

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE ANTITHESES (MATTHEW 5:21-48) IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT:  
MORAL PRECEPTS REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE AND BINDING ON ALL PEOPLE

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This dissertation entitled

**THE ANTITHESES (MATTHEW 5:21-48) IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT:  
MORAL PRECEPTS REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE AND BINDING ON ALL PEOPLE**

written by

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Amos Winarto Oei

## ABSTRACT

While many may agree that the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of Jesus' ethics, many also recognize that the Sermon is often a riddle. The vastness and variety of literature demonstrates that the interpretation of the Sermon is subject to many disagreements. At the heart of the Sermon of the Mount, the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48) become one source of polemics in the study of the Sermon. The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the scholarship of the Sermon on the Mount by addressing two problems in the study of the antitheses. The first concerns the nature of the moral demands in the antitheses. The second deals with their scope.

The intention of the dissertation is not to expose all possible misunderstandings of the interpretation of the antitheses but to examine some of the hermeneutical options to see how the nature of their presuppositions predetermines the logic of their conclusions. I will inspect two aspects of the antitheses which are basic in the interpretations that are given by the Roman Catholics, Helmut Thielicke, John Howard Yoder, Leonardo Boff, and John Calvin. These are (1) the universality (the nature) and (2) the individuality (the scope) of the moral demands in the antitheses. I will then demonstrate that the antitheses constitute moral teaching, which God specially reveals to Christians in Scripture, and as such are universal and binding on each human person. They are also intended to prescribe moral conduct of individuals and not of States.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 is Jesus of Nazareth's most celebrated discourse. In the history of Christian thought, the Sermon has been considered the epitome of Jesus' ethical teaching and therefore, for many, the essence of Christian morality, argues Luke Timothy Johnson.<sup>1</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan further states that "a history of the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount throughout the past two millennia would virtually amount to an introduction to the entire development of Christian theology and ethics."<sup>2</sup> Even though the sea of literary works on the Sermon is vast, some modern scholars have attempted to chart the waters of the history of its interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, such is the fame of the Sermon on the Mount that it is widely considered to be the heart of Jesus' moral teaching.

### I. The state of the problem

While many may agree that the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of Jesus' ethics, many also recognize that the Sermon is often a riddle. The vastness and variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Sermon on the Mount," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2000), 654.

<sup>2</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 229. Cf. Pelikan's statement in his introduction to *The Preaching of Chrysostom*, that the writing of the history of the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, which includes all the references to the Sermon in the history of exegesis, would be a massive historical enterprise (John Chrysostom, *The Preaching of Chrysostom: Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967], 28).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harpers, 1960); Warren S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975); Ursula Berner, *Die Bergpredigt: Rezeption und Auslegung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979); Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco: Word Books, 1982); Clarence Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for Its Meaning* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985); G. N. Stanton, "Sermon on the Mount/Plain," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 735-44 and *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992): 285-306; and the latest *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

literature demonstrates that the interpretation of the Sermon is subject to many disagreements.<sup>4</sup> Otto Riethmueller even remarks that the Sermon on the Mount has had to put up “with more opposition, distortion, dilution, and emasculation than any other writing in the literature of the world.”<sup>5</sup> At the heart of the Sermon of the Mount, as V. Hasler points out,<sup>6</sup> the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48) become one source of polemics in the study of the Sermon.<sup>7</sup>

This dissertation will address two problems in the study of the antitheses. The first concerns the nature of the moral demands in the antitheses. The second deals with their scope.

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<sup>4</sup> Modern studies on the Sermon on the Mount in the Matthew, including the devotional studies and commentaries, are too numerous to list. As Warren Carter points out, in the last two decades of the twentieth century the scholarship on the Sermon has been vigorous in Matthaen commentaries (see the commentaries listed in Warren Carter, “Some Contemporary Scholarship on the Sermon on the Mount,” *Current Research: Biblical Studies* 4 [1996]: 183-215). There are also other scholars who have attempted to provide surveys and bibliography, such as: Martin Dibelius, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940); S. M. Gilmour, “Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount,” *Crozer Quarterly* 24 (1947): 47-56; Amos Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) and “The Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, vol. 7 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), 155-164; Hans Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. S. M. Gilmour (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951); Henlee Barnette, “The Ethic of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Review and Expositor* 53(1956): 23-33; Carl F. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), 278-326; Irvan Batdorf, “How Shall We Interpret the Sermon on the Mount?” *Journal of Bible and Religion* (1959): 211-17; Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. N. Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963); Eduard Thurneysen, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. W. C. and J. M. Robinson (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964); A. M. Hunter, *Design for Life* (London: SCM Press, 1965); Fred L. Fisher, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976); D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 151-57 (Appendix II); W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, “Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 44 (1991): 283-309; Lorin L. Cranford, “Bibliography for the Sermon on the Mount,” *Southwest Journal of Theology* 35, no. 1 (1992): 34-8 and Warren Carter, *What Are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994). Other works will be referred to in the course of the study.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Riethmueller, “The City on the Mount,” *The Student World* 30 (1937): 203.

