God through the love that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” See Wilken, 51. Hans Dieter Betz points out that Augustine’s coordination of the Beatitudes and the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be traced back to the Cappadocian Fathers. See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 46.

¹²⁹⁶ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 146.

he understood the Beatitudes as the principal part of and keystone that governs and divides the entire Sermon, and the perfect answer to the question of happiness.¹²⁹⁷

In sum, although Augustine interpreted the text with the use of enormous biblical sources, his commentary was a mixture of exegetical, literary, and theological interpretations.¹²⁹⁸ Thus, his approach does not exactly belong to the task of exegesis or hermeneutics in today's understanding. Nevertheless, his reading of the Beatitudes had a strong impact on future interpretation until the thirteenth century.¹²⁹⁹

A detailed interpretation of the Beatitudes by Thomas Aquinas is found in his *Lectura in Matthaeum*—a written collection of oral commentary Aquinas gave at the University of Paris in late 1260s.¹³⁰⁰ He regarded his work as a task of exegesis that demands humility:¹³⁰¹ It is a word-to-word commentary that was accompanied by a lot of biblical citations. In fact he was considered as a 'living concordance' in his mastery of Scripture. For instance, when commenting on the notion of 'high mountain', he cited both Genesis 19:17 and Isaiah 2:2 to point out the link between the term and contemplation. He then divided the text based on the cumulative effects of virtue:¹³⁰² The first three

¹²⁹⁷ Ibid., 149-50. The idea of these ascending stages to God is originated from Gregory of Nyssa who influenced Ambrose's own interpretation of the eight beatitudes. Augustine then adopted Ambrose's idea in his own writing. The 'eighth' beatitude was perceived by Augustine as the recapitulation of the first, and the sum and fulfillment of the others. He said, "The eighth maxim returns, as it were, to the beginning, because it shows and commends what is perfect and complete." See Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 145, 145n, 146. Augustine, 18.

¹²⁹⁸ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 45.

¹²⁹⁹ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 159.

¹³⁰⁰ Holmes, 74-76. Holmes cites Raphaelis Cai, ed. *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 5th ed. (Rome: Marietti, 1951). The *Catena aurea* (Golden Chain), in contrast, is a compilation of the commentaries on the gospels by the Fathers of the Church. See Eleonore Stump, "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, eds. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252.

¹³⁰¹ Holmes, 80, 88, 96.

¹³⁰² Ibid., 81.

beatitudes are grouped together for they point out that virtue removes one from various evils like lust and cruelty. The fourth and fifth beatitudes, in contrast, reveal that virtue causes one to work for what is good.

However, Aquinas was not exactly concerned about the exegetical meaning of the text: “Aquinas’s scholarly concerns seem more focused on appropriating the insights and arguments of earlier philosophers and theologians than on engaging in historical investigation of the biblical text.”¹³⁰³ In sum, his interpretation is a kind of monastic exegesis; he “focused on the reality described rather than on the text describing it.”¹³⁰⁴

Later, in the *Prima Secundae* of *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas returned to the Beatitudes and offered a more mature interpretation of the text:¹³⁰⁵ The first three beatitudes are aimed at correcting the view that happiness is sensual and found in a life of pleasure. The next two pairs of Beatitudes are understood as *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* respectively. And the last one is a summary and confirmation of the previous ones.

As a result, Aquinas seemed to agree with Augustine’s view that in the Beatitudes is “the culmination of a succession of human responses to the question of happiness.”¹³⁰⁶ It became the primary source for his treatise on human happiness and our ultimate end.¹³⁰⁷ And, as mentioned before, he associated each one with a virtue acquired through a corresponding gift, and connected the gifts of the Holy Spirit, virtues, and the Beatitudes in a systematic way. Here, he departed from the Augustinian view that the

¹³⁰³ Stump, 256.

¹³⁰⁴ Holmes, 84.

¹³⁰⁵ Ibid., 82-83; *Summa Theologiae*, I.II. 69.3.

¹³⁰⁶ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 148.

¹³⁰⁷ Ibid., 183.

seven beatitudes are gifts of the Holy Spirit and extensions of virtues (that indicate dispositions); rather, they are the subsequent actions of these gifts.¹³⁰⁸ However, his overall examination of the text in *Summa Theologiae* lacks the kind of biblical learning and technical sophistication required of contemporary biblical studies.¹³⁰⁹

Martin Luther also produced a commentary on the Beatitudes as a series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount delivered after 1530.¹³¹⁰ It was basically a biblical exegesis that had a polemical nature. Both the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount had to be read in light of other scriptural texts.¹³¹¹ However, Luther presupposed in his interpretation that “the Bible spoke immediately to his own time.”¹³¹² Also, the text was to be interpreted as solely an application of his teaching on justification and the Law and treated as the Old Law.¹³¹³

As a whole, Luther rejected the traditional interpretation of the Beatitudes—that the beatitudes are evangelical counsels for the perfection of the spiritual ‘elite’—which leads to a two-level ethics of minimalism for most and perfection for a few.¹³¹⁴ Rather, he held the Augustinian view that the Beatitudes is a command for all Christians.¹³¹⁵ For instance, he interpreted the command to be ‘pure in heart’ (the sixth Beatitude) as addressing ordinary loving husbands and wives and children. Or, in order to rid the Beatitudes of any allowance for merit Luther claimed that Christ was talking only about

¹³⁰⁸ Carolyn Muessig, “Preaching the Beatitudes in the Late Middle Ages: Some Mendicant Examples,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 2 (2009): 139-40.

¹³⁰⁹ Fergus Kerr, “An Ethic of Beatitude,” *Priests & People* 17, no. 10 (Oct 2003): 375.

¹³¹⁰ Susan E. Schreiner, “Martin Luther,” in *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Ages*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 109.

¹³¹¹ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 139.

¹³¹² Schreiner, 110.

¹³¹³ Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 139.

¹³¹⁴ Schreiner, 112; Lohse, 64.

¹³¹⁵ Schreiner, 112.

“the works and fruit that no one can do unless he is already a Christian and in a state of grace.”¹³¹⁶

Taking all together, we note that the interpretations of the Beatitudes by Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther tend to be homiletical (and somehow hermeneutical) although one has to take into account that the exegetical and hermeneutical tasks of their times were not clearly divided. Still, they seemed to share the same approach that most contemporary ethicists employ, namely, to treat the Beatitudes more as ‘script’ than ‘scripted’.

Based on my position in Part One it is a surprise that many would approach the Beatitudes as ‘script’. For instance, Häring’s overall interpretation of the text in his meditation guidebook is clearly performance-oriented even though the text is interpreted in the context of the songs of the suffering servant in Isaiah.¹³¹⁷ Gutiérrez uses the text in light of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. He is basically more concerned with the call for social transformation and social justice found in the text than the texts themselves.

In reading the Gospel of Matthew through the lens of virtue,¹³¹⁸ Kotva also turns to the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes for demonstration. Regarding the Beatitudes he writes,

¹³¹⁶ Ibid., 110. Schreiner quotes Martin Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” in *Luther’s Works* 21, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956), 291.

¹³¹⁷ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 2.

¹³¹⁸ In a recent annual meeting of the United States based *Society of Christian Ethics*, young virtue ethicist William Mattison III, offers a virtue perspective of the Beatitudes and suggests that the Beatitudes are appropriately understood in the context of classical ethical reflection on happiness. He further proposes that there is an ‘intrinsic’ relationship—continuity of activity—between those ‘qualifying conditions’ and ‘rewards’ in each of the Beatitudes. In so doing, he turns to the commentaries of the Fathers of the Church, medieval theologians and Reformers, and some contemporary scholars. However, throughout the presentation he does not attend to the original meaning of the text or the writer’s original intention. Some ethicists from the forum thus comment that he simply presents a patristic view of the Beatitudes. Like

The Beatitudes depict[s] the kinds of people and actions that will receive a full share of God's coming Kingdom. In pronouncing blessings on the 'poor in spirit' (5:3), on those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' (5:6), and those who are 'pure of heart' (5:8), Matthew's Jesus promises God's reign to those who are humble before God, who yearn for and desire for God's justice, and who live from a position of genuineness and integrity.¹³¹⁹

Unfortunately, Kotva is pre-occupied with seeking similarities and potential connections between the gospel and virtue theory. He too takes up the text without first exploring the original meaning of the text intended by the author.

What, then, would the interpretation of the Beatitudes that is grounded in the approach I am proposing here be? I note that Verhey, whose works inspire the integrated approach that I am proposing, also turns to the Beatitudes for his own agenda. He first suggests the use of form criticism and source criticism to understand the Beatitudes.¹³²⁰ Verhey then highlights the practices of delivering sermons and praying as the outcomes of hermeneutics. He concludes that these practices express the virtues and values that form our character.

Still, Verhey's illustration does not undertake a full scale treatment of what the textual and practical interpretations of the Beatitudes would be.¹³²¹ Therefore, in the next

Kotva he bypasses the task of exegeting the original meaning of the text. See Mattison III, "The Beatitudes and Christian Ethics: A Virtue Perspective."

¹³¹⁹ Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 104.

¹³²⁰ Verhey, "Scripture as Script and as Scripted," 28-32. He points out that form criticism informs us that the form of the Beatitudes is similar to that of wisdom literature. It is written by the sage to express certain principles founded in life experience. This form was then modified by Jesus and the author to speak "to the present in view of the coming good future of God." Thus, the Beatitudes is a kind of eschatological wisdom. Source criticism, in addition, reveals that Matthew's Beatitudes has various sources.

¹³²¹ In *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes*, a book edited by Francis A. Eigo, some of the contributors attempt to present exegetical findings prior to interpret the individual beatitudes for their contemporary readers. However, the diverse academic backgrounds of these contributors lead to a rather inconsistent and

chapter, I attempt to fill this gap by first offering a detailed exegesis of the Beatitudes.

However, being an ethicist by training and being experimental in this work, I consult the works of some major Matthean scholars throughout the chapter in order to offer a more accurate exegesis of the text.

unsystematic treatment of the beatitudes as ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. Although Capuchin Franciscan Michael Crosby’s works on the Beatitudes present the case in a more consistent manner, his interpretation is spiritual-oriented rather than driven by ethical reflection. See Francis A. Eigo, ed., *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes* (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 1995); Crosby, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes*.

Chapter Seven: The Exegesis of the Text—The Beatitudes as ‘Scripted’

In this chapter I treat the Beatitudes as ‘scripted’ by conducting an exegesis of the text. The Beatitudes is part of the Sermon on the Mount which is widely known as the first of the five major discourses of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. As many Matthean scholars have pointed out, neither the Beatitudes nor the Sermon on the Mount are intended to stand by themselves.¹³²² Therefore, in order to offer an exposition of the text that is faithful to the gospel, we need to look at both the Sermon and the gospel as a whole and attend to certain issues that may serve as exegetical guidelines.¹³²³ For the sake of clarity, I begin with an exploration of some basic issues concerning the gospel itself.¹³²⁴ Then I turn to the Sermon on the Mount and examine certain specific issues, such as its structure and themes. Finally, I explore some critical and immediate issues of the Beatitudes like its relation to the rest of the Sermon and the meaning of ‘beatitude’ in Jewish and Christian contexts. The actual exegesis follows.

¹³²² Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 299.

¹³²³ For instance, in his enquiry of the settings that influence the composition of the Sermon on the Mount, William Davies identifies the following aspects of Matthew’s situation, namely, the Gospel itself, Jewish Messianic expectation, contemporary Judaism, the Early Church, and Jesus’ ministry. He emphasizes “the Sermon’s connection to the rest of Matthew’s gospel highlighting the relationship of God’s gift and demand, of law and grace.” See Warren Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 2-3. See also William D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

¹³²⁴ The major works consulted throughout this chapter are as follows: Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*; William D. Davies, and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1 (New York: Continuum, 1988); Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

7.1 The Gospel according to Matthew: Some Basic Issues

Authorship, Date and Place of Composition

Although the gospel is traditionally associated with Matthew the tax collector (9:9) who became one of the twelve disciples called by Jesus (10:3), more and more scholars are suspicious of identifying the evangelist with Matthew the apostle.¹³²⁵ Despite ambiguity about the actual identity of the author, the linguistic structure, the style of writing and, particularly the evangelist's knowledge of (and interest in) the Hebrew Scripture (and subsequent frequent use of Hebrew texts) as well as his awareness of Jewish debates about certain legal issues (like divorce and Sabbath observance) has convinced many scholars that the evangelist was beyond doubt a member of the Jewish community writing for Jews.¹³²⁶ The evangelist's audience (and community) was likewise Jewish Christians who "were involved in an ideological and theological struggle over which movement best preserved and represented the heritage of Israel after the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple in 70 CE."¹³²⁷

With regards to the issue of dating, both patristic writings (such as *Didache* 8) and the evangelist's apparent references to the destruction of the Jerusalem in the texts (21:41, 22:7 and 27:25) indicate that the gospel was written after 70 CE and before the turn of the

¹³²⁵ For convenience's sake and in deference to convention, I refer to the evangelist as Matthew.

¹³²⁶ Davies, and Allison, Jr. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 9-33, 58. John Meier, however, by pointing out that the evangelist made certain errors regarding things Jewish, counter proposes that Matthew was either a learnt gentile scholar or a Greek-speaking Diaspora Jewish Christian. See John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 22-23.

¹³²⁷ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching Without Anti-Judaism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 8.

century. These and other external and internal allusions support the view that the earliest possible date of composition would be around 85 or 90 CE.

Likewise, although there is no definite answer regarding the place of composition, it is generally understood that it was situated in a large Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean city where a substantial Jewish community has settled. One widely circulated suggestion is Antioch of Syria.

Setting and Purpose

In order to find clues on why the evangelist would have composed the gospel, we need to first understand the various settings—especially the socio-historical, political, and religious settings—of the gospel. Historical criticism shows that the gospel was written in a time of crisis that affected the whole Jewish community of the late first century CE: After 70 CE Judaism was in its early stage of transition during which various movements/communities emerged (including early rabbis and Matthew's community).¹³²⁸ The survival of Judaism was at stake and hence the tension among these movements was severe. In short, the gospel was clearly set in the context of ancient Judaism.

¹³²⁸ It is thus noted that Judaism of that period was a very diverse and complex reality. Charles Talbert argues that Matthew's separation is one *within* Judaism and not *from* it. See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount. Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5-7* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2004). Ulrich Luz, however, claims that Matthew's community was no longer belonging to the Jewish system and hence Matthew was not responding to a particular Jewish sect/movement but the overall Israel's no to Jesus. See Donald Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 10. Senior cites J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990). See also Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 54.

As far as Matthew's community was concerned,¹³²⁹ on the one hand, their relationship with the broader Jewish community was complicated and a trace of sectarianism could be noted; on the other hand, the community was rather fearful of the gentile world and thus adopted a policy of distancing. In addition, the law-keeping community of Matthew seemed to be having difficulties with those 'law-free' Christians.¹³³⁰ As a whole, Matthew's community was somehow alienated from the rest of the world. Alongside with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the presence of Roman (political and military) control, these circumstances had led the Jewish Christians of Matthew's community to seek identity and continuity (within discontinuity).

Subsequently, the fundamental purpose of the gospel, as Harrington notes, was to point out that Jesus is "the authoritative interpreter of the Torah and the fulfillment of Israel's hopes."¹³³¹ The best way to preserve their heritage is thus for Christian Jews like the evangelist himself to follow Jesus' teaching and example and to recognize him as the Son of David and the Lord.

Sources and Nature

Regarding the sources upon which Matthew drew for his writing, most Matthean scholars generally accept the so-called 'two-source' hypothesis. They agree that the evangelist apparently employed the materials from the Markan gospel (like the death of

¹³²⁹ See David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge and NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 181-221. Most scholars would agree that Matthew's community has separated from the synagogue. See Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?* 62.

¹³³⁰ The reason for Matthew's community to keep the entire law is, as Luz points out, because Jesus commands it (5:17-18). See Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 48.

¹³³¹ Harrington, *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free*, 9.

John the Baptist in 14:3-12), the Sayings source Q¹³³² (like the Sermon on the Mount in 5-7), and other oral (and/or written) traditions peculiar to Matthew (such as the infancy stories in 1:18-2:23). In particular, Matthew is noted for incorporating a lot of Mark's materials in his framework (including theological ideas such as the 'Son of God' sayings); hence, the gospel is at times understood as the 'revised' edition of Mark's gospel.¹³³³ As a whole, German New Testament scholar Ulrich Luz comments that the evangelist is related to his sources both linguistically and theologically.¹³³⁴

Moreover, as will be discussed shortly, although there is no firm evidence that Matthew depended directly on particular Jewish apocalypse (and vice versa),¹³³⁵ Matthew at least shared their apocalyptic theology.¹³³⁶

¹³³² The Saying source Q is referred to as a collection of Jesus' sayings. It is after the German word *Quelle*, meaning source.

¹³³³ Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.

¹³³⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 41-43. Luz further claims that such continuity between Matthew and his sources extends to sociological and historical continuity. See Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 49-52.

¹³³⁵ Apocalypse is "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." Adela Yarbro Collins, ed. "Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting," *Semeia* 36 (Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 2. Based on this definition, two strands of Jewish apocalypse can be classified, namely, 'historical' apocalypse that is characterized by visions (like the Daniel and 4 Ezra), and 'otherworldly journey' apocalypse that has strong cosmological speculation (like 3 Baruch). They all share these essential features: The revelation of a supernatural world and the activity of supernatural beings; a final judgment and a destruction of the wicked; and a hortatory aspect. They also involve a transcendent eschatology that seeks retribution beyond the limits of history. Some scholars, however, propose that the themes of revelation and reversal (and promise of restoration of the fortunes of a group) as the only essential elements of apocalyptic genre. Yet, this proposal is criticized for not able to clearly distinguish apocalypses from prophetic literature. See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 5-11. Collins cites E. P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm, (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983), 447-59. See also Collins, ed. *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, 1.

¹³³⁶ This apocalyptic theology or eschatology, in particular, is concerned with the coming of the Messiah, the judgment with rewards and punishments, and the arrival of the new world in its fullness. See Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 14.

Furthermore, taking into account the Jewish identity of the author and the settings of the gospel, it is logical to consider the gospel as fundamentally a Jewish text “in its conceptual and rhetorical assumptions, in its sociological setting, and in its theological message.”¹³³⁷ In fact, the gospel is seen as the most Jewish gospel. However, it is sometimes portrayed as anti-Jewish for its polemical tone in certain texts (e.g., 27:25). In order to correct this inadequate view, Harrington points out that the polemical parts of the gospel should be framed within the ‘inner-Jewish’ context:¹³³⁸ The evangelist was solely pinpointing the Pharisees and scribes of his time and those Jewish officials who were responsible for the death of Jesus. In other words, within its original historical context, the Gospel of Matthew needs not be seen as anti-Jewish.

Structure, Style, and Themes

Luz observes that scholars generally agree on the fact the gospel can be divided into sections even though how it is divided is debatable.¹³³⁹ The debate is due to the different structural principles like the literary (i.e., narratives vs. discourse) and geographical-chronological (i.e., Jesus’ movement or life sequence) patterns employed in dividing the gospel.¹³⁴⁰ Literary criticism, for instance, focuses on the narrative patterns and claims that Matthew was simply retelling the story according to Mark with his own

¹³³⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2.

¹³³⁸ Harrington, *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free*, 12-13.

¹³³⁹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 2.

¹³⁴⁰ For example, some scholars propose that the Gospel is a three-part arrangement that deals with Jesus’ person, proclamation, and passion. Others suggest that the Gospel has a chiastic outline with alternating narrative and discourse. See Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 15-16. Dale Allison, however, notes that these principles tend to fall into two camps: Those who divide the Gospel into three parts based on the repeated phrase in 4:17 and 16:21, and those who adopt Benjamin Bacon’s principle. See Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 135.

various ideas and themes. The gospel is thus divided into three main sections (1:1-4:16; 4:17-16:20 and 16:21-28:20) in which the second and third sections are corresponding to Mark's two major sections, namely, Jesus' ministry and preaching in Galilee and his journey to Jerusalem.¹³⁴¹

Yet, many scholars continue to adopt Benjamin Bacon's principle¹³⁴²—that there are five major speeches (chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25), each ending with 'when Jesus finished these words'. They also agree that the narratives alternate with discourses and triadic structure is employed.¹³⁴³ For example, the Sermon on the Mount follows the extended introductory narrative in chapters 1-4 and precedes the narrative on Jesus' activities within Israel in chapters 8-9.

Nevertheless, based on the evaluation of these diverse structural principles, a number of biblical scholars conclude that Matthew's 'plan' was "much less systematic and much richer in variety than most scholars have thought."¹³⁴⁴ Rather, the gospel is structurally mixed despite its apparent unity.¹³⁴⁵

¹³⁴¹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 4.

¹³⁴² This is Benjamin Bacon's so-called Pentateuchal theory: Each major speech contains a discourse and a narrative. This pattern seems to be modeled after the five books of the Pentateuch. See Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew?* 26. Senior cites Benjamin W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Constable, 1930). In this work, I adopt the traditional view that the Gospel is comprised of five great discourses and the preamble/epilogue.

¹³⁴³ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 16. Talbert cites Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1-7, 71-72.

¹³⁴⁴ Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew?* 35.

¹³⁴⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 72. Davies and Allison cite R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 11 and James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1911), 244.

On the other hand, Matthew used various literary techniques to construct his gospel.¹³⁴⁶ For instance, he gathered together materials that are similar in content or form (like the parables in 21:38-22:14 or the eschatological teaching in 24-25). Matthew also demonstrated a penchant for numbers (especially the triad) as learned Jews do with their Rabbinic texts. In addition, he was inclined to suggest his themes by repeating key words (like 'righteousness' in 5-7) or summarizing statements (7:12). As a result, different understandings of the genre of the gospel emerge, such as the genre of 'biography' as suggested by Burridge. Still, there exists a strong apocalyptic outlook within the gospel.

With regards to the themes of the gospel, Harrington identifies five major themes: 1) The God of Israel is the father of Jesus who is the preeminent presence of God. 2) The reign of the kingdom of heaven/God has begun and its fullness is yet to come. 3) Jesus, being the Son of God and of Man, and Messiah, is the present embodiment and manifestation of the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the Torah. 4) The disciples, though with little faith, are the closest followers of Jesus (and his teaching) and models for Christians. 5) The formation of Christian character through following Jesus and cultivating values and practices that help achieve the goal of human life, namely, with God in God's kingdom. Thus, all followers of Christ, including non-Jews, constitute the people of God.¹³⁴⁷

These themes somehow reflect the eschatological nature of the gospel: The earthly Jesus as the Son of Man is an eschatological figure who inaugurates the age of

¹³⁴⁶ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 6; Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 73-96. Davies and Allison identify thirteen different literary styles and characteristics in Matthew.

¹³⁴⁷ This understanding points to the question of the Gentile mission. See Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 15-21.

fulfillment, the kingdom of God.¹³⁴⁸ In fact, the Gospel of Matthew has long been recognized as “the most thoroughly ‘apocalyptic-eschatological’ of the gospels in its general outlook.”¹³⁴⁹

Apocalyptic-eschatological Outlook

The Jewish messianic and eschatological apocalyptic movements continued to survive and flourish into early Christianity and its writings.¹³⁵⁰ One such example is the character of the Sayings source Q: “Q’s perspective is framed both spatially by transcendent realities...and temporally by the coming judgment...and the eschatological meal in the Kingdom...[For] Q, as for some other expressions of Christian apocalypticism, the present already partakes of eschatological realities.”¹³⁵¹ Thus, although there is only one apocalyptic text in the New Testament (the book of *Revelation*), the Synoptic gospels “are colored by an apocalyptic worldview to a significant degree” because of the person of Jesus.¹³⁵²

¹³⁴⁸ Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Significance of the Earthly Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Ex auditu* 14 (1998): 61-62, 65.

¹³⁴⁹ Sim, 2n. Sim quotes F. C. Grant, *The Gospels: Their Origin and Their Growth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 137.

¹³⁵⁰ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 260. Collins cites Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 61-121.

¹³⁵¹ Ibid., 259. Collins quotes John S. Kloppenborg, “Symbolic Eschatology and the Apocalypticism of Q,” *HTR* 80 (1987): 296.

¹³⁵² Ibid., 256-57. Robert Miller notes that there is a debate on whether Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. One representative of those who give confirmative answer is Dale Allison. Those who reject this view are represented by the members of Jesus Seminar. See Robert J. Miller, “Introduction,” in *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate*, ed. Robert J. Miller (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2001), 2-11. Miller points out that the ‘kingdom’ sayings of Jesus, his other ambiguous sayings/deeds, as well as his relationship to the apocalyptic thinking of his time can be interpreted either way. In this work, I basically agree with the majority’s/Allison’s view.

Moreover, all the characteristics of Jewish apocalyptic theology—and apocalyptic eschatology in particular—are present in the Gospel of Matthew:¹³⁵³ In the first place, the use of cosmic terms (like angels in 4:11 and the evil ones in 13:19), parables (such as the parable of the weeds in 13:24-30, 36-43), and comparative terms (the narrow and wide gates in 7:13-14, or the faithful and wicked servants in 24:45-51) reveals the evangelist's adoption of a completely dualistic perspective.

Second, the gospel is also deterministic regarding the course of history. Both the portrayal of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament (26:56) and his knowledge/prophecy of the future (26: 21-25) presuppose that what God has set in motion is a history that cannot be changed.¹³⁵⁴

Third, Matthew identifies Jesus with the Son of Man¹³⁵⁵ who had a historical mission (8:20, 9:6), is now at the right hand of God (28:16-20), and will return in glory in

¹³⁵³ Sim identifies six characteristics of Jewish apocalyptic theology: First, it highlights dualism on various levels (such as the present vs. the future). Second, it has a deterministic view of history in that God remains in control of all events. Third, within the present time, terrible things are fast approaching and a savior will arrive. Fourth, the arrival of the savior introduces the eschatological events—the final and universal judgment. Fifth, it concentrates on the reversal of present circumstances in near future. Sixth, there is the imminence of the end. Sim, 35-53, 70. The following account is based on Sim's reconstruction of the Gospel of Matthew. I slightly rearrange its order here. See Sim, 75-177. Apart from these characteristics, some scholars further note that the symbol of 'kingdom' found in the Gospel "lent itself to an eschatological interpretation in the context of Jewish literature from around the turn of the era, especially in literature deriving from the land of Israel that was originally composed in a Semitic language." They also suggest that John the Baptist's preaching about the coming of an apocalyptic judgment as narrated by Matthew has an eschatological orientation (of restoration) that is typical of the apocalypses. See Collins, 258-60. Collins cites R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991); Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); and E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985).

¹³⁵⁴ Sim rightly points out that on the individual level Matthew upholds the notion of free will and repentance. He further notes that this inconsistency is commonly found in apocalyptic-eschatological writings of that time.

¹³⁵⁵ Some scholars point out that the 'Son of Man' and 'Messiah' sayings play a significant role in revealing the apocalyptic eschatology entailed in Jesus' teaching and deeds. In particular, the belief that Jesus as the Son of Man has risen and ascended, and will come on the clouds of heaven becomes the key to early Christian apocalypticism. See Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 261-64.

the end time (24:4-31). He also frequently refers to the future coming of the Son of Man at the end time (e.g. 10:23; 16:27-28). In addition, he provides us with various eschatological scenarios (e.g. 24:4-31). All these echo the characteristic of apocalyptic eschatology with regards to the arrival of a savior and the coming of end time events.

Fourth, both Matthew's terminology (like 'harvest' in 3:12 or 'on that day' in 7:22) and the description of eschatological scenarios converge on the final and universal judgment characterized by apocalyptic eschatology. Thus, Matthew depicts Jesus as the Son of Man who will be the judge (19:28; 25:31) and describes the scene of judgment in detail (in 7:21-23 and 25:31-46).

Fifth, subsequently, the final judgment and related parables (like the feast banquet in 8:11-12) depicted by Matthew foretell the fates of the wicked and the righteous: The fate of the wicked is eternal punishment (25:46) while the fate of the righteous is the state of the Beatitudes (5:3-10). This description of Matthew is in tune with common apocalyptic eschatological thinking that there will be a reversal of fates in the eschatological future.

Sixth, the evangelist likewise detailed the imminence of the end in his gospel, in 16:28 and 24:24. And the mission discourse in 9:37-10:42 further affirms this view in that the disciples will receive comfort in times of distress (10:22).

Why, then, would Matthew embrace apocalypticism¹³⁵⁶ and take recourse to apocalyptic eschatology? Historical criticism suggests that it is closely related to the

¹³⁵⁶ Robert Miller notes that there is a distinction between the terms 'eschatology' and 'apocalypticism'. Eschatology within biblical studies refers to a particular way of thinking that is centered on the end time. Although Jewish and Christian traditions have different eschatological hopes, both are convinced that God will prevail in the end of history. Apocalypticism, in contrast, is a kind of eschatology and, as will be seen

socio-historical setting of the Matthean community:¹³⁵⁷ The characteristics of apocalyptic eschatology allow the community to legitimate their existence and sectarian inclination in times of isolation. They also allow the evangelist to explain the current situation of the community. They further provide consolation and hope for the future, and satisfy the need for vengeance. In short, the gospel was constructed in such a way that dealt with the needs of the community at a time of difficulty. And the value of Jewish apocalypses lies not so much in the providing information about cosmology or future history as in their simple affirmation of a transcendent world.¹³⁵⁸

In offering pragmatic ethical values, apocalyptic literature “shape[s] one’s imaginative perception of a situation and so lay[s] the basis for whatever course of action it exhorts.”¹³⁵⁹ Its language is commissive in character: It commits us to a worldview that entails certain actions and attitudes.¹³⁶⁰ The ethical value of apocalyptic literature “lies in its demand for a committed life in the face of fierce opposition and conflict, even dualism in the realities of good and evil in the world.”¹³⁶¹

Many of the basic issues we have covered here are not absolutely resolved; for example, biblical scholars still debate on whether Matthew is anti-Jewish. Still, a general understanding of the gospel writer, his community, and the gospel itself can be grasped.

below, can be expressed in various ways. From a socio-historical perspective, apocalypticism is understood as a socio-religious movement. See Miller, “Introduction,” in *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate*, 5-6. See also Sim, 24.

¹³⁵⁷ Sim, 3-4, 181-221, 241-42. Sim cites B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924).

¹³⁵⁸ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 282.

¹³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³⁶⁰ Some scholars further note that apocalypses also implicitly motivate the readers to live good lives by generating fear and depicting punishment as certain Greco-Roman apocalyptic texts do. See Collins, ed. “Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting,” 8.

¹³⁶¹ Cahill, “Gender and Strategies of Goodness: The New Testament and Ethics,” 447.

In particular, the presence of Jewish apocalyptic theology (and eschatology) in the gospel is singularly highlighted for it has significant impact on, among others, the evangelist's views of eschatology, discipleship and attitude toward the Law. From the perspective of Christian ethics, Matthew's eschatology provides a framework for all of Christian life.¹³⁶² As Harrington points out, on the surface, the Gospel of Matthew seems problematic in a number of issues—such as traces of moralism, anti-Judaism, patriachalism, and legalism—but these issues can also be interpreted constructively.¹³⁶³ They also help pave the way to our interpretation of the texts as 'scripted' and 'script'. With such understanding I now turn to the Sermon on the Mount and its issues in order to lay out the proximate setting of the Beatitudes.

7.2 The Sermon on the Mount: Some Specific Issues

Its Place within the Gospel

Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is situated toward the beginning of the gospel.¹³⁶⁴ As far as the storyline of the gospel is concerned, Jesus has started his teaching and ministry in Galilee and the people from everywhere were drawn by him and to him. He went up to the mountain and addressed the disciples and the crowds (4:23-5:1). For those who hold the view that the gospel consists of five major speeches, the Sermon

¹³⁶² Daniel J. Harrington, "Problems and opportunities in Matthew's Gospel," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 6 (December 2007): 423.

¹³⁶³ Ibid..

¹³⁶⁴ It is noted that some scholars would begin the Sermon at Matthew 5:3 instead of Matthew 5:1, pointing out that 4:23-5:2 is a literary unit that introduces the Sermon on the Mount. However, for the sake of convenience, while accepting this finding, I follow the general use of Matthew 5-7 as a way to describe the Sermon.

is the first of these five discourses. However, the Sermon is by no means an independent speech. Matthean scholars William Davies and Dale Allison, for example, say, “Although the SM has a narrative beginning and conclusion, it should not be partitioned off and given a special interpretation... The broader context must be kept in mind.”¹³⁶⁵ Harrington likewise states that it “must never be detached from the narrative of Jesus as told by Matthew... [for] it is part of the story of Jesus.”¹³⁶⁶ In other words, the Sermon must not be treated as an independent speech and ethical treatise but as an integrated part of the whole gospel.

Yet, Jack Dean Kingsbury notes that there is no consensus among scholars regarding the exact place and role of the Sermon within the overall plan of Matthew:¹³⁶⁷ Those who employ literary criticism, on the one hand, insist that the narration of Jesus’ passion is the climatic feature of Matthew and hence perceive the Sermon as simply “the example par excellence” of Jesus’ ministry of teaching. Others who employ different critical methods, on the other hand, claim that the Sermon dominates the whole of the gospel, for “from it one gains insight into the structure of the Gospel and into its nature and purpose.”¹³⁶⁸ Betz, by interpreting the Sermon’s involvement of discussion of Jewish religious issues, further claims that the Sermon enjoys a peculiar relationship with Jewish scholarship that is not extended to the rest of the gospel (nor the New Testament as a whole). He thus concludes that the entire work of the evangelist is in a sense a

¹³⁶⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 302; Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 10.

¹³⁶⁶ Harrington, “Problems and opportunities in Matthew’s Gospel,” 418.

¹³⁶⁷ Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew,” *Interpretation* 41 (April 1987): 133.

¹³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

commentary on the Sermon although it never explicitly refers to the Sermon again.¹³⁶⁹

Allison, in contrast, takes a more nuanced path by pointing out that “most of the topics covered in the Sermon come up again elsewhere in Matthew, where they are often treated at further length.”¹³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the general view is that the Sermon plays an important role in the gospel.

Genre

The origin of the designation of the notion of ‘sermon’ can be traced back to Augustine. However, Betz finds this traditional notion is too broad and thus unsatisfactory:¹³⁷¹ Matthew’s use of *οἱ λόγοι* and *ἡ διδασχὴ* implies that the Sermon, strictly speaking, is not really a speech (*λόγος*) but a group of ‘sayings’ or ‘teachings’ respectively. By examining the ‘two ways’ motif in 7:13-14 (“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”) and evaluating its subsequent meaning in light of certain Hellenistic ethical/rhetoric literature, Betz then proposes that the specific literary genre of the Sermon is one of epitome: An epitome is “a condensation of a larger work, made by a redactor...for a specific purpose...[with] brevity and precision in selection and formulation...intended to be a systematic synopsis...[and] intended for those who have

¹³⁶⁹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 2, 6.

¹³⁷⁰ Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 9.

¹³⁷¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 71, 73, 76-77, 80; *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. L. L. Welborn (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 1-16.

[already] made considerable progress.”¹³⁷² As an epitome the Sermon systematically and selectively presents the teaching of Jesus and provides the necessary information/tool for the disciples of Jesus to creatively implement the teaching in concrete life. Betz further claims that the Sermon was oral in nature and in function in spite of being composed as written texts.¹³⁷³

Allison, however, is convinced that the Sermon, rather than being codes of law, is partially a poetic text that is both dramatic and pictorial. He also notes that the Sermon employs hyperbole that is common among Semitic literature.¹³⁷⁴ Harrington, from a different perspective, suggests that the Sermon is closest to the wisdom instructions found in Jewish wisdom literature, especially Proverbs 1-9 and 22-24, *Qoheleth*, and *Sirach*.¹³⁷⁵

Sources and Settings

If we follow the ‘two-source’ hypothesis and employ source criticism, we will note that much of the Sermon on the Mount is originated from the Q document.¹³⁷⁶ As a result, Matthew’s Sermon is sometimes called the ‘Q Sermon’. One concrete text of this so-called ‘Q Sermon’ is Jesus’ radical teaching on ‘love your enemies’ in 5:38-48.

However, Matthew did not simply copy from the Q sayings but also carried out

¹³⁷² Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, 13-14. Luz, on the contrary, claims that there is no real analogy between the Sermon and other form structures and hence one should not seek any conclusion regarding the Sermon’s genre. See Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 174.

¹³⁷³ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 82-83.

¹³⁷⁴ Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 11-12.

¹³⁷⁵ Harrington, “Problems and opportunities in Matthew’s Gospel,” 418.

¹³⁷⁶ Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew?* 22; Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount?* 13. The identification of the Q material is usually done by comparing with Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. Still, there are disagreements among scholars on aspects of Matthew’s use of the Sayings source.

redactional work by means of expansions, changes, and reorganization of the order.¹³⁷⁷ A second source employed by the evangelist is the diverse, assortment of material (sometimes called the M source) peculiar to him alone, such as 6:1-6, 16-18. A third possible (and yet debatable) source, as promoted by the Jesus Seminar, is the person of Jesus himself. Others like Davies further sought to find rabbinic parallels and demonstrate that Matthew 5-7 is illuminated by a particular type of rabbinic activity.¹³⁷⁸

Still, although only a few verses in the Sermon have possible parallels in Mark, Matthew might have borrowed from Mark certain sayings and motifs (Mark 3:7-13) in his introduction of the Sermon, and inserted the Sermon between Mark 1:21 (//Matthew 5:2) and 1:22 (//Matthew 7:28-29).¹³⁷⁹ Based on the investigation of the mountain settings in Matthew, some scholars further claim that the Sermon is actually based on the “Mark’s account of the mountain-top commissioning of the Twelve.”¹³⁸⁰

Finally, Jewish scholar Gerald Friedlander argues for the presence of Jewish influence by recalling Tertullian’s words that the Sermon is “in agreement with the spirit and teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures...[and thus] contains nothing new.”¹³⁸¹

As a whole, despite this diversity, one can still claim that the Sermon is at least a discourse “constructed out of discrete sayings either by the anonymous redactors of Q, or

¹³⁷⁷ Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount?* 14-15. Carter identifies three different possible sources here. See *What are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount?* 20-21. See also Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 126, 573-75.

¹³⁷⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 293.

¹³⁷⁹ Lambrecht, 25-26.

¹³⁸⁰ Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain. A Study in Matthean Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 194.

¹³⁸¹ Gerald Friedlander, *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1969), 16.

by the evangelist.”¹³⁸² And Matthew creatively shapes and interprets those materials passed on to him by the early Christian community.

Being an integrated, important part of the gospel, the Sermon likewise has “its background in rabbinic discussions after A. D. 70 and in the political and social conditions of the period.”¹³⁸³ Davies thus reminds us that the Sermon needs to be situated “in the wider context not only of Matthew’s gospel but of Judaism and the early Church...[for Matthew 5-7 was formulated] in direct confrontation with Pharisaic Judaism.”¹³⁸⁴ Together with Allison, Davies further claims that the Sermon is also set in a Mosaic context:¹³⁸⁵ The intentional parallels between Matthew 1-5 and the story of Moses indicate that Jesus who delivers the speech is the new Moses, Messiah and eschatological lawgiver. Consequently, the Sermon can be understood as the messianic Torah in that the Sermon is the teaching of the Messiah who affirms, interprets, and deepens the Old Law.

The Mountain and the Audience

One of the explicit differences between Luke’s Sermon and Matthew’s is the geographical location where the Sermon was delivered. Matthew’s Sermon is said to be delivered on a mountain instead of a plain. Traditionally, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion “[have] dominated the topology of first-century imaginations nurtured by the Old

¹³⁸² Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 655.

¹³⁸³ Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 294.

¹³⁸⁴ Donald Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996). 8. Senior cites Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*.

¹³⁸⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 297-98.

Testament.”¹³⁸⁶ In both instances the symbolic-theological setting is more important than historical-geographical setting. Which, then, was the mountain of teaching in Matthew’s gospel? Harrington points out that any attempt to determine the exact site is rather useless for there are many mountains along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.¹³⁸⁷ Still, the common view is that Mount Sinai was the place for it was there that the Torah was given and thus fits the view that Jesus came to promulgate a New Law. Terence Donaldson, who is interested in examining the mountain symbolisms and settings in the Bible, however, argues for a Zion typology, claiming that Matthew’s emphasis of Jesus as the new messianic Moses points to Mount Zion that played a role in eschatology, and that “in Jewish expectation one aspect of the consummation on Mount Zion was to be a new giving of the Torah.”¹³⁸⁸

With regards to the specific audience to whom the Sermon was delivered, the flow of the story indicates that the first disciples and the crowds are the intended audience (5:1-2). Betz, who perceives that the Sermon as an epitome, suggests that Matthew 5-7 was meant to instruct the disciples alone while the gospel was intended by Matthew as for the Jewish Christian community.¹³⁸⁹ Harrington, on the contrary, claims, “The mention of the disciples in 5:1 needs not exclude the crowds,” as 7:28-29 confirms.¹³⁹⁰

¹³⁸⁶ Dennis Hamm, *The Beatitudes in Context: What Luke and Matthew Meant* (Wilmington, DL: Michael Glazier, 1990), 76.

¹³⁸⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 78.

¹³⁸⁸ Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain. A Study in Matthean Theology*, 116. See also Hamm, *The Beatitudes in Context: What Luke and Matthew Meant*, 76.

¹³⁸⁹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 80-81. See also Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 20.

¹³⁹⁰ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 76

Purpose

Many scholars suggest that the Sermon is meant to “[proclaim] the definitive and authoritative teaching of Jesus for [the] community...[and provide] guidance on how disciples of Jesus are to live and [sustain] the community’s self-understanding in a situation of transition and marginality.”¹³⁹¹ In other words, it is aimed at interpreting the Matthean community’s concrete experience in relation to discipleship and providing direction and encouragement.

Donaldson adds that Matthew “attempt[s] to present the Sermon as Christian Torah and Jesus as the new Moses.”¹³⁹² Allison similarly claims that the Sermon as a discourse “presupposes and teaches important things about its speaker, whose identity is crucial for interpretation.”¹³⁹³ In short, the Sermon tells us who Jesus is.

Themes and Structure

According to Harrington, the basic theme of the Sermon is that “Jesus came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them,” as indicated in 5:17.¹³⁹⁴ Still, based on Jesus’ pronouncement at 5:20 (“unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”), many scholars would add that ‘greater righteousness’ is the structuring principle and core theme of the Sermon. For them this ‘greater righteousness’ is the kind of lifestyle of the disciples who devote

¹³⁹¹ Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount?* 65.

¹³⁹² Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain. A Study in Matthean Theology*, 111.

¹³⁹³ Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 15.

¹³⁹⁴ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 76.

themselves to God wholeheartedly by doing God's will.¹³⁹⁵ However, others counter-propose that the notion of 'Father' is the core subject matter of the Sermon and hence argue that the Lord's prayer is the heart of Matthew 5-7.¹³⁹⁶

In either case, the structure of the Sermon is determined by the themes identified. For those who focus on the theme of 'greater righteousness', the Sermon can therefore be divided into five parts:¹³⁹⁷ The first part specifies those who practice the greater righteousness, namely, those who live according to the Beatitudes and as 'salt of the earth' and 'light of the world' (5:3-16). The following three parts focus on the kinds of practices Jesus demands—toward the neighbor (5:17-48); before God, (6:1-18); and in other areas of life with the Golden Rule as the culmination of all practices (6:19-7:12). The final part contains certain concluding commands on practicing the greater righteousness (7:13-27).

Among those who claim the centrality of the Lord's prayer (6:9-13), some perceive the rest of the Sermon is a continuation of the prayer while others propose their own constructions.¹³⁹⁸ Allison, for example, constructs the Sermon and centers the Lord's prayer around various triads:¹³⁹⁹ Apart from introduction (4:23-5:2) and conclusion (7:28-8:1), the rest of the texts are divided into three parts, namely, the

¹³⁹⁵ Kingsbury, "The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew," 137. For an excursus of the notion of righteousness *δικαιοσύνη*, see Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 142.

¹³⁹⁶ Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 3; Dale C. Allison, "The structure of the Sermon on the Mount," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 425.

¹³⁹⁷ Kingsbury, "The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew," 136-42. Scholars who hold this view include Jack Dean Kingsbury, Hans Dieter Betz, and Joseph Fitzmyer. However, their exact structural divisions of the Sermon differ among themselves. In short, this the majority view among contemporary New Testament ethics scholars, such as Frank Matera and Allen Verhey.

¹³⁹⁸ Allison, Jr., "The structure of the Sermon on the Mount," 426-28. Allison challenges this position by claiming that apparent links between the Lord's prayer and other parts of the Sermon (e.g. between 6:12 and 7:1-5) are mere coincidence.

¹³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 429-40. Allison notes that these triads are derived from classical Jewish formulation.

Beatitudes (5:3-12), the task of God's people in the world (5:13-7:12), and warnings and judgment (7:13-27). The middle part, that is, the task of the people of God, consists of three pillars—Jesus and the Torah (5:17-48), the Christian cult (6:1-18), and social issues (6:19-7:12).¹⁴⁰⁰

Luz, who also notes the evangelist's fondness of tripartite division, divides the Sermon into three parts based on a chiastic structure:¹⁴⁰¹ In particular, he highlights that the central text is 6:1-18 within which the Lord's Prayer is exactly the middle of the entire Sermon. He further comments that the overall structure of the Sermon resulting from Matthew's redactional revision is a work of art in which symmetry, poise and unity is found. Thus, he insists that the Sermon has to be treated as a holistic entity.

Still, there are some scholars who suggest that the Beatitudes provides the structure for the Sermon:¹⁴⁰² The rest of the Sermon is basically an expansion in reverse order of the Beatitudes by means of triadic illustration. For instance, they claim that the eighth beatitude (in 5:10) is elaborated in 5:11-16.

Again, there is no real agreement among scholars on what the core theme of the Sermon is and how its structure be studied. Still, Joseph Fitzmyer rightly comments that

¹⁴⁰⁰ Allison further suggests that the evangelist arranged these three pillars in the Sermon so as to offer a Christian interpretation of the classical pillars of the Jewish *mishna*. See "The structure of the Sermon on the Mount," 442-43.

¹⁴⁰¹ Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 48-49. Indeed, since the time of Augustine, early church Fathers have begun to analyze the Sermon as a unified text. See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 106.

¹⁴⁰² Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?* 36-38. Unfortunately, many biblical scholars reject this proposal because it produces strange sequences and units and destroys certain internal unity.

Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is better structured than Luke's Sermon on the Plain for it is constructed around a single core theme.¹⁴⁰³

A Radical Ethics for All?

