

# DICTIONARY *of* SCRIPTURE *and* ETHICS



JOEL B. GREEN  
GENERAL EDITOR

JACQUELINE E. LAPSLEY, REBEKAH MILES, AND ALLEN VERHEY  
ASSOCIATE EDITORS

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# INTRODUCTION

JOEL B. GREEN, GENERAL EDITOR

Forty years ago, when James M. Gustafson surveyed the state of the discipline in Christian ethics, he called attention to the relation of Christian ethics and biblical studies and lamented the “paucity of material that relates the two areas in a scholarly way” (Gustafson 337). Many echoed Gustafson’s complaint, both from within Christian ethics and from within biblical studies. The complaint prompted the development of a considerable literature, as both moral theologians and biblical scholars attempted to relate Scripture and ethics “in a scholarly way.” Whatever else may be lamented about scholarly attention to the relation of Scripture and ethics, one can no longer lament a “paucity of material.”

The growth of this literature is one reason for the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. Students need a reference tool that will survey the literature and provide an introduction to the ethics of Scripture, to the relevance of Scripture to contemporary moral questions, and to the paths by which one might make a way from ethics to Scripture and back again. Pastors need a reference tool that will survey the relation of Scripture and ethics in a way relevant to their tasks of preaching, teaching, and counseling. And specialists in biblical studies or in Christian ethics who want to enter a conversation with the specialists in the other discipline need a reference tool that will provide an account of particular features of the other discipline that are especially relevant to the conversation between disciplines.

A second reason for compiling the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, however, is that for all the scholarly attention to the relation of Scripture and ethics, it remains a labyrinth. Among some, and for a variety of reasons, the study of Scripture has little, if anything, to contribute to the study of moral theology. There are biblical scholars who regard it as no part of the task of their discipline to form or inform the way Christians understand and embody Scripture. And there are Christian ethicists who regard the biblical text as at best marginally important to the ways in which Christian

ethics should be undertaken. On the other hand, there are some who regard the Bible as a timeless moral code that simply needs to be repeated and obeyed today. For still others, the biblical witness may be relevant today, but the trail from ancient Scripture to contemporary moral questions is an arduous one, best left to those who are experts on that trail, to a scholarly or ecclesiastical magisterium. And for yet others, including many scholars, the complexities and language of one discipline or the other make a meaningful conversation difficult, if not impossible.

## Negotiating the Labyrinth

In some ways, reasons for the troubled relationship between the Bible and ethics are easy to understand. Straightforward attempts to follow the Bible on any number of issues have long been frustrated by changing contexts. The world of Leviticus is not the world of 1 Corinthians, and neither of these is our world. Even if the theological considerations of religious communities demand wrestling with the ramifications of these ancient texts for faith and life, it remains the case that, historically speaking, they were not written “for/to/about us.” Within the Bible itself, we find attempts to reappropriate legal texts, for example, in new settings, and these interpretive impulses continued—and continue—in all sorts of attempts to comment on, apply, and embody these writings. Indeed, a common feature of ancient Judaism was “the realization that there was no pure teaching of Revelation apart from its regeneration or clarification through an authoritative type of exegesis” (Fishbane 4). Moving outside the interpretation of biblical texts among the biblical writers themselves, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (LXX) and the development of the targumic tradition served further to codify interpretive traditions. The Qumran scrolls evidence a vast exegetical enterprise, with two commitments not so much juxtaposed as intertwined: to the authority of the Scriptures

and to their interpretation and embodiment in the community of the faithful. The traditions of midrashim that subsequently grew up around the Scriptures similarly engaged in a dialogue with the biblical texts, extending their meaning from the past into the present, with “readers fighting to find what they must in the holy text” (Boyarin 16). That is, precisely because of the status of the biblical texts as Scripture, their immediacy to contemporary readers was a nonnegotiable presupposition; their capacity to speak on God’s behalf in the readers’ present and to be embodied in their lives was crucial.

The rise of historical criticism brought to the surface another challenge: diversity within the biblical canon. How does one present a *biblical* perspective on a given question when the Bible contains within its covers diverse approaches to the same issue? One answer has been a kind of harmonization that makes all of the voices speak as though they were one, in spite of the fact that no single voice in Scripture, taken on its own, could ever be heard to speak in just that way. Another answer has been to allow one voice to speak for all. In Protestant circles, the voice of choice has typically been Pauline, especially as heard in Romans. When thinking of the theology of James or John or Jude, according to this strategy, one is more likely to hear the voice of the Pauline ventriloquist than that of James, John, or Jude. A third answer has focused on the search for the coordinating center of Scripture—“covenant,” for example, or “reconciliation”—the effect of which has been to mute alternatives within the canon. A fourth has been to focus on Scripture’s metanarrative, a unity that lies in the character and activity of God that comes to expression in various but recognizably similar ways in these various texts. Fifth, many have found in the diversity of Scripture a reason to reject outright the possibility of using Scripture as a normative source in theology and ethics.

Other issues challenge us. We find in the Bible puzzling texts, some that offend both our own sensibilities and those of our forebears. What are we to make of the imprecatory psalms, for example, or apparently divinely sanctioned violence within families or among peoples, or strained rhetoric and oppressive perspectives regarding the status and role of women? These are not new questions, but have long tested the interpretive ingenuity of the Bible’s readers (Thompson). We face issues today about which texts from another time and place can hardly be expected to have anything to say, at least not in a direct way. The *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* does not pretend to resolve

all of these problems but rather serves to codify the issues and to identify ways in which they are being acknowledged and addressed in contemporary discussion.

The *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* aims to provide a map that will locate and orient conversations about the relation of Scripture and ethics. With essays and contributors representative of the full array of relevant concerns, the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* will become a useful, indeed essential, resource to which students, pastors, and scholars turn for orientation and perspective on Scripture and ethics. It may be too much to hope that this dictionary will provide a way out of the labyrinth, but it aims to provide a little light on the path. Then perhaps the confidence of the psalmist that “[God’s] word is a light to [our] path” (Ps. 119:105b) may be restored in the church.

## Organization

At the outset the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* departs from a conventional alphabetical listing of entries by providing three introductory articles. These survey, respectively, ethics within Scripture, historical perspectives on the place of Scripture in moral theology, and methodological issues concerning the relevance of Scripture to contemporary moral theology. These articles provide an orientation for the volume and for its users. Many of the items surveyed in these introductory articles will be more fully developed in other entries of the dictionary, but the introductory articles will serve to set the more particular entries in a larger context. So, for example, the introductory essay on ethics within Scripture will be developed further and sometimes challenged by the separate entries on each of the biblical books and by additional articles on genres, codes, and so forth found within Scripture. Similarly, the introductory article on historical perspectives of the role of Scripture in moral theology will be supplemented and sometimes challenged by separate entries on different communities of interpretation, on different key figures in the history of moral theology, and on the history of interpretation of some important biblical and moral topics. Finally, the issues surveyed in the introductory article on methodological questions concerning the relevance of Scripture to moral concerns will be revisited by some of the entries both on Scripture and on particular moral issues.

Among the entries located within the alphabetical listings are three different kinds of articles.

There are, first, articles on the relation of ethics and Scripture. There are articles, for example, on certain modes of moral reasoning and the ways in which those modes of moral reasoning have shaped appeals to Scripture in Christian ethics. There are articles on distinctive communities and traditions of biblical interpretation and moral reflection, highlighting the ways in which such communities and traditions shape appeals to Scripture in Christian ethics. There are entries on some important hermeneutical and methodological considerations concerning the relation of Scripture and Christian ethics.

There are, second, articles on ethics within Scripture. These entries focus on the ethics of each of the books of the Bible and on the possible significance of each book for contemporary Christian ethics. They sketch some of the moral issues explicitly addressed in the book and some of the patterns of moral reasoning displayed in the book. They supplement the introductory essay on “Ethics in Scripture,” but they are also supplemented by later articles on genres, collections, and passages found within Scripture. So, for example, one will find in addition to the entry on Matthew an entry on the Sermon on the Mount. The entry on Exodus might be supplemented by attention to entries in the alphabetical section on Law and the Covenant. In addition to articles focused on biblical books, however, articles attending to the ethics within Scripture will focus on passages that have played a particularly significant role in Christian ethics, for example, the Jubilee, the Golden Rule, and the Love Commandment; on the relevance of particular genres within Scripture to moral reflection; and on some of the material that may, as some have argued, have provided documentary sources for the canonical books.

The third type of article within the alphabetical listings is focused on issues in Christian ethics. These issues include both classical and contemporary issues. The entries include both major “orientation” articles on topics like bioethics, ecological ethics, economic ethics, political ethics, and sexual ethics, and shorter articles focused on more particular issues, like abortion, technology, capitalism, pacifism, and marriage. Again the more narrowly focused articles will supplement the broader “orientation” articles. Some of these articles begin with attention to Scripture and move toward attention to the contemporary discussion; some begin by introducing the contemporary issues and then retrieve biblical materials; but each entry works to join Scripture and ethics.

With its introductory essays, entries on the biblical books, major “orientation” articles, and different types of entries with their bibliographies and cross-references, the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* will be a valuable resource for all of those students, pastors, and scholars who want Scripture to form and inform their moral reflection and conversation and want their study of Scripture to be formed and informed by an interest in ethics.

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# ETHICS IN SCRIPTURE

ALLEN VERHEY

**E**thics may be defined as disciplined reflection concerning moral conduct and character. In Scripture, such reflection is always disciplined by convictions about God's will and way and by commitments to be faithful to God. Biblical ethics is inalienably theological. To sunder biblical ethics from the convictions about God that surround it and sustain it is to distort it. The fundamental unity of biblical ethics is simply this: there is one God in Scripture, and it is that one God who calls forth the creative reflection and faithful response of those who would be God's people.

That unity, however, is joined to an astonishing diversity. The Bible contains many books and more traditions, each addressed first to a particular community of God's people facing concrete questions of conduct in specific cultural and social contexts. Its reflections on the moral life, moreover, come in diverse modes of discourse. They come sometimes in statute, sometimes in story. They come sometimes in proverb, sometimes in prophetic promises (or threats). They come sometimes in remembering the past, sometimes in envisioning the future. The one God of Scripture assures the unity of biblical ethics, but there is no simple unitive understanding even of that one God or of that one God's will. To force biblical ethics into a timeless and systematic unity is to impoverish it. Still, there is but one God, to whom loyalty is due and to whom God's people respond in all of their responses to changing moral contexts.

## Ethics in the Old Testament

### *Ethics in Torah*

The one God formed a people by deliverance and covenant. The story was told in countless recitals of Israel's faith. The God of Abraham heard their cries when they were slaves, rescued them from Pharaoh's oppression, and made them a people with a covenant (e.g., Deut. 6:20–25; 26:5–9; Josh. 24:2–13). The covenant, like an ancient suzerainty treaty, acknowledged and confirmed that

God was the great king of Israel and that Israel was God's people. (George E. Mendenhall provided the classic description of ancient treaties in relation to Torah.) And like those ancient treaties, Israel's covenant began by identifying God as the great king and by reciting God's kindness to Israel (e.g., Exod. 20:2). It continued with stipulations forbidding loyalty to any other god as sovereign and requiring justice and peace in the land (e.g., Exod. 20:3–17). And it ended with provisions for the periodic renewal of covenant and with assurances of God's blessing on faithfulness to covenant and the threat of punishment for violation of the covenant (e.g., Exod. 23:22–33).

The remembered story and the covenant formed a community and its common life. And if Gerhard von Rad is right, they also provided a framework for the gathering of stories and stipulations into larger narrative and legal traditions (J, E, D, and P; various codes), and finally, for the gathering of those traditions into the Torah.

Much of the Torah (usually translated "law") is legal material. Various collections (e.g., the Decalogue [Exod. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21]; the Covenant Code [Exod. 20:22–23:19]; the Holiness Code [Lev. 17–26]; the Deuteronomistic Code [Deut. 4:44–28:46]) can be identified and correlated with particular periods of Israel's history. The later collections sometimes revised earlier legislation. It was evidently not the case that the whole law was given at once as a timeless code. Rather, the lawmakers displayed both fidelity to the earlier legal traditions and creativity with them as they responded both to new situations and to God.

Although the Torah contains no tidy distinction between ceremonial, civil, and moral laws, the traditional rubrics do identify significant functions of the legal material. As "ceremonial," the legal materials in Torah struggled against temptations offered by foreign cults to covenant infidelity and nurtured a communal memory and commitment to covenant. As "civil," the Torah had a fundamentally theocratic vision. In this theocratic vision, the rulers were ruled too; they were subjects,

not creators, of the law. Such a conviction, by its warnings against royal despotism, had a democratizing effect. As “moral,” the statutes protected the family and its economic participation in God’s gift of the land. They protected persons and their property. They required fairness in disputes and economic transactions. And they provided for the care and protection of vulnerable members of the society, such as widows, orphans, resident aliens, and the poor.

The legal materials never escaped the story or the covenant. Set in the context of narrative and covenant, the legal traditions were construed as grateful response to God’s works and ways. Moreover, the story formed and informed the statutes. The story of the one God who heard the cries of slaves in Egypt stood behind the legal protections for the vulnerable (e.g., Exod. 22:21–23; Lev. 19:33–34).

The narratives of the Torah were morally significant in their own right. Artfully told, they rendered the work and the will of the God to whom loyalty was due. They put on display something of God’s cause and character, the cause and character to be shared by the faithful people of God. Noteworthy among such narratives were the stories of creation. They affirmed that the one God of covenant is the God of creation too. This is no tribal deity; this is the one God of the universe. In the beginning there is a narrative prohibition of idolatry as compelling as any statute; nothing that God made is god. In the beginning there is a celebration of the material world and a narrative prohibition of anything like Platonic or gnostic dualism; all that God made is good. It was, in the beginning, an orderly and peaceable world. There is a narrative invitation to a common life of gratitude for the blessings of God. When the curse fell heavy on God’s good creation, the one God would not let human sin or the curse have the last word in God’s world. God came again to covenant and to bless, blessing Abraham with the promise that in him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1–3). The Yahwist’s stories of the patriarchs not only trace the blessing of David’s empire to that promise but also form political dispositions to use the technical and administrative skills of empire to bless the subject nations (Gen. 18–19; 26; 30:27–28; 39–41) (see Wolff).

### *Ethics in the Prophets*

The one God who created the world, who rescued slaves from Pharaoh and made covenant with a people, spoke to those people through the prophets. The prophets came as messengers of the great king. They came with a particular word for

a particular time, but they always reminded the people of the story and the covenant and called the people to respond faithfully.

Frequently, in resistance to unfaithfulness, they brought a word of judgment. The sum of their indictment was always the same: the people have violated the covenant (e.g., 1 Kgs. 19:10, 14; Hos. 8:1). Concretely—and the message of the prophet was always concrete—some specific idolatry or injustice was condemned as infidelity to the covenant. The infidelity of idolatry was never merely a cultic matter. The claims of Baal, for example, involved the fertility of wombs and land and an account of ownership. The prophetic announcement of God’s greater power freed the people to farm a land stripped of claims to divinity but acknowledged as God’s gift, and it required them to share the produce of that land with the poor. The infidelity of injustice was never merely a moral matter, for the one God of covenant demanded justice, and the welfare of the poor and powerless was the best index of covenant fidelity. So the prophets denounced unjust rulers, greedy merchants, corrupt judges, and the complacent rich. Their harshest criticisms, however, were aimed at those who celebrated covenant in ritual and ceremony but violated it by failing to protect the poor and powerless (e.g., Amos 5:21–24).

On the other side of God’s judgment the prophets saw and announced the good future of God. God will reign and establish both peace and justice, not only in Israel but also among the nations, and not only among the nations but also in the whole creation. That future was not contingent on human striving, but it already made claims on the present, affecting human vision and dispositions and actions. The prophets and the faithful were to be ready to suffer for the sake of God’s cause in the world.

### *Ethics in Wisdom*

The will and way of the one God could be known not only in the great events of liberation and covenant, not only in the oracles of the prophets, but also in the regularities of nature and experience. When the sages of Israel gave moral counsel, they seldom appealed directly to Torah or to covenant. Their advice concerning moral character and conduct was, rather, disciplined and tested by experience.

Carefully attending to nature and experience, the wise comprehended the basic principles operative in the world. To conform to these principles was at once a matter of piety, prudence, and morality. The one God who created the world has established and secured the order and stability of

ordinary life. So the sage could give advice about eating and drinking, about sleeping and working, about the way to handle money and anger, about relating to friends and enemies and women and fools, about when to speak and when to be silent—in short, about almost anything that is a part of human experience.

The ethics of the sage tended to be conservative, for the experience of the community over time provided a fund of wisdom, but the immediacy of experience kept the tradition open to challenge and revision. The ethics of the sage tended to be prudential, but experience sometimes could teach that the righteous may suffer, and that there is no tidy fit between piety, prudence, and morality (Job). The ethics of the sage tended to delight both in the simple things of life, such as the love between a man and a woman (Song of Songs), and in the quest for wisdom itself. Experience itself, however, could teach that wisdom has its limits in the inscrutable (Job 28), and that the way things seem to work in the world cannot simply be identified with the ways of God (Ecclesiastes).

Wisdom reflected about conduct and character quite differently than did the Torah and the prophets, but, like “the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7; 9:10), “the end of the matter” was a reminder of covenant: “Fear God and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of every one” (Eccl. 12:13). The beginning and end of wisdom kept wisdom in touch with Torah, struggling to keep Torah in touch with experience, and covenant in touch with creation.

### Ethics in the New Testament

The one God of creation and covenant, of Abraham and Israel, of Moses and David, of prophet and sage raised the crucified Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. That good news was celebrated among his followers as the vindication of Jesus and his message, as the disclosure of God’s power and purpose, and as the guarantee of God’s good future. The resurrection was a cause for great joy; it was also the basis for NT ethics and its exhortations to live in memory and in hope, to see moral conduct and character in the light of Jesus’ story, and to discern a life and a common life “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27).

#### *Jesus and the Gospels*

The resurrection was the vindication of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. He had come announcing that “the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark

1:15), that the coming cosmic sovereignty of God, the good future of God, was at hand. And he had made that future present; he had made its power felt already in his words of blessing and in his works of healing. He called the people to repent, to form their conduct and character in response to the good news of that coming future. He called his followers to “watch” for it and to pray for it, to welcome its presence, and to form community and character in ways that anticipated that future and responded to the ways that future was already making its power felt in him.

Such was the eschatological shape of Jesus’ ethic. He announced the future in axioms such as “Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Mark 10:31; Matt. 19:30; Luke 13:30). He made that future present by his presence among the disciples “as one who serves” (Luke 22:27; cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 13:2–17). And he called the people to welcome such a future and to follow him in commands such as “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35; cf. 10:44). To delight already in a coming kingdom in which the poor are blessed was even now to be carefree about wealth (Matt. 6:25, 31, 34; Luke 12:22) and to give generously to help the poor (Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33). To welcome even now a kingdom that belongs to children (Mark 10:14) was to welcome and to bless them (Mark 9:37). To respond faithfully to a future that was signaled by Jesus’ open conversation with women (e.g., Mark 7:24–30; John 4:1–26) was already to treat women as equals. To celebrate God’s forgiveness that made its power felt in Jesus’ fellowship with sinners (e.g., Mark 2:5; Luke 7:48) was to welcome sinners and to forgive one’s enemies.

Because Jesus announced and already unveiled the coming reign of God, he spoke “as one having authority” (Mark 1:22), not simply on the basis of the law or the tradition or the regularities of experience. And because the coming reign of God demanded a response of the whole person and not merely external observance of the law, Jesus consistently made radical demands. So Jesus’ radical demand for truthfulness replaced (and fulfilled) legal casuistry about oaths. The radical demand to forgive and to be reconciled set aside (and fulfilled) legal limitations on revenge. The demand to love even enemies put aside legal debates about the meaning of “neighbor.” His moral instructions were based neither on the precepts of law nor on the regularities of experience, but he did not discard them either; law and wisdom were qualified and fulfilled in this ethic of response to the future reign of the one God of Scripture.

This Jesus was put to death on a Roman cross, but the resurrection vindicated both Jesus and God's own faithfulness. This one who died in solidarity with the least, with sinners and the oppressed, and with all who suffer was delivered by God. This Jesus, humble in his life, humiliated by religious and political authorities in his death, was exalted by God. When the powers of death and doom had done their damndest, God raised up this Jesus and established forever the good future he had announced.

The Gospels used the church's memories of Jesus' words and deeds to tell his story faithfully and creatively. So they shaped the character and conduct of the communities that they addressed. Each Gospel provided a distinctive account both of Jesus and of the meaning of discipleship. In Mark, Jesus was the Christ as the one who suffered, and he called for a heroic discipleship. Mark's account of the ministry of Jesus opened with the call to discipleship (1:16–20). The central section of Mark's Gospel, with its three predictions of the passion, made it clear how heroic and dangerous an adventure discipleship could be. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (8:34 [and note the allusions to martyrdom in 8:35; 10:38–39]).

Hard on the heels of that saying Mark set the story of the transfiguration (9:2–8), in which a voice from heaven declared, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" It is striking that the voice did not say, "Look at him, all dazzling white." The voice said, "Listen to him." Silent during the transfiguration, Jesus ordered the disciples to say nothing of what they had seen until the resurrection, and then he told them once again that he, the Son of Man, "is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt" (9:12). Mark proceeded to tell the story of the passion, the story of a Christ who was rejected, betrayed, denied, deserted, condemned, handed over, mocked, and crucified, but still was the Son of God, the Beloved, and finally vindicated by God. The implications are as clear as they are shocking: Jesus is the Christ not by displaying some tyrannical power, not by lording it over others, but rather by his readiness to suffer for the sake of God's cause in the world and by his readiness to serve others humbly in self-giving love (cf. 10:42–44). And to be his disciple in this world is to share that readiness to suffer for the sake of God's cause and that readiness to serve others humbly in self-giving love.

The call to heroic discipleship was sustained by the call to watchfulness to which it was joined (13:33–37), by the expectation that, in spite of the

apparent power of religious leaders and Roman rulers, God's good future was sure to be.

Mark's call to watchful and heroic discipleship touched topics besides the readiness to suffer for the sake of God's cause, and it illumined even the most mundane of them with the same freedom and daring. Discipleship was not to be reduced to obedience to any law or code. Rules about fasting (2:18–22), Sabbath observance (2:23–3:6), and the distinction between "clean" and "unclean" (7:1–23) belonged to the past, not to the community marked by freedom and watchfulness. The final norm was no longer the precepts of Moses, but rather the Lord and his words (8:38). In chapter 10 Mark gathered the words of Jesus concerning marriage and divorce, children, possessions, and political power. The issues were dealt with not on the basis of the law or conventional righteousness, but rather on the basis of the Lord's words, which appealed in turn to God's intention at creation (10:6), the coming kingdom of God (10:14–15), the cost of discipleship (10:21), and identification with Christ (10:39, 43–45). Mark's Gospel provided no moral code, but it did nurture a moral posture at once less rigid and more demanding than any code.

Matthew's Gospel utilized most of Mark, but by subtle changes and significant additions Matthew provided an account of Jesus as the one who fulfills the law, as the one in whom God's covenant promises are fulfilled. And the call to discipleship became a call to a surpassing righteousness.

Matthew, in contrast to Mark, insisted that the law of Moses remained normative. Jesus came not to "abolish" the law but to "fulfill" it (Matt. 5:17). The least commandment ought still to be taught and still to be obeyed (5:18–19; 23:23). Matthew warned against "false prophets" who dismissed the law and sponsored lawlessness (7:15–27). To the controversies about Sabbath observance Matthew added legal arguments to show that Jesus did what was "lawful" (12:1–14; cf. Mark 2:23–3:6). From the controversy about ritual cleanliness Matthew omitted Mark's interpretation that Jesus "declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19; cf. Matt. 15:17); evidently, even kosher regulations remained normative. In Matthew's Gospel the law held, and Jesus was its best interpreter (see also 9:9–13; 19:3–12; 22:34–40).

The law, however, was not sufficient. Matthew accused the teachers of the law of being "blind guides" (23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26). They were blind to the real will of God in the law, and their pettifogging legalism hid it. Jesus, however, made God's will known, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. There, he called for a righteousness

that “exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees” (5:20). The Beatitudes (5:3–11) described the character traits that belong to such righteousness. The “antitheses” (5:21–47) contrasted such righteousness to mere external observance of laws that left dispositions of anger, lust, deceit, revenge, and selfishness unchanged. This was no calculating “works-righteousness”; rather, it was a self-forgetting response to Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom (4:12–25).

Matthew called the community to play a role in moral discernment and discipline. The church was charged with the task of interpreting the law, vested with the authority to “bind” and “loose” (18:18), to make legal rulings and judgments. These responsibilities for mutual admonition and communal discernment were set in the context of concern for the “little ones” (18:1–14) and forgiveness (18:21–35), and they were to be undertaken with prayer (18:19). Jesus was still among them (18:20), still calling for a surpassing righteousness.

In Luke’s Gospel, the emphasis fell on Jesus as the one “anointed . . . to bring good news to the poor” (4:18). Mary’s song, the Magnificat (1:46–55), sounded the theme early on as she celebrated God’s action on behalf of the humiliated and hungry and poor. In Luke, the infant Jesus was visited by shepherds in a manger, not by magi in a house (2:8–16; cf. Matt. 2:11–12). Again and again—in the Beatitudes and woes (6:20–26), for example, and in numerous parables (e.g., 12:13–21; 14:12–24; 16:19–31)—Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor and announced judgment on the anxious and ungenerous rich. Luke did not legislate in any of this; he gave no social program, but he insisted that a faithful response to this Jesus as the Christ, as the “anointed,” included care for the poor and powerless. The story of Zacchaeus (19:1–10), for example, made it clear that to welcome Jesus “gladly” was to do justice and to practice kindness. Luke’s story of the early church in Acts celebrated the friendship and the covenant fidelity that were displayed when “everything they owned was held in common” so that “there was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:32–34; cf. 2:44–45; cf. also Deut. 15). Character and community were, and were to be, fitting to “good news to the poor.”

The “poor” included not just those in poverty, but all those who did not count for much by the world’s way of counting. The gospel was good news, for example, also for women. By additional stories and sayings (e.g., 1:28–30; 2:36–38; 4:25–27; 7:11–17; 10:38–42; 11:27–28; 13:10–17; 15:8–10; 18:1–8), Luke displayed a Jesus remarkably free from the chauvinism of patriarchal culture. He

rejected the reduction of women to their reproductive and domestic roles. Women such as Mary of Bethany, who would learn from Jesus and follow him, were welcomed as equals in the circle of his disciples (10:38–42).

And the gospel was good news to “sinners” too, to those judged unworthy of God’s blessing. It was a gospel, after all, of “repentance and the forgiveness of sins” (24:47), and in a series of parables Jesus insisted that there is “joy in heaven over one sinner who repents” (15:7; cf. 15:10, 23–24). That gospel of the forgiveness of sins was to be proclaimed “to all nations” (24:47); it was to be proclaimed even to the gentiles, who surely were counted among the “sinners.” That story was told, of course, in Acts, but already early in Luke’s Gospel the devout old Simeon recognized in the infant Jesus God’s salvation “of all peoples” (2:31; cf., e.g., 3:6). The story of the gentile mission may await Acts, but already in the Gospel it was clear that to welcome this Jesus, this universal savior, was to welcome “sinners.” And already in the Gospel it was clear that a faithful response to Jesus meant relations of mutual respect and love between Jew and gentile. In the remarkable story of Jesus’ healing of the centurion’s servant (7:1–10), the centurion provided a paradigm for gentiles, not despising but loving the Jews, acknowledging that his access to God’s salvation was through the Jews; and the Jewish elders provided a model for Jews, not condemning this gentile but instead interceding on his behalf. In Acts 15, the Christian community included the gentiles without requiring that they become Jews; the church was to be an inclusive community, a welcoming community, a community of peaceable difference.

John’s Gospel told the story in ways quite different from the Synoptic Gospels, and its account of the moral life was also quite distinctive. It was written that the readers might have “life in [Jesus’] name” (20:31), and that life was inalienably a life formed and informed by love. Christ was the great revelation of God’s love for the world (3:16). As the Father loves the Son (e.g., 3:35; 5:20), so the Son loves his own (13:1). As the Son “abides” in the Father’s love and does his commandments, so the disciples are to abide in Christ’s love (15:9–10) and keep his commandments. And his commandment was simply that they should love one another as he had loved them (15:12; cf. 15:17). This “new commandment” (13:34) was, of course, hardly novel, but it rested now on a new reality: the love of God in Christ and the love of Christ in his own.

That reality was on display in the cross, uniquely and stunningly rendered by John as

Christ's "glory." The Son of Man was "lifted up" on the cross (3:14; 12:32–34). His glory did not come after that humiliating death; it was revealed precisely in the self-giving love of the cross. And that glory, the glory of humble service and love, was the glory that Jesus shared with the disciples (17:22). They too were "lifted up" to be servants, exalted in self-giving love.

The commandment in John was to love "one another" (e.g., 15:12) rather than the "neighbor" or the "enemy." John's emphasis surely fell on mutual love, on relations within the community. But an emphasis was not a restriction, and the horizon of God's love was the whole world (3:16). And as God so loved the world that he sent his Son, so Jesus sent his followers "into the world" (17:18; cf. 20:21). The mission of the Father's love seeks a response, an answering love; it seeks mutual love, and where it finds it, there is "life in Christ's name."

### *Paul and His Gospel*

Before the Gospels were written, Paul had addressed pastoral letters to the churches. He always wrote as an apostle (e.g., Rom. 1:1) rather than as a philosopher or a code-maker. And he always wrote to particular communities facing specific problems. In his letters he proclaimed the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ and called for the response of faith and faithfulness.

The proclamation of the gospel was always the announcement that God had acted in Christ's cross and resurrection to end the reign of sin and death and to establish the coming age of God's own cosmic sovereignty. That proclamation was sometimes in the indicative mood and sometimes in the imperative mood. In the indicative mood, Paul described the power of God to provide the eschatological salvation of which the Spirit was the "first fruits" (Rom. 8:23) and the "guarantee" (2 Cor. 5:5). But the present evil age continued; the powers of sin and death still asserted their doomed reign. The imperative mood acknowledged that Christians were still under threat from these powers and called them to hold fast to the salvation given them in Christ. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

Reflection about the moral life was disciplined by the gospel. Paul called the Romans, for example, to exercise a new discernment, not conformed to this present evil age but instead "transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12:2). There is no Pauline recipe for such discernment, no checklist or wooden scheme, but certain features of it are clear enough. It involved a new self-understanding, formed by the Spirit and conformed to

Christ (e.g., Rom. 6:11; Gal. 2:20). It involved a new perspective on the moral situation, an eschatological perspective, attentive both to the ways in which the power of God was already effective in the world and to the continuing assertiveness of sin and death. It invoked some fundamental values, gifts of the gospel and of the Spirit, notably freedom (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1) and love (e.g., 1 Cor. 13; Phil. 1:9). And it involved participation in a community of mutual instruction (e.g., Rom. 15:14). Discernment was not simply a spontaneous intuition granted by the Spirit, nor did it create rules and guidelines *ex nihilo*. Existing moral traditions, whether Jewish or Greek, could be utilized, but they were always to be tested and qualified by the gospel.

This new discernment was brought to bear on a wide range of concrete issues faced by the churches: the relations of Jew and gentile in the churches, slave and free, male and female, rich and poor. Paul's advice was provided not as timeless moral truths but rather as timely applications of the gospel to specific problems in particular contexts.

### *The Later New Testament*

The diversity of ethics in Scripture is only confirmed by other NT writings. The Pastoral Epistles encouraged a "quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:2). It was an ethic of moderation and sober good sense, avoiding the enthusiastic foolishness of others who might claim the Pauline tradition, whether ascetic or libertine.

The subtle theological arguments of the book of Hebrews did not exist for their own sake; they supported and sustained this "word of exhortation" (13:22). The theological basis was the covenant that was "new" (8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24) and "better" (7:22; 8:6), and the fitting response to that covenant was to "give thanks" and to "offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe" (12:28). Such worship, however, was not a matter of cultic observances. It involved "sacrifice," to be sure, and that "continually," but the sacrifice that is pleasing to God is "to do good and to share what you have" (13:15–16). Hebrews 13 collected a variety of moral instructions, including, for example, exhortations to mutual love, hospitality to strangers, consideration for the imprisoned and oppressed, respect for marriage, and freedom from the love of money.

The Letter of James too was a collection of moral instructions, and a somewhat eclectic collection at that. There was no single theme in James, but there was an unmistakable solidarity with the poor (1:9–11; 2:1–7, 15–16; 4:13–5:6) and a

consistent concern about the use of that recalcitrant little piece of flesh, the tongue (1:19, 26; 3:1–12; 4:11; 5:9, 12). James contains, of course, the famous polemic against a “faith without works” (2:14–26), and it seems likely that he had in mind a perverted form of Paulinism, but James and Paul perhaps are not so far apart. When James called for an active faith (2:22), readers of Paul might be reminded of Paul’s call for a “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

The ethic of 1 Peter was fundamentally a call to live with integrity the identity and community formed in baptism. The “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1:3; cf. 1:23) was a cause for great joy (1:6, 8), but it was also reason to “prepare your minds for action” and to “discipline yourselves” (1:13). In 1 Peter the author made extensive use of what seem to have been moral traditions associated with instructions for baptism (and which are also echoed in other NT texts [see Selwyn]). The mundane duties of this world in which Christians are “aliens and exiles” (2:11) were not disowned, but they were subtly and constantly reformed by being brought into association with the Christian’s new moral identity and community.

The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude defended sound doctrine and morality against the heretics who “promise them freedom” (2 Pet. 2:19). In 2 Peter is a carefully wrought catalog of virtues, beginning with “faith,” ending with “love,” and including in the middle a number of traditional Hellenistic virtues (1:5–8).

The Johannine Epistles, like the Pastoral Epistles and 2 Peter, defended sound doctrine and morality, but these epistles made their defense in ways clearly oriented to the Johannine perspective. To believe in Jesus—in the embodied, crucified Jesus—is to stand under the obligation to love. In Jesus’ death on the cross we know what love is (1 John 3:16). And to know that love is to be called to mutual love within the community (e.g., 1 John 2:9–11; 3:11, 14–18, 23; 4:7–12, 16–21; 2 John 5–6).

The book of Revelation, like most other apocalyptic literature, was motivated by a group’s experience of alienation and oppression. In the case of Revelation, the churches of Asia Minor suffered the vicious injustice and petty persecution of the Roman emperor. Revelation encouraged and exhorted those churches by constructing a symbolic universe that made intelligible both their faith that Jesus is Lord and their daily experience of injustice and suffering. The rock on which that universe was built was the risen and exalted Christ. He is

“the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5). He is the Lamb that was slain and is worthy “to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might” (5:12). The victory had been won, but there were still sovereignties in conflict. On the one side were God, his Christ, and those who worship them; on the other side were Satan, his regents, the beasts, and “the kings of the earth,” and all those who think to find security with them. The bestiality of empire was on display, and it called for “patient endurance” (1:9; 2:2–3, 10, 13, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).

The conflict is not a cosmic drama that one may watch as if it were some spectator sport; it is an eschatological battle for which one must enlist. Revelation called for courage, not calculation, for watchfulness, not computation. And “patient endurance” was not passivity. To be sure, Christians in this resistance movement against the bestiality of empire did not take arms to achieve a power like the emperor’s. But they resisted. And in their resistance, even in the style of it, they gave testimony to the victory of the Lamb that was slain. They were to live courageously and faithfully, resisting the pollution of empire, its cult surely and its lie that Caesar is Lord, but also its murder, fornication, sorcery, and idolatry (cf. the vice lists in 21:8; 22:15; see also 9:20–21). They were to be the voice of all creation, until “those who destroy the earth” would be destroyed (11:18), until the Lord makes “all things new” (21:5).

Ethics in Scripture are diverse, not monolithic. Yet, the one God of Scripture still calls in it and through it for a faithful response, still forms and reforms conduct and character and community until they are something “new,” something “worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

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# SCRIPTURE IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

## *A History*

CHARLES H. COSGROVE

Throughout the history of the church Christians have looked to the Bible for theological concepts by which to understand their moral obligations, commandments by which to live, values by which to order personal and social existence, patterns of life worthy of emulation, and insight into the dynamics of character formation. At the same time, the Bible has been used along with other sources of moral understanding (acknowledged and unacknowledged) and has been read in a wide variety of cultural contexts that have shaped the way it has been interpreted.

### The Early Church

In the NT direct appeal to the Bible in ethical exhortation and instruction is not nearly as frequent as appeal to other authorities. In the Gospels, Jesus is the chief model and authority for ethics. Elsewhere too we find appeals to the example or teaching of “Jesus” or “Christ” or “the Lord Jesus,” and so forth (e.g., Rom. 15:1–3; Phil. 2:5–11; Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 6:3; 1 Pet. 2:21–23). Other normative voices are civic authorities (Rom. 13:1–5; 1 Pet. 2:13–15); household authorities—masters (Col. 3:22; 1 Pet. 2:18), husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1), and parents (Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1); church leaders (Phlm. 8, 21; Heb. 13:17); common knowledge (Rom. 1:29–32; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1), including knowledge of one’s duties (Rom. 13:6–7); and traditional Christian instruction in so-called vice and virtue lists (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–23). The Jewish Scriptures figure in ethical argument and exhortation sometimes independently and sometimes in connection with other sources and authorities.

The Mosaic law became a subject of great debate in the early church. Throughout the early period, appeals to Scripture as a rule for ethics were complicated by the fact that an increasingly

influential wing of the church rejected the Mosaic law as a norm for the church or defended a complex (and perhaps sometimes confused and uncertain) understanding of its bearing on questions of behavior. For Paul, the law’s authority as a rule for righteousness has terminated in Christ (Rom. 3:21–4:25; 10:1–13; Gal. 3:6–4:7). Nevertheless, the ethic of Christ coincides at points with Mosaic commandments; and love, which Christ commands, fulfills the central purpose of the law (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14). Moreover, since Scripture was written for “us” (those in Christ who live at the end of the age), Paul reads Deut. 25:4 allegorically as a warrant for apostolic rights (1 Cor. 9:8–10) and interprets Ps. 69:9 christologically in describing Jesus’ self-giving way as an example to be imitated (Rom. 15:3). Paul also bases instructions about nonretaliation on Deut. 32:35 and Prov. 25:21–22 (see Rom. 12:19–20), and in a few places he adduces cautionary moral examples from Scripture (1 Cor. 10:1–11; 2 Cor. 11:3).