<sup>6</sup> V. Hasler, “Das Herzstück der Bergpredigt: Zum Verständnis der Antithesen in Matth. 5, 21–48,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 15 (1959): 90–106.

<sup>7</sup> Other issues identified by Stanton in his survey of scholarship on the Sermon on the Mount are: the relationship of Jesus to Moses, the relationship of grace and law, the addressees of the Sermon, the nature of the Sermon’s language, and the place of eschatology (Stanton, “Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” 740; cf. *A Gospel for a New People*, 296).

### A. On the nature of the antitheses

While the antitheses seem to set forth an ethic of Christian discipleship, are these moral demands only intended for those committed to the way of Jesus or for all people? Cahill argues that if the Sermon on the Mount is intended for Christian discipleship, then the moral demands of the antitheses are only for Christians and the question of whether or not such requirements can be universalized is irrelevant.<sup>8</sup> If Oliver O'Donovan's thesis is correct that Christian ethics must arise from the gospel of Jesus Christ or it can not be a Christian ethics,<sup>9</sup> how can Christian morality be considered a universal obligation for all people and not only for Christians? Is there such a thing as a specifically redemptive-based morality, in New Testament terms, a distinctive Christian ethic?<sup>10</sup> Or, as James Gustafson states it, "Can Ethics be Christian?"<sup>11</sup> If there is indeed such a morality, how does one, then, avoid "double morality," namely, one for non-Christians and one for Christians?

An analysis of the various views of the representative theologians and the official position of the Roman Catholic Church reveals contrasts in their theological interpretations on the nature of the moral demands in the antitheses. There are at least three camps. The first camp, represented by Leonardo Boff, makes mute the question whether or not the moral demands in the antitheses can be universalized. This camp

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Ethical Implications of the Sermon on the Mount," *Interpretation* 41, no. 2 (April 1987): 156.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>10</sup> To borrow the phrase from Basil Mitchell, "Is There a Distinctive Christian Ethics?" in *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong: Essays on Faith and Reason*, eds. William J. Abraham and Robert W. Prevost (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 42-56.

<sup>11</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).



believes the antitheses are not intended to convey moral demands to be obeyed. The second camp, represented by John Calvin, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, and Helmut Thielicke, argues for the universality of the moral demands in the antitheses. The third and last one, represented by John Howard Yoder, believes that the antitheses are intended only for Christians.

### **B. On the scope of the antitheses**

After surveying the range of authors and movements from patristic to modern times, Kissinger concludes that one of the most difficult problems associated with the Sermon on the Mount involves its relevance to social ethics.<sup>12</sup> He does not give a definite answer, however, as to whether or not these demands are meant to have applications for “super-individual entities”<sup>13</sup> such as institutions and States. While Barnette has firmly stated that “there is universal agreement that the ethic of the Sermon is personal, individual, relating to man’s neighbor,”<sup>14</sup> more recently, there are those who confuse individual morality applied by Christians in their individual relationship within society with social morality for a State to legislate.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Warren Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 124.

<sup>13</sup> According to Henry Stob, super-individual entities are “more or less integrated human groups, collectivities, and communities” (Henry Stob, *Ethical Reflections: Essays on Moral Themes* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978], 4).

<sup>14</sup> Barnette, “The Ethic of the Sermon on the Mount,” 32. Cf. Herman Bavinck, “Christian Principles and Social Relationship,” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 131-2 and Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Ethical Implications of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Interpretation* 41 no. 2 (1987): 153.

<sup>15</sup> See Jakub S. Trojan, “The Sermon on the Mount and the Social Task of the Church,” in *Reformed and Ecumenical: On Being Reformed in Ecumenical Encounters*, ed. Christine Lienemann-Perrin, Hendrik M. Vroom and Michael Weinrich (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2008), 24-41 and John Battle, “The Sermon on the Mount and Political Ethics,” *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 22 no. 1 (2009): 48-56. Battle in his article even mentions that in YouTube there is a piece of speech by Barack Obama responding to the question: “Which bit of the Bible should guide public policy?” Obama suggested “The Sermon on the Mount,” adding it was doubtful that the U. S. Defense Department “would survive its application” (Battle, “The Sermon on the Mount and Political Ethics,” 48-9).

An analysis of various theologians such as Leonardo Boff, John Calvin, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, Helmut Thielicke and John Howard Yoder reveals that they do not answer in agreement on the question of the scope of the moral demands in the antitheses. Boff argues that the antitheses are a call to engage in socio-political liberation against oppressive social, economic or political structures of a State. Calvin and the official position of the Roman Catholic Church interpret the antitheses as intended to address only the conduct of individuals and not the conduct of States. Thielicke and Yoder insist that the antitheses can become a guideline for the conduct of States.

## **II. Thesis statement**

In this dissertation, in response to the first problem, I will argue against the bifurcation of morality into one for Christians and one for non-Christians in the interpretation of the moral demands in the antitheses. The comparative analysis in this present study will further illumine my own position by asserting that the antitheses constitute a teaching of moral demands which are binding on all human beings.