As we saw above, some scholars consider the Sermon as an epitome that presents the teaching of Jesus and offers guidance for the disciples to creatively live out the teaching in concrete life. This implies that Matthew 5-7 has an explicit ethical function for its audience.¹⁴⁰⁴ The Sermon is the summation of Jesus' moral demand that implicitly implies the motif of the imitation of Christ who is the moral exemplar.¹⁴⁰⁵

In fact, during the patristic period Augustine had already understood the Sermon as "measured by the highest norms of morality, the perfect pattern of the Christian life [intended for all]."¹⁴⁰⁶ Luther, while rejecting the traditional view that the Sermon is an ethics of the perfect for the spiritual elite, also interpreted the Sermon as an ethics of repentance for all Christians.¹⁴⁰⁷ Still, later on, the Sermon was interpreted by some theologians as either an ethics of law or an ethics of ideal.¹⁴⁰⁸

Harrington notes, however, that the ethical teaching of Matthew 5-7 is analogous to Jewish *halakah*—advice on how the Jews are to behave.¹⁴⁰⁹ Still, he adds that the

¹⁴⁰³ Lambrecht, 26. Lambrecht cites Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke. Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981-85).

¹⁴⁰⁴ Some scholars further suggest that the Sermon is also about instruction in worship and prayer. See Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 31. Talbert cites John Riches, *Matthew. NT Guides* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 68.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., "Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount," 299; Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 22.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Johnson, "The Sermon on the Mount," 655. For Augustine the Sermon poses a perfectionistic ethics.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Lohse, 64.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Lohse, 65-66.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 8.

Sermon is not so much concerned with deciding halakic matters but rather with principles and attitudes, and it has both personal and communal ethical implications.¹⁴¹⁰ New Testament scholar Charles Talbert further claims that the Sermon has a twofold concrete ethical function of “[serving] as a catalyst for the formation of character...[and contributing] to decision making.”¹⁴¹¹

Nevertheless, these biblical scholars rightly remind us that the ethics of the Sermon cannot be separated from the theme of the kingdom of God for it is already present in the person of Jesus.¹⁴¹²

However, reflection and discussion on the eschatological nature and ethical demand of Matthew 5-7 lead these same scholars to raise the questions of whether the Sermon on the Mount contains radical ethics or not, and whether they are meant for all people. We have already seen that there is a spectrum of views throughout history:¹⁴¹³ Monastic and medieval commentators perceived the radical teachings as counsels of perfection only for certain people; Luther rejected this idea and claimed that the Sermon was intended for all even though the demands were impracticable. Reinhold Niebuhr likewise perceives that the Sermon “has the character of a norm that is impossible of fulfillment by humans.”¹⁴¹⁴ Those who employ the historical critical method, in contrast, suggest that the eschatological tone of the gospel would imply an interim ethics of the Sermon.

¹⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 76.

¹⁴¹¹ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 29.

¹⁴¹² Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 303-4.

¹⁴¹³ Ibid., 284-93. See also Lambrecht, 20-25. Joachim Jeremias and others identify three general views of interpretation: ethical, pedagogical, and eschatological interpretations. See Norman Perrin, ed. and trans. *The Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1963).

¹⁴¹⁴ Johnson, “The Sermon on the Mount,” 655.

In order to respond to these questions, Kingsbury argues that the reality of sin and of the disciples' little faith is not the determining factor of Jesus' ethics; rather, it is the reality of God's eschatological kingdom that counts—insofar as the kingdom of heaven is a present reality, an ethics of greater righteousness is possible.¹⁴¹⁵ Allison thus suggests that only when reading the Sermon in light of its eschatological orientation (which is an important characteristic of Matthew's gospel) that the Sermon's radical demands can be explained.¹⁴¹⁶ In a similar way, Harrington comments that although Matthew places Jesus' teaching in an eschatological framework, much of Jesus' teaching concerns behaviors in the present as well.¹⁴¹⁷ Thus, acting out the Sermon is possible.

With Allison, Davies further points out that “while moral perfection cannot be achieved, nevertheless one's character is built up as one earnestly struggles.”¹⁴¹⁸ They then conclude that the Sermon is “not about what we should *do* but about what we should *be*” and the ideal posted by the Sermon is a necessity—it has the ultimate end in the Sermon in view and sets forth the means to that end.¹⁴¹⁹

Finally, by adopting John Climacus's view on virtue, Allison suggests that the Sermon's ethical demand can be perceived as a ladder or as a challenge to Christians to become better over the course of time.¹⁴²⁰

¹⁴¹⁵ Kingsbury, “The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew,” 143.

¹⁴¹⁶ Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 13.

¹⁴¹⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 76.

¹⁴¹⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” 290-91; 307.

¹⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁴²⁰ Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, 14.

A Summary

So far I have explored some specific issues regarding the Sermon. We note that many of these issues are still undergoing debates and conflicting approaches are present. However, they are helpful to construct my own approach:

The Sermon is closely related to, and plays an important role in the larger context of the gospel. It is more than an epitome and is in close relation with the Jewish wisdom literature. The classical two-source hypothesis seems helpful in our understanding of the sources of the Sermon and its Jewish/Mosaic settings. Moreover, the primary audience of the Sermon tends to be both the disciples and the Israelites who came to listen to Jesus. The Sermon depicts Jesus' identity as not just the eschatological prophet and moral exemplar but the Son of God whose teaching guides us to live out our Christian moral life (especially in the midst of difficulty). We are called to have a righteousness that is greater than that of the Jewish Pharisees and scribes. Therefore, the ethical demands posed by Jesus in the Sermon, when understood in light of eschatological orientation that characterizes the gospel, are both possible and realistic. Furthermore, in order to grasp the entire teaching of Jesus delivered on the mountain, one must treat it as a united whole even though it can be divided structurally into various parts.

Finally, these findings help us to put the Beatitudes in its proper place and offer us needed information that can serve as guidelines in our exegesis of the Beatitudes. In the following pages I conclude our background exploration by looking at some critical and immediate issues regarding the Beatitudes.

7.3 The Beatitudes: Some Critical and Immediate Issues

The Meanings of ‘beatitude’ and ‘blessed’

Matthew 5:3-10 is often called the Beatitudes. The term ‘beatitude’ is derived from the Latin *beatitudo* and is equivalent to the Greek term *μακάρισμος* (macarism) which could have an Egyptian origin.¹⁴²¹ It is derived from the adjective *μακάριος* (meaning blessed or happy) and designates a literary genre. In classical Greek literature, the blessed is one who “takes cognizance of the essential harmony which binds him to society and to the world.”¹⁴²² Another Greek adjective that has a similar meaning is *ευδαιμων*. It is the adjective for *eudaimonia*, the notion that was employed by Aristotle in his discussion of human happiness. The evangelist, however, opted for *μακάριος* for a specific reason: It points toward the divine realm—it refers to the divine happiness that is intended by Jesus for his followers.¹⁴²³ According to Davies and Allison, the adjective *μακάριος* was first found in the work of Pindar (~518BCE) and meant “‘free from daily cares and worries’, ‘prosperous’, and was used of the blessed state of the gods, who neither toiled nor suffered.”¹⁴²⁴ Only later on did it take on various forms and was evoked by diverse spectrum of objects, ranging from praiseworthy children to virtue and wisdom. Still, it was always attached to divine providence.

¹⁴²¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 92.

¹⁴²² Crosby, 9. Crosby quotes David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 109.

¹⁴²³ Carl G. Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount. A Theological Investigation*, revised ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2001), 13. By comparing with Aristotle’s understanding of happiness, Vaught claims out that the nature of happiness found in the Beatitudes is not just divine but also relational—it comes as a gift made accessible through a relation between the giver and the receiver. It also points to an inner condition “that can be achieved regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.” See *The Sermon on the Mount. A Theological Investigation*, 13-14.

¹⁴²⁴ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 431.

As a literary genre macarism refers to a form initiated by *μακάριος* and means a living, multi-sided form of speech when used in the predicative form.¹⁴²⁵ By examining some of the oldest macarisms found in Egyptian literature, Betz suggests that this kind of literary form was originated in the liturgical context of religious, mystery cults.¹⁴²⁶ As a whole, both ancient Egyptian and Greek macarisms bear the following characteristics: “1) Their original function is in the ritual. 2) Their nature is that of declarative statements. 3) The future orientation is eschatological as well as this worldly. 4) They are connected with ethics and morality.”¹⁴²⁷

Later on, the conventional understanding of macarism—which sanctions materialism—was transformed and brought in line with the Greek philosophical trend of its day:¹⁴²⁸ Macarisms were employed by philosophers to formulate a philosophical idea in a succinct way, and at times to serve as an introduction to the didactic texts that follow. For instance, the ‘macarism of the wise man’ slowly emerged to counter the conventional view.

Nevertheless, macarisms are also found in the Sacred Scripture (Psalm 1) and the adjective is commonly translated into ‘happy’ and ‘blessed’ to denote the happiness bestowed by God upon those who receive God’s blessings.¹⁴²⁹ Although some biblical

¹⁴²⁵ James W. Thompson, “The Background and Function of the Beatitudes in Matthew and Luke,” *Restoration Quarterly* 41, no.2 (1999): 109. Thompson cites M. Hengel, “Zur matthaischen Seligpreisungen,” *TRu* 336.

¹⁴²⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 98.

¹⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁴²⁸ Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, 26-33; *The Sermon on the Mount*, 103-4.

¹⁴²⁹ Thomas Hoyt, Jr., “The Poor/Rich Theme in the Beatitudes,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 37, no. 1 (1980): 34.

scholars find these translations either inadequate or unsuitable,¹⁴³⁰ I follow the English translations adopted by the *New Revised Standard Version* (i.e., ‘blessed’) although the original meaning of *μακάριος* is kept throughout this work.

‘Beatitude’ (Macarism) in the Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, the word *ashre* (meaning ‘happy’), though not applied to God and less sacred, was the basis of the Septuagint translation.¹⁴³¹ It appears forty-five times; among them over one half occur in the *Psalms* and some thirty verses begin their sentence with this word.¹⁴³²

The macarisms in the Old Testament usually appear either in pairs or in series (as in Sirach 14:1-2; 25:8-10):¹⁴³³ Specifically, they first appeared in the wisdom literature and later employed in apocalyptic writings such as the book of *Daniel* (12:12). And different types of usage are noted: Some macarisms pronounce blessings on ethical conducts that are offered as models (as in Genesis 30:13 and Proverbs 3:13) and thus point to moral exhortation; others speak of the happiness that is granted and indicate the

¹⁴³⁰ The former sounds too banal, superficial and obscures the eschatological character of the beatitudes; the latter, on the contrary, sounds archaic and sometimes evokes inappropriate associations with the beyond in certain cultures. Thompson, 109; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 190.

¹⁴³¹ Another Hebrew word that is equivalent to *μακάριος* is *baruk*. It is linked to ‘kneeling’ and often applied to God (Genesis 1:28). However, its significance is minimal. See Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 432; Jim Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 18.

¹⁴³² Friedlander, 17-18. Most of the beatitudes are found in postexilic writings and only a few appear before the exile (e.g., 1 Kings 10:8). See Crosby, 9. Macarisms are also found in the Dead Seas Scrolls and in the Enoch literature like 2 Enoch 42:11. Some ethicists thus point out that Temple themes are an important source of its moral authority. See John W. Welch, “Temple Themes and Ethical Formation in the Sermon On the Mount,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 2 (2009): 156, 163.

¹⁴³³ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 432-33; Thompson, 110-11. It is noted that the use of macarism in cultic-religious context, however, is uncommon to Jewish literature. This type of use is found usually within apocalyptic texts, though. See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 100.

nature of these blessings (such as Psalm 144:12-15). In addition, they assume that the good deeds are rewarded in the present. Those beatitudes found in apocalyptic literature, in contrast, focus on assurance and the proffering of hope in future. Blessings are pronounced in the present and promises are to follow, as in Tobit 13:14. These eschatological macarisms also lead to the development of their counterparts, eschatological woes. They are employed as a literary effort to “create, or recreate, an apocalyptic vision in the imagination of the reader of the apocalyptic book.”¹⁴³⁴

In the New Testament, *μακάριος* appears around fifty times. Most of them are found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and are all used to express religious joy.¹⁴³⁵ Similar to what is observed in the Old Testament macarisms, New Testament macarisms are also diverse in forms and types, and are likewise divided into wisdom and eschatological macarisms, as in Romans 14:22 and Revelation 19:9 respectively.¹⁴³⁶ They also appear either in isolation (as in Matthew 11:6; 13:16) or in series—our Matthean Beatitudes is a typical example of the latter form.¹⁴³⁷

Jewish Influences, Sources, and Development of the Beatitudes

While the genre of macarism might have ancient Egyptian and Greek origin, Betz points out that the macarisms in 5:3-10 are developed out of a Jewish matrix: They share the tradition of Jewish wisdom literature despite bearing the characteristics of ancient

¹⁴³⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 102.

¹⁴³⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 434.

¹⁴³⁶ Ibid..

¹⁴³⁷ Thompson, 112. Some exegetes further claim that Matthew’s use of third person in the Beatitudes fits well the genre of macarism. See Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 185.

Egyptian and Greek macarisms.¹⁴³⁸ Not surprisingly, some exegetes conclude that the Matthean beatitudes are sayings of a sophisticated literary nature.¹⁴³⁹

As far as the content is concerned, many scholars note that the Beatitudes is closely related to certain Old Testament texts, especially passages from the Second Isaiah (57, 61, 66), and Psalm 37 (as well as Psalms 24 and 73).¹⁴⁴⁰ In order to understand the close connection between the Beatitudes and these texts, New Testament scholar George Wesley Buchanan explains that it was common for early Jews/Christians to prove their arguments by quoting authoritative scriptural texts.

However, Buchanan insists, “In dealing with the Beatitudes...it is not enough to recognize the quotations of scripture included in them. These texts must be understood against their entire background.”¹⁴⁴¹ The Babylonian Jews would be redeemed by their Lord who also redeems Jerusalem, proclaims good news to the afflicted, and comforts those who mourn.¹⁴⁴² It was “this mythological background upon which the author of the Beatitudes appealed, assuming that his readers were in the same situation as the captive Jews in Babylon.”¹⁴⁴³

While much of the Sermon on the Mount is originated from the Sayings source Q, is the Beatitudes likewise originated from the Q source, if there is also the Lukan version?

By analyzing the detailed wording of both versions of the Beatitudes as well as the

¹⁴³⁸ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 93.

¹⁴³⁹ For a detailed discussion of the complex web of the Beatitudes, see Andreij Kodjak, *A Structural Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986), 41-74.

¹⁴⁴⁰ George Wesley Buchanan, “Matthean Beatitudes and Traditional Promises,” in *New Synoptic Studies*, ed. William R. Farmer (Marcon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 161. Friedlander even offers a verse-to-verse comparison between the Beatitudes and certain Old Testament texts to support his claim that the Beatitudes is built upon Jewish sources. See Friedlander, 17-23.

¹⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁴⁴² Ibid., 163-65.

¹⁴⁴³ Ibid., 166.

themes occurring in these texts, Christopher Tuckett affirms the widely assumed view that at least the three common beatitudes of Matthew (5:3, 4, 6) and Luke (6:20b, 21) are dependent on Q.¹⁴⁴⁴ He further claims that all the differences between the two versions (such as the additional beatitudes of Matthew and the woes in Luke) are simply due to the redaction of the evangelists rather than the result of using slightly different versions of the Q source by them.¹⁴⁴⁵ Unfortunately, this view is not without challenges, especially by those who think that Luke used Matthew.¹⁴⁴⁶ As a result, there is no overwhelming consensus regarding the exact relationship between the two versions.

Still, if one takes the view of Tuckett, then stages of redactional development of the Beatitudes can be proposed as follows:¹⁴⁴⁷ There were three original beatitudes (vv3, 4, 6) found in both Matthew and Luke that existed before the canonical gospels (i.e., Q source) and can be traced back to the historical Jesus. They were expanded with the addition of the fourth beatitude (v 5) and all of them employ the ‘π’ alliteration.¹⁴⁴⁸ Matthew added three beatitudes that he found in the tradition that reflect the concerns for greater righteousness (vv7-9). Finally he rearranged the order and added the eighth one (v 10) so as to form two balanced sets of beatitude.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Christopher M. Tuckett, “The Beatitudes: A Source-Critical Study. With a Reply by M. D. Goulder,” *Novum Testamentum* 25 (1983): 193-207.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Davies and Allison are among those who insist that Q takes two different forms (Q^{mt} and Q^{lk}). This view produces a different hypothesis of the development of the Beatitudes: The dominical beatitudes (vv 3, 4, 6) were joined first by 5: 11-12 and then by 5:5 (which was from Q^{mt}). Three other beatitudes from Q^{mt} (vv 7-9) were then composed and added to form eight beatitudes. Matthew finally composed and added 5:10 as the ninth macarism. See Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 435-36.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Tuckett, 207-14.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Neil J. McEleney, “The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (January 1981): 3-13; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 186-87.

¹⁴⁴⁸ It is the observation of Christine Michaelis that all the Greek forms of the subjects of the first four beatitudes begin with ‘π’: πτωχοί, πενθοῦντες, πραεῖς, πεινῶντες. See McEleney, 13.

The Unity and Structure of the Beatitudes

Borrowing Luz's words, a first glance of the beatitudes gives the impression that they are "self-contained and compactly composed."¹⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, a good number of biblical scholars are convinced that such a unity is found: Luz himself, for example, claims that the first and the eighth beatitudes enclose the texts with the same, long concluding clause to form a single unit. New Testament scholar Alfred Plummer also addresses them as "eight different elements of excellence which may all be combined in one individual, who may acquire them in any order, or simultaneously."¹⁴⁵⁰ John Meier comments that these verses "form an ingenious and harmonious whole."¹⁴⁵¹ In sum, the consistency and unity of the eight beatitudes lies in their shared meaning, repetition, scriptural background, and stylistic composition.¹⁴⁵²

However, there is no consensus among scholars on how they are structurally united.¹⁴⁵³ There are two dominating views. Among those who hold the view that there are two sets of four beatitudes,¹⁴⁵⁴ some note that, based on linguistic evidence, the first four beatitudes are grouped together for they employ adjectives that begin with the Greek 'π' sound. Both sets conclude with the use of righteousness and contain an equal number

¹⁴⁴⁹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 185.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Buchanan, 172. Buchanan quotes Alfred A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 61.

¹⁴⁵¹ Ibid.. Buchanan quotes John P. Meier, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: W.H. Sadlier, 1983), 116.

¹⁴⁵² Ibid., 171-72.

¹⁴⁵³ Ibid., 174. Buchanan cites T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Liepzig, 1910), 181, 195; C. Michaelis, "Die Alliteration der Subjectsworte der Ersten 4 Seligpreisungen in Mt. v.s3-6 und ihre Bedeutung für den Aufbau der Seligpreisungen die Mt., Lk., und in Q," *Nov 2* (1958): 148-61.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 429; Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (1996): 475; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 142. However, these scholars hold different views on the emphases of the two sets of beatitudes.

of (36) words. Moreover, while the first set focuses on the persecuted (passive) condition of the disciples, the second set treats the ethical qualities that lead to persecution. Others suggest that the Beatitudes can be divided into those emphasizing the disciple's vertical relationship to God and horizontal relationship to others.¹⁴⁵⁵

Among those who perceive the Beatitudes as comprised of inclusions, they first point out that the first and the eighth beatitudes employ the enveloping present tense of the verbs as well as the same, concluding clause.¹⁴⁵⁶ Building upon this perception, some of them propose a chiasmic structure:¹⁴⁵⁷ Within this chiasmic layout, certain structural characteristics, such as parallels, rhyme, and alliteration between individual Beatitudes are identified. For instance, the Beatitudes consists of an alternating arrangement of pairs in which “the rhyming future passive...alternates with an active verbal form.”¹⁴⁵⁸ Based on these structural characteristics, some scholars further suggest that the Beatitudes demonstrates the kind of poetic structure defining Hebrew poetry.¹⁴⁵⁹

In sum, although a universally agreed structure of the Beatitudes may not be possible, many biblical exegetes recognize that the Beatitudes is one of the most carefully crafted passages and there is a sophisticated web of relationships between the individual beatitudes.¹⁴⁶⁰

Regarding the internal structure of each of the eight beatitudes, each macarism is comprised of a two-line statement: The first line (protasis) is introduced by *μακάριοι*

¹⁴⁵⁵ David L. Turner, “Whom Does God Approve? The Context, Structure, Purpose, and Exegesis of Matthew’s Beatitudes,” *Criswell Theological Review* 6, no. 1 (1992): 33.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 185.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Turner, 33-35.

¹⁴⁵⁸ H. Benedict Green, *Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 36-37.

¹⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-41. Green acknowledges that many of these characteristics are also found in Greek literatures.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Powell, 461; Green, 252.

while the second one (apodosis) begins with *ὅτι* (meaning ‘for/that/because’) and is followed by a promise.¹⁴⁶¹ And as far as its content is concerned, each beatitude has a pronouncement concerning who the blessed is as well as a promise concerning why one is blessed.¹⁴⁶²

However, Augustine argued that there are seven beatitudes, though this has not been widely accepted and ongoing debate among scholars continues:¹⁴⁶³ Many scholars insist that there are eight of them and argue that “verse 11 involves a change from the third to the second person plural...[and] verse 12 has a different beginning altogether...[thus] the composition destroys the pattern of serial beatitudes.”¹⁴⁶⁴ Still, there are some scholars like Davies, Allison, and Harrington, who would include verses 11 and 12 as well, making the beatitudes nine:¹⁴⁶⁵ These two verses, though different in form from the preceding verses, are thematically closer to the eighth beatitude than to 5:13-16. Having a much longer concluding text of a series with a shift from one person to another seems conventional. And the changes in verses 11 and 12 could be simply a result of literary design, as in the case of Sirach 25:7-11. Convinced that there are nine macarisms, they note that this fits the triadic number. Finally, a few scholars would even

¹⁴⁶¹ Thompson, 109.

¹⁴⁶² Turner, 30.

¹⁴⁶³ Buchanan, 175. Those who hold Augustine’s view basically remove the textually disputed second beatitude (5:4). See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 105.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 430; Allison, Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*, 175-77; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 82. Allison defends his position by turning to certain recently published Qumran materials (4Q525) and other parallels. See also Turner, 29-31.

opt for ten beatitudes solely based on the numerical popularity in Jewish symbolism and employ the Decalogue as a model.¹⁴⁶⁶

Finally, while the Beatitudes enjoys a structural unity in its own regard, there is the question of their formal connection to the Sermon.¹⁴⁶⁷ On the one hand, some scholars attempt to show correlation of the Beatitudes with the Sermon by rearranging, pairing up, and dividing the Beatitudes in such a way that shows coherence with 6:19-7:12. Others, on the other hand, adopt a kind of subjectivity and arbitrariness in searching for connections (such as the first beatitude corresponds to 7:7-11). Still, there are those who claim a double correspondence between the three main parts of the Sermon (5:21-48; 6:1-18; 6:19-7:12) and the Beatitudes.

Despite the diverse views with regards to the individual beatitude's connection with the rest of the Sermon, we can still correctly claim that the Beatitudes is not a separate entity but closely related to the Sermon and plays a unique role in revealing the teaching of the Sermon.

The Function of the Beatitudes

Though different types of macarisms in the Old and New Testaments are used in different ways, three types of functions can be proposed. First, the Beatitudes is primarily hortatory in nature as those macarisms in the wisdom literature are.¹⁴⁶⁸ It is an ethical imperative calling for cultivation of certain character traits, and regulations for the

¹⁴⁶⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 109.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Green, 256-61.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Thompson, 112-13.

community life.¹⁴⁶⁹ Specifically, it is perceived as entrance requirements for the kingdom.¹⁴⁷⁰

Second, those who take on the prophetic and apocalyptic view—and the claim that the Matthean Beatitudes points to a kind of eschatological ethics as the Sermon as a whole does—argue that the Beatitudes is primarily declarative promises rather than imperative demands.¹⁴⁷¹ Since the Beatitudes is situated outside the main corpus of imperatives found in 5:17-7:12, its moral dimension, though imperatival, is only secondary. The beatitudes are offered as eschatological blessings and hope for the oppressed rather than entrance requirements for the kingdom. In other words, the Beatitudes is conciliatory and implies the notion of grace (especially in the first half of the Beatitudes).

The third group of scholars tends to offer a more nuanced view. Betz comments that the Beatitudes must be seen at the same time as both a series of ethical virtues and promises.¹⁴⁷² He says, “[While] the [b]eatitudes are ipso facto future-oriented, as principles pronounced in the present they have an impact on the present as well.”¹⁴⁷³ Elsewhere he continues, “In fact, the [b]eatitudes set forth promises along with demands; they are both at once, not one or the other.”¹⁴⁷⁴ Luz, though he suggests that the Beatitudes could become ethicized in Matthew’s hands, also thinks that they continue to

¹⁴⁶⁹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 188.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Thompson, 114.

¹⁴⁷¹ Ibid.; Turner, 38; Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 439-40; Allison, Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*, 178. Robert Guelich, when analyzing the literary form of the Beatitudes, further dichotomizes the Beatitudes as either ‘eschatological blessings for the new age’ or ‘new ethical principles for present living’. See Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 66.

¹⁴⁷² Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 96-97.

¹⁴⁷³ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

express God's grace and hence concludes that these different approaches are complementary to each other.¹⁴⁷⁵ Harrington, in a similar way, says, "The [b]eatitudes function not as 'entrance requirements' but rather as a delineation of the characteristics and actions that will receive their full and appropriate eschatological reward."¹⁴⁷⁶

Last but not least, a related debate regarding the function and ethics of the Beatitudes is whether it offers reversals or rewards:¹⁴⁷⁷ Those who insist on seeing the beatitudes as statements/promises of reversal for the unfortunate would argue that Jesus proclaims a revolutionary nature of the kingdom of God that opposes the view of the Sadducees or Pharisees that the social order on earth will be repeated in heaven. Others like Luz suggest that each macarism should be allowed to be interpreted on its own terms even at the expense of diminishing unity.

New Testament scholar Mark Allan Powell attempts to resolve this issue by suggesting a 'two-stanza' structure of the Beatitudes based on a type of parallelism in Hebrew poetry:¹⁴⁷⁸ "The first stanza (5:3-6) speaks of reversals for the unfortunate, the second stanza (5:7-10) describes rewards for the virtuous."¹⁴⁷⁹ In other words, the first stanza attends to the destitute human condition and the second stanza focuses on activities.¹⁴⁸⁰ In addition, he insists that the blessings are aimed for the entire world rather than for the Christian community alone, for the use of third person plural implies a distinction between the immediate audience and those who are blessed. However, such an

¹⁴⁷⁵ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 188.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 83.

¹⁴⁷⁷ W. R. Dörmes, "Exegesis and Proclamation: 'Blessed are you . . .' (Matthew 5:1-12)," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 73 (1990): 68.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Powell, 462-77.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 462.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 193n84.

attempt risks dichotomizing and segregating the two sets of Beatitudes even though a theological link (that all the blessings are the effects of God's rule) among all macarisms could be established.

My own Approach

The above exploration of some immediate and critical issues of the Beatitudes reveals that many of these issues, like those of the Sermon, do not have a definite view and debates continue among scholars. Instead of getting further into these debates, I state some theses that express my own approach in this work.

First, I opt for the use of 'blessed' throughout the rest of this work without diminishing the original meaning of *μακάριος*. In particular, its direct reference to prosperity can be a fruitful means for our later discussion in Part Four.

Second, by following the two-source hypothesis, I too assume the majority view that certain beatitudes are rooted in the Sayings source Q and the remaining ones are a result of redaction by the evangelist.

Third, regarding the structure of the Beatitudes, the beatitudes form a sophisticated unified whole with a chiastic structure. Also, while acknowledging that the claims of those who argue for the inclusion of verses 11 and 12 are important, I would adopt the traditional view that there are eight beatitudes for they form a unified structural unit. Their structural coherence (of addressing the blessings in the third person plural) also fits the genre of macarism better. Moreover, such a choice is also made by taking into consideration the cultural factor that plays an important role in the last part of this

work: For Christians and non-Christians alike in a Chinese Confucian society, the traditional view of eight beatitudes is widely known and accepted. Considering eight instead of nine beatitudes may be more helpful to engage dialogue with them. Still, verses 11 and 12 as an elaboration of the eighth beatitude will be integrated into the exposition knowing that they are thematically close to verse 10. Furthermore, I take the traditional and majority claim that ‘mourners’ precedes ‘meek’.¹⁴⁸¹

Fourth, the Beatitudes is without doubt related to the Sermon and the gospel as a whole. I understand the macarisms as playing an important role in our understanding of the teaching of the Sermon. Thus, though our exegesis is focused on the eight beatitudes, it is done in light of the Sermon and the gospel.

Fifth and final, I agree with those who hold a more nuanced view about the functions of the Beatitudes: It is neither solely a set of moral demands nor of eschatological promises; rather, its implications are both eschatological and present, personal and communal. Moreover, the blessings need not be construed exclusively as either reversals or rewards. They point to the effects of God’s grace to those who follow Jesus’ teaching and example.

After stating my own approach, a subsequent question yet needs to be raised, “Who, then, are the blessed in the Matthean Beatitudes?” Some exegetes who perceive the Beatitudes as a unified whole would claim that “all of these eight [b]eatitudes describe as blessed those same people.”¹⁴⁸² Still, this claim does not really clarify who

¹⁴⁸¹ Neil McEleney notes that there are two sets of verse sequence and they both could go back to the second century and appeared in all the manuscripts. Most scholars prefer the order of ‘mourners’ and ‘meek’. See McEleney, 2-3.

¹⁴⁸² Buchanan, 170.

those same people are. Thus, I now turn to the exegesis of each of these eight beatitudes with the hope that some hints can be found during the process. Various exegetical tools such as historical, literary, and source criticisms are employed so as to better grasp the meaning of the text intended for the original readers.

7.4 The Beatitudes: An Exegesis¹⁴⁸³

5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν

This macarism is the first of the four beatitudes found also in the Lukan version (Luke 6:20b). The main difference between Matthew and Luke's version is that the former gives qualification to the meaning of 'poor'. For Matthew the poor are those who are 'poor in spirit'.¹⁴⁸⁴ And for various reasons the dative term 'in spirit' is probably redactional.¹⁴⁸⁵ The apodosis of the beatitude, on the other hand, is exactly the same as that of the eighth one literally. This resemblance thus grounds the argument that the two verses serve as an *inclusio* for the unity of 5:3-10.

The protasis of the beatitude basically tells us that 'the poor in spirit' are blessed by God. It finds direct reference in Isaiah 61:1 ("He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and

¹⁴⁸³ Other works consulted here include Powell, 460-79; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*; and Turner, 29-42.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Matthew is most probably referring to the human spirit. See Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 191.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Davies and Allison propose the following reasons: 1) Both the latter passage in 11:5 and the Lukan version do not give qualification to the word 'poor'. 2) Likewise, the subject of the first woe (the rich) in Luke does not have qualification either. 3) There would be perfect parallelism in Q if without τῷ πνεύματι. See Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 442.

release to the prisoners”). However, there are many other passages in the Old Testament that tell about God’s special care for the poor, such as Exodus 22:25-27 and Deuteronomy 15:7-11. It is thus important to read the macarism in light of the Old Testament tradition.¹⁴⁸⁶

Regarding the notion of ‘poor’, the Greek term *πτωχος* employed here basically means beggar. There are several Hebrew equivalents, such as *ani*, *dal*, and *ebyon*, which mean ‘poor’/‘afflicted’, ‘weak’ and ‘needy’ respectively.¹⁴⁸⁷ Thus, the term refers not only to those who are poor with few possessions but especially those who are socially and economically needy and dependent (such as those being forced to beg). The condition of poverty is never regarded as a blessing; and yet the person who is in such a condition can be blessed.

The term also refers to those who are in special need of God’s help (Psalms 12:5 and 22:24) and have nothing to rely upon except God (Amos 2:6-8). There is then a religious aspect of poverty in the term that is affirmed in these Old Testament passages:¹⁴⁸⁸ The oppressed and the poor are promised God’s salvation when they turn to God in their need. They will experience eschatological blessing and be made rich.

This twofold meaning of ‘poor’—that the religious and economic meanings go together—is found in New Testament writings as well, such as Romans 15:26. The early church community was aware of (or actually facing) the reality that those who suffer

¹⁴⁸⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 78.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 442.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 443. The presence of religious/spiritual sense in Isaiah 29:19 and 61:1 is explained by the fact that the Septuagint used *πτωχοι* to translate *anawim*, a religious nuanced term meaning piety. It refers to a “socio-economic class of people in Israel who are noted as much for their piety as for their poverty.” See Powell, 463.

material poverty are at the same time experiencing religious poverty.¹⁴⁸⁹ Still, Matthew's insertion/redaction tends to shift the emphasis from material poverty to the implicit spiritual poverty and make it explicit.¹⁴⁹⁰ However, it is mistaken to conclude that Matthew simply spiritualizes or softens Jesus' radical teaching; rather, the insertion could be meant to forestall the misunderstanding of the meaning of 'poor' and presuppose reflection.¹⁴⁹¹

Though a redaction by the evangelist, the phrase 'poor in spirit' is not a new concept.¹⁴⁹² It is found in Hebrew writings to describe the fainthearted, those who opt for voluntary poverty, or those who are spiritually poor. However, both Matthew's view on the renunciation of property (19:21) and the logic of the macarism itself point to the fact that the last interpretation is the most appropriate. Accordingly, the phrase implies lowliness with reference to one's spirit.¹⁴⁹³ It is used in the Hebrew writings to contrast those who have a 'hardened heart' or a 'haughty heart' (Proverbs 16:18-19).¹⁴⁹⁴ Still, the phrase refers more correctly to an attitude than a condition: In particular, it points to the virtue of humility—one that is highly praised in Jewish circles.¹⁴⁹⁵

¹⁴⁸⁹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 443. Therefore, the Lukan version of 'poor' cannot be read as purely economical. The rich in the Gospel of Luke simply do not have a sense of need for God (Luke 12:16-21).

¹⁴⁹⁰ Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 251. Powell, however, counter argues that since the Old Testament *anawim* refers to those who have strong trust in God, Matthew's addition would be unnecessary. Also, these people are actually spiritually rich rather than poor. Thus, the addition does not shift the emphasis; rather, it simply refers to those who have no reason for hope in this world. See Powell, 464.

¹⁴⁹¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 113, 115.

¹⁴⁹² Betz, however, notes that no other Greek usage of this phrase is found in the rest of the New Testament or other early Christian sources. See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 112; Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 444.

¹⁴⁹³ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 191.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 50.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 116. However, it does mean that the macarism calls for patience in the midst of poverty.

The literary composition of the apodosis of the beatitude deserves some clarification:¹⁴⁹⁶ First, the term *αὐτοῖς* (meaning ‘of them’) does not signify a sense of possession. The macarism does not mean that the poor will possess the kingdom nor that the kingdom will be comprised of the poor either. Rather, the macarism solely proclaims the eschatological outcome that the kingdom of heaven will be given to (among others) the poor.

Second, the kingdom of heaven is basically a synonym to ‘kingdom of God’ (19:23-24) and is referred to by Matthew as the reign of God. The use of ‘heaven’ is simply a Jewish substitute for ‘God’ in order to avoid abuse of the name ‘God’.¹⁴⁹⁷ Matthew uses it in two different ways throughout the gospel:¹⁴⁹⁸ The first and dominant use contains a passive connotation and future tense (e.g., 3:2 and 8:11); the second use contains an active connotation and present tense (12:28). Thus, although it bears a strong eschatological tone, the kingdom of heaven in the apodosis is understood and used conjunctively rather than disjunctively.¹⁴⁹⁹

Third, the use of present tense *ἐστίν* (‘is’) signifies a sense of confidence in the proleptic present; it also hints that the kingdom is already present and the corresponding blessing is now bestowed.¹⁵⁰⁰ One of its immediate effects is that the evils that cause poverty in present time will be eliminated.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 445.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79. Some scholars, however, suggest that the term ‘heaven’ is more than a substitute but an emphasis of God’s transcendence and sovereignty. See Hamm, 82. Hamm cites H. Traub, “*Ouranos*,” *TDNT* 5 (1967): 522.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 50.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Turner, 37; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 119.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 446.

As a whole, ‘the poor in spirit’, who are often suffering from economic poverty, are those who acquire the internal attitude of humility. They will be given the kingdom of God that is eschatological, although present recompense, especially the lifting of their poverty, is considered. And the logic of this macarism is built upon the demand of justice—indeed, apart from being the first macarism, 5:3 is also the center of interest in the New Testament period because ‘poverty’ and ‘wealth’ have been subjects of debate since the time of antiquity.¹⁵⁰¹ The beatitude overturns the popular, conventional macarism that the rich are those to be blessed and the poor forsaken.¹⁵⁰²

5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

For those who hold the view that the Beatitudes can be displayed chiastically, the second macarism corresponds to 5:9 for they both employ future divine passive—the combined use of passive connotation and future tense—in the apodosis.¹⁵⁰³ Still, Matthew’s second beatitude is also found in the Gospel of Luke although the two versions are ordered differently: For Matthew, this beatitude is put right after the macarism on poverty; Luke, in contrast, places it after the macarisms on poverty and hunger, and thus it becomes the third beatitude (Luke 6:21).¹⁵⁰⁴ In addition, the subjects and promises stated by the two evangelists are also quite different: For Matthew the mourners (πενθοῦντες) will be blessed and comforted (παρακληθήσονται); Luke,

¹⁵⁰¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 111-12, 119.

¹⁵⁰² Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 442.

¹⁵⁰³ Turner, 34.

¹⁵⁰⁴ It is thus suggested that Matthew’s order is a result of redaction.

however, tells us that those who weep (κλαίοντες) will be promised laughter (γελάσετε) by God.

Moreover, like the first beatitude this macarism also corresponds to Isaiah 61. In specific, it corresponds to verse 2 (“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn”). Therefore, the order of the two beatitudes also corresponds to the order of what Isaiah wrote in 61:1-2. This close parallel between the two texts calls for special attention to the ancient Jewish context in reading Matthew’s second beatitude.

In the first place, according to ancient consolation literature, mourning is an expected response to the reality of desperation and suffering.¹⁵⁰⁵ And in its most specific sense, πένθω (meaning ‘mourn’) refers to the grief of death and great loss. It is contained in rituals and prayers, particularly in those practices related to the burial of the dead.¹⁵⁰⁶ Therefore, by ordering the two macarisms as they are, the grieving in the second beatitude could be a natural response to the experience of the poor identified in the first macarism.¹⁵⁰⁷ Second, the Old Testament tradition provides us with the context for Israel’s mourning:¹⁵⁰⁸ As we read Isaiah 61:3-7, we are told that the returned Israelites were oppressed by their oppressors (v3), their cities were in ruins (v4), and they were aware of their own shame and dishonors (v7). In particular, they mourned over Jerusalem (Tobit 13:16) as Yahweh has not acted to reverse this situation. Together with many other

¹⁵⁰⁵ The ancient consolation literature consists of mainly philosophical and religious reflections and advices. For a more detailed discussion on this kind of literature, see Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 121-22.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 121.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 448; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 193.

passages (e.g., Jeremiah 38:13) in the Old Testament Isaiah 61:3-7 depicts the various incidents that led the faithful Israelites to grief.

In the New Testament, Matthew told us that the situation is very much the same:¹⁵⁰⁹ The righteous are persecuted by the wicked (5:10-12, 7:15-22); they have not seen the Twelve on their thrones (19:28); and the Son of Man has not come in his glory (24:29-31). In other words, they have not seen the kingdom of God in its fullness and the eschatological promise has not taken place. As a result, the people of God mourn over the situation they are facing. However, the use of the same Greek word in the 9:14-17 (on the parable of the bridegroom) hints that for Matthew, there are times when one needs not mourn—for instance, when Jesus is with us.

Although some Jewish writings (such as Joel 2:12-13) hint that the people's mourning could be associated with repentance—we mourn for our own sins and the sins of others—and Matthew's use of the more general term 'mourning' (rather than 'weeping' in Luke's case) could open up a religious interpretation, both the direct link with and the context of Isaiah 61 tends to tone down this spiritual view, and clarifies that this is not the evangelist's motive for using *πενθω*.¹⁵¹⁰

In the apodosis we are told that the mourners will be comforted. This promise likewise can be understood in light of the Old Testament tradition:¹⁵¹¹ *πενθοῦντες* and *παρακληθήσονται* are paired up as catchwords to associate with prophet Isaiah who

¹⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 448.

¹⁵¹⁰ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 51; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 193.

¹⁵¹¹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 448-49.

consoled the mourners of Zion (Sirach 48:23-25). Also, it is a common theme within the Jewish tradition that God turns our sorrow into joy (Jeremiah 31:13).

How, then, are the mourners comforted? The linguistic nature of the apodosis—the use of future divine passive—reveals two distinctive features of this comfort:¹⁵¹² First, the use of future tense makes it clear that the promised comfort is an eschatological prediction. Second, the use of divine passive—which is a common Jewish way of avoiding the use of God's name—further indicates that God is the one who offers comfort, just as a mother comforts her child (Isaiah 66:13). In fact, God's offer of comfort can be understood in various ways:¹⁵¹³ It is equated with salvation and redemption (Isaiah 61:2 and Jeremiah 31:13); associated with healing, pardon for iniquity, and nourishment (Isaiah 57:18, 40:1-2, and 66:13 respectively); and understood by the Israelites as freedom from and return from exile (Isaiah 49:13, 51:12). As a whole, God's comfort to the mourners converges to the experience of God's salvation and sustenance. It is other-worldly and fulfilled when the Son of Man comes in his glory. Still, not all who mourn are called blessed—only if their mourning is a sign of their waiting for the kingdom of heaven.¹⁵¹⁴

In conclusion, mourning over poverty, persecutions, and other loss is the concrete experience of both the Old Testament Israelites and the people of God in the New Testament era.¹⁵¹⁵ They will be comforted by God as God did in the past. The macarism is hardly a paraenesis or imperative. And the emphasis is not the state of mourning as

¹⁵¹² Ibid., 448; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 124.

¹⁵¹³ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 51.

¹⁵¹⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 123.

¹⁵¹⁵ Domeris, 69.

such but rather those who lament those causes of grief.¹⁵¹⁶ The comfort promised is an act of God that brings salvation, pardon, and nourishment. Again, the fulfillment of this eschatological prediction requires divine justice. Finally, in light of its ancient Jewish correspondence and closeness with the first beatitude, the practice of mourning in relation to the first macarism is to be regarded as a virtue.¹⁵¹⁷

5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν.

As noted earlier, this beatitude does not have a parallel in Luke's version and thus is probably a later addition by a redactor of the Sayings source or the evangelist himself.¹⁵¹⁸ It was inserted for the purpose of expounding the religious dimension of the term 'poor' in the first beatitude and hence forming a kind of parallelism with the first beatitude. Within a hypothetical chiastic structure, the third beatitude further corresponds to the sixth one (5:8) in that they both use future active verb with a direct object in the apodosis.¹⁵¹⁹

However, this macarism does not follow the previous beatitudes in making explicit correspondence with Isaiah 61.¹⁵²⁰ Rather, it makes direct reference to Psalm 37:11—the poor accept the present affliction, trust in the Lord, wait patiently for the Lord,

¹⁵¹⁶ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 449.

¹⁵¹⁷ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 124.

¹⁵¹⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 449. Obviously this redaction was done prior to the addition of the qualification 'in spirit' by Matthew.

¹⁵¹⁹ Turner, 34.

¹⁵²⁰ However, the apodosis of this beatitude corresponds to Isaiah 61:7 in that they both agree on having the definite article τῇ before the noun. Dennis Hamm suggests that this verse was the immediate inspiration which then led to full quotation of Psalm 37:11. See *The Beatitudes in Context: What Luke and Matthew Meant*, 89.

and refrain from anger or envy.¹⁵²¹ They will soon be delivered by the Lord from the wicked and inherit the land. In short, this direct reference foretells who the meek are in the beatitude.

The Greek term for ‘meek’ is *πραῦς*. In the New Testament, it runs parallel with other Greek terms, such as *ἡσυχίου* (quiet) and *ἡσυχίου* (gentle) in 1 Peter 3:4 and Titus 3:2 respectively.¹⁵²² Nevertheless, *πραῦς* appears in Matthew’s gospel in a few more places (11:29 and 21:5) to portray Jesus, like Moses before him, as a model and practitioner of meekness and gentleness.¹⁵²³

The Septuagint, however, employs *πραῦς* to translate the Hebrew word *anawim* (piety) as well. As we saw in 5:3, *anawim* has also been translated with *πτωχοὶ* (poor).¹⁵²⁴ As a result, ‘the meek’ becomes a synonym and variation of ‘the poor (in spirit)’. And by recalling Isaiah 61:7, the meek are at the same time those who mourn.¹⁵²⁵ Moreover, based on the Old Testament traditions of exodus and exile that speak of the disinherited receiving the promised land, the term is also associated with the particular human condition of ‘the powerless’ or ‘the oppressed’.¹⁵²⁶ Still, within the context of Jewish paraenesis, *πραῦς* never means nonviolence or political subordination.¹⁵²⁷

¹⁵²¹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 449.

¹⁵²² Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 194.

¹⁵²³ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 449; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 126.

¹⁵²⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 194. As a result, some manuscripts place this beatitude immediately after 5:3. See Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79.

¹⁵²⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 449.

¹⁵²⁶ Ibid..

¹⁵²⁷ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 194.

Finally, the Greek term does not simply refer to a human condition but also to an ethical attitude. In Hellenistic culture, meekness (*πραότης*) is an important ethical concept—it is a virtue closely related to philanthropy and a mark of the true philosopher like Socrates.¹⁵²⁸ And by translating *anawim* into *πραῦς*, the Greek term further takes on the notion of ‘humble’.¹⁵²⁹ For in Jewish literature of piety, meekness becomes a synonym for humility and a characteristic of the sage and the ruler.¹⁵³⁰ Major figures like Moses serve as paradigms. Curiously, although both the Greek and Jewish tradition praised meekness and gentleness, it was not widely practiced.¹⁵³¹

The apodosis of the third beatitude tells us that the meek and the gentle will inherit the land. The verb *κληρονομεῖν* originally means ‘to inherit’; however, it was translated into ‘to possess’ or ‘to acquire’ in the Septuagint—in either case, it never means ownership for we are part of God’s creation; rather, in both the Old and New Testament traditions to ‘possess’ or to ‘inherit’ the land implies eschatological hope and promise (Isaiah 60:21; Matthew 19:29; 25:34).¹⁵³²

Regarding the land to be inherited, linguistically speaking, the presence of the definite article *τὴν* (‘the’) could suggest that Matthew was referring to the land of Israel.¹⁵³³ However, various evidences show that the term *γῆν* (‘land’) tends to have a

¹⁵²⁸ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 125.

¹⁵²⁹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 194.

¹⁵³⁰ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 126.

¹⁵³¹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 449.

¹⁵³² Ibid., 450.

¹⁵³³ Another possible argument is that 8:11 suggests that the evangelist was expecting the coming of the Son of Man who will set up his throne in Israel.

general meaning instead—it refers to ‘the earth’.¹⁵³⁴ Moreover, although the new earth might be given an otherworldly interpretation, the earthly world can still be a mission land for the disciples and needs not be excluded (28:18-20).¹⁵³⁵

In conclusion, the redactional work of the editor has a particular purpose: It points out that ‘the meek’ are not just ‘the poor’ and those who mourn but also those who are humble (no matter they are the little ones or those in command). They will inherit the land just as ‘the poor in spirit’ will be given the kingdom of heaven. The beatitude also calls for the cultivation of humility by following Jesus the exemplar. Although the promise of inheriting the new earth (and new heaven) may be eschatological, the disciples have to reach out to the world as it is now.