The conviction that love is central to the Mosaic law was already taught by ancient Jewish rabbis. Mark and Luke attribute this belief to Jesus but imply that other Jewish teachers affirmed it as well (Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28). In Matthew, Jesus teaches that all the law and the prophets “hang” on the two Great Commandments (Matt. 22:40). One can understand Jesus’ opinions in controversies over the law as instances of applying the love command as an interpretive rule (e.g., Matt. 12:1–8, 9–13). In the Sermon on the Mount, however, Jesus casts his teaching at several points in the form, “You have heard that it was said [in the law of Moses]. . . . But I say to you . . .” (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–34, 38–39, 43–44). Is this reinterpretation, which upholds the authority of the law but asserts that Jesus is the authoritative interpreter, or is it supersession of the law’s authority, making Jesus the sole authority and

rendering the law's specific commandments obsolete? Other parts of Matthew favor the first alternative (see Matt. 5:17–20; 8:4).

Jewish followers of Jesus had already been shaped by their upbringing in the synagogue, where Scripture (especially the Torah or Pentateuch) was central. Hence, much of the moral instruction of the early church takes for granted prevailing Jewish views about various moral subjects, including sexual ethics, concern for the poor, gender roles, the virtues that should characterize a godly person, and so forth. These assumptions occasionally become explicit in appeals to Scripture that rest on traditional Jewish interpretation (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:9–15). The Jewish heritage is especially evident in the most common form of direct moral appeal to Scripture, the example. Paul singles out Abraham as a man of steadfast trust in God (Rom. 4); so does Hebrews, mentioning other exemplary biblical figures as well (Heb. 11). James refers to the prophets and Job as examples of suffering and patience (Jas. 5:10–11). Negative examples are also adduced: Lot's wife (Luke 17:32); Israel (1 Cor. 10:1–11; Heb. 3:16–4:11); disobedient angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, and Korah (Jude 6–11); Esau (Heb. 12:16); and Cain (1 John 3:12).

### The Patristic Period

By the second century, the church possessed not only the Jewish Scriptures but also apostolic writings (Gospels, the letters of Paul, etc.) as guides for ethical reflection. On many topics the church fathers worked out views consistent with the ethics of Greek and Roman philosophers by claiming that the Greeks had stolen their ideas from Moses and by articulating a theory of natural law available to all human beings. The concept of natural law came from philosophy, but the fathers found support for the idea in Rom. 1.

The church also staked out distinctive positions on moral questions such as service in the army, abortion and infanticide, and sexuality. Regarding participation in the Roman army, Jesus' "disarming" of Peter in Gethsemane was a crucial proof-text (Matt. 26:52), taken as signaling a new era of nonviolence for God's people that superseded the old era, in which violence was sanctioned by God (Tertullian, *Idol.* 19). The *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* include abortion in lists of prohibitions modeled on the Ten Commandments (*Did* 2.2; *Barn.* 19.5). Later church teachers developed this position by working out theories of

the embryo as a living person (with a soul), as evidenced by, for example, the fetal kick of John the Baptist (anonymous Christian cited in Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 50).

The fathers generally affirmed the Pauline rule of freedom from the Mosaic law but worked out their own understandings of it. By the middle of the second century Christians were distinguishing between commandments meant to be taken literally by the church and commandments meant to be interpreted only spiritually. According to Justin Martyr, some laws have enduring force because they are moral law; some concern the mystery of Christ; some were given because of Israel's hardness of heart and had only a temporary purpose (see Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 44; 46). According to the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the Jews were deceived by an evil angel into interpreting the Mosaic laws of sacrifice and so forth literally (9.4), but Moses wrote "in the Spirit" (10.2, 9) for those who have heard the "voice of the Lord" (9.7) and are spiritually circumcised in their hearing (10.12).

At the same time, Jewish teaching remained an important influence in Christian ethical instruction—for example, in Christian adoption of the "two ways." Developed in Judaism as an interpretation of the two paths set forth in Deut. 30, the "two ways" concept assumed a variety of forms. Christian versions appear in *Did.* 1–5; *Barn.* 18–20; *Apos. Con.* 7. Book 1 of the *Didache* (*Did.* 1.1–6.2) is a paraphrase of teachings known to us from the Sermon on the Mount. Otherwise, the instructions in *Did.* 1–5 and *Barn.* 18–20 contain practically no material drawn directly from the oral Jesus tradition, the Gospels, or other first-century "apostolic" writings (such as the letters of Paul or James). But one can see forms of ethical expression found also in the Sermon on the Mount and the letters of Paul, particularly the vice and virtue list and the apothegm (a succinct moral directive sometimes briefly elaborated). By contrast, Scripture is used heavily in the moral instructions in book 7 of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, where the "two ways" teaching is explicitly traced to Deut. 30:15, the apothegm is the primary form of instruction, and specific apothegms are drawn from many different parts of the Bible.

Hostile attitudes toward Jewish conceptions of God, creation, and the moral life existed in some of the Christian groups who styled themselves "gnostics." At least some gnostics taught that the creator depicted in the Jewish Scriptures is an evil deity whose activity as creator and promulgation of the law through Moses brought human souls into spiritual darkness and servitude. A number

of gnostic interpreters apparently regarded the Scriptures as in some sense authoritative and devoted considerable energy to interpreting Genesis, which offered them material for working out their spiritual-theological cosmologies of human origins. Some of this commentary survives in the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the *Tripartite Tractate*. It appears that gnostics took a dim view of sexuality and bodily appetites, which perhaps made a rigorous asceticism morally normative in most gnostic circles.

In the wider church, the Jewish Scriptures were studied as a source of moral instruction and a reservoir of moral examples. We see this already in *1 Clement*, which begins with a long moral discourse based on biblical examples of behavior to be imitated and avoided (*1 Clem.* 1–12). In a revealing description of what “preaching” meant in the second-century church, Justin Martyr mentions lengthy readings from “the writings of the prophets or the memoirs of his apostles,” after which the “president” exhorts the people to imitate what they have heard (*1 Apol.* 67). In time, Christian schools were formed, which included moral instruction through study of biblical examples. Fourth-century Christian school exercises in “characterization” (*ethopoia*) taught students to imagine what biblical figures might have said in moments of moral crisis (e.g., what Cain said after he killed Abel [P.Bod. 33] and what Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac said after God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac [P.Bod. 20]). This was preparation for the day when the students, as preachers and teachers, would present biblical stories as compelling moral examples.

In addition to extracting moral examples from Scripture, Christian writers backed up their exhortations with one-sentence scriptural proofs. The purpose of these sentences probably was not so much to prove something as to restate the exhortation in scriptural language and thus give it greater motivational force. The use of short proof sentences from Scripture became a staple of Christian moral discourse for later writers, being used in all aspects of moral appeal. For example, in Basil’s *Longer Rules*, Scripture sentences are adduced to reinforce a rule of practice, underscore the consequences of a certain action (as a warning or motivation), stress the requirement of right means to an end, and define appropriate ends.

Allusion and unmarked paraphrase of Paul, the Gospels (and oral Jesus tradition), and other earlier Christian writings are also extremely common in the apostolic and postapostolic fathers, many of whom saturate their discourse with phrases

from Scripture. Apparently, it was assumed that the audience would detect most of the borrowing, in which case a high concentration of scriptural phrases gave the impression that the speaker’s exhortation and instruction were simply the voice of the Bible, as if no interpretation were going on. In fact, the selection and disposition of the scriptural words as they were knitted together by the speaker’s own formulations made for a highly interpretive use of Scripture.

Virtually all of the church fathers engaged in forms of allegorical interpretation, a method of exegesis based on the assumption that Scripture contains hidden (encoded) teaching. This often involved the discovery of instruction about the moral-spiritual journey of the individual soul. For example, commenting on the words “Come to Heshbon, let it be built” in a sermon on Num. 21:27 (*Hom. Num.* 13), Origen interprets “Heshbon” as the soul torn and emptied of its pagan beliefs and immoral habits, then rebuilt and outfitted with pious thoughts, correct understanding, and upright morals. As a general rule, the literal sense of the apostolic writings was regarded as the guide and control on allegorical interpretation. Some fathers spoke of a “rule of truth” or “rule of faith” as normative for interpretation (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine). This rule, which included an ethical aspect, was regarded as expressing the essentials of apostolic teaching.

Some church fathers differentiated between higher and lower forms of Christian moral life. The idea is perhaps suggested already in *Herm.* 56.3 and *Did.* 6.2 (cf. Tertullian, *Ux.* 1.3). Advocates appealed to what they saw as evidence of such a distinction in the NT, in 1 Cor. 7:25–38; Rom. 3:3 (so Origen); Matt. 19:21 (so Ambrose). Ambrose and Augustine distinguished between “precepts” (mandatory for all) and “counsels” (freely chosen only by some), a distinction that became basic to the thinking of the medieval church (Ambrose, *Vid.* 12.72; 14.82; Augustine, *Virginit.* 15.15).

The fathers also took up specific moral issues, relying on various sources of inquiry in their day. These included, along with Scripture, “common knowledge” based on custom and cultural consensus and arcane knowledge based on specialized inquiry. For example, advocates of an ascetic lifestyle drew on philosophical asceticism, medicine, and Scripture in working out their teachings on fasting, sexual abstinence, and other forms of bodily self-denial. Often appeals to the various authorities were tightly interwoven. For example, Jerome counsels the widow Furia about how to

ward off sexual desire by interpreting 1 Cor. 6:18 in the light of Galen's theory that certain foods stoke the body's internal heat, arousing passion (Jerome, *Epist.* 54.9). Similarly, Augustine seems to assume some current medical-philosophical conception of gestation when, commenting on Exod. 21:22, he says that the question of murder does not arise where the fetus is "unformed."

Augustine was the most important figure of the patristic period for the future of Christian theology and ethics in the Western church. He accepted the allegorical method but cautioned against excesses and insisted on respect for the letter. Augustine worked out what we would call an "ethic of interpretation," emphasizing that judgments about which interpretations of the text to embrace should be guided by love of God and neighbor, a view that manifestly reflects Matt. 22:40 (*Doctr. chr.* 1.36.40). Augustine also found a basis in Jesus' teaching for the principle that intent, as consent to an action and not simply desire, is the basic criterion for evaluating moral action. Hence, although adultery is wrong, it might be permissible in certain cases, such as when a wife yields to the sexual advances of a wealthy suitor in order to get money that her husband desperately needs to pay his taxes, provided she does not submit out of desire for the man (*Serm. dom.* 1.16.50).

### The Medieval Period

The fathers developed the concept of the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, and by the fourth century the basic contours of the canon were established. They also assumed that Scripture contains levels of meaning beyond the ordinary meaning of its words. The fifth-century theologian John Cassian formalized this hermeneutical tradition of multiple senses of Scripture into a fourfold scheme: historical (literal), allegorical (Christ and his church), anagogical (eschatological/heavenly), and tropological (having to do with the moral-spiritual formation of the soul). Thus, a number of fundamental interpretative assumptions were established in the early centuries of the church and taken over by the medieval church. To illustrate, in the Latin-speaking West the author (Lat. *auctor*) of Scripture was identified as the Holy Spirit and distinguished from the writer (Lat. *scriptor*) of a book of Scripture, the writer being a human being whom the Spirit used as an instrument. The concept of the unified authorship of Scripture justified interpreting passages far apart in time and place in the light of one

another. Moreover, almost everyone assumed that Scripture contains secrets veiled under shadow and figure that could be discovered through allegorical interpretation. The plain sense set a certain limit on what allegorical exegesis could discover, but the latter also offered a way to find cherished philosophical concepts in biblical books that looked unphilosophical at the literal level. Greek moral philosophy, which focused on the formation of character, had been an influential conversation partner of the fathers. In the medieval period the allegorical method helped build a conceptual bridge between the unified authorship of Scripture and the newly rediscovered *Nicomachean Ethics* of "the Philosopher" (Aristotle).

The relation of Scripture to the world was also conceived differently than in the days when the church's relation to the world was essentially oppositional—as in early Christian apocalyptic but also in the pre-Constantinian church's sense of being an alien minority in a hostile world from which the path to martyrdom or the way of monastic and ascetic life was the noblest means of resistance and escape. The growth of the church in the fourth century and the changed political situation prompted a reconceptualization that affected how Scripture was read "historically" and "politically" in the early medieval period. In several works Eusebius had already woven scriptural history together with pagan history to form a salvation-historical narrative in which the Jewish patriarchs were cast as superior in understanding to their pagan counterparts. The Christian poet Prudentius viewed not only the Jewish but also the pagan past as preparatory (in a typological way) for the revelation in Christ and as part of a unified salvation history. Working in a similar vein, later minds not only read wider history in the light of Scripture but also interpreted Scripture in the light of wider history. Hence, in 492, responding to a crisis in which the current emperor claimed authority over the church in doctrinal matters, Pope Gelasius I argued that the emperors of Rome ceased to exercise priestly authority once Christ appeared, showing that Christ, the true priest and king, had in effect established a new relation between priestly and royal power. Apparently, Gelasius treated history and Scripture as both divinely authored, with Scripture providing clues to the meaning of history and history providing clues to the meaning of Scripture.

The new view of Christ's relation to temporal power encouraged the use of the OT for models of rulership (kingship), but the relation between church and state had to be worked out. Gelasius

observed that in the past some persons, such as Melchizedek, were both kings and priests, but that when Christ appeared, the true king and priest (an allusion to the Christology of Hebrews), he established a separation of these offices. In the twelfth century, the conviction that Christ is the true and supreme king over the world inspired the idea that the pope is the vicar (representative) of Christ. This meant that whatever Scripture says of Christ could be applied to the pope as his vicar. Allegorical interpretation of the “two swords” text in Luke 22:38 proved that the priesthood possesses both spiritual and political authority. Hence, it became plausible to use OT stories of kings, along with other passages deemed to speak (literally or allegorically) about temporal power, in support of a pontiff’s political aims and actions. Notable examples of this kind of self-serving exegesis are found in the “political” sermons of Pope Clement VI (1291–1352).

The Christ of the Gospels was also the model for the Christian life generally. Naturally, the proper way to imitate Christ was debated. One of the most pronounced discussions concerned the poverty of Christ. This interpretive conflict reached particular intensity in the fourteenth century between the Franciscans, who insisted that imitation required a vow of absolute poverty, and Pope John XXII, who rejected the claim that Jesus had ever embraced absolute poverty. Both sides appealed to a common fund of biblical passages. Central was how to understand the instructions in Matt. 10:9–10 to the disciples, when they are sent out on their mission, about taking no gold, silver, copper, and so on, a topic that led to the question of whether Pope John XXII had violated a “natural right” when he legally annulled Franciscan poverty in a series of bulls in 1322–23. William of Ockham’s defense of the Franciscans helped to establish the concept of a natural right as a freedom, a notion that would outlive the debate about Christ’s poverty.

In the medieval world, rules for the ordering of life under churchly authority, including moral behavior and discipline, were developed in what came to be known as “canon law,” a loose body of authoritative tradition that was eventually systematized in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Gratian’s *Decretum* and a collection of papal decretals assembled by Raymond of Peñafort under Pope Gregory IX. Sources included the Bible and Roman law as well as papal and conciliar decrees. In this era, but less so in subsequent development of canon law, the influence of the Bible was conspicuous. According to Gratian, the Bible reveals

natural law, which is distinct from human custom, and in his *Decretum* the Bible figures prominently as a source of prooftexts.

The work of codifying and interpreting canon law differed from moral theology, the primary purpose of which was not to articulate and interpret rules but rather to give an intelligible account of the moral-spiritual formation of the soul in preparation for heaven and the beatific vision. This went back to Augustine, who also inherited from his Christian and pagan predecessors a view of ethics as virtue-centered and oriented to character formation. Hence, the great French scholastic Peter Abelard (1079–1142) opened his treatise on ethics (*Scito te ipsum*) with the statement “We regard morals as the virtues and vices of the mind that make us prone to good or bad deeds.”

In the theological *summa* (a systematic compendium of theology), discussion of right action assumed the teaching of the church (codified in various bodies of canon law), which the scholars sought to interpret, not debate. The scholastics applied reason to moral questions in the light of Scripture and through interaction with other revered authorities—the church fathers and certain ancient philosophers regarded as sources of insight, to be reconciled where possible, not simply as debate partners.

Byzantine scholars transmitted ancient commentaries on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and wrote their own commentaries on the same. The Byzantine interest in Greek philosophical ethics is also evinced in a Christianized version of Epictetus’s *Enchiridion*, which served as a cherished introduction to ethics in the East, and Eastern moral exegesis of Scripture appeared in all kinds of works, including ascetical writings on prayer and spirituality. Nevertheless, Eastern Christian ethics did not become the subject of treatises but rather was treated almost exclusively as a dimension of theology, specifically, as a basic aspect of divine communion (or “deification”).

The importance of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition for Western medieval scholars led to debates about whether philosophy (and philosophical ethics) could be legitimately pursued on its own terms as an inquiry separate from theological ethics and the revelation in Scripture. One advocate of this conceptual separation was Albert the Great, who wrote the first Latin commentary on the whole of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. In conversation with Aristotle, Albert defined happiness as intellectual contemplation of immaterial, invisible realities achieved through detachment from earthly things through ascent to the divine.

In his commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Albert quoted Scripture only rarely. For example, in his extensive treatment of chapter 10 in his first commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Albert quotes Scripture only about ten times. Far more frequent are quotations from the fathers and from more recent scholars (including other commentators on Aristotle). The relative absence of Scripture owes in part to the topics, which often do not lend themselves to easy proof-texting from Scripture, and above all to the nature of the discourse as Albert conceives it: a philosophical discussion based on reason with only minimal recourse to proofs from the Bible. This approach was typical of a good deal of philosophically oriented medieval discussions of ethics. Methodologically, philosophical ethics, unlike theological ethics, did not rely on Scripture and Christian tradition but rather was conducted on the basis of reason through commentary on classical philosophers such as Aristotle. Hence, the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* by the great thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas (*Sententia libri ethicorum*) does not refer to Scripture at all.

Scripture does play a role in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, including the second part, where he examines the conditions of moral existence and its philosophical foundations. Thomas begins with the purpose of human life and the nature of the moral life (human action, passions and habits, vice and virtue, law and grace), then goes on to examine specific virtues and vices. These include the primary "theological" (or "supernatural") virtues of faith, hope, and charity, along with the chief "natural" virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Conceiving moral existence in terms of virtues and vices was a traditional approach, going back to the fathers and especially to Augustine, who derived the theological virtues from Scripture (with 1 Cor. 13:13 providing the hermeneutical key) and the natural virtues from the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition as mediated through Christian reflection.

The sections of Thomas's *Summa theologiae* dealing with ethics take the same form as other parts of the work. He presents logical analyses set forth in a consistent pattern of formal disputation (proposition, objections to it, his answer, and his replies to the objections) in which authorities are quoted from time to time. These authorities are Scripture, church fathers (Augustine, Ambrose, and others), certain ancient philosophers (especially Aristotle), and occasionally another source such as canon law. One or more of these

authorities may be found in many arguments, but not every argument contains an appeal to authority. Quotations from Scripture appear in some objections, but most are found in Thomas's statement of his own view (in contraries, answers, and replies). These quotations are almost always a single sentence from the Bible: a declaration, often in the form of a *sententia* (apothegm) or treated as such; a statement about what God does (past, present, or future tense); or an exhortation that can be treated as expressive of a principle or as showing a relation between concepts. The scriptural sentences are used in various ways: as a major premise in an argument, as a supplemental proof of a conclusion of an argument, as a formulation of a contrary, as evidence for the meaning of a key word or concept, and as a basis for drawing an inference about a relation between concepts. Thomas rarely appeals to anything but the plain sense of Scripture, although he does not oppose the hermeneutic of multiple senses and argues that the ceremonial and judicial laws of the OT have figurative meanings. He also never debates the interpretation of a text but almost always treats the meaning of Scripture as self-evident; only very occasionally does he cite an authority for an interpretation of Scripture (e.g., *ST II-I*, q. 4, a. 2).

A different rhetorical form of ethical discourse is found in Abelard's *Scito te ipsum*, a logical-philosophical analysis of moral culpability in which Scripture figures not only as a fund of *sententiae* but also as a source of moral examples. Sometimes Abelard expounds the meaning of a scriptural sentence. He also sometimes brings together groups of scriptural statements and discusses their interrelation as he develops a point, always assuming the inherent unity of Scripture. It is apparent that Scripture profoundly shaped Abelard's thinking. At the same time, he depended on the scholastic tradition for concepts and questions for interpreting Scripture.

A common theme in scholastic ethics is the nature of love as the central moral teaching of the Bible. The NT and the fathers bequeathed to the later church the conviction that love is the highest affection and the supreme virtue. Augustine, on whom medieval thinkers heavily depended, sought to encapsulate this teaching in an epigram: "Love, and do what you will" (*Tract. ep. Jo.* 7.8). For Augustine, love was not simply a criterion for judging right from wrong but rather a "weight" in the heart that moves the will to a good purpose and ultimately to union with God (*Conf.* 13.9.10). In this sense, love is passionate but in a spiritual sense, without bodily desire.

The idea that love, rightly understood, lacks sexual desire might have posed problems for the medieval efforts to interpret Song of Songs, but ever since Origen, that book had been interpreted as an allegory of spiritual love: Christ the bridegroom burning with celestial love for the church (or for the soul of each believer). Origen called that love *eros* (much less frequently *agape*) and thus inspired a spiritual eroticism of commentary on Song of Songs. Medieval divines interpreted Song of Songs on the basis of the fourfold reading of Scripture, which included a tropological (moral) sense. The tropological *modus* was variously understood as speaking in Song of Songs of the nuptials of the soul and Christ in a purifying spiritual ascent (Honorius); the soul's progression through faith, hope, and charity (Bernard of Clairvaux); the soul as a bride whom the Spirit makes "fertile with the offspring of the virtues" (the *Eulogium sponsi di sponsa* [PL 176, 987C]); and so forth. The medieval tradition of commentary on Song of Songs also saw a shift from expositions focused on the higher moral-spiritual life of the cloistered to interpretations that applied Song of Songs to the more general human struggle to order and direct desire.

The book of Psalms also offered expressions of the soul's ardent love for God and was revered as an innerbiblical corpus containing virtually everything found elsewhere in Scripture. That comprehensiveness was understood as including a moral voice in which David's colloquy with God is also David's dialogue with the church. David was seen as both a moral exemplar and a moral instructor. In commentary and preaching, as well as paraphrases and imitations of the psalms, David was taught as a model of compunction and penance, a source of soothing words to the soul in spiritual pain, and an example of justifiable individual and collective complaint in the midst of spiritual and temporal sufferings. Richard Rolle (1290–1349) extolled the psalms as medicine for the sick soul, urging recitation of them as a means to attain a vision of heaven. An instance of politically charged use of the complaint psalms is John Lydgate's rewriting of Ps. 136 in his *Defense of Holy Church* (1413–14). Lydgate encouraged readers to think of Henry V as a modern-day David who ought to remain vigilant against the political machinations of the Lollards.

### The Reformation Era

The various branches of the Protestant Reformation championed the principle of *sola scriptura*

and tended to be biblicistic in their approaches to theology and ethics. This biblicism led to reconceptualizations of the relation of church and society. Martin Luther's insistence that gospel and law are fundamentally different revived the old question of how Christians are to understand and make use of the Mosaic law. Reformers who represented what came to be known as the Lutheran and Reformed branches of Protestantism worked out a threefold use of the law: the law given to constrain behavior (the "first" or "civil" use); the law as God's means of convicting sinners and driving them to the mercy of the gospel (the "second" or "evangelical" use); and the law (or certain parts of law, the Ten Commandments above all) as moral law for the church (the "third" use). The third use of the law first appears in the writings of Philip Melancthon. Luther seems generally to have affirmed it, although he did not emphasize or expound it. The third use became enshrined as an expression of Lutheran faith in article 6 of the *Formula of Concord* (1577) and was also embraced by John Calvin (*Institutes* 2.7.12), becoming a hallmark of Reformed theology.

Calvin's understanding of the third use of the law was closely connected with his conception of sanctification as a process of increasing conformity to the Ten Commandments. Calvin regarded the Ten Commandments as the most comprehensive revelation of moral principles in Scripture. Under their broad injunctions one could order all the more specific moral instructions of the Bible. Other Reformers gave pride of place to the Sermon on the Mount as the epitome of scriptural ethics, and everyone found a hermeneutical key in Jesus' teaching that all of Scripture "hangs" on the two Great Commandments, love of God and neighbor (Matt. 22:40). For Calvin, the double love command ought to guide the interpretation of individual commandments. For Luther, the double love command showed above all the unity of the law in love as a principle for distinguishing law and gospel.

Another area of fresh discussion was the Sermon on the Mount. Against tradition, Luther argued that this sermon presents not counsels of perfection for the few but rather a gospel ethic to which every Christian is to aspire. At the same time, the sermon defines the moral life of the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of this world—that is, not the social order, which must be governed by law and not by the gospel. The distinction between law and gospel and the doctrine of two kingdoms guided Luther's interpretation of Paul's teaching about civil authority in Rom. 13. According to

Luther, the word *person* (*anima* or “soul” in the Vulgate) in Paul’s instruction “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1) includes the pope. Hence, the church does not stand above civil authority and must be obedient to it, at least in matters pertaining to worldly order (*To the Christian Nobility*).

Where Luther sharply distinguished temporal and spiritual authority as belonging to different spheres (different “kingdoms”), other Reformers assumed a greater unity between the two. Of particular significance is Huldrych Zwingli’s notion that the ordination of civil authority, according to Rom. 13:1–7, includes the idea, or at least the possibility, that the Christian magistrate who hears the gospel will carry out his office according to God’s will (*On Divine and Human Justice*). The concept of the Christian magistrate was a basic hermeneutical axiom in Zwingli’s approach to civil authority, and he tended to think of the body of Christ (the *corpus Christianum*) as a unity entailing the whole of society. Accordingly, in his commentary on Jeremiah (1531), Zwingli proposed that when citizens and magistrate heed the gospel, “the Christian city is nothing other than the Christian church.” Zwingli interpreted Matt. 18:15–20 (on dealing with an offender) as a basis for the Christian magistrate to exercise the right of excommunication, and he appealed to the fact that the OT spoke of rulers as “shepherds” to argue that the magistrate has a role in church discipline.

If Paul’s teaching about law and gospel in Romans and Galatians became guiding canons for Luther and his followers, the concept of discipleship in the Gospels provided the hermeneutical key for the Anabaptists, who made up the bulk of the so-called radical wing of the Reformation. According to Anabaptists, the prescriptions of the Sermon on the Mount are not individual and aspirational goals but rather are divine commands for a disciplined ordering of community life. The Anabaptists stressed the moral transformation of the believer and rejected or downplayed the concept of original sin, emphasizing the teaching in Ezekiel that sons do not inherit the guilt of their fathers (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Christ, they said, makes believers ethically righteous, which is the main point of the only Anabaptist writing that directly discusses “atonement theory” (*On the Satisfaction of Christ* [c. 1530]). The Anabaptist focus on the example and teachings of Jesus as the template for community ethics led most Anabaptists to embrace pacifism (e.g., those influenced by Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons, but not Thomas Müntzer and his followers). Article 6

of the Schleitheim Articles of the Swiss Brethren (1527) summarizes the scriptural basis for non-violence; almost all the prooftexts come from the example and teaching of Jesus. Moreover, on the basis of Jesus’ teaching about discipleship (Matt. 6:19–34; Luke 12:33; 14:33) and descriptions of the community of goods in Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–5:11, Anabaptists also renounced private property (so the Hutterites and Swiss Anabaptists according to the Swiss *Congregational Order* of 1527) or at least put special importance on simplicity of life and care for the poor. Anabaptists understood the reference in Luke 4:18 to preaching good news to the poor as a crucial expression of the gospel, calling for a church of and for the poor. They also rejected the taking of oaths (on the basis of Matt. 5:33–37).

The Roman response to the Protestant Reformation involved the so-called Counter-Reformation, in which the Council of Trent (1545–64) played a crucial role. At this council the Roman Catholic Church reaffirmed but also revised its canon law, declared that both the Bible and unwritten traditions passed down from the apostles are to be revered as sources of truth, and stressed that the church must be regarded as superior in its judgments over private interpretation (*Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures*, Session IV [1546]). But responding to Protestant challenges was not the only concern of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. A number of creative thinkers were working on their own questions in the domains of both theology and ethics. A subject bearing on biblical interpretation was “probabilism.” Dominican theologian Bartholomew Medina, commenting on Thomas Aquinas, had formulated the following principle: “If an opinion is probable, it may be followed, even if the opposing opinion is more probable” (*Commentary on the Summa* I-II, 19.6). This view became a dominant topic of discussion among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Roman Catholic divines. In matters of ethics probabilism touched individual moral freedom, and in *Apologema pro antiquissima et universalissima doctrina de probabilitate* (1663), Juan Caramuel analyzed examples of moral action in Scripture in an effort to show that an incipient probabilism is present in Scripture’s judgment on those actions.

### The Modern (and Postmodern) Era

By the late nineteenth century, questions of personal morality, domestic relations, contemporary

social and political problems, the relation of church and state, the duties of citizenship, relations between nations, the proper role of government, the nature of justice, movements such as communism and socialism, questions of human rights, the poor, and so forth were ordered under a discipline of “Christian ethics” (in the Protestant world) or “moral theology” (in Roman Catholicism) distinct from the disciplines of biblical theology and dogmatic theology. This development was an eventual result from a momentous shift in the late eighteenth century when study of the Bible (in the universities of Europe) began to be separated from dogmatic theology as a distinct historical subject. According to the new conception, set forth programmatically by Johann Philipp Gabler in a famous address in 1787, specialists in biblical studies were to supply the theologians with critically established historical descriptions of biblical theology; the theologians, for their part, had the constructive task of translating biblical theology into contemporary thought forms. For Christian ethics, this meant applying the Bible to the questions of the day with awareness of the need for translation from the ancient world into the modern. Christian ethics and moral theology emerged as later disciplinary divisions. In practice, however, no strict division of labor was followed by individual scholars; one finds systematic treatments of ethics that depend on ethicists’ and dogmatists’ own interpretations of Scripture, as well as historical studies of biblical ethics that are oriented to modern questions and concerns.

Nevertheless, there was growing agreement that while the Bible has a fixed sense (its historical sense), Christian ethics is a constructive discipline that must constantly evolve to grapple with new issues and to rethink old issues under changed conditions. At the same time, there was an increasing sense of a gap between the diverse moralities of Scripture and what seemed morally proper and rational to the modern mind. This posed a challenge to the Protestant project of basing theology and ethics directly on Scripture. Hence, for some, the Bible’s perceived moral deficiencies called for defense through rational interpretation and explanation (e.g., J. A. Hessey, *Moral Difficulties Connected with the Bible* [1871]; Newman Smyth, *The Morality of the Old Testament* [1886]).

The new relation between biblical morality and contemporary moral thought was worked out in terms of new modes of inquiry set in motion by the Enlightenment, which solidified the Cartesian method of inquiry not only in science but also, in modified form, in other fields. In a way that

almost defies historical analysis (because of the interaction over centuries of so many political and intellectual forces), the Bible helped create the conditions for the Enlightenment but also became an object of Enlightenment criticism, including criticism based on Enlightenment notions of religion. Advocates of the Enlightenment approach to knowledge championed reason against the authority of institutions (notably the church) and ancient books (the Bible and Aristotle). The recognition by seventeenth-century scientists (*philosophes*) that neither ancient philosophy nor Scripture offered adequate or accurate foundations for inquiries into cosmology, geography, geology, physical anthropology, and the like had led to a distinction between the scope (*scopus*) of philosophy (science) and the scope of Scripture. The province of science was empirical truth; the province of the Bible was the truth about God and salvation. In the eighteenth century this view was increasingly embraced by divines, including John Wesley. They regarded the Bible as authoritative for matters of faith and the moral life, not for knowledge about the physical world.

For some, however, the authority of the Bible was no longer absolute even for doctrine or ethics. Alexander Geddes (1737–1802), an early historical critic, concluded that the divine command that the Israelites exterminate the Canaanites (Josh. 1–3) was not really from God but rather was an invention of “some posterior Jew” (*The Holy Bible*, vol. 2 [1797], ii). This form of moral criticism of Scripture differed from the traditional view going back to the church fathers, who claimed that God had accommodated to “Jewish weakness” by encoding with allegory various practices commanded in the Jewish Scriptures that were later superseded in their literal sense by Christ. Geddes and other Enlightenment Christians treated the Bible like any other ancient book, subjecting it to the same moral criticism that they applied to Homer and other ancient writers. Geddes and other practitioners of what was called “higher criticism” also tended to differentiate the teachings of the OT from the “pure religion of Jesus,” which they understood as essentially moral and rational (devoid of the supernatural and of traditional dogma). Intense interest in reconstructing the true history and true religion of Jesus behind the trappings of the Gospels led to numerous portraits of Jesus from 1750 through the early twentieth century, many of which cast Jesus chiefly as an enlightened moral teacher (so Joseph Priestley, G. W. F. Hegel, Ernst Renan, and Adolf von Harnack). The religio-moral authority of Jesus was largely taken

for granted in these reconstructions, but the Bible was treated not as an authority but rather as a fallible historical source for recovering the life and teaching of Jesus. This shift from the assumption that authority resides in a text (Scripture) to the view that authority resides in history (in the Jesus of history or in God's activity in history) was one aspect of a broader theological problem posed by the Enlightenment: how could faith rest on the "accidents" of history and the uncertainties of historical knowledge?

For the majority of Christians who continued to accept the authority of Scripture, a number of ethical issues came to the fore as matters of intense debate in the nineteenth century. These included the question of whether the Bible supports slavery (a debate begun by abolitionists who began marshaling Scripture against defenders of the institution) and whether it teaches the subordination of women (to their husbands and to men in general). In working out their arguments from Scripture, women such as Elizabeth Wordsworth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Florence Nightingale used the concept of "progressive revelation" (developed by Enlightenment thinkers such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing) to assign patriarchy (and other things in the OT that they found morally repugnant) to the primitive beginnings of biblical morality. Moreover, by assuming that the revelation of morality in Scripture is from the primitive to the more enlightened, they plotted an evolutionary trajectory that pointed beyond the limited egalitarian vision of the apostles (such as Paul) to perfect equality of the sexes as God's ultimate will.

The concept of progressive revelation in biblical morality was also embraced by abolitionists such as Francis Wayland to argue that the slaveholding of the patriarchs has less revelatory weight than NT teaching (notably the command of Jesus to love one's neighbor as oneself). Wayland and other abolitionists also developed a hermeneutic of "ethical implication," which seems to have owed something to principles of legal interpretation invoked in nineteenth-century debates about the US Constitution. They argued that the moral teaching of Scripture consists in what is commanded or prohibited in Scripture but also in what is required by or consistent with Scripture's explicit injunctions. Accordingly, they maintained that the system of slavery in America, because it did not recognize the parental rights of slaves, violated implicit ordinances of Scripture, namely, the duty of children to obey parents and of parents to care for and exercise authority over their children (Wayland, *Elements of Moral Science* [1856 edition]).

A good deal of nineteenth-century Protestant ethics entailed establishing Christian morality on the basis of theological doctrines and, with the aid of theophilosophical principles, working out positions on specific moral questions (e.g., in the influential works of Hans Martensen, G. C. A. Harless, and Isaak Dorner). Gabler's program assumed the existence of "universal concepts" by which to translate biblical theology into dogmatic theology. This idea appears to have controlled the constructive efforts of many nineteenth-century Christian ethicists who referred to the Bible only occasionally (and usually in the old proof-texting style of the medieval theologians that they claimed to have superseded) by referring generally to what Scripture "teaches." Thus, it is with breezy confidence that R. F. Weidner asserted (in an epitome of the Christian ethics of Martensen and Harless) that "the education of man for the Kingdom of God" is a basic teaching of Scripture about "the aim of history" (*Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. [1897], 37). This and similar theophilosophical conceptions of the message of the Bible reflected an age devoted to the idea that history is evolving progressively through increasing enlightenment toward the earthly kingdom of God.

The end of the nineteenth century also saw the birth of the history-of-religions school, which put in question the presumed uniqueness of Israelite and early Christian religion in their ancient religious environments. Within the diverse theological movement known as neoorthodoxy, higher criticism's historical relativization of biblical ethics was met with different responses. For Rudolf Bultmann, who maintained that there is nothing in the ethics of the NT that an upstanding pagan would not have endorsed, the witness of the gospel, preserved most clearly in Paul, entails freedom not simply from the Mosaic law but from every human convention and moral norm. The Bible bears on ethics not by providing its material criteria but rather by disclosing a way of being characterized by radical faith, which Bultmann expounded through a Christian form of existentialism. Most neoorthodox theologians accepted the results of historical criticism and recognized that the moral teachings of the Bible are diverse, reflecting a variety of practices in different times and places and showing the influence of the beliefs of other ancient Mediterranean peoples. Hence, except within emergent fundamentalism, it was generally agreed that biblical morality had to be mediated through some kind of critical hermeneutic and could not be accepted naively.

In the twentieth century, the use of the Bible in ethics often entailed the assumption that Scripture speaks appropriately to the present not at its moral rule level (the level of specific prescriptions) but only at the level of its general ethical concepts—love, justice, mercy, peace, nonviolence, reconciliation, equality, and so forth (e.g., Paul Ramsey). Some who operated with this hermeneutical assumption attended to biblical rules (commandments and other moral instructions) by looking to the purpose behind the rule and treated that purpose as more important than the letter of the rule.