In response to the second problem, I will argue that the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount are best understood as moral demands only for the conduct of individual persons. By contrasting some theologians such as Leonard Boff, John Calvin, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, Helmut Thielicke and John Howard Yoder in their understanding of the scope of the antitheses, I will show that the antitheses are intended to regulate moral conduct of individual persons and not of States.

### III. Methodology

In this dissertation, I will read the text of the antitheses with the realization that others have read it. I limit this dissertation to four theologians and one official position of an institutional church. The theologians are Leonardo Boff to represent Liberation theology, John Calvin from the Reformed tradition, Helmut Thielicke to stand for the Lutheran tradition and John Howard Yoder from the Mennonite tradition. The institutional church whose official interpretation of the antitheses I will examine is the Roman Catholic Church. I employ a systematic method of description and analysis to explore the interpretations of these theologians and the Roman Catholic Church concerning the nature and scope of the antitheses. I do this in order to bring some contributions to the study of the Sermon on the Mount, especially to shed light on the universality and the individuality of moral demands in the antitheses.

Furthermore, as Robert Guelich concludes in his survey of the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount from patristic to modern times, there are generally two lines of interpretation of the antitheses, either a narrow, more literal direction or a broader, more illustrative one.<sup>16</sup> On one side, the moral demands are interpreted literally as a call for the church to be non-resistant (John Howard Yoder).<sup>17</sup> On the other side, the demands are read more symbolically calling for ethical and religious conduct whose application is qualified in the broader context of either: (1) First, Scripture that provides a hermeneutic, for example: the *usus elencticus* of the law (Helmut Thielicke),<sup>18</sup> the natural law theory

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<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Guelich, "Interpreting Sermon on the Mount," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 129.

<sup>17</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1972) and *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again: Sermons on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John W.

(the Roman Catholic Church)<sup>19</sup> and the analogy of Scripture (John Calvin),<sup>20</sup> or (2) Second, social revolution (Leonardo Boff).<sup>21</sup> The rationale and validity of this present study therefore lie in the need to resolve in a comparatively objective way the various theological interpretations of the antitheses.<sup>22</sup> My hope is to consider their best insights, to test them against my own and to contribute to the wider ongoing attempt to understand the moral relevance of the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the antitheses.

The purpose of the dissertation is to analyze some hermeneutical options in the interpretation of the antitheses. As a consequence, this project will systematically approach the antitheses as a unit. The intention is not to formulate a historical-exegetical interpretation or to comment on each antithesis. There will be some discussion on particular antitheses whenever it is necessary to explain the hermeneutical option of an author addressed in a chapter.

For practical reasons, the discussion of major theologians will be put in alphabetical order. Following the treatment of individual theologians, I will treat the churchly interpretation of the antitheses, in this case the official position of the Roman

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Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), *Theological Ethics*, vol.1-3, ed. William H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), and *The Evangelical Faith*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1-3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974).

<sup>19</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II (United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994).

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, trans. A. W. Morrison, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, trans. Patrick Hughes (New York: Orbis Books, 1978). Cf. A prologue entitled “A Sermon on the Mount of Corcovado” in Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 1-5.

<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Greenman, Larsen, and Spencer’s recent method whose survey explores the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount by different authors from patristic to modern times without scrutinizing their conflicting claims to validity (see Greenman, Larsen, and Spencer, eds., *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries*).

Catholic Church. The reason for this is to illustrate a move from an individual to an institutional interpretation of the antitheses.

In sum, the intention of the dissertation is not to expose all possible misunderstandings of the interpretation of the antitheses but to examine some of the hermeneutical options to see how the nature of their presuppositions predetermines the logic of their conclusions. I will inspect two aspects of the antitheses which are basic in the interpretations that are given by the Roman Catholic Church, Helmut Thielicke, John Howard Yoder, Leonardo Boff, and John Calvin. These are (1) the universality and (2) the individuality of the moral demands in the antitheses. I will then demonstrate that the antitheses constitute moral teaching, which God specially reveals to Christians in Scripture, and as such are universal and binding on each human person. They are also intended to prescribe moral conduct of individuals and not of States.

#### **IV. Terminology**

The argument in this dissertation requires some parameters in order to achieve its goal. The first parameter is on the discussion of the term “antitheses.” The second is the distinction between personal or individual ethics and social ethics.