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

5:6 is the third beatitude shared by both Matthew and Luke and is the equivalent of the second beatitude in Luke’s version (6:21). However, based on the difference between the two versions and other literary/linguistic differences, it is most probably that Matthew inserted ‘thirst’ and ‘righteousness’ to the original macarism.¹⁵³⁶ Moreover, if one adopts the chiasmic hypothesis and the view that the Beatitudes can be divided into

¹⁵³⁴ These evidences include: First, Matthew seems to expect a cosmic renewal instead of nationalistic hope (19:28). Second, the term is used without any qualification throughout the Gospel (e.g., 6:10, 19; 24:30); thus, *γῆν* is not restricted to any particular territory. Third, since the kingdom of heaven has been spiritualized, the land, likewise, needs to be interpreted in a similar way. Fourth, the promise of land in apocalyptic literature is expanded to include the whole world (1 Enoch 5:7). See Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 450; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79.

¹⁵³⁵ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 128.

¹⁵³⁶ These differences include the awkward Greek writing and the breaking of the ‘π’ alliteration found among the first four beatitudes. See Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 451.

two parts, then the fourth beatitude finds parallel with two other beatitudes: It corresponds to the fifth macarism chiastically and parallels to the last beatitude by focusing on the concept of righteousness.

The original macarism alludes to Psalm 107:5, 8, 9 where God will satisfy the hungry and the thirsty. However, in the Old Testament, the images of hunger and thirst have a religious significance as well.¹⁵³⁷ It points to an active seeking (and not just a longing) for God and desiring for God's teaching and the words of the Law as one desires for food and drink (Psalms 42:2; 143:6; Isaiah 32:6). Subsequently, the phrase 'to hunger and thirst for righteousness' can well be compared to 6:33 where one seeks God's kingdom and his righteousness above all else.

Regarding the notion of righteousness (its Greek and Hebrew equivalents are *δικαιοσύνην* and *sedaqah* respectively), it alludes to Isaiah 61:3, 8, 10, 11; 62:1-2; 63:1.¹⁵³⁸ It is rendered 'justice' (especially restorative justice in a covenant community setting) and its use is in conformity to the Jewish understanding:¹⁵³⁹ The kingdom of heaven is the realm of God's righteousness; and righteousness is the basis for the interpretation of the Torah and the ethical standard for human conduct. It is the realization of God's goodness in the world and points to "the gift of a right relationship with God."¹⁵⁴⁰ In light of the Sermon on the Mount, *δικαιοσύνην* is best understood first

¹⁵³⁷ Ibid., 451-52.

¹⁵³⁸ Buchanan, 182-83.

¹⁵³⁹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 130; Glen H. Stassen, "The Beatitudes as Eschatological Peacemaking Virtues," in Brawley, *Character Ethics and the New Testament*, 251.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Hamm, 95. Some scholars are concerned that the English term 'righteousness' may spiritualize *δικαιοσύνην* with the idea of justification. See Crosby, 101.

as God's justice (6:33) and only then the right conduct required by God (3:15; 5:20; 6:1; 21:32).¹⁵⁴¹

Consequently, Matthew's inclusion of *δικαιοσύνην* in the macarism has several meanings; among them are the clarification of the object and nature of hunger and thirst, and the provision of a specific content to its meaning.¹⁵⁴² Our hunger and thirst for righteousness is the response to our unrighteous human condition, it refers again to those identified in the first beatitude.¹⁵⁴³ As a relational term, it is concerned with not just personal but also social righteousness.¹⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, the blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, rather than those who think they have achieved it.¹⁵⁴⁵ In other words, what is important is to keep up of the desire for righteousness and make an effort to achieve it faithfully.¹⁵⁴⁶

In the apodosis, we see again the use of future divine passive connotation—it points out that their satisfaction is eschatological in nature and fulfilled by God, as prophesized by Isaiah in 49:10. Indeed, such fulfillment is crucial to apocalyptic literature

¹⁵⁴¹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79; Hamm, 93-95. There is no agreement among scholars on whether righteousness refers to God's activity or human effort. Based on the view that the Sermon has both an eschatological tone and yet concerns for the present, I follow the approach of Harrington and Hamm that it refers *first* to God's justice. In contrast, 5:10 stresses the 'task' aspect rather than the 'gift' aspect. See Hamm, 95. See also Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 453; Carter, *What are They Saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?* 82-84; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 52; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 195.

¹⁵⁴² Other significances include, 1) It makes the Beatitudes in line with the overall theme of 'greater righteousness' in the Sermon on the Mount. 2) It highlights the Beatitudes's overall correspondence with Isaiah 61. See Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 451-52. The addition does not, however, spiritualize the meaning of hunger. It is because the use of hunger in the original Q version already implies an inward deficiency.

¹⁵⁴³ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 129.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Turner, 40.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 453; Turner, 40.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 132; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196.

(1 Enoch 48:1).¹⁵⁴⁷ However, how the hungry and the thirsty are satisfied by God can be quite diverse, such as the vision of God/God's glory (Psalm 17:15) and indwelling of righteousness in the world (Isaiah 32:1, 16-17).¹⁵⁴⁸ And a more direct understanding points to the eschatological messianic banquet (Psalm 107:1-9).

In sum, the fourth beatitude calls to our attention the notion of righteousness. We need to constantly seek God's righteousness with effort. Those who strive for God's righteousness will be satisfied by God who grants us eschatological banquet. Though we seek first God's justice, we are also called to acquire certain conducts and relationships that have righteousness as the ethical standard.

5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

Starting with 5:7 we note that the remaining four beatitudes are added by the evangelist from his own sources, for no parallels are found in the Lukan version. It is suggested that the first three of these four macarisms are taken from a tradition that reflects the concerns for greater righteousness. In specific, the fifth beatitude corresponds to Proverbs 14:21 (and 17:5) where those who are kind to the poor will be blessed.¹⁵⁴⁹

Regarding the Greek term *ἐλεήμων* (meaning merciful), it appears only twice in the New Testament (Matthew 5:7 and Hebrews 2:17). And its synonym *οἰκτίρμων* is

¹⁵⁴⁷ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 132.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 453.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79.

found in Luke 6:36 alone.¹⁵⁵⁰ Still, as will be discussed below, the notion of mercy (ἐλεος) occurs rather frequently throughout the gospel. The Hebrew equivalent of ἐλεήμων is *ḥannun*. In the Old Testament and Jewish literature, the practice of mercy, which is the essence of the works of charity, often refers to deeds done out of compassion with the unfortunate and helpless, especially in terms of almsgiving (as in Tobit 4:5-7).¹⁵⁵¹ It is a well known doctrine among the Jewish people and is often praised in the ancient literature.¹⁵⁵²

Despite being a praiseworthy human virtue, the disposition toward mercy is first understood as an attribute of God (Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 4:31).¹⁵⁵³ God has shown mercy to the people (Psalm 72:13) and wants human beings to desire mercy as well (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8). Subsequently, the exercise of mercy becomes one of the most important religious and social duties for the Jewish people.

Within the context of ancient Greece, unfortunately, mercy was treated with suspicion in Hellenistic philosophical ethics because of its impact on the emotions.¹⁵⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in the New Testament, the concept of mercy and its similar sentiments are brought up frequently by Matthew.¹⁵⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵⁰ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 454. The choice of ἐλεήμων over οἰκτῆρων is probably a matter of personal preference—Matthew is noted for having fondness for the ἐλε-root.

¹⁵⁵¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 132; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196.

¹⁵⁵² Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 132.

¹⁵⁵³ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 454; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 133. This claim is supported by strong statistical evidence: It is noted that in the Septuagint, the word (and its verb, adjective, and noun forms) is predominantly used to describe God and God's actions and only secondarily describes human quality and action. See Hamm, 96. Hamm cites Jacques Dupont, *Les Béatitudes* vol.3 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1973), 604.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 133.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 52.

In the first place, being merciful and compassionate is a proper attitude towards the human condition noted in the first beatitude—the poor, the outcasts, and even outsiders (9:10-13; 15:21-28).¹⁵⁵⁶ Second, as in the Jewish tradition, to be merciful and compassionate is a fundamental demand (9:13; 12:7).¹⁵⁵⁷ Third, mercy is regularly demonstrated by Jesus’ words (18:23-35) and examples (9:27-31). Indeed, the demand for mercy is placed at the center of Jesus’ proclamation and challenges the disciples to show mercy to all, including one’s enemy (5:43-48). Fourth, the particular sentiment of mercy toward one’s enemy in turn calls for forgiveness (6:12, 14-15; 7:1-5). A concrete evidence is the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in 18:21-35 where Matthew applies the principle to a narrative context.¹⁵⁵⁸ Fifth, mercy is regarded by Matthew—as well as other New Testament writers—as an expression of righteousness and wisdom.¹⁵⁵⁹ Together with faith and justice, mercy is seen as one of the weightier demands of the law (23:13).

On the other hand, Matthew cites Hosea 6:6 (“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice”) twice in his understanding of mercy as a fundamental demand (9:13; 12:7).¹⁵⁶⁰ Here, ἔλεος is used to render the Hebrew term *hesed* (meaning steadfast, covenantal love of God for the people). Thus, ἔλεος connotes the idea of loyalty within a relationship, especially loyalty to God.¹⁵⁶¹ In other words, acts of mercy are concrete expressions of

¹⁵⁵⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 133.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 454-55.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 454; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 133.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Cf. James 2:13; 3:13-18.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 455; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79.

¹⁵⁶¹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 455.

loyalty to God and what God desires of the people. As a result, the polemical tone in Matthew's use of ἔλεος reflects the view that the Pharisees of Matthew's time, on the contrary, failed to remain faithful to God.¹⁵⁶² They failed to act mercifully to others (9:10-13; 12:1-7).

With regard to the apodosis of the macarism, the fifth beatitude also employs future divine passive connotation as the second, the fourth, and the seventh beatitudes do. In other words, the promise is to be taken eschatologically in that in the final judgment God will show mercy to those who have shown mercy to others.

As a whole, 5:7 is a rather straightforward macarism that poses very few exegetical problems, partly because its protasis and apodosis are in exact parallel.¹⁵⁶³ The beatitude thus seems to approach the Old Testament's idea that 'deeds determine fate' and the parenetic motif that there is a correspondence between human and divine behavior.¹⁵⁶⁴ As far as the addressees are concerned, they are called by God who is merciful to be compassionate and merciful particularly to those human predicaments. It is an attitude that at the same time demands actions. Jesus' words and examples further challenge us to extend our mercy to all by means of forgiveness. And our practice of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness must be built upon the covenantal relationship with God and a response faithful to God's steadfast love.

¹⁵⁶² Ibid..

¹⁵⁶³ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 132.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196.

5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.

The sixth beatitude does not have any parallel in Luke's version and was added together with the fifth and seventh macarisms by the evangelist. Its explicit Old Testament correspondence is Psalm 24:3-5 ("...Those who have clean hands and pure hearts...They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation").¹⁵⁶⁵ The psalm is to be sung during the temple entrance liturgy to describe those who could ascend 'the hills of the Lord'.¹⁵⁶⁶ It tells that only those people are fit for divine worship. Other relevant passages include Psalms 51:10; 73:1, 13; and Proverbs 22:11 in which God shows goodness to those who have a clean and pure heart.

Historically, the idea of purity was commonly found in religions in terms of rituals and reflections:¹⁵⁶⁷ For instance, in antiquity as well as the Old Testament Judaism, purification rituals were conducted to remove impurities. Later in ancient Greek reflections, ritual purity was vaguely connected to morality while the internal condition of the person was slowly considered as a greater source of impurity than other external causes and was thus intensified.

In both the Old Testament and New Testament traditions, the term 'heart' καρδία (*lebab* in Hebrew) is a comprehensive term and is at times used interchangeably with the word 'soul' (ψυχή):¹⁵⁶⁸ It is referred to as the true self (in Matthew 13:15); the place of emotions (such as joy in Proverbs 27:11); the desire or will (in Proverbs 6:18); the

¹⁵⁶⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 455.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 134; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79; Hamm, 100.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 134.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 456.

intellect (in Mark 2:6); and the inner space where one encounters the deity (in Psalm 27:8 and Ephesians 3:17). For Matthew, in particular, the heart is the source of outward speech and conduct (15:18-19) as well as the realm of inner life (9:4).¹⁵⁶⁹

The phrase ‘pure in heart’ (καθαρὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ) is understood within the Jewish tradition as “an undivided obedience to God without sin” and is an important virtue.¹⁵⁷⁰ In simple terms, it points to ‘singleness of intention’ and ‘will only God’s will’ with one’s whole being.¹⁵⁷¹ It is used comprehensively although its narrow cultic usage is often highlighted.¹⁵⁷² In the ancient Greek culture, the idea of ‘purity of the soul’ is similarly significant to the people.¹⁵⁷³ Only the pure-hearted can enter the land of the Blessed. Thus, ‘purity of the soul’ is associated with the notion of eschatology.

As far as the New Testament and the Gospel of Matthew is concerned, the meaning of ‘pure in heart’ and its interpretation can be found in the Sermon on the Mount:¹⁵⁷⁴ It means lacking adulterous thoughts and the like (5:27-30); attending to the inner encounter with God and not external piety (6:1-18); and maintaining integrity between interior thought and exterior acts (15:8). It is a fundamental virtue (integrity) that underlies those ethical attitudes in the Sermon.¹⁵⁷⁵ Moreover, in comparison to the Jewish tradition, the New Testament emphasizes more on internal purity than external/cultic purity. And this emphasis on interior disposition of the person could imply that those who

¹⁵⁶⁹ Powell, 472.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 134; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196.

¹⁵⁷¹ Stassen, “The Beatitudes as Eschatological Peacemaking Virtues,” 252.

¹⁵⁷² Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196.

¹⁵⁷³ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 135.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 456.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 136.

are pure in heart and the ‘poor in spirit’ are synonymous.¹⁵⁷⁶ Still, it does not mean that the Matthean macarism rejects the Jewish cultic usage completely.¹⁵⁷⁷ Therefore, ‘pure in heart’ in the New Testament neither points to external purity nor single-heartedness alone but a sense of integrity between one’s external actions and the inner being.¹⁵⁷⁸

The apodosis of the beatitude says that ‘the pure in heart’ will see God. Within Judaism seeing God is equivalent to knowing God; and the knowledge or vision of God is usually associated with the promise of future, as in Isaiah 52:6 and Jeremiah 24:7.¹⁵⁷⁹ Still, two contrasting traditions about seeing God are identified:¹⁵⁸⁰ The first one focuses on the possibility of physical sight pertaining to this world (Exodus 3:6; 1 Timothy 6:15-16); the second and dominant tradition, on the contrary, tends to emphasize the blessed goal of acquiring spiritual sight in the world to come (Psalm 17:15, Revelation 22:4).

As a whole, both the use of future active connotation and the influence of Greek and Jewish traditions point to an eschatological understanding of the sixth apodosis:¹⁵⁸¹ Within the ancient Greek world, only the best could achieve the purity of the soul so as to experience a full vision of the most sacred. And since the purity of the soul is associated with the eschatological future, the full vision will be achieved only in the eschatological future. Judaism, while recognizing that God was seen by Moses only (Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10), likewise, longed for seeing God in *eschaton*. Finally, this

¹⁵⁷⁶ Ibid..

¹⁵⁷⁷ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 456; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 457.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Ibid..

¹⁵⁸¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 135-37; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 196. However, Moses was unable to see God’s face (Exodus 33:20).

eschatological promise of seeing God is further given interpretation in the Sermon (7:21-23)—those who enter the kingdom will see God who is the judge.

In sum, the beatitude points to an eschatological future and vision promised by God. It challenges the hegemony of the Pharisees and Sadducees who stressed outward manifestations of purity/impurity.¹⁵⁸² 5:8 reveals that those who are pure in heart will be able to see God in *eschaton*. The ‘pure in heart’ have their moral righteousness emerging from the inner self and finding expressions in outward actions. The beatitude thus emphasizes the integrity of the whole being and understands purity in heart as a fundamental, all-encompassing virtue.

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται.

Verse 9 is the third macarism added by the evangelist. It has similar verbal usage and themes with 5:38-48 (on turning the other cheek and loving one’s enemy) and finds parallel in the apocalyptic literature of 2 Enoch 52:11-12 (“Happy is he who establishes peace. Cursed is he who strikes down those who are in peace”).¹⁵⁸³ Unfortunately, 5:9 is a rather controversial macarism because of the possible political implications rooted in the meaning of peacemaking.¹⁵⁸⁴

¹⁵⁸² Domeris, 71; Turner, 40-41.

¹⁵⁸³ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 457.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 137.

The Greek term *εἰρηνοποιός* is a typical verbal adjective found in Hellenistic Greek to describe those leaders who establish security and socio-economic welfare.¹⁵⁸⁵ Within ancient Greek society, peacemaking was highly valued since the people longed for peace and stability after centuries of wars. It was also understood by the philosophers as a proper task within families and between individuals.¹⁵⁸⁶

In Judaism peacemaking has long been considered a virtue. The Hebrew concept of *shalom* (peace) was fundamental to both the Old Testament and Jewish religions.¹⁵⁸⁷ It points to abundance and all-round right relationships. It is the fullness of God's gift and involves a cosmic dimension in which the creator intends a cosmic order. Still, the term is paralleled to *mishpat* (justice) and is thus closer to the concept of righteousness than to that of tranquility or order.¹⁵⁸⁸ Therefore, war and violence are not completely ruled out by the Jewish tradition, as shown in both Jewish literature and historical events.¹⁵⁸⁹

Within the New Testament tradition, *εἰρηνοποιός* occurs only once—Matthew 5:9—while other verbal composites such as *ποιεῖν εἰρήνην* (meaning 'make peace') are employed more frequently elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., James 3:18; Ephesians 2:15).¹⁵⁹⁰ Still, the evangelist promotes peacemaking elsewhere in the Sermon:¹⁵⁹¹ For instance, the antitheses in 5:21-48 present instances of peacemaking in the context of family and friendship. In fact, both biblical traditions generally envision peacemaking in

¹⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.; Powell, 473.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 139.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Hamm, 102; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 139.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Powell, 474.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 139.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 138.

¹⁵⁹¹ Ibid..

terms of human relationships. Thus, the religious dimension—that is, making peace with God—is only minimal.¹⁵⁹²

Moreover, in light of human relationships, the term implies a positive action and thus is best referred to someone who seeks to bring peace (i.e., peacemaker) rather than a pacifist. It also envisions the notion of reconciliation which in turn implies forgiveness.¹⁵⁹³ The pursuit of peace is a requirement for following Jesus for he is the one who brings peace (Luke 2:14) and God is the principal peacemaker (especially by forgiving sins) and a God of peace (Romans 16:20).¹⁵⁹⁴

Regarding the controversy involving the interpretation of peacemaking, it is related to the understanding that peace is constitutive of the kingdom of God (Romans 14:17, 19) and peacemaking is a direct consequence (and demand) of righteousness and a function of the kingdom of God.¹⁵⁹⁵ Both righteousness and the kingdom require personal pursuit of peace in all aspects of life, including political and economic life. In this sense, political implications can be expected.

However, as seen above, the instances presented by Matthew in the Sermon are concerned with those relationships between individuals instead of social/political groups. In addition, these and other implications are presented solely as a personal example of the individual disciples. They are used to help the disciples cultivate the appropriate attitudes and only then that they apply these attitudes to broader social and political

¹⁵⁹² Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 458.

¹⁵⁹³ Ibid., 457; Powell, 473.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 458; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 141.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 138; Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 198-99.

environment.¹⁵⁹⁶ In other words, these implications do not serve as a general guide for political behavior and hence rule out political involvement as a group. Peacemaking within a broader political paradigm is at most only secondary.¹⁵⁹⁷

Apart from this controversy, another puzzle regarding this macarism is the disharmonization with 10:34-35 when Jesus claims that he does not come to bring peace but the sword. In fact, the lack of harmony is typical of the evangelist's style (e.g., 8:12 with 13:38) and Matthew simply tries to preserve the tradition and at the same time be creative.¹⁵⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Matthew basically affirms the positive values of peacemaking in spite of the hostility experienced by his community:¹⁵⁹⁹ By taking up responsibilities against all persecutions and injustice and demonstrating the belief that God's kingdom will prevail, the peacemakers will be rewarded by God.

The promise of the beatitude is that the peacemakers will be called sons (children¹⁶⁰⁰) of God. Here, the connection between the promise of divine sonship and the exhortation to peacemaking finds parallel from the Old Testament tradition where sonship and peace-making were brought together:¹⁶⁰¹ "See, a son shall be born to you; he

¹⁵⁹⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 139.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Powell, 473.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 458.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 140.

¹⁶⁰⁰ In the Old Testament, being 'sons of God' was alluded to joining the angels (Genesis 6:1-4). Thus, Harrington points out that the gender-neutral term 'children' might obscure this allusion. See Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 80. Hamm, on the other hand, points out that the inclusive term 'children' was available to Matthew and hence his choice of 'sons' might well be tied with the 'Son of God' title. See *The Beatitudes in Context: What Luke and Matthew Meant*, 103. As far as exegesis is concerned, I continue to use 'sons of God' that is more faithful to the Greek translation. However, such use does not discriminate the other gender in any way. It is the same with regards to the use of 'sonship' here.

¹⁶⁰¹ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 459.

shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies on every side...He shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him” (1 Chronicles 22:9-10).

With regards to the phrase ‘sons of God’ it occurs only once in Matthew.

However, there are various passages in both the Old and New Testaments that indicate who the sons of God are—the righteous ones (Wisdom 5:1-5; Matthew 5:48; Revelation 21:7). Moreover, although the subject is not specified, it is understood that the one who calls is God. And it is generally assumed that ‘called to be something by God’ is equivalent to ‘being that something’.¹⁶⁰² Therefore, the promise in the apodosis can be rephrased as being sons of God. In fact, for Matthew those whose conduct is similar to God’s own are already sons of God—whom they address as Father (5:45; 6:9), and the people of God are expected to become sons of God in the *eschaton*—they will share a special kind of intimacy with God that is not experienced in the present time, and a likeness to God.¹⁶⁰³

Finally, both the use of future divine passive connotation and the notion of ‘sons of God’ point to the overall eschatological nature of this promise. However, Matthew’s understanding of divine sonship differs from Paul’s in that for Paul the present pronouncement does not exempt the people from facing the last judgment.¹⁶⁰⁴

In conclusion, the seventh beatitude points out that the eschatological promise to the peacemakers is that they will be God’s children. Peacemaking is a long established virtue valued by both the Greek and Jewish worlds and is primarily concerned with

¹⁶⁰² Ibid., 458.

¹⁶⁰³ Ibid., 458-59.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 142.

interpersonal relationship that demands reconciliation and forgiveness. The pursuit of peace is a demand by Jesus. Although the notion of peacemaking has posed a couple of interpretative problems with regards to political implications and its seemingly conflicting relationship with violence, Matthew basically affirms the positive values of peacemaking and proposes peacemaking as an appropriate attitude for the followers of Jesus rather than a pure political agenda.

5: 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

{5:11-12 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἰπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν [ψευδόμενοι] ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ· χαίrete καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.}¹⁶⁰⁵

The eighth beatitude is the last of the four macarisms added by Matthew. Verse 10 has no Lukan parallel and is added at a later time.¹⁶⁰⁶ It forms an *inclusio* with the first beatitude by employing exactly the same apodosis. As an *inclusio*, it implies that the promises made in 5:4-9 are basically alternative ways of expressing the promise of the

¹⁶⁰⁵ As stated in 7.3, I understand 5:11-12 as an expansion of 5:10. Thus, I hereby integrate the two verses in the exegesis of the eighth beatitude.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Verses 11 and 12, however, parallel Luke 6:22-23.

kingdom of heaven expressed in the apodosis.¹⁶⁰⁷ The beatitude also echoes the fourth macarism by focusing on righteousness and prepares for what is required of the greater righteousness in verse 20.¹⁶⁰⁸

Moreover, since verse 10 and verses 11 and 12 share the same subject matter of ‘persecution’ it is suggested that they are related in one way or another. Some exegetes perceive it as the ninth beatitude despite the fact that 5:11-12 differs from the rest of the Beatitudes in that it is formulated in the second person plural rather than the third person and contains much more words.¹⁶⁰⁹ It serves as a bridge between the eight beatitudes and the teaching on love of enemies on the one hand and as a smooth transition to the ‘salt and light’ saying on the other.¹⁶¹⁰ It is further argued that Matthew’s later addition of 5:10 was simply a numerical consideration—to form a multiple of three and to complete the triadic structure of the Beatitudes that contains the themes of ‘righteousness’ and ‘kingdom of heaven’.¹⁶¹¹ However, it is equally argued that 5:11-12 is an expansion of the eight beatitude.

Regarding the motif of the persecution of the righteous, it can be found in many Old Testament passages, such as Wisdom 2:10-20, Psalm 7:1-17, and Job 13:20-27. Among them the persecution of the prophets was a dominant theme that later became part

¹⁶⁰⁷ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 460. Robert Guelich further claims that the subjects of the first and the eighth beatitudes are synonymous to each other. See *The Sermon on the Mount*, 93.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 80.

¹⁶⁰⁹ There are various suggestions regarding the change from the third person to the second person plural: Some exegetes think that it is a rhetorical design, others propose that it is meant to apply what has been said generally to the concrete situation of the disciples. See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 147; Powell, 477-78.

¹⁶¹⁰ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 460.

¹⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 459.

of the martyrdom ideology.¹⁶¹² In fact, this motif is also found in ancient Greek thoughts where major philosophers are at times portrayed as the prototype of the persecuted righteous man just like Job of the Old Testament.¹⁶¹³ However, none of the Old Testament passages grants blessing to the persecuted.¹⁶¹⁴ The New Testament tradition, in contrast, poses a possible parallel to the macarism in 1 Peter 3:14 (“But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed”).¹⁶¹⁵ Still, the beatitude does not connect the theme with the life and death of Jesus as its parallel does.¹⁶¹⁶

Nevertheless, the verb form of persecution, *διώκω*, suggests that the persecution suffered by the righteous may refer to physical violence and/or verbal abuse.¹⁶¹⁷ And the use of perfect passive participle further implies that Matthew is aware that the persecution has begun in the past and continues to the present (5:12; 10:16-33).¹⁶¹⁸ In addition, the Greek word *ἐνεκεν* (meaning ‘on account of’)—which normally indicates the latter is a cause or an occasion of the former—implies that righteousness is the cause of persecution:¹⁶¹⁹ *Δικαιοσύνης* emphasizes what the right conduct demanded by God is and gives content to the reason of persecution.

¹⁶¹² Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 144.

¹⁶¹³ Ibid..

¹⁶¹⁴ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 459.

¹⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 460.

¹⁶¹⁶ The lack of connection is because of the overall absence of a Christology in the Sermon on the Mount which comes from a pre-Matthean source. See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 145.

¹⁶¹⁷ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 459.

¹⁶¹⁸ Ibid..

¹⁶¹⁹ Ibid..

Subsequently, this understanding of persecution and the description in verses 11-12 mutually interpret each other:¹⁶²⁰ In the first place, the use of the second person plural in verses 11 and 12 implies that persecution is constitutive of discipleship (for Jesus is now addressing the disciples directly). Second, Matthew's three forms of persecution, when compared to Luke's list (Luke 6:20-23), point to a more severe conflict experienced by Matthew's community; yet they also hint that those final conflicts between Jewish Christians and the Jews (such as complete separation) are not implied by the macarism.¹⁶²¹ These various forms of persecution find references in both the New Testament (Galatians 4:29 and Acts 5:17-18) and the Jewish tradition:¹⁶²² The first form of hostility, 'revile', is a traditional theme from the Jewish wisdom literature and is associated with the persecution of the righteous (Psalm 69:10). The second type of hostility, *διώξωσιν*, is used in a peculiar way that implies that persecution could come from within, which in turn hints that Matthew's community was persecuted by the Jews. The third form of hostility, 'saying all kinds of evil against someone', can be viewed as slanders and defamation (which are treated extensively in the Old Testament writings such as Levi 19:16). Again, it is a traditional theme of the Jewish wisdom literature and is associated with martyrdom (Proverbs 6:17, 19). And the qualification 'falsely' might be added by a scribe to make the hostility more specific.

¹⁶²⁰ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 199.

¹⁶²¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 150; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 80.

¹⁶²² Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 149-50; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 54; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 80.

Third, both the language employed and the omission of the subject imply that the persecutions are rather general and could be applied to various situations.¹⁶²³ Still, verse 11 supplies the concrete description to the persecution of the righteous in the eighth beatitude—those who experience these kinds of persecution are indeed suffering for righteousness.

Fourth, the phrase *ἐνεκεν ἐμοῦ* ('on account of me') states clearly that the proper cause of persecution is Jesus and his teaching.¹⁶²⁴ In verse 12, the syllogism 'for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you' recalls the Old Testament tradition (and theme) that suffering from persecution is part of the prophet's vocation (e.g., 2 Chronicles 36:16; Nehemiah 9: 26; 1 Thessalonians 2: 14-16).¹⁶²⁵ It also provides a historical verdict to the present persecution as well as the reward granted.¹⁶²⁶ The possible subjects of persecution are the Pharisees and scribes who are the sons of those who murdered the prophets (23:31-36).

As far as the Jewish tradition is concerned, persecution for the sake of righteousness is understood as the greatest test/education for the righteous and produces the highest virtue.¹⁶²⁷

With regards to the promise of the eighth macarism, it is the same as that of the first beatitude. Still, the first two parts of verse 12 provides additional information about this promise—the receiving of great reward. The idea of receiving reward from God

¹⁶²³ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 462.

¹⁶²⁴ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 147.

¹⁶²⁵ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 464; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 54.

¹⁶²⁶ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 153.

¹⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

because of persecution is actually found in Jewish apocalyptic literature (such as 1 Enoch 108:10 and 4 Ezra 7:88-100) while the notion of reward is also found in Jewish teachings:¹⁶²⁸ According to Jewish doctrine, reward is a conditional entitlement claimed by the qualified person and it can be claimed only once. When Matthew applies it to the Sermon and the Beatitudes, he implies that those who follow the teaching of Jesus would be guaranteed of treasure in heaven. This guarantee provides the reason for their rejoicing. However, one has to wait for the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God in order to claim the reward—in fact, the reward is always granted in the last judgment and is thus eschatological in nature (6:1, 2, 5, 16).¹⁶²⁹

Last but not least, the two imperatives *χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε* (‘rejoice’ and ‘be glad’) could have a liturgical appeal and the *ὅτι* clause offers an immediate reason for rejoicing:¹⁶³⁰ The disciples, like the prophets of the past, would be counted as God’s servants and rewarded greatly. This *ὅτι* clause parallels and sums up other similar clauses stated in the previous beatitudes. Although the kingdom of heaven has not arrived in its fullness, the promise of future blessing has already transformed the present. Thus, the imperatives (and apodosis) point not only to the eschatological future but to the present as well. It echoes what is observed in the apodosis of the first beatitude.

In conclusion, 5:10-12 tells us that those who suffer from various kinds of physical and/or verbal persecution for the sake of righteousness as the prophets did and

¹⁶²⁸ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 80; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 152.

¹⁶²⁹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, 199.

¹⁶³⁰ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 151; Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 463.

on account of Jesus and his teaching, will be rewarded greatly in the eschatological coming of the kingdom of heaven. Still, they should rejoice and be glad right now because of the guarantee of this reward. Moreover, by forming an *inclusio* with the first beatitude, this expanded eighth beatitude sums up the basic thoughts of the other beatitudes and forms a climax for the ethical teaching of the whole Beatitudes:¹⁶³¹ The attitude of humility identified in the first beatitude reaches its climax in the cultivation of the highest virtue of bearing persecution for righteousness's sake.

A Summary

As a whole, we note that the Beatitudes finds close correspondence with the ancient Jewish and Greek traditions, the Jewish prophetic and wisdom literature in particular: The first two beatitudes allude to Isaiah 61:1-3; the third macarism finds correspondence in Psalm 37:11; the beatitude on seeking God's righteousness likewise alludes to the Psalm (107:5, 8-9); the fifth beatitude finds parallel in Proverbs 14:21; the sixth macarism may allude to Psalm 24:3-5; the beatitude on peacemaking, in contrast, finds parallel in the apocalyptic literature of 2 Enoch 52:11-12; and the last beatitude can allude to a number of Old Testament passages, especially those related to the persecution of the prophets.

All these allusions and parallels, as well as the situation of Matthew's community, guide us to understand the original meaning of the macarisms: The poor in spirit, who are often suffering from economic poverty, are those who acquire the internal attitude of

¹⁶³¹ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 146.

humility. The mourners lament over the causes of griefs, especially the poverty that causes the grief of the poor. The meek, like the poor in spirit, are called to be humble and follow the example of Jesus. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness seek first God's righteousness with effort. The merciful are those who are compassionate particularly to human predicaments, and extend mercy to all by means of forgiveness. They do so as a response to God's covenantal, steadfast love. The pure in heart live a life of moral integrity in that their moral righteousness emerges from the inner self and finds corresponding expressions in outward actions. The peacemakers are concerned first with interpersonal relationship that demands reconciliation and forgiveness. Finally, only those who suffer from all kinds of physical and/or verbal persecution for the sake of righteousness and on account of Jesus and his teaching will be rewarded. This understanding of these macarisms helps clarify to us who the blessed people are in the mind of the evangelist.

The subsequent promises—reversals of the present predicament and rewards alike—are set within an eschatological framework which contrasts to that of the wisdom writings that expects immediate effects in this life: The blessed are given the kingdom of heaven that may also contain present recompense; they will be comforted by God who brings salvation, pardon, and nourishment; they will inherit the new earth and new heaven when the kingdom comes in its fullness; they will be satisfied by God who grants us the eschatological banquet; they will also receive God's own mercy and steadfast love; they will be able to see God in the *eschaton* and become God's children; and they will receive great reward in the kingdom of heaven. While these promises converge in the

eschatological coming of the kingdom of God, some anticipation of the reward in present life is possible.¹⁶³² The Beatitudes underlines God's providence.

As far as the ethics of the Beatitudes is concerned, these findings confirm that the macarisms are blessings, explanations of certain attitudes and actions that lead to eschatological reward, as well as standards for what the Matthean community should manifest in enduring their suffering and conflict with others.¹⁶³³ The first and third beatitudes highlight the attitude of humility. The second macarism points out that mourning over those causes of grief is itself a pious practice. The fourth beatitude attends to the conducts and relationships that are built upon God's righteousness. The fifth macarism states clearly that mercy and compassion to those human predicaments as well as forgiveness are practiced by the merciful. Those who are pure in heart highlight the importance of integrity in one's whole being. The seventh beatitude points out the acquisition of peacemaking by means of reconciliation and forgiveness. The last beatitude encourages us to cultivate the highest virtue of bearing persecution for the sake of righteousness and Jesus' teaching. These matching practices and attitudes, in other words, are the virtues of the Beatitudes. And among them the demand of justice, though not explicitly listed, is to be pursued and possessed by all for it is a manifestation of God's righteousness.

Although Matthew does not refer the Beatitudes explicitly to the life and death of Jesus, he elsewhere points out that Jesus has all these qualities:¹⁶³⁴ He is humble, meek

¹⁶³² Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 82-83.

¹⁶³³ Ibid., 83.

¹⁶³⁴ Davies, and Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 467.

and righteous (11:29); he mourns for others (26:36-46) and has mercy on the people (9:27); he lives a life of integrity with his words and deeds; and is reviled and persecuted throughout his Passion. Thus, the person of Jesus has truthfully illustrated to us the eight beatitudes and become the exemplar *par excellence* for the disciples. Also, those correspondences between particular beatitudes and the Jewish tradition (especially the Second Isaiah) further point out that Jesus is the anointed one, and the eschatological Messiah.

In sum, as Davies and Allison rightly conclude, the Beatitudes serves as a practical theodicy:¹⁶³⁵ The Beatitudes puts the present difficulties of the Matthean community into perspective, lessens the pain and agony of the suffered, and offers encouragement by means of eschatological promises.

7.5 Conclusion

So far I have offered an exegesis of the Beatitudes in this chapter as a way to concretely illustrate the first phase of doing a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics that treats the text as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. Various biblical tools and the works of some major contemporary Matthean experts are employed so as to present a detailed and more accurate exegesis of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12. Since neither the Beatitudes nor the Sermon on the Mount is intended to stand by itself, it becomes necessary to first turn to certain issues related to the gospel in general and the Sermon on

¹⁶³⁵ Ibid..

the Mount in specific prior to exploring the Beatitudes's own issues and exegeting the text. They are treated in the first three parts of this chapter. Although many of the issues are still debatable, some general claims can be made. This acquisition not only helps us to understand the gospel itself but also offers useful exegetical guidelines.

The corresponding attitudes and conducts defined in the beatitudes include humility, mourning, striving for God's righteousness, mercy and compassion, forgiveness, integrity, reconciliation and peacemaking, and bearing all kinds of persecution for the sake of righteousness and justice. However, in order to better understand the meanings of these identified attitudes and actions as well as to interpret the Beatitudes's ethical relevance in a contemporary context, we need to read the Beatitudes through a particular hermeneutical lens. Thus, in the next chapter I move onto the next phrase of our illustration and employ the hermeneutics of virtue ethics as proposed in Part Two to interpret the exegeted Beatitudes.

In so doing, a legitimate, though specific, question relevant to the overall construction of a more integrated Scripture-based theological ethics emerges: What difference does it make between interpreting the Beatitudes as most ethicists have done and interpreting the exegeted Beatitudes that I have just presented? In other words, what can ethicists learn from exegeting the Beatitudes? Generally speaking, an ethicist can acquire a more accurate understanding of the Beatitudes than what one understands superficially. This subsequently helps produce a more faithful interpretation of the ethical relevance of the Beatitudes. Also, the exegeted Beatitudes reveals to us those hidden

insights of which an ethicist may be unaware and hence broadens the scope of one's interpretation.

But what is that understanding and hidden insights? Several specific and significant features emerge from the 'scripted' Beatitudes that guide our hermeneutics in the right direction. In the first place, the overall text bears an explicit Jewish influence—it is written by a Jewish Christian for a Jewish Christian community and is grounded in Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic literature. Therefore, ethicists are reminded to pay special attention to the strong Jewish socio-cultural and religious context when interpreting the text and seeking ethical relevance for the contemporary world. In other words, while our hermeneutics is never context-free, the text to be interpreted likewise has its own context that needs to be addressed.

Second, the eight beatitudes, though dealing with different attitudes and conducts, form a tightly integrated and sophisticated whole. The fruit of exegesis shows that such unity—not uniformity—is not only found in terms of literary form but also in terms of contents. In particular, the various attitudes, practices, and conducts identified in each of the beatitudes converge to certain core loci. For instance, the 'poor in spirit', the mourners, the meek, and the merciful are not simple general personal attributes but rather are deeply connected to the identity of the community under persecution. Their concerns for the community's predicaments, embodied by those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the 'pure in heart', the peacemaker, and those who suffer, point to righteousness as the foundational relationship between God and the community. Or, in terms of moral attitudes, the first, second, and third beatitudes highlight the attitude of

personal and communal humility, while the fifth and the seventh beatitudes bring out not only virtues of mercy and reconciliation respectively but together the practice of forgiveness as well.

Third, this integration on the level of content points to the overall radical nature of ethics in the Beatitudes. On the surface the Beatitudes simply poses certain attitudes and conduct as demands of discipleship. There seems no great difficulty in acquiring these individual attitudes or acting out their corresponding conducts. However, the internal unity among the beatitudes hints that the Beatitudes, like the Sermon on the Mount, proposes a radical demand on being disciples of Jesus: Being poor in spirit demands at the same time mercy and meekness. In other words, the Beatitudes is a call to strive for perfection. Grace is thus needed in practicing and striving for those attitudes. Moreover, the exegesis discloses that Jesus is the concrete exemplar *par excellence* in our moral development based on the Beatitudes. In short, the call to discipleship has real great expectation in Matthew's gospel.

Fourth, the outcome of exegeting the Beatitudes shows that while each of the beatitudes points to a corresponding human response and lays its promise in an eschatological framework, God's providence is found in all situations. God is not simply the giver of rewards but is ever present in the blessed.¹⁶³⁶ Thus, during the process of interpretation, one must not over-emphasize human effort or overlook God's providence.

Fifth, the revelation of the unity among the beatitudes further rejects the dichotomy that some beatitudes (like the first and the sixth beatitudes) are concerned with

¹⁶³⁶ Pinchas Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* trans. Arlene Swidler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 31-32.

persons (her/himself) while other beatitudes (such as the fourth and seventh beatitudes) are concerned with the community. Still, it similarly rejects the opposite view of some theologians (like the liberation theologians) that the Beatitudes is solely socio-political driven. Rather, the findings of the exegesis hint that the communal aspect of the Beatitudes is found in each of the beatitudes despite the fact that it is explicit in some and implicit in others.

Chapter Eight: The Interpretation of a Key Text through the Hermeneutics of Virtue Ethics—The Beatitudes as ‘Scripted Script’

In our earlier exploration of the audiences of the Beatitudes (and the Sermon on the Mount), some scholars like Jack Dean Kingsbury argue that neither the crowds nor the first disciples nor the evangelist’s community are the real intended addressee but the ‘implied reader’ “who is a disciple of Jesus and who lives in the perilous times between the resurrection and the Parousia.”¹⁶³⁷ By correlating the Sermon with Jesus’ instruction to the disciples in Matthew 28:20, Ulrich Luz similarly claims that the Sermon is “precisely *not* intended to be limited to the inside of the Church [although] Matthew puts special emphasis on [the disciples].”¹⁶³⁸ Rather, it addresses directly its present readers by providing a “guiding principle by which that community is to measure its own works.”¹⁶³⁹ That means, the Beatitudes is also written for and spoken to the people of God in the twenty-first century.

This understanding highlights the necessity of carrying out the hermeneutical task in reading the Beatitudes. As I have been proposing throughout this work, the construction of a more integrated Scripture-based theological ethics challenges us to treat the text as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. Therefore, in this chapter, I continue to make my case by moving into hermeneutics and see how the Beatitudes is meaningful to our contemporary readers in their Christian moral life.

¹⁶³⁷ Kingsbury, 135.

¹⁶³⁸ Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 43.

¹⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

Regarding the relevance of the Beatitudes to our contemporary Christian moral life, Pinckaers argues that it is still relevant at both personal and social levels, for the problems of poverty and wealth, violence, justice and forgiveness, war and peace, and persecution have constantly recurred throughout our human history.¹⁶⁴⁰ The Beatitudes, he suggests, reads like “a summary of human life crossed with questions and contradictions.”¹⁶⁴¹ Indeed, the Beatitudes as a whole makes us attentive to those limit-experiences such as death and suffering, and invites us to find meanings in these seemingly meaningless situations.¹⁶⁴² Still, it reminds us that our human conditions are full of promise in God’s eyes and thus affirms our deepest longing for goodness, freedom, wholeness, and harmony.¹⁶⁴³ It is the answer of Jesus to the human question of happiness and it shows the followers the path to God.¹⁶⁴⁴

Therefore, in order to interpret the Beatitudes and to understand its ethical implications for contemporary Christians and their community, as proposed earlier, I employ virtue ethics as the hermeneutical tool.¹⁶⁴⁵ In fact, interpreting the Beatitudes in light of virtue for ethical implications is not the interest of the contemporary Christian

¹⁶⁴⁰ Servais Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness—God’s Way: Living the Beatitudes*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (New York: Alba House, 1998), 37.

¹⁶⁴¹ Ibid..

¹⁶⁴² Susan Muto, “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit and the Pure of Heart,” in *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 1995), 131.

¹⁶⁴³ Ibid., 132.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, viii.

¹⁶⁴⁵ As stated earlier, virtue theory is not the only methodological approach proposed by theological ethicists to interpret the Beatitudes. For instance, Eberhard Schockenhoff attempts to relate the theological-ethical interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount with natural law: From the perspective of natural law theory, he notes that there exists an ethical universalism in the Sermon. The basic outlines of a theological interpretation of the Sermon as such would “combine the universal validity and practicability of its commandments.” In other words, the Sermon has an universal intention and envisages all humankind. See Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 226, 265-67, 279.

virtue ethicists alone:¹⁶⁴⁶ Early church Fathers such as Ambrose claimed that the four beatitudes common to Luke and Matthew reflect the four cardinal virtues (justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence). Medieval mendicants had also long perceived the Beatitudes as a pedagogical touchstone in their teaching of morals and virtues.

Dominican William Peraldus, for example, wrote a theological treatise on the relationship between the virtues and the Beatitudes. Francis of Assisi, in particular, interpreted the text literally and physically, and his literal interpretation was noted for underlining a trend that claims that one's outward action manifests the inner disposition of the person. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, though argued that the beatitudes are not virtues but actions, agreed that these actions are resulted from proper dispositions.

Still, it was the fourteenth century Observant Franciscan Bernardino of Siena who first specifically interpreted the eight beatitudes in light of virtue:¹⁶⁴⁷ The Beatitudes is a grace that indicates that one's soul is purified. Each beatitude is at the same time an extension of the virtues and an action disclosing one's inner and proper disposition. For example, in his interpretation of the fourth beatitude (on hunger and thirst for righteousness), Bernardino perceived that righteousness pertains to God, individual, and neighbor. Subsequently, the virtues of honoring God, self-discipline, as well as obedience, concord, and beneficence (toward a superior, an equal, and an inferior respectively) are needed for the realization of righteousness. Or, in the case of peacemaking, he argued that the virtues of active faith, charity, and concord of peace are crucial necessities. Moreover, although Bernardino was a preacher and he was solely concerned about the

¹⁶⁴⁶ Muessig, 136-42.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 143-44, 150.

lives of his fellow friars, his interpretation of the Beatitudes in light of virtue is praised for focusing not only on individuals but also the community in general.

Unfortunately, the trend to interpret the Beatitudes for its audience in light of virtue has somehow lost ground with the rise of other ethical approaches. It is not until the resurgence in attention to virtue that ethicists begin to revisit the relationship between the Beatitudes and virtues. For instance, as mentioned at the beginning of Part Three, Benjamin Farley identifies several virtues that are extolled in the Beatitudes: Absolute renunciation and docility, acceptance of God's comfort, meekness, commitment to righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, cultivation of peace, and courage. Baptist ethicist Glen Stassen, who is interested in peacemaking and social justice, also turns to the Beatitudes for guidance in the search of virtues needed for peacemaking:¹⁶⁴⁸ He claims that all virtues found in the Beatitudes are primarily "God's virtues as merciful deliverer" and only secondarily are they human virtues. Thus, the focus of the Beatitudes is God's grace rather than our human virtues. He then briefly identifies certain virtues and concludes that the Beatitudes (and other biblical traditions) are a better source than those traditional Greek virtues for a virtue ethics of peacemaking.