In addition to taking seriously the problem of the great cultural distance between the social worlds presupposed by biblical morality(ies) and those of the modern era, twentieth-century interpreters also approached biblical ethics with awareness of the apocalyptic assumptions under which NT writers framed their moral instructions. Many interpreters concluded that since the early Christians expected a near end of the world, their instructions about how to live ought to be understood as “interim ethics”—that is, an ethics for the time between the passing present order and the soon-to-arrive new creation. This concept was famously applied to the Sermon on the Mount by Albert Schweitzer but also influenced how Paul’s practical instructions to his churches were viewed. Seeing NT ethics as largely interim ethics was another argument against appropriating its teachings at the rule level.

Some twentieth-century interpreters embraced the concept of eschatological transition (found in, e.g., 1 Cor. 7:29–31) and made it the basis of a “crisis ethic.” Eschewing moral rules as alien to the gospel, they maintained that every believer is always living between the times and must discover God’s will in the crisis created by the tension between the ever-present old and new. Bultmann worked out a crisis ethic through conversation with existentialist philosophy. Karl Barth maintained that ultimately the Christian is called to be obedient not to Scripture but rather to God’s personal address, contending that the Bible’s witness to God’s revelation in Christ prepares one to hear God’s command, but that the command is not found in Scripture and must be heard in the concrete situation. Others who adopted the eschatological framework maintained that believers are called to live between the times by embodying the radical ethic of Jesus. The church has to discern the way, but that discernment ought to hew closely to the specific patterns of life expressed in the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and

displayed in the paradigm of Jesus’ life (so Stanley Hauerwas).

The scope and the purpose of Christian ethics also were in dispute. In the first half of the century it was largely assumed that, in addition to working out norms for personal ethics, the church has a responsibility to apply Christian ethical principles to society, a task requiring judgments about the bearing of biblical teaching on social and political questions. Advocates of “Christian realism” distinguished the personal from the social, arguing, for example, that the Sermon on the Mount presents an ideal suited to individual moral aspiration but impractical for social life. Social existence requires a realistic ethic of justice worked out in terms of broad biblical concepts, not concrete biblical prescriptions (so Reinhold Niebuhr). In the latter part of the twentieth century a number of influential voices began insisting that the church, not the individual or society, is the proper subject of Christian ethics. The church is called to be a distinct moral community that bears witness to the world by embodying the way of Jesus. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and other rigorous NT moral instruction were meant not as a general social ethic or a merely personal ethic but rather as an ethic for the church. For some, this understanding of ecclesial ethics was a way of rejecting the assumptions of Christendom (the notion of a unified Christian social order) in favor of the agonistic relation between the church and the world assumed by the NT (so John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas). Increasing religious pluralism and secularization made this way of thinking attractive for those who wished to conform their lives in Christian community as closely as possible to what they understood as NT patterns of faith and life without imagining that the church could or should shape the wider society in the image of the kingdom of God.

In Roman Catholic circles natural-law ethics tended to dominate, although after Vatican II there was greater interest in a renewal of moral theology nourished by study of Scripture (*Optatum Totius* §16). At the same time, critical academic study of Scripture was much more likely to receive the Vatican’s imprimatur than in previous generations. Meanwhile in Europe (in the form of political theology) and in Latin America (in the form of liberation theology) the post–World War II period saw both Protestants and Catholics engaging Scripture with fresh interest in a Christian social ethics that would place the problem of the poor front and center. Latin American liberation theology espoused a new hermeneutical

principle, contending that the Bible speaks not only on behalf of the poor but also from their perspective; hence, the poor are in the best social location to understand Scripture. This idea, called “the epistemological privilege of the poor,” was allied to the conviction that social location (and precommitments) shapes interpretation of the Bible. The appearance of liberation theology in the Western academy ushered in an era of perspectival interpretation. Various scholars began stressing that the influence of social location is not a problem to be overcome but rather is a necessary condition of interpretation that should be formalized as part of the hermeneutic process (see, e.g., Tolbert and Segovia). At the same time, the field of hermeneutics was overwhelmed by theoretical challenges. Whether in the dialogical forms espoused by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur or the deconstructionist brands associated with Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, philosophical hermeneutics confronted Christian ethics with questions about the semantic clarity of texts and the location of meaning in texts, radicalizing the kinds of questions that earlier generations of Christians had tackled in discussing, for example, allegorical interpretation, the perspicuity of Scripture, and probabilism.

The interaction between liberationist and philosophical hermeneutics raised fresh questions about both the interpreter and the biblical text as factors in the hermeneutic process. If the church fathers and most theologians of the medieval and Reformation eras had assumed that in order to interpret rightly one needed to be well formed spiritually, and if the Enlightenment and its heirs had tended to emphasize the power of reason and the importance of “method” in interpretation, an increasing number of late-twentieth-century interpreters focused on the process by which the socially (or ideologically) conditioned interpreter constructs meaning out of a (somewhat or radically) “indeterminate” biblical text under the impulse of a certain interest (or precommitment). Recognizing that in a situation of multiple interpretive possibilities and competing human interests the interpreter must be regarded as a moral agent led to reflection on the “ethics of interpretation” (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Daniel Patte).

Biblical scholarship also became increasingly sensitive to the role of literary or oral “form” in textual communication and the importance of considering the nature and purpose of a biblical text before using it as a basis for conclusions about ethics. Hence, one asked whether poetic descriptions of God’s knowledge of the person in the

womb (Ps. 139:13–16) were being used appropriately if made the basis for inferences about the moral status of the fetus or whether references to animal life in poetic descriptions designed to extol the greatness of the Creator (Ps. 104) warranted philosophical inferences about the moral status of living things in Christian versions of deep ecology. At the same time, many biblical interpreters were also developing a fresh appreciation for the way Scripture, in the variety of its genres (and not only or even primarily in ethical prescriptions), bears on ethics by shaping community Christian identity and providing insight into moral formation.

By the close of the twentieth century, the role of the Bible in Christian ethics had become a highly complex theological and intellectual problem. Except in fundamentalist circles, one could no longer simply equate biblical ethics with Christian ethics. The diversity of moral perspectives in Scripture and the epochal difference between antiquity and modernity (or postmodernity) made it difficult to conceive the Bible as a direct source of Christian ethics. This problem was only exacerbated by a growing perception that Scripture was not only a weapon against ideology (as Latin American liberation theology generally treated the Bible) but also a purveyor of it (as some feminist biblical interpreters contended). Hence, by the dawn of the twenty-first century, almost all participants in the discussion agreed that the Bible is in some sense an authority for Christian ethics, but conceptions of that authority—its force and scope—continued to vary widely.

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# SCRIPTURE IN ETHICS

## *Methodological Issues*

BRUCE C. BIRCH

All traditions that regard the text of the Bible as Scripture would agree that these texts should be important resources for Christian ethics. Yet there is little agreement on, and often little attention paid to, how Scripture and ethics relate. Although the literature on this relationship has grown significantly in the last two decades, the tendency in practice in the Christian life is to leave this relationship unexamined. Texts are only casually or haphazardly brought into conversation with formative or normative concerns for Christian ethics. This article seeks to raise some issues of perspective, foundational understandings, and methodological practice that might be helpful in constructing a more self-conscious relating of Scripture to the moral life in Christian practice. The views reflected here in brief draw on and are consistent with longer treatments of this subject in previous publications (Birch and Rasmussen; Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*).

### **Perspectives on Biblical Ethics**

It is helpful to think of different arenas within which questions of the relationship between the Bible and ethics can be raised. Each of these arenas poses different challenges and offers differing insights, but it is important not to confuse them or assume only one to be significant.

#### *The World behind the Text*

Some treatments of biblical ethics have focused on recovering, understanding, and critically assessing the morality of the biblical communities out of which the biblical texts were produced. Since these texts represent the witness of Israel and the early church stretching over more than fifteen centuries, the ethical systems of differing

times, places, and groups reflected in the biblical text are diverse and complex.

Naturally, there has been considerable interest in recovering the morality of Jesus as the central figure in Christian faith, understood by most Christian traditions as God incarnate in human history. How Jesus lived, who he understood himself to be, and how his death and resurrection became the confessional foundation for the formation of the church make Jesus' own understanding of ethics crucially important. The popular slogan "What would Jesus do?" reflects this concern to use the ethics of Jesus as a model for moral conduct.

By the same token, entire denominational traditions have placed a high value on discovering and emulating the pattern of moral life practiced in the earliest church, especially as reflected in the book of Acts and the writings of Paul and other early church leaders in the NT Epistles. These NT writings often are treated as manuals of conduct for contemporary Christian life.

Efforts to discern and understand the ethics of Jesus or the early church may help to deepen our knowledge of the biblical communities that produced the witnesses of the biblical text. However, these communities were diverse and complex, and their testimonies in the biblical texts do not produce a single, unified ethic that can be emulated. There are four canonical Gospels, and each has a unique portrait of Jesus. There have been many notable efforts to recover the actual words and teachings of Jesus in a historical sense, and these have produced no uniform result. The writings of Paul and other NT authors reflect the unique circumstances of early congregations in differing time periods, and although all contribute to the resources for Christian ethics, there is once again no singular unified Christian ethic to be recovered and emulated.

With respect to the OT, the witness of Israel to its life lived in covenant with God is even more diverse and stretched over a longer period of time and historical circumstances. Efforts to find unifying themes throughout the OT texts or developmental patterns of moral conduct have been notably unsuccessful. We cannot produce a typical or complete history of ancient Israelite ethics. Different texts reflect different social strata and historical settings. Many recent studies have helped us to understand these glimpses of ancient Israel more fully in their own contexts, but there is no singular code of moral conduct to be emulated here. Instead, there is a richness of testimony of life lived in relation to God, both in obedience and disobedience. We may learn from these and be informed from them in our own moral efforts, and this methodology is addressed later in this article.

### *The Text as Canon*

Another way to understand biblical ethics is to see it as the moral conversation contained within the texts collected, edited, recognized, and passed on as a canon of Scripture. For Christians, the canons of the OT and the NT (and, for Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, the Apocrypha) have been collectively passed on through the generations as foundational for Christian faith and practice, theology and ethics. As soon as these texts have been gathered into the collections of Law, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, and Epistles and given authority as scriptural canon throughout historical processes of collection and recognition, a new context is created for assessing the biblical resources for Christian ethics. Individual books and at times divergent voices within a single book may be studied for their moral witness, but also subject to study and reflection are the moral conversations that take place between books and texts within the canon. Tensions, agreements, convergences, continuities, and contradictions are now handed on from one generation to the next. One concern of biblical ethics is to listen carefully and critically to the moral witness of the entire canon.

The character of the moral conversation created by the formation of canon is to some degree an artificial construct that transcends the witness to any particular historical context in biblical times. Biblical ethics at this canonical level can be informed by what we can critically discover about the particularities of the world behind the text, but the canon itself forms a new context within which texts make their moral witness in a larger conversation. This canonical moral witness may or may not be capable of connection to concrete moral worlds behind the text (e.g., the entire book

of Job reveals little about the world out of which its witness came).

The nature of the moral conversation may differ greatly within the canon. Sometimes continuities of moral witness may be observed, such as the consistent concern for the welfare of the poor and the dispossessed. New juxtapositions raise new issues for moral conversation. Why do we have four Gospel portraits of Jesus, and what does each contribute, singly and in juxtaposition, to the moral vision grounded in the life and witness of Jesus of Nazareth? What are the moral implications of encountering the universal God of creation before beginning the particular story of God's promise to Abraham? How is this altered further by Paul's extension of God's people to include gentiles as well as Jews? Sometimes the canon forces us to deal with moral tensions. For example, what is the proper role of faith to public civil authority? We must read both the story of Daniel and Rom. 13.

Biblical authority will be discussed more fully below, but here it should be said that a proper understanding of canon emphasizes that canon is not a definitive collection of timeless, divinely revealed truths. Canon is a collection of witnesses to an ongoing encounter with the presence of God in the lives of persons and communities. The canon is witness to a process of experiencing, witnessing, preserving, and passing on testimony to the experience of divine reality in a wide range of human contexts. Thus, the canon functions not as a static deposit of timeless truth, but rather as a partner in conversation with our own experience of God's presence in our lives. "The canon functions not in isolation from our own experience of God but precisely in the process of letting our own story be intersected by the biblical story and reflecting critically and acting faithfully in the church out of those intersections. The end result toward which we should strive is a deabsolutized canon which allows for the honoring of ancient witness to the degree that it reveals to us the basic truths of our faith while at the same time honoring the power and authority of our own experience of God" (Birch and Rasmussen 156–57).

### *The Text as Scripture in the Present*

The canon of Scripture, both OT and NT, originated in ancient times, but these collections of texts and their voices have been passed on through the generations to the present as authoritative in some fundamental way for the moral character and conduct of contemporary communities of faith. Thus, biblical ethics can refer to critical reflection on these texts and the way in which they inform the moral life of contemporary Christians. Some

of the issues and dynamics of this will be discussed below, but here we should note that studies focused on Scripture as a resource for contemporary ethics will not find there some uniform system or pattern of moral identity and behavior that can simply be adopted or imposed. Nor is it productive to force upon the canon some moral system formed outside the text.

It may well be that the canon invites readers into a process of moral conversation and discernment with a diversity of witnesses that communities of faith have passed on as valued dialogue partners. These texts do not invite us into a ready-made set of moral rules, norms, and conclusions. The process of conversation and discernment will yield diverse results: illumination and insight in one instance, but dialogic struggle and tension in another. In reading of Jesus' life and ministry, we may find models to emulate in practice and thought. But in reading of Israel's experience as God's people, we will encounter testimony to both obedient and disobedient life lived before God. The faithful moral alternative in one biblical context may not be the faithful choice in another. Differences between the biblical world and our own must be faced honestly, and the use of Scripture as an ethical resource cannot be a simple pattern of emulating ancient ways, nor will we find a single, unified moral code to merely adopt. What the canon represents is the judgment of generations of faithful communities that have found these texts worthy of moral contemplation and ethical reflection. They witness to the experience of relationship to God and the challenge of life as God's people in diverse contexts and circumstances. The moral authority of these texts is foundational for the moral character and conduct of contemporary communities of faith, but only in dialogue with the traditions that passed on these texts and with the best critical understanding of our own experience of God and the world we live in now.

### Foundational Understandings

The relationship between Scripture and ethics is dynamic and multifaceted. The Bible is certainly no simple prescriptive manual, nor is it just distant historical background for the Christian life. The church's claim that the Bible is a living resource for the life of faith is a serious one, but to understand that relationship requires clarity about some foundational matters. The sections below discuss some of these, related to community, moral agency, biblical authority, and divine reality.

### *The Centrality of Community*

The canon of Scripture is the product of community. Whatever the diverse origins of particular texts or books of the Bible, the communities of ancient Israel and the early church collected, preserved, debated, and passed on the particular collection of ancient faith witnesses that we know as the OT and the NT. As a resource for Christian ethics, the witness of these texts is fully available only in the context of contemporary faith communities.

The Bible is the story of a community of those who understood themselves to be God's people, both ancient Israel as God's covenant people and the early church as the body of Christ. For those communities, the moral life was never a matter of individual character and conduct alone. The moral life is lived in the midst of and held accountable by the faith community. Individual moral life is lived in the context of a community that understands itself to be called into being by the gracious activity of God, seeks together to discern the nature of the moral life, and holds its members accountable to one another. Israel, the early church, generations of the faithful, and the contemporary church in its diverse forms all serve as interpretive communities within which the Bible is both a witness to the experience of God's grace and a testimony with the power to mediate that divine grace to transform new generations.

The Bible is the church's book. The church is shaped by the story and testimony of the canon of Scripture. Both the church's identity and its ongoing activity are shaped in dialogue with the Bible as a foundational resource. This relationship between ecclesial community, the Bible, and the moral life has multiple dimensions.

The church acts as the shaper of moral identity. In the life of faith communities the stories of Israel, Jesus, and the early church are encountered in worship, teaching, and testimony. Here others are invited to make the biblical story a part of their own identity.

The church acts as the bearer of moral tradition. Differing ecclesial traditions give testimony to the power of the text of Scripture to shape Christian life and mission. We do not begin anew each time we open the pages of the Bible seeking resources for the moral life; others have gone before us, and we stand in rich streams of moral tradition as we seek to be faithful moral agents in our own time.

The church is the community of moral deliberations. Christians are not isolated readers of the text trying to discern the witness of Scripture to moral life. The life of faith communities provides

contexts and forums for sharing both insights and challenges in claiming the biblical witness as central to moral life in our own world. Discernment happens not by heroic individual reflection but rather by sharing our deliberations with others in the effort to see how biblical witness to God's grace can help us discern that grace in the pathways of our own lives.

The church is the agent of moral action. There is always a place for the faithful ethical action of a committed individual, but those actions are a part of a larger active witness by ongoing historical communities. The power of even an individual act of moral witness is magnified by awareness of the larger church community of moral action to make God's grace visible in the world. And actions joined in systems of active witness can have remarkable transformative power.

The text of Scripture is where the originating and the ongoing interpretive communities meet. It is out of those intersections that the Bible has moral influence mediated through faith communities, both ancient and modern.

### *Moral Agency and Aspects of Christian Ethics*

The Bible assumes that we, as humans created by God, are capable of moral responsibility. In the language of Christian ethics, we are created as moral agents, capable of being shaped by relationships to God and neighbor and capable of making moral decisions that affect those relationships. As such, the Bible also assumes that we can be held morally accountable for our lives as moral agents in the world, accountable for who we are and what we do as individuals and as communities. Moral agency encompasses both character and conduct, both our being and our doing. Here we will look at three aspects: (1) decision-making and action; (2) character formation; and (3) virtue, value, obligation, and vision.

For many, Christian ethics automatically suggests decision-making and action. In this dimension of Christian ethics the central question is: What are we to do? This can be applied to any of the many moral issues that face ancient or modern persons and communities. How is the Bible a resource for questions of moral conduct?

Over the centuries there have always been some tempted to make the Bible into a prescriptive code of conduct. This has never been very successful. At best, the result has been a picking and choosing of biblical texts that seem more usable in this way—for example, the Ten Commandments or the teachings of Jesus. But the simple truth is that the Bible never makes moral decisions for us, nor do

biblical texts lay out strategies or courses of action. And biblical texts do not speak with a single voice. The commandment says, "Do not kill," but other laws in the Pentateuch allow capital punishment and waging of war. The teachings of Jesus include those often called his "hard sayings," radical demands of the kingdom that few can meet.

Many of our modern issues requiring moral discernment and action simply could not be anticipated by the biblical communities (e.g., issues of bioethics). Others appear in such radically altered modern contexts that moral response seems complex and unclear. The early church dealt with issues of economic disparity by owning and sharing everything in common, but this does not translate immediately into morally responsible decisions in a complex global economy where economic disparities are intertwined with complex socio-political systems.

Still, the Bible is an important resource for the ethics of doing as long as we do not expect the text to do our decision-making for us. The texts of Scripture do make clear broad moral imperatives that frame our moral decisions—for example, the constant concern for those marginalized in human community: the poor, the weak, the hungry, the outcast. Scripture offers images that challenge our moral imagination and consideration of moral alternatives (e.g., Jesus with the woman taken in adultery). The Bible supplies important principles, norms, and standards that can guide our decisions in particular contexts: justice, love, compassion, righteousness. We should note, however, that this does not let us off the hook in deciding what the most just or loving action might be in a given context. The Bible also makes clear that faithful life as moral agents is never lived in isolation; we are a part of God's people, called to hold one another accountable for our actions in the world and to regard the failure to act at all as a moral failure.

Christian ethics, however, involves more than what we do. It involves who we are to be. Alongside moral decision-making and action we must consider character formation, questions of identity, of "our basic moral perception." "Character formation is the learning and internalizing of a way of life formative of our own moral identity. It is our moral 'being,' the expression of who we are. . . . Character includes our basic moral perception—how we see and understand things—as well as our fundamental dispositions, intentions, and motives" (Birch and Rasmussen 190).

Moral character and identity are shaped by many elements: family, culture, relationships, particular experiences. But Christian moral

character must have a fundamental relationship to the Bible. Christian moral agents are nurtured by relationship to the stories, hymns, visions, commandments, and teachings of the entire Scripture handed on and reflected upon by generations of God's people. In the life of Christian congregations we are exposed to the entire range of materials in Scripture, and this helps to shape our identity as people of faith and moral agents. This material shapes us in different ways both by the diversity of the texts themselves and by the way they are read, taught, and used in the lives of congregations and individuals.

While moral character and conduct, being and doing, provide a broad framework for the moral life and the Bible as a resource for Christian ethics, there are many other useful categories that provide nuance, perspective, and insight into the full complexity of moral agency. A full discussion of the Christian moral life would want to discuss categories such as virtue, value, obligation, and vision. Virtue focuses on qualities that mark us as Christian moral persons and communities (kindness, courage, humility, love, righteous anger, and others). Value tends to focus on qualities that mark the social embodiment of morality (justice, love, equality, peace). Scripture helps to name and form virtues and values, and these overlap in actual human experience. Obligation has to do with duties, commitments, and responsibilities that arise out of the decision to live our lives in the context of Christian community and the Scripture that foundationally defines its life. Some obligations are a part of the common frameworks that we share with others in our social contexts (e.g., family, citizenship, culture). Christian obligation arises out of our decision to be a part of the church, and then the Bible becomes a part of the resources that the church uses to shape its character and conduct in the world. Moral vision is the large picture of the moral drama that Scripture invites us into as partners with God in the redemptive activity of God's people. Moral vision is the category that suggests a framework anchored in the character and conduct of God that encompasses our being and our doing as Christian moral agents.

### *The Nature of Biblical Authority*

The nature of biblical authority and how it functions in the life of Christian traditions and communities have been the subjects of considerable diversity of opinion, and this is one reason why Christian faith has such a variety of expressions. The Bible, understood as Scripture, is acknowledged by all Christian traditions as normative for the understanding and living of the Christian

life. It shapes Christian identity and practice, as referenced in the preceding section. But how does the normative character of the Bible express itself? What is its relation to other authorities that also shape human moral life?

"Authority is not a property inherent in the Bible itself. It is the recognition of the Christian community over centuries of experience that the Scripture is a source of empowerment for its life in the world" (Birch and Rasmussen 142). To function in this way, however, the Bible must be understood as pointing beyond itself to the experience of the biblical communities with the character and activity of God. Authority rests not in the pages of the text, but rather in its function as a mediating witness to God, who called biblical communities of covenant and church into being and is still graciously active in our present experience.

Human moral life is shaped by many sources of authority. We become moral agents because we have been given identity and have been guided in our actions by a complex matrix of authoritative influences that are then shaped by us as individuals and members of various communities. These influences include family, nationality, ethnic identity, cultural context, formal and informal education, gender experience, signal life events, influential individuals in varied roles, and professed religious belief. The Christian moral life must include the Bible and its interpretive traditions as authoritative in some manner; otherwise, there is no basis on which to label our ethics as Christian. However, in Christian ethics the Bible, though always primary, is never self-sufficient. The Bible cannot be the sole source of authoritative influence, and thus it is never the exclusive authority for the moral life. Nevertheless, the Bible is indispensable for ethics to be labeled as Christian because it places us in a common tradition with other varieties of Christian experience throughout history and in today's world.

The Bible's primary and central role finds expression in a variety of ways because the Bible itself is an entire library of diverse texts. First and foremost, the Bible tells the story of who we are as the people of God connected historically to the communities responsible for the witness and preservation of the biblical texts. Centrally important within this entire biblical story is the story of Jesus, told in the diverse voices of the Gospels. But Jesus' story is connected both to Israel's story and to the early church's story. That story can model for the church both faithful and unfaithful moral life. To reflect on the biblical story is to aid us in discerning God's presence and activity in our own

stories. For those who choose to be part of the Christian community, the Bible becomes an active dialogue partner in assessing and drawing on the other sources of moral influence in our lives. It is a matter of both content and process.

The authority of Scripture resides partly in its witness to a process of discerning and responding to the character and action of God in the life of the biblical witnesses. This in turn invites us to a similar process of discernment in our own time, guided by the way in which Scripture sensitizes us to the presence and activity of God here and now. But,

attention to biblical authority as it mediates a process does not mean there is no continuity of biblical content to be claimed. . . . Our identity as the church is obviously shaped by images, concepts, and metaphors that are part of the Bible's content and not just witness to a process. But these cannot be regarded as revelatory deposits functioning as divinely sanctioned doctrine. The content must be constantly tested by the process. Which stories and images continue to manifest the redeeming power of God? Some matters of content are reassessed by the church, e.g., the biblical acceptance of slavery, Paul's admonition for women to keep silent in the church. Some matters of content are reasserted, e.g., God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed. Some matters of content remain central although our interactions with them may change, e.g., the gospel story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (Birch and Rasmussen 157)

Already implied in this brief discussion of biblical authority for Christian ethics is the recognition that the broad diversity of biblical material suggests various ways in which these materials are used and are experienced as authoritative. "Different types of biblical material must be appropriated in different ways. . . . The problem with most discussions of biblical authority is that they seem to imply a monolithic view of the Bible and its use. There is no single way in which the Bible is authoritative in ethical matters" (Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 157). A constant moral imperative to care for the poor and dispossessed will carry authority in a contemporary ethical discussion in response to poverty. At the same time, diverse witnesses to the attitude of the faithful toward the power of the state will range as widely as the story of Daniel and the admonitions of Paul in Rom. 13. The authority of Scripture here is not to prescribe a course of action or even a line of response. It operates more to define a framework within which moral options in relating to the power of the state must be considered and weighed. Stories and hymns have authority in shaping the character of our lives as persons and communities that read

and sing them and respond to the character of God revealed in them.

The Bible as the Scripture of the church forms the necessary authoritative framework within which ethical reflection must take place if it is to be Christian. Within that framework other moral influence can be engaged in dialogue and discernment. The God of the biblical text is still active in our own lives, our own faith communities, and our own religious experience. Hence, we must discuss the importance of witness to divine reality both in the biblical text and in our own time as a focus for Christian moral claims.

### *Divine Reality*

For those who regard the Bible as Scripture, the texts that have been collected and passed on in the OT and the NT are witnesses to divine reality. They are the gathered testimonies of Israel and the early church to their experience of God in the life of Israel as God's covenant people; in the testimonies to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; in the formation and spread of the early church. Hence, Scripture as a resource for the Christian moral life mediates a divine reality that is assumed to be still present and active in the lives of contemporary confessing communities. Understanding who God is and how God has been active, what God wills and what God models, is essential to the Bible's role in Christian ethics.

The common popular view of the Bible's use in Christian ethics focuses on morality as obedience to God's revealed will. In its unexamined form this finds expression in those who think of the Bible as a prescriptive handbook for moral behavior. On closer examination, this always proves to be a highly selective sample of biblical texts. In more sophisticated forms the stress on revealed divine will has tended to identify a canon within the canon of texts regarded as serious expressions of God's will for how we are to conduct ourselves, guides to moral behavior and God's intention for us. The result has been emphasis on important texts such as the Decalogue, the preaching of the prophets, the teachings of Jesus, and the moral admonitions of Paul and other early church voices. Such texts are indeed centrally important, for the Bible does call us to live a life obedient to God's purposes for us, and for Christians, the teachings of Jesus in particular are important guides to moral conduct in lives that express love of God and neighbor.

However, God is much more than a lawgiver or a moral teacher in the Bible, and earlier we noted the limitations of the Bible in giving us moral instruction on what we are to do. It is more faithful to the range and diversity of biblical materials to

focus on the character of God as well as the will of God, especially as revealed in divine activity related to the biblical communities of faith.

In addition to the roles of lawgiver and teacher, associated with the will of God as seen in, for example, the Decalogue and the teachings of Jesus, God plays many other roles in Scripture. These include creator, promise giver, deliverer, judge, redeemer, sovereign, and covenant partner. These roles do not appear in systematic discursive treatments in the biblical texts. They appear in stories of God's encounters and relationships with key biblical figures and ongoing biblical communities. They appear in relationships that the biblical stories tell us God has risked in divine presence within human history and divine encounters with individuals and communities that have given testimony in the biblical texts to these encounters.

Some scholars have appropriately highlighted the imitation of God (*imitatio Dei*) or of Christ (*imitatio Christi*) as a basis for ethics in the use of Scripture. Texts such as Lev. 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy," or the entire emphasis of 1 John on loving as God has loved, make this moral imitation of God explicit. Many other texts name qualities of God's character that model moral character for God's people: love, righteousness, justice, compassion, faithfulness, service.

### The Practice of Using Scripture as a Moral Resource

Beyond the scope of this article lies the complex set of practices that persons and communities must cultivate in light of the methodological perspectives discussed above. It is an ongoing process that stretches and matures through the Christian life. These practices include:

- *The development of critical skill in reading and understanding the biblical texts as fully as possible.* This is more than exegesis of individual and isolated texts; it is the development of patterns of reading that allows conversation between texts within the canon while honoring the full witness of each text. Fortunately, many useful tools are available to aid our reading, such as study Bibles, commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, computer programs, and Internet resources.
- *The practice of "reading in communion"* (see Fowl and Jones). Christian ethics is not informed by isolated individual reading of

biblical texts so much as the reading together in community that takes place in the ongoing use of Scripture in the life of congregations. This is not simply the obvious practice of formal study of the Bible in various programs within the church; it also involves exposure to the Scripture in liturgy, preaching, hymns, and devotion. When this exposure to the biblical story is rich, the ongoing conversation in Christian community about the issues that challenge us will be informed by the implicit and explicit shaping of lives and decisions that comprise our identity as Christian moral agents in the world.

Clearly, the relating of Scripture to Christian ethics is a rich and complex conversation that is both historical and global. We are invited into the conversation not for the discovery of fixed moral truths, but rather to experience the moral power of life lived in the presence of God and as a part of God's people.

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# A

## Abortion

Induced abortion (as opposed to spontaneous abortion, or miscarriage) is the deliberate termination of a pregnancy through the destruction and/or removal of the embryo or fetus.

Because recent discussion of abortion, even in the church, has almost universally considered it a political issue addressed within the framework of rights, the first task of Christian ethics is to make the question a truly theological and ecclesial one (Bauerschmidt; Hauerwas), reframing it within the fundamental scriptural framework of covenant faithfulness, or discipleship. How should being a baptized community of faith, hope, and love in Christ shape the way Christians approach abortion?

Recent theological approaches to abortion are parallel to the three traditional theological perspectives on war, though they are major areas on a spectrum, not precisely fixed points. (1) The position that sometimes designates itself “pro-life” or “right-to-life” is similar to the pacifist position, arguing that abortion is (perhaps with rare exceptions) unethical. Unlike pacifism, however, this position sometimes depends on asserting the innocence of the embryo/fetus. (2) The “justifiable abortion” position, existing in various forms (e.g., Steffen), resembles the just-war tradition: abortion is tragic but justified in certain circumstances. The criteria can relate to the status of the fetus/embryo (e.g., deformity, nonviability, threat to the woman’s health) or to the situation of the pregnant woman (e.g., forced pregnancy; economic, emotional, or physical distress). Unlike just-war theory, the just-abortion argument usually recognizes the satisfaction of one criterion as sufficient rather than requiring the satisfaction of multiple criteria. (3) A third position—“pro-choice,” “procreative choice,” or “abortion rights” (e.g., Harrison)—is similar to the holy-war tradition in seeing the agent as sacred and capable of making a free, responsible decision without providing formal justification.

One cause of these various views is Scripture’s apparent silence on the issue. This can lead to

certain erroneous or misguided claims: that abortion was unknown in antiquity; that Scripture should have no role in the abortion debate; that Jews and Christians cannot formulate a robust position on the issue; or that Scripture’s silence necessarily implies divine neutrality or approval, and that the faith community should follow suit.

The silence also leads people to look for texts to support their position. Abortion opponents often quote “choose life” (Deut. 30:19). They also appeal to texts about God’s creation and call in the womb (Ps. 139:13–14a; Isa. 44:1–2; Jer. 1:5) and about fetal activity (Luke 1:41, 44) to argue that Scripture considers the embryo/fetus to be God’s direct creation and indeed a human being. Those who disagree respond that, biblically, the embryo/fetus is akin to property that can be damaged (Exod. 21:22–23), and that human life does not begin until the first breath (Gen. 2:7). Each side accuses the other of prooftexting.

Some interpreters, recognizing the impasse created by appeals to such texts, have looked to broader scriptural themes for an implicit position on abortion or a framework for considering it. Abortion opponents have argued that scriptural themes such as creation as divine gift, the summons to welcome children, and the vision of *shalom* (part of a “consistent ethic of life”) validate their position. Supporters of abortion/choice have argued for the voluntary and relational character of covenants in the Bible and stressed divine grace and forgiveness for poor decisions. They have also appealed to stewardship of creation and to choice (“choose life”), the former accenting human responsibility, the latter human freedom and liberation.

Critics of stewardship as justification for abortion have argued, however, that biblical stewardship does not include the deliberate destruction of creation, especially of human, or even potentially human, life. And critics of human freedom as justification for abortion point out that scriptural freedom is not absolute, that what is chosen is crucial. Moreover, they contend, liberation in Scripture is

freedom *from* false deities, ideologies, and values, and freedom *for* joyful, bonded, covenantal service to God and others.

One significant aspect of the discussion is the witness of early Judaism (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles*, Philo, Josephus) and early Christianity against abortion, despite its absence from the Scriptures that have come down to us. (Rabbinic literature would permit abortion to save the woman's life.) Certain scriptural images and themes, including some noted above, shaped the symbolic world of Jews and then Christians; opposition to abortion, exposure, and infanticide became an ethical boundary marker for both groups in their pagan cultures. In explaining the biblical summons to love of neighbor, both *Did.* 2.2 and *Barn.* 19.5 (ca. 95–135) say, "Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion." Subsequent Christian writers echo the prohibition and treat the unborn as "the object of God's care" (Athenagoras, *Plea* 35) (see Bonner; Gorman, *Abortion*).

This historical witness demonstrates that Scripture can have a key role in the abortion debate even if exegesis alone, still less proof-texting, is insufficient. A hermeneutic is needed that recognizes the difficulty of the issue, expresses pastoral sensitivity, and preserves the basic requirements of covenant faithfulness. Recent work on metathemes in the Bible's moral vision, individual and corporate baptismal identity, virtue ethics, narrative, and analogy may provide a way forward.

Richard Hays suggests that the NT's central themes of cross, community, and new creation compel us to reframe abortion so that a problem pregnancy is not merely about an individual's decision. Rather, it is an occasion for the church to act together in generous, Christlike, sacrificial love to embrace the pregnant woman and her child *in utero* with spiritual and tangible support. Believers constitute one body (1 Cor. 12)—indeed, a family—and are called to bear one another's burdens (Rom. 12:5; Gal. 6:2). Such a view does not, however, eliminate personal responsibility, for the believer's body is not his or her own but God's, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). It is the locus and means of self-giving love for God and others (Rom. 6; 12:1–2).

Related to the communal and familial images is the overarching biblical motif of care for the needy (e.g., Matt. 25), including the widow and the orphan (Ps. 82:3–4; Jas. 1:27). The call to protect and provide for the vulnerable may be applied, by analogy, to the situation of both the woman and the developing child. Thus, a text that numerous ethicists (e.g., Bauerschmidt; O'Donovan; Hays)

have seen as significant for the church's response to abortion is the parable of the good Samaritan. The attempt to identify the status of the other ("Who is my neighbor?") may imply that the inquirer desires to define certain others in such a way that they are incapable of placing a moral demand on the inquirer. Jesus transforms the question about the identity of the neighbor into a summons to actually be a neighbor. Analogously, the contemporary question of the personhood ("neighbor-hood") of the embryo/fetus should perhaps be reconstituted first of all as a question about the meaning of being a neighbor to the other(s) in need, both those already born and those not yet born. Furthermore, the parable suggests that when the question of identity or status is transformed, the summons to "go and do likewise" requires Jesus' disciples to be engaged in creative and potentially costly forms of community and ministry, and thus to recognize the neighbor by being a neighbor.

The result is an ethic of cruciform hospitality practiced by those baptized into the master story of Christ (Bauerschmidt; Hays; Stallworth). Although this approach may not resolve every difficult case, it suggests that the relationship between Scripture and abortion is fundamentally about what kind of community of faith, hope, and love is needed for women and children, seen and unseen, to be welcomed into that community and into the world.

*See also* Adoption; Birth Control; Body; Children; Family Planning; Infanticide; Procreation; Sanctity of Human Life

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Michael J. Gorman

**Absolutes, Moral** *See* Moral Absolutes

**Abstinence** *See* Alcohol; Gluttony; Sexual Ethics

## Abuse

Abuse involves misuse, corruption, deceit, condemnation, vilification, violence, and excessive harm against one's self, another person, or another's relationships; it causes emotional battering, producing shame and disgrace. Abuse, a form of misbegotten anguish, engages the unauthentic self via unjust, immoral, despicable, reprehensible acts. Antithetical to beauty, truth, peace, and justice, abuse devastates, often allegedly for a higher good, such as ecclesial, national, or personal aggrandizement.

Abuse occurs in the OT in the context of family and national violence amid quests for leadership, liberation, and land acquisition. The Hebrew term *'alal* can mean "to abuse, act severely, harshly, ruthlessly; to make a fool or mockery of; to exploit, manipulate, dishonor, insult, defile, harm, or negatively have power over; to cause pain and/or shame." Sometimes God deals harshly with humanity—for example, the Egyptians (Exod. 10:2). A case of human abuse involves a Levite who gives his secondary wife/concubine to depraved men who gang-rape her (Judg. 19:25). With premeditation, he betrays and dismembers her and then sends her body parts throughout Israel, where violence invokes anarchy.

With similar sentiments, sexual abuse, often a hidden sin, involves aggression and hatred, objectifies and desecrates persons' mental, emotional, and bodily integrity, and robs them of their selfhood, victimizing them. See the incidents of Shechem's rape of Dinah (Gen. 34), Amnon's forced incest with Tamar (2 Sam. 13), and David's manipulation of Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11).

Wounded and denied an honorable death by his armor bearer, Saul commits suicide by falling on his own sword to prevent his Philistine enemies from abusing him (1 Sam. 31:4). Balaam's donkey makes a fool of him (Num. 22:29), and Jeremiah is mocked and ridiculed as a result of his prophecy

against Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 20:7–18). When King Zedekiah fears that Judeans will abuse him, Jeremiah counters that his obedience to God's voice will keep him safe (Jer. 38:19–20). Habakkuk laments God's silence as he cries out for help in the face of violence (Hab. 1:2–3).