##### **A. Antitheses**

Matthew 5:21-48 is a large discourse unit usually called “the antitheses.” Marcion was perhaps the one who coined the name.<sup>23</sup> He believed that in this passage Jesus was cancelling the Law of Moses and replacing it with teachings that were antithetical to Moses. But the previous passage (Matthew 5:17-20) demonstrates that Jesus is not

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<sup>23</sup> David Buttrick, *Speaking Jesus: Homiletic Theology and the Sermon on the Mount* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 94.

discarding the Law of Moses.<sup>24</sup> If anything, in Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus opposes a stated or an implied interpretation of the Law of Moses that attempts to evade the full intent of the demands of the Law. In none of the six antitheses is Jesus abolishing the law. This does not also mean that the contrasting, antithetical element should be minimized, as does J. R. Levison, who would translate the second element “*and* I say to you,” thus avoiding the contrastive “*but* I say to you”.<sup>25</sup> Hans Dieter Betz instead maintains the contrasting element in the sense that in the antitheses “the refutation... is not directed against what God has *in fact* said but against what he has *allegedly* said.”<sup>26</sup> Since the focus of the dissertation is Matthew 5:21-48, I will not directly deal with the exegetical issues of the relationship between Jesus and Torah in Matthew 5:17-20. I will instead follow many other scholars which regard the antitheses not as an abolishment of the Law but as an effort for the right interpretation of it, especially, in the light of the polemic of Jesus against scribes and Pharisees.<sup>27</sup> I will employ the term “antitheses” within this parameter of understanding.

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<sup>24</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). Tertullian reported that Marcion wanted to eradicate this verse (*Adv. Marc.* 5.14.14).

<sup>25</sup> J. R. Levison, “A Better Righteousness: The Character and Purpose of Matthew 5.21–48,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 12 (1982): 176 (171–94).

<sup>26</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3 – 7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 208.

<sup>27</sup> Examples are David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), 60; W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963), 102; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 120; E. P. Blair, *Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 114; Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 144; and Brice L. Martin, “Matthew on Christ and the Law,” *Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (March 1983): 53-70.

In addition, the present study will also not directly deal with and discuss the label “radical” which is often attached to the antitheses. The antitheses are often called “radical” in the sense that they are impossible to practice or impractical. For example, Karl Barth argues that “it would be sheer folly to interpret the imperatives of the Sermon on the Mount as if we should bestir ourselves to actualize these pictures.”<sup>28</sup> He believes that constructing a picture of the Christian life from directives contained in the antitheses has always proved impossible. The direction of the present study is not to show whether or not it is possible to live out all the moral demands in the antitheses. Instead, this dissertation only assumes that the antitheses are possible to practice.

### **B. Personal and social ethics**

There is a distinction between personal or individual ethics and social ethics. Personal ethics has to do with the development of one’s own character and social ethics is concerned with the proper ordering of the life of society.<sup>29</sup> In personal ethics, on one hand, an individual makes the moral response to the neighbor who is immediately present to him. This moral response is made directly, with a certain degree of intimacy, and not mediated through the structures and agencies of society. Personal ethics is concerned with human behavior on this level. On the other hand, social ethics pays attention to the social dimension of human existence. As a consequence, it is preoccupied with super-individual entities. It is concerned with the moral significance of more or less integrated human groups, collectives, and communities, such as a government or a State.

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<sup>28</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part 2, trans. G.W. Bromiley et al. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 688-9.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Stob, *Ethical Reflections*, 4.

The argument that the antitheses are only for personal ethics is set within this parameter of distinction. It is simply to say that Jesus delivers the demands of the antitheses for the moral formation and character development of individuals. The antitheses are only concerned with the person in his or her attitudes and actions toward others, and in the first instance toward those others whom the person meets in individual or one-to-one encounter.

## **V. Chapter survey**

The project of this dissertation will consist of seven main chapters. In the second chapter, I will analyze Leonardo Boff's understanding of the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount. Two things I will argue. For Boff, the antitheses do not provide moral precepts and he also interprets the antitheses as Jesus' call for people to engage in a social revolution. The third chapter is on John Calvin. I will examine his exposition of the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount and argue two things. First, Calvin interprets the moral demands in the antitheses to be binding on everybody, and not just Christians. Second, he understands the antitheses as applying to individual persons but not to States.

The fourth chapter is on Helmut Thielicke. I will examine Thielicke's exposition of the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount and argue two things. He understands the antitheses to primarily function as *usus elenchticus* to show human helplessness in keeping the laws and to reveal their sin. He also extends this *usus elenchticus* of the antitheses beyond individuals to States. The fifth chapter is on John Howard Yoder. I will demonstrate in this chapter that for Yoder the antitheses comprise both personal and social ethics because they reveal a life in the kingdom of God intended not merely for individual Christians but also for States.



The sixth chapter is on the official position of the Roman Catholic Church. The aim of this chapter is to examine an institutional or a churchly interpretation of the antitheses. The Roman Catholics argue that the antitheses are derived from the universal moral order – through which the Decalogue is also derived – and revealed to Christians to govern their individual moral conduct. The seventh chapter is where I will appropriate the studies of previous chapters to argue that the antitheses are universal moral demands. The eighth chapter is also where I appropriate the studies of previous chapters to argue that the antitheses are intended to govern the conduct of individuals. The ninth and final chapter is the conclusion. This is where I will draw some reflections on the project of the dissertation for further study and for its contribution to church ministry in the world.