Despite these notable exceptions, William Mattison rightly comments that the recent resurgence of virtue ethics seems to not draw enough attention to the importance of the Beatitudes:¹⁶⁴⁹ He notes that a real lacuna does exist and hence hopes to contribute to the more prominent incorporation of the beatitudes into contemporary Christian ethics

¹⁶⁴⁸ Stassen, "The Beatitudes as Eschatological Peacemaking Virtues," 246-56.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Mattison III, "The Beatitudes and Christian Ethics: A Virtue Perspective." Mattison have employed the same approach in his treatment of the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon. See "The Lord's Prayers and an Ethics of Virtue: Continuing a History of Commentary," *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 279-31.

(and moral theology) and to discussions that are endemic to virtue approaches to ethics. By turning to classical Greco-Roman literature and some early Christian thinkers like Augustine, Mattison argues that the Beatitudes is appropriately understood in the context of the question of happiness and is a rich resource in answering virtue-focused questions. In addition, he claims that since the Beatitudes is all about happiness it is only appropriate to employ virtue ethics that similarly sought happiness as the interpretative tool.

However, Mattison is more concerned with arguing for an intrinsic relationship (or continuity) between the qualifying condition and the state of reward/happiness obtained—that is, each promise/reward is a continuation and culmination of a life of a particular qualifying condition—than in interpreting the text. He basically follows Augustine’s approach and suggests that the Beatitudes commends the seven virtues—three theological and four cardinal. And at times, his understanding of the original meaning of certain beatitudes (such as mourning) seems superficial and hence leads to a mistaken interpretation of those beatitudes.

Therefore, here I attempt to offer a more comprehensive and more exact interpretation for our contemporary world that is based on the outcome of the previous exegesis. In so doing, instead of simply proposing corresponding virtue(s) in each of the eight beatitudes, I will adopt the foundational questions (based on the threefold structure) of virtue theory: Who are we? What ought we to become? And finally, how do we get there?

To the first question, I will reflect upon our own status within the larger society and point out the problems that challenge our moral formation. The second question guides us to understand the concrete meaning and content of each proposed virtue. In other words, what does it mean to be a particular kind of virtuous person as suggested by each beatitude? The last question further leads us to explore the practices of these virtues, as well as to identify certain moral exemplars (predominantly) within the Christian tradition, beginning with Jesus who is the exemplar *par excellence*. By practicing the virtuous acts and by imitating these exemplary models, we can (partially) achieve the goal of becoming a virtuous person. It points to the formation of our moral character that is in line with the Beatitudes.

Moreover, I will briefly reflect upon the social and communal dimension of each virtue, for two reasons. First, as discussed before, one of the important yields of contemporary virtue theory is ‘community and communal identity’. In other words, there is a communal aspect in our virtuous life and we are called to form a particular kind of community. Therefore, by interpreting the Beatitudes through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics, we note that Matthew does not only invite us to be a particular virtuous Christian but also a specific virtuous Christian community.

Second, most contemporary scholars agree that the Beatitudes itself has a social characteristic. Historically, however, Jesus himself was not a social reformer, and the Beatitudes does not suggest a ‘social ethics’ in the strict sense. Even those exemplary saints and theologians before the modern era were not social reformers in any radical sense. They did not envision the possibility of bringing about a different social order. It

was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that theologians and Christians began to read the beatitudes with a different set of social lenses.

In order to respond to this basic issue, some ethicists point out that the text implies social objectives and serves as the basis of “a social ethics of consistent discipleship action.”¹⁶⁵⁰ Lisa Sowle Cahill, for instance, by perceiving the overall Sermon as a kingdom ethics that portrays right relationship to God and righteous actions towards others, argues that although the Beatitudes (and the Sermon) does not directly suggest the social dimension of its ethical implications, it is implied in the broader meaning of discipleship—there is “a continuing social meaning of the inclusive call to discipleship and of merciful action.”¹⁶⁵¹ She thus claims that if the ethics of Matthew 5-7 is one of discipleship and forgiving love, then the social dimension presupposes personal transformation as necessary.¹⁶⁵² Theologian William Cavanaugh further suggests that discipleship goes beyond social citizenship for “the community is invited to enter into a deeper kind of social relationship that is based on social justice and the priority of poor.”¹⁶⁵³

Finally, throughout the interpretation, it is important to note that, as far as the Christian community is concerned, we are not simply proposing certain human virtues but also *Christian* virtues: First, since virtue is not so much a question of doing as of being, the Beatitudes likewise is concerned with our being as Christians in the first place.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The Ethical Implications of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Interpretation* 41, no. 4 (April 1987): 153. Cahill cites Stephen C. Mott, “Use of the Bible in Social Ethics II,” *Transformation* 1 (1984): 24.

¹⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 147-53.

¹⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶⁵³ John Battle, “The Sermon on the Mount and Political Ethics,” *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 22, no. 1 (2009): 53.

Second, as one theologian insightfully puts, the beatitudes are “literally ‘be-attitudes’ or attitudes of being that disclose basic dispositions of Christian character formation.”¹⁶⁵⁴

Third, the Beatitudes tells us how to acquire the more abundant life that Christ brought to us.¹⁶⁵⁵ In particular, though formulated in the indicative mode, it arouses a longing for corresponding Christian action.¹⁶⁵⁶ Fourth, as the Beatitudes is particularly directed toward the victims of unrighteousness, and bestows empowerment and encouragement upon them, it thus contains a theological declaration of God’s mercy and divine providence.¹⁶⁵⁷ It is therefore argued that the Beatitudes reveals that human virtue is not enough because of its limitations and our failure to fully acquire the virtues.¹⁶⁵⁸ In sum, the Beatitudes describes best “the Christian virtues that make one worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven.”¹⁶⁵⁹

8.1 The Virtue of Humility in 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

English Dominican Gerald Vann, in his interpretation of the first beatitude, focuses on its spiritual meaning alone without making any reference to reality of material

¹⁶⁵⁴ Muto, 130.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Gerald Vann, *The Divine Pity: A Study in the Social Implications of the Beatitudes* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), 23-24.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Lapidé, 32.

¹⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Vann, 19.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Liviu Barbu, “The ‘Poor in Spirit’ and Our Life in Christ: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Christian Discipleship,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 3 (2009): 263.

poverty.¹⁶⁶⁰ Our exegesis, however, reveals that the ‘poor in spirit’, who acquire the internal attitude of humility, are often those suffering from economic poverty. Though the kingdom of heaven given to them is eschatological in nature, present recompense, especially the lifting of their poverty, is also considered. Therefore, one cannot talk about ‘poverty in spirit’ without looking into the reality of material poverty. Who, then, are the ‘poor’ and the ‘poor in spirit’ in our society?

Poverty as a Human Condition

Theologically speaking, human beings are created to share God’s infinity. However, because of sin—the pride of autonomy and the will to be one’s own master—we lost the docility that makes love and oneness (with God) possible.¹⁶⁶¹ In this sense, humankind is inescapably poor—there is poverty intrinsic to our human beings.¹⁶⁶²

Theologian Johannes Metz, based on this understanding of the innate poverty within us, further identifies six concrete types of poverty experienced by people in their daily life, including:¹⁶⁶³ 1) Poverty of misery and neediness in which one lives a life of severe poverty and insecurity; 2) poverty of our provisional nature in that our future is unknown and we are overcome by fear; and 3) poverty of finiteness in that the inescapable end is near. Here, Metz expands the meaning of ‘poverty’ to include psychological and material poverty.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Vann, 26-49.

¹⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁶⁶² Muto, 135, 137.

¹⁶⁶³ Johannes B. Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, trans. John Drury (Paramus, NJ: Paulist Press, 1968), 37-48. The other three identified types are: 1) Poverty of the commonplace in that we feel overwhelmed by our routine and average life; 2) poverty of uniqueness and superiority in which great people suffer loneliness and become the most vulnerable persons; and 3) poverty of death.

While acknowledging that these various types of poverty are true and real, Servias Pinckaers adds that there is also the poverty of error and sin—the most hidden and difficult type of poverty in that one faces the painful endurance of the sense of guilt—and rightly points out that these various forms of poverty, especially material and spiritual poverty, are not isolated from one another for poverty is experienced in both the body and the soul.¹⁶⁶⁴ He further identifies “the fundamental emptiness which lies at the depths of our being: The consciousness of our condition as creature” as the primordial poverty.¹⁶⁶⁵

The overall experience of poverty, however, can lead us to certain awakenings of self-understanding.¹⁶⁶⁶ Our helplessness and total dependency on a strange ‘beyond’, as well as our attempts to fuse with others in their poverty. In other words, it discloses our deepest self as dependent, solitary, vulnerable, and nothingness. All these experiences in turn help us to be aware of our place in creation and to seek ‘redemption’. Indeed, Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide is right to claim that all the suffering and struggling from poverty, destitution, and marginalization will turn out to be meaningful, especially since God dwells among the poor.¹⁶⁶⁷ And we are challenged to honestly acknowledge this poverty within us and accept it with a ‘poverty of spirit’.¹⁶⁶⁸

The Meaning of ‘Poor in Spirit’

What, then, does this ‘poor in spirit’ or ‘poverty of spirit’ mean for us nowadays? In the context of virtue theory, the notion points to the virtue of humility. Still, various

¹⁶⁶⁴ Pinckaers, 43-45.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Muto, 136.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Lapide, 27-28.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Pinckaers, 47.

understandings are conceived throughout Christian history. John Chrysostom, for example, perceived it as an antidote of pride—the root of all evil and the forerunner of original sin.¹⁶⁶⁹ For Luther it means the detachment of one’s heart from temporal things and reliance of God’s grace.¹⁶⁷⁰ Modern Eastern Orthodox Christians similarly understand ‘poor in spirit’ as “[the] renunciation of any personal velleities, of any desires of possession or dominion, directing one’s entire disposition towards the reception of the divine grace...[and a] spiritual emptying.”¹⁶⁷¹ It implies a total dependence on God’s grace and has a childlike trust in God’s providence. Betz, on the other hand, defines it as “one’s self-consciousness of the ‘poverty’ of the human condition.”¹⁶⁷² By referring to the life and death of Jesus, Metz further depicts it as “obedient acceptance of our natural impoverishment.”¹⁶⁷³ These understandings, though diverse, are not contradictory to each other. In fact, a more comprehensive understanding of humility takes on all these aspects.

Humility as a Virtue

Since the first beatitude is the starting point of the Sermon on the Mount and of one’s journey to the kingdom of God, some scholars thus claim that it is the foundation of all the beatitudes (and the Sermon).¹⁶⁷⁴ Others also claim that humility, being the virtue of the first beatitude, is necessarily understood as the “lowest and most elementary

¹⁶⁶⁹ Barbu, 264. Barbu cites John Chrysostom, “Homilies on St. Matthew (Homily XV),” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series I, vol. X, ed. P. Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 89.

¹⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 266. Barbu cites Martin Luther, “The Sermon on the Mount,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. XXI, trans. and ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis, CO: Concordia, 1956), 10, 13, 15.

¹⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 267. Barbu quotes Natalia Manolescu-Dinu, *Iisus Hristos Mantuitorul* [Jesus Christ the Savior] (Bucharest: Bizantina, 2004), 255.

¹⁶⁷² Ibid., Barbu cites Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 114-19.

¹⁶⁷³ Metz, 23.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 16.

virtue.”¹⁶⁷⁵ This understanding runs parallel with John Climacus’s own metaphor of the life of holiness as a ladder and humility being the first step on that ladder. It is further seen as it were “the parent and generation of the virtues.”¹⁶⁷⁶ This view thus implies that every virtue is a form of humility: Justice, for instance, is “the humility of the man who knows that every possession is also a responsibility.”¹⁶⁷⁷ In a similar way, Metz perceives the virtue of humility as the ground of every theological virtue and calls it “the mother of the threefold mystery of faith, hope and charity.”¹⁶⁷⁸

Moreover, some theologians argue that humility is not just a virtue among others but “a necessary ingredient in any authentic Christian attitude toward life” and through which imitation of Christ is possible.¹⁶⁷⁹ This argument can be traced back to Chrysostom who claimed that the virtue of humility is an indispensable virtue for the Christians at all times. He said, “Without humility all fall away and perish.”¹⁶⁸⁰

Nevertheless, humility as a Christian virtue for the ‘poor in spirit’ implies the cultivation of other relevant virtues. In particular, grounded in a strong sense of the need of God’s help, a humble person will therefore be trusting before God, be patient to God’s assistance, and put oneself completely at the disposal of God’s command.¹⁶⁸¹ Thus, it points to the need of the theological virtues of faith and hope in God and God’s

deliverance. Also, as the teaching on Original Sin demonstrates, because of human pride

¹⁶⁷⁵ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Barbu, 265, 274. Barbu quotes Ambrose, “*In Lucam 5.51*,” in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 32.4, ed. C. Schenkl, 201.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Vann, 18.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Metz, 26, 47.

¹⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Barbu, 264. Barbu quotes John Chrysostom, “Homilies on St. Matthew (Homily XV),” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series I, vol. X, ed. P. Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 89.

¹⁶⁸¹ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 41.

we disobeyed God and lost our original human nature (that is, in communion with God). Therefore, in obeying God one acquires humility.¹⁶⁸² In this way, the virtues of obedience and humility are directly connected.

The Practice of Humility

As far as the cultivation of the virtue of humility is concerned, Michael Crosby rightly points out that the first step is to acknowledge God as our ultimate source and meaning of our lives.¹⁶⁸³ A second step is the renunciation of whatever separates us from God—especially spiritual pride that is our biggest obstacle.¹⁶⁸⁴ In practical terms, such renunciation or self-emptiness points to detachment.¹⁶⁸⁵ Within the Ignatian tradition, it does not mean ‘not caring’; on the contrary, it cares for things, though in a way different from how avaricious people do. One learns to see God in all things and hence loves them in accordance with God’s will. Thus, one is more than a steward of God’s creation but a lover as well. And love as such is not a possessive love. Moreover, detachment does not simply mean the giving up of things but more importantly, the giving up of the obsessive desire for them.¹⁶⁸⁶ When one is detached from the desire to possess, one can rejoice in whatever things one has and grow in freedom.

On the other hand, some theologians further suggest the practice of sharing. They point out that when one is ready to share all that one has received from God, one is able to rejoice and be happy and will not lose one’s equilibrium in the midst of poverty and

¹⁶⁸² Barbu, 268.

¹⁶⁸³ Crosby, 44.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Muto, 140.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Vann, 27-32; Crosby, 45.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Muto, 140.

hardships.¹⁶⁸⁷ Within the sphere of one's liturgical and sacramental life, humility is further accompanied and expressed by Christian devotion as well as the sacrament of reconciliation that help us to recognize our sinfulness and hence remain humble in front of God.¹⁶⁸⁸

The Exemplars

In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." These words tell us that we can turn to Jesus in our cultivation of Christian humility. Indeed, there are many narratives in the New Testament that portray Jesus as a model of humility: He teaches us by not just words (e.g., Matthew 19:16-30) but also his own example (Philippians 2:6-8). As a whole, these narratives highlight certain traits of Jesus' humility: His hiddenness, powerlessness, and self-emptying.¹⁶⁸⁹ In particular, Christ's own humility and obedience to God the Father, from incarnation to the cross, is the perfect example of humility.¹⁶⁹⁰ By making himself poor (and a humble servant) and dedicating the whole life to the lowly and the poor, Jesus enriches us all (2 Corinthians 8:9) and opens our hearts to a life in the service of God and others.¹⁶⁹¹ Häring thus rightly claims that one needs to look to Christ the exemplar before asking abstract questions about poverty.¹⁶⁹²

¹⁶⁸⁷ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 11-12.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Vann, 30, 33-42, 101. Vann further links the beatitude with the sacrament of Baptism. He does so with the other six beatitudes as well. See also Muto, 129.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Muto, 142. Muto cites Ladislaus Boros, *Hidden God* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973).

¹⁶⁹⁰ Barbu, 268n40.

¹⁶⁹¹ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 8.

¹⁶⁹² Ibid..

Apart from Jesus Christ, the first human being identified as a model of humility (at least in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions) is the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose humility is best manifested in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) and her humble life (John 2:5). Still, there are many notable saints throughout the Christian history that exemplify the virtue of humility:¹⁶⁹³ Orthodox Saint Basil of Moscow in the fourth century, for example, gave away his last clothing and became naked and was called the ‘holy fool of Moscow’. Indeed, concrete practices of asceticism, self-denial, and obedience to the spiritual father are commonly found in the Eastern Church tradition.¹⁶⁹⁴

Within the Latin rite of the Catholic tradition, Francis of Assisi is well known for embracing poverty literally and concretely.¹⁶⁹⁵ He spoke of having poverty as his bride, practiced strict poverty voluntarily and insisted that one should ‘hate’ oneself—especially the pride inside us. Dominic, likewise, suggested that his followers possess poverty and offered his own interpretation: It is a perfection of freedom so much so that “it is a question less of what you possess than of how you possess it.”¹⁶⁹⁶

In our contemporary society, there are also Christians who practice humility as a way of discipleship, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the members of her religious congregation who are known for living an extremely simple lifestyle and serving the poorest of the poor.¹⁶⁹⁷ Like their pioneer Christian saints these exemplary Christians take on voluntary poverty as a means to acquire spiritual poverty in imitation of Christ.

¹⁶⁹³ Forest, 25. Forest cites *Praying with Icons* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

¹⁶⁹⁴ Barbu, 270. Eastern Orthodox tradition believes that God’s will for each of us is revealed in the advice of one’s spiritual father.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Forest, 26.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Vann, 31.

¹⁶⁹⁷ Forest, 26-27.

In both cases, these exemplary figures demonstrate that living a simple life for the sake of the poor is possible for all. In this way, their simple lifestyle challenges our society's false beliefs that wealth and material possessions are the goals of human life. They effectively call for changes of mentality on both personal and social levels.

The Social, Communal Aspect of the Virtue of Humility

While these Christian models' voluntary poverty is praiseworthy, the reality of forced poverty in our contemporary society challenges the followers of Christ to look beyond personal spiritual growth. In particular, the people of God are called to serve the poor and the suffering:¹⁶⁹⁸ Because of their awareness of dependence on God, the 'poor in spirit' can accept their responsibility to cooperate with God's plan in bringing about the original order. In the Gospel of Matthew, this plan of God is identified as doing good toward others, especially toward the poor and the desperate by means of sharing (19:16-22; 25:31-46).¹⁶⁹⁹ In fact, our wealth—including the spiritual wealth—is given "in view of the multitude...[and]...in the service of those who are worried and anguished."¹⁷⁰⁰ In our contemporary world, the practice of sharing is not limited to personal or communal levels but more importantly, the societal and international level. The virtue of humility challenges our society and nation to share our natural resources, technological advancement, and financial wealth with developing countries. One concrete, immediate

¹⁶⁹⁸ Crosby, 40-44.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 48-49.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 16.

social action on the international platform should be the cancelation of international debts by the developed countries.

Moreover, Häring notes that human pride—as is manifested in our human lust to possess and to dominate (and manipulate) others—is the cause of forced poverty and social injustice and rightly stresses the social implications of the Beatitudes.¹⁷⁰¹ Therefore, we are called to not just serve the poor but also to combat injustice and promote justice. Pinckaers likewise claims that both humility and the acceptance of poverty do not mean “passivity in the face of the injustices which cause poverty.”¹⁷⁰² Some theologians thus argue that the ‘poor in spirit’ include those who trust in God for their security and God’s presence with them when they work for justice.¹⁷⁰³ Based on Latin America experiences, these theologians suggest the need to change the infrastructure that leads to a culture of domination/oppression and subsequent social injustice. In so doing, they call for personal conversion and creation of alternative communities/societies as the first step of promoting changes. Last but not least, humility also reminds us that we are unable to change anything without God’s grace.

¹⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 10. Häring illustrates his point by recalling that Pope Benedict XV emphasized the applicability of the Beatitudes to political life in the aftermath of World War II. See also 13-14.

¹⁷⁰² Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 54.

¹⁷⁰³ Crosby, 49-50. Crosby cites Nathan E. Williams, “A Second Look at the First Beatitude,” *Expository Times* 98 (1987): 40.

8.2 Solidarity as a Virtue in 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Some interpreters take a more personal and spiritual approach toward the beatitude and interpret it as solely concerning one's sinfulness or personal suffering.¹⁷⁰⁴ Yet, we learn from the earlier exegesis that those who mourn are closely related to the 'poor in spirit'. The object of mourning, therefore, is not so much one's own suffering or sins but the concrete human experience of poverty and suffering encountered by other members of the community. And the fulfillment of the eschatological prediction further requires divine justice. Such understanding guides us to grasp the virtue intended by the evangelist: We are called to mourn over the suffering of others caused by injustice. The virtue of consoling, in contrast, is not the main concern as some ethicists like Häring have presumed.

Suffering and Mourning as Human Experience

Suffering and mourning often go hand in hand in our human experience. In the time of gospel writing, it was the concrete experience of the evangelist's community; still, it is also the experience of our human family nowadays. Indeed, Jesus explicitly tells us that suffering, sorrow and mourning are inevitable (John 16:20-22).

¹⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 73.

What are the sufferings in our humankind? Pinckaers offers a brief but helpful summary:¹⁷⁰⁵ They could be physical (such as pain and poverty), moral (such as disappointments), spiritual (like the consciousness of sins), or a result of loss (such as death). And the term for ‘mourning’ normally refers to the grief of death and great loss. It designates the keenest of sufferings in that one can do nothing but weep.

Still, a closer look of the reality in our contemporary world shows that the object of our grieving is not limited to individual suffering alone. There is massive suffering in every corner of our human society: For instance, the discrimination experienced by the illegal/undocumented immigrants in our own countries; our alienation towards the HIV/AIDS victims; the severe poverty and political unrest in developing countries; and even communal conflicts due to differences in religious belief. Based on our earlier discussion on poverty, we can claim that these people also suffer from poverty in one way or another. It is further pointed out that the despoliation of the earth is another object of our mourning in the twenty-first century.¹⁷⁰⁶

As a whole, the object of our mourning is the various suffering and predicament of others caused by injustice in our society, especially but not exclusively, material/economic poverty and persecution.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 73, 88-89.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Crosby, 78.

The Meaning of Mourning

In his commentary on this beatitude, Thomas Aquinas systematically distinguishes the different kinds of grief experienced by human beings.¹⁷⁰⁷ His analysis, though correct, seems to overemphasize the self and the spiritual dimension of the self. In fact, ‘mourning’ in the beatitude is other-oriented:¹⁷⁰⁸ It has the other as the center and the self as identified with the other in the act of mourning. It is the ready and joyful subordination of one’s own comfort and well-being to the suffering of others in order to bring strength and courage to others.¹⁷⁰⁹ In this way, one allows one’s private life to be invaded and to suffer with those in agony. This openness and subordination to the other’s suffering, therefore, implies a certain degree of humility. It is thus appropriate to claim that humility and mourning are inseparable.¹⁷¹⁰

Moreover, this other-centered attitude of grieving also points to the notion of solidarity—the sharing between the sufferer and the mourner in their experience of suffering, the guilt/sin that causes it, and the final redemption. However, mourning as such is not a kind of sentimentality in that the emotion is isolated (rather than shared) and made as an end in itself; it is not a kind of sensuality either—in which the sense-pleasure (of comforting/being comforted) is made an end in itself.¹⁷¹¹

¹⁷⁰⁷ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 76.

¹⁷⁰⁸ Vann, 78.

¹⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁷¹⁰ Forest, 38.

¹⁷¹¹ Vann, 80-89.

Mourning as an Expression of the Virtue of Solidarity

Häring presumes that comforting is the core virtue ascribed in the second beatitude and thus focuses on the notion of comfort and consolation in their interpretation of the text. However, our exegesis discloses the fact that mourning itself is a virtuous act to be practiced. It is also a necessary step prior to consoling others.

As a virtuous Christian act, mourning refers to an attitude that identifies with God's will to accompany those who grieve.¹⁷¹² Thus, the virtuous act of mourning is an expression of the virtue of solidarity, which in turn points to the theological virtue of charity. Still, the inseparability between mourning and humility also implies that, in one sense, mourning is another form of the virtue of humility—a humility that is about and toward the other that surrounds the self, and leads to the giving up of one's desires altogether for the sake of the other.¹⁷¹³

In addition, mourning is related to the virtue of fortitude as well—the courage to face the reality of our world.¹⁷¹⁴ Those who mourn over the sufferings of others first take the courage to accept the reality of sufferings and pains rather than denial, and then address the causes of these sufferings.¹⁷¹⁵ Subsequently, it also points to the need of the theological virtue of hope in God and God's deliverance.

¹⁷¹² Ibid., 79, 93.

¹⁷¹³ Ibid., 79, 83.

¹⁷¹⁴ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 78.

¹⁷¹⁵ Crosby, 65.

The Practice of Mourning

Theologians offer some concrete steps that help prepare our inner selves for the practice of mourning:¹⁷¹⁶ In the first place, we need to acquire a sense of willingness in taking other people's troubles to oneself and in sharing of our own selves. Second, one also needs to acquire an attitude of single-mindedness so much so that one lets go one's desire even to the point of discomfort for the sake of bringing God's love to others. Third, such willingness calls for readiness to accompany others. In order to cultivate this readiness, mortification—being a particular form of voluntary suffering—is a helpful means. By voluntarily suffering and choosing discomfort as love demands, one further learns about other's suffering and grief. Such readiness needs to be further supplemented by 'awareness'. It is through such awareness that the sufferers around us can be recognized, and that one's mortification becomes other-oriented rather than self-centered.

In concrete terms, James Keenan highlights the importance of the act of listening. It allows and welcomes the sufferer to speak and to be heard.¹⁷¹⁷ For their voice is "their lifeline to the world from which they find themselves progressively isolated. Thus, through the voice the one isolated in suffering is able to reach out to others."¹⁷¹⁸

Finally, as our exegesis shows, mourning is contained in rituals and prayers. Thus, in our Christian liturgy, the practice of intercession helps us to be more aware of the sufferings and needs of those we know as well as those we don't know, and strengthens our bonding with them.

¹⁷¹⁶ Vann, 80-102.

¹⁷¹⁷ James F. Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 75-80. Keenan acknowledges that at times the sufferers are inhibited from communicating their pain by the suffering itself.

¹⁷¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

The Exemplars

In his reflection on the meaning of the second beatitude, Häring emphasizes that Jesus is ‘the consoler’.¹⁷¹⁹ However, Jesus is also one who exemplifies the real meaning of mourning: In the first place, by his own suffering and death on the cross he is able to fully understand the grief of and listen to the voice of those who suffer. Second, he also mourns and grieves as ordinary people do in witnessing loss and suffering, as is in the case of the death of Lazarus (John 11:33-38). Third, he mourns not for his own suffering but that of the others, especially the suffering of the people of Jerusalem—both the victims and the evildoers—in the foreseeable future because of sin (Luke 19:41-44).

Within the Catholic tradition, the life of ‘Father Damian’, who is better known as ‘The Apostle of the Lepers’ and has recently been canonized, is a concrete example and model of the virtues of mourning for and solidarity with the poor and the suffering. He served the abandoned lepers in Hawaiian Islands, comforted their suffering, and was in solidarity with them even to point of catching the same disease and dying of leprosy himself. His testimony is best depicted in the following memoir:

On 10 May, 1873, Father Damien, at his own request and with the sanction of his bishop, arrived at the settlement as its resident priest. There were then 600 lepers...[They] are comparatively comfortable, but as soon as the dreadful disease renders them helpless, it would seem that even demons themselves would pity their condition and hasten their death...For a long time, however, Father Damien was the only one to bring them the succor they so greatly needed. He not only administered the consolations of religion, but also rendered them such little medical service and bodily comforts as were within his power. He dressed their ulcers, helped them erect their cottages, and went so far as to dig their graves and make their coffins. After twelve years of this heroic service he discovered in himself the first symptoms of the disease. This was in 1885. He nevertheless

¹⁷¹⁹ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 20.

continued his charitable ministrations... On 28 March, 1889, Father Damien became helpless and passed away shortly after, closing his fifteenth year in the service of the lepers.¹⁷²⁰

His example has subsequently inspired many missionaries and groups to be in solidarity with and care for especially those who are marginalized by our modern world. Indeed, Fr. Damien has been named as the un-official patron of those with HIV/AIDS.¹⁷²¹ Moreover, his exemplary life has challenged us to reflect upon our social practices that cause massive suffering, especially against the already marginalized.

The Social, Communal Aspect of the Practice of Mourning and the Virtue of Solidarity

Häring rightly claims that mourning and sorrow can be authentic only when we open our hearts to the suffering of those around us in the society.¹⁷²² However, as we open our hearts and listen to their lament, we also become aware of the fact that we are part of the cause of their suffering: Have we thought of our global business practices and our over-consumption of goods, as causes of the shortage of basic needs in the developing world as well as directly creating poor working conditions there? In this way, the practice of mourning is never a private matter. Thus, even when one grieves for one's sin, it is not so much a sorrow for losing one's merit but for causing injustice to God's honor, to the community and the larger society.¹⁷²³

¹⁷²⁰ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Father Damian (Joseph de Veuster)," <http://newadvent.org/cathen/04615a.htm> (accessed April 14, 2010).

¹⁷²¹ Catholic Online, "Saint Damien of Molokai," http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=2817# (accessed May 17, 2010).

¹⁷²² Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 23.

¹⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

Moreover, mourning that is other-centered is a manifestation of one's protest against the evil and injustice that causes the massive suffering of our human family, as well as one's demand for restoration of justice.¹⁷²⁴ Mourning makes the voice of the sufferers heard and their unjust suffering known. In this way, mourning and the virtue of solidarity becomes the first step to bringing about social change. By referring to Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium es Spes*), one theologian thus claims that mourning (and its corresponding beatitude) points to an ecclesial stance in that the Church commits itself to be involved in the pains and struggles of the human family.¹⁷²⁵

8.3 The Virtue of Meekness in 5:5

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

An examination of the text shows that the beatitude on meekness was inserted for the purpose of expounding the religious dimension of the notion of 'poor in spirit' in the first beatitude. Its connection with the Old Testament indicates that the meek are the poor and the mourners who accept the present affliction, trust in the Lord, wait patiently for the Lord, and refrain from anger or envy. Many interpreters thus single heartedly are concerned with the meaning of meekness for these powerless people, as Pinckaers

¹⁷²⁴ Crosby, 66.

¹⁷²⁵ Ibid., 74. Crosby cites David P. Reid, "'A Strategy of Endurance': The Book of *Revelation* as Commentary on the Beatitudes, Blessed are the Mourning and the Suffering," in *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 1995).

does.¹⁷²⁶ Still, our exegesis shows that the term meekness is also employed to portray the moral character of those in power. What, then, can we understand about the powerful in our contemporary world?

Arrogance in Human World

Sadly speaking, we are living in a society that promotes individualism and competition in all sectors. We are always told of how important we are and how better we are than others. Within human relationships, such mentality is often expressed in terms of narcissism and arrogance. Still, such egoism and arrogance is also exercised on the communal and cultural level, especially in the form of ethnic and racial discriminations, such as Nazism and other forms of anti-Semitism in Europe, or racism against the African-Americans that led to civil rights movement in the 1960s.

In the business sector, our economic policies on both corporate or national levels likewise are manipulated in such a way that places our own benefits above all else: Those international patenting and trade regulations, for instance, are often criticized as defending the profits of the wealthy at the expense of the poor and the weak. Furthermore, our advancement in science and technology has also prompted us to think that humankind is capable of resolving all the problems and achieving our own happiness.¹⁷²⁷ On the global level, we continue to view that the earth exists for our consumption despite the call for environmental conservation by ecologists.

¹⁷²⁶ See Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 55-64.

¹⁷²⁷ Although this thought was mentioned by Vann over fifty years ago, it is still applicable to our contemporary world that holds the mentality of self-sufficiency even stronger than before. See Vann, 50-51.

A subsequent and related issue emerged here is the use of violence:¹⁷²⁸ For those in power, violence (in whatever form) is a means to control and ‘protect’ their possessions, power and prestige at the expense of others. And for those who are victimized and oppressed, it becomes their last resort in fighting for their cause. In order to counter-balance such culture and use of violence as a means or solution in our society, the virtue of meekness is much needed.

The Meaning of Meekness

Meekness is sometimes used to signify ‘spiritual sweetness’, a quality that characterizes wisdom and is also attributed to God who is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Nehemiah 9:17).¹⁷²⁹ Still, as far as human behavior is concerned, the term meekness does not mean weakness or cowardice or refer to a feminine quality as some mistakenly understood.¹⁷³⁰ Rather, as mentioned above, it refers to the attitude of the poor: Being humble and patience without resentment. It is also the proper attitude required of the powerful: Being humble and gentle toward others.

Although meekness points to humility in both cases, we note that it adds a unique quality to humility. For meekness, in spiritual terms, is a mental attitude of human beings that is “the combination of open-mindedness, faith in God, and the realization that the Will of God for us is always something joyous and interesting and vital and much better

¹⁷²⁸ Crosby, 92-93.

¹⁷²⁹ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 57.

¹⁷³⁰ See comments by Forest, 48-49.

than anything we could think of for ourselves.”¹⁷³¹ In other words, it is trusting God above all other options including violence.¹⁷³² Therefore, meekness is in relation to not just humility and poverty of spirit but also to a spirit of peace.¹⁷³³ In the language of psychology, it is thus “the outcome of a long struggle against the disordered violence of our feelings, failings, and fears.”¹⁷³⁴ It is not equated with weakness but rather compared to taming a tiger. It points to self-control. One theologian thus claims that meekness is “the secret of overcoming any kind of difficulty.”¹⁷³⁵

Meekness as a Virtue

Meekness as a Christian virtue for the poor and those who mourn basically bears those qualities of the virtue of humility—awareness of one’s helplessness, being patient to God’s help, and in obedience to God’s will. It counteracts those vices such as envy, jealousy, and vengeance. For the poor and the suffering, the virtue of meekness is also connected to the virtue of fortitude in enduring the suffering.¹⁷³⁶

On the other hand, meekness is also an important moral virtue for the powerful, such as rulers in our contemporary society. Together with the virtue of humility it calls for the acknowledgement of our insufficiency even though we seem to be capable and

¹⁷³¹ Clarence Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for its Meaning* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 313.

¹⁷³² Monika K. Hellwig, “The Blessedness of the Meek, the Merciful, and the Peacemakers,” in *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 1995), 194.

¹⁷³³ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 58.

¹⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷³⁵ Bauman, 312. Bauman quotes Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount: A General Introduction to Scientific Christianity in the Form of a Spiritual Key to Matthew V, VI, and VII* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1938), 28-32.

¹⁷³⁶ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 32.

sufficient. It counteracts the cardinal vice of pride and allows us to ‘see’ the reality of sin and our share of it.¹⁷³⁷ It also calls for obedience and helps transform our desire to dominate into an energy that serves. In other words, our meekness points to the loving service of God and God’s people.¹⁷³⁸

In sum, meekness can be understood as an expansion of the virtue of humility to one’s whole life.¹⁷³⁹

The Practice of Meekness

Like practicing the virtue of humility, the very first step to practice meekness is to acknowledge God as our ultimate source which helps us to achieve inner tranquility and peace.¹⁷⁴⁰ On the part of the poor and oppressed they are further encouraged to practice self control and restraint from anger and revenge. The practice of forgiveness is also here summoned: By letting go of anger the poor and the suffering become freer and are able to forgive others and their wrongdoings.¹⁷⁴¹ For those who are powerful, they are in turn called to practice the restraint of power (a specific form of violence) and arrogance.¹⁷⁴² In so doing, we need to unlearn the pattern of behaviors that controls/controls others and ‘defends’ our possessions and prestige. Crosby, for example, points to the need to tackle consumerism as a concrete practice.¹⁷⁴³

¹⁷³⁷ Vann, 52.

¹⁷³⁸ Ibid., 55, 58.

¹⁷³⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷⁴¹ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 65.

¹⁷⁴² Hellwig, 193.

¹⁷⁴³ Crosby, 94.

Within the context of spirituality, we (especially with power and prestige) are called to practice piety: It is rooted in a kind of justice that is concerned with those one cannot repay fully, such as one's parents and God.¹⁷⁴⁴ Aquinas, for instance, understands piety as giving the due reverence and care to those we obey, especially our parents.¹⁷⁴⁵ It begins with the family and expands to the society and finally, God. It helps us to cultivate a life of worshiping God rather than self-worship.

Finally, one ethicist further believes that injustice and its subsequent human suffering, though they may arouse rebellion and harden one's heart, can be a good source to cultivate and practice meekness for it unwraps our egoism and makes us sensitive to others.¹⁷⁴⁶

As a whole, the practice of meekness by both the poor and the powerful, demands tremendous strength—psychological and spiritual alike. We need God's grace to strengthen us.

The Exemplars

As quoted earlier, Jesus invites us to learn from him to be gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:28-29). In fact, there are a number of passages that illustrate Jesus' meekness toward others, including sinners. For instance, in his encounter with the woman who is known as a sinner, Jesus treats her with respect and kindness (Luke 7:36-50). Still, his meekness is best revealed throughout his Passion: He chooses to enter Jerusalem on

¹⁷⁴⁴ Vann, 57.

¹⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 58. Vann notes that for Aquinas, piety differs from the virtue of religion in that the latter worships God from afar.

¹⁷⁴⁶ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 64-65.

the back of a donkey that symbolizes patience and gentleness. While suffering from all sorts of physical pain, betrayal and denial of his disciples, and unjust condemnation by the Jews and the authorities, Jesus remains silent like a sheep before its shearer. Even during his last moments on earth, he continues to be gentle without anger, and shows kindness to those around him. In particular, he consoles the women who wail for him and gives assurance to the bandit crucified with him (Matthew 27:45-50; Luke 23:27-28, 39-43). Some scholars further claim that the culmination of Jesus' meekness comes in his prayer for those who crucify him (Luke 23:34).¹⁷⁴⁷

Within the Catholic tradition, Francis de Sales has been praised for being a model of Christian meekness that is revealed in his renewal of religious life.¹⁷⁴⁸ For example, he founded a new order with a mild rule for women who are too weak or too old. He also encouraged ordinary lay people to pursue holiness by living out a less ascetic state of life. He said, "Always be as gentle as you can, and remember that more flies are caught with a spoonful of honey than with a hundred barrels of vinegar."¹⁷⁴⁹ Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical on the saint, *Rerum Omnium Perturbationem*, thus commenced that Francis de Sales "excelled in meekness of heart, a virtue so peculiar to himself that it might be considered his most characteristic trait...[and] possessed the power to attract hearts in

¹⁷⁴⁷ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 31.

¹⁷⁴⁸ Catholic Answers, "St. Francis de Sales, Patron Saint of Gentle Evangelists," <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2008/0809fea1sb1.asp> (accessed March 29, 2010).

¹⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.. Catholic Answers quote Jean Pierre Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazarre, 2006), 78.

that very measure of success which Christ himself has promised to the meek—‘Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land’.”¹⁷⁵⁰

In our contemporary era, James Allison, a gay Catholic theologian, demonstrates what meekness means on a personal level in his *Faith beyond Resentment*: By reflecting on the embittered experience and resentment of gay Catholics toward the official church, Allison points out that “resentment on either side is complicity in the cycling of sacred violence.”¹⁷⁵¹ He warns that “most forms of resistance simply continue the cycle of sacred violence,” and so urges the use of “fraternal dialogue” by both sides as a genuine Christian response.

Still, in our secular world, one globally recognized contemporary exemplar of meekness is Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi who employed the Beatitudes as a source of spiritual renewal. His meekness is best reflected in his insistence on nonviolence towards social and political injustice of his home country. Although Gandhi was never awarded Nobel Peace Prize and was alleged by some for not being consistently pacifist, he has been identified as “the strongest symbol of non-violence in the 20th century.”¹⁷⁵² His example in turn highlights the social dimension of the virtue of meekness.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Pope Pius XI, *Rerum Omnium Perturbationem*, Encyclical letter, January 26, 1923, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_26011923_rerum-omnium-perturbationem_en.html (accessed March 29, 2010).

¹⁷⁵¹ Mark D. Jordan, review of *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, by James Allison, *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (July 2003): 447.

¹⁷⁵² See Øyvind Tønnesson, “Mahatma Gandhi, the Missing Laureate,” *Nobelprize.org*, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/articles/gandhi/ (accessed April 26, 2010).

The Social, Communal Aspect of the Virtue of Meekness

Regarding the social and communal relevance of the virtue of meekness, Häring rightly claims that such relevance is rather obvious, for meekness is needed in all aspects of our human relationships.¹⁷⁵³ Apart from building up relationship between individuals, it is also needed in other social settings like the business sector. Corporate executives must insure that their managers refrain from abusing the employees and neglecting their welfare (e.g., in terms of wages and working conditions). Giant corporations should also avoid monopolies that undermine the survival of smaller companies. Developed countries likewise have to renounce unfair trade treaties that hinder the development of poor countries. Employees, small companies, and poor countries, in turn should avoid the use of unacceptable practices in defending their welfare and rights.

Moreover, meekness without embittered criticisms and anger is crucial to community building on both national and international levels. In specific, meekness is crucial to mutual respect and authentic dialogues with other cultures, religions and political views. For instance, in engaging inter-religious dialogues, we need to be humble, patient, and gentle in listening to others' faith experience, and refrain from violence and control in times of conflict and disagreements. In international conflicts, meekness should challenge the leaders of the powerful countries to refrain from military actions or economic sanctions that would further diminish a weaker nation.

Finally, the call to non-violence as a demand of meekness, as Crosby insightfully notes, can be extended to the relationship between humankind and our environment: It

¹⁷⁵³ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 35.

points to the notion of stewardship which is in contrast to the violence and abuse done to our earth.¹⁷⁵⁴ For instance, meekness challenges the policy makers of our society to consider other more environmental friendly lifestyles and alternative sources of energy.

8.4 Striving for and Discerning God's Righteousness in 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The notion of righteousness is added to give the fourth beatitude its proper content and object. Many theologians, especially those who seek social implications of the beatitude, incline to interpret the text narrowly as calling for social justice, as in the case of Gerald Vann.¹⁷⁵⁵ Our exegesis clarifies that we are called to first strive for God's righteousness with effort and only second do we seek the right conduct required by God as a response to the unrighteous human conditions.¹⁷⁵⁶ To what, then, does God's righteousness refer in today's society and how do we strive for it?

God's Righteousness or Human Justice?

God's righteousness as revealed in Scripture is very different from our contemporary human understanding of justice. Historically speaking, the notion of justice in our society has changed since the end of the thirteenth century, "when external changes between men, determined by law, became the special domain of the virtue of

¹⁷⁵⁴ Crosby, 99.

¹⁷⁵⁵ Vann, 108.

¹⁷⁵⁶ Therefore, my interpretation here will focus on God's righteousness alone, that is, the 'gift' aspect of 'righteousness'. The interpretation of righteousness as an ethical command will be discussed in conjunction with the eighth beatitude.

justice. In order to establish law, justice had to abstract from persons and aim at strict objectivity. Only at this price could there be true justice in such a setting.”¹⁷⁵⁷ As a result, human justice has lost its human contact and has become solely a legal affair for the society. We become indifferent just as Lady Justice has become blindfolded. And we are more interested in the justice done to us rather than to others.

God’s righteousness, on the contrary, is built upon personal relationships, first between God and God’s people by means of covenant and the law, and then between humankind through mutual respect and rightful relationships.¹⁷⁵⁸ It is thus a gift of right relationship with God and the right realization of God’s goodness in the world. It reveals God’s will for us as individuals and community. It has God as the source, is manifested in the person of Jesus, and proceeds from our hearts in the form of charity.

However, God’s righteousness is not the same as God’s mercy and love in the strict sense: The former “stresses the idea of rectitude, uprightness, and the harmonious ordering of those things which are fitting, while love and mercy point more directly to spontaneity, generosity, and abundance in the gift.”¹⁷⁵⁹ Consequently, at times we are pre-occupied with one particular aspect of God’s righteousness that calls for the judgment of humankind and neglect other aspects of our relationship with God.¹⁷⁶⁰ God is thus portrayed as a rigorous judge and vindicator rather than a merciful and loving God who is eager to make covenant with us.

¹⁷⁵⁷ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 98-99.

¹⁷⁵⁸ Ibid..

¹⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 104-5.

Finally, more often than not we fail to distinguish God's righteousness from our own and hence end up striving for a righteousness that is self-centered rather than what God desires for each of us and our community.

The Meaning of Striving

Gregory the Great rightly observed that we often experience a desire for possessing a particular thing before we actually possess it.¹⁷⁶¹ Thus, one's hunger and thirst for something, which precisely depicts the experience that arouses one's desire for that something and then seeks after it, is a very fundamental human experience. When one strives for something, one commits the whole self so much so that one does not feel inhibited or satisfied with less than necessary.¹⁷⁶² It is also an ongoing process that does not end until that desire is fulfilled. One universal experience of such hunger and thirst is our humankind's desire for happiness. As far as Christianity is concerned, the first evangelist tells us that the object of our hunger and thirst should be God's righteousness. Therefore, striving for God's righteousness means continually and totally orienting one's heart (including emotions, thinking, and behaviors) to do what God's righteousness demands.¹⁷⁶³

¹⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 94.

¹⁷⁶² Ibid..

¹⁷⁶³ Crosby, 107.

Striving for God's Righteousness as a Christian Virtue

For Aquinas, fortitude of the soul expresses the determined desire for honoring God's rights and is thus the principal motive for our hunger and thirst for God's justice (I.II. 69.3 ad 3). It also offers us strength to combat our inclination to be lukewarm.¹⁷⁶⁴ In this way, the virtue of hunger and thirst after God's righteousness is connected to the virtue of fortitude.

Still, our understanding of the notion of 'striving' implies the need to persevere in our striving, while the understanding of God's righteousness as right relationship with God points us to the virtue of faithful obedience toward God and God's covenant. Therefore, the virtues of perseverance and obedience are crucial to the fourth beatitude. Moreover, since God's righteousness implies rightful human relationships as well, several Christian virtues are relevant. First, God's righteousness is expressed in the virtue of justice which is "the generous and spontaneous will to render to each his due."¹⁷⁶⁵ It emphasizes generosity and fairness in relationships. Second, our rightful human relationship also finds its place in the virtue of charity toward others. Third, the virtue of peacemaking, as will be seen later, is also needed in restoring broken relationships.

The Practice of Striving for God's Righteousness

Traditionally, religious acts of justice are understood as a reflection of God's justice. Thus, based on the teaching of the gospel, the practice of piety through fasting, praying, and almsgiving, has been seen by Catholics as a concrete expression of God's

¹⁷⁶⁴ Vann, 115-18.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 102.

righteousness on earth:¹⁷⁶⁶ Fasting makes us more open to experience God's transcendence and thus shapes our vision in way that we may see the world as God sees it. Praying (with the Lord's Prayer in particular) helps focus on social transformation; as we pray, we are invited by God to bring God's kingdom on earth and to deliver others from all forms of indebtedness. While justice seeks to correct the suffering caused by unjust economic and political structures of our society, almsgiving can alleviate that suffering while the structures are being transformed.