In the NT, the Gospels reach their climax with Jesus' suffering and death prior to his resurrection appearances. In the book of Acts, Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, Silas, and others suffer abuse at the hands of the authorities (Acts 7:54–60; 12:1–5; 16:19–24). Elsewhere, Paul documents the abuse he endured as an apostle, which he interprets as a form of identification with the suffering of Christ (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:23–33). At the same time, he castigates the Corinthians for putting up with someone who "makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face" (2 Cor. 11:20). Here, the focus is less on the abuser (i.e., Christians from outside the Corinthian church who have come into it and exercised leadership contrary to Paul's ministry) and more on the Corinthians' apparent tolerance of this sort of exploitation. The author of 1 Peter addresses Christians whose lives are marked by slander and oppression from nonbelievers, and he urges them to follow the example of Jesus by not returning abuse for abuse (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:23; 3:9).

Cognizant of the Ten Commandments, with their call to honor God and respect the person and property of others, in concert with Jesus' admonition to love God and our neighbors as ourselves, Christian ethics calls us to respect appropriate boundaries, to do no harm, and not to give credence to abuse by keeping silent in the face of it.

*See also* Child Abuse; Cruelty; Incest; Killing; Oppression; Sexual Abuse; Spousal Abuse; Violence

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Cheryl Kirk-Duggan

## Accountability

Moral responsibility is often spoken of in terms of accountability. Financial transactions and their consequences are recorded in account ledgers and other financial documents, and people use the logic and language of such accounting to think and talk about moral obligations and interactions and their consequences. This is true in both formal and

everyday moral reasoning, as well as in scriptural moral discourse. For example, the letter to the Colossians speaks of a “record”: “God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13b–14).

The record being cleared is a handwritten certificate of indebtedness or an account sheet (*cheirographon*). The concept of moral debt and credit is implied: just as debits and credits are recorded in an actual ledger and accrue incrementally, so individual moral transactions—actions and failures to act—contribute to character and moral standing in incremental fashion. Moreover, just as a debtor has a responsibility to repay the creditor and, if the debt is not paid, must answer to an auditor or judge, so those who are guilty of “trespass” (*paraptōma*, “lapse”) must answer to legitimate moral authorities. Thus, moral accountability combines concepts of moral transactions and accumulated consequences with the reporting function of accounting, giving an account or an explanation.

### *Accountability and Oversight*

In the NT, the authority that household managers have over household accounts and affairs is often used to conceptualize both human moral responsibility and the ultimate authority—the right and responsibility—that God has to judge human behavior overall. This kind of oversight includes care and concern as well as the maintenance of household honor. Relationships in the household mirror and lay a foundation for order in the larger social structures of the state and in the church, the new household of God. Leaders in the churches are accountable for the consequences of their teaching (Matt. 23; Luke 20:47; Jas. 3:1). Human rulers are delegated by God to hold the community to moral norms, and rulers in turn are ultimately accountable to God (1 Pet. 2:13–17). Thus, accountability has social-political and ecclesial dimensions and is not confined to the personal and individual sphere. A structure of legitimate moral authority is implied; moral accounting implies moral authority.

### *Accountability and Moral Agency*

In Scripture, ultimate accountability is sometimes spoken of in terms of a scroll or record book, but the canonical authors use several versions of the moral books. In the OT, the “Book of Life” lists the righteous (Pss. 1:1–3; 7:9; 11:7; 34:12; 37:17, 29; 55:22; 75:10; 92:12–14; 140:13). The Lord says to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot

out of my book” (Exod. 32:33; cf. Pss. 9:5; 69:28). In the NT, Philippians and Revelation also refer to a “Book of Life” holding the names of those slated for eternal life; erasure of one’s name signifies loss of belonging or of citizenship in God’s kingdom (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). In the Revelation to John, account books figure in the picture of final judgment: “The dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books” (Rev. 20:12; cf. Dan. 7:10).

In 1 Peter, yet another variation occurs; the accountable subject is a group of people, “the family of God” (4:17). This picture coheres with an OT theme that assumes group or communal responsibility (Exod. 32:9–10; Deut. 9:13–14). For contemporary readers steeped in cultures of expressive individualism, this can challenge assumptions about the scope of moral agency. Is membership in a large category—the righteous—nevertheless dependent on individual behavior? Some passages clearly speak of individual agency and a level of responsibility that includes scrutiny of each deed (1 Pet. 1:17). In other contexts, the emphasis is less on individual deeds and more on overall character or disposition over a lifetime, on the quality of faithfulness. In Rom. 4:3, Paul notes that “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness” (one meaning of *logizomai* is “to keep records of commercial accounts”).

### *Final Accounting and Judgment*

Strict accountability entails judgment (Exod. 32:33–34); the guilty are punished and the righteous rewarded. But there is throughout Scripture an alternative theme, in which the nurturing and gracious God provides mercy and pardon (e.g., Mic. 7:18–19), especially when there is repentance (e.g., Ezek. 18:23, 27–28, 32; 33:14–16). Thus, David writes, “Blessed are those whose sin the Lord does not count against them” (Ps. 32:2b TNIV; [cf. Ps. 103:10–12; Isa. 43:25; Jer. 50:20; Ezek. 20:44; Rom. 4:7–8; 2 Cor. 5:19; Rev. 14:5]).

### *Account as Story, Testimony*

Sometimes accountability takes the form of testimony, of telling one’s story to the judge. Thus, in Isa. 43:25–26, God calls the people to account: “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together; state the case for your innocence” (TNIV). The author of 1 Peter warns of a time when the unfaithful “will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead” (4:5). Jesus portrays a scene

of legal accountability and testimony gathering in the parable of the sheep and the goats, where behavior and dispositions toward the needy (or “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine”) are linked to core character and ultimate destiny (Matt. 25:31–46).

### *Conclusion: Accountability and Justification*

Accountability signifies that human behavior counts. It matters what people do to and for one another. Both individual and social well-being are at stake. People have moral obligations as individuals and in groups, including churches and nations, and there are consequences for failure to meet those obligations. Certain punishment is pictured as the natural consequence of moral debt (Exod. 32:34; Isa. 13:11; Jer. 21:14; 1 Pet. 2:14), yet the ultimate judge is God the Father, who “cares for you,” and “will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish” anxious Christians (1 Pet. 5:7, 10). The overall goal of judgment and punishment, of warnings about final accountability, seems to be corrective nurturing toward authentic goodness and wholeness of character, in both individuals and groups. The reality and seriousness of moral accountability are linked to the gravity and costliness of the gift of grace, of redemption (Eph. 2:3–10; Col. 2:13–14).

*See also* Collective Responsibility; Debt; Moral Agency; Responsibility

Bonnie Howe

## Acts

The author of the Acts of the Apostles is unknown to us, but is likely the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. Although the tradition has identified the author as Luke, Paul’s sometime companion (see, e.g., Phlm. 24), that proposal offers us little help in actually interpreting the narrative. Thus, the promise of the Spirit spans both volumes, but Paul in Acts is not coordinated with Paul’s letters. God’s kingdom is less prominent in Acts than in Luke; nonetheless, the risen Jesus, Philip, Barnabas, and Paul proclaim God’s kingdom. Thus, believing communities are aspects of God’s rule, so that in the following approaches ethics is not merely individual but communal.

(1) In Acts law identifies deficient behavior (2:23; 7:53; 13:39), enhances reputations (5:34), demonstrates piety (21:20, 24; 22:12), affects relationships between Judeans and gentiles (10:28), but does not prescribe praxis. One exception is the Jerusalem decree for gentiles to abstain from sexual immorality (15:29; 21:25).

(2) Acts advocates values that imply praxis. Magic (13:6–11; 19:19), divination (16:16), and idolatry (14:15; 17:16–31) are renounced; their counterpart is belief. Substantial importance falls on the use of possessions. Lying to God by defrauding the community in regard to possessions has drastic consequences (5:1–10). Trying to buy God’s gifts is reprehensible (8:19–20). Holding everything in common and distributing according to need reflect how the community is related to God (2:44–45). Giving alms receives positive evaluations (10:4, 31; 24:17), although, for some interpreters, giving alms stands in tension with distributing according to need. The latter expresses parity, whereas benefactors and beggars perpetuate “paternalistic humanitarianism.”

(3) Characters such as Peter, Paul, Lydia, Dorcas, Stephen, and Cornelius play such positive roles that many interpreters make them models of praxis. Some translations of 20:35 imply that Paul makes himself an “example.” But Paul’s statement is expressed using a Greek verb (no noun corresponds to “example”) more adequately rendered “teaching by indication”: “that by such work we must support the weak.” Models serve as analogies for readers, but analogies break down when pushed toward their limits (e.g., raising the dead). Further, the characters themselves reflect the origin of what they do in God (3:12, 16). Still, readers can identify with characters in their deficiencies (Peter’s reluctance to go to Cornelius [10:20, 28]) and can envision models of God in relation to humanity. If analogies are used to envision roles of ministry, a quotation from Joel clarifies that the first preachers included both women and men (2:11, 17–18).

(4) Acts construes a world centered on God, who is manifest in unusual phenomena: resurrection appearances, the coming of the Spirit with aural and visual analogies, speaking in tongues, divine plans for events and history. Praxis is repeatedly determined by interpreting Scripture or special revelation from the Spirit. God is strongly characterized as a God of power (1:7–8; 2:11) who changes relationships among people. Prominent among these is the surpassing of ethnic limits: “In every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10:35).

(5) Because Acts depicts the emerging identity of a new group, it is especially suitable for demonstrating the convergence of philosophical, feminist, and sociological theories concerning identity as a source for ethics. All three disciplines emphasize the relational character of identity. Identity

emerges in community, changes by social patterns, and is sustained in relationships of solidarity.

Pentecost is a case in point (chap. 2). Here it is possible to see how identity, as it is embedded in social identity, is a source for praxis. If a group number is small, a substantial factor of power is needed for social identity. The conferring of the Holy Spirit is described as the reception of such power (1:8). Moreover, when the Holy Spirit comes (2:1–4), then according to thematic development from Luke 11:13 through Luke 24:49, the group assumes identity as God’s children who receive the promise of the Spirit from their divine parent. The essential component of the unfolding identity is their relationship with God.

An ethical consequence of this identity might, at first glance, be called “distributive justice.” But distribution according to need differs from conventional distributive justice (2:44–45). Distributive justice presumes normal institutional structures. The early Jerusalem community establishes itself as an alternative to existing structures. No consideration is given to how important specific functions are for the common good, as alleged when executives are compensated out of proportion to employees. Conventionally, lower classes work for the benefit of higher classes; Acts reverses the exchange. People at higher levels sell their possessions for redistribution to people at lower levels. This is no longer distributive justice but “differential justice.”

(6) Acts is often considered an accommodation to the Roman Empire. But new sensitivity to how empire is experienced raises awareness of how the believing community is an alternative to empire. Acts reflects how imperial power filters down through governors, client kings, and elite collaborators. Noticing the collaboration of the people and the intersection of government and religion in the case of Herod Agrippa I in 12:20–23 sharpens awareness of how virtually everyone (regrettably) collaborates with oppressive systems. Even opponents recognize that Paul and Silas, by proclaiming another king, Jesus, act against the emperor (17:7). When Paul’s Roman citizenship protects him from being flogged, it demonstrates inequality in Rome’s judicial system (22:24–25). When Paul speaks to Felix about justice and self-control (24:25), Felix’s fear shows that Paul expounds not abstract virtues but criteria for imperial agents. Felix’s desire for a bribe in 24:26 confirms the need. Finally, Paul’s appeal to the emperor in 25:11 is not an expression of confidence in the notorious Nero, but is a way out of the collaboration between ruling Judean elites and Festus (25:9–12).

*See also* Almsgiving; Authority and Power; Colonialism and Postcolonialism; Divination and Magic; Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity; Holy Spirit; Kingdom of God; Koinonia; Luke; Women, Status of

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Robert L. Brawley

## Additions to Daniel

The Greek version of Daniel contains the “Prayer of Azariah” (a communal lament/confession) and the “Song of the Three Jews” (a benediction) between 3:23 and 3:24, as well as the “Story of Susanna” (a detective story) and the “Story of Bel and the Dragon” (a parody on idolatry) at the end (chaps. 13 and 14 in most editions). The additions reflect in various ways the tensions between the two great attributes of God in the Bible: justice and mercy.

In his prayer made in the fiery furnace, Azariah addresses God directly (“O Lord, God of our ancestors”) and acknowledges the justice of God in allowing Israel to be defeated and exiled at the hands of the Babylonians in the sixth century BCE. He goes on to appeal to the mercy of God and reminds God of his promises to Abraham. He suggests that “a contrite heart and a humble spirit” may now serve as an acceptable sacrifice and issue in Azariah’s own (and Israel’s) deliverance.

In their long benediction in the fiery furnace, Azariah and his companions, Hananiah and Mishael, first bless directly (“Blessed are you”) the God of Israel and of all creation. Then they invite all creation to join in their praise (“Bless the Lord”), including what is in the heavens (vv. 36–41), what comes down from the heavens (vv. 42–51), what lives on earth (vv. 52–59), and various classes of humans (vv. 60–66). They end by blessing God for their own deliverance. The song is an eloquent statement in praise of God’s mercy, and its invitation to all creation to join the chorus of praise has positive implications for ecological ethics.

The Susanna story combines sex, religion, and death. Two “dirty old men” (who are elders and judges in the Jewish community in Babylon) happen to see the beautiful, God-fearing Susanna

bathing, and they lust after her. When she refuses their advances, they accuse her of adultery with “a young man.” She is saved from execution only when God stirs in Daniel “a holy spirit,” and he finds a way to prove the accusation false by separating the two men and showing that their testimony is contradictory. As a result, they (rather than Susanna) are condemned to death. The Susanna story illustrates the justice of God, the power of trust in God, and God’s use of Daniel’s wisdom. It has also initiated a long artistic tradition of erotic portrayals of the naked Susanna.

In the episode about Bel and the Dragon, Daniel engages in contests about who the living God is. Playing detective again, he exposes the folly of idolatry and affirms the sovereignty of the God of Israel, who has mercy on those who love and trust him in the midst of their sufferings. The Additions to Daniel are part of Catholic and Orthodox Christian Bibles.

See also Daniel; Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal Books; Idolatry; Justice; Mercy

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Daniel J. Harrington

## Additions to Esther

The Hebrew text of Esther presents theological and ethical problems. Not only is there no explicit mention of God, but it is also silent about circumcision, Sabbath observance, and food laws, which were major identifying markers in Diaspora Judaism. Moreover, Esther becomes part of the Persian royal harem and eventually enters a mixed marriage with the gentile king. These problems may partly explain why no fragments of it were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Greek version of Esther turns the theology implicit in the Hebrew text into an explicit theology by introducing God into the main narrative (2:20; 4:8; 6:13). It also contains six additional sections that Jerome gathered into an appendix and placed at the end of the book. These additions heighten the role of God and prayer, give greater prominence to Esther and her motivation, and ameliorate some of the ethical problems.

Additions A (Mordecai’s dream) and F (its interpretation) place the crisis facing the Jews in a cosmic context and state the basic theme of the Greek version, “These things have come from God” (10:4). Also included are full texts of what purport

to be the royal decree ordering the extermination of all Jews (addition B) and its cancellation (addition E). Addition A is early evidence for charges leveled by anti-Semites against Jews throughout the ages (“perversely following a strange manner of life and laws”), while addition E recognizes that Jews are “governed by most righteous laws” and are “children of the living God.”

Addition C contains two lengthy prayers by Mordecai and Esther that serve to embed the story more firmly into the wider story of God and Israel. Mordecai appeals to God as ruler of the universe and the God of Abraham to spare Israel from destruction, thus linking the story to Israel’s previous scriptural traditions. Esther prays to “the Lord God of Israel” for eloquence before the king. She claims to “hate the splendor of the wicked and to abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien.” She swears that she has avoided the (unclean) food and drink served at the king’s table. Whatever unseemly behavior she has undertaken has been done in the service of the greater good of rescuing her people from certain annihilation. Saving Israel overrides behaviors that might appear immoral to some. The emotional and psychological struggle that Esther undergoes is neatly captured in addition C when she enters the king’s court unannounced and with God’s help wins a favorable hearing and averts her people’s crisis. Although the Greek version of Esther does not solve all the book’s theological and ethical problems, it most likely was intended to make the story less morally offensive in some circles. The Greek version is part of Catholic and Orthodox Christian Bibles.

See also Anti-Semitism; Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal Books; Esther; Exile; Feminist Ethics

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Daniel J. Harrington

## Adoption

In a tradition whose Scriptures speak repeatedly and favorably of adoption and whose founder was, in one or more senses, adopted, one would expect a perspective and practice of caring for abandoned and orphaned children by grafting them into families. That has been the case for the Christian tradition.

About 2 to 4 percent of families in the United States include an adopted child, and about one

million children in the United States live with adoptive parents. At any given time in the United States alone, somewhere between 200,000 and 500,000 singles or couples are looking to adopt, and some 100,000 nonrelative adoptions take place each year, about half from out of the foster care system and about 20,000 from overseas.

The adoption of a child has enriched the lives of families of various faith traditions, but adopting children is a complex and multilayered phenomenon that raises a number of ethical issues. Motivations for adoption vary widely, from “saving” children, to expanding the faith, to recognizing children’s “right to be adopted,” to addressing the problem of infertility.

### *Adoption in Scripture*

The first chapter of Genesis includes the divine mandate to the newly created humans to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28), a command repeated to Noah and his family as they set foot on dry land again after the flood (Gen. 9:1). Barrenness functions as the driving motif in many Hebrew narratives: Sarah and Abraham (Gen. 11:30; 16:1), the women of the house of Abimelech (Gen. 20:18), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Rachel (Gen. 29:31; 30:1), the wife of Manoah (Judg. 13:2), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2, 5–6). Rachel’s plaintive plea to Jacob represents the anguish that many infertile couples still experience: “Give me children, or I shall die!” (Gen. 30:1).

Although there is no legal prescription regarding adoption in Hebrew law, we find several stories in the OT that involve adoption-like practices. Joseph becomes a foster parent to Jacob’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:5). Hadad and the sister of Queen Tahpenes give birth to a son, Genubath, who becomes one of Pharaoh’s children (1 Kgs. 11:20). Mordecai adopts Esther as his own daughter after her parents die (Esth. 2:7, 15). Most prominent among these adoptees is Moses, whose mother leaves him in a basket among the reeds to protect him from Pharaoh (Exod. 2:1–10). In a broader sense, the OT suggests that God adopts Israel (e.g., Jer. 3:19; 7:6–7).

Aside from these direct, familial, or metaphorical adoption references, the OT evidences a profound concern for widows and orphans, apparently including not only children whose parents are deceased but also those who are abandoned. In Exod. 22:22; Ps. 82:3; Isa. 1:17; and Hos. 14:3 we find the charge to the Hebrew people to exercise justice and mercy with widows and orphans, a prominent theme in other OT texts as well.

In the NT adoption becomes a central theological concept, particularly at the hands of the

apostle Paul. Among Jesus’ recorded sayings is a strong motif of honoring the spiritual family over the natural family (e.g., Matt. 10:34–38; Luke 9:57–62; 14:26).

In Galatians Paul says that new followers of Jesus once were enslaved to false gods, but “God sent his Son . . . so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal. 4:4–5). Belonging to Christ, Paul says, makes believers “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

In Rom. 8:14–17 Paul argues that all those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God, who have received “a spirit of adoption.” Later in the same chapter, Paul describes what earlier appeared to be a present reality (adoption) as an eschatological hope; although children of God have the firstfruits of the Spirit, “we . . . groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23).

Ephesians 1:3–14 echoes many of the same adoption themes already mentioned in Paul’s epistles: believers are “destined . . . for adoption as [God’s] children through Jesus Christ” (v. 5), and they have “obtained an inheritance” through Christ (v. 11), being marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit as a “pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people” (v. 14).

Accentuating the theme of adoption even further in Christian Scripture are the descriptions of Jesus’ relationship with his human parents and with God, which can be understood in some senses as adoption. Scripture suggests that although Joseph has nothing to do with Jesus’ conception, he raises Jesus as his son, so much so that Matthew’s genealogy traces Jesus’ lineage through Joseph (Matt. 1:16).

### *Adoption Ethics*

Appropriate contemporary Christian ethical thinking about adoption might begin with God’s call to care for orphans as well as with ethicist Timothy Jackson’s attention to the “right to be adopted” rather than potential parents’ rights to have or to adopt children.

As with birth parents, adoptive parents never know how their children will develop. In the spirit of the biblical tradition, being a parent means being open to welcoming strangers, whether they come to families by birth, the foster system, or adoption.

With the preponderance of adoptions from overseas, Western families have become particularly sensitive to their nations’ tragic histories of imperialism and colonialism, seeking to avoid replicating those behaviors in their adoption practices.

Contemporary Christians also debate who should be able to adopt. Should it be only married, heterosexual couples, or should single people and same-sex couples be able to adopt as well? Should adoption be restricted to parents of the same racial identity?

Children fostered or adopted into Christian homes should be made conscious of the blessing and embrace of God and introduced to Jesus, who took children upon his knee and called upon adults to be as little children, and to welcome them. Physically, politically, and economically embodying this graceful reality to all children in our midst is essential for those who represent the God manifested in Jesus. If God's grace covers all God's children across the world, in every faith and nation, then Christian believers' treatment of their birth children as well as those of outsiders, strangers, and enemies—their young neighbors at the family gate—must reflect such grace.

See also Abortion; Birth Control; Childlessness; Children; Family; Foster Care; Orphans; Parenthood, Parenting

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Keith Graber Miller

## Adultery

In the Bible, adultery is the act of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who is either married or engaged to be married ("betrothed") to another man. The gravity of the violation of marriage through sexual infidelity is shown by its proscription in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18) and its status within some biblical law traditions as a capital crime. Both the man

and the woman caught in adultery are to be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22 [by stoning]; cf. John 8:5).

The Bible does not explicitly explain the reasons for the gravity of adultery, but some inferences may be made. The Bible's creation narrative portrays the fusion of the man and the woman into "one flesh" as a divinely created, joyful, and precious gift that addresses human loneliness (Gen. 2:18, 23–25). The joining of the man and woman also provides the crucible for the birth of children and the future of succeeding generations (Gen. 4:1; 5:1–32). In ancient Israel's patrilineal society, in which the family line is traced through fathers and sons, it was important to ensure the identity of the father of every child. A negative consequence of adultery was that children born of an "illicit union" in the law of Deuteronomy were prohibited from admission into the worship assembly (Deut. 23:2).

A woman's sexuality was considered to be under the guardianship of a male (husband, father, or other male relative). Thus, adultery by one man was understood primarily as a shameful offense against another man (the woman's husband) and the honor of his extended family (Deut. 22:24). Some of the prophets also used adultery as a metaphor for covenant infidelity in the relationship of Israel and Israel's God (Hos. 2–4). The exclusivity required in the worship of God (Exod. 20:3) mirrored the exclusivity of relationship required in human marriage, thereby associating adultery within the human community with theological concerns about the faithfulness of the community in its relationship to God (Jer. 2:20–24, 33–35; 3:1–9; 23:10, 14; Ezek. 18:6, 11, 15; 22:11; 33:26).

A gender-based double standard existed in sexual matters in ancient Israel. Sexual fidelity to one man was required of an individual woman, but a married man could have sexual relations with his own multiple wives (Gen. 29:15–30) or with his own multiple concubines (Gen. 16:1–4; 30:3–13; 2 Sam. 5:13; 16:20–22) without incurring the charge of adultery. The double standard is also apparent in some of the laws concerning charges of adultery that could be brought by husbands against their wives but not by wives against their husbands. In Num. 5:16–28 a ritual of ordeal is commanded for cases where a husband brings a charge of adultery against his wife but has no evidence to support it. The law in Deut. 22:13–21 describes a case in which a groom brings a charge against his bride that she is not a virgin. If the case is proved true, the bride is executed. The parents may save their daughter if they present a bloody

sheet from the marriage bed as evidence of their daughter's virginity. No provision exists for the bride to bring a similar charge against the groom.

Other biblical traditions mitigate these male-biased texts by condemning men, and not only women, caught in adultery. The prophet Malachi condemns adultery by married males not because it is an affront to another male's honor, but because the adulterer has been faithless to "the wife of your youth . . . though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did not one God make her?" (Mal. 2:14–15). The wisdom tradition likewise urges its male readers to be faithful and to rejoice in the "wife of your youth" and not to be enticed "by another woman" (Prov. 5:15–23). The prophet Hosea condemns "your daughters" who commit adultery, but then he commands that they not be punished, since their fathers also commit adultery and sleep with prostitutes (Hos. 4:13–14).

One of the Bible's most notorious stories of marital infidelity is King David's adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of David's own soldiers, Uriah. Bathsheba became pregnant, and David tried to cover up his adultery by having Uriah killed in battle. The prophet Nathan condemned David for his affair with Bathsheba and for his killing of Uriah, indicating that the child born of their union would die as a consequence of his sin (1 Sam. 11–12). The narrative clearly condemns David but not Bathsheba; however, the death penalty is not imposed.

The most significant NT narrative involving adultery is Jesus' rescue of a woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned (John 7:53–8:11). When asked about the law of Moses concerning the stoning of adulterers, Jesus famously replied, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus broadens the scope of the adultery commandment to include even the one "who looks at a woman with lust" (Matt. 5:27–30) and even those who are divorced and then remarry another person (Matt. 5:32; cf. 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18; see also Rom. 7:3). Elsewhere adultery is included in NT lists of prohibited acts (Rom. 2:22; 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:9; Jas. 4:4). As in the OT prophets, the writers of the NT use adultery as a broad metaphor for unfaithfulness and deceit (Matt. 12:29; 16:4; Mark 8:38; 2 Pet. 2:14).

Thus, adultery is severely condemned in both Testaments. While some legal traditions impose a penalty of death, other biblical traditions offer a degree of forgiveness and mercy, even though severe consequences inevitably follow instances

of marital infidelity. Jesus' words broaden the scope of adultery to include all those who even lust for another, thereby placing a restraint on self-righteous accusations against others without also rigorous self-examination of one's own lapses of sexual purity and faithfulness.

*See also* Hosea; Lust; Marriage and Divorce; Sex and Sexuality; Sex Discrimination; Sexual Ethics; Ten Commandments; Women, Status of

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Dennis T. Olson

### Advance Directive *See* Bioethics

### Advertising *See* Media, Ethical Issues of

### Affections

Affections are intelligent responses to the perception of value. Examples of specifically Christian affections include love for God and neighbor, joy over what God has done in Christ, grief over our sins, fear of offending the Lord, and gratitude for the gifts of life and salvation. Such affections are the necessary contents of the well-formed "heart"—the center of the human being.

Augustine and Aquinas, as well as Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, saw affections as voluntary movements of the will, ascribable to God as well as to humans. This classic Christian psychology is distinguished from the views of the Stoics, who understood much of affectivity to be a function of mistaken judgments. Augustine and Aquinas saw the Stoics as being unable to distinguish between the virtuous "affections" and the vicious "passions." For the Christian tradition, the proper object of the heart makes all the difference: affections are actions of the rational soul, focusing on God and neighbor, whereas passions are actions of the irrational soul, taking as their object the prideful self.

Today, the terms *affections* and *passions* have fallen out of common usage, often in favor of "emotion" language. This is problematic for understanding what Aquinas and Edwards meant, as our modern concept of "emotion" has

blinded us to what the tradition saw as essential to “affections.”

As shown by Thomas Dixon, the “emotions” came into being as a distinct psychological category in the nineteenth century, replacing terms such as *appetites*, *passions*, *sentiments*, and *affections*. Along with this change in terminology came a change in conceptuality. The tendency to see emotions as independent mini-agents of their own started with David Hume and was reinforced by people such as Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, both of whom describe a tripartite model of the soul, where in addition to understanding and will, a third faculty of feeling (*Gefühl* or *Empfindung*) was added. It is easy to see why modern thinkers, following such models, came to view our affective life as necessarily irrational and involuntary.

This is seen especially in Thomas Brown’s influential *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, where his fundamental conceptual distinction was between “our intellectual states of mind and our emotions.” Ever after this, finding the intellectual component in affectivity—something inherent in the classical emphasis on the differing objects of passions and affections—is virtually impossible, as emotions and the intellect are ruled separate by definition. “Emotions” from this point onward, then, not only tended to replace “affections” and “passions,” but they came to be associated with positivist and reductionist theories, where they are seen as involuntary, non-cognitive states.

This means that if we are to understand what people such as Augustine, Aquinas, Edwards, and Wesley meant by the “life of the heart,” the “affections,” and “heart religion,” we must bracket out what our modern world has invited us to believe about “emotions” and conceive of affective reality in a different way. Fortunately, several thinkers have begun this process. Philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum and Robert Roberts see emotions as intelligent responses to the perception of value, not just as nonreasoning movements or unthinking energies that simply push the person around. In short, these philosophers are now reconstruing “emotions” in a way entirely consistent with the Christian tradition’s view of the “affections,” allowing Christians to recover the classical discourse of the heart and its affections.

Setting “affections” in its classical context, we see why Jonathan Edwards could say that “true religion” consists, in large part, in having “religious affections.” Such affections, often described by the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–24), are not

mere involuntary, felt impulses, unexpectedly and irrationally popping into consciousness, nor are they, à la Friedrich Schleiermacher, some universally present feeling of absolute dependence. The religious affections are embodied recognitions of who God is and what God has done; they are patterned through the spiritual disciplines, informed by prayer, and shaped by Scripture and the sacraments. Although the felt awareness of these affections may come and go, the affections are most reliably shown not in episodes of feeling, available only through introspection, but in the overall shape of a life, something outwardly observable in community.

*See also* Emotion; Fruit of the Spirit; Galatians; Moral Formation; Passions; Practices; Sanctification; Wesleyan Ethics

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Gregory S. Clapper

**Affluence** *See* Wealth

## **African American Ethics**

While various terms have found currency (e.g., *Coloreds*, *Negroes*, *Blacks*, *Black Americans*), the term *African American* is used here to describe persons and communities who are the product of the dynamic intersection of two worlds: African and American.

### **Overview of the Emergence of African Americans**

The task of how African Americans use the Bible in ethical deliberations and as a book from which ethical actions spring becomes much more problematic without a description of who African Americans are as a community of discourse.

Africa is the second-largest continent in terms of size and population. Africa by some counts is composed of more than fifty countries, and nearly a thousand languages and dialects are spoken by diverse tribes. Each tribe also has religious expressions intrinsic to its own histories and historical settings. Yet sub-Saharan and western Africa generally represent areas of Africa from which much of the history of African Americans is derived.

Despite the diversity of life in Africa, there is a legitimate sense that sociocultural and religious understandings can be filtered through a shared African worldview. The African worldview embraces a belief in a Supreme Being, although the Supreme Being is not viewed as necessarily active in everyday affairs. There are lesser divinities who serve as mediators and are active in the fabric of everyday life. The “spiritual” pervades all of life, so that the distinct notions of sacred and secular space make little or no sense. Further, in the African worldview harmony between the living and the dead is important. Rituals and ceremonies proliferate to assuage the displeasure of the gods and spirits who otherwise would disrupt the harmony that everyone desires.

Moreover, tribal life and tribal identity are corporate. The sense of self or personhood is embedded in the tribe or the community. An old Ashanti proverb captures this idea: “Because we are, I am.” Appropriate rituals mark the passage of children into tribal membership and mark the passage of young males and females into their adult roles. The Western notion of radical individualism is alien to the African worldview. One is not a person apart from community or tribal affiliation. In the West there is the notion that one can be a person apart from any identification with a community. There is little need to romanticize Africa or its inhabitants, but it is necessary to recognize the integrity of the African view of life, lived in a context of freedom and self-determination.

The English made initial contact with the western part of Africa in the fifteenth century, and their assumptions and presuppositions about Africans found their way into the logic and practices that cemented the racist ideology of white supremacy. In the subsequent practice of enslavement, millions of enslaved Africans began the journey across the Atlantic and ended up in the thirteen colonies. For those who survived the treacherous journey, their existence required strategies of survival and resilience in a new place—a place not truly their home.

In the colonies and later the United States, enslaved Africans, suffering under the oppressive weight of slavery, responded in ways that constructed paths of freedom and advanced the claim of being created in the image of God. Inevitably, enslaved Africans confronted North American evangelical Christians, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The enslaved Africans’ engagement with the beliefs of North American evangelical Christians teased out a hybrid but real form of Christianity consistent with

the values of their native land and the lived realities of African life in the New World. Future encounters with North American Christianity, especially during the First and Second Great Awakenings, also had significant shaping force.

From the inception of the slave economy and its deleterious practices, the enslaved men and women of African descent learned by necessity to live both as Africans, to the extent possible, and as Americans. Enslaved Africans engaged the assumptions of a white Christianity that sought to subjugate their minds and bodies, including their interpretations of the Bible that served as a canonical authority for racist readings of the Scriptures.

### *Christian Ethics in an African American Context*

African American ethics refers both to a discipline and a way of thinking and being in the world. The United States has experienced significant racial progress over these nearly four hundred years. At this writing, the people of the United States elected the nation’s first African American president. In all dimensions of life, progress can be observed. Yet, the intransigence of racism and the entrenchment of its logic and assumptions still inform much of our corporate life. The importance of the African American community is essential to the multitude of moral and ethical conversations about the value of human life and the proper goal of our common strivings as humans on this earth. In this ongoing engagement, the interpretation of the Bible has been and still is central. A focus on this dimension of African American ethics represents the thrust of the remainder of this essay.

### *African American Communities’ Distinctive Approaches and Appeals to Scripture in Ethics*

No reader approaches texts without presuppositions; that is, no community of readers comes to the text as blank slates. African Americans, at least at the beginning, filtered their fundamental readings of the Bible through a hermeneutical lens colored by their engagement with the distorted and dehumanizing practices of slaveholders, buttressed by a pernicious racist ideology. In the context of Africans being uprooted from their sense of place and a world of meaning-making and being compelled to live in a strange land, enslaved Africans responded in ways that promoted a quest for liberation or freedom. This liberationist or emancipatory impulse was a central thread in how the Bible was read and a central tenet of interpretation (exodus motif; Jubilee Year [Lev. 25:8–55]; Isa. 25:6–9; 65:20–25; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8; Luke 4:18–19; Rev. 21:3–7). This impulse to pursue liberation is central, in varying

degrees, to all subsequent African American readings of the Bible.

European contact with the continent of Africa included also the role of missionaries and merchants and their use of the Bible to support colonialist ideologies. Europeans and whites presented the Bible as the sacred text, interpreted as having universal claims on all peoples. The slaves, even during the initial period of contact between “whiteness” and “blackness,” attempted, sometimes successfully, to offer alternative responses to racist ideologies. Thus, African American use of the Bible is a function of the lived black experience within North America, particularly in the United States.

African Americans read the Bible as marginalized outsiders (Evans 35). The distorted relationships between those viewed as masters and thus superior and those viewed as enslaved and thus inferior provided the conceptual space for alternative readings of Scripture. A way to understand this might be thus: the alternative readings sought to decenter dominant, dehumanizing discourses and biblical interpretations, while they sought also to center or move to the center those biblical interpretations designed to provide other visions of human flourishing. Specifically, alternative readings and interpretations provided a sense of racial empowerment, a basis for self-love, a platform for moral uplift, a structure for moral rearmament, and a promise of progress and a hopeful future.

Historically, African American readings of the Bible take into account the historical contexts in which the readers lived. While the list of African American scholars and practitioners who have addressed African Americans’ use of the Bible is long, Vincent Wimbush provides a helpful typology that attempts to provide a history of African American interpretations of the Bible. Wimbush identifies six “circles of biblical imaginary.” In his discussion are the implicit and explicit reminders that the circles of African American interpreters of the Bible are diverse and emerge during specific periods of history in the United States. The critique of American society, especially its expressions and practices of racism and the formative nature of its liberal democratic ethos, requires consistent attention to alternative, compensatory readings of the Bible.

At times, the voices of African Americans have been muted and their roles maligned by patriarchal practices of both white and black males. Yet, there is a cacophony of strident womanist voices that resist efforts to marginalize their readings and interpretations of the Bible and other texts. Their

contributions are many and significant, speaking to the broad scope of African American experiences. Katie G. Cannon, Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, Marcia Y. Riggs, Cheryl J. Sanders, Emilie M. Townes, and a host of others represent contemporary scholars whose works promote the kind of sociocultural analysis needed in any engagement of the African American community with alienating discourses and practices in our national life.

The rise of the independent black church movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also gave birth to interpreters of the Bible who challenged racism and its social practices in the United States. The black church nurtured spokespersons who offered life-affirming biblical interpretation in addition to criticizing racist rhetoric and dismantling the evil of segregation.

Frederick Douglass and Jarena Lee represent bold nineteenth-century examples of African Americans who offered stinging critiques of American society and male patriarchy by engaging in a critical reading of the Bible. Yet, many decades later, the emergence of the Black Power movement in the twentieth century presented the African American community with an interpretive challenge to its readings and interpretations of the Bible. The appropriation of Black Power by the representatives of the black theology project (such as James H. Cone) presents a continuing challenge in the search for a broad agreement among African Americans regarding the place of socioeconomic and sociopolitical action in service to the ongoing quest for liberation. For black theologians such as Cone, Black Power is not alien to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In his books, Cone not only addressed the quest for liberation but also repositioned it within a context where God is the “God of the Oppressed.” Cone asks and answers this basic question: “What has the gospel to do with the oppressed of the land and their struggle for liberation?” (Cone 9). Cone maintains that theologians who fail to place that question at the center of their work have ignored the essence of the gospel. While some black theologians criticized Cone early on for placing his work within the systematic structure of European theology, the basic point is that tensions exist between black theology and the black Christian churches. Some African American scholars have expressed deep concern that black churches, in their desire to link up with white evangelical Christianity, have diminished their capacity of allowing Scripture to serve as a prophetic critique of all forms of racist ideology (Wimbush 84). This concern is seen within the worship life of many black

churches as their sermons focus on “otherworldly” existence, thereby eclipsing the moral importance of life in the here and now.