## CHAPTER TWO: LEONARDO BOFF ON THE ANTITHESES

### I. Introduction

Leonardo Boff was born in 1938 in Concordia, Santa Catarina, Brazil. His father was a teacher who identified himself with the cause of the poor in Concordia. According to Deane W. Ferm, Boff considers his father a decisive influence on his life in helping him see the world from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Deane Ferm also points out two major experiences which lead Boff to embrace the theology of liberation.<sup>1</sup> The first was his work as a priest in the slum of Petrópolis, near Rio de Janeiro, where he came into contact with people who had to scavenge for food in garbage dumps and yet were able to hope and draw a sense of self-worth from their base communities. The second grew out of Boff's frequent trips to the diocese of Acre-Purus, in the heart of the Amazon jungle. In his travels to visit and minister to the poor villages, Boff realized that these villagers did not envision the church as a hierarchical institution. They knew nothing about Vatican pronouncements or bishops' conferences. Those two experiences had a profound impact to Boff in the development of his view of Jesus as the total liberator of the human condition. They have led Boff to write his book: *Jesus Christ Liberator: a Critical Christology for Our Time*.<sup>2</sup>

Harvey Cox mentions that as “an eloquent interpreter and prolific writer,” Boff is one of the liberation theology's prominent figures for the struggle for justice.<sup>3</sup> As a liberation theologian, Boff attempts to interpret Scripture and Christianity from the

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<sup>1</sup> Deane W. Ferm, *Profiles in Liberation* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), 125-27.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, trans. Patrick Hughes (New York: Orbis Books, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park: Meyer Stone Books, 1988), 11.

perspective of the oppressed, especially poor people. He argues that reflection on poverty in Latin America is, in the first place, a part of the necessary commitment that is a prerequisite to doing theology in that setting. Boff says, at the beginning of his study of Christology, “It is with preoccupations that are ours alone, taken from our Latin American context that we will reread not only the old texts of the New Testament but also the most recent commentaries written in Europe.”<sup>4</sup> He is convinced that to follow Christ in Latin America means to work to change the existing social, economic, and political structures. He works out this conviction by his endeavors to look at the message of Jesus through the eyes of those who have normally been oppressed, excluded and ignored.

One of Boff’s endeavors is evident in his understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. While he does not write a major commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, there are three writings in which Boff analyzes either some parts of the Sermon or the Sermon in general. They are *Ecology and Liberation*,<sup>5</sup> *Jesus Christ Liberator*, and *The Lord’s Prayer: the Prayer of Integral Liberation*.<sup>6</sup> In his *Ecology and Liberation*, Boff titles the prologue “A Sermon from the Mount of Corcovado.” The Christ of Corcovado is the famous sculpture that towers above Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro. Boff imagines the statue coming to life and preaching the Sermon to the city. Christ addresses the oppressed with compassion, detailing various types of exploitation that Indians, slaves, peasants, street children, and the earth have experienced. He declares blessed all those

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<sup>4</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Leonardo Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer: the Prayer of Integral Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983).

who struggle in their oppression: “You are all blessed, all who are poor, hungry, sick and without hope.”<sup>7</sup> This word of blessings, however, is not extended to the oppressors. Those people, like “masters of power, who have sucked the workers’ blood for five hundred years,”<sup>8</sup> are instead subject to curses and destruction. In *Jesus Christ Liberator*, Boff dedicates a chapter, “Jesus Christ, Liberator of the Human Condition” to argue that the norms of the Sermon presuppose love, a new person free for greater things.<sup>9</sup> In *the Lord’s Prayer*, Boff argues that an involvement in struggles against injustice can provide the impetus for one to his or her knees. He also explains that the Lord’s Prayer maintains the religious and political dimensions of one’s faith in creative tension, avoiding deadening reductionisms. For example, the petition “Give us this day our daily bread” has both structural-political and spiritual-personal connotations. “Heavenly bread,” Boff argues, “deprived of earthly bread, is incomprehensible.”<sup>10</sup>

William T. Cavanaugh has written an essay comparing Leonardo Boff and John Paul II in their interpretation of the Sermon.<sup>11</sup> They both consider the Sermon as the heart of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples. They differ, however, on their diagnoses of the evils in society. For Boff, as Cavanaugh identifies, the problem lies in poverty and human misery while for John Paul II it is in the personal desire to have an illusory freedom based on the relativism of the truth. Cavanaugh specifically points out that Boff interprets the Sermon

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<sup>7</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 63-79.

<sup>10</sup> Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 82.

<sup>11</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, “Pope John Paul II and Leonardo Boff,” in *Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007): 223-244.

to characterize a permanent crisis for all social and ecclesiastical systems.<sup>12</sup> Given the oppressive situation and the enslavement of the marginalized in Latin America, Boff understands that the Sermon does not reinforce social order but overturns it.

While Cavanaugh deals with Boff's interpretation of the SM in general, in this chapter I will specifically analyze Boff's understanding of the antitheses in the Sermon. Two things I will argue. First, for Boff the antitheses are not moral precepts. And secondly, Boff interprets the antitheses as Jesus' call for social revolution.