However, in order to seek and obey God's will, we need to know that our striving is oriented to God's righteousness rather than our own. Ignatius of Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, thus suggested the practice of discernment of spirits:¹⁷⁶⁷

Both the good and the evil spirit act upon a soul according to the attitude it assumes toward them. If it poses as their friend, they flatter it; if to resist them, they torment it. But the evil spirit speaks only to the imagination and the senses, whereas the good spirit acts upon reason and conscience. The evil labors to excite concupiscence, the good to intensify love for God. Of course it may happen that a perfectly well-disposed soul suffers from the attacks of the devil deprived of the sustaining consolations of the good angel; but this is only a temporary trial the passing of which must be awaited in patience and humility.¹⁷⁶⁸

Through the practice of discernment one becomes clearer what God's righteousness means to the particular person and hence gives one a better sense of direction in one's ongoing hunger and thirst for God's justice.

¹⁷⁶⁶ Crosby, 111-16.

¹⁷⁶⁷ See Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, trans. Elder Mullan (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1914), 91-92.

¹⁷⁶⁸ Paul Debuchy, "Discernment of Spirits," in *Catholic Encyclopedia* eds. Charles G. Herbermann and others (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913), [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Discernment_of_Spirits](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Discernment_of_Spirits) (accessed March 31, 2010).

The Exemplars

In the Old Testament there are righteous persons, such as Noah (Genesis 6:9) and Abraham (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3), who strive for God's righteousness and live it out faithfully. And it is through them and in their relationships with others that others, especially those in need, experience God's mercy.¹⁷⁶⁹ Still, during his earthly life Jesus teaches us how to respond to God's righteousness by his very own example. For instance, when he asks John the Baptist to baptize him, he says, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). These words reveal that Jesus comes to fulfill the law, the prophets, and God's will. In fact, Jesus is the embodiment and incarnation of God's righteousness; and his whole life "supremely manifests God's merciful, compassionate justice."¹⁷⁷⁰ Thus, by turning to Jesus' life journey, we learn the true meaning of God's righteousness.

Within the Catholic tradition, Ignatius of Loyola is known for not only advocating the practice of discernment but also living a life of discernment throughout his entire religious life. In our contemporary society, the lives of many Christians (religious and lay alike) can also be concrete demonstrations of what hunger and thirst for God's righteousness mean. Among them is Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Her hunger and thirst for God's righteousness is noted from the very beginning of her vocation to serve the poor: "I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order.

¹⁷⁶⁹ Forest, 69.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 40.

To fail would have been to break the faith.”¹⁷⁷¹ And she continued to hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness in her lifelong struggle to do God’s will.¹⁷⁷²

Although these exemplars were discerning and responding to God’s righteousness on a personal level, the result of their discernments always pointed to the service of others on both inter-personal and social levels. Also, the practice of discernment may be applicable on the communal and social levels as the community and society seek to discern and strive for God’s righteousness that leads to change of communal and social practices and modify their ways of proceeding.

The Social, Communal Aspect of Striving for God’s Righteousness

The virtue recognized in the fourth beatitude confronts us to ask if our society as a whole indeed strives for God’s righteousness or otherwise. It also challenges us to discern and re-evaluate the values promoted by our society. For instance, is our culture of euthanasia, abortion, and death penalty a promotion of God’s righteousness or our own? Or, within the Catholic tradition, do we perceive the challenge of others (say ethicists and feminists) regarding certain non-doctrinal magisterial teachings, such as the restricted role of conscience in moral decision making, the designation of homosexual inclination as ‘objective disorder’, and the prohibition of discussion on ordaining women, an

¹⁷⁷¹ See Joan Graff Clucas, *Mother Teresa* (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 1988), 35.

¹⁷⁷² Although the disclosure of her ‘secret’ life reveals that she was tormented by a crisis of faith for almost half of a century, it also reminds us that our hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness is a lifelong journey and it demands ongoing discernment of God’s will. See David Van Biema, “Mother Teresa’s Crisis of Faith,” *Time* August 23, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1655415,00.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).

invitation to re-discern whether our official Church teachings have been in line with God's righteousness?¹⁷⁷³

In addition, in our diversified society that emphasizes freedom and individualism, even when we recognize what God's righteousness is, we are often tempted to give up or compromise too easily when challenged by other value systems. Thus, one of the biggest challenges for our society nowadays is to put into practice—that is, to carry out necessary policy changes—after honestly discerning God's righteousness for our society. We need God's grace to enlighten us and to strengthen us in holding firmly to what God's righteousness demands of us as individual Christians, faith community, and society.

8.5 The Virtue of Mercy in 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

The fifth beatitude is a straightforward one that does not pose any exegetical problem. Still, our exploration confirms that mercy is an attribute of God who is compassionate particularly to those human predicaments like the poor and the sufferers identified in the previous beatitudes. It is also an attitude that demands actions, and our practice of mercy must be built upon the covenantal relationship with God and a response faithful to God's steadfast love. It has to be extended to all including our transgressors by means of forgiveness.

¹⁷⁷³ I am in debt to Mary Ann Hinsdale's identification of these three cases although she is referring to the issue of 'boundary breaking'. See Mary Ann Hinsdale, "Blessed are the Persecuted...Hungering and Thirsting for Justice: Blessings for those Breaking Boundaries," in *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 1995), 182.

Miseries in Our Human World

During my formation as a Jesuit priest, I have been privileged to live in different countries, in both the developed and developing world. One concrete experience common to all is the reality of human misery around us: In Manila, every Sunday I served the children who live in those ‘smokey mountains’ and spend their entire day picking up ‘valuables’ from the garbage dump. In Belfast of Ireland, I attended funerals of those who died in sectarian conflicts and visited prisoners who are imprisoned because of their fight for an end to colonization. In a remote island in the Pacific Ocean that is simply known as ‘within the US missile testing range’, I too worked with a group of islanders whose community was completely abandoned by the outside world and their environment and natural resources exploited by the Army. In the post Khmer Rouge Cambodia, I lived day and night with a group of landmine victims who struggle to resume a simple life in spite of their physical disability. In my daily reflection, a simple but only too familiar question raised is, “Why these unnecessary miseries?”

Indeed, the majority of people in our world are still experiencing different kinds of miseries: Poverty, struggling for freedom, hatred, exploitation, and physical pain, etc. Edward Schillebeeckx rightly says that “there is an excess of suffering and evil in our history...there is a barbarous excess.”¹⁷⁷⁴ In his own reflection on the human experience of suffering, Keenan notes that there are two different types of ongoing discussions, namely, the theoretical and speculative question of theodicy—that is, how to reconcile a

¹⁷⁷⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 725.

merciful and providential God with the reality of suffering—in the academic setting and those conversations that occur in intimate and concrete situations.¹⁷⁷⁵

From a religious perspective, each religious tradition has its own specific interpretation of suffering and responses to the miserable. Christianity, for instance, rejects the view that suffering is necessarily a result of one's sinfulness. Despite these differences they share the same deepest concern that suffering needs to be overcome.¹⁷⁷⁶ For example, during a meeting held by the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, Paul Cardinal Shan Kuo-hsi of Taiwan insisted that the Church's mission of love and service to life is actualized when it is "put into action in concrete forms of service in alleviating suffering..."¹⁷⁷⁷ What does this mission of love and service mean in our Christian life nowadays? The answer lies in the cultivation of the virtue of mercy.

The Meaning of Mercy

Literally speaking, the term 'mercy' means "the perception of an evil or misery which moves us" and refers to what pertains to misery.¹⁷⁷⁸ Aquinas explained that the term takes its name from *misericordia* which denotes one's compassionate heart (*miserum cor*) for another's unhappiness. He thus defined it as "the compassion in our heart for another person's misery, a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help him" (II.II. 30.1).

¹⁷⁷⁵ Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, 67.

¹⁷⁷⁶ Schillebeeckx, 675.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Edmund Chia, *Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide: Interreligious Dialogue in Pursuit of Fullness of Life in Asia*. FABC Paper No. 92K, <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-92k.htm> (accessed April 3, 2010).

¹⁷⁷⁸ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 116.

Keenan, from a different approach, defines it as “the willingness to enter into chaos of another...[which] often entails an elective suffering for the sake of others.”¹⁷⁷⁹ From this he insightfully offers a theological interpretation of mercy as God’s salvation to humankind.¹⁷⁸⁰ Creation is God’s merciful act that brings order into the chaos of the universe; incarnation is God’s entry into the chaos of human existence; and redemption is God’s mercy that delivers us from the chaos of slavery to sin. He further notes that mercy is emphasized by Scripture as the condition for salvation, as made clearly in the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).¹⁷⁸¹ In short, God who is mercy first shows mercy to us.

However, in ancient times mercy was opposed by some philosophers:¹⁷⁸² It was understood as a defect of character and an impulsive response rooted in ignorance. It was considered as a contradiction to justice for mercy implies unearned help or relief. The latter charge has been a challenge for both Christians and non-Christians in our contemporary world.

Mercy as a Virtue

In fact, mercy as a virtue is not in opposition to the virtue of justice. Aquinas quotes the words of the early church Fathers: “Justice and mercy are so united, that the one ought to be mingled with the other; justice without mercy is cruelty; mercy without

¹⁷⁷⁹ Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, 72.

¹⁷⁸⁰ James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*. 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 4.

¹⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

justice, profusion.”¹⁷⁸³ Yet, this view must be understood in light of God’s righteousness: God’s righteousness precedes and presupposes mercy (I. 21.4) and is manifested in it.¹⁷⁸⁴ Thus, mercy does not oppose justice (as mistakenly understood) but is in the interest of God’s justice first.¹⁷⁸⁵ It echoes what the previous beatitude demands.

Moreover, the virtue of mercy is inseparable from the Christian virtue of charity for mercy is actually the active work and immediate effect of charity. It has to be rooted in right reason—truth (II.II. 30.3)—and is interested more in the conversion of one’s heart rather than external deeds. Furthermore, the virtue of mercy takes on the virtue of mourning as well because we mourn for and take pity on those who experience suffering and misery in their lives.

Finally, some Catholics claim that although all Christian traditions recognize the importance of the virtue of mercy, the Catholic tradition distinguishes itself from others by its long tradition of performing corporal and spiritual ‘works’ of mercy.¹⁷⁸⁶ In other words, it is precisely ‘works’ that differentiates Catholics from Protestants.

The Works of Mercy in the Catholic Tradition

In our interpretation of the virtuous act of mourning, we noted that solidarity is crucial to the sufferers. However, the virtue of mercy further highlights the importance of action to relieve their suffering. What are the actions and works of mercy, particularly within the Catholic tradition? Keenan notes that the New Testament provides us the

¹⁷⁸³ Aquinas, Thomas. *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. John Henry Newman (London: Saint Austin Press, 1997), 152.

¹⁷⁸⁴ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 49.

¹⁷⁸⁵ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 118-19.

¹⁷⁸⁶ Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, 2.

foundational guide: ¹⁷⁸⁷ First, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) defines ‘love of neighbor’ as the practice of mercy. Second, the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 demonstrates that the corporal works of mercy need not be something extraordinary; rather, giving food and drink to the hungry and the thirsty, welcoming a stranger, sheltering the homeless, or visiting the sick and the imprisoned is already an Christian act of mercy. Still, these six (together with burying the dead) specific types of merciful acts are later identified by the early Church as the cornerstone of Christian life. And almsgiving was particularly praised and encouraged as a merciful giving.

There are, however, also spiritual works of mercy proposed by the Catholic church, such as giving good counsel and praying for the dead. In specific, the acts of admonishing the sinner, forgiving the offenses, and bearing wrongs patiently are widely practiced. ¹⁷⁸⁸ As a whole, these spiritual works of mercy are primarily recommended for individuals and are often related to the liturgical and sacramental life of the faithful. In the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, for example, we first experience God’s mercy and forgiveness and from there we are able to do likewise (Matthew 6:12). Or, during the Eucharistic celebration, the words *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) continue to remind us of our need for God’s mercy and our mission to bring God’s mercy to others.

These liturgical practices further highlight the importance of forgiveness as a Christian act of mercy (for Catholics and non-Catholics alike): ¹⁷⁸⁹ It allows us to recognize the deprivation and helplessness of the people around us. Thus, it demands not

¹⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 2, 10.

¹⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁷⁸⁹ Crosby, 130, 133, 139.

just compassion but the release of people from their enslavement and their debts. It also demands the avoidance of one's negative anger. In fact, Lisa Sowle Cahill is convinced that the whole Beatitudes confirms the view that one needs to approach the enemy/evildoer "in a compassionate desire to meet the needs of wrongdoers and victims as well as possible in the circumstances."¹⁷⁹⁰

The Exemplars

Jesus, being the embodiment of God's greatest act of mercy to humankind (Romans 5:6-8), is the one whom we should ultimately imitate in the cultivation of the virtue of mercy. His attitude (Mark 1:41), words (Matthew 18:23-35) and deeds (Matthew 9:27-30) illustrate to us the kind of mercy that God desires. In particular, he challenges the disciples to do likewise and show mercy to all, including one's enemy (Matthew 5:43-48). He says, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13).

From the twelfth century onward, we note that many religious orders (such as the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul), lay associations and Confraternities (such as the Confraternity of Misericordia founded by the Queen Eleanor of Portugal in the fifteenth century) have been founded to carry out various kinds of corporal works of mercy based on the needs of the society of their times and according to their charisms. For instance, the Knights of St. Lazarus was noted for building many hospitals to take care of the lepers, blind, and orphans. Some Confraternities were also missioned to visit

¹⁷⁹⁰ Cahill, "The Ethical Implications of the Sermon on the Mount," 150.

prisoners and others.¹⁷⁹¹ In fact, many of these organizations and institutions continue to serve our society to date.

One contemporary, specific example is the birth of the *Jesuit Refugee Service* (JRS) in 1980 under the mandate of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, then the Superior General of the *Society of Jesus*. It aims at caring for both the spiritual and physical needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced people. Although JRS has been known for emphasizing its unique characteristic of ‘accompaniment’,¹⁷⁹² it also promotes advocacy for human rights works as well as engages in academic research work to tackle the root causes of forced migration on the international level.¹⁷⁹³

Nevertheless, these groups and organizations do not only serve as concrete models for us but also channels through which we can practice the virtue of mercy. Unfortunately, although mercy is the greatest virtue among those that relate to our neighbor (II.II. 30.4), some Christians rightly lament that the virtue seems to be eroded in our contemporary society on the national and international levels, as in the case of death penalty.¹⁷⁹⁴

The Social, Communal Aspect of the Virtue of Mercy

The virtue of mercy, apart from being a distinctive mark of the Catholic tradition, also bears important social and communal implications. I think of two urgent social

¹⁷⁹¹ Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, 12-13.

¹⁷⁹² Kevin O’Brien, “Consolation in Action,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2005), 14, 30.

¹⁷⁹³ For research activities in which JRS has been involved, see their website <http://www.jrs.net/inf/research/index.php?lang=en>. See also David Hollenbach, ed., *Driven from Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

¹⁷⁹⁴ Forest, 81.

practices of mercy need to be recovered for our contemporary world. The first is the practice of hospitality towards the immigrants. In the past century, we have witnessed significant international, massive migrations. These migrants are often victims of those inter-related root causes of involuntary emigration: Natural disasters, economic, politics, and violence. We need to draft and implement national and international policies that are not just humanitarian-based but also in light of Christian virtue of mercy.

The second is the act of amnesty and the abolishment of death penalty.¹⁷⁹⁵ As said earlier, the beatitude teaches us to seek first God's justice before human justice. Thus, while not ignoring what justice demands, God's justice and mercy urge us to assure social conditions that permit a (normal) person to grow to maturity. Both life sentence and death penalty are in principle and in reality contradicting what a merciful society demands. Indeed, these social and institutional practices may further perpetuate the cycle of violence and vengeance. The Christian virtue of mercy challenges the kind of 'eye for eye' justice and urges us to seek alternative ways that meet the needs of both the victims and the wrongdoers. Last but not least, amnesty and the abolishment of death penalty are not simply an act of clemency or mere forgiveness of enemies by all means. Rather, they are acts that promote reconciliation.

¹⁷⁹⁵ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 55.

8.6 Integrity as a Virtue in 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

Based on Aquinas's discussion of the quality that makes one perfect in oneself, Vann interprets 'purity of heart' as pointing to the virtue of temperance. He explains that temperance implies Christian reverence toward our own nature that extends to all creatures and to God.¹⁷⁹⁶ Pinckaers, on the other hand, turns his entire attention to the meaning of 'purity' in his interpretation of the beatitude.¹⁷⁹⁷ However, our exegesis indicates that the 'pure in heart' are those who have their moral righteousness emerging from the inner self and finding parallel expressions in outward actions. The beatitude thus emphasizes the integrity of the whole being and understands purity in heart as a fundamental, all-encompassing virtue. This emphasis challenges the righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes of that time who are called by Jesus as hypocrites.

Hypocrisy in Our Church?

The recent crisis within the Catholic Church on sex scandals and the alleged cover-ups by the hierarchy poses a criticism: Is the Catholic Church a hypocrite? For example, a leading German weekly newsmagazine, under the headline "The Hypocrites: The Catholic Church and Sex," reported on the continuing sex scandal involving the Catholic clergy in the country, and a public official's criticism that German bishops

¹⁷⁹⁶ Vann, 167.

¹⁷⁹⁷ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 131-44. It is worthy to note that there is a rather diverse interpretation on the ethical meaning of the 'purity of heart' among contemporary theologians and scholars, ranging from focusing on 'purity' to the notion of 'heart' to the meaning of 'seeing'. However, they seldom turn their attention to the notion of 'integrity'. See Forest, 89-103; Crosby, 140-58.

“have not shown an active interest in a truly open and thorough investigation” of the institutions under their responsibility.¹⁷⁹⁸ Some thus charge that the Catholic Church is full of hypocrisy—for instance, as one gay Catholic theologian writes, on the one hand, the Church claims that homosexual Christians are all loved children of God; on the other hand, the Church systematically excludes them.¹⁷⁹⁹

Within the ancient context of purity, hypocrisy points to the hiding of impurity under the cover of external observances.¹⁸⁰⁰ Still, according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the notion of hypocrisy refers to “the pretension to qualities which one does not possess, or...the putting forward of a false appearance of virtue or religion.”¹⁸⁰¹ It says,

Essentially its malice is identical with that of *lying*; in both cases there is *discordance* between what a man has in his mind and the simultaneous manifestation of himself. So far as the morality of the act goes, it is unimportant that this difference between the interior and the exterior be set out in words, as happens in formal lies, or be acted out in one’s demeanors, as is true of simulation.¹⁸⁰²

As far as moral formation is concerned, this interpretation implies that hypocrisy is an attitude that is in opposition to ‘honesty’ and to “being in accord with one’s whole being.”¹⁸⁰³

¹⁷⁹⁸ John L. Allen Jr., “Scandal takes familiar trajectory in Germany,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 3, 2010, <http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/scandal-takes-familiar-trajectory-germany> (accessed April 6, 2010).

¹⁷⁹⁹ Jordan, 447.

¹⁸⁰⁰ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 133.

¹⁸⁰¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Hypocrisy.” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07610a.htm> (accessed April 8, 2010).

¹⁸⁰² *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Hypocrisy.” Italics are mine.

¹⁸⁰³ Alan P. F. Sell, *Aspects of Christian Integrity* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), ix.

The Meaning of Integrity

According to Reformed theologian Alan Sell, honesty and wholeness are the principal meanings of the virtue of integrity.¹⁸⁰⁴ Being a kind of wholeness, integrity conveys a sense of personal congruence: Congruence of one's act and faith/belief, and correspondence between one's 'private' and 'public' selves.¹⁸⁰⁵ From a religious point of view, integrity points to an undivided life commanded by God.¹⁸⁰⁶ Hypocrisy, on the contrary, implies a divided heart that "desires one thing but behaves as if it desired another."¹⁸⁰⁷

Within the specific context of Christian community, Sell further argues that both principal meanings are essential to Christian thought and practice, and from which he probes the various aspects of Christian integrity, including doctrinal, ethical, ecclesiastical, and pastoral integrity.¹⁸⁰⁸ In the aspect of Christian morality, he understands integrity as a state: "Through a 'spiral' in which will and desire direct practical intelligence and practical intelligence instructs will and desire, a personal subject achieves an integration of self that conforms to the truth of the good as it is given by God, and in charity participates in the divine love."¹⁸⁰⁹

¹⁸⁰⁴ Ibid..

¹⁸⁰⁵ Michael Jenkins, "The Integrity of Ministry: Communicative Theology and the Leadership of Congregations," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 3. Jenkins cites Stephen L. Carter, *Integrity* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 7.

¹⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 3. Jenkins cites Carter, 8.

¹⁸⁰⁷ Forest, 89-90.

¹⁸⁰⁸ Louise Kretzschmar, review of *Aspects of Christian Integrity*, by Alan P. F. Sell, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 87 (June 1994): 76.

¹⁸⁰⁹ William Werpehowski, "Practical Wisdom and the Integrity of Christian Life," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 2007): 67. Werpehowski cites James F. Keenan, "The Virtue of Prudence (IIaIIae, qq. 47-56)," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 259.

Integrity as a Virtue

Honesty is one of the two principal meanings of integrity. Thus, integrity as a virtue first points to the virtue of truthfulness. Keenan notes that intolerance and ridicule often inhibit honesty. By reflecting on certain practices in his North American society, such as the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ compromise for homosexuals in the armed forces, he highlights three obstacles that hinder the promotion of the virtue of truthfulness in the society:¹⁸¹⁰ The first obstacle is that litigiousness discourages one from acknowledging or apologizing mistakes, errors, and infractions. The second is that ‘privacy’ sometimes shields us from being true to ourselves and others. The third obstacle is the lack of credible leadership who promotes the virtue of truthfulness. In fact, many are convinced that the leadership’s failure to honor truthfulness from the beginning is an essential cause of the Roman Catholic Church’s current crisis in the sex scandal. Therefore, in order to cultivate the virtue of integrity, both individuals and the leadership of a community need first to overcome these three obstacles.

The second principle meaning of integrity, wholeness, refers to the integration of the being in all aspects, especially one’s inner self and external actions. Now since prudence “guides the moral agent to living a self-directed life that seeks integration [of natural inclinations],” and in particular, integrates one’s appetites and practical reason, the virtue of integrity is therefore closely connected to the virtue of prudence.¹⁸¹¹

A third and yet relevant virtue is the virtue of vigilance or watchfulness: Whether one’s interior thought is in tune with the exterior actions can only be known through

¹⁸¹⁰ James F. Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 45-46.

¹⁸¹¹ Keenan, “The Virtue of Prudence (IIa IIae, qq. 47-56),” 259, 265.

ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The disposition of self-evaluation, that is, watchfulness, thus helps the person not just to achieve integrity in a single event but also to form a moral character of integrity.

Finally, from a biblical point of view, Jesus points out that hypocrites, while focusing on external deeds, neglect the virtues of justice and mercy and faith that we ought to practice (Matthew 23:23). Thus, the Christian virtue of integrity that calls for congruence of deeds and proclamation urges us to acquire other virtues, especially the virtues of mercy, justice, and faith.

The Practice of Integrity

In order to cultivate the virtue of integrity and its related virtues like truthfulness, the role of one's conscience is crucial. Conscience differs from superego in that it calls us to grow rather than restrains us. It urges us to act in accordance with what the inner self believes is good and truth. As the Catholic Church explains, "In the depths of our conscience, we detect a law which does not impose, but which holds us to obedience. Always summoning us to love good and avoid evil...In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of humanity in the search for truth."¹⁸¹²

Many contemporary moral theologians, by turning to Aquinas who insisted that we ought not to violate conscience even to the point of excommunication, further advocate for the primacy of conscience even though our conscience may err.¹⁸¹³ Thus, the

¹⁸¹² Vatican II, *Optatam Totius*.

¹⁸¹³ Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, 35. Keenan cites Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, IV, 38.4.

practice of integrity points to the need to nurture and follow an informed conscience. Catholic ethicist William Werpehowski, in addition, proposes the practice of repentance, renewal, and perseverance as a means to cultivate the virtue of integrity of Christian life:¹⁸¹⁴ In particular, he argues that perseverance in repentance and renewal can substantively contribute to a life of integrity by “shattering illusions about our identity, making a break with what falsely claims to make it up, and acting in the world from our suffering and need for the sake of our needy and suffering neighbors.”¹⁸¹⁵

Still, the virtue of integrity finds expressions in Christian liturgy:¹⁸¹⁶ In the first place, liturgy is the worship of the whole person—our words and bodily movements are expressions of the self’s total self-offering to God. Second, it is in the liturgy that one experiences integrity on various levels—personal integrity that is the renewal of the self; cosmic integrity that unites one to all creation; and integrity of the self in the infinity of God.

In the area of Christian spirituality, since the age of the Desert Fathers of the fourth century, the practice of the Prayer of the Heart—the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer that slowly integrates into one’s breathing and beating of the heart—has been widely adopted as a practice to cultivate an integration of one’s inner life with the external body and action.¹⁸¹⁷ Furthermore, the virtue of watchfulness calls for the practice of examining our own Christian life. One growing popular practice is that of daily ‘examen of conscience’ as suggested in the *Spiritual Exercises*: It is a prayer exercise where one tries

¹⁸¹⁴ Werpehowski, 67.

¹⁸¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁸¹⁶ Vann, 170-72.

¹⁸¹⁷ Forest, 96-97.

to find the movement of the spirit in one's daily life and through which one identifies the incongruence between one's inner movement and external action. Examen helps us to be more sensitive to the longings and sources of our own spirit and hence becomes more open to God.

The Exemplars

Elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus denounces the Pharisees and scribes as hypocrites for their behaviors and bad examples: Their self-righteousness (7:1-5) and those self-centered and attention-seeking religious acts such as praying and fasting in public (6:2, 5, 16) do not match up with what they teach (23:1-33). Jesus, on the contrary, lives an exemplary life of integrity by doing exactly what he preached about God's kingdom, such as praying to God the Father (6:5-13; 14:23; 26:36-44) and serving God (20:25-28; John 13:1-17).

Within the Catholic tradition, who are the models of Christian integrity? The late Pope John Paul II offered his own choice. During his pastoral visit to Lombardy, Italy, Pope John Paul II told his audience in Desio, the birthplace of Pope Pius XI, that they should cultivate the virtue of integrity as demonstrated in the life of Pope Pius XI. He said,

Dear brothers and sisters! These are only some parts of the synthetic personality of Pope Pius XI, which is rooted in virtue ethics and Christian faith of the people of Desio. And here I would invite and encourage you to grow with increasing commitment to the same values of integrity, discipline, dedication to duty, and even more steadfast adherence to Jesus

Christ, generous participation in the life of the Church, a strong evangelical witness in society.¹⁸¹⁸

Historically speaking, Pope Pius XI's pontificate was marked by the emergence of the Fascist government and Nazism. Therefore, his Christian integrity was by and large manifested in his social teaching that is in tune with the gospel values that he valued greatly—in particular, through his writings (e.g. *Quadragesimo anno*) he advocated for social justice and common good, and spoke against the emerging powers of his time, including communism, nationalism, racism, and totalitarianism. His virtuous act of Christian integrity, subsequently, has had a great impact on the society.

The Social, Communal Aspect of the Virtue of Integrity

The exemplary role of Pope Pius XI points to the social implication of the virtue. However, this social dimension is not a secondary but an essential quality of the person, for integrity implies that one is congruent toward others as that person is in oneself.¹⁸¹⁹ This social and communal aspect of the virtue, in particular, challenges the leadership of our society and community to re-examine their roles as leaders. Indeed, Häring rightly points out that the beatitude is very important to our social renewal: When we are truthful to our own vocation in the society, say as educators, lawyers, or politicians, we contribute to the building of the society.¹⁸²⁰

¹⁸¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Incontro di Giovanni Paolo II con la Popolazione di Desio [John Paul II's Address to the People of Desio]*, Papal Speech, May 21, 1983, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1983/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830521_popolazione-desio_it.html (accessed April 6, 2010). English translation is mine.

¹⁸¹⁹ Jenkins, 3-4.

¹⁸²⁰ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 82-83.

Within the Catholic community, many Catholics, theologians and lay scholars alike, in light of the Church leadership's failure to honor truthfulness from the beginning of the sex scandal, urge the Church to not just apologize and be humble but also take courage to change and to be truthful. Pastoral theologian Michael Jenkins, for instance, proposes a communicative model of theological reflection—that experiments with the rhetoric of its uncommitted environment and engages in reflections across such boundaries—for Church leaders to maintain integrity as leaders.¹⁸²¹ He explains, “A communicative model of theological reflection provides support and critical facility for our life-long negotiation between pragmatism of organizational leadership and the confessional commitments at the heart of the Christian community's identity.”¹⁸²²

In the broader society, integrity and truthfulness particularly challenge the unhealthy atmosphere of doing business nowadays. We note from daily news how corporations, big and small, local and international, cover up the problems of their products.¹⁸²³ Also, most advertisements in the mass media often exaggerate the functions and hide the known negative effects of their products, and mislead the possible consumers in their choice-making. Thus, the virtue of integrity calls for a conversion in the overall mentality of running business today.

Finally, the social, communal implication of the virtue of integrity brings us back to the issue of justice, for one's truthfulness and wholeness does not only affect the person's well being but also that of the community and the society. First, it is a matter of

¹⁸²¹ Jenkins, 6.

¹⁸²² Ibid., 7.

¹⁸²³ By the time of writing, there have been serious cases of misconduct and cover-up reported, ranging from former global finance services firm Lehman Brothers Holdings to car-making giant Toyota Motor Corporation.

fairness towards others, especially those who are under one's leadership or seek fair trade. Second, leaders who have acquired the virtue of integrity, by acting truthfully to their own beliefs, inevitably challenge the injustice of our society, as in the case of Archbishop Óscar Romero who defended the poor Salvadorans and called for international intervention, which led to his assassination by the government in 1980. In so doing, we need the grace of God in order to act courageously.

8.7 The Virtue of Peacemaking in 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

An exegesis of the Greek and Hebrew terms for peace shows that 'peace' is paralleled to 'justice' and is closer to the concept of righteousness than to that of tranquility or order. Most ethicists seem to agree on this point. Some theologians, based on this understanding, further claim that the beatitude definitely suggests a political agenda. However, our exegesis also makes it clear that peace and peacemaking is understood by Matthew as an appropriate attitude primarily for personal and communal practice and only subsequently for social change. And it hardly advocates the establishment of a Christian political party.

Yearning for Peace in Our Modern World

Both our personal experiences and historical evidence reveal that our society has been a disturbed one: There are disharmonies and conflicts in almost every aspect of

human relationships and social life, ranging from marriage and family, to community, and to cultural/ethnic groups and nations. Some well-known and specific conflicts of the twentieth century, as Catholic ethicist Stephen Pope observes, include the Holocaust in Germany, the racist segregation in the United States, Apartheid in South Africa, and the so-called ‘Troubles’ in the north of Ireland.¹⁸²⁴ In fact, the recent sex scandals by certain clergymen and the alleged cover-ups by the hierarchy also create certain degrees of disharmony and conflict within the Catholic Church. Some contemporary conflicts further developed into warfare, such as the genocide/civil war between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda in the 1990s.

By reflecting on the experience of Vietnam War, American psychologist Ralph White identifies six causes of conflict (or stumbling blocks) in our human relationships on all levels:¹⁸²⁵ First, we perceive the other in terms of the diabolical enemy image. Second, we conceive a kind of ‘virile’ image of the self. Third, we bear a sense of moral self-righteousness. Fourth, we selectively attend to (or not attend to) certain aspects of the reality and focus only on extreme situations. Fifth, we lack a sense of empathy of the other. Sixth, we develop an overall irrational and subjective interpretation of reality.

These stumbling blocks and their subsequent conflicts often lead to hatred, violence and suffering on both sides. On the societal and global level, these conflicts further cause massive death, poverty, migration, fear, and other sufferings and miseries. Pinckaers rightly comments that we all yearn for peace: “We yearn for external peace,

¹⁸²⁴ Stephen J. Pope, “The Challenge of Peace,” (course, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, Spring 2009).

¹⁸²⁵ Crosby, 161-62. Crosby cites Ralph K. White, *Nobody Wanted War: Misperception in Vietnam and Other Wars* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

achieved through good relationships with our neighbors, and interior peace which is freedom from anxieties, troubles, and inner conflicts.”¹⁸²⁶ This yearning for peace, as a result, calls for peacemaking in all aspects and levels of human relationships.

The Meaning of Peace and Peacemaking

From a theological perspective, peace is one important blessing of God granted to us through Jesus Christ (Luke 24:36; John 14:27; 20:19-26). Christians are in turn commanded by Jesus to bring peace to the world (Luke 10:5). Still, we need to distinguish genuine peace from false peace that some people have mistaken as peace. Genuine peace does not mean to compromise, desert or evade confrontation but rather acknowledges the inevitability of conflicts.¹⁸²⁷ Peace is only achieved by the transformation of all human relationships and the resolution of conflicts.¹⁸²⁸ False peace, on the contrary, is expressed and obtained in two contrasting ways:¹⁸²⁹ The first one is modeled on a *pax romana* that employs force and dominion to achieve peace. The other one points to a kind of passivity that accepts all disorder and suffering at all cost in exchange for stability. Neither one is the kind of peace Jesus preaches. This misunderstanding of peace further leads some activists to claim that justice and peace are incompatible.

¹⁸²⁶ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 154.

¹⁸²⁷ Hellwig, 198.

¹⁸²⁸ Pope, “The Challenge of Peace.”

¹⁸²⁹ Crosby, 159.

Gaudium et Spes offers a Christian definition of genuine peace (#78):¹⁸³⁰

Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice. The common good of humanity finds its ultimate meaning in the eternal law. But since the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on, peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly.

Here, the document emphasizes and reaffirms that peace is not just the tranquility of order but also the advocacy of the work of justice. It also clarifies that peace is a kind of ‘work’ to be ‘made’.¹⁸³¹

Monika Hellwig offers an interpretation of the meaning of Christian peacemaking in a similar manner: It is “the recentering of God in one’s own life, and in society...[The latter] means not only explicit worship and silent adoration...[but also] the welcoming of God’s order, God’s reign...[and] living by God’s law.”¹⁸³² She also suggests that the first step to genuine Christian peacemaking is “to listen to those who have been silenced...and restore the means of sustenance and social participation to those who had these things snatched from them.”¹⁸³³

¹⁸³⁰ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, December 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed April 7, 2010).

¹⁸³¹ Crosby, 159.

¹⁸³² Hellwig, 199.

¹⁸³³ Ibid..

Peacemaking as a Virtue

As just mentioned above, it is mistaken to view that peace and justice are incompatible, for genuine peace is built upon justice. Thus, the cultivation of the virtue of peacemaking implies the attainment of the virtue of justice at the same time. Moreover, since genuine peace is achieved neither by means of force or dominion nor passive acceptance of disorder and injustice at all cost, the virtues of meekness and fortitude are called into place respectively: The virtue of meekness insists on patience and the rejection of violence while fortitude demands active seeking of peace and endurance in the midst of conflict and suffering. In this way, the third and the seventh beatitudes are closely connected to each other.

Still, the virtues implied in the second beatitude, such as mourning and solidarity, are also relevant to peacemaking for they motivate us to assist others in achieving peace. Also, in order to avoid the building up of those stumbling blocks to peace, one needs to cultivate the virtue of humility as well.

Finally, since peacemakers inevitably encounter opponents in the process of making peace, the virtue of mercy (and its particular practice of forgiveness) that leads to transformation of relationships and eventual reconciliation is crucial to the whole process of peacemaking and restoring the rightful relationships.

The Practice of Peacemaking

Since peacemaking points to an active transformation of relationships on different levels, various practices and precautions can be identified. First, prior to making peace in

our human relationships, one needs first to acquire peace in one's own heart. Pinckaers rightly explains that "we cannot envisage lasting peace among men without an interior rootedness in peace of conscience...[or] to maintain active and stable peace with others if we are in inner conflicts."¹⁸³⁴ Second, there are different levels of human relationships—interpersonal, familial, communal and international—and peacemaking has to be practiced on all levels accordingly. Some ethicists thus insist on the importance of building peace in the family first and only then extending to the community and the larger society.¹⁸³⁵ Third, one should not just remove those stumbling blocks but also actively build up/create right relationships. In so doing, we need to engage in dialogue with and show mutual respect and concerns for the other. Crosby, for instance, suggests three stages of creating right relationships within a community based on the practices of the early Christian community (Matthew 18:10-20):¹⁸³⁶ Affirmation of the other's significance and values; fraternal correction; and communal reconciliation. Indeed, reconciliation is a mutual experience of transformation that results in the resolution of the existing conflict.

In fact, these practices are often concretely performed in the Christian's liturgical and sacramental life, particularly during the Catholic Eucharistic celebration: In our personal prayer and the sacrament of reconciliation, we recognize God's own blessing of peace through the forgiveness of sins. We in turn practice forgiveness by communal prayers through which we pray for one another, especially for our enemies, adversaries,

¹⁸³⁴ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 158.

¹⁸³⁵ Vann, 193-202; Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 72.

¹⁸³⁶ Crosby, 169-73.

and whomsoever we find difficulties to live with.¹⁸³⁷ The subsequent sign of peace, in specific, expresses our willingness to reconcile with one another and to make peace with other members of the community. It is an important liturgical practice of peacemaking and it unites faithful of diverse cultural and socio-political backgrounds into a single faith community.

The Exemplars

We are told that Jesus is the Prince of Peace about whom the Old Testament prophets prophesied (Isaiah 9:6). Still, Jesus speaks strongly about peace and is the one who brings God's peace to us (Luke 2:14). Specifically, he brings God's peace to humankind by forgiving our wrongdoings (Luke 23:34). We are called to imitate him in bringing peace in our world (Luke 10:5).

Within the history of Christianity, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena were known for making peace between the Church and the civil powers of their times.¹⁸³⁸ In particular, Francis of Assisi was famous for embracing peace as his lifelong watchword, and a prayer is attributed to him that aims at making peace in human relationships: "Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy."¹⁸³⁹

¹⁸³⁷ Forest, 127.

¹⁸³⁸ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "St. Francis of Assisi," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06221a.htm>; "St. Catherine of Siena," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03447a.htm> (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁸³⁹ From the viewpoint of virtue ethics, this prayer suggests several Christian virtues for peacemaking, namely, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the virtue of joy.

In the twentieth century, there are many international figures who have taken great efforts to make peace with their enemies and build peace for their own countries.¹⁸⁴⁰ In the United States of America, Dorothy Day is noted for “drawing together of Catholic biblical and theological resources to establish pacifism and conscientious objection as a legitimate stance for Catholics and for Americans.”¹⁸⁴¹ In South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, for decades contributed to a peaceful struggle against the unjust system of apartheid by not just persistently criticizing the apartheid government but also relentlessly urging reconciliation between both sides. He continues to make peace by chairing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has become a model for peacemaking in other similar post-conflict procedures around the world.¹⁸⁴²

Within the Catholic Church, Pope John XXIII is recognized by some scholars as a promoter of peace too. He took bold initiatives to promote peace during his pontificate, as exemplified in documents like *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*.¹⁸⁴³ He pointed out that a stable world order depends on God’s order as established in creation and the nature of human reality in the world, and offered a radical approach to peacemaking that challenges the established oppressive power. Indeed, the Catholic Church has been well

¹⁸⁴⁰ I admit that the follow examples deal with the social implication of peacemaking. Among those contemporary figures who exemplify peacemaking on interpersonal and communal levels is Pope John Paul II who took the initiative to forgive and reconcile with the man who attempted to assassinate him in 1981.

¹⁸⁴¹ Mark and Louise Zwick, *Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker Movement*, <http://www.cjd.org/paper/pacifism.htm> (accessed March 17, 2009). And her advocacy for pacifism and conscientious objection was affirmed by the United States Catholic Bishops as a legitimate expression of Catholic faith in their 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*.

¹⁸⁴² The Desmond Tutu Peace Center, “About Desmond and Leah Tutu,” <http://www.tutu.org/bio-desmond-tutu.php> (accessed March 19, 2009).

¹⁸⁴³ Hellwig, 203.

known among other religions for considering peacemaking in the public sphere seriously through its official documents.

The Social Implication of the Virtue of Peacemaking

Although the virtue of peacemaking is primarily concerned about the transformation and restoration of right relationships on the inter-personal and communal level, it does not deny the need for the social implication of peacemaking. In fact, the reality of our contemporary world urges us to go beyond the inter-personal and communal level in the practice of peacemaking. Some theologians and ethicists also argue that since Christ came to bring peace and reconciliation to all people, we too have to bring peace on all levels.

Subsequently, some of them, such as the Mennonite John Howard Yoder, suggest that the analogous practice of peacemaking in the social sector could be nonviolent resistance or nonviolent direct action.¹⁸⁴⁴ They believe that a central norm of Christian life is nonresistant love that includes nonviolence and pacifism. Glen Stassen, on the other hand, advocates for ‘just peacemaking’ that suggests that nonviolent direct action needs to be accompanied by ‘independent initiatives’, such as treaties on nuclear weapon reduction.¹⁸⁴⁵ He argues that the two strategies are not in conflict with one another but actually share certain common features, like being proactive in nature and affirming the dignity of the enemy. In particular, he emphasizes the need for international cooperation

¹⁸⁴⁴ Stassen, “The Sermon on the Mount as Realistic Disclosure of Solid Ground,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2009): 67-68.

¹⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

and is convinced that nations involved in active international cooperation “make war and have war made against them less frequently.”¹⁸⁴⁶ Others further call for national forgiveness as a way to peacemaking in the international realm.¹⁸⁴⁷

In a similar manner, *Gaudium es Spes* appeals for taking serious actions on the international scale in the promotion and making of peace:¹⁸⁴⁸ It argues that it is not enough to restrain the manner of warfare; rather, there is a need to ban war altogether. It also affirms that peacemaking is the responsibility of all Christians, and justice is the basis for authentic peacemaking in our contemporary world (##88-90).

Last but not least, Matthean scholar Warren Carter further extends peacemaking to the cosmic level. He claims that ‘cosmic peace’ “consists not of exploitation but of all things cosmically in right relation to God” and grounds itself in right relations and justice with all.¹⁸⁴⁹ I am convinced that the extension to make peace with the earth is not just necessary but also urgent in the twenty-first century.

8.8 Bearing Persecution for Righteousness’ sake as a Virtue in 5:10-12

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Our exegesis reveals that the eighth beatitude forms an *inclusio* with the first beatitude and focuses on righteousness as the fourth macarism does (although the eighth

¹⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 72.

¹⁸⁴⁸ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*.

¹⁸⁴⁹ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociological and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 136.

macarism emphasizes the ‘task’ aspect of righteousness). We also saw that persecution and suffering, though diverse in nature, are the direct effects of seeking righteousness, following Jesus and his teaching, and being prophetic. And the evangelist hints that persecution and suffering continue in the present to those who remain faithful to Jesus’ mandate and carry on his mission faithfully. This information enriches our interpretation of the last beatitude for the contemporary world.

Persecution and Injustice in Human World

In many parts of our present world there are still people who are persecuted for various reasons, ranging from political and religious reasons to simply because of their fighting for justice on behalf of the poor and the suffering. Some of them are physically tortured while others are imprisoned or forced into exile, as seen in countries like Myanmar. Even in places where physical persecution is abandoned, the persecuted often suffer from all sorts of unjust treatment such as censorship, the exclusion of basic human rights, and poverty. Pinckaers rightly notes that it is also true among contemporary Christians:¹⁸⁵⁰ Persecution is not limited to physical or political oppressions but also includes all kinds of injustice and ill treatment done to those who try to live their Christian life faithfully, such as those underground Catholics in mainland China.

While the Church has suffered various kinds of persecution throughout its history, at times it has played the role of persecutor towards its opponents. For instance, during the medieval and Reformation period, the Catholic church became greatly intolerant

¹⁸⁵⁰ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 183.

toward its opponents and other forms of knowledge such as science, and conducted interrogation through the setting up of the Inquisition as a means to silence the challengers, as in the case of Galileo whose doctrine was denounced by the Inquisition as anti-scriptural and heretical.¹⁸⁵¹

Even in modern time, a number of Christians and theologians continue to experience some forms of persecution (such as marginalization and silencing) by the ecclesial authority and their faith community because of their sexual orientation or views on certain non-doctrinal and/or moral issues like women's ordination. Indeed, those who persecute others would without doubt believe that they are just doing what is right and just.

The Meaning of Martyrdom

Throughout human history persecutions are best exemplified in the form of martyrdom. The Greek term *μαρτυς* (*martus*) “signifies a witness who testifies to a fact of which he has knowledge from personal observation.”¹⁸⁵² It first appears in Christian literature and points to the disciples' witnessing of their Christian faith with the risk of persecution and even death. And it was only in a later development that the term is used exclusively to refer to those who die for their faith. Martyrdom was thus understood as one of the defining characteristics of sainthood in the early church.¹⁸⁵³

¹⁸⁵¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Galileo,” <http://newadvent.org/cathen/06342b.htm> (accessed April 13, 2010).

¹⁸⁵² *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Martyr,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09736b.htm> (accessed April 13, 2010).

¹⁸⁵³ Forest, 138. Forest quotes Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 1.

From a different perspective, although we need not always risk our lives in witnessing our Christian faith, we are all still called to dying to the self in our ordinary life for the sake of loving God and neighbors.¹⁸⁵⁴ And as far as moral life is concerned, martyrdom and ‘dying to the self’ point to the attainment of a certain Christian attitude and cultivate certain virtues.

Bearing Persecution for the sake of Righteousness as a Virtue

As a virtue, bearing persecution for the sake of righteousness points to a number of Christian virtues. The first relevant virtue is fortitude: According to Aquinas, the cardinal virtue of fortitude “guard[s] the will against being withdrawn from the good of reason through fear of bodily evil” (II.II. 123.4). It allows the person to face and endure the foreseeable persecution without fear. In this way, it also enables one to take on the active, prophetic role despite criticisms, rejection or persecution. Aquinas thus claimed that martyrdom is a proper act of the virtue (II.II. 124.1).

A second relevant virtue to be cultivated is the virtue of justice for righteousness is the core content and object of the beatitude. In fact, we are persecuted because of our hunger and thirst for righteousness on behalf of the poor and the suffering who are victims of social injustice. In this way, our striving for righteousness is motivated by the reality of the sufferer, which implies the cultivation of those virtues related to the beatitude of mourning, such as the virtue of solidarity. Also, as followers of Christ we are

¹⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., 146.

called to imitate Christ who refrains from vengeance and forgives those who persecute him; thus, the eighth beatitude is related to meekness as well.