This critical appraisal of black churches is a reminder that if the readings and interpretations of the Bible, and all aspects of worship, do not provide a critical analysis of social, economic, and political realities and inspire African Americans to seek life-affirming modalities of existence, then the African American church is being unfaithful to God and to the African American communities through time and space. While hearing this criticism clearly, black churches have often made their own criticisms of academic black theology. Specifically, it is argued that those who embrace the black theology project must seek a deeper analysis of, or at least be more attentive to, the ways that liberation is expressed by black churches in their preaching, singing, pastoral care, and other practices. The notion of liberation, for them, must be broadened to include the spiritual liberation from sin as a necessary component of the gospel. Some African American theologians fear that the increased participation of African Americans in holiness, pentecostal, and fundamentalist church groups will mean the loss of those liberative interpretations of Scripture that have historically sustained African Americans. Yet, more conservative Christians need not be antagonistic to the ongoing quest for liberation (e.g., Cheryl J. Sanders). African Americans as a community of discourse have embraced, and still embrace in many cases, various reading strategies that build bridges across all forms of human division.

### *A Way Forward: Some Concluding Thoughts*

African American ethics takes up God’s agenda of reconciliation as revealed in Scripture. The problem is how one promotes the biblical notion of reconciliation in the face of the continuing legacy of racism and racist ideology in the United States. The role of Scripture is formative for a community’s life, through its practices and social embodiments of more truthful interpretations of the biblical story in all of its aspects. There is general historical agreement that ongoing reflection on the social and cultural realities in which all humans participate is a critical ethical dimension of our communal readings of the Bible.

African American ethics should not be marginalized by African American insistence that whites cannot understand the plight of African Americans. Such an insistence ensures a racial ownership of human experiences in a way that is not consistent with life lived with God’s end in view. Likewise, even white Christians, whether labeled

as liberal, conservative, or fundamentalist, must exercise vigilance against appealing to unexamined claims to universal and absolute interpretations of the Bible that effectively obscure the presence of African Americans and thereby render African American life invisible. Interpretation requires that a community be capable of welcoming the stranger who enters its midst. That is why it is important to engage diverse reading communities in order to humanize our lives together and to experience the real benefits of connecting with broader communities of discourse. Galatians 3:28 is a central verse for gifting our vision to seek the plurality of oneness in the church and world.

Finally, vigilance against uncritical participation in the nation’s liberal democratic society is required. African American ethics suffers to the extent that faith becomes only an inward, individualistic experience. Aligning faith commitments to the logic and presuppositions of market capitalism, without proper vigilance, mutes the prophetic impulses necessary for liberation and transformation of lives and communities.

*See also* Discrimination; Emancipation; Jubilee; Justice; Liberation; Liberationist Ethics; Race; Racism; Reconciliation; Slavery

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James W. Lewis

## Agape

The Greek word *agapē* in the LXX translates Hebrew words reflecting multiple facets of affection and commitment. The narrative complexity of the word comes alive with attention to the OT text as it came to be translated from Hebrew to Greek. The LXX translators used *agapē* to translate words as disparate as *'ahab*, often a form of intimately passionate love; *raḥam*, related to the Hebrew word for “womb,” a poignantly physical attachment eliciting mercy toward another; and *dôd*, which indicates a joyful delight in another. Passages pair *agapē* with Greek versions of *hesed*, an abounding loyalty often linked to forgiveness; *ḥaseq*, which refers to being bound or attached to another; and *rāšâ*, which refers to being pleased with another—all words that shape the meaning of *agapē* in particular contexts. *Agapē* is used in these instances both for God’s love and our responsive stance toward God and neighbor, creating an intertextual meaning.

Scriptural study of agape helpfully complicates Western scholarship on Christian love. In his seminal work on agape in Western ethics, Gene Outka refers his readers back two generations to another progenitor. Referring to Anders Nygren, Outka suggests, “His critics have been legion, but few have ignored or been unaffected by his thesis. . . . One may justifiably regard his work as the beginning of the modern treatment of the subject” (Outka 1). Nygren began a particularly modern pursuit, that of crystallizing the import of agape around a vital essence or, as he puts it, “motif.” His work set a scholarly trajectory to distill the term and make it universally applicable. Through purportedly “scientific analysis,” agape could be made “indifferent to value” and thus readily available to Christians across time and place.

The effort made intuitive sense in postwar Western Europe. The scriptural command to love God, neighbor, stranger, and enemy had become central in Western European thought. The horrors of Nazi Germany and the retributive firebombing of German and Japanese cities had made tragically clear how ready leaders (and the led) were to set aside the command when circumstances dictated or allowed. By the time Nygren’s *Agape and Eros* came out in English, the Western world was predictably ready for the crystal clarity and diamond-like beauty of Nygren’s “scientific analysis” on agape. The truly loving agent whom Nygren distilled in his study was a serviceable ideal for a miserably misanthropic era: purely self-giving, shorn of particular context, capable of instant and unambiguous action for the sake of another, initiated

by God alone, with no storied motivation on the part of the loving one.

A serviceable ideal is scarcely the whole story. Hans Frei is a crucial interlocutor when considering agape as an item of ethical study. Frei’s genealogy of “mythophiles” helps to give context to the supposedly context-free studies of agape initiated by Nygren. Frei argues that to “paraphrase by general statement” the truth of Scripture is to “reduce it to meaninglessness.” To search the manifold forms and contexts of the scriptural canon in order to find a “central ideational theme” is, according to Frei, to make a type of reader’s category error. Frei explains that meaning in Scripture is “not *illustrated* (as though it were an intellectually presubsuming or preconceived archetype or ideal essence) but *constituted* through the mutual, specific determinations of agents, speech, social context, and circumstances that form the indispensable narrative web” (Frei 280). Efforts to summarize reliably the core of Christian love are susceptible to the same sort of attempt to find the core Jesus of history, or the perduring anchor of faith. To paraphrase one commentator, the search for the historical agape is likely to recover a picture that looks remarkably like the scholar searching.

Scriptural references to agape may link God’s command to love one’s neighbor to a story of God’s anguish at the deep betrayal of God’s people, or to God’s liberation of a people betrayed by their own neighbors. Reading the texts together, in tension, may bring out a word of solace or a word of God’s judgment. By way of assigned lectionary texts, attentively and cyclically read, a congregation may receive a command to love in conjunction with their origins as nameless nomads, or in the midst of a call to rage against and passionately love family members who have forsaken them, or in conjunction with a story demanding attention to the deviant, or alongside a summons to perceive with gratitude those who become more holy each day. *Agape* becomes a resonant term, one evoking not one particular stance but rather a web of scriptural stories and meanings.

Hosea may be a helpful example of the way agape is shaded in Scripture. God’s stance toward Israel is one of profound memory and investment in this prophetic book. The book suggests that love for those who are closest and with whom memories are shared is at times painful and difficult, perhaps even more so than love for those who are distantly strange. The stranger in one’s own bedroom may be harder to love than the one across an ocean. At the risk of paraphrasing, one might say that Hosea narrates the acute betrayal unique to

intimacy, love, and deep memory. Because God's agape is entwined with God's enduring relationship with the people of Israel, God's anger is particularly passionate and even vengeful. As in the case of Jeremiah and Isaiah, Hosea's metaphors draw from the intensity of a lover's vulnerable connection to his beloved and from a mother's passion for disobedient children. God has known God's people from conception, heard their cries in Egypt, and held them as they toddled toward maturity. God remembers a people who accepted God's love with grateful, youthful abandon and cannot with this memory send them away when they seek other lovers. The book layers metaphor upon metaphor, with God summoning Israel to respond in repentance and renewed commitment, as God is Israel's true parent, lover, and spouse. God's agape here may seem scandalously foolish, even indecent. The word may appear here as a judgment on those who remain distantly engaged, as a word of admonishment on those who note with dispassionate regard the loved ones they are vulnerably to cherish.

In Exodus and Leviticus, Abraham's and Moses' descendants are to remember with gratitude the mercy that God has shown them even while they were wandering and murmuring, and thus they are to identify with and show mercy to the wanderer in their midst. A NT text that is helpfully read for features of agape is Luke's Gospel, as Luke's readers are set before a forgiving God and led to include even enemies in the scope of Israel's stance of mercy. Willard Swartley has described Luke's version of agape as an outrageous extension of the banquet tradition to those who might otherwise be seen as unfit to invite to the table (Luke 14:16–24). Echoing a strand of agape in the OT, that of God's searching for those who are scattered (Ezek. 34), Luke narrates a God who longs for those who are "in the wilderness" (Luke 15:4) due to oppression or rebellion. Although the parable of the nameless man on the highway may be read as a call to love universally, the Samaritan, an outsider, most clearly answers the call to love. This move may be read as a universalizing one, but it may also be read, perhaps simultaneously, as a recalibration of inside and outside, placing the stranger inside God's enduring covenant (Luke 10:29–37). The stories of lost sheep and small coins may newly adjust the vision of those interlocutors who deem themselves to be obviously above mere shepherds and surely better than a woman with a broom. The Lukan parables recast divine and human agape as abiding in the face of transgression. They go beyond this, even, to indicate that those who are

lost are unique recipients of God's concern and, when found, a cause for God's delight.

Colin Grant suggests that the love evoked in agape is "identified only through the horizon of theological conviction and sustained through the apparatus of religion." Grant reads human agape as best cast in a context of "the divine extravagance of giving" (Grant 19). In this encyclopedic setting, wherein scholars each must sift through and explain particular, scriptural terms for the sake of clarity and brevity, one example of divine extravagance may be the lavish fecundity of Scripture itself—as it bears judgment, lament, joy, patience, resilience—for the daily task and manna of agape.

*See also* Altruism; Charity, Works of; Covenant; Enemy, Enemy Love; Grace; Love, Love Command; Neighbor, Neighbor Love

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Amy Laura Hall

## **Aged, Aging**

Ethical actions and attitudes toward older people flow from an understanding of who they are. Two distinctive characteristics of older people stand out at various points in Scripture.

### **The Characteristic Wisdom**

First, older people generally are wise. "Is not wisdom found among the aged?" Job asks rhetorically, and "Does not long life bring understanding?" (Job 12:12 TNIV; cf. 15:10; 32:7). "Elders" (normally elderly) are, therefore, in the best position to give good counsel based on the experience and memory of what God has done (e.g., Exod. 3:18; Deut. 32:7; Acts 15:2; 1 Pet. 5:5). In old age, people "still produce fruit" (Ps. 92:14), even if that simply means living a life of moral virtue (Titus 2:2–3) or praising God (Ps. 148:12). The more severe the limitations of old age, the greater the inspiration such examples are for the community. The mere presence of elderly people, in fact, is perhaps the best reminder that our own days will

quickly pass—a reality that we must learn if we are to “gain a wise heart” (Ps. 90:12). Accordingly, a family that has lost all of its elderly members has been severely punished (1 Sam. 2:31). A city with men and women of “great age” is considered blessed (Zech. 8:4).

The difference that the wisdom of elderly counsel can make is nowhere more dramatically illustrated than in 1 Kgs. 12 (cf. 2 Chr. 10). There, a large assembly of God’s people asks King Rehoboam to lighten their harsh workload. The king consults with two groups of counselors, one of old men and one of young men. His failure to heed the wise counsel of the old men leads to the dramatic breakup of God’s kingdom into the two antagonistic kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Wisdom, then, generally is presented as a function of the life experience that only elderly persons have. Because it is also the product of righteousness and God’s Spirit, however, it is possible occasionally for young people to have wisdom (Job 32:8–9; Eccl. 4:13) and older people to lack it (Job 12:20).

### *The Characteristic Weakness*

A second characteristic of many elderly persons, at least at some point, is that they are weak. Old age is acknowledged in Scripture as a time of suffering and vulnerability (2 Sam. 19:35; Eccl. 12:1–7). It is a time of failing eyes (e.g., Gen. 27:1; 48:10; 1 Sam. 4:15; 1 Kgs. 14:4), failing feet (e.g., 1 Kgs. 15:23), and declining overall bodily health (e.g., 1 Sam. 4:18; 1 Kgs. 1:1). Knowing that insensitive people take advantage of the weakness of older people, the psalmist prays, “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent” (Ps. 71:9; cf. 71:18).

Such weakness generally is characteristic of older people but not necessarily so. Elderly people, therefore, should not automatically be written off as mentally or physically incapable simply because of their age. God often breaks through stereotypes. Who would have thought that Sarah and Abraham would have a child in their very old age (Gen. 18:11–14; 21:5–7); or that the Shunammite woman would have a baby with her elderly husband (2 Kgs. 4:14–17); or that the elderly Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a child (Luke 1:7, 18, 24–25, 36–37)? Who would have expected Jacob to father Joseph at such an old age that Joseph became special for that reason (Gen. 37:3)? Although weakness often is present in older people, it must be discovered and documented, never assumed.

### *The Response of Respecting*

Both the wisdom and weakness of elderly people call for ethical responses, namely, respecting and

protecting. We respond appropriately to wisdom by respecting it and those who possess it. Evil societies sometimes are characterized by their lack of respect for older people (Deut. 28:50; 2 Chr. 36:17; Isa. 47:6). It is an evil day when “the youth will be insolent to the elder” (Isa. 3:5), when elders are shown no respect (Lam. 5:12). Those who are young are to resist the temptation to despise or speak harshly to those who are old (e.g., Prov. 23:22; 1 Tim. 5:1) and instead are to recognize gray hair (i.e., old age) as a crown of splendor (Prov. 16:31; 20:29).

People are to “rise before the aged,” says the Lord, and “defer to the old” (Lev. 19:32). This particular command is one of seven commands in Lev. 19 whose importance is underlined by the conclusion, “I am the LORD.” And this command regarding elderly people prefaces those words with the call to “fear your God.” The point seems to be that obedience to this command in particular expresses a special reverence for God. By showing respect for those who are elderly, we are revering God.

### *The Response of Protecting*

If we rightly respond to wisdom by respecting people who possess it, we appropriately respond to the relative weakness of elderly people by protecting them. God is frequently portrayed in biblical writings as the protector of those who are weak (Exod. 22:22–27; Pss. 35:10; 140:12), and God’s people are challenged to be the same (Prov. 31:8–9; 1 Thess. 5:14). So it is not at all surprising to find God affirming, “Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you” (Isa. 46:4).

That God says “even in old age” emphasizes that in a world enamored with strength and productivity it is all too easy to neglect older people. King David observed this phenomenon in his day, which is why he implores God to sustain him, as he puts it, “even when I am old and gray” (Ps. 71:18 TNIV). Because God is a sustainer of those who are old, it is natural to expect that godly people will be as well (e.g., Ruth 4:15). Community is built, to the benefit of all, when the needs of some provide others opportunity to serve and to witness the blessing of being served.

Elderly people are as worthy of staying alive and even receiving life-saving care as anyone else. In fact, whether a particular society values the wisdom and other contributions of older people is ultimately beside the point. All persons are God’s creation in God’s own image (Gen. 1:27) and are the objects of God’s sacrificial love in Christ (John 3:16). God pours out the Spirit on those who are old as well as on those who are young (Joel 2:28;

Acts 2:17). The equal worth of all persons demands that all be respected and that those who are weak accordingly receive special protection.

### Contemporary Challenges

This biblical outlook is at odds with some influential contemporary outlooks. For example, a utilitarian way of viewing people promotes whatever most people in society consider beneficial. In contemporary cultures that value people primarily in terms of their economic productivity, elderly people may not be given the same access to needed resources as younger people. This problem is compounded by its discriminatory impact on women. In the United States, for example, a large majority of older people are women. Scripture identifies the male/female distinction, along with slave/free and ethnic distinctions, as inappropriate categories used by one group to assert superiority over another (e.g., Gal. 3:28). Biblical writings exhort the community to provide special protection and care to older women in particular, who often are widows (e.g., Isa. 1:17; Jas. 1:27).

A biblical outlook is also at odds with the common human aspiration to live forever in this world. Genesis 3 introduces the suffering that unavoidably marks this world because of people's sinful self-centeredness. In response, God banishes humanity from the garden of Eden so that people cannot "take from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). Far from mere punishment, this banishment is a wonderful example of God's mercy. In place of eternal life in this world of "bondage to decay" God offers an opportunity for forgiveness and the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:21–23). The resurrection of the crucified Jesus is God's victory over death and sin. That victory is a divine victory, not a technological victory. God's only begotten Son transforms death itself into the doorway to an immortality of joy (Rev. 21:4). Efforts to extend life become antagonistic to God's purposes if understood as part of a larger attempt to achieve immortality in this world. However, long life and health can be received as a blessing (Prov. 10:27; 16:31; Isa. 65:20). In response to God's gift and cause, our efforts to extend life through a variety of medical and other interventions can constitute a welcome participation in God's merciful involvement in a suffering world.

See also Death and Dying; Dementia; Dependent Care; Euthanasia; Family; Healthcare Ethics; Widows

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John F. Kilner

## Alcohol

Drinking alcohol in moderation is neither prohibited nor identified as sinful in the Bible. Typically, consuming alcohol is portrayed as a commonly accepted social practice and a common element in religious rites. Alongside positive references to the moderate consumption of alcohol are numerous passages warning against the abuse of alcohol and condemning drunkenness.

### Positive Images

The Bible presents an abundance of positive references to wine and strong drink, portraying the consumption of alcohol as a commonly accepted cultural practice (e.g., Judg. 19:19; 1 Tim. 5:23). Some well-known figures in the OT, such as Isaac, are depicted as drinking wine (Gen. 27:25), and in the NT Jesus served wine at Passover (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25–26) and performed his first miracle by turning water into wine (John 2:1–11). Other positive references regard wine as a divine blessing (e.g., Isa. 25:6) and a lack of wine as God's curse (e.g., Deut. 28:39). Wine is given as a gift (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:20) and used in religious rites (e.g., Lev. 23:13), including the Last Supper, where the symbolic use of "cup" employs wine from the Passover meal (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25–26). Wine is also employed as a standard for what is good, so that something can be "better than wine" (e.g., Song 1:2).

### Negative Images

Almost all negative texts regarding alcohol warn against its abuse and condemn drunkenness (e.g., Isa. 28:1; Eph. 5:18). One NT text, however, speaks of abstaining from wine in order to prevent a brother or sister from stumbling (Rom. 14:21), and a few passages refer to vows of abstinence, although these apply to a particular group, such as the Levite priests (Lev. 10:9), or, as in the case of John the Baptist, a particular person (Luke 1:15), and are never required of the whole community.

### Contemporary Arguments

Since the Bible clearly allows for moderate consumption of alcohol as well as the use of alcohol

in religious rituals, on what basis have some Christians maintained that the Bible demands total abstinence from alcohol?

Christians who believe that the Bible teaches abstinence often claim that biblical references to wine indicate either unfermented grape juice or wine so diluted as to have virtually no intoxicating effect unless consumed in large quantities. The Hebrew and Greek words for “wine” and most especially for “strong drink,” however, do not support these assertions. Furthermore, the claim for unfermented grape juice cannot be sustained by the logic of many biblical texts. Why would the Bible warn against drunkenness if “wine” refers to unfermented grape juice, which, by definition, cannot cause intoxication? After Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding at Cana, why would the steward have marveled that the bridegroom brought out the good wine after the guests had become intoxicated if it did not contain alcohol (John 2:1–11)? The more common claim that references to wine and strong drink refer to drinks with extremely low alcohol content, thereby providing a necessary alternative to contaminated water, lacks linguistic and cultural evidence. In addition, it does not demand abstinence, but allows one to consume drinks with low alcohol content, especially when consumed for a specific purpose. A third argument, popular among nineteenth-century prohibitionists and sometimes employed today, is the “two wine” theory, which maintains that in the Bible the word *wine* sometimes refers to alcohol and other times indicates unfermented grape juice. Since the same word for wine is used in both cases, the “two wine” theory is impossible to support with unbiased linguistic arguments.

### *Making Biblical Claims*

Although one cannot rightly maintain that the Bible forbids the consumption of alcohol, one also cannot claim that Christians who choose abstinence are only following personal or cultural preferences with no guidance from Scripture. Only by means of proof-texting can one say that a decision to refrain from drinking alcohol cannot be informed by the Bible. For instance, the Bible provides strong advocacy for the least of the brothers and sisters (Matt. 25:31–46) and exhorts us to define our own actions by their effect on others (Rom. 14:21). Given the potentially devastating financial, emotional, and physical effects of alcoholism and alcohol-related accidents, Christians can heed the biblical imperatives to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19) and to treat the body as a temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20) by choosing total abstinence. This choice is clearly

informed by the Bible, even though the Bible does not explicitly prohibit drinking alcohol.

Hence, Christians who consume alcohol in moderation cannot claim that their teetotaling brothers and sisters have no biblical grounds for their decision to refrain from drinking. However, Christians who judge other Christians for allowing moderate consumption of alcohol have no biblical basis for their condemnation either. Perhaps the best scriptural guidance to inform Christian attitudes about drinking alcohol arises from the contrasting portrayals of John the Baptist, who exercised abstinence, and Jesus, who did not. The Pharisees condemned them both: “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Luke 7:33–34). Christians can, with John the Baptist and in allegiance to Jesus’ concern for the least of the brothers and sisters, choose total abstinence, or they can, in line with numerous passages from the Bible as well as Jesus’ own actions, choose to drink in moderation. Those who choose abstinence and those who choose moderation can together follow biblical teaching by fighting against the abuse of alcohol.

*See also* Asceticism; Body; Temperance

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Nancy J. Duff

## **Aliens, Immigration, and Refugees**

Migration has been a human reality throughout history. People move for many reasons, and the various labels assigned to them reflect these circumstances. The term *refugee* refers to those who are forced to abandon their place of origin because of a natural disaster or to escape a war zone or the threat of violent persecution. These persons seek asylum in a different place through their own efforts or through the intervention of international agencies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which works with governments and local organizations (often religious institutions) to resettle them. Ideally, treatment of refugees should follow internationally agreed conventions.

The term *immigrant* is used of those who leave home willingly and desire short- or long-term residence somewhere else. Most migrate in an effort

to find employment and to provide their family a suitable life and future. Entry into a new land can be done according to proper protocols at established ports of entry or outside of that legal framework. Another category is “internally displaced persons,” referring to those who remain within their national boundaries but change locations for the same reasons appropriate to refugee or immigrant status.

The twenty-first century is witnessing the movement of millions across borders. This demographic phenomenon impacts local and international economies, brings unforeseen pressures on law enforcement and the integrity of national borders, can strain educational and healthcare infrastructures, and is raising concerns about cultural identity in receiving countries. Living in a different culture creates challenges for the recently arrived populations as well. They wrestle with their own identity as they engage the complex problems related to their economic survival and accommodation to strange surroundings. Another affected sphere is religion. Refugees and immigrants around the world are revitalizing their traditions, Christian and non-Christian, and bringing fresh perspectives on the practice of their faith to their new lands.

### *Migration and the Bible*

Migration and its effects are a major topic in both the OT and the NT. Then, as now, the reasons for migration vary. Many of those in the Bible who migrated would be categorized technically today as refugees or as forcefully displaced, but the descriptions of life and the theological reflection that those situations generated mirror the experiences of migrants everywhere. Scripture can offer distinct but interrelated messages to those who take in the outsider and to the newcomers. The majority culture that accepts refugees and immigrants learns that God loves the vulnerable. This divine concern should shape attitudes and orient actions on behalf of the stranger. Also, those who come from another place can be encouraged and empowered by God’s commitment to the weak and by the biblical accounts of others of similar fate.

**Biblical terminology.** Several terms are used to refer to outsiders in the Bible. It is possible that each carries a discrete nuance. These distinctions are difficult to discern, however, because of the complexity of the biblical data and because of inconsistencies in the English versions. The same English word can be used for various Hebrew and Greek terms, and a particular Hebrew or Greek term is translated by different English words. The most common translations of the words in

question are *alien*, *stranger*, *resident alien*, *foreigner*, and *sojourner*.

The relevant Hebrew terms in the OT are the nouns *nēkār*, *tōšāb*, and *gēr*, and the adjectives *nokrī* and *zār*. This variety in terminology implies that Israel differentiated among the outsiders in their midst. The terms *nēkār/nokrī* and *zār* can refer to something or someone who is foreign to Israel. These can be neutral designations (e.g., *nokrī* in Ruth 2:10; 1 Kgs. 8:41, 43), but frequently they carry a negative connotation of being a corrupting influence or a threat (*nēkār/nokrī* in Josh. 24:20; 1 Kgs. 11:1–8; Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13:23–27; Ps. 144:7; *zār* in Deut. 32:16; Prov. 22:14; Isa. 1:7). Those who are *nēkār/nokrī* are excluded from participating in certain rituals (Exod. 12:43) and from office (Deut. 17:15). Perhaps these were outsiders who did not seek to stay and integrate themselves into Israelite life and faith. The term *tōšāb* is harder to define. In the few places where *tōšāb* occurs, it often is in parallel with “hired servant” (Exod. 12:45; Lev. 25:6, 40) or *gēr* (Gen. 23:4; Lev. 25:23). In the latter case, some argue, the combination is to be construed as “resident alien” (Lev. 25:35, 47). The most significant term in the OT is *gēr*. The *gēr*, as its verbal root *gūr* suggests (“to take up residence”), is someone from elsewhere who settled down on a temporary or permanent basis. There are a series of provisions in the OT law for these individuals, who had made a commitment to become part of the community of Israel. It is impossible to determine whether this incorporation into national life was simply part of natural processes or if at some point formal procedures were established to make it official. As will become evident, the OT’s contribution to discussions on refugees and immigrants is not limited to passages where these terms appear.

The relevant NT words are *xenos*, *paroikos*, and *parepidēmos*. These refer to people or things that may come from elsewhere and so appear to be out of place and have no status. The word *xenos* occurs four times in Matt. 25:31–46, where Jesus identifies the stranger with himself. *Xenos* and its verbal root, *xenizō*, can indicate something that is alien and unwelcome (e.g., Acts 17:20; Heb. 13:9). This word is the source of the English term *xenophobia*, which is the fear or dislike of someone foreign. It occurs in parallel with *paroikos* in Eph. 2:19 to refer to the relationship to the household of God that people have before they come to faith, and with *parepidēmos* in Heb. 11:13 to describe how past saints viewed themselves in the world. *Paroikos* and *parepidēmos* appear together in 1 Pet. 2:11. They may point to the legal standing in the

Roman Empire of the recipients of the letter as well as to their new spiritual reality in the world (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1).

**Old Testament narratives.** The place to ground discussion on refugees and immigrants is the creation of humankind in the image of God in Gen. 1:26–28. There are several interpretations of the meaning of the image. The ontological view holds that the image of God concerns what humans are and what they possess (an intellect, will, emotions, and a spiritual component). Some argue for a relational perspective, which holds that it refers to the unique communion with God available to humans through Christ, the supreme embodiment of the divine image (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). A third view contends that the image is functional. It is humanity's special task to rule as God's vice-regents on earth. All three options assert that every person has worth. Outsiders also are created in the divine image. They too are valuable in God's sight and worthy of respect. Their giftedness as humans signifies that they have great potential. For these newcomers, the image communicates that there is no warrant to feel inferior as second-class persons. At the same time, there is a claim on their lives. The image can be a motivation for them to develop skills for the common good and to live responsibly as God's representatives in their adopted land.

The movement of individuals and groups begins in the opening chapters of Genesis. Cain is condemned to perpetual wandering for murdering Abel (Gen. 4:10–14). In the biblical narrative humanity is scattered at Babel, and this dispersal yields the multiplication of nations (Gen. 10–11). Nations have geographical boundaries (Gen. 10:5, 20, 30–31; cf. Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26), but peoples have migrated across these for millennia. The story of the chosen people begins with Terah's move from Ur to Haran and Abram's subsequent pilgrimage from there to Canaan (Gen. 11:31–12:5). In other words, the history of the patriarch and his descendants is one born of migration (Gen. 23:4; cf. Deut. 26:5).

Many move to survive. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (and his sons and their families) sojourn temporarily in different places in their search for food (Egypt [Gen. 12; 42–46]; the Negev [Gen. 20]; Philistia [Gen. 26]). Jacob goes north to Aram to flee the wrath of his brother Esau and lives for a time with Laban and his family (Gen. 27–31). Moses leaves Egypt for many years to avoid trouble for killing someone; he marries a Midianite and names their son "Gershom," a word play on the term *gēr* (Exod. 2). Naomi and her family leave Bethlehem in a time of famine and cross the Jordan

into Moab. Ten years later, now a widow and with both her sons dead, she moves back with Ruth, her daughter-in-law. Naomi the immigrant has returned home, and now Ruth is the immigrant. Survival is still the issue, however, and Ruth goes to the fields to glean alongside the harvesters of Boaz. Others are removed forcibly from their homes. Joseph is betrayed and sold into slavery. He overcomes difficult circumstances in Egypt, rises to become second to Pharaoh, and helps save that land from starvation (Gen. 37; 39–41). He prepares the way for his father and the rest of his clan to migrate to the Nile Delta and settle in Goshen (Gen. 47:1–12). Centuries later, thousands are taken into exile into several regions of Mesopotamia when Israel falls to Assyria in the eighth century BCE (2 Kgs. 17), and Judah to Babylon in the sixth century BCE (2 Kgs. 24–25).

Life in other lands could be harsh. After a time, the ruler of Egypt forgot Joseph's contributions and exploited the Israelites as slave labor for building projects (Exod. 1; 5). Egyptian sources describe measures (e.g., building a line of forts along the eastern frontier) to keep out certain groups seeking pasture and employment in the fertile regions of the Nile River. Inscriptional evidence indicates that some in Assyrian exile became domestic servants; others were assigned to work on farms or in construction. Psalm 137 voices the anger, shame, and homesickness of those forcibly removed from Judah by Babylon. Not everyone, though, endured such harsh fates. In Egypt some foreigners rose to prominence (Joseph [Gen. 41]; Moses [Exod. 1–2]). Daniel lived in the royal precincts, where he served several kings with distinction. Esther's uncle Mordecai seems to have been a man of some means, and this young woman became queen of the Persian Empire. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, a post that required absolute loyalty. Ezra and Ezekiel apparently ministered freely among their people in exile.

Another key issue, pertinent to both the host culture and migrant populations, is the accommodation of newcomers to their new situations. The OT narratives reflect a spectrum of assimilation processes and their effects. Some desire little acculturation. Ezra, for example, as a priest deeply committed to the law, seems to have assimilated little. He desires instead to return to his homeland and to reestablish life there according to the demands of the Mosaic covenant.

Others assimilate to a significant degree but do not totally forget their roots. Naomi goes back to seek the support of friends and kin in Bethlehem after the death of her husband and sons. Jeremiah

instructs those in exile to plan for a long stay and to invest their lives in the place where they find themselves. This advice is accompanied by an exhortation to continue to trust in the God of Israel in light of a possible future return (Jer. 29:1–14). Daniel and his friends receive Babylonian names and are trained for service to the empire. Yet, even as they fulfill their duties, they maintain the dietary laws and openly testify to their faith, even at great personal cost (Dan. 1–6). Nehemiah is cupbearer to the king but still is attentive to news from his ancestral land. He leaves with the king's permission and support to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He revitalizes Jewish society as governor but after a time returns to his post in the Persian court.

Still others evidently experience almost total assimilation. Joseph is given an Egyptian name, marries an Egyptian, and has two sons by her (Gen. 41:45, 50–52). He is so acculturated that his brothers do not recognize him. Interestingly, Joseph had not forgotten his mother tongue and understands their conversation (Gen. 42–45). Following Egyptian custom, he embalms Jacob after his death, and the same is done to him (Gen. 50:2, 26). Moses is thought to be an Egyptian by the women at the well (Exod. 2:19). Ruth leaves her homeland and declares her intention to take on the identity of her mother-in-law's people (Ruth 1:16–17). Yet, as one who has recently arrived, Ruth must be coached by Naomi on how to navigate the different cultural mores and institutions (Ruth 2–3). Ruth marries Boaz and is fully accepted into the Israelite community. The closing lines of the narrative reveal that this immigrant woman is a key piece in the genealogy of David (Ruth 4:13–22). Esther is generations removed from the fall of Judah. Like many exiles, she had both a Jewish and a Persian name (Esth. 2:7). Mordecai, her relative, must have done well for himself financially and socially in order to have the right to sit at the city gate (e.g., Esth. 3:2; 5:9). That this prosperous foreigner did not do him homage infuriated Haman and motivated him to seek the destruction of all the Jews. Mordecai demonstrates loyalty to the king by uncovering an assassination plot (Esth. 2:21–23), even as he works through Esther to save their people (Esth. 4; 8–10). There is no indication that either contemplated returning to the land.

From these same narratives it is possible to reconstruct a continuum of responses of the host peoples: from Egyptian anxiety of being overrun by large numbers of foreign workers (and their violent effort to halt the growth of that population) and Haman's hatred of the Jews, to the ambivalent

reception of Abraham (Gen. 12:10–20; 26:6–11), to the inclusion of Ruth by the Bethlehemites and the deep trust that Artaxerxes has in Nehemiah, and Nebuchadnezzar and Darius in Daniel. These diverse emotional reactions are accompanied by diverse political decisions and social arrangements. The treatment of immigrants, however they arrived, was an issue in the ancient world.

Finally, mention should be made of the ancient practice of hospitality toward strangers. The people of God practiced this openness toward others (e.g., Abraham [Gen. 18:1–8]) and also were beneficiaries of gracious treatment when they traveled elsewhere (e.g., Moses [Exod. 2:15–20]). Kindness toward the outsider reflected righteousness before God (Job 31:32).

The OT narratives can orient discussion about immigration and refugees in several ways. For example, they demonstrate that migration was a fundamental reality for many peoples of the Bible, even as it is today. It is not a recent or isolated phenomenon. Moreover, the kinds of forces that drive contemporary migration, such as basic human needs and military conflict, and the mistreatment that strangers sometimes endure are present in the biblical accounts. The different assimilation experiences in these accounts also mirror modern variations. An appreciation of the Scriptures as in large measure a collection of the stories of migrant and displaced peoples can sensitize today's receiving communities to the presence and plight of these persons in their midst. That the Bible contains migration accounts is helpful too for those who have migrated. In its pages the displaced discover individuals and circumstances with which they can identify. They are exposed to examples of how to live faithfully in potentially adverse situations (e.g., Joseph, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel) in full confidence that God is with them no matter where they are on the assimilation spectrum and irrespective of the kind of welcome they experience in their new land.

*Old Testament law.* Sojourners (the term *gēr*), whether from another country or internally displaced, were especially vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life. This is evident in that they are classified with widows, orphans, and the poor as being most at risk. There were no governmental assistance programs such as we have today. The extended family was to provide a safety net in times of need. The difficulty for these outsiders was that they were separated from those kinship networks. Moreover, they were outside the local land tenure system, where property was passed on within the family through male heirs. In an agrarian peasant

society such as Israel, these outsiders, without family and land, were at the mercy of the Israelites for sustenance, work, and protection.

The provision of food was a constant concern because sojourners depended on others for day-to-day living. They were at risk of being overworked and underpaid (or not paid at all). As outsiders, they might find themselves at a disadvantage in legal matters. Legislation in the OT responds to these challenges. Sojourners qualified, along with those other needy groups, for the gleaning laws at harvest time (Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 24:19–22) and the triennial tithe (Deut. 14:28–29). They were to be given rest on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14) and be paid a fair wage on time (Deut. 24:14–15). No one was to take advantage of them in the courts (Deut. 1:16–17; 27:19). The prophets denounced those who oppressed the sojourner (Jer. 7:5–7; 22:2–5; Mal. 3:5).

The law does not stipulate specific penalties for not showing compassion toward the sojourner. Instead, it makes a moral appeal rooted in two primary motivations. First, the Israelites must never forget that they had been despised foreigners in another land. At one time, they had been workers in Egypt's oppressive system, but they had been redeemed by God's gracious, powerful hand. That is, as descendants of immigrants, they should be generous to the sojourners among them. That saga of migration was to define them, and the treatment of the outsider served as a measure of their faith in God (Lev. 19:34; Exod. 23:9). From the very outset of their escape from Egypt, outsiders had lived among them (Exod. 12:38). The Israelites themselves were sojourners still in that land of which God was the owner (Lev. 25:23). The second and more important reason to love the sojourner is that God does. God demands charity toward the weak, including the outsider (Deut. 10:14–19; cf. Ps. 146:6–9; Jer. 7:4–7; Zech. 7:8–10).

The legislation related to sojourners was generous, but mutuality was assumed as well. With these benefits came the expectation of accommodation by the outsider. The sojourner was expected to learn the laws of the land (Deut. 31:10–13; cf. Josh. 8:34–35). Penalties for violations were to be the same for native and outsider alike (Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:29). Participation in religious feasts (e.g., Exod. 12:48–49; 20:8–11; Lev. 16:29–30; Deut. 16:11, 14) required conversion, an awareness of procedures, and the ability to speak Hebrew. These laws point to a degree of assimilation into the local community. The prophets spoke of a future day when there would be a shared life with outsiders (Isa. 56:1–8; Ezek. 47:21–23).

This legal material remains relevant for the contemporary situation. As Scripture, the law is part of the divine revelation to the church, which must discern guidance from its demands. Even though these laws indeed were designed for Israel—its time, place, and culture—their significance reaches beyond that ancient people of God. Deuteronomy 4:5–8 states that Israel's legislation (and thus their laws regarding the sojourner) was a witness to the other nations of the character of God and the fundamental values that can make for a healthy society. Then and now, other nations will have their own particular legislation and socioeconomic configurations for outsiders, but the divine insistence on their care remains.

*The New Testament.* An examination of relevant material in the NT starts with Jesus himself. When he was a small child, Jesus and his family fled to Egypt to avoid Herod's rampage (Matt. 2:13–15). No information about the length of their sojourn in Egypt is provided, but at that time there was a large, long-standing Jewish community there. Jesus lived as a refugee in a foreign land, and so life in another place as a displaced person was part of his personal experience.