## **II. The antitheses are not moral precepts**

The moral precepts are universally binding moral requirements for all people. They are distinguished from moral rules. A moral rule is an application of a moral precept to a specific context. In this chapter, I will use the term "moral precepts" with law interchangeably. To show that Boff does not consider the antitheses as moral precepts, I will examine Boff's argument that the antitheses display Jesus' complete freedom before the exclusivism and authoritarianism of the law. He says, "In the Jewish religion at the time of Jesus, everything was prescribed and determined, first relations with God and then relations among human beings. Conscience felt itself oppressed by insupportable legal prescriptions. Jesus raises an impressive protest against all such human enslavement in the name of law."<sup>13</sup> For Boff, his interpretation of the antitheses as Jesus' "impressive protest" means two things. First, Jesus is against the prevalent exclusivism of his era. Secondly, Jesus is above the law.

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<sup>12</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, "Pope John Paul II and Leonardo Boff," 241.

<sup>13</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 63.

### A. Jesus vs. exclusivism

Boff explains that in the antitheses Jesus is against the Pharisees and the scribes of his era because they enslave people in the name of the law in which consciences are “oppressed by the insupportable regimentation of legal prescriptions (cf. Matthew 23:4).”<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees and the scribes indeed are not immoral people. They observe the letter of the law. They pay all their taxes (Matthew 23:6), they have the first places in the synagogue (Matthew 23:6), they observe fast and pay tithes (Luke 18:12), they appreciate religion that they build holy monuments (Matthew 23:29) and they are even passionate for their established system of life that they would travel the world in search of a follower (Matthew 23:15). The problem with them begins when they tie up heavy burdens of laws and lay them on the shoulders of others but then they themselves will not lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:3-4). They only want to make sure that the people observe all the law strictly but then they leave the people to their own. As a consequence, a social stratification emerges. On one side, the Pharisees and the scribes are “structured into the system that they created for themselves,” as Boff explains, “they are rich, well known, have religion, and are confident that God is at their side.”<sup>15</sup> On the other side, there are those people in their “marginalized situation within the socio-religious Jewish system,”<sup>16</sup> such as, shepherds, tax collectors and prostitutes (Matthew 21:3), who are not able to observe all the law strictly. Jesus reacts against this social stratification in his teaching of the antitheses.

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<sup>14</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 74-5.

<sup>16</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 75.

Jesus disdains the social stratification created by the Pharisees and the scribes through their law. Boff calls the antitheses “radical formulas”<sup>17</sup> because through them Jesus identifies himself with a conscience liberated from the oppression of legal prescriptions which divides people into classes of pious and impious. In the antitheses Jesus does not intend to engage in a polemic with the Pharisees and the scribes against their legalism or works-righteousness. What Jesus addresses is not their problem of legalism but of exclusivism. Jesus does not indict the Pharisees and the scribes of his day for their moral action but for their elitist action.<sup>18</sup> The antitheses demonstrate Jesus’ break from the social conventions of his era. He does not endorse the established order of his era which legitimates a social status quo which alienates people from one another and divides and discriminates people into different classes. In Boff’s words, “The present order of things [the religious and social order in Jesus’ era] cannot save people from their fundamental alienation. It is order in the midst of disorder. A change of life is required, a complete turnabout of the old situation.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus in the antitheses is especially against the class division or discrimination between the pious and impious established by the Pharisees and the scribes because of their blind submission to the letter of the law.

### **B. Jesus above the law**

Jesus does not only demonstrate his contempt of the established order which divides people into classes of pious and impious but also he shows his authority over the law which he addresses in the antitheses. As Boff argues, “Jesus comports himself as one

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<sup>17</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 73.

higher than laws.”<sup>20</sup> Boff interprets that in the antitheses Jesus shows superiority over the law not by appealing to other superior moral precepts.<sup>21</sup> The evidence of Jesus’ superiority in the antitheses is not that he has the authority to correct the corrupted interpretation of the laws by the Pharisees and scribes of his era. Instead, he is superior because Jesus “de-theologizes the conception of the law,” namely, that “the will of God is not to be found only in the legal prescriptions and sacred books.”<sup>22</sup> Using something outside oneself as a standard, such as laws, will require the person to alienate himself or herself from others who do not use the same standard. This situation will not happen when one chooses to look within oneself. Boff explains in this way:

The distinction between pure and impure no longer exists outside of the human person, but depends on you, on the intentions of your heart, wherein lies the root of your actions. In this regard, the support given by the crutch of law no longer exists. If we have purified ourselves, all around us will be equally pure (cf. Luke 11:41). The distinction between pious and profane works no longer exists, because the manner of practicing works of piety ought not to be distinguished from the manner of practicing other works (Matt. 6:17-18). *The true distinction is that which a person establishes in his conscience when confronted with God* (Matt.6:4, 6, 18).<sup>23</sup>

What counts now is not exterior categories and labels that people can adhere to or not, but instead, what matters is what is revealed in the heart of one who open himself or herself to God and to others. Jesus shows his superiority over the law by choosing to follow his own heart and conscience to open himself to God and others instead of choosing to submit to the law. This is evident when in the antitheses he does not repeat what the Old Testament has taught but instead he has the courage to rise up and say:

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<sup>20</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 82

<sup>22</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 76-7. Emphasis added.