Finally, the apodosis of this extended beatitude invites us to rejoice and be glad in the midst of persecution. This joyfulness points to the virtue of gratitude: It is argued that gratitude can be experienced not just as an obligation but also as a virtue.¹⁸⁵⁵ Some moral theologians further perceive it as the “pivotal virtue of moral life.”¹⁸⁵⁶ It is because our life is filled with God’s gifts; the whole Christian life and the entirety of Christian ethics is thus the appropriate response to the benevolence of God.¹⁸⁵⁷ Moreover, gratitude, and not ordinary happiness, is the root of rejoicing.¹⁸⁵⁸ It is because of gratitude that we become joyful and not vice versa. Our ability to rejoice then builds up further satisfaction and makes us more thankful. Rejoicing is, therefore, the living out and practice of gratitude.

The Practice of Bearing Persecution for a Righteous Cause

Like the practice of mourning, we need to begin with internal preparation—acquiring a sense of willingness and readiness in taking other people’s troubles to oneself. Externally, we practice mortification as a way to prepare ourselves in facing and enduring possible persecution. Liturgically speaking, fasting and abstinence from meat on certain days of the liturgical year, as well as participation in the Stations of the Cross and the

¹⁸⁵⁵ Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 172.

¹⁸⁵⁶ Gula, 52.

¹⁸⁵⁷ Mark Graham, *Sustainable Agriculture. A Christian Ethic of Gratitude* (OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 9-10.

¹⁸⁵⁸ David Steindl-Rast, *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer* (NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 204.

Holy Triduum are some ordinary and yet helpful practices of experiencing the Lord's suffering and persecution, which in turn make us ready to accept persecution spiritually.

Moreover, we learn to practice self control, patience, and to forgive those who persecute us, as is in the practice of meekness. Again, in our spiritual and sacramental life, the prayer of 'Our Father', the sign of peace, and the sacrament of reconciliation, guide us to experience God's forgiveness and enable us to forgive others, especially our enemies who persecute us in whatever way.

On the other hand, in order to exercise our prophetic role in challenging injustice in our society, we need to learn to discern and follow our own conscience, and hold firm to what we believe is right. Last but not least, we learn to rejoice as a way to cultivate the virtue of gratitude. However, as Paul points out, our joy is built upon the Lord rather than on physical or material pleasure (Philippians 3:1a, 4:4).

The Exemplars

In the Old Testament, the prophets (such as Jeremiah) were above all the subject of persecution, for their prophetic voice challenged Israel's own social-political injustice and their unfaithfulness to God (Jeremiah 26).

In the New Testament, although the beatitude does not connect the theme of 'persecution for righteousness' sake' with the life and death of Jesus, we are all aware of the fact that he is persecuted because of his hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, and his Passion is "the climax and fulfillment of the protracted suffering of the prophets

under persecution.”¹⁸⁵⁹ Indeed, Jesus is “the Prophet in whom the great prophetic tradition of Israel finds its culmination as well as its final class conflict with the priestly class.”¹⁸⁶⁰ Later on, the disciples and the Christians were likewise persecuted for the sake of the Lord, as exemplified in the death of Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60).

In the medieval time, many Christians held firm to their faith even under the wrongful persecution by the Church itself. One famous case is Joan of Arc of the fifteenth century. She was first accused of heresy, then imprisoned, deprived of any spiritual privileges, and eventually executed.¹⁸⁶¹ Like other Christians who were also wrongfully persecuted in the Church history, she exemplifies to us the virtue of bearing persecution for the sake of following Christ.

Nowadays, in our pluralistic society, while it may be true that we seldom face martyrdom solely because of defending our Christian faith; still, there are many Christians who bear persecution and risk their lives because of hungering and thirsting for justice and exercising their prophetic role of challenging the society’s injustice. One recent exemplar is the six Jesuits and two lay helpers who were murdered by the military government in the city of San Salvador in 1989. Although their ministry was within a university that basically serves the country’s elites, their exemplary and prophetic role to bring righteousness to the country despite a possible death threat, as was Archbishop Romero, is best understood in the following testimony.

[They] were killed for the way they lived, that is, for how they expressed their faith in love... The Jesuits and their colleagues concluded that they

¹⁸⁵⁹ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 170.

¹⁸⁶⁰ Häring, *The Beatitudes: Their Personal and Social Implications*, 80.

¹⁸⁶¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “St. Joan of Arc,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08409c.htm> (accessed April 13, 2010).

could not limit their mission to teaching and innocuous research...[Thus] they sought countless ways to unmask the lies that justified the pervasive injustice and the continuing violence, and they made constructive proposals for a just peace and a more humane social order... That is what got them killed...[They] stood for a Church of the poor (in the words of Pope John XXIII) which would serve as a vanguard of this new society, modeling equitable social relations and solidarity; a prophetic Church like the one that Archbishop Romero symbolizes, which gives credible witness to the fullness of life that God promises...[They] knew they were risking their lives. But they understood that that was the price of being human in their time and place; that was the cost of following Christ.¹⁸⁶²

The Social, Communal Aspect of the Virtue of Bearing Persecution for Righteousness'

Sake

The above-mentioned Christian models and their exemplary acts rightly confirm that the virtue emerged in the last beatitude has an explicit social and communal aspect: The virtue is definitely other-oriented for we hunger and thirst for righteousness on behalf of the sufferer and the poor. In our contemporary world, we saw from the previous reflections that most of the human poverty, suffering, misery, anger/hatred, and conflicts, are directly or indirectly caused by structural injustices in our society. Thus, we are called to exercise our prophetic role in challenging these unjust structures and in seeking social change. This prophetic role in turn calls us to voice out those injustices courageously by words and deeds on all levels. Unfortunately, in concrete situations, such prophetic voices are often a minority and subsequently are often suppressed or ignored, and their advocates are persecuted by the authorities. Therefore, we are in great need of God's grace so as to persevere in our prophetic role and to embrace persecution joyfully.

¹⁸⁶² Dean Brackley, "Remembering the Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador: Twenty Years On," *Thinking Faith* (November 16, 2009) http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20091116_1.htm (accessed April 12, 2010).

8.9 Conclusion

So far I have offered an interpretation of the Beatitudes through the lens of virtue ethics. In particular, I adopt the three foundational questions based on the threefold structure of contemporary virtue theory as a basis for our hermeneutics: I first focus on the kind of moral person we are by reflecting upon the situation we are currently facing. Then I examine the meaning and content of the virtues identified in the Beatitudes as a way to point out the kind of moral person we ought to become. Finally, I treat the last foundational question of ‘how do we get there’ by exploring the practices correspond to each of these identified virtues, as well as those moral exemplars to which we can turn. It points to our character formation as Christians. The social, communal aspect of these virtues is also succinctly reflected on, showing that it is an important yield of virtue ethics and the Beatitudes has a social character. This reflection in turn helps us to respond to the question of what kind of Christian moral community and society the Beatitudes calls us to form.

Our answers to these questions can be summarized as follows. First, based on our earlier exegesis of the Beatitudes, we acquire a better understanding of and deeper insight into the text which guides us to depict and focus more accurately our own situation as moral agents within society. We note that humankind continues to face different predicaments in our contemporary world: Poverty, suffering and human loss, violence and abuse of power, miseries, hypocrisy, disharmony, and persecution. They are the

result of unrighteousness and we hold responsibility for these happenings. It is the same concrete world in which the disciples of Jesus are situated.

Second, many of the Christian virtues identified are inter-related to each other. That means, a virtue implied in one beatitude is also needed for another beatitude (such as the virtues of humility and fortitude in the first three and the last two beatitudes respectively), or the cultivation of one virtue naturally calls for the attainment of other virtues (such as mourning over others' suffering calls for virtuous acts of mercy towards the other as well as justice). Still, core Christian virtue(s) for each beatitude can be proposed here: The first beatitude points to the virtue of humility; the beatitude of mourning implies the virtues of solidarity and humility; the third beatitude points to the virtue of meekness that is humility expanded to the poor and the powerful; the fourth beatitude highlights the virtue of obedience in our relation with God; the fifth beatitude suggests the virtue of mercy which is an immediate effect of the virtue of charity; the beatitude on 'pure in heart' implies the virtue of integrity of one's inner self and outer actions; the next beatitude attends to the virtue of peacemaking that is built upon the virtue of justice; and the eighth beatitude stresses the virtue of fortitude for the sake of justice and the virtue of gratitude toward God.

Third, subsequently, various corresponding Christian practices are proposed and exemplary models are recognized. Some of them are biblical figures and canonized saints while others are ordinary Christians who have exemplified a particular Christian virtue in their lives. Still, Jesus is the example *par excellence* for he has acquired all these virtues in his teaching and entire life. Indeed, Jesus' exemplary life and the inter-relatedness of

the virtues show that the Beatitudes poses a radical ethical demand upon the followers of Christ. To be a disciple of Jesus means not only being humble but also meek and merciful at the same time, eager to make peace and strive for righteousness to the point of being persecuted, etc. Thus, in the cultivation of the proposed virtues, the acting out of their respective practices, and the imitation of those virtuous models, we need the gift of God's grace.

Fourth, our reflection on the reality of our contemporary human world further reveals that we need God's grace not just for our individual moral/character formation but also God's providence here and now so as to form a Christian community living by the Beatitudes. In short, a community (and society) as such has the following characteristics: 1) It humbly acknowledges and is aware of the presence of poverty, suffering, miseries, and other forms of injustice in its society and that each member of the community contributes to the actual cause of such poverty and suffering. 2) It has sympathy to the poor and the suffering, and is eager to accompany and serve them by promoting corporal works of mercy. 3) It takes courage and commits itself to the combat against injustice (and promotes justice) on their behalf regardless of criticisms, oppositions, and persecution. 4) It has a leadership that honors truthfulness and personal integrity. Such leadership will regularly re-examine its policies and value systems in order to be in line with God's will and in the service of the common good of the society. 5) Specifically, it advocates amnesty and hospitality toward those who are perceived by us as 'a threat' to the society. It also encourages mutual respect and dialogue among different interest groups and refrains from the use of violence or abuse of power. 6) With

regards to its relationship with other communities and societies, it makes and builds peace with those of different ethnicity, culture, religion, and belief by engaging in dialogues and reconciliation. 7) It promotes harmony with and care for our natural world and environment. 8) Finally, it lives not by its own efforts alone but also hopes in God's providence and grace as well.

However, each Christian community living by the Beatitudes is necessarily situated in a larger society that has its own unique cultural and historical construct that produces an impact on the community. For instance, as Chinese theologian Archie Lee rightly points out, in the case of engaging in the hermeneutics of biblical texts for their society within the larger context of Asia, Asian Christians have to deal with "their connection with their community and its cultural-religious [contexts and] texts, which had nurtured and shaped their lives and continued to sustain and nourish their well-being."¹⁸⁶³

How can we bring the Beatitudes and its corresponding Christian moral virtues into a particular society and engage in meaningful dialogue between the two? In my particular identity of being a Chinese Catholic ethicist in a Chinese society like Hong Kong that is deeply influenced by Confucianism¹⁸⁶⁴ and where Christianity and Confucianism encounter each other in many different ways, how do we engage in fruitful

¹⁸⁶³ Archie C. C. Lee, "Cross-textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-scriptural Asia," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C. H. Kim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 182-83.

¹⁸⁶⁴ While it is true that "Chinese culture [should not] come to be equated almost exclusively with Confucian tradition...[or the Chinese people] possess mainly a philosophical tradition that focuses on moral and ethical living with no substantive religious beliefs and practices," Confucianism continues to have a strong influence on many Chinese societies outside mainland China, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. See Lee, "Cross-textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-scriptural Asia," 180.

dialogue between Christian ethics and Confucian ethics, and in specific, how can the Beatitudes as scripted script be meaningful to the people?

The methodological argument for a more integrated scriptural ethics proposed in this work can be beneficial to this enterprise. First, there exists a multi-scriptural phenomenon within Asian cultures (and religions); and Asians have become familiar with pluralistic scriptural traditions.¹⁸⁶⁵ Sri Lankan Christian scholar Aloysius Pieris, for example, urges that biblical interpretation in Asia needs to “acknowledge and take into account scriptures of other Asian religions in their search for the divine-human encounter and the ‘God experience’ in the human concern for liberation praxis.”¹⁸⁶⁶ Lee likewise comments that the Christian Bible should constantly “engage and negotiate with other scriptures in order to shape a Christian identity in a multi-scriptural context, which is... ambiguously hybrid in a postmodern and postcolonial setting.”¹⁸⁶⁷ Our proposed Christian ethics that understands Scripture as not just ‘script’ but *also* ‘scripted’ thus can be helpful to make Christian ethics more explicable to the multi-textual Asian society.

Second, in the case of the Chinese society, one of the major scriptures is the Confucian text. Methodologically speaking, Confucianism goes to the texts in its search of ethical teachings. That means, Confucian ethics is primarily the fruit of careful interpretation of their ‘sacred’ texts. Thus, a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics that perceives the text as *both* ‘scripted’ and ‘script’ can better engage in cross-

¹⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., 179. However, the focus on the written tradition in Asia does not mean to undermine Asia’s rich oral traditions. See also 182.

¹⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., 192. Lee cites Aloysius Pieris, “Cross-Scripture Reading in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Search for the Right Method,” in Philip L. Wickeri, ed., *Scripture, Community, and Mission* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asian, London: The Council for World Mission, 2003), 234-55.

¹⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., 200.

cultural dialogue with Confucian ethics, for subsequent comparative work of moral traditions needs to be both text-based and interpretative. Moreover, if biblical texts are constitutive of Christian theological ethics, and if Confucian texts are constitutive of a Confucian ethics, then doing a cross-cultural ethics begins not with analogous generalities but very specific texts.

Therefore, by way of demonstration, in the next and final part of this work, I will attempt to bring the Beatitudes as ‘scripted script’ into the Confucian society and engage in dialogue between Confucian ethics and Christian ethics. In so doing, I will discuss the nature of Confucian ethics and its conception of virtue found in specific classical Confucian texts, especially the writings of Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi. I will also briefly explore the possible Confucian understanding of certain key ideas fundamental to the Beatitudes, such as ‘blessed’, ‘next life’, and ‘reward’, so as to provide a platform for the discussion of Confucian engagement of the Beatitudes. Finally, in concrete terms, I discuss how the Beatitudes as ‘scripted script’ can be comparable to Confucian texts and what precautions and uncertainties should be noted.

Part Four: Bringing the Data Forward

In this last part of my work, I bring the fruit of previous chapters into a specific context, namely, the Confucian tradition in East Asia in general and in Chinese society in particular. I am hoping that such an attempt may help engage meaningful dialogue between Confucian ethics and Christian ethics.

Indeed, the special Synod of Asia held in Rome in 1998 re-confirmed the need to show “esteem for the ethical values in the customs and practices found in the teachings of the great philosophers of Asia, which promote natural virtues and pious devotion to ancestors...[and called for] dialogue with the cultures of Asia, dialogue with the religions of Asia, and with the peoples of Asia.”¹⁸⁶⁸ However, in order to engage in such a dialogue in our specific Confucian context and bring the Beatitudes and its virtues to its Chinese audience, we need to first acquire a basic understanding of this particular tradition and its approach to morality. Only then can we see how the Beatitudes and its virtues can be compared to the Confucian tradition.

Therefore, in this final chapter, I begin with a brief overview of the Confucian tradition.¹⁸⁶⁹ It is followed by an examination of its religious claims and those key concepts that emerged from the Beatitudes, such as ‘blessed’, ‘reward’, and ‘next life’. Then I attend to the argument that Confucian ethics is a virtue-based ethics, from which I explore how those virtues identified in the Beatitudes can be received by those in the

¹⁸⁶⁸ Special Synod of Asia, “Message to the People of God,” *Origins* 28 (May 28, 1998): 19-20.

¹⁸⁶⁹ In order to present the original thinking of Confucianism, I limit my research to the classical period of the Confucian tradition, especially its major thinkers and writings. These thinkers, as I will discuss later, are Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi.

Confucian tradition. Finally, I conclude with some precautions in engaging dialogue between the two traditions.

However, prior to exploring the possible Confucian reception of the Beatitudes, a few words about the Confucian sacred texts employed here are needed. They are the *Analects*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the book of *Mencius*, and the writings of Xunzi. These texts belong to the classical period of Confucianism. They become, as we will see, part of the canon of Confucianism.¹⁸⁷⁰

The *Analects*, widely accepted as the most reliable source of Confucius's doctrines, is a collection of sayings by the Master and his disciples pertaining to Confucius's teachings and deeds.¹⁸⁷¹ These sayings are short, unsystematic, and often with little or no context; hence its literary form is close to that of a collection of wisdom sayings or proverbs.

The *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, whose authorships and dates of composition are debatable, are two texts relevant to transmission of the teachings of Confucius.¹⁸⁷² They are not really 'books' but essays in the strict sense and are rather comprehensive in content. Specifically, the *Great Learning* is a short text on Confucian learning with commentaries by one of Confucius's disciples. It mainly deals with social

¹⁸⁷⁰ Xunzi's work was largely neglected until the nineteenth century and was not "elevated to the position of a Confucian classic" by Confucian scholars. See Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 115.

¹⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 18n11.

¹⁸⁷² Yao Xin-zhong, preface to *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung*, trans. Andrew Plaks (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), vii-ix.

and political matters. The *Doctrine of the Mean*, in contrast, is a discourse on metaphysics, psychology and spirituality.¹⁸⁷³

The book of *Mencius* consists of both sayings of Mencius and dialogues between Mencius and other people. Its literary style differs greatly from that of the *Analects* in that they are often lengthy and contextualized.¹⁸⁷⁴ Thus, the book is divided by into seven smaller books, each of which contains questions and answers.

Finally, the writings of Xunzi, unlike the book of *Mencius*, are self-contained essays on various subjects, such as the role of Heaven, the regulations of a king, or the functions of rites and music. In particular, the essay on human nature is one of the most philosophical works by Xunzi and has drawn significant attention among many contemporary scholars.¹⁸⁷⁵

As a whole, these Confucian sacred texts are rather diverse in their literary genre and style. None of them has anything like those macarisms in the Beatitudes. Thus, throughout this chapter I am not seeking structural or literary parallels between the Beatitudes and the Confucian texts. And I am not looking for a set of eight macarisms or proverbs either. Rather, I simply look for parallel virtues promoted by the Confucian sacred texts.

¹⁸⁷³ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 95-96.

¹⁸⁷⁴ D.C. Lau, introduction to *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Classics, 1970).

¹⁸⁷⁵ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 116.

Chapter Nine: Bringing the Beatitudes into the Confucian Chinese Society in East Asia

9.1 Confucian Tradition at a Glance

When talking about the history of Chinese philosophy, renowned Chinese philosopher Chan Wing-tsit commented that it can be characterized in the single word ‘humanism’—one that emphasizes the unity of humankind and Heaven—that reached its climax in the teaching of Confucius.¹⁸⁷⁶ In other words, the history of Chinese philosophy is inseparable from the emergence and development of the Confucian tradition itself.

Harvard Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming divides this development of the Confucian tradition into three epochs.¹⁸⁷⁷ The first epoch began with Confucius and ended in the third century when the Han dynasty was disintegrated. Its representative thinkers, apart from Confucius (551-479 BCE) himself, include Mencius (390-305 BCE) and Xunzi (298-238 BCE). They formed what we call nowadays the classical Confucian tradition.

Confucius lived in a period when “the ‘feudal’ ritual system had been so fundamentally undermined that political crises precipitated a profound sense of moral

¹⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., 3. Tu likewise states that the fundamental concern of Confucianism is learning to be human that “seeks harmony with nature and mutuality with Heaven.” See Tu Wei-ming, “Confucianism,” in *Our Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (New York: HarperOne, 1993), 140.

¹⁸⁷⁷ The following summary of the three epochs is based on Tu’s accounts. See Tu, “Confucianism,” 155-222; and “The Implications of the Rise of ‘Confucian’ East Asia,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 195. I also rely on Chan Wing-tsit and Philip Ivanhoe for additional information for the accounts of those named Confucian thinkers. See Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*; and Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000).

decline.”¹⁸⁷⁸ He longed for a well-ordered society that was politically stable and based on good government that was responsive to the citizens’ basic needs.¹⁸⁷⁹ Confucius is best known for evolving the concept of *jen* 仁 (humanity/benevolence):¹⁸⁸⁰ Although the term was a pre-Confucian word and denoted the particular virtue of kindness originally, it was Confucius who interpreted it in a totally new way, transformed it into a general virtue, and made it the core theme of his overall conversations. It is the virtue of *chiün tzu* 君子 (the gentleman) who wishes to establish his own character and that of others, be a prominent person, and helps others to be likewise. As far as one’s moral formation is concerned, Confucius advocated the need of self-cultivation¹⁸⁸¹ which points to a kind of ‘acquisition model’ that emphasizes *xue* 學 (learning), which in turn prompts actions and the development of character.

We should note that in the alleged androcentric ancient Confucian society, only men can be *chiün tsu*, and all of Confucius’s disciples seemed to be men. The notion literally means ‘ruler’s son’ and is translated into various terms, including the ‘noble man’, ‘gentleman’, and the ‘superior person’.¹⁸⁸² And the most cited and controversial Confucian text for anti-feminism is found in the *Analects* 17:25 in which Confucius said

¹⁸⁷⁸ Tu, “Confucianism,” 151.

¹⁸⁷⁹ Antonio S. Cua, *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1998), 269.

¹⁸⁸⁰ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 16. Chan quotes Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D.C. Lau (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Classics, 1979), 6:28. In this work, I will adopt Bryan Van Norden’s view that *jen* in the broad sense refers to humanity, and it refers to the virtue of benevolence in the narrow sense. See Bryan Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁸⁸¹ Tu explains that self-cultivation is an end in itself and it leads to self-transformation that signifies the process of self-realization. See Tu, “Confucianism,” 142-43.

¹⁸⁸² See James T. Bretzke, “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1995): 28n11.

that both women and small men are difficult to deal with. However, some scholars interpret the term ‘women’ narrowly to mean solely ‘concubines’ and not women in general.¹⁸⁸³ Sandra Wawrytko further argues that the qualities of *chün tsu* (such as intelligence) are gender-spanning while those ‘feminine’ characteristics like gentleness are incorporated into the Confucian moral ideal. Also, although the gender interfusion of *chün tsu* could open for misunderstanding, she is convinced that for Confucius “feminism was an appropriate option...[and] the *chün tsu* ideal epitomizes it!”¹⁸⁸⁴ It is with her argument that we move forward.

Mencius was a pupil of Confucius’s grandson’s pupil. His teachings were basically derived from those of Confucius but he differed from Confucius’s doctrines in that he claimed that *xing* 性 (human nature) is not just good but is *originally* good:¹⁸⁸⁵ One possesses innate knowledge of the good and innate ability to do good for we are born with four *duan* 端 (‘sprouts’ or ‘germs’, nascent moral dispositions), namely, *jen* (benevolence), *yi* 義 (righteousness/dutifulness), *li* 禮 (ritual propriety), and *zhi* 智 (wisdom).¹⁸⁸⁶ Thus, one only needs to recover this original nature of humankind and all

¹⁸⁸³ Sandra A. Wawrytko, “Kongzi as Feminist: Confucian Self-cultivation in a Contemporary Context,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (June 2000): 175. Wawrytko cites James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vols. 1 and 2 (Shanghai: Oxford University Press, 1935), 330n.

¹⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 179-82.

¹⁸⁸⁵ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 49-50. Chan quotes Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Classics, 1970), 7A:15. *Italic* is mine.

¹⁸⁸⁶ *Mencius*, 2A:6, 6A:6. His argument was illustrated in one of his best known passages where he said, “Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. From this it can be seen that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human.” Moreover, Mencius’s view of those four ‘sprouts’ seems comparable to Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of natural inclinations. See *Summa Theologiae* I.II. 94.

can become a sage. In short, he suggested, in contemporary terminology, a kind of ‘discovery model’ of moral self-cultivation.¹⁸⁸⁷

Xunzi was a contemporary figure to Mencius. Like Mencius he believed in the perfection of the self through self-cultivation, and the significance of virtues like benevolence and righteousness. However, he differed greatly from Mencius on how these could actually come about. In particular, Xunzi opposed Mencius by claiming that human nature is originally evil. The very first sentence of *Man’s Nature is Evil* reads, “Man’s nature is evil; goodness is the result of conscious activity.”¹⁸⁸⁸ The transformation of human nature relies on external conscious activity from which the sage creates ritual principles and lays down regulations to reform, train and transform one’s nature.¹⁸⁸⁹ In this way Xunzi emphasized the role of law/regulations and ritual principles and pointed to a ‘re-formation model’ of moral self-cultivation.¹⁸⁹⁰ As a whole, Xunzi’s doctrine on human nature has been understood as comparable to Augustine’s notion of the Original Sin or the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Sinologist Homer Dubs even refers Xunzi’s doctrine as “an Augustinian turn in the Confucian tradition.”¹⁸⁹¹ Still, in contemporary

¹⁸⁸⁷ Lee H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 58-60, 79.

¹⁸⁸⁸ Xunzi, “Man’s Nature is Evil,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 157.

¹⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 161. However, Xunzi’s view was unable to explain the origin of morality. See Erin M. Cline, “Two Senses of Justice: Confucianism, Rawls, and Comparative Political Philosophy,” *Dao* 6 (2007): 375-76.

¹⁸⁹⁰ Philip Ivanhoe calls it ‘development model’. However, I find the use of ‘development’ can be confusing because the ‘discovery model’ of Mencius also leads to some sort of development in the process—the four sprouts need to be extended and developed. See Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-Ming* (Mercer, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 73; Bryan Van Norden, “Virtue of Righteousness in Mencius,” in *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community*, eds. Shun Kwong-loi and David B. Wong (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 150.

¹⁸⁹¹ Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 31. Ivanhoe cites Homer D. Dubs, “Mencius and Sun-dz on Human Nature,” *Philosophy East and West* 6 (1965): 216.

philosophical terminology, Xunzi's overall philosophy is seen as representing naturalistic Confucianism that is in contrast to Mencius's idealistic view of Confucianism, and their differences are compared with those between Aristotle and Plato.

The second epoch started after the collapse of the Tang dynasty (in the tenth century) when Confucian thinkers offered a creative intellectual response to the growing challenge of Buddhism and Taoism of that time. They also re-interpreted and re-appropriated those classical Confucian thoughts, with special interests in metaphysical enquiry. This epoch was recognized as the period of Neo-Confucianism and was represented by Chu Hsi (1130-1200 CE) and Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529 CE). Chu offered a great synthesis of the concepts of those classical thinkers and grouped the *Analects*, the book of *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean* as the *Four Books*.¹⁸⁹² Some scholars thus have likened Chu to Aquinas. Wang, on the other hand, proposed doctrines of "the extension of the innate knowledge of the good" and "the unity of knowledge and action."¹⁸⁹³ In this way, Wang differed from Chu in a fundamental way: Wang's approach is moral whereas Chu's is intellectual.

Nevertheless, since the fifteenth century, the thoughts of Neo-Confucianism were spread beyond China to other parts of East Asia (such as Korea and Japan) till the early twentieth century: According to Tu, prior to the appearance of the Western powers in the mid-nineteenth century, Neo-Confucianism had had a great impact on East Asia's polity,

¹⁸⁹² The *Analects* contains twenty books each of which has a certain number of paragraphs. The *Book of Mencius* has seven books each of which is divided into Part A and Part B. The *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, however, contain only short chapters.

¹⁸⁹³ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 588-89.

society, and culture, and had become an integral part of East Asia.¹⁸⁹⁴ Even now, he is convinced that “the pervasiveness of ideas such as network capitalism, soft authoritarianism, group spirit, and consensual politics throughout the East Asia economy, polity, and society” suggests that the Confucian tradition continues to be relevant in East Asian modernity.¹⁸⁹⁵ It defines the meaning of being modern in East Asia and at the same time being restructured by modernization.¹⁸⁹⁶ Still, Mary Evelyn Bucker comments that the Confucian tradition finds distinctive expressions in different parts of East Asia and is thus problematic to view it as a singular tradition.¹⁸⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Tu rightly concludes that Confucianism has gone through significant transformations throughout the past two millennia. He suggests that it is more important in seeking new ways of approaching the Confucian way in the twenty-first century than simply reflecting on the past. He describes the possibility of carrying out the New Confucian movement as the third epoch. Its distinctiveness lies on the ambition to advance the exploration of the Confucian way beyond East Asia and into the West. But this is for the future.

¹⁸⁹⁴ Tu, “The Implications of the Rise of ‘Confucian’ East Asia,” 196.

¹⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 204. Tu subsequently identifies several salient (and ideal) features of East Asia that are under the influence of the Confucian traditions. Some of them are: 1) A government that is responsive to the needs of its people and responsible for their welfare. 2) Exemplary teaching is the means of inspiration for voluntary participation. 3) Family as the basic unit of society and human interactions are governed by the principle of reciprocity. 4) There exists a dynamic interaction between private/family and public/state. 5) Character building is the primary purpose of education. 6) The society encourages self-cultivation. However, Tu also admits that these societal ideals are not fully actualized in East Asian societies for many of them often reveal a totally contradictory behavior and attitude. See Tu, “The Implications of the Rise of ‘Confucian’ East Asia,” 205-7.

¹⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 210.

¹⁸⁹⁷ Mary Evelyn Bucker, introduction to *Confucian Spirituality* Vol. 1, eds. Tu Wei-ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 7.

9.2 Confucianism as a Religion and Its Worldview

In the book *Our Religions*, Confucianism is introduced as one of the seven historical world religions.¹⁸⁹⁸ Some scholars wonder if it is appropriate to treat it as a world religion in tandem with Christianity and Hinduism. Contemporary Confucian scholar Rodney Leon Taylor rightly notes that the question of whether Confucianism is a religion is not a new one, and various attempts have been made by philosophers and Confucian scholars alike to seek the definition of the religious character of Confucianism.¹⁸⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Tu claims that the question is timely as we continue to explore the possibility of the third epoch of Confucianism. He explains, “Confucian religiousness is crucial to...the current conversation among theologians and comparative religionists in the West, a conversation occasioned by a shared need to realize authenticity and wholeness personally and communally in an increasingly pluralistic world.”¹⁹⁰⁰

Historically speaking, Christian missionaries of the past (such as Mateo Ricci), by noting the practice of rituals in filial piety, qualified Confucianism as a major religion and even tried to incorporate these rituals into Christianity as incidental additions.¹⁹⁰¹ Pioneer Sinologist James Legge of the nineteenth century, likewise defined Confucianism first an ancient religion of China and only then the thinking of the great philosopher

¹⁸⁹⁸ Arvind Sharma, ed., *Our Religions* (New York: HarperOne, 1993).

¹⁸⁹⁹ Rodney Leon Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 1.

¹⁹⁰⁰ Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Righteousness* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989), 94.

¹⁹⁰¹ Robert Cummings Neville, foreword to *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism*, by Rodney Leon Taylor, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

himself.¹⁹⁰² Twentieth century British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who approaches religions by family resemblances, also comments that Confucianism, together with Judaism, belongs to the family of ‘prophetic’ religions despite the fact that Confucianism does not have explicit belief in deities.¹⁹⁰³ Herbert Fingarette, in his pioneer and popular book *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, argues that “not only Confucius’s teaching originated from the concept of Heaven [*tien* 天], but also that his notion of holiness of life teaches that the secular is the place where the sacred is manifested.”¹⁹⁰⁴ Christian ethicist Lee Yearley, in addition, employs a particular theory of religious thought to analyze the religious elements of classical Confucian thought.¹⁹⁰⁵ He concludes that such analysis clarifies how Confucian thinkers can be compared to other recognizable religious thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas of the West.¹⁹⁰⁶

Still, Tu offers his own view: Although radical transcendence like the concepts of ‘God’ and ‘the ultimate other’ is absent in Confucian symbolism, the notion of *tien* that is widely accepted by Confucian thinkers as a source for self-transformation points to a kind of religiosity that is comparable to other great world religions. He says, “Heaven is

¹⁹⁰² John H. Berthrong, and Jeffrey L. Richey, “Introduction: Teaching Confucianism as a Religious Tradition,” in *Teaching Confucianism*, ed. Jeffrey L. Richey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3. Berthrong and Richey quotes James Legge, *The Religions of China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880), 4.

¹⁹⁰³ Randall, 9. Randall cites *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Religion.”

¹⁹⁰⁴ Yeo Khiok-khng, *What has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing: Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 121-22. Yeo cites Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

¹⁹⁰⁵ Yearley specifically employs the theory of Joachim Wach—that argues that one’s religious experience normally expresses in the form of thought, social form, or actions of service—to analyze Mencius’s reflections on human nature. Lee H. Yearley, “Mencius on Human Nature: The Forms of His Religious Thought,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43, no. 2 (June 1975): 185-88.

¹⁹⁰⁶ Yearley, “Mencius on Human Nature: The Forms of His Religious Thought,” 198.

omniscient and omnipresent, if not omnipotent.”¹⁹⁰⁷ Tu further claims that although Confucianism’s spiritual orientation is this worldly, it still has a transcendent dimension—transcendence in immanence, as seen in a passage from the *Analects*: “Heaven is about to use your Master as the wooden tongue for a bell [to rouse the empire].”¹⁹⁰⁸ In short, Tu’s understanding of Confucian religiosity points to a kind of ‘anthropocosmic’ vision that emphasizes the “comprehensive interaction of Heaven, Earth, and humans.”¹⁹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, it is Taylor who offers us a more comprehensive discussion of the religious dimensions of the Confucian tradition.¹⁹¹⁰ He first clarifies that the absence of the term ‘religion’ in Confucian literature does not mean the tradition does not have a religious dimension. He then, as Tu did, turns to the notion of *tien* (Heaven) as a basis of his own argument that Confucianism, other than being an ethical system and humanistic teaching, is profoundly religious. He claims that *tien* in the classical Confucian text is not an abstract philosophical concept as some have argued but “functions as a religious authority or absolute often theistic in its portrayal.”¹⁹¹¹ And its role in the ultimate transformation of humankind (into a transformed person like the sage) further makes this *tien* religious in meaning. Taylor concludes that the recognition of this religious core allows a religious interpretation of other elements of the Confucian tradition. For instance,

¹⁹⁰⁷ Tu, “Confucianism,” 145-46.

¹⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., 203; *The Analects*, 3:24.

¹⁹⁰⁹ Mary Evelyn Buckner, introduction to *Confucian Spirituality* Vol. 1, eds. Tu Wei-ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 24; Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 102-07.

¹⁹¹⁰ Taylor, 2-4.

¹⁹¹¹ Ibid., 2.

the prominent writings of Confucianism are not mere ‘Classics’ but ‘Scripture’ that has religious authority.

Taylor later turns to two relevant issues for support. The first issue is the religious understanding of sainthood. In the Confucian tradition, the sage is a perfect human being whose role is to restore humankind and the world to the ways of virtue—the Way of Heaven.¹⁹¹² Still, Taylor argues that the sage can be a religious figure in the sense that, like the saint, he suggests “characteristics of both ‘otherness’ or inimitability, associated with the veneration of the saint, and exemplariness or imitability, resulting in the emulation of the saint by his followers.”¹⁹¹³ He points out that this ‘otherness’ has been present but was only consciously suppressed by the Confucian tradition. Even the ordinariness of the sage’s deeds “has the character of the religious when seen within the soteriological context of the tradition.”¹⁹¹⁴ Taylor concludes, “Although any wholesale adoption of the term saint for sage is premature at best, the sheer possibility of commonality at least partially adumbrates the religious potential found within the Confucian sage.”¹⁹¹⁵ In fact, for Confucius, the sages were “the semi-divine architects of the golden age [the ideal world].”¹⁹¹⁶ This partially explains why, Confucius, who was perceived by his disciples as a sage, has been venerated as a god (of culture) in East Asia for the past two millennia.¹⁹¹⁷

¹⁹¹² Ibid., 39.

¹⁹¹³ Ibid., 40.

¹⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 51-52.

¹⁹¹⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹⁹¹⁶ Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, 91, 113.

¹⁹¹⁷ Tu Wei-ming, “The Confucian Sage: Exemplar of Personal Knowledge,” in *Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual*, 29-44 (Albany, NY: State University of NY Press, 1993), 39.

Regarding the second issue, the question of religious response to suffering, Taylor rightly notes that suffering remains a crucial element in the definition of religion and every religious tradition struggles to offer its own unique interpretation and religious response. In the Confucian tradition, Mencius, for example, perceived suffering as constitutive elements for human greatness: “That is why Heaven, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his fame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughens his nature and makes good his deficiencies.”¹⁹¹⁸ However, by arguing that there exists a Confucian soteriology—that recognizes “the Way of Heaven as an Absolute and the provision for the ultimate transformation of humanity”¹⁹¹⁹—Taylor is convinced that the Confucian tradition’s acceptance of the reality of suffering, and its commitment to overcome it, is a proper religious response to suffering in spite of the fact that it does not share an explicit Christian eschatology.¹⁹²⁰

Bucker, while defending the religious dimension of Confucianism as Taylor does, refrains from employing the term ‘religion’ because it associates with formal institutional structures and obscures rather than clarifies the distinctive religious dimension of the Confucian tradition. Rather, she suggests that the religious dimension of Confucianism is better understood as a religious worldview with distinctive spiritual elements and

¹⁹¹⁸ *Mencius*, 6B:15. See also Tu Wei-ming, “Pain and Suffering in Confucian Self-cultivation.” *Philosophy East & West* 34, no. 4 (1984): 379.

¹⁹¹⁹ Taylor, 133.

¹⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 133-34.

cosmological orientation.¹⁹²¹ It echoes the above-mentioned ‘anthropocosmic’ view envisioned by Tu.

Finally, in a more recent book on Confucianism, John Berthrong and Jeffrey Richey attempt to demonstrate that Confucianism is an authentic East Asian religious tradition.¹⁹²² They argue that Confucianism, as other religions do, “attempts to develop a unified (though not necessarily uniform) set of beliefs, institutions, and practices in response to fundamental questions about the universe (cosmology), human beings (anthropology), and how to live (ethics).”¹⁹²³

In sum, these contemporary scholars generally argue that there is a more than an implicit religious dimension in the Confucian tradition. However, they seem to equally admit that one should not label Confucianism as a religion in the same way as one does with other world religions.

This caution is grounded on a number of observations.¹⁹²⁴ First, Confucian tradition does not have the view that the deity is a person even though *tien* is sometimes

¹⁹²¹ Cosmological orientation is described as “encompassing a continuity of being between all life forms without a radical break between the divine and human worlds. Heaven, Earth, and humans are part of a continuous worldview that is organic, holistic, and dynamic.” Bucker concludes that it is “interwoven with spiritual expressions in the form of communitarian ethics of society, self-cultivation of the person, and ritual expressions integrating self, society, and cosmos.” See Mary Evelyn Bucker, introduction to *Confucian Spirituality* Vol. 1, eds. Tu Wei-ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 4, 20, 26.

¹⁹²² Berthrong, and Richey, “Introduction: Teaching Confucianism as a Religious Tradition,” in *Teaching Confucianism*, 3-24.

¹⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the problem of God in Confucianism, see Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1977), 112-50. In general, Ching argues that many of the Christian notions of God such as ‘personal God’, ‘Creator’, and ‘Lord of all things’ can be identified in Confucianism. However, her arguments are predominantly based on those pre-Confucian and neo-Confucian texts rather than the specific Confucian texts employed here. The only exception is the term *shang ti* 上帝 (Lord on High or God) which appears once each in the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. See Confucius, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and the Doctrine of*

portrayed as if it is a person on high. Likewise, while the Mandate of Heaven is at times interpreted as a decree from such a deity, it is also understood as the law of nature. Second, although Heaven can be argued as the source of spiritual transformation and perfection of the self, it does not claim to be the source of the natural world and universe. Confucian tradition simply does not develop any doctrine of creation. Hence, *tien* is not the creator of humankind and the natural world. And Tu's claim of interaction between Heaven and human beings cannot be referred to as the kind of creator-creature relationship either. Third, there is also the lack of the idea of establishing personal relationship with God. Despite the fact that ritual sacrifices to the deity were approved by Confucian thinkers, they were done out of respect to the unknown deity rather than out of personal relationship with the deity. Fourth, while some Confucian scholars argue that Confucianism affirms the presence of the deity, negation of God is also found in Confucian tradition.¹⁹²⁵ In particular, its entire philosophy is androcentric rather than theo-centric.

Apart from holding a distinguished religious view of Heaven, the Confucian tradition also holds a rather unique worldview. This worldview is based on the Confucian vision of the unity of Heaven, Earth, and humanity. In the *Doctrine of the Mean* the author says,

It is only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity that can exist under Heaven, who can give its full development to his nature. Able to give its full development to his own nature, he can do the same to the nature of other men. Able to give its full development to the nature of

the Mean, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), *The Great Learning* 10:5 (375), *The Doctrine of the Mean* 19:6 (404). Still, Confucius did not elaborate or explain the term in these texts.

¹⁹²⁵ I am grateful to Lisa Sowle Cahill who pointed out to me that there are Christian apophatic traditions that also 'negate' God.

other men, he can give their full development to the natures of creatures and things. Able to give their full development to the natures of creatures and things, he can assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, he may with Heaven and Earth form a ternion.¹⁹²⁶

As noted earlier, Tu describes this Confucian worldview as one of anthropocosmic in which “the human is embedded in the cosmic order, rather than an anthropocentric worldview, in which the human is alienated, either by choice or by default, from the natural world.”¹⁹²⁷ And the vision of comprehensive unity further leads some scholars to conclude,

The Confucian worldview, rooted in earth, body, family, and community, is not ‘adjustment to the world,’ submission to the status quo, or passive acceptance of the physical, biological, social, and political constraints of the human condition. Rather, it is dictated by an ethic of responsibility informed by a transcendent vision. We do not become ‘spiritual’ by departing from or transcending above our earth, body, family, and community, but by working through them. Indeed, our daily life is not merely secular but a response to a cosmological decree. Since the Mandate of Heaven that enjoins us to take part in the great enterprise of cosmic transformation is implicit in our nature, we are Heaven’s partners...The ultimate goal of being human is to enable the ‘Heavenly virtue’ to flow through us.¹⁹²⁸

In other words, the ultimate goal of morality and self-cultivation based on such a worldview is for the sake of forming a union with the community, Heaven and Earth. As a result, Confucian worldview forms and promotes a particular mode of morality and culture that differs from that of the Christian tradition. The latter, in simple terms, holds a worldview that is biblical, theological and eschatological. It understands the world as God’s creation and the presence of the

¹⁹²⁶ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, 22 (416).

¹⁹²⁷ Tu Wei-ming, “The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism: Implications for China and the World,” *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 244.

¹⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 245. Tu notes that these scholars are influenced by certain neo-Confucian thinkers.

‘already but not yet’ kingdom of God. Christians are called to be followers of Christ and live a moral life in this world that brings about kingdom of God and eternal union with God. Although it is concerned with the earthly world as Confucian worldview is, Christian worldview emphasizes far much more the eschatological coming of the reign of God. The former is not other-worldly (though it seeks moral progress), has not an other (God) beyond the human, and no matter how rich and inclusive as a real moral paradigm the notion of *chiün tsu* is, it does not offer a historical figure who acts as a model and redeemer of all his followers.

9.3 The Ideas of ‘Blessed’, ‘Reward’, and ‘Next Life’ in Confucian Tradition

By far Taylor has examined two specific issues in his search for the religious dimension of the Confucian tradition. However, there are other issues and ideas—that are specifically related to the Beatitudes—which are relevant to the quest of Confucian religiousness. Among them are the concepts of ‘blessed’, ‘reward’, and ‘next life’ that are key to the macarisms in Matthew 5:3-12. The discussion of these issues in turn can contribute to our task of bringing the Beatitudes into the Confucian society.

Blessedness and Happiness

Throughout the Chinese history, prosperity and long life are two main goals of the people:¹⁹²⁹ Regarding the notion of prosperity within the Confucian tradition, it is more commonly used than ‘blessing’. It refers to the possession of what is needed for human life, such as the presence of respectful parents, loving spouse and children, and harmonious family. It is believed that prosperity must come from outside. Although one cannot grant it to oneself, one can surely ask for it.

Specifically, for Confucius, prosperity and even virtues are given by Heaven. The Master said, “Heaven is the author of the virtue that is in me. What can Huan Tui do to me?”¹⁹³⁰ In this way, it echoes the Israelites’ understanding that Yahweh is the source of blessing: In the Hebrew Bible, blessings are granted by God either directly (Genesis 1:22) or through the prophets, the leaders, or the elderly member of the family, as in the case of Isaac’s blessing of Jacob (Genesis 27:23). And Israelites constantly seek God’s blessing, especially in times of persecution and oppression.

Surprisingly, Confucius himself was seen as one without much of the above-defined prosperity:¹⁹³¹ When he was still a child he lost his father. As a teenager he was poor and was forced to acquire different skills to earn a living. He got divorced after a few years of marriage and his son died early. And his career as a civil servant was,

¹⁹²⁹ 錢穆, *晚學盲言*, 第二版 (桂林:廣西師範大學出版社, 2004), 626.

¹⁹³⁰ *Analects*, 7:23.

¹⁹³¹ Ibid., 9:6; James Legge, “Confucius and His Immediate Disciples,” in *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 56-88. See also 錢穆, 626-27. The notion of ‘the Way’, in simple terms, is comparable to the universal Truth understood by contemporary philosophy. A more thorough interpretation will be discussed below. See 9.4.

unfortunately, unsuccessful also. Consequently, he took up the career of teaching for the rest of his life.

Nevertheless, in advocating the reading of the Beatitudes through virtue ethics, Mattison argues that it is more appropriate to translate the opening word of each beatitude into “happy” rather than ‘blessed’ in English.¹⁹³² How is happiness understood in the Confucian tradition?

In the first place, for all the three Confucian thinkers, one will be happy when *jen* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), and *tao* (the Way) are actualized.¹⁹³³ This understanding is expressed in the following conversation between Confucius and his disciple:

Tzu-kung said, “‘Poor without being obsequious, wealthy without being arrogant.’ What do you think of this saying?” The Master said, “That will do, but better still ‘Poor yet delighting in the Way, wealthy yet observant of the rites.’”¹⁹³⁴

For Confucius, the wise man will be joyful and the benevolent will have long life.¹⁹³⁵

Xunzi further claims that when righteousness and benevolence reign, happiness will be found in the whole society.¹⁹³⁶

Second, happiness is not built upon wealth or other material possessions but rooted in inner joy. In other words, true happiness can be found in simple things and ordinary daily experience. In the very beginning of the *Analects* the Master said, “Is it not

¹⁹³² Mattison III, “The Beatitudes and Christian Ethics: A Virtue Perspective.”

¹⁹³³ 王德有, «苦樂觀», *中國傳統人生哲學縱橫談*, 紫竹 編 (濟南:齊魯書社出版, 1992), 156. The notion of ‘the Way’ will be discussed below.

¹⁹³⁴ *Analects*, 1:15.

¹⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6: 23.

¹⁹³⁶ 王德有, 156.

a pleasure, having learned something to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a joy to have friends come from afar?”¹⁹³⁷ In another occasion, Confucius commented, “In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one’s elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.”¹⁹³⁸ Here, Confucius made it clear that we should not seek happiness through unrighteousness or means that are contradictory to *jen*.