In his teaching Jesus never deals directly with the topic of migration. Nevertheless, at least two items are relevant. First, Jesus involved himself with those who were different and despised by the broader community. On several occasions he engaged the Samaritans, a people loathsome to many Jews. Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman (John 4:7–26), and he uses a Samaritan as a paragon of righteousness in his response to the question "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29–37). This teaching is consistent with his call to reach out to the marginalized—gentiles, women, the poor, the sick, and those classified as sinners by the religious authorities.

The second point concerns Jesus' pronouncement in Matt. 25:31–46 about caring for the stranger (vv. 35, 38, 43–44). Advocates for refugees and immigrants often appeal to this passage to defend the rights of outsiders. This interpretation is possible but faces the problem that the referent is disputed. The occurrences of the qualification "the least of these" and "brothers" (Matt. 25:40, 45) may restrict these individuals to Jesus' disciples (cf. Matt. 10:42; 12:48–50; 18:6, 10, 14; 28:10). If this latter interpretation is the better one, then the "strangers" are followers who suffer for Jesus' sake at the hands of others.

The forced displacement of believers due to persecution is recorded in Acts. Many are scattered by the persecution headed by Saul (later called

“Paul”), himself a Diaspora Jew (Acts 8:1–5; cf. Rev. 1:9), and itinerant preachers apparently were a common phenomenon in the early church (cf. the missionary journeys of Paul; 1 Cor. 16:5–18; Gal. 4:13–14; Phil. 2:19–30; 3 John 5–10). There also are multiethnic churches with believers from various backgrounds and places of origin (e.g., Acts 13:1), a mix that produced tensions (Acts 15; Gal. 2; Eph. 2).

The NT Epistles reveal that all Christians are sojourners in a spiritual sense; their citizenship ultimately lies elsewhere (Phil. 3:20; Heb. 13:14). In 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11 the author speaks of believers as “aliens” and “strangers.” The addressees of this letter may have been literal exiles who had been moved by the empire. If so, that legal standing reflected in unique ways their spiritual status as Christians. In addition, hospitality toward others, whether fellow believers or unfamiliar persons, is a Christian virtue. All Christians are to be gracious to others (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; cf. Luke 14:12–14), and this quality should distinguish the leadership of the church (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

### *Migration, Theology, and Mission*

Both the OT and the NT have much to teach concerning the migration of people. This survey has pointed out that refugees and immigrants are made in the image of God, that migration is part of human experience, that many biblical “heroes” were displaced persons, and that OT legislation was benevolent to the vulnerable in many concrete ways. The life and teachings of Jesus demonstrate the need for believers to consider the possibility that those who are different may be the very ones who can lead them to a deeper faith, while the NT Epistles call the church to care for the outsider. After all, every Christian is an outsider—a stranger—in the world. This extensive scriptural material should shape attitudes and actions toward outsiders. Today, many believers need to be reminded that they are descendants of immigrants and displaced people, and that to follow the God of the Bible means being gracious toward those whom he loves. How these biblical perspectives and moral demands take shape in personal behavior, church initiatives, and civil legislation that can promote human flourishing and the common good depends on the impact of the Christian ethical voice and involvement.

These multiple challenges for migrant populations, which contain many Christians, have spawned creative theological reflection. As in the days of the Jewish exile and during the early years of the church, displaced believers are wrestling in fresh ways with the person of God and the nature

of faith. New ways of thinking are attempting to move beyond traditional theological categories and limited interpretations of the Bible that have not given enough attention to the views and experiences of marginalized peoples. Theologians and pastoral workers are turning to postcolonial studies, international law, the histories of migration, and sociological and anthropological work on ethnicity, hybridity, and transnationalism to better comprehend the situation of immigrants and refugees—that is, the modern-day human diaspora in an era of globalization. This diaspora theology seeks to speak from and for these people, whether to encourage those who suffer as victims of their circumstances or to orient those who see their displacement as an important moment in the worldwide work of the sovereign God. Inevitably, these efforts are leading to new appreciations and understandings of the character and mission of the church that will enrich theology and Christian practice.

*See also* Exile; Globalization; Hospitality; Image of God; Nationalism; Population Policy and Control

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M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas)

## **Almsgiving**

Almsgiving in the NT refers to benevolent activity on behalf of the needy as an expression of genuine

social solidarity—that is, of caring for and embracing those in need as if they were members of one’s own kin group. Although the terminology of “almsgiving” is absent from the OT, Israel’s Scriptures both call for the care of the needy (conventionalized in references to “the alien, the orphan, and the widow”) and provide the theological footing of the practice in the Gospels and Acts. By way of more specific background, we can point to legislation concerning “gleaning rights” (Deut. 24:19–22), loans to the poor (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35–37), and the tithe for the needy (Deut. 14:27–29).

Almsgiving is one of several responses among the Jews to the burdensome economic situation under Roman occupation (compare, e.g., the “community of goods” among the Essenes and in the Jerusalem church, banditry, and revolutionary activity against Rome). In addition to day-to-day economic struggles in an agrarian-based economy, war, failed crops, natural disasters, and taxes set the stage for the downward mobility of persons below the level of subsistence. However, neither Rome nor the regional governments supported by Rome made allowances for assistance in times of distress. The urban elite might provide benefaction in isolated instances, but the situation at the time of Jesus was characterized by the near absence of charitable practices in the Roman world. Jesus’ commentary on the situation of the prodigal son living in need is thus a faithful barometer of socioeconomic realities: “no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16).

Recognizing that economic sharing is embedded in social relations, we can see immediately the problem of “giving to the poor” in Roman antiquity. Often, giving to the needy was rank-specific, so as to allow those who had temporarily fallen on hard times to maintain their accustomed status. Otherwise, the practice of giving to the needy would exist outside of normal structures of reciprocity; that is, givers had nothing to gain from the gift because they could never be repaid and because giving to the destitute did not enhance one’s social stature in public life. This is exactly the point of almsgiving, however. Thus, according to the Gospels, Jesus castigates the Pharisees and scribes because they shared none of their resources with the needy and engaged in acts of greed; in other words, their practices distanced them from the needy (Luke 11:39–41; 20:47). Similarly, in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus directs a rich man to sell what he has and give to the poor (Matt. 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). He does not ask this rich man to embrace poverty per se, otherwise he could

have counseled disinvestment without redistribution. Rather, in this scenario, to preserve one’s wealth was to preserve one’s social distance from the marginal. In another example, in Luke 19:1–10, a rich man, Zacchaeus, demonstrates his identity with the poor through almsgiving. Almsgiving, then, takes place apart from the normal structures of socioeconomic reciprocity and is not a measure of honor and status, except before God, who sees and rewards such practices (Matt. 6:1–18; Luke 6:27–36; 14:12–14; Acts 10:1–4).

In the early church, Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE) is known for his unrelenting emphasis on almsgiving. Perhaps without engaging in sufficient critical reflection on how wealth is produced, Clement encouraged Christian participation in business affairs and entrepreneurial activity in the commercially oriented Alexandria so that Christians might be in a better position to assist the poor. For him, the solution to the problem of scarcity was, first, a renegotiation of consumption—“The best wealth is to have few desires” (*Paed.* 2.3)—and, second, for the wealthy to come to the aid of the needy.

Clearly, almsgiving should not be confused with such contemporary “acts of charity” as giving a small monetary gift to the homeless person one passes each day. In light of the social nature of economic sharing, giving small amounts to the needy and giving to those with whom one has no expectation of genuine relationship do not qualify as illustrations of almsgiving.

*See also* Charity, Works of; Economic Ethics; Koinonia; Tithe, Tithing

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Joel B. Green

## Altruism

Altruism is a broad sociological classification for other-regarding actions that emerged in the nineteenth century as a secular alternative to the language of charity, benevolence, and Christian love. Although it captures the other-regarding essence of generous behaviors, it is now so deeply identified with self-sacrifice that it hardly captures the ways in which a generous life contributes to the happiness and flourishing of altruists (e.g., as exemplified in 2 Cor. 9:7, “God loves a cheerful giver”). Moreover, it does not distinguish between

the various forms of altruism. Altruism can be based on reason alone, on instinct, and on position or role expectation (e.g., a firefighter). Hence the Pauline words, “If I give everything I have to feed the poor . . . but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2–3). In other words, we can sacrifice ourselves for others, but in the absence of love, we have achieved little.

From the Christian perspective, the highest human expression of altruism is altruistic love, or agape. Love includes an emotional center that affirms others in a tenderness and concern, and that is palpable in things such as facial expression and tone of voice. Altruistic love is an intentional affirmation of the other, combining emotion and reason with action. Its agapic enhancement involves elevation by worldview (including biblical teachings) and the experience of divine love.

In the Christian tradition, forms of altruism that are widely extensive beyond kin, that are enduring over time, and that are purely motivated have some grounding in the work of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). Or as Jas. 1:17 reads, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” And perhaps most centrally, in 1 John 4:19, “We love because [God] first loved us.”

The Christian theological tradition has not embraced the language of altruism, which originated in a positivistic effort to displace the particularity of agape love. The historical tension between Christianity and secular altruistic science has severely limited the potential for dialogue between theology and science around agape love.

Altruism, even without the emotionally intense features that are associated with love, concerns the role of the other in moral experience. By the strictest definition, the altruist is someone who does something for the other and for the other’s sake rather than as a means to self-promotion or internal well-being—for example, even the feeling of inner satisfaction. A more balanced definition would indicate that a sense of internal well-being as an indirect side effect of altruistic behavior does not imply that the agent’s psychological motive is somehow impure and egoistic. Many philosophers have argued for the motivational reality of altruism, even if mixed with some subordinated egoistic desires to get what the self wants or needs, so long as the controlling aim is to give to the other what he or she may want or need. Psychological

altruism exists when the agent seeks to promote the well-being of the other “at least primarily for the other person’s sake” (Hazo 18). However, if altruistic acts are purely tactical, then there is no genuine psychological altruism present, and the action is primarily egoistic. In the broadest terms, the altruist no longer sees self as the only center of value, but discovers the other as other (Levinas; Wyschogrod) rather than as an entity in orbit around the self in its egoism. Claims of the self to ontological centrality are set aside.

Altruism is other-regarding, either with regard to actions or motivations; altruistic love adds the feature of deep affirmative affect to altruism; agape is altruistic love universalized to all humanity as informed by theistic commitments and the experience of the Holy Spirit. Pitirim Sorokin noted that the great sages of altruistic love seem to embody an attractive force of love that they have discovered as objectively existing in the universe, and that is associated with a Supreme Being or “Supraconsciousness.” Something is at work in love for all humanity that has connections with spirituality.

*See also* Affections; Agape; Benevolence; Care, Caring; Charity, Works of; Fruit of the Spirit; Selfishness; Self-Love

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Stephen Post

## Amos

The book of Amos perennially has generated interest because of its strong ethical message. Its strident condemnation of oppression and of religious ritual has resonated in diverse contexts over time. Many consider Amos and other prophets of that era—Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea—as the zenith of what has been called “ethical monotheism”: they are champions of God’s universal demand for justice. Recently, liberation theologies have found a valuable resource in Amos.

The book’s heading (1:1) locates the prophet in the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel in the mid-eighth century BCE. This was a time of economic exploitation facilitated by the internal policies of the monarchy and international political and

economic realities. The text is less interested in analyzing these underlying realities than in appealing to moral sensibilities concerning the plight of the needy, the arrogance of nationalism, and the nature of acceptable worship.

The book of Amos draws on various strands of theological traditions in ancient Israel. Its vocabulary and themes find echoes in the wisdom literature and the covenant demands of the law, while the concern for the sanctuaries and rituals suggests that the prophet was well acquainted with the religious world of that time. The moral voice of Amos is full of indignation and sarcasm, and the ethical realities presented in the book are complex and include every sphere of social life.

The exploitation of the poor is a key theme. They are sold into slavery because of debts and suffer undue taxation and unfair treatment in legal proceedings (2:6; 5:10–15; 8:4–6). In the midst of this injustice the comfortable enjoy abundance (3:15–4:3; 6:4–6; cf. Isa. 3:16–4:1; 5:8–25; Jer. 22:1–16). The well-to-do acquire their goods and status with violence toward the vulnerable (3:9–10; cf. Mic. 2:1–5; 3:1–4). The cruelty of the nations in warfare that is condemned in the opening chapter is evident within the borders of the people of God in the abuse of the unfortunate.

Although this socioeconomic criticism is aimed at those who take advantage of the weak, the prophet also turns his withering gaze against the nation as a whole. He mocks its military pretense. The litany of conflicts in chap. 1, the mockery of insignificant victories (6:13), and the announcement of comprehensive defeat in the near future (2:14–16; 3:11–12; 5:1–3, 16–17, 27; 6:8–14; 7:9, 17; 8:1–3, 9–10; 9:9–10) undermine Israel's confident posturing. Apparently, this pride in military power was shared by the entire populace. All crowded the sanctuaries to celebrate the national deity, whom they felt would ensure their safety. But the Lord God of hosts will have none of this worship that ignores oppression and takes his endorsement for granted (3:14; 4:4–6; 5:4–6, 18–27; 7:9; 9:1; cf. Isa. 1:10–20; 58; Jer. 7:1–11; Mic. 6:6–8; Mal. 3:2–5). The visions reveal that Israel is “so small” (7:1–6) and that its mighty fortresses actually have walls like “tin” (7:7–8 NET [not “plumb line,” as in many translations]). The religious ideology that Amos so fiercely derides is defended by the high priest Amaziah (7:10–13). What made this uncritical and self-deceiving wedding of patriotism and religion even more insidious is that those who are the victims of the injustices of the nation cheer this perversion of the divine will along with the rest.

They stubbornly accept that system and champion king and country (4:4–12).

The Lord desires that Israel seek and love the good and hate evil. This “good” is to be manifested concretely in the socioeconomic relationships of the community (5:10–15). It is to be the public display of righteousness and charity, which they have distorted and undermined (5:7; 6:12). God desires both just structures and a people of virtue. Ideally, they would have been nurtured in those ideals in their worship gatherings and would have had exemplars worth imitating in their leaders, but this is clearly not the case (4:1; 6:1; 7:9–10, 16–17; cf. Isa. 1:23; Ezek. 34).

The coming judgment is comprehensive. Some readers are troubled that all suffer the divine punishment. The text teaches, however, that sin and its recompense are not only individual or perfectly symmetrical. Judgments in history are not tidy. The personal and the social are interwoven, and the web of community ties complicates the nature of sin and chastisement. Transgression is systemic; it is embedded in social relationships in every sphere, and all are complicit at some level. The ideological distortions of faith also know no class, racial, or gender boundaries. Nations violate the norms of God on the international stage as well, as they go to war to acquire power, labor, and land (1:3–2:3; cf. Isa. 13–23; Jer. 46–51).

Amos teaches that everyone is guilty, especially the people of God whose knowledge and experience place them beyond excuse (2:11–12; 3:1–2; 9:7). At times, those who are innocent of some of these transgressions endure undeserved hardship. That is why the leaders are held most responsible for the plight and fate of their people. They make the domestic and foreign policies that affect everyone else and set a moral tone for society.

The broad, realistic ethical vision of Amos incorporates economics, politics, and religion. It involves individuals, social groups, and the entire nation in its censure. Yet this book also proclaims a future of peace, plenty, and a restored relationship with God and creation beyond the present injustice and the imminent wrath (9:11–15). Judgment is not God's final word. That future is an ethical hope that helps readers bear the contradictions of today and should motivate them to work to approximate that coming reality in the contemporary world.

*See also* Economic Ethics; Exploitation; Idolatry; Justice; Liberationist Ethics; Old Testament Ethics; Poverty and Poor; Wealth

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M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas)

## Anabaptist Ethics

Christian discipleship, peacemaking, community, integrity, and fidelity to Scripture have been at the core of Anabaptist ethics for the past five centuries.

Anabaptists emerged in the volatile context of early sixteenth-century Europe, becoming part of the Radical Reformation (the "left wing" of the Protestant Reformation). Of central importance to many early Anabaptist leaders were the autonomy of the church from the state in matters of worship and religious practice; the necessity for baptism into the church to be voluntary, based on an adult commitment to follow in the way of Christ; the separation of Christians from the "worldly" realm of politics; and, for most surviving groups of Anabaptists, rejection of "the sword."

Anabaptists' direct spiritual descendants—today's Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites, who number about 1.2 million around the world, with 60 percent of those in the southern hemisphere—are still shaped by their forebears' seminal sixteenth-century convictions, though they embody these sometimes-contested Anabaptist ethical principles in different ways in their contemporary contexts.

### *The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Discipleship*

Because of their profound concern for ethics, Anabaptists did not fully embrace Reformer Martin Luther's call to salvation *sola fidei* ("by faith alone"), believing that such a view could degenerate into inattention to Christian living. Instead, they pointed toward a synergistic, salvific blending of divine action and human cooperation, perhaps more akin to a late-medieval Catholic view of God-infused transformation and active faith. True faith is lived out in life, they asserted, and all followers are called to follow Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. Early Dutch Anabaptist leader Menno Simons began all his treatises with an epigram from 1 Cor. 3:11: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ."

Such faithful following was possible, early Anabaptists believed, because of the transformative grace of God and a slightly more optimistic view of human nature than was true for some of their Protestant counterparts. Menno Simons, after whom Mennonites were named, argued for what might be called "complex innocence" in childhood, a recognition of the absence of both faithfulness and sinfulness in children, but an "innocence," as he describes it, tempered with the acknowledgment of an inherited Adamic nature predisposed toward sinning.

Training children toward making commitments of faith and being faithful disciples was the ever-present goal of childhood nurture. Such a life of discipleship was impossible without experiencing a new birth, being converted and changed, and parents needed to guide their children toward such conversions and lifelong commitments. Voluntary baptism or *ana*-baptism (*re*-baptism, for those who had been baptized as infants in state churches) was construed as the beginning of the Christian life, not the end.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptists were known to live moral, upright lives, and they developed a reputation for being people of integrity and clean living. Often, early Anabaptist sermons included stories about the results of being good, with preachers telling virtuous-person narratives to inspire others also to be like Jesus. Such preaching was effective in the sixteenth-century context, where a large middle ground of people, whose intellectual leader was the Catholic humanist Erasmus, were attracted to this sort of moral preaching. Although Anabaptists were not self-consciously followers of Erasmus, many Anabaptist ideas and foundational scriptural texts can be found in his writings.

Although they did not formally recognize a "canon within the canon," early Anabaptists clearly gave priority to the NT over the OT and saw Jesus as absolutely central to understanding the biblical text, the key through which believers could interpret both Testaments. Most formative for Anabaptist ethics were the Synoptic Gospels, which most closely narrated the life and teachings of Jesus. Within those three Gospel accounts, Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) and its Lukan counterpart (Luke 6) were most instructive, including Jesus' words about loving enemies, turning the other cheek, and sacrificial service to others. The Matthean Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12) are repeatedly cited in Anabaptist sources, often in relation to suffering and persecution.

Because a small number of sixteenth-century Anabaptists were violent, and because the pacifist

Anabaptists refused to obey civil authorities on matters such as infant baptism, they were perceived as a threat to social order. Within months after their beginnings in 1525, their first martyrs were killed, initially at the hands of Catholic authorities and later by Protestants. Over the course of the next century, thousands of Anabaptists were killed, and those in the movement fled to other lands and rural areas safe from the avenging arm of religious and civil authorities.

Hundreds of these martyr stories are told in a collection titled *Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, a huge volume in continuous publication since 1660 and still a staple in many Anabaptist homes. The text begins with the deaths of Jesus and Stephen and then traces a continuous history of faithful martyrs through the Waldenses, Albigenes, and the stories of hundreds of the Anabaptist martyrs.

The most influential story from *Martyrs Mirror* is of Anabaptist Dirk Willems, who in 1569 had been imprisoned for allowing people to be rebaptized in his home. After escaping from prison, he made it across an icy pond to safety, but an Anabaptist catcher in hot pursuit broke through the ice to his almost certain death. Instead of running ahead to safety, Willems returned to the precarious ice and saved the life of his persecutor, who then promptly arrested him. Soon afterward, Willems was burned at the stake. For generations of Anabaptists, the story seared its way into their sense of faith and faithfulness: believers are called to service to others, even if that means risking their own lives.

Another key section of the Sermon on the Mount that infuses early Anabaptist thought is the reference to truth-telling, integrity, and “the oath” (Matt. 5:33–37). The Anabaptist position on truth-telling has been rather absolutist throughout most of the tradition’s history. In the 1527 Schleithem Confession, the earliest Anabaptist confession of faith, one of the questions that early Anabaptists dealt with was swearing the oath. Although there were other problematic dimensions to swearing an oath (including swearing allegiance to a particular government), one of the problems with oath-swearing was that it suggested that the swearer was not being truthful all the time.

The Schleithem Confession says, “Christ taught us similarly when He says: Your speech shall be yea, yea; and nay, nay; for what is more than that comes of evil.” The implication was that Christian believers are always to tell the truth, not just when under an oath. For some contemporary Anabaptists, this is still an issue when they

testify in court: if they are asked to swear, instead they simply “affirm” that they will tell the truth now—as always.

Early Anabaptists and their descendants also have drawn extensively on the Sermon on the Mount’s call for nonresistance and loving one’s enemies (see below). Often Anabaptists read such Christian teachings in a fairly straightforward, more or less literal manner, believing that such instructions should be embodied in their own lives. They understood the text simply to mean what it said, and they shaped their lives more around direct biblical teachings than complex theological expositions.

### *On Vocation*

Pluralistic in both their sixteenth-century and twenty-first-century forms, early Anabaptists and their descendants have wrestled at length with the meaning of discipleship, the Christian obligation to engage or disengage “the world,” the commitment to practice nonviolence, and the Christian’s calling.

In the Christian church’s first several centuries, those who committed themselves to the Jesus movement recognized the import of that decision of faith and calling—the way in which being a disciple of a crucified Christ could shape the entirety of their lives. As small, often marginalized, and intermittently persecuted communities of believers, being committed to Christ and the church often meant opening themselves to transformation and service as well as making sacrifices, taking risks, and closing occupational or vocational doors.

The meaning of Christian discipleship and the stratification of ordinary Christians and church leaders both underwent profound transformation in the years after the emperor Constantine came into power in 311/312 and new converts flooded into the now favored Christian church. Leaders, monks, and nuns became “the religious,” those who had a sacred calling or vocation. Christian calling became truncated, referring largely to those who entered the priesthood or religious orders but generally devaluing the work of others outside those confines.

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther rejected what he saw as a vocational double standard as well as his monastic vows, believing that true faith needed to be worked out in the complex and often difficult realities of life beyond monastery walls. He maintained that all stations in life in which it is possible to live honestly are divine vocations.

Although early Anabaptists generally appreciated Luther’s honoring of more than monastic and priestly callings, they were suspicious that

the content of a Christian's activity in a particular "station" or "office" seemed to come more from the "orders of creation" than from faith in Jesus. Tensions with civil authorities emerged over a range of issues, but particularly over the role of the Christian in governance.

Most Anabaptists were particularly critical of occupational roles that involved coercive force or violence, including any sort of political office; some were deeply suspicious of any work having to do with trade or commerce; others were worried even about the traditional assignment of special vocational status to "religious" occupations. The Anabaptists did not expect their convictions to be adopted by the whole society, but in the turmoil of the sixteenth century these radical practices and public pronouncements represented a threat to the stability of society.

### *Perspectives on the State*

Building on the writings of Augustine as well as their contemporaries, most early Anabaptists agreed with Luther that the state was ordained to preserve order in a fallen world, adopting some version of a dualistic, two-kingdom understanding of the world. However, the surviving strains of Anabaptism parted ways with Luther on the issue of the Christian's role in the two kingdoms. For Luther, Christians stood squarely in the midst of both kingdoms: in their private, personal lives, they were in the kingdom of God, and in their public lives they were in the earthly kingdom. People were essentially split down the middle in their loyalties: Christian love called them to act in both kingdoms, abiding by the ethic of each when working in that realm and not expecting to effect much change in the earthly kingdom.

For most of the Anabaptists, it was the world, not individuals, that was split: faithful Christians lived in the kingdom of God and abided only by its ethics, and others were in the earthly kingdom. The Anabaptists acknowledged that God had instituted civil government, and therefore it should be obeyed, but only up to the point where the state's demands clearly contradicted God's authority. The foundational framework for Christians' relation to government was Acts 5:29 (obedience to God rather than human authorities) rather than the more socially conservative perspective of Rom. 13, which became the foundational passage for some other Protestant traditions.

Because of their understandings of the commandments of Christ, however, Anabaptists believed Christians could not kill, even when the state had legitimated killing in the cases of war and capital punishment. Therefore, although they

believed that the state was divinely instituted, most Anabaptists said the true Christian could not participate in the government's work, because the civil realm required the use of violence for maintaining order and was therefore "outside the perfection of Christ," as the Schleithem Confession says. Even Anabaptist leader Pilgram Marpeck, who served as a civil engineer, said, in effect, that one can be a Christian magistrate, but not for long; soon, one has to give up either the "Christian" or "magistrate" identity marker.

### *Commitments to Peace*

Traditionally, the Anabaptists' peace position has been rooted in the biblical portrayal of Jesus' way of love and his willingness to suffer on the cross. Anabaptists generally have believed that Jesus' demonstration of love in all relationships should be normative for his followers. Often in Anabaptist history the faithful response to violence has been characterized as "nonresistance," a term derived from the Sermon on the Mount injunction to "resist not evil" (Matt. 5:39) but to turn the other cheek. For Mennonites, Hutterites, and Amish, nonresistance has been a way of being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, not a strategy for achieving peace.

Such a posture, espoused most articulately by Guy F. Hershberger in his mid-twentieth-century book *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, was broader than simple conscientious objection or refusal to participate in warfare; nonresistance had implications for all dimensions of Christian life. Although many Anabaptists still use the language of "nonresistance," in the past sixty years, influenced in part by the successful activist movements of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Mennonites and other Anabaptist descendants have debated the appropriateness of nonviolent resistance, sociopolitical activism, justice making, and "responsibility" in the political arena.

Influenced in part by Mennonite theologian John H. Yoder and other Anabaptist leaders, many twentieth-century Mennonites began to question the traditional church/world dualism of their faith heritage. Beginning in the 1960s, the language of the "lordship of Christ" over all the world (not just the church) began to be used in Mennonite circles. In Yoder's view, that theological shift justified and perhaps mandated a Mennonite "witness" to the state, asking the state to embody more fully the norms that Christ revealed, norms relevant for both individuals and institutions, including nations.

Others, such as Gordon Kaufman and J. Lawrence Burkholder, argued further for an Anabaptist

embrace of “responsibility” as part of Christian discipleship, an ethic that could serve as a corrective to more naive forms of simply following Jesus in what is actually a complex, ethically ambiguous world. They and other Anabaptist thinkers in the last third of the twentieth century helped bring to the foreground Anabaptists’ obligation to seek justice as well as practice love. Anabaptist thinkers and practitioners since their time have been attentive to justice concerns, particularly in the area of restorative (rather than retributive) justice, with some additional addressing of distributive justice.

In Yoder’s classic *Politics of Jesus*, he argues that Jesus’ ethic is a relevant social strategy for contemporary Christians: believers should create distinct communities through which the gospel works to change other sociopolitical structures. Yoder argues that “the ministry and the claims of Jesus are best understood as presenting to hearers and readers not the avoidance of political options, but one particular social-political-ethical option” that “is of direct significance for social ethics” (Yoder 11). In that Yoderian model, which has been picked up by Methodist ethicist Stanley Hauerwas and “baptist” James William McClendon, the church is called first “to be the church, not to change the world.” The belief is that by focusing on forming faithful communities of believers, Christians will be able to live authentically and thereby also have a secondary, collective influence on reforming society.

In this more engaged spirit, recent Anabaptists also have not been content only to maintain a negative attitude toward war. Especially in North America, many have felt a need to do some corresponding positive act through which they could assist their countries and the world. Mennonite historian James C. Juhnke has contended that in the United States, the Mennonite tragedy was not that they became Americans so slowly, but that “they so desperately wanted to be good American citizens and could not fulfill the requirements without violating their consciences or abandoning the tradition of their forebears” (Juhnke 156). Juhnke attributes to this tension “whatever was creative in the Mennonite experience”—relief programs, development of positive alternatives to military service, and scattered criticism of American nationalism from a pacifist perspective.

In the contemporary context, Anabaptist concerns about warfare and violence have stimulated extensive development of peace studies and conflict-transformation programs in Anabaptist-related colleges and universities and have birthed

creative peacemaking efforts in Mennonite denominational and interdenominational agencies, such as the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). An active peacemaking group, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) emerged in the 1980s with the support of the three historic peace churches. In hot spots such as Haiti, Hebron, Afghanistan, and Iraq, CPT sends small teams of workers to stand between hostile groups, document and report atrocities and violations of human rights, and actively intervene in violent situations.

How these various efforts at active peacemaking and social and political engagement will reshape contemporary Anabaptist ethics remains to be seen. Some notion of church/world separation likely will be maintained as Anabaptists sort through a number of possible models for embodying the faithful, peaceful way of Christ in the twenty-first century. It is quite possible that as Anabaptist themes are embraced by broader Christian thinkers and communities such as Stanley Hauerwas, Sojourners, and the “emergent church” movement, these people, publications, and bodies of believers will carry forward important Anabaptist convictions as much as or more so than do many of the ethnic institutional Anabaptist churches.

*See also* Beatitudes; Government; Just-Peacemaking Theory; Pacifism; Peace; Sermon on the Mount; Truthfulness, Truth-Telling; Violence

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Keith Graber Miller

## Anger

Anger is a passionate response to real or perceived insult or injury, to oneself or another. Christianity has been decidedly ambivalent about anger. Since the time of Gregory the Great, anger has been enumerated among the seven capital vices (better known as the seven deadly sins); however, Thomas Aquinas, whose explication of the seven deadly sins is generally regarded as exhaustive, allows that although anger carries with it the potential to do mortal harm it is not always a sin, for anger is among the passions with which people are created, and hence is not fundamentally evil. Thus, Thomas allows for the possibility of a righteous anger, properly constrained by right reason, which he says is praiseworthy. On this point he goes so far as to quote Chrysostom's assertion that in certain circumstances the failure to become angry is a sin (*ST II-I*, qq. 46–48).

The Pentateuch frequently portrays God as “angry” toward particular persons or groups of people. When God's anger is directed toward Israel, it usually is on account of some form of idolatry. Perhaps the paradigmatic example of this is found in the story of the golden calf in Exod. 32, where Moses both intercedes for Israel, asking an angry God not to destroy them for their idolatry, and then serves as the agent and mediator of God's anger, leading a retributive slaughter against the worst of the idolaters. Even in the Pentateuch, however, God's anger usually is depicted as diminutive in comparison to God's mercy. More, God's anger and mercy often are juxtaposed in the writings of the prophets, who cite God's anger as the cause of the misfortunes of Israel and Judah but also offer assurances that God's anger is temporary and of little consequence in comparison to God's steadfast love, which, the prophets assure, will soon be manifest in the restoration of God's people.

The psalms display something of this tension with respect to God's anger. On the one hand, the psalmist frequently asks God to remember his covenant and withdraw his anger, either from the psalmist personally or from the people of Israel. These psalms often conclude with an expression of confidence that God, because of his mercy, will eventually restore them to their rightful place as the people of God. On the other hand, the psalms of imprecation frequently evoke God's anger toward the psalmist's enemies, advocating their destruction in sometimes shocking terms.

The NT authors take a more cautionary approach to the matter of anger. They speak of God's anger, but they do so sparingly in comparison to

their OT counterparts. Jesus is portrayed as becoming angry, most often toward his opponents among the scribes and Pharisees and the temple elites in Jerusalem. When addressing anger in general terms, however, NT texts are decidedly more circumspect. Anger is potentially a deterrent to faithful Christian life; it is contrary to the virtue of love (1 Cor. 13:5), it subverts faithful discipleship (Eph. 4:25–26, 31–32; Col. 3:7–9; Jas. 1:19–21), and divides the community and renders ineffective its witness to the gospel (2 Cor. 12:19–21). In several places the NT (following the wisdom of the OT) admonishes Christians to be “slow to anger.” Christians tempted to anger would do well to heed the advice of the author of Ephesians, who says, “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil” (Eph. 4:26).

*See also* Patience

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Joel James Shuman

## Anglican Ethics and Moral Theology

The English Reformation formed Anglicanism as a distinct tradition. The English reformers in the sixteenth century—most notably, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer, all of whom were martyred—sought a reformation along the lines of continental Protestant Reformers. Besides the destruction of altars and monastic communities and the rejection and separation from the Roman Catholic Church, they emphasized the primacy of Scripture, the reading of Scripture in the vernacular in public worship, and justification by faith.

However, by the seventeenth century, the Church of England under Queen Elizabeth (1533–1603) saw a church that was both Catholic and Reformed. This was in part because the church was constituted by the people of England as both Catholic and Reformed rather than the church constituting the people as either Catholic or Reformed. Believing that a nation cannot endure and prosper without a common, established religion, Anglicanism emphasized common worship, tolerance of differing opinions, and increasingly dispersed authority. Dispersed authority, along with the elimination of mandatory, private confession and priestly absolution, meant an emphasis on individual conscience.

There was, in turn, an emphasis on practical piety, on forming the self in Christian faith. The practices of Christian faith were understood as matters of religious duties toward God and moral duties toward the neighbor and toward the self. These were referred to as matters of religion, justice, and temperance, or as the petition in the general confession in the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* says, “to live a godly, righteous, and sober life.”

This emphasis on practical piety pervades Anglican thought. For example, Richard Hooker’s apology for the Church of England begins with God’s order in which we participate through Christ, stressing later the experience of grace in the sacrament of Holy Communion over particular beliefs about the nature of the sacrament (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, book V, 1597). Jeremy Taylor (*The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*, 1650; *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, 1651) and William Law (*A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, 1728), both notable influences on John Wesley (1703–91), speak of Christian faith as a way of life. Joseph Butler focuses on virtue (*Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, 1726). Fredrick Denison Maurice turns to piety as the experience of reconciliation (*The Kingdom of Christ*, 1838/1842). In the twentieth century, William Temple details Christian faith as self-offering (*Christus Veritas*, 1924), and Kenneth Kirk offers an account of Christian faith as the practices that lead to and from the vision of God (*The Vision of God*, 1931).

For Anglicans, “Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation” (Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, article 6). But, as claimed by Richard Hooker, Scripture does not interpret itself: one must be “persuaded by other means that Scriptures are the oracles of God” (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, book I.XIV.1). For those who are persuaded, Scripture reveals the truth and way of salvation that come by Jesus Christ, including those things, such as the Trinity, which are not brought to full light without the use of reason. This reflects the broad realist tradition of most of Anglicanism. “They err,” Hooker says, “who think that of the will of God to do this or that there is no reason besides his will” (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, book I.II.5). Anglican ethics and moral theology, in turn, are generally eudemonistic. In perceiving what is true, we act so as to become what we are meant to be and thereby achieve fulfillment, beatitude.

These theological and philosophical convictions reflect what has come to be described as an incarnational and sacramental theology, drawing from

the prologue of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word [*logos*, the order of things]. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:1, 14). Concern is given to establishing the order of things as made known and effected by Jesus Christ. As with Richard Hooker, emphasis is given to participation in the divine order; or, as the Orthodox say, emphasis is placed on *theosis*, Athanasius’s claim that “God became human that humans might become God” (*Inc.* 54.3).

Anglican ethics and moral theology have developed primarily along two foci. First, grounded in appeals to nature and forms of natural law, ethics is concerned with the end of life and the right ordering of society as a whole. Such work is that of a moral theology or casuistry seeking to provide moral teaching and guidance. Second, ethics is concerned about sanctification and the development of a virtue ethic. Of particular interest has been understanding conscience and an ascetical theology concerned with moral formation and sanctification as tied to spiritual disciplines. Within the Anglican tradition moral theology and ascetical theology are integrally related.

Given the first focus on the end and ordering of life, Scripture has, in Anglican ethics, served as a revelation of our supernatural end and as a moral guide for our present life. A biblical story and a covenant theology are assumed from Genesis to Revelation. Moral commands, most notably the Ten Commandments, reinforced the moral law as given in nature. So the Ten Commandments have been at the heart of the *Catechism of 1549* and the *Book of Common Prayer* (in all its editions). In terms of practical moral reasoning, Anglicans of the seventeenth century—the Caroline divines such as William Perkins, William Ames, Robert Sanderson, Joseph Hall, Jeremy Taylor, and Richard Baxter—developed a practical moral theology that combined the ascetical emphasis on sanctification and virtue with the examination of cases. Again, moral law was grounded in nature as well as given in divine commands found in Scripture. As casuists, these thinkers understood the need for adjudicating such commands or rules given the particular circumstances of cases. In fact, natural law assumptions of the day reflecting establishment views were taken for granted.

Given the second focus on sanctification and virtue ethics, Jesus Christ is the great exemplar, the prototype for what it means to be human. For example, Jeremy Taylor’s most influential book in his own time was titled *The Great Exemplar* (1649). Drawing from the four Gospels, Taylor offers a spiritual reading of Scripture combining

narrative, meditation, and prayer in order to focus the reader on the gracious work of God and on holy life as a life given in relationship to God. New Testament figures are icons that illumine the Christian life. From the faith of Mary to the wickedness of Herod, the character of this life is told in terms of Jesus' life and teachings.

Since F. D. Maurice and the rise of historical consciousness—from Charles Gore to archbishops William Temple and Michael Ramsey and the present archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams—Christ has more frequently been understood as revealing the end of life as communion with God and the shape of such a life as self-offering to God and neighbor (Ramsey, *An Era in Anglican Theology: From Gore to Temple*, 1960). Such an understanding was also the theological ground for Anglican social thought with its critique of laissez-faire capitalism, fascism, and nationalism and its proposals for a Christian society (M. B. Reckitt, *Maurice to Temple*, 1947). As a theology of the cross, the canon of Scripture that interprets the rest of Scripture has at its center the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, followed by Philippians and its kenotic understanding of Christ (Phil. 2:6–8). Scripture as read and understood in light of worship—given lectionary readings that are thematically tied to the liturgical year—offers the shape of the Christian life. As Anglican Dom Gregory Dix says, the shape of eucharistic worship is, like that of Christ, kenotic (*The Shape of the Liturgy*, 1948).