“You have heard but I say to you,” (Matthew 5:21, 27-8, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). Jesus is “a person who boldly proclaims ‘I’,” as Boff explains, “without guaranteeing himself by other authorities from outside himself.”<sup>24</sup>

Boff’s interpretation of the antitheses, which shows Jesus’ superiority over the law, implies two things. First, Boff puts Jesus of the antitheses in contrast to the law of the Old Testament. And secondly, Boff understands Jesus to provide a source, other than the law, for people to look for the will of God.

First, Boff’s reading that in the antitheses Jesus is above the law implies Jesus contrasts himself with the law in the Old Testament. This is evident when Boff says, “The God of Jesus is no longer the God of Torah, the Law. He is the God of mercy, of unlimited goodness, and of patience for the weak who recognize that they are weak and start on the road back to God.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Boff commends St. Francis’s rule for employing a “minimum of law and a maximum of spirituality.”<sup>26</sup> In the antitheses, Jesus reveals himself as one who is liberated from the oppressed conscience by the law of the Old Testament and is now free to bend the law to the higher purpose of love, even loving the enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). The lesson of the six antitheses from Matthew 5:21-48 is the “liberty and nonconformity” of Jesus with regard to the law.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, while one may understand that Jesus is not completely against the law, one must realize

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<sup>24</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Leonardo Boff, *St. Francis: A Model for Human Liberation*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 101.

<sup>27</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 68.

that Jesus considers the law something which can easily be discarded, in Boff's term, "a crutch,"<sup>28</sup> once a person, like Jesus, no longer needs it.

Secondly, when Jesus reveals in the antitheses that the law no longer has an absolute grip in the life of people, he also provide them with a different source for finding the will of God. Jesus does not encourage libertinism in the sense one leading a depraved and irresponsible life. One might not be bound by the law, but one is still bound with something else. Jesus is the prime of example of this. The antitheses reveal a person who is not bound by the law but instead binds himself with something higher than the law. "The clear and juridical vision of the law no longer exists," Boff argues, "Jesus offers a clear objective, expressed in the Sermon on the Mount...Jesus permits us to observe traditions insofar as they do not harm but favor the principal objective (Matthew 5:19-20; 23:23)."<sup>29</sup> The principal objective, which Boff speaks here, is love. "The Pharisees do not wish to listen to Jesus because his message is disquieting, obliging them to de-establish themselves," as Boff explains, "it demands a conversion away from the safe and solid ground of the law and to the norm of a universal love that is superior to all laws (Matthew 5:43-48)."<sup>30</sup> Love is the principle which is other and higher than the law. The antitheses are samples of this creative love.

### **C. The antitheses are samples of Jesus' creative love and not laws**

Boff does not take the antitheses to constitute moral precepts which are fixed and require all people to obey. Instead, he interprets them as samples of Jesus' creative love

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<sup>28</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 75.

in his era. They are not laws but “a catechism of comportment for a disciple of Jesus, for one who has already embraced the good news and is seeking to construct norms that conform to the tidings brought by Christ: divine sonship.”<sup>31</sup> As a catechism of comportment, they only provide guidance or model for one to practice his or her love to God and others in each given moment. Love is higher than the law because it calls for creative imagination. The law can only restrain people’s creativity because they can only follow and obey what the law demands. Love, as an alternative to the law, allows one to exercise “the vigor of one’s interior decision” and “the responsible autonomy of those who know what they want and why they live.”<sup>32</sup> Boff believes that it is easier to live within laws and prescriptions that determine everything than it is to create a norm inspired by love for each moment.<sup>33</sup> In the antitheses Jesus does not give another law to restrain and burden one’s conscience and life but instead he only sets samples for one to make a creative decision. In Boff’s words,

[Jesus] does not theologize. Nor does he appeal to superior moral principles. Nor does he lose himself in a minute and heartless casuistry. But his words bite into the concrete world until it is forced to make a decision before God. His determinations are incisive and direct: ‘Be reconciled with your brother’ (Matt.5:24b). ‘Offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well’ (Matt.5:39). ‘Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matt.5:44).<sup>34</sup>

By providing love and not law in the antitheses as the source to find the will of God, Jesus is able to treat humans as human and help them to be true to themselves. As Boff explains, “In the important questions of life, nothing can substitute for the human person:

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<sup>31</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 82.

neither law, nor tradition, nor religion. People must decide from within, before God and before others. Because of this they need creativity and liberty.”<sup>35</sup> Only love can fulfill people’s need for creativity and liberty.