Third, even in the midst of hardship happiness can also be found. In the *Analects*, the Master said, “How admirable Hui is! Living in a mean dwelling on a bowlful of rice and a ladleful of water is a hardship most men would find intolerable, but Hui does not allow this to affect his joy. How admirable Hui is!”¹⁹³⁹ In this way, it is not unlike Paul’s teaching on rejoicing in the Lord even in the midst of suffering and persecution (Philippians 4:4-7).

Prosperity as a Reward

According to some pre-Confucian literature such as the book of *Changes*, since the time of Western Chou Dynasty, it had been a common belief that prosperity and calamity are the corresponding results of doing good and bad.¹⁹⁴⁰ The thinkers of Confucianism continued this tradition and highlighted the causal relationship between prosperity (and calamity) and one’s moral life. For example, Mencius recalled Confucius’s own comments: “There is neither good nor bad fortune which man does not

¹⁹³⁷ *Analects*, 1:1.

¹⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:16.

¹⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6:11.

¹⁹⁴⁰ 馬振鐸, «善惡觀», *中國傳統人生哲學縱橫談*, 紫竹 編 (濟南:齊魯書社出版, 1992), 234.

bring upon himself. The *Odes* say, ‘Long may he be worthy of Heaven’s Mandate and seek for himself much good fortune.’ The *Tai chia* says, ‘When Heaven sends down calamities, there is hope of weathering them; when man brings them upon himself, there is no hope of escape.’”¹⁹⁴¹ In other words, prosperity and calamity are the immediate result of our own deeds and we are responsible for whatever outcome it produces.

Mencius further illustrated this causal relationship between doing good and prosperity by looking at different levels of human relationship. He said, “He who loves others is always loved by them; he who respects others is always respected by them.”¹⁹⁴² Or, in the case of the relationship between the king and his people, he said: “The people will delight in the joy of him who delights in their joy, and will worry over the troubles of him who worries over their troubles.”¹⁹⁴³ With regards to the causal relationship between calamity and doing bad, Mencius said: “If you killed his father, he would kill your father; if you killed his elder brother, he would kill your elder brother. This being the case, though you may not have killed your father and brother with your own hands, it is but one step removed.”¹⁹⁴⁴

Xunzi also made it clear that only when one accords with what is proper to one’s species that one will be blessed, and those who do not do so will eventually suffer from misfortune.¹⁹⁴⁵

¹⁹⁴¹ *Mencius*, 2A:4.

¹⁹⁴² *Ibid.*, 4B:28.

¹⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1B:4.

¹⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7B:7.

¹⁹⁴⁵ Xunzi, “A Discussion of Heaven,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 81.

In short, Confucian prosperity can be understood as a reward to those who do good things. However, the emphasis here is the presence of a relationship between the two and the responsibility of the doer. It does not consider the role of reward as the motivating force for doing good. In fact, these same Confucian thinkers explicitly rejected the utilitarian and consequentialist view that our human goal is to attain reward, or that we do good merely for the sake of being awarded. On the contrary, they insisted that one should focus on doing what is good and righteous, and then prosperity will be bestowed. For instance, in the *Analects*, “The Master said, ‘The gentleman understands what is moral. The small man understands what is profitable.’”¹⁹⁴⁶ Mencius, in particular, strongly opposed the mentality of doing good for the sake of reward. He said,

There are honors bestowed by Heaven, and there are honors bestowed by man. Benevolence, dutifulness, conscientiousness, truthfulness to one’s word, unflagging delight in what is good, these are honors bestowed by Heaven. The position of a Ducal Minister, a Minister, or a Counselor is an honor bestowed by man. Men of antiquity bent their efforts towards acquiring honors bestowed by Heaven, and honors bestowed by man followed by a matter of course. Men of today bend their efforts towards acquiring honors bestowed by Heaven in order to win honors bestowed by man, and once the latter is won they discard the former. Such men are deluded to the extreme, and in the end are sure only to perish.¹⁹⁴⁷

Xunzi even claimed that such behavior of the ‘men of today’ is an evil act.¹⁹⁴⁸

As a whole, this causal relationship between moral good/bad and prosperity/calamity has two distinctive characteristics:¹⁹⁴⁹ First, prosperity is this-worldly, even if it happens after one’s death by being extended to one’s descendants. Second,

¹⁹⁴⁶ *Analects*, 4:16.

¹⁹⁴⁷ *Mencius*, 6A:16.

¹⁹⁴⁸ 馬振鐸, 238.

¹⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

since Confucianism does not have the concept of the reincarnation, this causal relationship cannot offer explanation to all situations, especially in the case that good people suffer while bad people prosper.

In order to respond to this challenge, Confucian thinkers elsewhere pointed out that attaining prosperity is not as important as acting out righteousness. As quoted above, Confucius said, “Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.”¹⁹⁵⁰ Mencius likewise said, “Fish is what I want; bear’s palm is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take bear’s palm than fish. Life is what I want; dutifulness is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would choose dutifulness rather than life.”¹⁹⁵¹ He also insisted that “if it is not in accordance with the Way...one should not accept even one basketful of rice from another person.”¹⁹⁵² In other words, reward is plausible only if there is an appropriate ground for receiving it, and it is better still to first follow the Way than long for prosperity.

The Question of Destiny and Next Life

In general, the Confucian tradition believes that one’s destiny and fate—that is, life and death, and wealth and poor, etc.—are predestined by the Mandate of Heaven. Confucius said in the *Analects*, “Life and death are a matter of Destiny; wealth and honor depend on Heaven.”¹⁹⁵³ Thus, Confucius seldom talked about fate and destiny and

¹⁹⁵⁰ *Analects*, 7:16.

¹⁹⁵¹ *Mencius*, 6A:10.

¹⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, 3B:4.

¹⁹⁵³ *Analects*, 12:5.

discouraged his disciple to discuss them either. As the *Analects* recalls, “The occasions on which the Master talked about profit, Destiny and benevolence were rare.”¹⁹⁵⁴

Even when he talked about the issue of human destiny with his disciples, Confucius plainly suggested that one should accept it. The Master said, “If Heaven intends culture to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If Heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me?”¹⁹⁵⁵ In another occasion, he similarly said, “It is Destiny if the Way prevails; it is equally Destiny if the Way falls into disuse. What can Kung-po do in defiance of Destiny?”¹⁹⁵⁶

Mencius further suggested that one should welcome one’s own destiny. He said, “Whether he is going to die young or to live to a ripe old age makes no difference to his steadfastness of purpose. It is through awaiting whatever is to befall him with a perfected character that he stands firm on his proper Destiny.”¹⁹⁵⁷

Among the three Confucian thinkers Xunzi showed the most progressive view on the question of destiny and fate. He strongly believed that one can change one’s own destiny. He asked, “Is it better to wait for things to increase of themselves, or to apply your talents and transform them?”¹⁹⁵⁸ In this way, his view differed greatly from that of Confucius and Mencius.¹⁹⁵⁹

¹⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., 9:1.

¹⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 9:5.

¹⁹⁵⁶ Ibid., 14:36.

¹⁹⁵⁷ *Mencius*, 7A:1.

¹⁹⁵⁸ Xunzi, “A Discussion of Heaven,” 86.

¹⁹⁵⁹ *中國儒學辭典*, 趙吉惠, 郭厚安 編 (遼寧: 遼寧人民出版社, 1988), s.v. «人定勝天».

Regarding the issue of ‘next life’, we have to bear in mind first that the Confucian tradition does not believe in immortality at all; rather, life and death are part of the unavoidable cycle.¹⁹⁶⁰ Similarly, Confucianism does not believe in the existence of (an immortal) soul after death either.¹⁹⁶¹ Yet, this does not mean that the Confucian tradition denies the existence of spirits of the dead (ancestors) and gods. Confucian thinkers simply did not talk about them. In the *Analects*, it is mentioned that “the topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, forces, disorder and gods.”¹⁹⁶² Confucius also told his disciples, “You don’t understand even life. How can you understand death?”¹⁹⁶³ His reluctance to talk about gods and spiritual beings, as one theologian suggests, is because Confucius did not want to engage in discussion of superstition.¹⁹⁶⁴

Moreover, when the issue of spirits and gods was actually brought up, Confucius would advise the disciples to stay away from the spirits and gods. He said, “To keep one’s distance from gods and spirits while showing them reverence can be called wisdom.”¹⁹⁶⁵ And when offering sacrifices to them as a gesture of respect, he too reminded the disciples that one should do so only to the spirits of one’s own ancestors.¹⁹⁶⁶ He further claimed that if one lives a life of benevolence and righteousness, one needs not

¹⁹⁶⁰ 張踐,《生死觀》,《中國傳統人生哲學縱橫談》,紫竹編(濟南:齊魯書社,1992),129.

¹⁹⁶¹ Ibid., 130. For the Confucian tradition, spirit and soul are two different concepts. The soul will cease to exist together with the mortal body at the moment of death.

¹⁹⁶² *Analects*, 7:21.

¹⁹⁶³ Ibid., 11:12.

¹⁹⁶⁴ Bretzke, “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 37.

¹⁹⁶⁵ *Analects*, 6:22.

¹⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 2:24.

pray to gods even at the moment of sickness, for such a life is already a kind of prayer.¹⁹⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Confucius believed that one can be eternally present analogically. He proposed three hierarchical ways in which eternity can be implied:¹⁹⁶⁸ The first and most important way is by means of cultivating virtue. Confucius made his point by noting the different reactions of the common people toward the deaths of virtuous Po Yi and Shu Chi, and the un-virtuous Duke Ching. The second and less significant way is by means of praiseworthy deeds, as in the case of Kuan Chung who was remembered for helping Duke Huan to become the leader and saving the Empire from collapse. The last and least effective way among the three is by means of writings, for the author of memorable sayings and writings is not necessarily virtuous.

9.4 Confucian Virtue Ethics

Confucianism as Moral Teaching

The ongoing discussion on whether Confucianism is a religion both challenges and enriches the common view that the tradition is simply a kind of ethical teaching. Still, Confucianism is a distinctive ethical teaching in its own regard because of the above-mentioned unique worldview within which it is formed. What, then, is this distinctive Confucian ethics? In exploring the characteristics of Confucian ethics, Chinese philosopher Liu Yu-li argues that the distinctiveness of Confucian ethics lies on its

¹⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 7:35. 蔡仁厚, *孔孟荀哲學*, 第三版 (台北:台灣學生書局, 1990), 136.

¹⁹⁶⁸ *Analects*, 16:12; 14:17; 14:4.

understanding of morality: There are two related and united aspects of Confucian morality, namely, *tao* 道 (the Way) and *te* 德 (virtue).¹⁹⁶⁹

Literally speaking, the term *tao* means a path or a road. It is also understood philosophically as truth or principle. It is employed by the Confucian tradition to refer to ‘the Way’ that is originated from Heaven and manifested in the wisdom of the ancient sage kings, the teaching of Confucius, and the exemplary life of virtuous people.¹⁹⁷⁰ It is thus not beyond reach and human beings have the potential to pursue and understand it.¹⁹⁷¹

Moreover, the Way is universal because it is “the foundation of a harmonious universe, a peaceful society and a good life, and without it the transformation of the universe would break down, human society would fall into chaos, and the state would weaken and collapse.”¹⁹⁷² Some philosophers thus compare the Way to the Western notion of universal ‘Truth’ that covers all the truths about the universe and humankind.¹⁹⁷³

As far as Confucian ethics is concerned, these philosophers perceive the Way as the cornerstone to understand Confucian ethics, for it is that “which wise and good men follow and always have followed as they sought to conform their lives to the will of

¹⁹⁶⁹ Liu Yu-li, *The Unity of Rule and Virtue* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 62-63. The identification of these two aspects is based on the fact that the Chinese term for morality is *tao-de*. As will be seen later, Antonio Cua likewise points out that the two aspects are interdependent.

¹⁹⁷⁰ Ibid., 64. However, the Confucian *tao* differs from that of the Taoists. The latter refers *tao* solely to cosmic principle.

¹⁹⁷¹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 13:1 (393).

¹⁹⁷² Liu, 64. Liu cites Yao Xin-zhong, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 139-40.

¹⁹⁷³ Liu, 73. Liu cites Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D.C. Lau (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Classics, 1979), ix.

Heaven.”¹⁹⁷⁴ Thus, Tu claims that *tao* functions as “a governing perspective and a point of orientation.”¹⁹⁷⁵ James Bretzke, in addition, notes that *tao* furnishes less as a map for the moral life than as a moral vision that is realized in the fulfillment of one’s humanity.¹⁹⁷⁶ He also suggests that *tao* operates in a way that parallels moral discernment and from which he claims that *tao* is “obviously quite congenial to an ethics of virtue, especially if the *tao* is viewed akin to prudence as the form of the virtues, as well as to the related notion of moral virtuousity.”¹⁹⁷⁷ Specifically, it “guides the Confucian *chün tzu* [the gentleman]...in the application and integration of...individual virtues.”¹⁹⁷⁸

Regarding *te* Yearley offers us a truthful description: “The conception of virtue (*te* 德) operative in ancient time is a complex one that bears the marks of its long history.”¹⁹⁷⁹ Yearley continues,

Originally the notion of virtue probably referred only to the sacred king. By at least the sixth century B.C.E., however, it signified a property that rises from a laudatory life or is given as a reward for one. It, furthermore, is a property that enables the holder to accomplish things that would otherwise be impossible. The idea of virtue, then, is thought of as a property tied to a commendable life. Moreover, the possession of virtuousness generates special abilities; indeed, ‘power’ often is an appropriate translation for *te*.

Indeed, for Confucius virtue “was originally the almost magical power of the King that induced others to obey him without the need for the use of military force or

¹⁹⁷⁴ Liu, 79.

¹⁹⁷⁵ Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 37.

¹⁹⁷⁶ James T. Bretzke, “Moral Theology out of East Asia,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 112.

¹⁹⁷⁷ Ibid..

¹⁹⁷⁸ Bretzke, “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 34.

¹⁹⁷⁹ Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage*, 54.

other forms of violent coercion.”¹⁹⁸⁰ The Master said, “He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it.”¹⁹⁸¹ Xunzi, in whose writings (especially in his *A Discussion of Kings*) the term *te* appears most, particularly referred *te* to as “the state or power of a person who has a high degree of ethical development,” such as kings and rulers of society.¹⁹⁸² Still, *te* is also understood by the Confucian tradition as “a kind of moral character trait which is obtained from oneself...in the *xing* 性 (human nature) as a result of personal cultivation.”¹⁹⁸³ In this way, it is comparable to the Greek understanding of virtue.

With regards to the source of virtue, Confucius claimed that all virtues are originated from and rooted in *jen* (humanity).¹⁹⁸⁴ Mencius developed this view of Confucius and pointed out that *te* naturally develops from the good human nature: “Benevolence, dutifulness, observance of the rites, and wisdom do not give me a luster from the outside; they are in me originally.”¹⁹⁸⁵ Elsewhere he said, “If a man is able to develop these four germs that he possesses, he will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through.”¹⁹⁸⁶ As mentioned earlier, he adopted a kind of discovery model of attaining virtue. Xunzi, who held an opposite understanding of human nature, argued that one should distinguish human nature from human effort (or conscious activity), and

¹⁹⁸⁰ Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 67.

¹⁹⁸¹ *Analects*, 2:1.

¹⁹⁸² Jonathan W. Schofer, “Virtues in Xunzi’s Thought,” in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, eds. T.C. Kline III, and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 76.

¹⁹⁸³ Liu, 37.

¹⁹⁸⁴ 蔡仁厚, 85.

¹⁹⁸⁵ *Mencius*, 6A:6.

¹⁹⁸⁶ *Mencius*, 2A:6.

hence the cultivation of *te* is a person's conscious activity in following the ritual principles that are produced by the sage.¹⁹⁸⁷ Still, Xunzi agreed with Mencius that virtues can be cultivated.¹⁹⁸⁸

Confucian Ethics as Virtue Ethics

Those who focus on the *te* aspect of Confucian morality would claim that virtue ethics is the implicit theory behind Confucian ethics.¹⁹⁸⁹ This claim can be understood in two ways. First, Confucian literature bequeaths a large and complex ethical vocabulary in which a significant number of virtue-related terms are found.¹⁹⁹⁰ For example, the opening sentence of the *Great Learning* points out clearly that ethical education depends on the exemplification of the virtues: "What the Great Learning teaches, is—to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence."¹⁹⁹¹ In the *Analects*, virtue is explicitly discussed on various occasions. For instance, "The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort;" "I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue;" and "A good horse is praised for its virtue, not for its strength."¹⁹⁹² Still, Confucian thinkers did not only highlight the importance of virtue in general but also named them in particular. The Master said, "The man of wisdom is never in two

¹⁹⁸⁷ Xunzi, "Man's Nature is Evil," 158. Although Xunzi acknowledged that humankind has "essential faculties needed to understand necessary ethical principles and the potential ability to put them into practice," these essential faculties only enable one to redirect, but not build upon, one's natural tendencies. See Xunzi, "Man's Nature is Evil," 166-67; Schofer, 72.

¹⁹⁸⁸ Liu, 43.

¹⁹⁸⁹ Pellegrino and Thomasma, 14.

¹⁹⁹⁰ Cua, 271. In particular, Mencius is a rich resource for studying Confucian virtues. See Van Norden, "Virtue of Righteousness in Mencius," 148.

¹⁹⁹¹ *Great Learning*, 1 (356).

¹⁹⁹² *Analects*, 4:11; 7:6; 14:33.

minds; the man of benevolence never worries; the man of courage is never afraid.”¹⁹⁹³ At times they also hinted that some virtues are more central than others: “There are five things and whoever is capable of putting them into practice in the Empire is certainly ‘benevolent’... They are respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness and generosity.”¹⁹⁹⁴

Second, according to Tu, “the fundamental concern of the Confucian tradition is learning to be human.”¹⁹⁹⁵ Learning to be human entails a process of self-cultivation which is an end in itself and results in attainment of the cardinal virtue of *jen*.¹⁹⁹⁶ In other words, self-cultivation is closely related to the cultivation of virtue. Aaron Stalnaker likewise claims that the specific subject of the cultivation of virtue and its analogous questions “were central to widespread debates in ancient China about... ‘self-cultivation.’”¹⁹⁹⁷

Taking all into consideration, these scholars are convinced that the discussion of virtue is appropriate to the discussion of the Confucian tradition, and a virtue-based ethics is inevitably a significant component of Confucian ethics. Bryan Van Norden further points out that although Aristotelianism and Confucianism may disagree on certain issues regarding virtues—such as what the virtues are—it is appropriate to approach Confucian ethics from the perspective of virtue ethics at least on the ‘thin’ level.¹⁹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁹³ Ibid., 9:29.

¹⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., 17:6.

¹⁹⁹⁵ Tu, “Confucianism,” 141.

¹⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., 186.

¹⁹⁹⁷ Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 19.

¹⁹⁹⁸ Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 16-21. Van Norden understands the ‘thin’ description as having little theoretical content and which can be shared by a broad

Key Virtues in Confucian Ethics

The concept of *jen* is crucial to the Confucian tradition in general and the teaching of Confucius in particular. For Confucius, on the one hand, “[it renders] the inner cultivation of an inborn tendency to be humane...on the other hand, *jen* means establishing real loving relations with other people.”¹⁹⁹⁹ Thus, *jen* is understood as “a universal virtue underlying all the particular ones.”²⁰⁰⁰ Another important virtue advocated by Confucius is *yi* (righteousness) which appears in the *Analects* many times. These appearances basically depict *yi* as what is right, just, and moral, and is a virtue of *chün tzu*.²⁰⁰¹ The Master said: “The superior man in everything considers righteousness to be essential.”²⁰⁰² Moreover, Confucius pointed out that *jen* is expressed in following right ritual forms and hence stressed the virtue of *li* (propriety) as well.²⁰⁰³ In short, *jen*, *yi*, and *li* are the essential qualities of *chün tzu*. Still, for Confucius, the three virtues are inter-dependent:²⁰⁰⁴ 1) The ethical significance of *li* depends on the presence of *jen*. The Master said, “If a man has no *jen*, what has he to do with *li*?” 2) The rationale for accepting *li* is provided by the ethical significance of *yi*.

Apart from these three inter-dependent virtues, Confucius also emphasized the virtues of wisdom and courage that are found in the *Doctrine of the Mean*. He said, “The

range of discussants who may disagree significantly; while a ‘thick’ description refers to the detailed account given by a particular participant and framed in terms of distinctive concepts.

¹⁹⁹⁹ Robert Cummings Neville, “Tu Wei-ming’s Confucianism,” in *Boston Confucianism. Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 97.

²⁰⁰⁰ Ching, 9.

²⁰⁰¹ 蔡仁厚, 118-23.

²⁰⁰² *Analects* 15:17 (299).

²⁰⁰³ Neville, 98.

²⁰⁰⁴ Cua, 276-77; *Analects*, 3:3. Cua claims that the ideal of *tao* can be a unifying perspective for understanding the interdependence of these three virtues—on the one hand, they depend on *tao* for their distinctive character; on the other hand, they are the concrete specification and realization of the abstract ideal of *tao*. See Cua, 274, 303.

man of wisdom is never in two minds; the man of benevolence never worries; the man of courage is never afraid.”²⁰⁰⁵ Together with *jen* they form a triad of virtues that are universal binding and through which one attains the Way. Furthermore, Confucius is convinced that the perfection of virtue lies in the mean. He thus said, “Supreme indeed is the mean as a moral virtue.”²⁰⁰⁶

Mencius developed Confucius’s emphasis on the virtue of *jen* in various ways. In the first place, he heightened the tension between *jen* and *yi* and advocated them as the two guiding principles and cardinal virtues in governing human relationships:²⁰⁰⁷ *Jen* is needed to bind people together and *yi* makes necessary distinctions. In this way, Mencius promoted the virtue of righteousness to the highest level among other virtues. Still, he clarified that righteousness comes from *jen*.²⁰⁰⁸ Second, for Mencius the four sprouts within us are actualized by the four central virtues—benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. Third, Mencius highlighted the Five Relationships (that is, the five fundamental human relationships of ruler-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend) and from which the virtues of righteousness, intimacy, reciprocity, respect, and fidelity emerged.²⁰⁰⁹

Finally, Xunzi agreed with Mencius that benevolence and righteousness are very important virtues.²⁰¹⁰ However, based on his view that human nature is evil, the virtue of *li* became significantly important. Xunzi said, “Since man’s nature is evil, it must wait for

²⁰⁰⁵ *Analects*, 9:29; 14:28.

²⁰⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 6:29.

²⁰⁰⁷ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 50; William Theodore de Bary, “The Prophetic Voice in the Confucian Noble Man,” *Ching Feng* 33, no. 1-2 (April 1990): 8.

²⁰⁰⁸ *Mencius*, 4B:19.

²⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3A:4.

²⁰¹⁰ Tu, “Confucianism,” 160.

the instructions of a teacher before it can become upright, and for the guidance of ritual principles before it can become orderly.”²⁰¹¹ Rituals are also created “to train men’s desires and to provide for their satisfaction.”²⁰¹² He explained, “Through rites men’s likes and dislikes are regulated and their joys and hates made appropriate.”²⁰¹³ Thus, Tu rightly comments that for Xunzi “learning to be human, in this sense, can be understood as a process of ritualization.”²⁰¹⁴

In conclusion, Tu offers a rather helpful synthesis of these various understandings of virtues within the Confucian tradition—there is a ‘priority of virtues’ that reflects the basic Confucian structure of virtues as “a progressive articulation of the concept of humanity”:²⁰¹⁵ 1) *Jen* is ‘the cardinal virtue’ to which all the other virtues are internally linked; 2) together with the virtue of wisdom they are called ‘the two primary virtues’ that support each other; with courage these two primary virtues are understood as ‘the three universal virtues’ that aims at the realization of humanity; and 3) the two primary virtues are part of ‘the four primordial virtues’ that also includes righteousness and ritual propriety. Still, Yearley rightly comments that the Confucian tradition contains not only these core virtues but also other ‘lesser’ and yet relevant virtues such as equanimity, and

²⁰¹¹ Xunzi, “Man’s Nature is Evil,” 157.

²⁰¹² Xunzi, “A Discussion of Rites,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 89.

²⁰¹³ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰¹⁴ Tu Wei-ming, *Way, learning, and Politics*, 6. See also Chan, “As West Meets East: Reading Xunzi’s ‘A Discussion of Rites’—Through the Lens of Contemporary Western Ritual Theories.”

²⁰¹⁵ Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 57-58.

it still lacks the kind of schematization of virtues found in Western philosophy and Christianity.²⁰¹⁶

Confucian Religious Virtues?

The earlier discussion of Confucian religiousness naturally leads one to ask if certain virtues found in the Confucian tradition can be religious virtues just as those infused, theological virtues named by Thomas Aquinas are. Yearley responds that although the Confucian tradition does not make formal distinction between religious and non-religious virtues, it does make distinctions on the objects pursued, the intentions manifested, the behavior produced, and the empowerment displayed.²⁰¹⁷ In other words, he is convinced that certain forms of Confucian virtues contain qualities of religious virtues and have a very special character that allows them to nurture attitudes and produce actions that are profoundly different from other forms of the virtue.²⁰¹⁸ For example, he notes that there are three different forms of the Confucian virtue of courage: The first form deals with normal instance while the second one “seems to live in a symbiotic relationship with other high spiritual attainments, most notably an unmoved mind...and a refined form of righteousness.”²⁰¹⁹ The third kind of courage is further defined by “a spontaneity that completely transcends the division, and even hesitancy,

²⁰¹⁶ Lee H. Yearley, “Virtues and Religious Virtues in the Confucian Tradition,” in *Confucian Spirituality* vol. 1, ed. Tu Wei-ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 143, 146.

²⁰¹⁷ Ibid., 145-46.

²⁰¹⁸ Ibid..

²⁰¹⁹ Ibid., 147.

that defines even the best forms of ordinary courage” and hence can be understood as a religious virtue.²⁰²⁰

Of course, we have to bear in mind that even if certain Confucian virtues can be religious virtues, they would not have a supernatural source as Christian theological virtues do. Also, the cultivation of Confucian virtues has self-cultivation as the end while Christian virtues are aimed at forming a community of disciples that has God as the ultimate end.

The Four Yields of Virtue in Confucian Ethics

Finally, I turn to the four yields of virtue briefly to further the claim that Confucian ethics can be virtue ethics.

Character and Self-cultivation

According to Tu, the Confucian concept of self-cultivation can be generally characterized as “a gradual process of character formation...[for it makes] ‘oneself receptive to the symbolic resources of one’s own culture and responsive to the sharable values of one’s own society.’”²⁰²¹ Chinese philosopher Antonio Cua likewise points out that the formation of character through the self-cultivation of virtues is stressed by the Confucian tradition.²⁰²²

²⁰²⁰ Ibid..

²⁰²¹ Cua, 138. Cua quotes Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 68.

²⁰²² Cua, 269.

How then can self-cultivation be attained? Liu points out that it is achieved through learning, thinking, self-examination, and practicing.²⁰²³ Regarding learning, Confucius explicitly claimed that it is for the sake of the self: “Men of Antiquity studied to improve themselves; men of today study to impress others.”²⁰²⁴ Elsewhere the Master also said, “To love benevolence without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness. To love cleverness without loving learning is liable to lead to deviation from the right path...To love courage without loving learning is liable to lead to insubordination.”²⁰²⁵ In other words, learning is the first step to the cultivation of the self and one’s character. Moreover, for Confucius the process of learning begins with ‘elementary learning’ (such as the learning of the six arts of ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic).²⁰²⁶ Xunzi further claimed that particular virtues (such as endurance) are required in the process of learning.

Learning, however, needs to be reinforced by careful thinking: “If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.”²⁰²⁷ Regarding self-examination, the disciple of Confucius said, “Everyday I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another’s behalf, have I failed to do my best? In what dealings with my

²⁰²³ Liu 44-49. The role of practicing in self-cultivation will be treated separately for it is one of the four key yields of virtue.

²⁰²⁴ Tu, “Confucianism,” 141-42. *Analects*, 14:24.

²⁰²⁵ *Analects*, 17:8.

²⁰²⁶ Tu, *Way, Learning, and Politics*, 32-38.

²⁰²⁷ *Analects*, 2:15.

friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried out myself?”²⁰²⁸

On the other hand, although cultivation of virtues and character formation aim at becoming a man of *jen*, the Confucian tradition does not claim that perfection is a realizable goal for the formation of the self.²⁰²⁹ Even a gentleman still has a lot to learn from others and has his own incapacities. And despite being seen as a sage by his disciples, Confucius clarified that there are certain qualities of the gentleman which he has not succeeded in following.²⁰³⁰

Practice

As I have just said, one way to attain self-cultivation is by means of practicing. It is because only when one puts what one learns into practice can one become *chün tsu*.²⁰³¹ Confucius, by reflecting on his own experience, thus made it clear that a lifelong attempt at accumulating righteous acts is necessary for achieving spontaneity in his words and deeds.²⁰³² Xunzi likewise insisted that one needs to, apart from receiving instructions of a teacher, accumulate and practice these good acts. He said, “If the man in the street applies himself to training and study...continuing his efforts over a long period of time and accumulating good acts without stop, then he can achieve a godlike understanding and

²⁰²⁸ Ibid., 1:4.

²⁰²⁹ Joel Kupperman, “Tradition and Community in the Formation of Character and Self,” in *Confucian Ethics*, eds. Shun Kowng-loi and David B. Wong (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 111.

²⁰³⁰ *Analects*, 7:22; 14.28.

²⁰³¹ Liu 47; *Analects*, 1:6.

²⁰³² *Mencius*, 2A:2. See also Tu, *Way, Learning, and Politics*, 32.

form a triad with Heaven and earth.”²⁰³³ Xunzi explained the importance of practice by employing various agricultural metaphors, “A man who accumulates (practice in) hoeing and ploughing, becomes a farmer; who accumulates (practice in) chopping and shaving wood, becomes an artisan...who accumulates (practice in) the rules of proper conduct (*li*) and standards of justice (*yi*), becomes a superior man.”²⁰³⁴ As a result, Cua concludes that there is an assumption of the primacy of practice implicit in the Confucian tradition.²⁰³⁵

Exemplar

For Confucius we do not only learn from the books alone—we also learn from our friends and even the common people: “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them.”²⁰³⁶ Still, he clarified that the ideal moral character to be learnt is found in *chün tsu* and the sage. This clarification has led contemporary scholars to identify Confucius as one of the first moral teachers in history to “recognize the role of paradigmatic individuals in moral education.”²⁰³⁷

Simply speaking, *chün tsu* is a person of many virtues.²⁰³⁸ He is also one who has the power to influence the course of human affairs: “The virtue of the *chün tsu* is like the wind, the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is

²⁰³³ Xunzi, “Man’s Nature is Evil,” 167.

²⁰³⁴ Liu, 49. Liu quotes Xunzi, 儒效.

²⁰³⁵ Cua, 268.

²⁰³⁶ *Analects*, 7:22.

²⁰³⁷ Cua, 152.

²⁰³⁸ Some of the important ones are: 1) His whole life is a manifestation of *jen*. 2) He regards righteousness as the essence of all things and treasures it more than anything else. 3) He acquires the virtues of wisdom, benevolence, and courage. 4) He has trustworthiness and faithfulness as guiding principles. 5) He is a man of integrity who speaks according to his deeds. 6) He always acts according to the mean and maintains harmony in his mind and deed. See Liu, 55-56; *Analects*, 4:5; 15:18; 14:28; 1:8; 2:13; and *Doctrine of the Mean*, 10:5 (390).

sure to bend.”²⁰³⁹ He is thus understood as the paradigmatic individual in the inculcation of *jen*, and an exemplar of virtues.²⁰⁴⁰ Yet, as an exemplary individual, *chün tsu* serves as a “standard of inspiration by providing a point of orientation rather than specific target of achievement.”²⁰⁴¹ This is similar to the Aristotelian admonition not to imitate or do what the prudent person does but to act *as* the prudent person would.

The sages, in contrast, are almost unattainable for Confucius: First, they do not only acquire the virtues of *chün tsu* but also attain the highest exemplification of virtue.²⁰⁴² Second, they need to be capable of bringing salvation to all by playing a kingly role and by educating the common people as well.²⁰⁴³ In other words, they are perfect human beings of *jen* who can establish a harmonious social and political order. Thus, sagehood was not the practical end or attainable ideal for ordinary moral agents.²⁰⁴⁴ Still, many of his disciples would regard Confucius as not just the transmitter of the Way but also as an exemplar of sagehood even though Confucius did not consider himself a sage at all.²⁰⁴⁵ For Confucius, then *chün tsu* is a model for ordinary life.

Mencius developed Confucius’s view of moral ideals by dividing these ideal moral characters into various levels: *Chün tsu*, as the ‘great man’, is one who shines forth with the full possession of goodness, practices the Way alone, and is not affected by

²⁰³⁹ *Analects*, 12:19.

²⁰⁴⁰ Cua, 148-50.

²⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰⁴² Tu Wei-ming, “The Confucian Sage: Exemplar of Personal Knowledge,” in *Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 29, 42.

²⁰⁴³ *Analects*, 6:30.

²⁰⁴⁴ Cua, 148-49.

²⁰⁴⁵ Tu, “The Confucian Sage: Exemplar of Personal Knowledge,” 43; Ching, 80.

others.²⁰⁴⁶ The sage is one who is totally transformed by this greatness. They are “men who manifest perfectly the virtues that govern human relationships.”²⁰⁴⁷ The divine, in contrast, is one who transcends our human understanding. However, Mencius differed from Confucius in that he was convinced that anyone can become a sage—for goodness was grounded in our human nature and we all have the power to become morally perfect.²⁰⁴⁸ Xunzi agreed with Mencius on this point although they disagreed on how sagehood can be achieved.²⁰⁴⁹

Despite the differences among these Confucian thinkers, it is their general conviction that virtues can be learnt from *chün tzu* and the paradigmatic sage.²⁰⁵⁰ And the sage and *chün tzu* function as a moral character within the community representing the people’s desire for the self-cultivation of virtues.²⁰⁵¹

Community

Moral self-cultivation as stressed by Confucianism is expressed in terms of character formation and the cultivation of virtue of the individual. Still, Tu rightly claims that self-cultivation is never a private matter.²⁰⁵² First, the self is the focal point for all relationships. We find in the *Great Learning*: “The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their

²⁰⁴⁶ Mencius, 3B:2; 7B:25.

²⁰⁴⁷ Ching, 81.

²⁰⁴⁸ Mencius, 6B:2. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, 91.

²⁰⁴⁹ Liu, 43.

²⁰⁵⁰ Tu, *Way, Learning, and Politics*, 29-30.

²⁰⁵¹ Bretzke, “The Tao of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 29.

²⁰⁵² Tu, *Way, Learning, and Politics*, 40-41.

families, they first cultivated their persons.”²⁰⁵³ The dynamic transformative power of self-cultivation leads outward and upward “from self and family through the universal state and even to the universe itself.”²⁰⁵⁴

Second, the five fundamental human relationships imply that the self, the community, and the society cannot be divided, and their corresponding virtues have a social, communal dimension.²⁰⁵⁵ For example, Fingarette points out that virtues like *chung* 忠 (loyalty) and *shu* 恕 (reciprocity) “inherently involve a dynamic relation to other persons.”²⁰⁵⁶ An implicit illustration of this claim can be found in the virtue of filial piety. Tu notes, “A filial son is likely to be watchful over his personal conduct, conscientious about family affairs, responsive to social obligations and, as a result, qualified for political assignments. It is therefore the belief of Confucian thinkers that filial sons often turn out to be loyal ministers. Consequently they value filiality as an importance instrument for fostering political leadership.”²⁰⁵⁷

Third, our self-cultivation can be an act of service to the community and the society as well. We find in the *Analects*, “A benevolent man helps others to take their stand insofar as he himself wishes to take this stand, and get others there insofar as he himself wishes to get there.”²⁰⁵⁸

²⁰⁵³ *Great Learning*, 4 (357).

²⁰⁵⁴ De Bary, 15. De Bary rightly notes that even though the word ‘community’ is missing, Tu repeatedly inserts the word into the sequence from family to state and defines such a Confucian community as ‘fiduciary community’—an ideal community that is grounded in the five fundamental relationships. See Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 39-66.

²⁰⁵⁵ Bretzke, “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 29.

²⁰⁵⁶ Fingarette, 55.

²⁰⁵⁷ Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 41.

²⁰⁵⁸ *Analects*, 6:30.

Therefore, for Confucian ethics, “the individual never operates alone, but always within the matrix of...human relationships.”²⁰⁵⁹ In this way, self-cultivation is not only extended to the communal, but also to the social and global levels. And the community is the basis of this moral matrix and an integral part of the overall enterprise of self-cultivation.²⁰⁶⁰ Indeed, some advocates of Confucian ethics would claim that Confucian virtue ethics has a stronger communal character than its Western counterpart.²⁰⁶¹ Curiously, some of those who oppose Confucianism would charge that Confucianism emphasizes on community so much so that the individual’s identity is either absorbed or compromised.²⁰⁶²

Critics on Confucian Virtue Ethics

In a very recent book on Buddhist ethics, the author argues against the common view that Buddhist ethics is a form of virtue ethics. He insists that the various Buddhist traditions of thought “fall within the family of a welfare-based, universalist consequentialism” rather than virtue ethics and claims that Buddhist ethics is not eudaimonistic at all.²⁰⁶³ One reviewer, however, rightly points out that the author admits and accommodates the fact that Buddhism “is interested in the intrinsic value of virtues

²⁰⁵⁹ Bretzke, “Moral Theology out of East Asia,” 113. Tu refers this matrix as “a fiduciary community of relationships.” See Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 39.

²⁰⁶⁰ Tu, “Confucianism,” 143.

²⁰⁶¹ Bretzke, “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 39.

²⁰⁶² James T. Bretzke, “Human Rights or Human Rites? A Confucian Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41, no. 1 (2003): 57.

²⁰⁶³ Karin Meyers, review of *Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics*, by Charles Goodman, *H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews* (April, 2010), <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25417> (accessed April 19, 2010). Meyers cites Goodman.

by counting virtue (along with happiness) as constitutive of the objective good.”²⁰⁶⁴ She thus suggests that Buddhist ethics is at least a form of ‘character Consequentialism’ and concludes that “the question of whether Buddhist ethics is best understood in terms of a consequentialist or virtue ethics...may not be an either/or proposition.”²⁰⁶⁵

This kind of debate is likewise found in the case of Confucian virtue ethics. By interpreting *li* as moral principles and *jen* as moral feelings, Liu claims that there exists a unity of the two in Confucian ethics.²⁰⁶⁶ They are the external and internal aspects of morality and both have the universal *tao* as the common source. They are also mutually dependent in that *jen* is the essence and the content of *li* while *li* is the concrete manifestation of *jen*. Liu thus perceives the view that Confucian ethics is virtue ethics as inadequate. Subsequently, she counter-proposes that Confucian ethics is a unique kind of ethics in that it is at the same time rule and virtue-based ethics.

But Liu would do well to understand the place of norms in virtue ethics. Virtue ethics has norms, principles, guidelines, and maxims, that is, a variety of directives toward exercising practices that lead to the development of virtue. Without practices, we cannot acquire virtue. But in order to teach virtue, we rely on rules and norms to instruct us to exercise certain practices. Thus, parents try to teach children virtues by using rules, norms, and maxims. For instance, to teach honesty, a parent might say to her son ‘never lie’ or offer the maxim ‘a good boy never lies’.²⁰⁶⁷

²⁰⁶⁴ Ibid..

²⁰⁶⁵ Ibid..

²⁰⁶⁶ Liu, 102, 182-87.

²⁰⁶⁷ See Keenan, “Virtues, Principles and a Consistent Ethics of Life;” Daniel Daly, “The Relationship of Virtue and Norms in the *Summa Theologiae*,” *The Heythrop Journal* 51, no. 2 (March 2010): 214-29.

9.5 Confucian Reception of the Virtues of the Beatitudes

According to some Christian theologians, the Beatitudes has been perceived as ‘a spiritual synopsis’ that is comparable to the eightfold path of Buddhism.²⁰⁶⁸ Still, our work shows that the Beatitudes is more than spiritual text but the basis of a particular set of Christian virtues that touches the personal, communal, and social levels of the moral agent. Based on our conviction that Confucian ethics can be virtue ethics, I am interested to see how this set of Christian virtues can be received to the Confucian Chinese audience in East Asia. In so doing, I explore how each of the key virtues identified our previous chapter can be compared to those found in the Confucian tradition. As I said earlier, because of the differences in literary forms between the Beatitudes and the Confucian texts, I do not look for eight corresponding maxims but rather for parallel virtues. Obviously, benevolence and righteousness are the overriding virtues for Confucian tradition. But we will see a simple correspondence between the Beatitudes and the Confucian text in the virtues that they each promote.

Humility

The first beatitude is concerned with both material and spiritual poverty and hence calls for the virtue of humility toward God. It also reminds us our responsibility to tackle poverty by practicing sharing and changing the unjust infrastructure on the social level. In the Confucian tradition, we likewise find the discussion of poverty and the need of

²⁰⁶⁸ Bauman, 312.

humility. In the first place, Confucian thinkers like Confucius were born at a time of political and social unrest. The experience of poverty was a concrete reality. Mencius lamented, “Nowadays, the means laid down for the people are sufficient neither for the care of parents nor for the support of wife and children. In good years life is always hard, while in bad years there is no way of escaping death. Thus simply to survive takes more energy than the people have.”²⁰⁶⁹ Still, it was also the personal experience of these thinkers, as in the case of Confucius. They thus dealt with this concrete human experience in their moral teachings.

Second, Confucius was convinced that the most effective means to eliminate poverty is to initiate social change from the top. He thus insisted that it is a fundamental task of the government: When being asked about what should be done to the numerous people in a country, Confucius said without hesitation, “Make the people rich.”²⁰⁷⁰ However, Confucius did not make the elimination of material poverty the final end of human flourishing. He continued, “When the people have become rich...train them.” And the pursuit of wealth, though points to an important basic good for which one strives, is not the absolute goal of human life either. The Master said, “If wealth were a permissible pursuit, I would be willing even to act as a guard holding a whip outside the market place. If it is not, I shall follow my own preferences.”²⁰⁷¹ In particular, he rejected the use of immoral or unrighteous means to attain this good. He said, “In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one’s elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found.

²⁰⁶⁹ *Mencius*, 1A:7.

²⁰⁷⁰ *Analects*, 13:9.

²⁰⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7:12.

Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.”²⁰⁷² Here, as discussed earlier, Confucius was convinced that happiness can also be found in the midst of poverty and other hardship.

Mencius further insisted that only when the basic needs of the people are fulfilled can they follow the leader and be formed. He explained,

Only a gentleman can have a constant heart in spite of a lack of constant means of support. The people, on the other hand, will not have constant hearts if they are without constant means...Hence when determining what means of support the people should have, a clear-sighted ruler ensures that these are sufficient, on the one hand, for the care of parents, and, on the other hand, for the support of wife and children, so that the people always have sufficient food in good years and escape starvation in bad; only then does he drive them towards goodness; in this way the people find it easy to follow him.²⁰⁷³

Regarding the teaching on being humble, the *Doctrine of the Mean* is seen as an excellent commentary on the virtue of humility.²⁰⁷⁴ Tu, in his analytical interpretation of this book, succinctly writes, “The way of the profound person strongly suggests a sense of humility...The profound person is plain, simple, amiable, for he knows that the ultimate manifestation of his true nature can never be attained by breaking away from human commonality. Thus, in a quiet and modest manner he goes about the great task of self-realization. He does not assume an air of superiority; nor does he pretend to have privileged access to an extraordinary truth.”²⁰⁷⁵

²⁰⁷² Ibid., 7:16.

²⁰⁷³ Mencius, 1A:7.

²⁰⁷⁴ Donald Corcoran, “Benedictine Humility and Confucian Sincerity,” in *Purity of Heart and Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions*, ed. Bruno Barnhart and Joseph Wong (New York: Continuum, 2001), 233.

²⁰⁷⁵ Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 89.

In the *Analects*, we too find various texts that advocate the cultivation of humility. For instance, the Master turned to the example of a historical figure to illustrate the meaning of humility. He said, “Meng Chi-fan was not given to boasting. When the army was routed, he stayed in the rear. But on entering the gate, he goaded his horse on, saying, ‘I did not lag behind out of presumption. It was simply that my horse refused to go forward.’”²⁰⁷⁶ Later Confucius also spoke against boasting, “Extravagance means ostentation, frugality means shabbiness. I would rather be shabby than ostentatious.”²⁰⁷⁷

Last but not least, in modern western society Confucianism is often understood as a promoter of filial piety. Xunzi’s formulation of the virtue of filial piety is significant in the understanding of humility.²⁰⁷⁸ *Xiao* 孝 (filial piety/filiality) is the proper response toward one’s family (especially the parents) that makes fullness of life possible. By attending to one’s origin, filiality reveals and expresses one’s fundamental dependence, frailty, and emotions toward the origin from which one receives so much so that one can never fully repay the debt incurred. It calls for humility toward one’s origin. Now since there are many levels of origins in our human relationships and lives, such as the origin of life given by Heaven, Xunzi’s formulation and interpretation extends to one’s humility toward the transcendence (by means of virtues like *li*) and hence finds parallel with the first beatitude’s view of being humble to God. In the case of the kings and rulers, the

²⁰⁷⁶ *Analects*, 6:15.

²⁰⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7:36.

²⁰⁷⁸ Yearley, “Virtues and Religious Virtues in the Confucian Tradition,” 143-44.

recognition of their origin and humility thus call them to govern and rule justly and not to be a dictator.²⁰⁷⁹

Solidarity

Those who are sensitive toward and mourn for the suffering of the poor, as described in the second beatitude, demonstrate to us that mourning is an expression of the virtue of solidarity. It calls for our awareness of the suffering in our world, protest against social injustice, and reflection on our personal, communal, and social practices. Although the concept of solidarity is not explicitly found in the Confucian tradition, stories of mourning and ritual practices of mourning can be identified.

A concrete incident is Confucius's response toward the death of his beloved disciple Yen Hui. In the *Analects* we find, "When Yen Yuan died, the Master said, 'Alas! Heaven has bereft me! Heaven has bereft me!'" It continues, "When Yen Yuan died, in weeping for him, the Master showed undue sorrow. His followers asked, 'You are showing undue sorrow.' 'Am I? Yet if not for him, for whom should I show undue sorrow?'"²⁰⁸⁰ In other words, Confucius grieved seriously on the occasion of the death of a good disciple.

Though he did not experience mourning personally, Mencius suggested that sensitivity toward the sufferer is an innate response of humankind. He said, "No man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others... Suppose a man were, all of a

²⁰⁷⁹ Xunzi, "The Regulations of a King," in *Basic Writings*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 33-55.

²⁰⁸⁰ *Analects*, 11:9, 10.

sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. From this it can be seen that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human.”²⁰⁸¹ Thus, what one needs to do is to develop this heart of compassion.