In the twentieth century, Kenneth Kirk draws together moral theology and ascetical theology. Begun in his book *Some Principles of Moral Theology and Their Application* (1920), Kirk's work concludes with the publication of his Bampton Lectures in 1931 as *The Vision of God*. Contextualizing moral commands in Scripture, Kirk grounds the moral life in the experience of its end in the vision of God as revealed in Jesus. Again, with Philippians and the Gospel of John as the primary sources, Jesus is the great exemplar, the prototype of what it means to be human.

The description of virtue and what is distinctive about Christian virtue grounded in the love of God could and did become removed from explicit reference to Scripture, as was the case with Butler's *Fifteen Sermons* and the English moral philosophy tradition represented by John Locke and David Hume. But as evident in Butler's more philosophical account of virtue and its grounding in the love of God (sermons 13 and 14), Scripture reveals the end of life and in Christ the character of such a life.

Parallel and in contrast to such development was an evangelical theology and ethic, beginning with John Wesley. While sharing common features with the broader Anglican tradition—for example, the place of piety and worship and the social character and obligations of Christian faith—the scriptural Christianity of evangelical Anglicans differed in taking a more positivist reading of Scripture as the revelation of the divine will. Emphasizing justification by faith and conversion, in terms of ethics the evangelical tradition read Scripture as a set of divine commands. In personal matters they were quite conservative; in social matters they were more radical reformers. For example, they assumed understandings of marriage and the prohibition against divorce, but condemned the slave trade and worked for specific reforms to address the conditions of the working poor. Most notable among these thinkers was William Wilberforce, whose thought is expressed in his 1797 publication of *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country Contrasted with Real Christianity*.

Anglicanism remains a diverse tradition. This includes those dissenting from Anglican catholicity or comprehensiveness. Some evangelicals, for example, seek to complete the English Reformation along the lines of the continental Reformation. Some Anglo-Catholics, who seek a unity of faith and witness, share a common desire to establish more centralized authority. Each defines the breadth of Anglicanism as heterodox, in which truth is sacrificed to tolerance (which is then called comprehensiveness). In either case, there is fundamental disagreement about the truth of Scripture.

In terms of Christian ethics and moral theology, the divide between “conservatives” and “liberals” within Anglicanism may be understood as grounded in the difference between a voluntarist view of Scripture as the revelation of the divine will and ethics as a matter of divine command and a view of Scripture as historically and culturally shaped yet revealing a divine purpose and in Christ the character or virtues necessary for participation in the divine life. This is especially true in the highly contested area of human sexual ethics. On the one hand, Anglicans continue to deploy biblical critical studies to contextualize moral judgments and to understand them in light of broader ends. On the other hand, other Anglicans identify the authority of Scripture with specific moral commands.

The diversity of contemporary Anglican moral theology also includes reflection on Christian

ethics in a postestablishment or postcolonial context. These include prophetic and countercultural accounts of Christian faith in relationship to culture and society. Still, predominantly—as with the nonviolent American theologian William Stringfellow and the nonviolent liberation theology of South African Desmond Tutu—Scripture offers a revelation of the end of human life while Christ is the exemplar or prototype of participation in that life—hence a continued focus on sanctification and a virtue ethic.

See also Casuistry; Divine Command Theories of Ethics; John; Natural Law; Philippians; Sanctification; Ten Commandments; Virtue Ethics

Timothy F. Sedgwick

## Animals

Western European Enlightenment rationality of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made a fundamental distinction between the mental and the physical. This distinction categorically distinguished humans, the only physical beings with mind/spirit, from animals and the rest of brute nature. Notably, this distinction was also used to deny full personhood to women and to some peoples who purportedly lacked full possession of the reasoning capacities that signaled possession of mind. In terms of ethical consideration, then, mainstream Enlightenment rationality was decidedly androcentric, Eurocentric, and anthropocentric.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Western rationality's racism and sexism was largely recognized, and ongoing critique was initiated. But predominant Western rationality into the twenty-first century remains unwittingly anthropocentric. Consider, for instance, the category "animals." While in biology class humans are commonly categorized as animals, in common ethical, religious, and popular discourse "animals" is not understood to include humans. In accord with this predominant expectation, for instance, one would not expect to encounter theological anthropology under this entry for "animals." Indeed, in popular speech "animal" remains a term of derision when applied to a person. Or consider how ordinarily talk about animal experimentation would not be expected to include discussion of experimentation on humans.

Significantly, anthropocentrism even permeates modern Western environmentalism. The environment in question is typically the *human* environment. Animals are part of the environment and sometimes are even grouped with minerals, soil, and crops as resources to be preserved, managed,

and sustainably harvested. Humans are not part of the environment. In accord with modern anthropocentric rationality, humans alone are thought to be above brute nature.

In place of the classic scriptural nexus "Creator/creatures/creation," then, modern Western Christians think in terms of the categorically different nexus of "God/humans/animals/nature." This fundamental shift in understanding decisively determines the very vocabularies and concepts out of which modern Westerners think. As a result, for instance, in the Adam and Eve creation narrative translators naturally translate a Hebrew word (*nepeš*) as "living being" when they apply it to humans and translate the same Hebrew as "living creature" when they apply it to the birds and beasts (Gen. 2:7, 19).

Within the parameters of this predominant modern Western conceptual framework, "things" such as animals disappear as subjects of direct divine and moral concern. Humans, as a categorically unique kind of being, are understood to be the sole proper subjects of direct divine and moral concern. "Nature," a category that includes everything that is not human, has only indirect or instrumental value. That is, natural objects, including animals, are considered valuable only insofar as they are valuable for humans.

In this fashion, anthropocentrism, not as a considered conclusion but as an unquestioned presumption, pervades mainstream modern rationality. To be sure, the way anthropomorphism plays to human pride and self-interest means that it has always influenced human reflection. In the wake of Enlightenment rationality, however, anthropocentrism gained unprecedented philosophical justification and began to exert unprecedented influence. Animals were simply rendered invisible as subjects of direct divine and moral concern as anthropocentrism was inscribed into modern Western rationality at a primordial level.

Not surprisingly, modern ethical and biblical reflection—and this obtains across the theological spectrum—has been decisively shaped by modernity's anthropocentrism. Consider, for instance, the account of Noah and the flood. In a recent work focused on biblical creation theology, one author, explaining the thematic significance of the actual shape of Hebrew narratives, points out that the central verses in Hebrew narratives are also often the thematic key to the story. Accordingly, Gen. 8:1, "God remembered Noah," would be the pivot-point for the story of Noah. However, Gen. 8:1 actually says, "God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the domestic animals."

In the same way, it has long been standard to refer to “God’s covenant with Noah” or the “Noahic covenant.” Until recently, it was not thought significant or even noticed that the text repeatedly (six times in nine verses) specifies that God’s covenant is not only with Noah but also “with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark” (Gen. 9:10).

Similarly, even as twentieth-century students of the OT were taught to attend to the significance of blessings, the blessing of the fishes and the birds in Gen. 1:22 and the call for land creatures to be fruitful and multiply in Gen. 8:17 typically were not really noticed. In the same vein, while the creation of humans in the image of God and the blessing of humans and the call for them to have dominion over the earth in Gen. 1:28 is surely one of the most famous passages of Scripture, the explicitly vegan giving of seeds and fruits exclusively for food to every creature with the “breath of life” in the very next verses (Gen. 1:29–30) receives scant notice.

As Western Christians have begun to become conscious of modernity’s anthropocentrism, however, they have begun to notice God’s delight in and blessing of nonhuman creatures in the seven days of creation narrative. They have begun to notice that the creation that God declares “very good” is expressly vegan. They have begun to notice that God covenants with all creatures and even the earth in what many now call the “rainbow” or “earth” covenant. Christians are attending anew to texts such as Ps. 148, where all creatures, from sun to birds to young men, are called on to praise God. They are noticing the wholly peaceable character of famous eschatological passages such as Isa. 11:1–10, the so-called Peaceable Kingdom passage, where “the lion shall eat straw like the ox,” and no creature anywhere, whether human, domestic, or wild, will “hurt or destroy” on all God’s holy mountain.

Conscious of modernity’s anthropocentrism, Christians are noticing Jesus’ background assertion that God attends to the death of each sparrow (Matt. 10:29). And they are noticing that Jesus rightly presumes that not even his theological opponents will dare to deny that it is good to break the Sabbath in order to rescue a sheep or an ox from a pit (Matt. 12:11; Luke 14:5). They are noticing that the “fire” of 2 Pet. 3:11–13 does not destroy the physical universe, loosing souls to be with God in some unearthly reality, but rather burns away all unrighteousness as it refines a “new

heaven [i.e., a new sky] and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”

Examples revealing anthropocentric distortion of Scripture could easily be multiplied. But the clear effect of anthropocentrism vis-à-vis all these familiar texts is sufficient to make the problem evident. For as is now clear, modern Western philosophical, scientific, theological, ethical, and biblical understanding has been pervaded by an anthropocentrism that is alien to the Christian Scriptures. We must reevaluate not only Scripture and ethics but also theology, history, and worship in light of our newly found awareness that nonhuman creatures together with human creatures constitute a community of subjects of direct divine and moral concern.

Insofar as all the theological disciplines have developed decisively in the modern West, rigorous reorientation in the wake of our recent and ongoing awakening to anthropocentrism is vital. The issues raised are diverse and complex. Clearly, the Christian Scriptures differentiate between humans and other creatures. But what exactly are the differences? And what are their ethical implications? How do our major translations and mainstream interpretations of Scripture need to change in order to correct for modern anthropocentrism? And what are the theological and ethical consequences of making such a correction? What in the patristic writings and those of the Reformers have we failed to notice or misinterpreted because we have been looking unawares through anthropocentric spectacles? How are we to consider the place and capacities of nonhuman creatures in relation to worship, salvation, or heaven? When, if ever, is it permissible to kill, eat, wear, or experiment on nonhuman creatures? Are there ethically significant distinctions to be drawn among nonhuman creatures? If so, what are the criteria? What are Christians to think ethically and spiritually about pets, zoos, wilderness areas, pesticides, transgenic organisms, the “creation” and patenting of life, extermination of invasive species, human-caused extinction events, and varieties of hunting?

Anthropocentrism still reigns in early twenty-first-century scriptural interpretation, theology, and ethics. Nonanthropocentric focus on nonhuman creatures remains the purview of a small if fast-growing collection of scholars and advocates on the margins of mainstream theological discussion. But with ever-widening consciousness of the distorting influence of modern anthropocentrism, one can anticipate that the next few decades will see the emergence of significant areas of interpretive and ethical consensus about nonhuman

creatures, as well as identification of edges of debate requiring ongoing research.

Although nonanthropocentric interpretation of Scripture and ethics remains in its infancy, one can identify three broad currents of thought: (1) the “land ethic” or “deep ecology,” (2) “animal rights,” and (3) “animal theology.” The land ethic (c. 1948, Aldo Leopold) and deep ecology (c. 1972, Arne Naess) are biocentric and holistic. For Leopold, “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (Leopold 224–25). This move beyond anthropocentrism, which becomes self-conscious in deep ecology, de-emphasizes individual animals, human or otherwise, and focuses instead on the health of biosystems.

Notably, this perspective may be reflected in Ps. 104. Nonetheless, it stands in tension with the vast majority of Scripture, which is overwhelmingly concerned with individual creatures. Christians will reject the position of a small minority of deep ecologists who refuse to distinguish ethically between amoebas and humans. Also, the land ethic and deep ecology should be distinguished from a metaphysical Darwinism (in contrast to a scientific Darwinism) that rejects moral ideals not consistent with biological realities, and that tends to invoke biological distinctions (e.g., capacity to reason, capacity for language) in the course of retaining modernity’s categorical anthropocentrism.

Highly marginal nineteenth- and twentieth-century movements on behalf of animals rose to mainstream notice when Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975) captured the public imagination and stimulated the late twentieth-century “animal rights” movement. Singer’s utilitarian argument turned upon the moral significance of animals’ capacity to suffer. His frank description of the suffering of animals at human hands stirred widespread indignation and spurred overt resistance to anthropocentric disregard for the well-being of nonhuman animals. Appropriating the most powerful moral and international legal vocabulary available, the movement established itself around an appeal to animal “rights.”

A Christian version of animal rights quickly materialized with Andrew Linzey’s *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment* (1976). The modern legal concept of “rights” is alien to Scripture, but globally it is a central ethical and legal category. Just as many Christians adopted the “rights” category on behalf of Christian ideals vis-à-vis humans, Linzey adopted the “rights” category vis-à-vis animals. By the 1990s, Linzey and other Christians had

developed arguments using specifically scriptural and theological concepts, and as a result a variety of ethical positions predicated on “reverence for life,” “creature care,” and “love for all creatures” began to undergird Christian advocacy for “animal theology.”

In contrast to biocentric perspectives, animal theology remains focused on individuals. In contrast to animal rights, animal theology is predicated on a nonanthropomorphic reading of Scripture and the Christian tradition. As illustrated above, the focus upon individual creatures and the inclusion of all creatures among a community of subjects who are loved by and worship God, and thus who are all subjects of direct divine and moral concern, is consistent with the mainstream of Scripture. However, scriptural, theological, and ethical debates over the precise contours of right regard for nonhuman creatures remain in their infancy. There is general agreement that anthropocentrism has distorted biblical interpretation, theology, and ethics, and that blatant mistreatment of nonhuman creatures is beyond the pale. But a mature, nonanthropocentric reading of Scripture and general consensus over right Christian response to a host of theological and ethical questions regarding nonhuman creatures are as yet the vital and still-to-be-realized product of this emerging sphere of scriptural, theological, and ethical reflection.

*See also* Bioethics; Creation, Biblical Accounts of; Creation Ethics; Ecological Ethics; Humanity; Vegetarianism

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William Greenway

**Annulment** *See* Marriage and Divorce

## Antichrist

The term *antichrist* (Gk. *antichristos*) refers to the adversary of God and God’s aims who is expected to appear in the end times. The term derives from the combination of the noun *Christos*, which means “anointed one” or “messiah,” with the prefix *anti*, which means either “against” or

“instead of.” In this case, both senses of the prefix are important because almost all the relevant literature portrays the antichrist as one who is “against Christ,” and some picture him also as a substitute for Christ. In the NT, the term appears only in 1–2 John (1 John 2:18 [2x], 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), but analogous figures appear in Rev. 13 (the beast from the sea), apocalyptic discourses in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., false christs and false prophets in Mark 13:21–22), and 2 Thess. 2:1–3 (“the lawless one . . . destined for destruction”).

The significance of the antichrist is tied to two traditions in Jewish and Christian thought: (1) the challenge of recognizing genuine agents from God, and (2) the crescendo of wickedness anticipated before God puts down the power of evil and actualizes his righteous aims in his kingdom.

First, distinguishing between true and false prophecy has long been controversial. For example, in Deut. 18:21 this question is raised: “How can we tell that a message is not from the LORD?” (NET). According to Deuteronomy, the truth of a prophetic word depends on whether it happens. Passages in the NT likewise emphasize the need to distinguish God’s message from its counterfeits. In 1 John 4:1–3 the author warns that false prophets have gone out into the world. These people are false teachers who deny the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22) and refuse to accept that Jesus really came to earth as a human (1 John 4:2; cf. 2 John 7). Such people speak by “the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3) (see also Jer. 28:9; Mark 13:22; 1 Cor. 12:1–3). The issue persists in the early church, with the result that the *Didache* distinguishes between true and false prophets and apostles in terms of the doctrine they teach and the behaviors they practice, especially with regard to potential abuses of hospitality and money (*Did.* 11).

Second, ancient Jewish writings anticipate increased wickedness on the earth, sometimes together with the rise of an evil tyrant in opposition to God, in preparation for the end. For example, the book of Daniel describes a mighty ruler who wages war against God’s holy ones (7:18–27), a king who will grow strong in power, cause fearful destruction, and destroy the powerful and the people of the holy ones (8:24). God must act against this ruler in order to break the power of evil and to establish his everlasting kingdom (7:27; 8:25). Similarly, in Mark’s account of Jesus’ warning about the end times, Jesus adds to his references to wars and earthquakes the coming of false prophets and false messiahs who will attempt to deceive the faithful through showy miracles and pronouncements. The most picturesque

is Revelation’s description of the beast from the sea, presented as the antithesis of Christ, with his counterfeit crowns (13:1; cf. 19:12), blasphemous names (13:1; cf. 19:11, 13, 16), power and authority (which the beast receives from Satan [13:2], but Jesus has from God [12:5, 10]), and a mortal wound that has been healed (13:3; cf. 1:18; 5:6). Clearly, the beast from the sea is Satan’s agent of war against God’s people (see 12:17–13:18) and as such is presented as the negative image of Christ.

Speculation about the antichrist continued in the early church. For example, in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the beast of the fourth kingdom (Dan. 7:7–8) is the contemporary Roman Empire, identified with the increase in wickedness accompanying the last days (*Barn.* 4.1–5). *Didache* 16 anticipates the rise of false prophets together with a deceiver who will claim to be God’s Son. In agreement with 1–2 John, Polycarp wrote that the antichrist is the spirit of false teaching (*Pol. Phil.* 7). Both in the NT, then, and in the early church it was possible to speak of the antichrist (or antichrists, in the case of 1 John 2:18) in the present tense while at the same time holding to the belief that the end time would see the emergence of the antichrist in his fullness.

See also Eschatology and Ethics; Revelation, Book of

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Joel B. Green

## Antinomianism

Antinomianism is an approach to Christian ethics that rejects behavioral standards of any sort as instances of a fixed and inflexible legalism. Antinomian practice maintains that Christians live without reference to norms as recipients of the free grace of God.

One can find teaching against antinomianism in the OT (e.g., Isa. 5:7, 13, 24–25; Hos. 4:6; 8:12; Mal. 2:7–8), and it is possible that the Epistle of Jude counters an early Christian antinomianism that is a distortion of Paul’s understanding of freedom and grace (see vv. 4, 8, 16, 23). More discussion about antinomianism is focused on Matthew’s approach to the law. Although some have speculated that Matthew’s polemics are directed against antinomians as well as rabbis, others are more skeptical and see in Matthew a new and demanding form of religious practice. Jesus’

teaching in the Sermon on the Mount does not replace the law, but rather fills out its intention (e.g., Matt. 5:27–32).

Paul's approach to these issues is the focus of contemporary debate between two broad lines of interpretation. Traditional interpretation holds that Paul's teaching is explicitly antinomian by opposing Spirit, gospel, and grace on the one hand, and law on the other. In this view, Paul attacks the law as the foundation of an unattainable system of works focused on self-achievement. Gaining in acceptance, however, is the idea that the traditional approach involves a mischaracterization of Judaism. Thus, a second group of interpreters maintains that grace was as central to the Judaism of Paul's day as it was in Paul's thought, and that both Judaism and Paul affirm that God's people will be judged according to their deeds (e.g., Rom. 2:6–16; 1 Cor. 3:12–15; 11:27–34; 2 Cor. 5:9–10; Gal. 6:7). This view sees Paul's opposition to the law as grounded not in human inability to obey God's commands (cf. Phil. 3:6), but rather in his conviction that works of Torah no longer mediate the grace of God to a single ethnic group (Rom. 3:28–30).

Today, the Christian's relationship to the law is a matter of continuing concern. The church continues to struggle to balance law and grace in the life of the community while acknowledging the essential nature of the law and the OT for moral reflection in the NT. Whether citing or alluding to the law in ethical instruction (Matt. 5:17; Luke 4:3–12), describing believers as "fulfilling" the law by walking by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4), or urging believers to comport themselves with the "law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25), the NT rejects the idea that the faithful are free to ignore divine standards of behavior in the law.

See also Law and Gospel; Legalism; Libertinism

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Love L. Sechrest

## Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is hostility and/or prejudice against Jews and Judaism. Christian anti-Semitism, the

specific topic of this entry, refers to the prejudice long held by Christians against Jews. The basis for this prejudice often is grounded in the NT, but a closer look at the Scriptures demonstrates the complexity of this issue both in antiquity and throughout history. Although the term itself implies discrimination against all Semites (Arabs and other Semitic-language-speaking peoples), it has been used exclusively in reference to Jews and Judaism.

### Confusion of Terms

Although the term *anti-Semitism* would logically be a referent to hostility against any group of Semites, it is often and irregularly interchanged with the term *anti-Judaism*. The terms *anti-Jewish* and *anti-Semitic* are commonly used, though not uniformly. One common distinction associates "anti-Jewish" with the issue of Jews as a religious group and "anti-Semitic" with the issue of Jews as an ethnic group; however, inconsistent usage of this distinction has led to what Flannery calls "a semantical confusion that has often rendered rational discourse on the subject well nigh impossible" (Flannery 5). In the present article, the term *anti-Semitism* applies to all forms of anti-Judaism, but with the understanding that the term itself is more appropriately used only after its creation in the nineteenth century and only in reference to Jews and Judaism.

### Anti-Semitism and the New Testament

One cannot read the NT without noting passages containing invective against the Jews and Judaism. The polemic ranges from subtle insult to stinging attack. Note, for example, Matt. 5:20: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Matt. 23:34–36; 27:25); John 8:42–44: "Jesus said to them [the Jews], 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your Father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him'; Acts 7:51–53: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained

by angels and yet you have not kept it" (see also, e.g., Rom. 10:4; 1 Thess. 2:14–16).

Although these passages certainly demonstrate a clear hostility between early Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews, it often is difficult to determine the degree to which such polemical language reflects an intramural or an extramural fight. It has become increasingly clear that early non-Christian Jews and Jewish Christians were engaged in disputes over what it meant to carry on the covenant traditions of the Jewish people. These quarrels are best viewed as being between rival siblings, each striving to define itself in a post-70 CE, post-Second Temple era, in which the only Jewish survivors are Pharisaic Jews (the precursors of rabbinic Judaism) and messianic Jews (the precursors of Christianity). So, if these and other similar NT passages do indeed reflect the kind of "in-house" conflict within first-century Judaism, why do they continue to be so problematic?

The problem, simply stated, is that these texts have been anachronistically applied to Jews and Judaism throughout two thousand years of history. Although the first-century controversy between messianic and nonmessianic Jews may have been a Jewish in-house dispute, for centuries the passages have engendered Christian "anti-Jewish" or "anti-Semitic" attitudes and actions and have been called forth as a defense or justification for atrocities of all kinds against the Jewish people and Judaism. What began as an internal conflict became the seedbed for Christian "anti-Semitism" throughout the history of Christianity. From the damning preaching of Melito of Sardis in the second century and John Chrysostom's "Eight Homilies against the Jews" in the fourth century, to the equally vicious condemnation by Martin Luther ("The Jews and Their Lies") in the sixteenth century, to the unspeakable horrors of the Nazi regime, NT passages (such as those listed above) have fueled the fires of prejudice and outrage against the Jews for putting Jesus to death (hence deicide) and for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (damnable disbelief from the perspective of many Christians). In turn, Christianity has been accused of being anti-Semitic in origin. Indeed, Rosemary Radford Ruether has called anti-Judaism the "left hand of Christology." (For a concise review of the history of Christian anti-Semitism, see Saperstein.)

### *An Ongoing Dilemma*

Recognition of the potential for harm inherent in these biblical passages has prompted biblical scholars to approach these texts in a variety of ways. Whereas pre-World War II biblical interpretation

often promoted the idea of Christian supersessionism (Christianity as the replacement and completion of Judaism), the post-Holocaust context had to come to grips with the way such texts had been used to foment Christian hatred and persecution of Jews, culminating in the complicity of so-called Christian peoples in the horrors of the Shoah (the Holocaust).

Since the 1960s, however, various positive steps have been taken to address Christian anti-Semitism. In 1965 the Vatican II Council issued the historic document *Nostra aetate* ("In Our Time"), presenting important changes in the church's official teaching on Jews and Judaism. Jews were no longer to be viewed as "Christ-killers," and the Jewish religion was to be revered as an ongoing and living tradition. This was followed in 1974 by "Guidelines for Implementing *Nostra Aetate*," in 1985 by "Correct Ways to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechism," and in 1998 by "We Remember the Shoah." These moves by the Roman Catholic Church included Pope John Paul II's historic visit to the Jewish synagogue in Rome (1986), where he referred to the Jewish people as "our elder brethren." The World Council of Churches has also made efforts to address the problem of Christian anti-Semitism. This is apparent in its 1967 publication "The Church and the Jewish People" as well as its 1982 "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue." The past thirty years have seen a number of statements from within Protestant Christianity as well. The United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Lutheran Church, and United Church of Christ have issued statements regarding the inappropriateness of using the polemical passages of the NT as justification for hostility against Jews and Judaism as well as calling into question the practice of Christian proselytizing of Jews.

Although progress has been made in our reinterpretation of these texts, much work remains. In the world of the church, these texts too often continue to be ignored, thoughtlessly used, or explained away. Many Christians still consider Judaism to be incomplete and Christianity to be its fulfillment; too many Christians continue to stereotype Jews and Judaism as "Other," an inferior "Other." Clearly, these are unpleasant texts, but history has shown that we cannot afford to ignore them or dismiss them. In our increasingly pluralistic world, it is imperative that we wrestle not only with these "anti-Jewish" passages in the Christian canon but also with how they have been

interpreted and misused. Only then can we begin to overcome a history of abuse. Contextual understandings of the NT writings within the formative period of early Jewish Christianity are imperative for all interpretations that seek to read these texts with responsibility and integrity.

See also Religious Toleration; Supersessionism

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Judy Yates Siker

## Anxiety

The term *anxiety* can mean several things. It is an emotion closely related to fear, worry, and dread; a basic human physiological response characterized by increased autonomic system activity to situations that combine danger and uncertainty, or an existential condition that shapes basic human interactions with the world and God. Though interrelated, each use of the term is freighted with distinct connotations for Scripture and ethics.

Anxiety as emotion is closely related to fear, but whereas fear is an emotional response to an identifiable danger, anxiety is a response to an unidentified threat or anticipated danger. Most expressions of this emotion (e.g., separation anxiety) are understandable responses to stressful situations and are likely to be evolutionary adaptations that, though uncomfortable, help those feeling the emotion to focus on the situation at hand, asking questions about both the situation and one's ability to successfully cope with it. Some expressions of the emotion, however (e.g., performance anxiety), can be disabling. More than any other person, Sigmund Freud brought anxiety to the fore; his understanding of its relation to the unconscious continues to impact contemporary understandings of the emotion. A universal emotion, anxiety nevertheless exhibits cultural variations: in a highly formal society, anxieties about breaking etiquette may be pronounced, while in a highly conformist society, it may be anxieties about being different.

The Scriptures usually encourage those feeling anxiety not to worry (explicitly in Matt. 6:25–34; Phil. 4:6; implicitly in Prov. 12:25), suggesting in

these instances that anxiety is a manifestation of the human failure to trust in divine providence. There is, though, countertestimony to such encouragement in Scripture that recognizes either the mysteriousness of God's governance (as in Job) or the importance of learning to fear God rather than feel anxiety (e.g., Ps. 2:11). Although Christian ethicists have talked about the valued role of the emotions, including anxiety and fear, in ordering a moral life since antiquity, the attention to emotion in moral reasoning receded after the Enlightenment and has only just come back into focus as the result of work by various feminists, classicists, neurobiologists, and others. One exception to this is the use of the "anxious bench" in American evangelicalism since the early nineteenth century—a place where those considering becoming Christian sat so that others could pray for them to reorder their lives. One contemporary concern of social ethicists is that Christians challenge the social structures that promote undue anxiety.

Anxiety as a physiological response is closely connected to anxiety as an emotion but tends to be more positive about the possibilities for anxiety to stimulate moral action. According to behaviorists such as O. Hobart Mowrer, anxiety prepares us to deal with traumatic events before they occur. Since anxiety produces discomfort, we develop learned behaviors that help us either avoid or mitigate the impact of such events. Those behaviors may be remoral, but attention to this system provides insights into the early processes of moral development, as when children avoid dangerous or immoral behavior out of anxiety about possible consequences. Although anxiety as a physiological response helps order conventional moral life, Christians recognize that often they are called into anxiety-provoking situations—for example, practicing nonviolence at the risk of bodily suffering, reaching out to strangers or enemies at the risk of rejection, and generally refusing to live a life marked by the avoidance of suffering.

Anxiety as an existential condition has had the clearest and most dramatic impact in Christian ethics, due largely to the influence of Søren Kierkegaard, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich on twentieth-century Christian ethics. Kierkegaard not only foreshadowed the philosophical tradition of existentialism (as developed by Heidegger, Camus, Sartre, and others), which emphasizes angst in ethics, but also gave Niebuhr and Tillich a language for considering the complexities of the human condition. According to Niebuhr, the human ability to transcend the self gives an awareness of our own mortality; the tension between

self-transcendence and finitude creates anxiety that should lead to creativity and trust but inevitably leads to sin. Tillich emphasized anxiety as an ontological (versus psychological) condition, the proper response to which is the courage to be. One of the seminal challenges to their approach, though, is to ask whether a Christian theological anthropology should be constructed around anxiety or gratitude.

See also Emotion; Freedom; Moral Development

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Mark Douglas

## Apartheid

Today most people believe that apartheid—the idea of separate development of people in their racial groups—was a terrible doctrine, evil, oppressive, and certainly unchristian. However, hard though it may be for those outside South Africa to understand, apartheid was a scriptural doctrine taught by the Dutch Reformed Church and backed by its excellent faculties of biblical studies in major universities. The biblical basis for apartheid was set out in the report *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* (1976). This is a challenge to those involved in biblical ethics, since both those who argued for apartheid and those in the liberation struggle used similar methods of exegesis to justify their opposing positions. This can be demonstrated by a brief consideration of the four main subgenres of ethical material in the Bible.

First, in terms of rules, the report interpreted God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) to include the separate diversity of peoples, as confirmed in Deut. 32:8–9 and Acts 17:26–27 with "the boundaries of their territories" (General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, *Human Relations*, 14–15). Also, commands forbidding the marriage of Israelites with other peoples were used to prohibit mixed marriages in South Africa under article 16 of the Immorality Act (General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, *Human Relations*, 93–99).

Second, contrasting principles were derived from Gen. 1:28: "separate development" (God made us all different), as argued by the Dutch Reformed

Church (*Human Relations*, 14–15), versus "unity" (God made us one in our diversity), as argued by the liberationists. Similarly, the Dutch Reformed Church's treatment of Pentecost produced the principle of everyone hearing "God's great deeds in our own language" (Acts 2:10). However, Bax (128–30) criticized the exegesis in the Dutch Reformed Church report and produced the opposite principle of the Spirit at Pentecost "breaking down the barriers that separate humanity."

Third, the first French Huguenot settlers applied the paradigmatic narrative of the exodus story from slavery to a land flowing with milk and honey to their experience of escaping from persecution in Europe to the riches of the Cape area such as the Franschhoek Valley. However, they also applied the conquest material from Joshua and Judges to justify their oppression and slavery of the native peoples. This was further reinforced by the Boers' escape from the oppression of the British authorities in the Cape on the Great Trek culminating in their victory over twenty thousand Zulus at Blood River on December 16, 1838, subsequently kept as Covenant Day. However, the irony is that the same exodus paradigm lies at the heart of liberation theology and the black theology that influenced Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak.

Finally, the overall worldview of biblical theology was used by both sides. Thus, the Dutch Reformed Church viewed its understanding of "human relations in the light of scripture" as based upon the whole scheme of creation-fall-incarnation-redemption, while the liberationists argued exactly the same for their understanding.

The fact that both sides could appeal to the same Scriptures using similar hermeneutical methods was a challenge at the time and remains so today. Despite the scriptural support for apartheid marshaled by the Dutch Reformed Church, the consequent oppression and bloodshed could not be justified. Thus, a decade later, its report *Church and Society* (1986) recognized that "the conviction has gradually grown that a forced separation and division of peoples cannot be considered a biblical imperative" (Dutch Reformed Church, *Church and Society*, 47). After the transition to majority democratic rule, Dominee Freek Swanepoel from the Dutch Reformed Church admitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that "the church had erred seriously with the Biblical foundation of the forced segregation of people. . . . We have indeed taught our people wrongly with regard to apartheid as a Biblical instruction" (TRC Faith Communities Hearings, East London, November 17–19, 1997). Thus, the

pro-apartheid exegesis serves as a warning that we must read the Scriptures within an inclusive community of interpretation where the voices of those most affected by any interpretation are properly heard. Only then can such oppression carried out under the supposed aegis of biblical justification be avoided in the future (see Burridge 347–409).

See also Colonialism and Postcolonialism; Liberationist Ethics; Race; Racism

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Richard A. Burridge

**Apocryphal Books** See Deuterocanonical/ Apocryphal Books

## Apostolic Fathers

The Apostolic Fathers is a collection of late first- to mid-second-century texts that form a bridge between the NT and patristic literature. Typically included are the following: a letter by the church at Rome (*1 Clement*), a letter by Polycarp of Smyrna (*To the Philippians*) and an account of his martyrdom (*Martyrdom of Polycarp*), seven letters by Ignatius of Antioch, an anonymous letter attributed to Barnabas, an apology to Diognetus, a homily (*2 Clement*), a manual of instruction (*Didache*), and collected visions and teachings (*Shepherd of Hermas*).

Social ethics generally permeate these works. The NT directive to seek God's kingdom seems particularly evident. In *2 Clement*, Christians are exhorted toward mutual love (9.6) and righteousness (11.7). In *Shepherd of Hermas*, those who seek the seal of baptism must first be clothed in the twelve virtues and bear their names (*Herm. Sim.* 9.14–16). Several authors encourage the giving of alms and charity. Polycarp insists that alms deliver the giver from death (10.2), while the *Didache* urges charity for all who ask (1.5).

More broadly, the Apostolic Fathers arises at a transitional moment as the church discards its Jewish roots for more Hellenistic moorings. Of primary concern is the question of what ethics might be for Christians as they separate from the customary moral doctrines of the synagogue.

The authors of *1 Clement* and the *Didache* take a conservative view, envisioning an ethic that continues to cling to conventional Jewish ideals. The letter of *1 Clement* is written to correct a situation at Corinth in which younger elders have removed the established leadership of the church without due process. The author responds by offering Moses as a model by which leaders should execute their duties. The unique nature of this Jewish prophet serves as a key to how all Christians must live. There is nothing more divine than to live in order and harmony as is befitting God's will in the manner of patience, humility, righteousness, and self-control. Though explicitly directed toward Corinth's leadership, such attributes surface throughout the work as essential for the life of the larger community.

The *Didache* embraces a parallel position, offering the Decalogue as a foundation for correct Christian living. Prohibitions against acts such as murder, adultery, and theft form the structure of a desirable community ideal. At the same time, the *Didache* integrates warnings against lesser transgressions in order to protect the faithful from even greater sins. Included here are cautions against worldly practices such as magic, sorcery, abortion, infanticide, astrology, and idolatry (1.1–6.2). These sins typify the "way of death" and find analogous warnings in *Barn.* 18–20. The *Didache* counsels Christians to walk in the "way of life" instead, attending to the wisdom that paves its path. The "two ways" is popular within late Judaism and Qumran (see 1QS 3.13–4.26), as well as elsewhere among early Christians (see *Herm. Mand.* 6.1–2.10).

Other authors in this literature depart notably from any vision of ethics that depends on traditional Jewish norms, instead typically integrating elements of Hellenistic philosophy and instruction. The letters of Ignatius and the *Epistle to Diognetus* best illustrate this view.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writes seven letters to churches in Asia Minor and Italy as soldiers take him to martyrdom in Rome early in the second century. He fears unstable leadership, Christians who would return the church to Judaism, and the threat of Docetism. These concerns push him toward a three-tiered model of institutional leadership that features a central overseer (bishop) and a cadre of supporters (deacons and presbyters). Like *1 Clement* and *Hermas*, both from Rome, Ignatius speaks of endurance, unity, and patience. He envisions church harmony to be an express result of compliance with the will of the bishop. The duty of Christians is to model their lives around the directives of God's duly ordained leaders, who provide regulation through correct

liturgical practice and appropriate theological confession. For Ignatius, an ethical lifestyle means an existence of obedience.

The *Epistle to Diognetus* takes a more Stoic approach to Christian ethics. After indicating the various ways in which Christianity is superior to the foolish worship practices of Jews and the idolatry of pagans, the author argues that Christians live in the world much like a soul dwells within a body. They reside on earth, unseen, suffering wrong, loving those who hate them, and existing as immortal beings, appointed by God for the benefit of the mortal world (6.1–10). It is because they are citizens of another kingdom that believers in Christ quietly suffer injustice, become poor, and experience dishonor and slander. This concept ultimately became a foundation for Augustine's *The City of God* and has influenced Christian views of ethics in the West.

Between these extremes are several authors who combine Jewish and Hellenistic themes in their understanding of what it means to live an ethical lifestyle. The bishop Polycarp, for instance, is concerned for order and harmony within the church, much like his contemporary Ignatius and the author of *1 Clement*. In contrast to the latter text, however, he hesitates to incorporate OT texts when arguing on behalf of righteousness as a key to being Christian. His warnings to avoid any temptation toward slander, greed, and false testimony (4.3) and his admonitions to be gentle, steadfast, and enduring in patience (12.2) largely reflect NT themes and ideals, which find distinctive parallel in the teachings of Ignatius. Polycarp may actually seek to avoid a close connection with Judaism because of open hostility between the synagogue and church in Smyrna. The author of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* ultimately accuses the Jews there of instigating his death.

Two other authors run beyond Ignatius and Polycarp in the use of OT texts in detailing an ethical lifestyle, though they make use of these materials in differing ways. The author of *2 Clement* composes an entire homily based on Isa. 54. In reflection of the prophet's words, Christians are encouraged to endure their suffering in patience with the hope of God's future reward. They are warned to avoid adultery, slander, and jealousy; they are enticed to be self-controlled, merciful, and kind (4.2). As transients in the world, Christians must live a holy and righteous life in order to obtain God's kingdom.