Xunzi, who stressed the importance of the virtue of *li*, perceived mourning as a proper ritual practice to express due reverence and grief toward the deceased by the community members.²⁰⁸² Once the person is confirmed dead, a fixed three-year mourning period then begins. When the fixed three-year mourning period is over, sacrificial memorial rites are conducted at various times with certain symbolic, expressive acts, including the wearing of a mourning garment that expresses the feelings of grief. For Xunzi, such a long, fixed period of mourning has a multi-level and practical purpose and has to be promoted—it accommodates the emotions involved and extends the honor due; it distinguishes the duties owed to different relatives and prevents forgetfulness by the mourners; and it represents the ultimate principle of harmony and unity within a community. In this way, the practice of mourning becomes a communal event (and even a social one depending on the status of the one who died).

²⁰⁸¹ *Mencius*, 2A:6.

²⁰⁸² Xunzi, “A Discussion of Heaven,” 91-110.

With regards to being in solidarity with the sufferer, Confucius pointed out that the first step is to empathize with the sufferer. In so doing, he thus said, “When eating in the presence of one who had been bereaved, the Master never ate his full.”²⁰⁸³

Finally, although it is the belief of the Confucian tradition that *chün tzu*, who has fully developed his moral nature, would understand this ultimate mystery of suffering and accepts it willingly; it is also the Confucian thinkers’ common belief that one’s moral nature commits the person to accompany and help others to understand and ease their suffering. For them this commitment is a moral responsibility of the moral person.²⁰⁸⁴ Unfortunately, they did not discuss this moral responsibility beyond personal level.

Meekness

The third beatitude points to the virtue of meekness that is humility expanded to the lives of the poor and the powerful. For the poor and the sufferer, humility as such urges the practice of self control and restraint from anger and revenge. For those who are in power and authority, they are in turn called to be gentle and restrain from abuse of power or being arrogant. And its social relevance is obvious.

Perhaps the weakest link between the Beatitudes and the Confucian virtues is meekness. In the Confucian tradition, we find only some similar teachings on meekness where both the inferior and the superior have to cultivate gentleness according to their status. Regarding the poor and the oppressed, Confucius was fully aware of their strong inclination toward anger and vengeance. He thus said, “It is more difficult not to

²⁰⁸³ *Analects*, 7:9.

²⁰⁸⁴ Taylor, 130.

complain of injustice when poor than not to behave with arrogance when rich.”²⁰⁸⁵ He then explained that *chiün tzu* would learn to refrain from revenge toward unrighteousness.²⁰⁸⁶

In fact, Confucius was perceived by his disciples as a man of meekness—benign, upright, courteous, temperate, and complaisant.²⁰⁸⁷ He did not seek anger or revenge toward what had happened to him. One concrete incident was his response towards the death of his beloved disciple. He said to the Duke Ai, “There was one Yen Hui who was eager to learn...Unfortunately his allotted span was a short one and he died. Now there is no one.”²⁰⁸⁸ Taylor interprets that Confucius grieved without bitterness toward Heaven but accepted the death of Yen Hui as the Mandate of Heaven.²⁰⁸⁹

Mencius, by commending the virtuous acts of sage king Shun who did not store up his anger and bitterness toward his brother who often plotted against his wife, likewise pointed out that meekness is a virtue of the benevolent man. He said, “A benevolent man never harbors anger or nurses a grudge against his brother.”²⁰⁹⁰

For the powerful, Confucius commented that it is not enough for the powerful and rich not to be arrogant. We find in the *Analects*, “Tzu-kung said, ‘Poor without being obsequious, wealthy without being arrogant.’ What do you think of this saying?” The Master said, “That will do, but better still ‘Poor yet delighting in the Way, wealthy yet

²⁰⁸⁵ *Analects*, 14:10.

²⁰⁸⁶ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 10:3 (389-90).

²⁰⁸⁷ *Analects*, 1:10.

²⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 6:3.

²⁰⁸⁹ Taylor, 129.

²⁰⁹⁰ *Mencius*, 5A:3.

observant of the rites.’’²⁰⁹¹ Here, Confucius again suggested that the wealthy and the powerful should imitate the rite-observing *chün tzu* who shows forbearance and gentleness in teaching those who are inferior to them.²⁰⁹²

Obedience to and Discernment of the Mandate of Heaven

The fourth beatitude highlights the virtue of obedience in our relation with God and, in so doing one strives first to discern what God’s will is for each of us. The community and society likewise strive to discern God’s will and hold up to it faithfully. Although Confucianism as a religion does not hold any view on establishing active relationship between Heaven and humankind, it does talk about the Mandate of Heaven and discusses the issues of understanding of and responding to the Mandate of Heaven.

First, Confucian thinkers acknowledged the existence of the mysterious Mandate of Heaven. According to Chinese philosopher D. C. Lau, the theory in the Mandate of Heaven was innovated (by the Duke of Chou) long before the time of Confucius. Lau notes, “Heaven cares profoundly about the welfare of the common people and the Emperor is set up expressly to promote that welfare...As soon as he forgets his function and begins to rule for his own sake, Heaven will withdraw the Decree and bestow it on someone more worthy. Thus the Decree of Heaven is a moral imperative.”²⁰⁹³ In this way, the fate of the Emperor (the Son of Heaven) echoes that of the kings in the Old Testament such as Saul who were anointed by God to guide the Israelites. However, Confucian

²⁰⁹¹ *Analects*, 1:15.

²⁰⁹² *Doctrine of the Mean*, 10:3 (389-90).

²⁰⁹³ D.C. Lau, trans., introduction to *The Analects* by Confucius (Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1979), 28.

understanding of the Mandate of Heaven as moral imperative tends to echo the task aspect of God's righteousness rather than the gift aspect intended in the fourth beatitude.

Second, since the time of Confucius, the Mandate of Heaven was no longer confined to the Emperor but to everyone who was "subject to the Decree of Heaven which enjoined [one] to be moral and it was [one's] duty to live up to the demands of that Decree."²⁰⁹⁴ As a result, the Mandate of Heaven has been conceived as individual mission and personal commitment, and each individual has the responsibility to respond to it.²⁰⁹⁵ In particular, Confucius emphasized the following of the Mandate of Heaven and warned against any attempt to disobey the Mandate of Heaven: "When you have offended against Heaven, there is nowhere you can turn to in your prayers."²⁰⁹⁶ This emphasis on following the Mandate of Heaven, as some scholars suggest, is to "exercise a moral political conscience in all human affairs...[to] provide a cosmic dimension to the individual's own moral understanding...[and to] furnish the human person with the capacity for self-transcendence."²⁰⁹⁷

Third, in order to follow the Mandate of Heaven, one needs first to know and understand what the Mandate of Heaven is. Confucius thus insisted that knowing and understanding is crucial: "A man has no way of becoming a gentleman unless he understands Destiny."²⁰⁹⁸ He also claimed that it is a long process: "At fifty I understood

²⁰⁹⁴ Ibid..

²⁰⁹⁵ De Bary, 5.

²⁰⁹⁶ *Analects*, 3:13. However, for Confucius such emphasis does not mean passive dependence on the Mandate of Heaven. He was convinced that one should still work hard for one's well-being. Also, at times Confucius seemed to refer the Mandate of Heaven as the law of nature.

²⁰⁹⁷ Bretzke, "The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics," 38. Bretzke quotes de Bary, "The Prophetic Voice in the Confucian Noble Man," 7.

²⁰⁹⁸ *Analects*, 20:3.

the Decree of Heaven.”²⁰⁹⁹ Such a claim also implies that understanding the Mandate of Heaven is a difficult task even for the sage. Still, Lau rightly comments that for Confucius, by the same token, understanding the Decree of Heaven is possible.²¹⁰⁰

How then can one know and understand the Decree of Heaven? Although the Confucian tradition does not contain the Western notion of discernment, Mencius’s view is not far from it. He argued that the acceptance of one’s destiny should be conditional—one only accepts what is proper to one’s destiny. Mencius said, “Though nothing happens that is not due to Destiny, one accepts willingly only what is one’s proper Destiny. That is why he who understands Destiny does not stand under a wall on the verge of collapse.”²¹⁰¹ For Mencius one’s proper destiny is to follow only the Way and hence one needs to discern carefully the Mandate of Heaven.

Finally, Confucius did not agree that one should strive for something that is unattainable.²¹⁰² In this way, Confucius seemed to oppose the author of the fourth beatitude who stresses on hungering and thirsting for God’s righteousness.

Charity and Benevolence

The fifth beatitude suggests the virtue of mercy which is an immediate effect of the virtue of charity. It calls for concrete merciful and charitable acts toward those who are living a miserable life including our enemies. In the field of comparative ethics, many

²⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:4.

²¹⁰⁰ D.C. Lau, trans., introduction to *The Analects* by Confucius, 28.

²¹⁰¹ *Mencius*, 7A:2.

²¹⁰² It is noted that the narrative in *Analects* 14:38 could lead to the mistaken view that Confucius was a stubborn and immoderate person in striving for what is impossible. See 張連康, *廿一世紀的當家思想—論語*, 下冊 (台北: 漢康圖書出版社, 1999), 857-58.

scholars agree that *jen* as a specific virtue “offers parallels to the Christian virtue of love or charity.”²¹⁰³ For example, *jen* is inclusive in nature as Christian charity is: Mencius said, “A benevolent man extends his love from those he loves to those he does not love.”²¹⁰⁴

Two caveats are needed. First, Christians love one another because God first loved us. That corollary is not in Confucianism: The Confucian teaching of benevolence does not offer Heaven’s love for humankind as a reason for imitation. Second, in the pre-Confucian era, *jen* was understood as an aristocratic virtue of the superior showing kindness toward the inferior and having pity on the helpless.²¹⁰⁵ It was only much later that Confucius transformed it into a general virtue. Thus, in order to understand *jen* as a virtue of benevolence, I turn to the view of other Confucian thinkers, especially that of Mencius.

In the first place, for Mencius, the most destitute and helpless are “[those] old men without wives, old women without husbands, old people without children, [and] young children without fathers.”²¹⁰⁶ They are the most disadvantaged people in the society because they are deprived of even the most basic human relationships. Together with the lesser virtue *en* 恩 (kindness) *jen* shows kindness and mercy to the destitute and the helpless.

²¹⁰³ Ching, 93.

²¹⁰⁴ *Mencius*, 7B:1. See also 7A:46; 4B:28.

²¹⁰⁵ Ching, 93.

²¹⁰⁶ *Mencius*, 1B:5; 4A:27.

Second, the virtue of benevolence emerges from our human nature. Mencius said, “The heart of compassionate is the germ of benevolence.”²¹⁰⁷ And a gentleman’s compassion and benevolence extend to the natural world: “It is the way of a benevolent man...once having seen them alive, he cannot bear to see them die, and once having heard their cry, he cannot bear to eat their flesh.”²¹⁰⁸

Third, there are different levels of benevolence according to its various objects: “A gentleman is sparing with living creatures but show no benevolence towards them; he shows benevolence towards the people but is not attached to them. He is attached to his parents but is merely benevolent towards the people; he is benevolent towards the people but is merely sparing with living creatures.”²¹⁰⁹ In other words, benevolence and mercy are practiced differently towards family members, community members, and nature.

Fourth, Mencius perceived benevolence more as a virtue of the leader in helping the people than simply a personal virtue in human relationship. He claimed that benevolence and righteousness are all that matters for a leader and they are the guiding principles in government.²¹¹⁰ In this way Mencius strongly advocated for a benevolent government. Elsewhere he suggested concrete acts that such a government should do. For example, such a government will take the people away from their work only after they have tilled the land and ministered to the needs of their parents. It will have its

²¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2A:6, 6A:6.

²¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1A:7.

²¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 7A:45.

²¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1A:1, 5; 2A:5; 3A:3. See also Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 50.

resources opened for all to use, exempt them from border duty/tax, and limit the scope of punishment to solely the one who committed the crime.²¹¹¹

These institutional practices, as a whole, have demonstrated to us the possible social implications of benevolence, especially in the context of government.²¹¹² First, people are the center of governance. Mencius said, “The people are of the supreme importance...last comes the ruler.”²¹¹³ Therefore, it can and must be claimed that all political roles exist at the service of the people. Second, a benevolent government will therefore commit itself to the *welfare* of its people. In so doing, benevolence is manifested, as Mencius explained in various places, through satisfying the basic needs of the people, educating them in the fundamental human relationships, and demanding their service without hardship.²¹¹⁴ Third, one should vigorously oppose those practices that are motivated simply by utility, advantages, and profit. In this way, institutional and societal reforms, even to the point of revolution, for the good of the society are permissible.²¹¹⁵

Integrity

The beatitude on ‘pure in heart’ implies the virtue of integrity of one’s inner self and outer actions. In particular, it calls for truthfulness in one’s words and the practice of self-examination. In the Confucian tradition, *chung* renders a virtue close to that of

²¹¹¹ Ibid., 1A:5; 1B:5; 2A:5; 3A:3.

²¹¹² 蔡仁厚, 310-16.

²¹¹³ *Mencius*, 7B:14.

²¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1A:7; 3A:3; 7A:12, 14.

²¹¹⁵ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 50.

integrity. It refers to one's action being loyal to one's own heart and conscience.²¹¹⁶ And its counterpart is the virtue of *shu* (reciprocity) that is an extension of *chung* to others.

For Confucius, it is important to act in accordance to what one says and vice versa. The Master said, "Earnest in practicing the ordinary virtues, and careful in speaking about them; if, in his practice, he has anything defective, the superior man dares not but exert himself; and if, in his words, he has any excess, he dares not allow himself such license. Thus his words have respect to his actions, and his actions have respect to his words."²¹¹⁷ However, Confucius did not elaborate this specific virtue further. Rather, elsewhere he talked about the primacy of one's deeds over words—one should be quick in action and exceed in his deeds.²¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, Confucius was aware of the lack of integrity in the daily life of many people. He said, "Men all say, 'We are wise,' but being driven forward and taken in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, they know not how to escape. Men all say, 'We are wise,' but happening to choose the course of the Mean, they are not able to keep it for a round month."²¹¹⁹ He thus compared one who lacks integrity to a small man.²¹²⁰

Finally, within the context of Confucian spiritual practice, the Confucian tradition advocates the examination of the self as Christian spirituality does. As quoted earlier from the *Analects*, Confucius's disciple practiced such examination frequently:

²¹¹⁶ Ching, 94. Chan Wing-tsit, by interpreting the words of the Confucian pupil Tseng Tzu (*Analects*, 4:15), similarly claims that *chung* points to the development of the self's character while *shu* points to that of others. See Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 785-86. In contemporary usage, *chung*, however, can be referred to the loyalty of the subject to his/her superior as well.

²¹¹⁷ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 13:4 (394-95).

²¹¹⁸ *Analects*, 1:14; 4:24; 14:27.

²¹¹⁹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 7 (388).

²¹²⁰ *Analects*, 17:12. With regards to the virtue of truthfulness, unfortunately Confucian thinkers did not say much.

“Everyday I examine myself on three counts.”²¹²¹ In this way, self-examination is regarded as a practice recommended for all. Taylor further claims that the whole spiritual process of self-cultivation implies the virtue of integrity, for self-cultivation is aimed at “attaining authenticity...through conscientious study, critical self-examination, continual effort, and a willingness to change oneself.”²¹²²

Peacemaking

The virtue of peacemaking in the seventh beatitude is built upon righteousness and is concerned primarily with personal and communal practice and only subsequently for social change. It does not, however, advocate for forming Christian political groups. Within the Confucian tradition, a peaceful society is an important goal of the Confucian thinkers who witnessed the negative impacts of war during their life times. For example, as noted before, Confucius lived in a time of political unrest and hence longed for an ideal society that is well-ordered and politically stable, and is based on good government that responds to the citizens’ basic needs. Like Aristotle, Confucius was concerned about the establishment of a good society rather than inter-personal relationship.

In order to achieve such a peaceful and ordered society, the Confucian tradition generally rejects the idea of warfare as an effective means. Mencius, in particular, inherited Confucius’s view and said: “In wars to gain land, the dead fill the plains; in wars to gain cities, the dead fill the cities. This is known as showing the land the way to

²¹²¹ Ibid., 1:4.

²¹²² Mary Evelyn Buckner, introduction to *Confucian Spirituality*, 6. Buckner cites W. Theodore de Bary, *Learning for One’s Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

devour human flesh. Death is too light a punishment for such men. Hence those skilled in war should suffer the most severe punishment; those who secure alliances with other feudal lords come next...”²¹²³ In other words, he perceived waging war and its related behaviors as a grave crime.²¹²⁴ Instead, he was convinced that it is the virtues of benevolence and righteousness in the person that ‘conquers’ the people and hence achieves peace.²¹²⁵

In his debate on military affairs, Xunzi further stressed that the virtue of *li* is greatly needed in establishing order and peace. He said, “If he honors rites and values righteousness, the state will be ordered... To honor rights and seek to achieve merit is the highest manner of action.”²¹²⁶ Here, we note that Xunzi did not reject the possibility of war for the sake of righteousness. He explained, “The benevolent man does indeed love others, and because he loves others, he hates to see men do them harm. The righteous man acts in accordance with what is right, and for that reason he hates to see men do wrong. He takes up arms in order to put an end to violence and to do away with harm, not in order to contend with others for spoils.”²¹²⁷

Nevertheless, the emphasis on benevolence, righteousness, and ritual propriety points to the Confucian tradition’s claim that it is the inner forces within the person rather than the external forces of government and military that holds the society together.²¹²⁸

²¹²³ *Mencius*, 4A:14.

²¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7B:4.

²¹²⁵ 王邦雄, 等著, *孟子義理疏解* (台北: 鵝湖出版社, 2002), 288-89; *Mencius*, *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Classics, 1970), 7B:4.

²¹²⁶ Xunzi, “Debating Military Affairs,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 60.

²¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²¹²⁸ Hellwig, 207.

This claim in turn implies that self-cultivation is the means by which peace of the world can be achieved. The Master said, “[The gentleman] cultivates himself and thereby brings peace and security to the people.”²¹²⁹ The *Great Learning* explains this relationship between self-cultivation and peacemaking, and stresses the need of learning as the starting point:

Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families.
Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons.
Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts.
Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.²¹³⁰

In particular, one should learn literature, fine arts, and craftsmanship.²¹³¹

In sum, although Confucius (and his followers) did not discuss peacemaking on inter-personal and communal levels, he was convinced that peacemaking should begin with one’s inner self and then extend to the family (and community) and finally the state (and the universe). In this way, Confucius partially shared the view of the beatitude with regards to the path to peacemaking.

Righteousness

Our exegesis and interpretation indicate that the virtue of righteousness runs through the Beatitudes and is specifically stressed in the seventh and eighth beatitudes by the author in relation to the virtues of peacemaking and fortitude respectively. We also

²¹²⁹ *Analects*, 14:42.

²¹³⁰ *Great Learning*, 4 (357-58).

²¹³¹ Hellwig, 208.

note that Christian understanding of righteousness has both the gift aspect (that emphasizes God's righteousness) and the task aspect and hence cannot be solely understood as human justice. In the Confucian tradition, the term *yi*, though generally translated into righteousness or justice, as some scholars rightly point out, likewise should not be totally equated with fairness or justice understood in a Western philosophical context.²¹³² Both Confucius and Mencius offered helpful interpretations of righteousness.

For Confucius, *yi* is frequently paired up with the vice of excessive concern for profit—these sayings imply that righteousness renders both fair distribution of wealth and the lack of greed.²¹³³ Still, it also renders other meanings, such as the need to address the problem of poverty, the provision of assistance to the needy, and the importance of doing what is right.²¹³⁴ In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius thus said, “Righteousness is the accordance of actions with what is right, and the great exercise of it is in honoring the worthy.”²¹³⁵ Subsequently, Confucius claimed that the right thing to do is to repay those who harm us with justice rather than with goodness.²¹³⁶ Here, Confucius's view was quite different from the Christian commandment of love. Still, Confucius's emphasis on righteousness has led some Chinese scholars to liken him with prophets of the Old Testament such as Amos who stresses more on morality than religiosity.²¹³⁷

²¹³² Bretzke, “The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 31n21. Bretzke cites R. P. Peerenboom, “Confucian Justice: Achieving a Human Society,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1990): 17-32.

²¹³³ Cline, “369. See also *Analects*, 4:16; 6:4; 16:10.

²¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 370.

²¹³⁵ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 20:5 (405-6).

²¹³⁶ *Analects*, 14:34.

²¹³⁷ Yeo, *What has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing*, 122, 24.

Nevertheless, we should briefly examine a rather controversial passage in the

Analects:

The Governor of She said to Confucius, “In our village there is a man nicknamed ‘Straight Body’. When his father stole a sheep, he gave evidence against him.” Confucius answered, “In our village those who are straight are quite different. Fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. Straightness is to be found in such behavior.”²¹³⁸

Clearly Confucius would agree that stealing is wrong and that lying, generally speaking, is wrong, but he was more concerned about familial responsibilities and loyalties.²¹³⁹ One scholar interprets that for Confucius, who definitely had an appreciation for a sense of justice, “legal justice is considered secondary to parental loyalty.”²¹⁴⁰

Mencius developed the view of Confucius and argued that profit cannot be the metric for choosing or determining what is right. He said, “What is the point of mentioning the word ‘profit’? All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness.”²¹⁴¹ Mencius also insisted that “there are things we do not currently regard as unrighteous, that we should regard as unrighteous, because they are similar in ethically relevant respects to things we do recognize as unrighteous.”²¹⁴² In addition, he connected the virtue of righteousness with the emotions of *xiu* 羞 (shame) and *wu* 惡 (dislike) to explain the psychological reason for choosing righteousness: One will not allow oneself to be disgraced by committing an unrighteous act.²¹⁴³

²¹³⁸ *Analects*, 13:18.

²¹³⁹ 張連康, 765-68.

²¹⁴⁰ Cline, 370.

²¹⁴¹ *Mencius*, 1A:1.

²¹⁴² Van Norden, “Virtue of Righteousness in Mencius,” 151; *Mencius*, 6A:10; 7B:31.

²¹⁴³ *Mencius*, 2A:6; 6A:6.

Fortitude for the sake of Righteousness

The eighth beatitude stresses the virtue of fortitude for the sake of justice as well as the virtue of gratitude toward God. It calls for readiness to embrace opposition and all kinds of persecution. In the Confucian tradition, although Confucian thinkers did not talk about enduring persecution *per se*, they recognized the virtue of fortitude and named it as one of the three universally binding virtues for *chiün tzu*.²¹⁴⁴ However, they also made it clear that courage must be accompanied by *yi*. When being asked if courage is esteemed by *chiün tzu* the Master answered, “The superior man holds righteousness to be of highest importance. A man in a superior situation, having valor without righteousness, will be guilty of insubordination; one of the lower people, having valor without righteousness, will commit robbery.”²¹⁴⁵

Confucius further insisted that the virtue of fortitude does not simply accompany righteousness; rather, it must be practiced for the sake of *yi*. The Master thus said, “If on looking within, one finds oneself to be in the wrong, then even though one’s adversary be only a common fellow coarsely clad one is bound to tremble with fear. But if one finds oneself in the right, one goes forward even against men in the thousands.”²¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, Confucian thinkers agreed that sacrificing one’s life is a courageous act.²¹⁴⁷ Thus, Mencius found giving up one’s life for the sake of righteousness most praiseworthy. The book of *Mencius* tells one of the most famous conversations of Mencius:

²¹⁴⁴ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 20:8. The other two universally binding virtues are wisdom and magnanimity. The terms ‘fortitude’ and ‘courage’ are used interchangeably here.

²¹⁴⁵ *Analects*, 17:23.

²¹⁴⁶ *Mencius*, 2A:2.

²¹⁴⁷ *Analects*, 14:12.

Fish is what I want; bear's palm is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take bear's palm than fish. Life is what I want; dutifulness is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would choose dutifulness rather than life. On the one hand, though life is what I want, there is something I want more than life. That is why I do not cling to life at all costs. On the other hand, though death is what I loathe, there is something I loathe more than death. That is why there are troubles I do not avoid.²¹⁴⁸

Confucius, who paid special attention to the cultivation of *jen*, had similarly suggested that one should, for benevolence's sake, sacrifice one's earthly life. He said, "For Gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence while it is inconceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished."²¹⁴⁹

As a whole, the Confucian tradition's rigorous view on upholding righteousness and benevolence runs parallel to the Christian practice of martyrdom although the latter's ultimate object is Christian faith in Christ. Furthermore, some scholars rightly perceive the teachings of Confucian thinkers as a manifestation of the prophetic voice found in Christian Scripture—they rendered severe judgments and criticisms on their unrighteous rulers by appealing to the authority of Heaven.²¹⁵⁰ One concrete example is Mencius's fearless criticism against the pretention of the powerful and the prestigious:

When speaking to men of consequence it is necessary to look on them with contempt and not be impressed by their lofty position. Their hall is tens of feet high; the capitals are several feet broad. Were I to meet with success, I would not indulge in such things. Their tables, laden with food, measure ten feet across, and their female attendants are counted in the hundreds. Were I to meet with success, I would not indulge in such things. They have a great time drinking, driving and hunting, with a retinue of a

²¹⁴⁸ *Mencius*, 6A:10.

²¹⁴⁹ *Analects*, 15:9.

²¹⁵⁰ De Bary, 6-9.

thousand chariots. Were I to meet with success, I would not indulge in such things. All the things they do I would not do, and everything I do is in accordance with ancient institutions. Why, then, should I cower before them?²¹⁵¹

With regards to the virtue of gratitude, there is no direct discussion by Confucian thinkers. Still, as noted in our earlier exploration of Confucian humility, Xunzi highlighted the need to attend to one's origin in our relationships with others. He thus suggested that *jing* 敬 (respectful reverence) is the appropriate virtue and gratuitous response to Heaven and earth, the origins of the unpayable debt of human life.²¹⁵² In this way, *jing* can be comparable to Christian virtue of gratitude toward God.

A Radical Demand?

Finally, for Confucian thinkers our self-cultivation of moral virtues and transformation into *chiün tzu* imply that we need acquire all these and other virtues throughout our entire moral life. In this way, they called for a radical ethical demand in the same way as the virtues of the Beatitudes do—they are not independent ethical dispositions but form a tightly integrated and sophisticated whole that proposes a radical ethical demands on being followers of Christ.

²¹⁵¹ *Mencius*, 7B:34.

²¹⁵² Yearley, "Virtues and Religious Virtues in the Confucian Tradition," 143.

9.6 Some Reflections and Precautions

According to Yearley, the history of comparison in religious thoughts can be traced back to the sixteenth century when Catholic missionaries entered China.²¹⁵³ Within the field of philosophical ethics, Stalnaker notes that there is a twofold motivation (especially on the part of the Western world) for engaging comparative work. On the one hand, due to the reality of “its colonialist past and current global hegemony, the modern West has simultaneously developed traditions of attentive and empathetic attention to other religions and philosophical systems.”²¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, there is also a more intellectual and ethical need to “nurture and follow more specific traditions of personal development in order to (1) follow with integrity our considered conclusions about ultimate values; and (2) have the rich philosophical, metaphysical, ritual, and artistic resources for personal formation that particular, historically extended traditions provide.”²¹⁵⁵ From an intellectual point of view, both Stalnaker and Yearley are convinced that the process of comparison helps show the distinctiveness and complexity of those previously assumed ideas, and expand the scope of other subjects by examining conceptions that were ignored previously and adjusting those general accounts about these conceptions.

Nevertheless, among those who work on comparative ethics between the Christian and Confucian traditions, Yearley and Stalnaker are noted for taking efforts to

²¹⁵³ Lee H. Yearley, “A Comparison between Classical Chinese Thought and Thomistic Christian Thought,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 427.

²¹⁵⁴ Stalnaker, 293.

²¹⁵⁵ Ibid..

reflect on the contemporary trend of comparative work and offer personal suggestions and precautions on future direction of doing comparative work on these two traditions. I find them helpful for my own reflection on bringing the Beatitudes to the Confucian Chinese audience.

The first insight is that certain general, major motifs, such as worldview and intellectual emphases, often appear in contemporary comparative works between Chinese and Western thoughts.²¹⁵⁶ In our case, we too have turned to, among others, the motifs of virtue, religiousness, and worldview of the two traditions. By comparing these general perspectives, abstract ideas, as well as cultural contexts, they observe that there are substantial differences between the Confucian tradition and Christianity.²¹⁵⁷ For instance, the Confucian tradition perceives the Heaven as an uncreated, organismic, and naturalistic one; and it emphasizes the practical realm rather than the theoretical one in its intellectual pursuit. In addition, Confucian thinkers prefer the use of narratives to lengthy, rigorous analysis in presenting ideas.

In our specific context of bringing the Beatitudes to the Confucian Chinese audience through the lens of virtue, we too identify certain dissimilarities between the two traditions. First, the difference in their overall worldviews within which the virtues of the Beatitudes and of the Confucian tradition are formed leads to different goals. For the Confucian tradition, the ultimate purpose of self-cultivation of virtues is the self-transformation and subsequent transformation of the universe through which the self is

²¹⁵⁶ Yearley, "A Comparison between Classical Chinese Thought and Thomistic Christian Thought," 428-36.

²¹⁵⁷ See also Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 170.

united with Heaven and Earth. Christian acquisition of virtues, in contrast, is aimed at following Christ (discipleship), bringing about the kingdom of God, and achieving union with God. Subsequently, by cultivating certain virtues like filial piety Confucian tradition tends to confirm and affirm traditional cultural order albeit while incorporate moral progress, whereas Christianity maintains a variety of stances of affirmation and negation towards its cultures.²¹⁵⁸

Second, although the Confucian tradition may have a religious element, it does not uphold the idea of a personal God but an impersonal Heaven. There is no dominant goal of union with God but self-transformation and subsequent transformation of the universe. Thus, Confucian virtue ethics does not have a transcendental being as the source of its virtues and as *telos*. And the overall self-cultivation of moral virtues is this-worldly. Christian virtue ethics, in contrast, points to a triadic relationship with God and others, and has God's grace as the source for the cultivation of virtues. Third, certain virtue-relevant concepts related to the Christian tradition are absent in the other tradition. One particular example is the notion of grace that we explored earlier. For Confucian virtue ethics, there is no conception of external help in the process of self-cultivation of virtues. Fourth, regarding the set of virtues identified in the Beatitudes and its parallels in the Confucian texts, some of these virtues likewise find no equivalent in its counterpart. For example, the virtue of ritual propriety is unique to the Confucian tradition even though some contemporary Christian virtue ethicists would suggest that Christian spirituality (and liturgical life) can be compared to Christian virtue ethics on a thin level.

²¹⁵⁸ See Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

Fifth, the meanings of those matching virtues are not exactly the same. There are two reasons for this dissimilarity: 1) Some virtues have more than one meaning within their own tradition, such as *chung* in Confucian ethics; 2) the lack of a transcendental being as the ultimate end of acquisition in the Confucian tradition implies that its virtues do not have a clear religious aspect as Christian virtues do. In this way, one may claim that there is no Confucian religious virtue in the strict sense. The virtue of benevolence, for instance, is referred to the love towards other worldly beings only.

However, our exploration also shows that there are resemblances between Confucian ethics and Christian ethics. First, Confucian ethics bears many qualities of virtue ethics, especially the four key yields of virtue—character formation, practices, exemplar, and community. In this way, Confucian ethics as virtue ethics is comparable to Christian virtue ethics. Second, Confucian literature contains and presents many concrete moral virtues as Christian scripture does. In particular, both traditions identify (and share) certain virtues as fundamental. For instance, the Confucian tradition highlights the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, fortitude, wisdom, ritual propriety, and filial piety. Christian virtue ethics, similarly, advocates for the virtues of charity, justice, fortitude, and wisdom, and adds other key virtues like faith, hope, and temperance. Third, they hold similar understanding of the meaning of certain virtues. A concrete example is the virtue of fortitude. Both traditions agree that courage is crucial for human fulfillment and there is a religious aspect of the virtue. Fourth, by the same token, the specific set of Christian virtues emerged in the Beatitudes—though is not exactly the same as its counterpart—finds general, matching parallels with those of the Confucian tradition. For example, both

traditions emphasize the importance of the virtues of righteousness and benevolence in one's moral life and hence urge us to attain the virtue of fortitude for the sake of righteousness even to the point of being persecuted or laying down one's life.

The identification of both dissimilarities and resemblances, subsequently, leads to a second insight—there exists a relationship between the two. In order to explain the relationship between the resemblances and dissimilarities among the conceptions identified (especially on the theoretical level), Yearley first adopts the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' theories:²¹⁵⁹ Primary theory refers to what is universal and trans-cultural, and underlies one's ability to cope with normal situations. Secondary theory, though it is built upon primary theory to explain peculiar happenings, is culture-driven and has an equivocal character. Therefore, the dissimilarities identified above, such as those peculiar notions of grace and filial piety, often occur in the secondary theory, while the common understanding of the concept and yields of virtue belongs to the primary theory. He then suggests that there is a third 'practical' theory—that partially overlaps the 'primary' and 'secondary' theories—that accounts for the co-existence of resemblances and dissimilarities within those complicated conceptual forms, such as the conceptions of Confucian self-cultivation and *jen* in our case.

Grounded in Yearley's practical theory, Stalnaker advocates for a holistic approach in the quest of their relationship:²¹⁶⁰ He argues that the trio of 'primary', 'secondary', and 'practical' theories are often mixed together into a generally coherent

²¹⁵⁹ The notions of 'primary theory' and 'secondary theory' are the works of Robin Horton. See Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 176-81.

²¹⁶⁰ Stalnaker, 295-96.

whole in the mind of the sophisticated thinkers that represent their traditions. For instance, the primary theory of ‘sacred texts’ in both Christian virtue ethics and the Confucian tradition cannot be comprehended without making reference to or being shaped by secondary theory. Or, engaging in practical theory such as rituals would require simultaneous address of certain secondary theoretical concepts.

In short, their adaptation of the theory allows us to probe and understand the rather complex relationships between those resemblances and dissimilarities we have identified in the Beatitudes and the Confucian tradition.

A third insight is the claim that “establishing focal and secondary meanings helps *facilitate comparisons*.”²¹⁶¹ While the focal meaning of particular virtues might be set in one specific tradition, the secondary meaning of the virtues can be used to interpret the other tradition’s account and from which one is able to relate certain qualities of the virtues. Therefore, for instance, in the reception of the Christian virtue of fortitude in the Confucian context, while its focal meaning (i.e., fortitude as a cardinal virtue) is unique to Christian virtue ethics, its secondary meaning (i.e., endurance and self-sacrifice for the sake of righteousness) can help us understand the Confucian tradition as well as the religious aspect of fortitude in these two traditions. Subsequently, Yearley proposes the use of analogical imagination in engaging the comparative task—to compare the subjects analogically and articulate similarities in differences (and differences in similarities), and

²¹⁶¹ Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 193-94.

to use our imagination to examine and construct analogies, to set focal and secondary meanings, and to articulate their relationships.²¹⁶²

Finally, Stalnaker, who believes that the approach to comparative work goes beyond the debate on ‘exclusivism’, ‘inclusivism’, and ‘pluralism’, proposes a multifaceted ‘global neighborliness’ as an ideal for comparative studies of religious thoughts and ethics:²¹⁶³ This ideal basically perceives the other tradition in comparison as potential teacher rather than convert or threat. It has several aspects, including attentiveness/curiosity toward the other tradition; charitable interpretation of seemingly strange ideas without hasty negative judgment; critical engagement in those resemblances and dissimilarities identified without rush to assimilation; being mindful of the complexity of the tradition itself and avoid over-generalizing about it; and being discrete throughout the process.

I note that these facets also rightfully remind us that we need to take practical precautions as well in doing cross-cultural comparative studies. I identify some of these precautions as follows.

In the first place, there exists diversity within the tradition itself. As we saw throughout this chapter, although both Mencius and Xunzi inherited and developed Confucius’s doctrines, they differed from each other in various issues. In particular, they differed greatly in the understanding of human nature and the subsequent means for self-cultivation of virtues. The Christian approach to virtue, as discussed in Part Two, also reveals a similar diversity. Thus, in exploring the possible reception of the Beatitudes and

²¹⁶² Ibid., 175, 190, 196-201.

²¹⁶³ Stalnaker, 293, 299-301.

its virtues in the Confucian tradition, the internal divergence of Confucianism needs to be addressed and stated.

Second, one needs also to be aware of the various aspects of tradition—such as history and political impact—that are involved in the development of a specific tradition and its understanding of certain conceptions. Bretzke rightly comments that “no one philosophical or religious tradition can stand alone in isolation, or hope to express in a credible and comprehensive fashion the totality of [those] complex, multifaceted and polyvalent notion[s].”²¹⁶⁴

Third, one should not evaluate the compatibility of the traditions solely by their explicit resemblances or dissimilarities. For instance, although the Confucian tradition does not systematically present or involve in analytical discussion of their virtues, it does not mean that their insights and understanding of virtues is less important than that of Christian virtues. Or, although Confucian virtue ethics focuses on self-cultivation, one should not rush to the conclusion that it does not have social implications. As we have seen above, for Confucian thinkers self-cultivation is the very first step to the transformation of the state and the universe. Yet, we need to be careful that we do not overlook the dissimilarities as we search for commonality.

Fourth, there is the substantial linguistic and textual problem: On the one hand, we are dealing with ancient Chinese sacred texts that are quite different from contemporary Chinese; on the other hand, we are also dealing with ancient

²¹⁶⁴ Bretzke, “Human Rights or Human Rites? A Confucian Cross-Cultural Perspective,” 56.

Greek/Hebrew texts and present them in contemporary English.²¹⁶⁵ Therefore, the work of exegesis is needed on both sides. This linguistic precaution points us back to the argument throughout this entire work—the need to treat the sacred text as ‘scripted script’. Now since scriptural texts are constitutive of both traditions, then doing a cross-cultural ethics begins not with analogous generalities but very specific texts.

Finally, from the perspective of East Asian context, there are some concrete challenges for doing comparative work on the part of the West. First, there is the unhealthy assumption that “Asia has nothing to contribute but is there to receive.”²¹⁶⁶ Thus, while examining the possible Confucian reception of the Beatitudes and its virtues, I am equally convinced that the process can be done in reverse order, that is, the Christian reception of Confucian virtues. Second, more often than not it is the Confucian tradition (or other non-Western traditions) that strives to develop its own distinctive conception of certain Western (and Christian in particular) notions (such as ‘rights’) and not vice versa.²¹⁶⁷ Third, within the religious context, there further exists a biased presupposition that the Christian Bible is of supreme and absolute authority over other sacred texts.²¹⁶⁸ Indian biblical scholar Stanley Samartha rightly reminds us that the multi-scriptural reality of Asia (including East Asia) would resist any claim of supreme authority of one

²¹⁶⁵ Though Yearley was dealing with fourth century BCE Chinese and thirteenth century CE Latin, his problem is applicable to our own situation.

²¹⁶⁶ Lee, “Cross-textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-scriptural Asia,” 191. Lee quotes Preman Niles, “The Word of God and the People of Asia,” in James T. Butler et al. eds, *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 282.

²¹⁶⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Questions for Confucians,” in *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community*, eds. Shun Kwong-loi and David B. Wong (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 218.

²¹⁶⁸ Lee, “Cross-textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-scriptural Asia,” 193.

scripture over another.²¹⁶⁹ Subsequently, we need to be open and respectful in our reading of the Confucian text.

In conclusion, with these insights and precautions in mind and being a Christian ethicist in a Confucian context, I agree with Yearley and Tu that cross-cultural comparative work is an important intellectual activity for both our contemporary theological quest and the exploration of the third epoch of Confucianism.²¹⁷⁰ In my own attempt to bring the Beatitudes and its corresponding virtues to the Confucian Chinese audience, I hope I have engaged in some of these facets of global neighborliness and taken the precautions seriously.

²¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 188. Lee cites Stanley J. Samartha, *The Search for a New Hermeneutics in Asian Christian Theology* (Bangalore: Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, 1987).

²¹⁷⁰ Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 203.

Conclusion

Throughout this entire work I have been advocating for a more integrated approach for doing Scripture-based Christian theological ethics that treats Scripture as ‘scripted script’. For a variety of reasons—from the growing complexities of each field to the lack of communication and competency in the other’s field to the problems in interdisciplinary exercise—Scripture scholars do not use much ethical theory, while theological ethicists do little actual exegesis.

Despite these difficulties, contemporary scholars from both fields agree that a better integration and cooperation between biblical studies and moral theology is much needed. Since the 1980s we began to see different attempts among these scholars to better bridge Scripture with Christian ethics and to address the relationship between the two. In my own attempt to propose a more integrated approach to scriptural ethics, I believe that only through careful observation of the contributions and limitations of these scholars that we can identify specific methodological insights that will rightfully shape the future of a Scripture-based ethics. Thus, this work begins with a review of the recent development by both biblical scholars and Christian ethicists in their attempts to construct an integrated scriptural ethics.

Among the works of contemporary biblical scholars we note a couple of contributions to and signs of methodological development. First and foremost, their exegetical task goes beyond traditional critical methods and attends to even the philosophical/ethical theory behind the text. They also show greater appreciation of the

task of hermeneutics in their works. However, their hermeneutical and ethical claims are inadequate and unconvincing, for these claims are not grounded in any sustaining, sound ethical theory.

Christian ethicists likewise have offered certain methodological insights. They advance the field of Scripture-based ethics by not simply using Scripture but also attempting to understand the original meanings of the texts employed. Yet, their attempts are not without problems, especially regarding their exegesis that is either superficial or selective. Subsequently, they are still concerned more about interpreting the text's meaning for contemporary world than with first examining its original meaning to see if the text can be rightly employed.

In both cases, we can conclude that they still have either stressed the importance of the scriptural text or the importance of ethical hermeneutics. In other words, they see Scripture as either 'scripted' *or* 'script'. This lack of balance could lead to incomplete, inconsistent, or even incorrect interpretation of the text for today's readers. I am thus convinced that a balanced view of Scripture as 'scripted' *and* 'script' seems to be the right direction toward constructing a more integrated scriptural ethics. This conviction is shared by some scholars from both disciplines whose works have demonstrated what this new direction could be. Their advancement also reveals that the methodological goal that I am advocating is attainable.

Still, writing as a Catholic theological ethicist who does ethics by working with scriptural texts, I further my advocacy in concrete by suggesting a particular model for the construction. Plainly speaking, I take virtue ethics as a worthy hermeneutical tool for

doing Scripture-based ethics. It has several unique characteristics that can complement other principle-based ethical theories, such as its teleological structure and those key yields of virtue that attend to not just the character formation and identity of individuals but also that of the moral community. Moreover, some pioneer Christian virtue ethicists have further convinced us that a Christian adoption of virtue ethics is possible—there exists theological links that help translate virtue theory’s philosophical language into Christian ones.

Apart from those theological links, there is also a strong biblical link between the two: Scripture exposes us to and advocates for certain virtues, forms virtues, shapes moral character and identity, provides exemplary models, and reforms the faith community. Indeed, this explicit biblical link provides a very helpful argument for the virtue theory’s suitability as the hermeneutical tool in our construction of a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics.

Subsequently, after presenting the hermeneutical tool, I move on to consolidate my argument with a concrete illustration: Treating the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 as both ‘scripted’ and ‘script’. In other words, I would offer both exegesis and interpretation of the text. In fact, by treating the Beatitudes as ‘scripted’, we can be benefited by acquiring more accurate understanding of the original meanings of each of the macarisms and their corresponding eschatological blessings. We also gain certain overlooked/hidden insights that help guide our subsequent hermeneutics in the right direction. Specifically, I note that the entire Beatitudes bears an explicit Jewish influence; its macarisms form a tightly integrated and sophisticated whole; it depicts a radical ethical demand of the

disciples; it highlights the need of God's grace and providence; and it has a communal quality. As a whole, it makes a substantial difference to the hermeneutical task that follows.

In the subsequent interpretation of the Beatitudes through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics for Christian moral living, I identify a new set of core virtues (and corresponding practices) that is not just for personal formation but also for the formation of the community, and effects social change: Humility, solidarity, meekness, obedience in our relation with God, mercy and charity, integrity and truthfulness, just peacemaking, fortitude, and gratitude toward God.

Whenever renowned Catholic historian John O'Malley sees conceptual arguments endorsing one methodology over another, he asks 'so what?' O'Malley's question asks us to give at least a concrete example of how a more integrated scriptural ethics leads to actual benefits and improvements. Our twofold treatment of the Beatitudes as 'scripted' and 'script' only partially responds to his challenge. Thus, I conclude this work by bringing its fruits forward. In particular, I turn to my own Confucian Chinese culture and explore the possible reception of the Beatitudes and its virtues by the Confucian tradition. It is because—apart from the general view that Confucian ethics can be virtue ethics—methodologically speaking, Confucianism goes to the texts in its search of ethical teachings, that is, Confucian ethics is primarily the fruit of careful interpretation of their 'sacred' texts. Now that I have been arguing for greater attentiveness to the scriptural text throughout my advocacy for a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics, common grounds are thus created that can be helpful to make Christian ethics more explicable to

Confucian society and more supportive of cross-cultural dialogue with Confucian ethics, for doing a cross-cultural ethics as such begins not with analogous generalities but very specific texts, and needs to be both text-based and interpretative.

Therefore, by way of demonstration, I explore how the Beatitudes as ‘scripted script’ can be compared to the virtues of the Confucian tradition, and meaningful to its Confucian Chinese audience. By turning to the sacred texts of the Confucian tradition and extracting their moral virtues I note that they match those of the Beatitudes in many positive areas. Still, dissimilarities in terms of specific contents and fundamental conceptions are also recognized. There exists a complex relationship between these findings and we have to take precautions and at times re-think our own presuppositions in doing cross-cultural ethics.

In sum, I am convinced that this comparative exercise can provide an opportunity to demonstrate the possible benefit resulting from the methodological shift into a more integrated scriptural ethics—one that is more capable of cross-cultural exchange. Being a Catholic theological ethicist who does ethics by working with Scripture and engages in cross-cultural dialogue within a Confucian context, I hope that this work does not only advocate further advancements in the field of Scripture-based Christian ethics within the Christian tradition but also encourages cross-cultural exchange with other ethical systems.

Glossary of Chinese Terms

English Pin-yin	Chinese character	English translation
<i>chi</i>	智	Wisdom
<i>chung</i>	忠	Conscientiousness/Loyalty
<i>chün tzu</i>	君子	The Gentleman/Superior Person/Noble Man
<i>duan</i>	端	Sprouts or Germs (nascent moral dispositions)
<i>en</i>	恩	Kindness
<i>jen</i>	仁	Humanity/ Benevolence
<i>li</i>	禮	Ritual propriety
<i>shu</i>	恕	Reciprocity/Altruism/Empathy
<i>tao</i>	道	The Way
<i>te</i>	德	Virtue
<i>tien</i>	天	Heaven
<i>wu</i>	惡	Dislike
<i>xiao</i>	孝	Filiality/Filial Piety
<i>xing</i>	性	Human Nature
<i>xiu</i>	羞	Shame
<i>xue</i>	學	Learning
<i>yi</i>	義	Righteousness/Dutifulness

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