The *Epistle of Barnabas*, however, once more lays claim to the figure of Moses as an ideal for those who would be faithful to God. Unlike

*1 Clement*, this author uses the prophet as a counterbalance to the faithlessness of the early Israelites. Whereas Moses acted with distinction in revealing the divine will for the chosen people, the Jews ultimately forsook their right to this covenant with God through their disobedience to the demands of that agreement. It is now for Christians to meet those same contractual demands in faith, thus to complete their true role as the people of God in a lifestyle of ethical piety.

The ethical agenda of the Apostolic Fathers is both broad and inclusive, featuring the essentials of traditional Jewish values and incorporating the best of Hellenistic moral concerns. The mixture of these elements is inconsistent, however, hinting at the diverse ways in which early NT values would ultimately become fixed within later patristic ethical values.

See also Almsgiving; Authority and Power; Didache; Martyrdom; Virtue(s)

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Clayton N. Jefford

## Armaments *See* War

### Ars Moriendi Tradition, Use of Scripture in

The *Ars Moriendi* (“art of dying”) tradition is a genre of devotional literature written to help Christians face death faithfully. Although some writings on how to die well predate them (e.g., Jean Gerson's *De arte moriendi* [c. 1408]), two anonymously written texts—*Tractatus artis bene moriendi* (c. 1415), and its abridged version, the *Ars moriendi*—are commonly recognized as the earliest works in the Christian *Ars Moriendi* tradition. Both enjoyed enormous popularity across Europe into the sixteenth century. They reflected the belief that one's disposition at death decisively determined one's eternal fate, depicting the deathbed as a place where Satan tempts the dying to faithlessness, despair, impatience, pride, and avarice. The texts offer practical strategies for avoiding each temptation.

The *Tractatus* makes little use of Scripture, drawing more heavily on liturgical texts and authorities such as Augustine and various popes.

Even when it instructs readers to model their dying after Christ, the text makes no direct references to the Gospels, merely naming five actions of Christ on the cross to be imitated.

Erasmus's *Preparing for Death* (1533) is far superior to the medieval *Ars moriendi*. Its focus shifts from dispensing techniques for outwitting Satan toward highlighting the need to live virtuously throughout life in order to die well. Erasmus's work is saturated with scriptural content; he draws especially on Pauline letters and other epistles to argue that trust in God's mercy and faith in the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection are the keys to sustaining hope in the face of death.

Erasmus uses biblical narrative (e.g., Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane) much more effectively when calling upon Christians to imitate Jesus in dying. He also highlights many passages about forgiveness (e.g., Luke 15:11–32; 18:10–14) in order to inspire readers to express forgiveness (a crucial task for the dying) and to strengthen their hope in God's mercy.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several distinguished theologians contributed to the *Ars Moriendi* tradition. Their use of Scripture varied widely, typically reflecting the theological commitments of each author. Thomas Lupset's humanistic *Way of Dying Well* (1534) is devoid of scriptural references, reflecting his confidence in reason and natural law, whereas Thomas Becon's *The Sicke Man's Salve* (1561) cites Scripture to support almost every point. A notable Roman Catholic work is Robert Bellarmine's *The Art of Dying Well* (1619), which focuses primarily on the sacraments and the cultivation of virtue but draws heavily on Scripture to support this emphasis. Bellarmine highlights Luke 12:35–37 as a reminder that death could come at any time, encouraging readers to prepare themselves to meet the Lord by living righteously. Texts stressing the relative unimportance of a world that is passing away (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:31; 2 Cor. 4:17–18) are also emphasized.

Perhaps the most sustained instance of scripturally grounded reflection upon death in this genre is William Perkins's *A Salve for a Sicke Man* (1595). Perkins considers the claim in Ecclesiastes that the day of death is better than the day of birth (Eccl. 7:1). Perkins proceeds systematically, considering whether death is natural or a punishment for sin, how death could be regarded as welcome when Jesus prayed to be spared from death (Luke 22:42), and many other questions. Perkins's main conclusion is that the sting of death is sin (1 Cor. 15:56); Christians should lead lives of repentance and trust in God's mercy in order to remove their fear of death.

*Holy Dying* (1651) by Jeremy Taylor is notable for its seamless integration of Christian and classical sources. Taylor calls readers to follow the way of the cross if they would learn to live well and die well. Christians should avoid a life of ease and instead, "Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection" (Jas. 4:9). Taylor asserts that those who fail to learn patience by enduring smaller hardships throughout life will find it nearly impossible to die well. He encourages readers to see suffering as a form of chastisement for sin; one endures suffering as a form of mortification of the flesh so that one's spirit might ultimately be saved (1 Cor. 5:5).

Taylor draws most heavily on Scripture in three sections on prayer and virtue. He says that one becomes patient by learning to trust that God hears the afflicted (Ps. 6:9) and shows mercy toward those who trust in the Lord (Pss. 17; 27; 31). The section on faithfulness draws more deeply from the NT, calling readers to believe in God's promise of salvation through Jesus Christ and to be confident that all sinners have Jesus as their advocate before God (1 John 2:1–2). The section on charity returns to the psalms (especially Ps. 71), offering expressions of love for God while calling to mind God's mercy.

Taylor's use of Scripture is emblematic of the way the *Ars Moriendi* tradition matured beyond its medieval roots. The tradition draws on a wide variety of texts that capture the central tenets and themes of Christian faith in order to make the case that only a lifetime's pursuit of deep, vibrant faith can prepare one to die well.

*See also* Aged, Aging; Death and Dying; Hospice; Suffering; Virtue(s)

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Christopher P. Vogt

**Artificial Insemination** *See* Reproductive Technologies

### Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is the science and engineering of making "intelligent" machines. While the term

is currently invoked at the interface of several fields, including computer science, nanotechnology, and robotics, it also enjoys a longer history as a theme in the world's literature, mythology, and religious traditions (McCorduck). From the "golden robots" of Hephaestus to the golem stories in Jewish lore, from the dreams of Dr. Faustus to the cautionary tale of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, from the cinematic adventures of Buck Rogers to Stanley Kubrick's darker vision in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the history of such musings provides a richer framework for assessing recent technical developments.

On the one hand, the issues raised by the aims of computer science to create artificial intelligence touch on, and at times overlap with, religious questions concerning human responsibility and accountability raised by technology in its broadest sense: what theological vision informs our judgments about the appropriateness of human efforts to alter or transform nature? Two basic interpretive perspectives, both informed by Scripture, have emerged in the Christian tradition. The first, more literally conservative in its implications, stresses the essential giftedness of creation and cautions us against reducing it to merely instrumental status. The second framework, recently elaborated in the language of humans as "created co-creators" (e.g., Hefner; Peters), appears more dynamic and open-ended in its willingness to view human efforts to transform nature, including human nature, as an appropriate exercise of our creativity. The realm of artificial intelligence also finds some parallels with recent developments in synthetic biology, whose express aim is to engineer new forms of biological life "from the ground up" that have never existed before in evolutionary nature. On the other hand, the realm of artificial intelligence also poses novel issues, because recent efforts to replicate human intelligence challenge us to reflect anew about the status of *homo sapiens* as a distinct form of consciousness and agency in the world. Such reflections include both descriptive and prescriptive issues, which in turn require careful theological scrutiny.

At the descriptive level, definitional questions continue to plague discussions. What do we mean by "intelligence" in the first place? Which functions or capacities are central to the way that intelligence is defined? Moreover, even if particular human capacities such as computation or memory retrieval can be mimicked in programmable machines, whether such functions can ever eventuate in an "awareness" that parallels human self-consciousness remains a matter of deep dispute among philosophers of mind.

From a scriptural perspective, questions about human uniqueness are centrally captured by a twofold emphasis in the Christian tradition: humans are made "in the image of God" and must be understood as unitary creatures comprising body, soul, and spirit. Both themes provide important correctives to certain tendencies at work in popular discussions of science, including artificial intelligence. The theme of *imago Dei* refers to our capacity to reason, but it also is tied to other attributes of God that we are meant to reflect: freedom, compassion, and covenantal love (*hesed*), and the capacity for relationship with others (Campbell). Any account of artificial intelligence that seeks to reduce or minimize the range of such human capacities in order to draw simplistic parallels between humans and machines will be deeply impoverished. The second theme, that of our unitary nature as creatures of body, soul, and spirit, suggests that any effort at thoroughgoing materialism will, of necessity, fail to honor the robust scriptural vision of our human nature and destiny as creatures who live the "already but not yet" character of the resurrection's promise.

*See also* Dualism, Anthropological; Humanity; Image of God; Monism, Anthropological

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B. Andrew Lustig

## Asceticism

Asceticism is the programmatic use of suffering or self-denial for spiritual or moral growth. It may include abstinence (e.g., from food or sex), renunciation (e.g., of property, political power, marriage, or social contact), or the deliberate self-infliction of pain (e.g., self-flagellation or the application of noxious substances).

### Scripture and Tradition

Scripture is not univocal on this matter, its voices ranging from the approving to the suspicious. Aside from the general fast commanded for the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29; 23:27), there is little in the way of divine commandment to fast (see, perhaps, Joel 1:13–15; 2:12–15), unless one sees the impact of the various Sabbath regulations as

a kind of economic asceticism (Exod. 23:10–12; Lev. 25).

More commonly, ascetic practices are narrated as voluntary and commendable. Fasting, the wearing of sackcloth, and the application of ashes are often associated with spiritual preparation (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2; Acts 13:3; 14:23), mourning (Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 1:12; 3:31–35; Esth. 4:3), petition (2 Sam. 12:16–23; Ezra 8:21; Neh. 1:14), penance (2 Kgs. 19:1; Jon. 3:5–8), or subservience (1 Kgs. 21:27; cf. political subservience in 1 Kgs. 20:31).

Ascetic practices are also associated with vocation. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist are obliged to follow the (normally voluntary) ascetic practices of Nazirites (Judg. 13; 1 Sam. 1:11; Luke 1:15; cf. Num. 6). In the NT, following Christ is so strongly linked with suffering—political persecution, sacrificial sharing, and personal restraint—that one may argue that Christians have a general vocation of suffering, the cultivation of which through practices of self-denial is not unwarranted (e.g., Matt. 5:10–12; 10:38; 16:24; Luke 9:23; John 15:19–20; Acts 4:34–35; 5:41; Gal. 5:19–24; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 5:5–7; 1 Tim. 3:2–3; Heb. 13:13; 1 Pet. 4:1–2).

Accordingly, church history is replete with examples both of “heroic” self-denial and of a suspicion toward legalistic or immoderate asceticism. Ascetic practices are associated predominantly with the monastic tradition, beginning with the ascetic feats of the desert monastics (e.g., Anthony the Great, Simeon the Stylite), continuing with the Cenobitic monastic orders, most particularly among mystic theologians (e.g., Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi) emphasizing the imitation of Christ’s passion.

The prophetic tradition, however, includes fasting among those religious rites vitiated by economic injustice or religious insincerity (Isa. 1:10–17; 58:4–7; Jer. 14:12; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8; Zech. 7; cf. Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees in Matt. 23:23; Luke 18:11–13). Aside from a preparatory forty-day fast, Jesus’ public ministry is not characterized by asceticism; his apparent sociality (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34) and his followers’ lack of fasting (Mark 2:18 pars.) arouse controversy. The early church seems to have practiced fasting (Acts 13:3; 14:23) and other voluntary asceticism (Acts 21:20–26), but Paul urges those who adopt any kind of ascetic practice not to allow it to cause dissension (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 7:5).

Thomas Aquinas, similarly, insists that abstinence be practiced “with due regard” for the moral and physical health of the individual and the needs of the community (*ST II-II*, q. 146, a. 1), and

Protestants have largely jettisoned the association of asceticism with vocation, eschewing mandatory celibacy and poverty for ordained clergy.

### Contemporary Situation

Many moderns find themselves to be heirs of William James, who, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, approves of moderate practices of self-denial as promoting a sort of healthy temperance and moral robustness yet regards with suspicion anything that does not observe “the golden mean.” Following James, many find themselves willing to acknowledge the medical and psychological benefits of moderate self-denial while still associating (what are seen as) extreme ascetic practices with psychological disorder.

Political critiques of Western capitalism, however, suggest that our success in the acquisition of wealth, knowledge, and power has led to an inability to sympathize with those who are suffering. What we think of as “reasonable” comfort, on this read, has been too heavily influenced by habits of consumption and leisure. Self-denial becomes a means both of solidarity with those who have no choice whether to suffer and of retraining one’s understanding of “reasonable” freedom from suffering.

Certainly, contemporary Christians can affirm wholeheartedly the medical, psychological, ecological, and moral benefits of disciplined self-denial. Yet the weight of Scripture and tradition suggests that Christians may need to be willing to imitate Christ in ways that are more threatening and unpalatable in a world that too easily strives for the dangerously comfortable.

*See also* Celibacy; Continence; Food; Self-Denial; Temperance; Vegetarianism

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Sarah Conrad Sours

**Astrology** *See* Divination and Magic

**Asylum** *See* Aliens, Immigration, and Refugees

## Atonement

The ethical implications of the cross are significant and numerous. Jesus modeled giving oneself for others and responding to violence not with more violence but with forgiveness. This article explores

the ethical import of the saving work of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

### *Atonement in the Old Testament*

The atonement has ethical implications even when its meaning is stated simply as forgiveness of sin and restoration of relationship with God. When God gave the law to the people of Israel, it included instruction on what to do when they broke the commandments. So too, biblical ethics today must address the issue of failing or falling short. The law, however, included sacrifices as a means of atonement not just to liberate from guilt and shame but also to restore relationship with God. Human alienation from God is the fundamental cause and result of sinful actions. To restore that relationship is therefore central to enabling ethical living.

To understand the full depth of atonement in the OT, and thus in the NT as well, it must be placed within the context of God's covenants with Adam, Abraham, and Israel through Moses. A covenant is a formal arrangement of mutual loyalty between two parties that states the nature and purpose of the covenant, the obligations of the parties, and consequences for failure to meet those obligations. Covenants were common in the ancient Near East at all levels, from covenants between nations to familial covenants. God's covenants in the OT had both formal and familial characteristics. Within a covenantal context people are not considered just or righteous based on an abstract standard or legal code; they are considered just or righteous if they are faithful to their covenantal obligations to other people and to God. In this covenantal context law and justice have a strong relational character. For instance, when one commits a wrong against another, the offender does not simply pay a fine or a penalty but makes a payment of restitution to the victim as a step toward renewing the relationship (e.g., Lev. 6:1–7; Num. 5:5–10).

God provided Israel instruction for sacrifices for a variety of purposes, including cleansing, purifying, and removing guilt. Placing them all in their covenantal context brings to light important observations. Fundamentally, the purpose of sacrifice was not to placate God but to restore broken covenantal relationships. Integral to the sacrificial act was an attitude of repentance and obedience, identifying with the animal and offering oneself to God (e.g., Lev. 1:4; 4:4; 6–7; 17; Ps. 32; Isa. 6:1–8). Through the prophets God communicated strong displeasure with sacrifices not linked with changed ethical behavior (Isa. 1; Amos 5:21–24). Atonement was not a matter of God's simply overlooking the sin because of the sacrifice;

rather, an actual restoration of interpersonal covenant relationships took place.

### *Atonement in the New Testament*

The OT provides key observations for understanding atonement in the NT. Atonement is real change, from alienation to restored relationship. Biblical justice and ethics are relational, horizontal and vertical, individual and corporate, and restorative rather than retaliatory. Through the lens of God's covenants with Adam, Abraham, and Israel, God proves to be a just God by working to bring salvation and thus be faithful to covenant commitments. On the human side, Jesus, in a substitutionary way, both suffers the covenantal sanction that Israel deserves and fulfills covenant obligation by living faithfully in ways Israel has failed. Jesus thus "enables a new objective situation, namely, the end of exile and the construction of a new kind of temple, indwelt by God's own Spirit" (Vanhoozer 400).

The atonement is foundational to ethical behavior through liberating from guilt and shame, restoring relationship with God, and giving the church the same Spirit who enabled Jesus to lay down his life for others. It is a mistake, however, to see the atonement only as precursor to ethics. To empty the atonement of its ethical character would potentially weaken an individual's and a church's concept of Christian ethics. If proclamation of salvation through the cross does not include an ethical dimension, it is too easy to see ethical living as a second step, or even an optional appendix, to the core message of Christianity. For this reason, it is imperative to allow the covenantal character described above to shape one's understanding of the atonement and to follow the NT in using a diversity of imagery to communicate various aspects of the saving significance of the cross. We will look at some of that imagery, highlighting its ethical import.

Imagery of redemption and ransom implies liberation from enslavement or captivity (e.g., Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:13–14; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:18). The ethical dimension of the Christian life is strengthened through following the NT writers in proclaiming atonement not just as liberation from sin and death but also as liberation for righteous living (Rom. 6:18). God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). Peter reminds his readers that they were ransomed from their futile ways and exhorts them to therefore rid themselves of all malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander (1 Pet. 1:18; 2:1).

The Pauline proclamation of salvation coming through union with Jesus has a similar dynamic—saved from, saved for. Through Adam came death and sin; through Christ came life and righteousness (Rom. 5:12–21). Paul portrays righteous ethical living not only as a result of the atonement but also as its means. Cohering with the covenantal dynamic observed above, salvation comes through Jesus' faithful obedience. He lives justly in our place, and through union with him we are justified.

Justification in a covenantal biblical context means not only to be declared free from guilt but also to be restored to right relationship. To be justified has ethical import through addressing the root cause of sin by healing our broken relationship with God. Through the covenantal lens justification also has a social dimension. To be restored in covenant relation to God also brings one into relationship with others—the covenant people of God. This social dimension is evident in that in the letters where Paul uses justification imagery, Galatians and Romans, he is addressing Christian communities struggling with questions of ethnic tension and identity. Who belongs, and on what basis do they belong? To use justification imagery to proclaim the saving significance of the cross reminds us of the central role of justice, right relationships, in Scripture. It also reminds us that restored relationship with God includes incorporation into the people of God. An expectation of ethical obligations to others within this community flows from this imagery.

Reconciliation imagery of the atonement also has vertical and horizontal dimensions with ethical implications. It is not God who needs to be reconciled to humans, but humans who need to be reconciled to God. Yet God takes the initiative and works through the cross and resurrection to make friends out of enemies (Rom. 5:10). Once again we see the “saved from, saved for” dynamic. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). It is not only through the cross that God models the same thing that Jesus and NT writers call us to do—love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14–21; 1 Pet. 2:21–23). Horizontal reconciliation, making peace between alienated people, is integral to and enabled by the atonement. The author of Ephesians, referring to the division between gentiles and Israel, writes that Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph. 2:14). Jesus takes two peacemaking initiatives: he tears

down the barrier of division, and he creates people with a new identity. He brings interethnic peace through the cross by creating in himself “one new humanity,” members together of the “household of God” (Eph. 2:11–22). Thus we are called to live out this reality and to follow his peacemaking example.

The NT provides rich and diverse atonement imagery. A weakness, however, of limiting thinking about and proclamation of the atonement to this imagery is that it too easily isolates the atonement from the life Jesus lived. Jesus' crucifixion was the consequence of a life in the service of God's purpose and in opposition to competing social, political, and religious powers. For instance, Luke's theology of the atonement is communicated not through a collection of images but rather through a lived-out drama of salvation. Ethics, a way of life, is central to the drama.

Jesus embodied the fullness of salvation interpreted as status reversal; his death was the center point of the divine-human struggle over how life is to be lived, in humility or self-glorification. Though anointed by God, though righteous before God, though innocent, he is put to death. Rejected by people, he is raised up by God—and with him the least, the lost, the left out are also raised. In his death, and in consequence of his resurrection by God, the way of salvation is exemplified and made accessible to all those who will follow. (Green and Baker 77)

Luke's theology of the atonement enriches our understanding of the ethical character of other NT imagery. For instance, it adds concreteness to the imagery that through the cross God “disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). Through the saving work of the cross and resurrection we are freed from the enslaving powers of death and alienation of “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Some of these powers are the same that Jesus faced, such as mammon, ethnic prejudice, economic and political oppression, cultural practices that define some people as of greater value and status than others, and a religiosity of exclusion. Other powers are more contemporary, such as consumerism and technology. The cross and resurrection free us to follow the ways of the kingdom of God and to obey God without fear of the consequences of disobeying these powers. They have been exposed. Jesus repeatedly confronted a religiosity of exclusion, climaxing at the cross. God, through the resurrection, validated Jesus' stance against the alienating power of religion. The ethics of the kingdom does not have a bounded character that creates a community

of exclusion. The purpose of this ethics is not to define who is “in” and who is “out” but rather to challenge and guide people brought together through their covenant relation with God to more fully walk in the way of Jesus and be the people and community that God created them to be.

Finally, the revelatory aspect of the cross is of both saving and ethical significance. The cross reveals the character and depth of human sin—what we are called to repent of. Jesus’ life and death reveal what it means to live authentically as humans created in the image of God—the life we are called to live. The cross and resurrection reveal that God is a God of radical grace and self-giving love. The ethical direction found in Scripture is an expression of that love.

*See also* Covenant; Cruciformity; Forgiveness; Judgment; Justice; Peace; Reconciliation; Righteousness

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Mark D. Baker

## **Authority and Power**

Authority and power are connected, contested, controversial concepts. “Power” denotes the energy and effective force residing in a person, role, or institution, while those in “authority” have a rightful charge to decide, to lead, and sometimes to enforce decisions. We speak of “spheres” of authority and “centers” of power, and we think in terms of vertical hierarchies, of being “under” authority or of having authority “over” someone or something.

Authority and power have long been topics of discussion and a locus of struggle in philosophy and theology, but such struggle gained intensity and verve in the twentieth century and continues into the twenty-first. For ethicists, both secular and theological, questions concerning who or what has legitimate authority, including moral authority, loom large. Philosopher Charles Taylor observes that people in modern secularized societies differ

from those in earlier contexts—for example, those of the Scriptures and the early church, the medieval church, and even the churches of the Reformation—in the ways people imagine themselves in relation to authority and in the ways we picture what it means to have power or resist it. No longer do people assume that temporal powers directly correspond to supernatural ones, or that earthly power or office signifies divine appointment or delegation.

In every generation there will be voices counseling obedience to authorities, ecclesial and secular. But the more nuanced and interesting stances have come from those in the trajectory of the apostle Peter, who, in the face of imperial prohibition of his teaching ministry, declared, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29). This has been a pivotal question: how do we discern in the moment whose authority is legitimate and when established structures should be resisted or reformed? Moreover, as the Christian gospel has spread around the globe, new voices and perspectives on Christian ethics and scriptural interpretation have entered the conversation. Significant shifts have come from those theorists offering critiques of power and querying dominant authorities. It is beyond the scope of this article to cover the entire global spectrum, but this article does focus on contemporary critical voices, some of them from the “margins.”

### **Authority and Power in Scripture**

The biblical narratives turn time and again to stories of struggle around authority and power. In the biblical witness, God has ultimate authoritative power. In the beginning, God speaks, and the world is created. In relationships with creation and with people, God displays the character of completely legitimate, loving authority graciously wielded. Through steadfast love (*hesed*) God demonstrates noncoercive exercise of power that is trustworthy and just. The narratives also tell of misused power and illegitimate authority: false prophets and ungodly generals, judges, kings, and priests. In stark contrast, Jesus comes humbly exercising divine power on behalf of others.

**Old Testament.** In the grand narrative of the OT, God displays authority and power via various roles: father and mother, lawgiver and judge, shepherd and gardener, king, warrior, conqueror, deliverer, authoritative voice. In each role, the distinctive character of God’s authority and power is displayed. The voice of God speaks, and creation responds. As household head, God provides powerful nurturing, blessing, and honor. As judge, God distinguishes the righteous from

the unrighteous, the just from unjust, and pronounces consequences for actions. As shepherd, God gives powerful guidance and protection. The military commander God wages war on the unjust, defends the cause of the poor and oppressed, and makes a safe place in which his people may dwell in *shalom*. The OT God as authorizing power delegates responsibilities to human beings: Adam is empowered to name the animals and to care for the garden; Abraham to father a nation set aside for God; priests to bless and intercede; judges to mediate; kings and governors to rule; military leaders to command; prophets to speak.

Moses preeminently embodies God-given authority characterized by several of these key roles: he is a shepherd, lawgiver, mediator, judge, general, and prophet. As the narrative progresses, questions arise: shall the people of God have a temporal king? How will the power of an unjust or ungodly king be confronted and circumscribed? There is perennial strife between priestly temple authorities and other temporal structures. More prophets arise, and while the false ones coddle ungodly rulers, godly prophets speak truth to power and to the people. Thus, the prophetic voice becomes an authoritative channel of divine correction and guidance. Throughout the grand narrative God's steadfast love (*hesed*) remains a major OT theme, the prevailing character of God's power and authority. That power is displayed as God liberates his people from bondage, and continues as God announces and demonstrates his purpose to heal the nations, to re-create and redeem humankind and indeed all of creation.

**New Testament.** Jesus is the Lord (*kyrios*, "ruler"), the king, the new Moses—both prophet and priest. He wields Spirit-authorized power (*dynamis*, "power") as he confronts earthly and cosmic powers. His healing ministry displays authority over material and spiritual powers and restores marginalized individuals to honorable places in their families and communities. Thus familial structures are recast, tyrannical political power is defanged or relativized, and oppressive religious authorities are confronted (Luke 20:45–21:4). A question arises: by what authority (*exousia*, "authority") is Jesus doing these things (Mark 11:28)? In the process of making disciples, Jesus models authoritative, gentle shepherding of God's people. He displays noncoercive power and authority that invites and does not force, that frees and then empowers. New associations are formed, and new power and authority structures are built, as the new family of God is to be governed by love that is self-giving (*agapē*) and fraternal (*philadelphia*).

The NT Epistles evidence struggles among early Christians regarding how to define and exercise their new power and authority within the church, in the face of established temporal authorities (temple and empire), and in a world full of spiritual "authorities" and "powers." Paul's teaching that Christ's rule is total and preeminent (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16) fits the ancient Near Eastern conceptual world, in which earthly authorities correspond to—mirror and express—cosmic, supernatural powers (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 6:12). In his character and message, the apostle Paul follows Jesus' example of self-giving leadership and of empowering the lowly (1 Cor. 1:26b–29). Paul urges believers to rely on the power of God (*en dynamei theou* [1 Cor. 2:5]); on this power the church is founded. And Paul wishes to pattern his own ministry and the shape of the church on the example of Jesus Christ's humble obedience (Phil. 2:5–11).

### *Authority and Power in Contemporary Ethics*

In twentieth-century Christian ethics, authority and power came to be seen as matters of personal and group identity and agency strongly flavored by sociopolitical and economic factors, and Scripture often was interpreted in that light as well. Social analysts noticed effects of dominative power—"power-over"—but they also pointed to its transformative capacity, and in ethics these social theories, especially conflict theories, shaped the focal moral questions. Accordingly, the next sections review some key secular theories, then trace their influence in contemporary Christian ethics of power and authority. Readers desiring to move beyond the thumbnail sketches provided here would do well to consult *Comprehending Power in Christian Social Ethics*, Christian social ethicist Christine Firer Hinze's more complete survey and assessment.

**Influential social theories.** The vision that philosopher and social scientist Karl Marx (1818–83) had of ideal society implies a normative judgment that dominative power over others is illegitimate and ultimately will wane as the people find and assert their collective power. Marx's penetrating critiques of oppressive power-over, especially in capitalist systems, so focused attention on the systemic social and economic aspects of power that today the concepts of power and authority are almost invariably framed in those terms, even by non-Marxist thinkers.

German lawyer, political economist, and sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) raised questions about the nature of social power and of the place of the individual agent in the modern rationalized,

“disenchanted” world that has undergone “demagicalization.” For him, rationalization itself is the greatest force shaping life in the modern world—the force that dictates that the norms for actions will be based on measurability, systematicity, and effectiveness. Many Christian ethicists work with or adapt Weber’s taxonomy of social authority, which identifies certain ideal types categorized according to their spheres of authority.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–75) distinguished between authority and power and saw legitimate, positive power in the human capacity to “act in concert” rather than via coercive command and lockstep obedience (Arendt 143). Arendt thus departed from the Western philosophical tradition, which she thought framed power as rule, hierarchical power-over. Arendt grounded her view of authority in the ancient Roman concept of *auctoritas*, authority foundational to a community and arising out of character, wisdom, and skill rather than relying on coercion or persuasion (Hinze 140). As Arendt critiqued contemporary society, she saw almost no structures operating in the public sphere with noncoercive authority.

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–84) shifted analyses of power away from the market and property metaphors, by which it was viewed as a substance of measurable and exchangeable commodity (Hinze 113). By contrast, Foucault pointed to “power relations,” dynamic and multifaceted forces that operate in human societies, with potential for positive transformative impact. He saw power as operant in human relations at a personal level but even more significantly at systemic, social, and political structural levels, where it manages to subjugate and direct people’s actions. Foucault thought that freedom from repressive and abusive power relationships comes only via awareness and resistance.

**Power and authority in twentieth-century Christian ethics.** Twentieth-century Christian ethicists and theologians interacted with these and other secular sociopolitical theories to develop Christian perspectives on the roles of individual agents in communities and in the political arena. Analyses of power relations and the nature of legitimate authority were key topics.

In the 1930s, French Roman Catholic neo-Thomist and personalist philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), whose ideas became influential especially in Latin America, developed a distinctively Christian vision of the common good created when power and authority structures enable whole persons—spiritual and material beings with relationships to God—to flourish. In

his vision, power-over can be beneficent when authorities recognize the sovereignty of God and adhere to proper norms, and in that case they have a right to be obeyed. When political authorities become oppressive or self-serving, they fail to fulfill their proper, essential roles and are rendered illegitimate.

The emergence of fascism in Europe presented exactly the kind of challenge that Maritain’s ethic attempted to address. The divine command ethic of Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) was forged and tempered in that context as well. The Barmen Declaration, which Barth drafted, declares Jesus Lord (“Führer”), pointedly rejecting “other lords.” German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45), a student of Barth, wrestled with how to maintain a faithful church even in Nazi Germany. He thought it important to distinguish between spheres of authority, to separate the church from the world. While Bonhoeffer strove against the secular kingdom in which he lived, he prized and cultivated the life of the Confessing Church, within whose fellowship he counseled humility and gentleness. Bonhoeffer acted on his convictions as he chose to participate in a plot to assassinate Hitler, for which the Third Reich executed him.

In the wake of World War II, Christian theologians assessed the churches’ roles in the buildup of the Third Reich and the execution of that conflict. German theologian Dorothee Sölle said that it was no longer appropriate to found a Christian ethic on the concept of obedience to authority and asked, “Is it possible to imagine a moral philosopher or theologian who would use the word ‘obedience’ as if nothing had happened? . . . The dangers of the religious ideology of obedience do not end when religion itself loses its spell and binding power. The Nazi ideology with its antireligious leanings proves the point that after disenchantment of the world, to use Max Weber’s phrase, there is still domination and unquestioned authority and obedience” (Sölle x, xiii). Sölle called for a historically aware, contextualized theological ethic of power and authority grounded in Jesus’ example of the self-aware yet selfless human being free to live for others.

For German American Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), the concept of power is linked with core theological issues of the nature of human identity (*imago Dei*) and the nature of reality itself (ontology). Love and justice are foundational relations, and both are fundamental to redemptive power. Beginning with the Genesis story of the fall of humankind, Tillich sees a human

tendency toward conflict and abuse of power resulting from the estrangement accompanying the exposure of our finitude, our lack of omnipotence and omniscience. Tillich critiqued other Christian ethicists for missing the relationship between power and love; he envisioned “creative justice” issuing from a collective life where in particular situations love, power, and formal justice were applied, symbolized by the (tranhistorical, immanent) kingdom of God. Still, he recognized a tragic necessity in human life for hierarchies and social structures that will at times be coercive (Hinze 202–3). Tillich’s analysis of power and authority was influential in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King Jr., and it has traces in the thought of some Christian feminists.

American Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) saw political will to power as both pervasive and potentially malevolent, rooted in human pride and ego assertion. As with Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr’s model for Christian participation in the sociopolitical arena was colored by a Lutheran two-kingdoms theology in which there is unavoidable tension between life in the secular world and life in the kingdom of God. He saw God’s spirit working within history but cautioned that progress toward realization of the kingdom would be slow. Niebuhr spoke of kingdom ethics as an “impossible possibility” (Niebuhr 2:246–47).

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68) wrote, “Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice” (King 37). Grounding his call for social justice in scriptural mandates and images, and steeped in personalist theology and the thought of Tillich and Niebuhr, King articulated a version of Black Power that critiqued both “immoral power” and “powerless morality.” Properly fused, power, love, and justice could be transformative.

*Liberation perspectives on power and authority.* The final three decades of the twentieth century witnessed the development of liberation theologies in response to oppressive social and political conditions and structures. These theologies from the “underside” focus attention on concrete social, economic, cultural, and relational contexts and seek to critique the power relations operative in each sphere. For liberationists, the central moral problem is systemic oppression in its particular local form, not a formal, theoretical problem or difficulty with belief in the modern era, as it was for Tillich and Niebuhr.

For Peruvian Dominican priest and theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928), biblical grounding for the call to liberation is deep in the exodus story and the kingdom of God, which Jesus announced and ushered in. God is on the side of the poor, working for their liberation, and Christians are accordingly called to solidarity with and action on behalf of the oppressed. The crisis of oppression has spiritual, institutional, and historical dimensions, and the liberating solidarity and praxis called for will also need to address each of those spheres. Similarly, Argentine Methodist theologian José Míguez Bonino speaks of “the active solidarity of love” that empowers the oppressed to break free from dominative and dependent social, economic, and political arrangements. Cuban American ethicist Miguel De La Torre says, “Solidarity that comes from making an option for the poor is crucial not because Christ is *with* the marginalized but, rather, Christ *is* the marginalized. In the words of the Apostle Paul, ‘Remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who for [our] sake, although rich became poor, so that [we] might become rich through the poverty of that One’ (2 Cor. 8:9)” (De La Torre 57).

In the vision of Christian feminist ethicists, the notion of authority is revised and recast. Patriarchal and sexist authority structures and assumptions of power are rejected in favor of egalitarian models. For American Baptist womanist ethicist Emilie Townes (b. 1955), “The concept of power that comes from decision and responsibility is one that entails the ability to effect change and to work with others. This power requires openness, vulnerability, and readiness to change” (Townes 86). Letty Russell (1930–2007) wrote of empowerment of individuals in concert with others and of power that authorizes legitimate power: “Authority might be understood as legitimate power only when it opens the way to inclusiveness and wholeness in the household of faith” (Russell 61). Moreover, willingness “to work for God’s covenant purpose of justice, *shalom*” is what qualifies people for inclusion in the power circle (Russell 36). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (b. 1938) moves the description and discussion of power beyond power-over associated with empire to “power for,” affecting transformation. Beverly Harrison (b. 1932), influenced by her teacher Reinhold Niebuhr, offered a Christian feminist power analysis: “Evil is the consequence of disparities of power because where disparity of power is great, violence or control by coercion is the dominant mode of social interaction. Evil, on this reading, is the active or passive effort to deny or suppress

another's power-of-being-in-relation. When power disparities are great, those 'in charge' cease to have to be accountable to those less powerful for what they do. Societies in which . . . some groups have vast and unchecked power and others are denied even the power of survival, are unjust societies" (Harrison 154–55). Harrison cautioned, "We act together and find our good in each other and in God, and our power grows together, or we deny our relation and reproduce a violent world where no one experiences holy power" (Harrison 41).

See also Autonomy; Conquest; Egalitarianism; Equality; Liberation; Liberationist Ethics; Powers and Principalities; Resistance Movements; Submission and Subordination; Tyranny

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Bonnie Howe

## Autonomy

The term *autonomy*, from the Greek *auto* ("self") and *nomos* ("law"), refers to the right of self-direction. It requires agency (the capacity to act as one intends) and liberty (freedom from external control). Originally a political term applied to self-governing nations, *autonomy* now more commonly applies to an institution or individual following a self-chosen plan. The autonomy of ethics indicates the independence of moral thinking from other influences, such as religion, culture, and tradition.

Ethicists as early as Aristotle addressed the political autonomy of the city-state; individual autonomy gained prominence much later, in the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant defined autonomy as the capacity to make moral decisions based on universalized maxims, without regard to external circumstances, potential outcomes, or personal desire.

Since Kant, the concept of autonomy has been applied in practical ways. In the helping professions, carefully crafted policies protect patient autonomy, preserving human dignity and preventing abuse where imbalance of power exists. In healthcare ethics, for example, informed consent protects patients'

rights to make decisions about their own health. In business and legal ethics, practices such as performance reviews and judicial action hold individuals and institutions accountable and assume the ability to self-regulate behavior. Politically, acknowledging self-government means rejecting paternalism.

Despite the importance of autonomy to contemporary ethics, however, theological ethicists caution that overemphasis on autonomy may lead to unchecked individualism, reduce human relationships to contractual obligations, and especially undermine human dependence on God.

Extending autonomy to the point of individualism is a modern Western tendency, whereas many other cultures subordinate the autonomy of the individual to the well-being of the community. This may create tension when, for example, Western healthcare ethics emphasizes patient autonomy to the extent that it disregards practices of corporate decision-making (common in many Latin American cultures) or protecting patients from the gravity of their situation (as in some Asian cultures).

Scripture affirms individual autonomy but also values community. The divine image and likeness of God in human beings (Gen. 1:26–27) bestows human dignity and demands our honor and respect for self and others. At the same time, human beings exist in community with God and with other persons. Only God has absolute autonomy in the sense of being free from all authority; human autonomy is always in the context of appropriate submission to God and to human authorities (Matt. 9:8; Rom. 13:1–4; 1 Thess. 4:8).

Indeed, Scripture always speaks of human autonomy against the background of our total dependence on God. The Bible also has much to say about how we use our freedom and toward what end. Romans 6 equates freedom from sin with freedom for righteousness, for example. The author of 1 Cor. 9 says that he is free but makes himself slave to all. Autonomy that is consistent with Scripture is not freedom to indulge one's self-interests, but rather freedom from all that hinders one's service to God and other persons.

See also Freedom; Healthcare Ethics; Image of God; Individualism; Moral Agency; Self

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Amy Renee Wagner