Boff further argues that Jesus’ liberty and creativity demonstrated in the antitheses are based on common life experience. “He appeals to sound reason,” Boff says.<sup>36</sup> For example, he commands that one should love enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). Why? Because all, friends and enemies, are children of the same Father who causes his sun to rise on the wicked as well as the good, and his rain to fall on the honest and dishonest alike (Matthew 5:45). Likewise, it is not good simply to say: do not kill, or do not commit adultery. Anger and covetous looks are already sinful (Matthew 5:21-30). Why? What use is it to combat the consequences if first one does not heal the cause (Matthew 5:22, 28)? Common sense tells people that it is better taking out the root of the problem rather than mere handling the surface. Jesus draws his teaching from the common experiences that all people can verify and not just some elite students of law. What Jesus brings is not something esoteric, something in which common people are not invested. Cavanaugh points out that Boff’s view of what Jesus brings to the people is “the ability to discover latent possibilities in oneself.”<sup>37</sup> “Jesus does not wish to say something new, merely for effect and whatever the cost, but something as old as humankind,” Boff further explains, “not something original, but something that is valid for all; not astonishing things, but things people can comprehend on their own if they have clear

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<sup>35</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 78.

<sup>36</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Cavanaugh, “Pope John Paul II and Leonardo Boff,” 228.

vision and a little good sense.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus invites people to understand and apply freely and creatively this common-sense teaching of love in the antitheses. He no longer demands that people obey the law, but invites them to love and gives them an example by the way he handles the law in the antitheses. He discloses to people what they are capable of but because they have been oppressed, blinded and alienated by the exclusivism and authoritarianism of the law, they are no longer what they are capable of.

The antitheses express this love. Jesus rebukes the exclusivism and authoritarianism of his era in the antitheses in order to announce the good news of love, namely, instead of social stratification, there is a fundamental equality: all are worthy of love. In Boff’s words, “[Jesus] does not preach any such system of justice that signifies the consecration and legitimation of a social status quo that has as its starting point discrimination between people... He announces a principles that checkmates all fetishistic and inhuman subordination be to a system, be it social or religious.”<sup>39</sup> This display of Jesus’ power in the antitheses is a call to his followers to participate in the new order which liberates them from exclusivism and authoritarianism. They are liberated from exclusivism because in this new order they are no longer divided within themselves between those who observe strictly the law and those who do not. They are also liberated from authoritarianism because they are no longer subjected to the requirement to always submit themselves to the demand of the law.

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<sup>38</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 84. Boff here seems to disagree with Gutierrez’s belief that the gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of completely new human beings: “History, contrary to essentialist and static thinking, is not the development of potentialities pre-existent in man; it is rather the conquest of new, qualitatively different ways of being a man in order to achieve an ever more total and complete fulfillment of the individual in solidarity with all mankind” (Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973], 32-3).

<sup>39</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 71.

How does one freely and creatively make love the principal guidance of life and moral conduct? Boff answers that such love “exists only in giving oneself to, and putting oneself at the service of, others” and that kind of love is “that we love one another as God has loved us.”<sup>40</sup> Boff and his younger brother outline some characteristics of people who creatively and freely express this love.<sup>41</sup> Like the Good Samaritan, they will act *comradely*, making liberation of others their own struggle, determining what sort of support they can give and how they can identify with the consequences of their actions however burdensome they may be. They will also be *prophetic*, denouncing mechanisms that generate oppression. They are *committed* to the oppressed for their liberation, traveling together with others who share the same vision, expending their energies in achieving it, and being ready to lay down their lives for it. They seek *freedom from* the schemes and illusions imposed by the dominant system, in order to be free to create with others more adequate forms of life, of work, and of being Christian. They are *joyful* to accept the price to be paid for liberation. They are *contemplative* in the struggles and resistance of the poor and lowly to find God in human history. Finally, they are *utopian* because they will not rest after advances or be disheartened after setbacks.

### **III. The antitheses are Jesus’ call for social revolution**

The previous section examines Boff’s understanding of the antitheses as expressions of love. Jesus does not require his followers to obey the demands of the law. What he requires is that they follow their own liberty and creativity in how they love God

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<sup>40</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 69.

<sup>41</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 93-4.

and others. If the law can help them to love, they may employ the law. But if the law is in their way of expressing love, they should not submit to the law.

This section deals with Boff's interpretation of Jesus' teaching in the antitheses as a call for social revolution. He grounds this interpretation on his conviction that Jesus is the Liberator. From the perspective of the oppressed, as Boff explains, "to worship and proclaim Jesus Christ as the Liberator is to ponder and live out our Christological faith within a socio-historical context marked by domination and oppression."<sup>42</sup> To understand Jesus Christ as the Liberator in this way implies two things. First, since Jesus is concerned with the oppressed, the antitheses have a social dimension and provide a stimulus for social revolution. They are Jesus' call to engage in social revolution to liberate the oppressed. Second, in this call for liberation the emphasis is on dealing with the social injustice instead of personal sin.

### **A. Jesus Christ the Liberator**

When Boff interprets that in the antitheses Jesus calls people to be liberated from the exclusivism and authoritarianism of the law, he further argues that Jesus does not only call for people to be creative and free in their expressions of love, but also to join his cause of greater things, namely, the struggle to liberate the oppressed, the lowly and the poor. As he explains, "The norms of the Sermon on the Mount presuppose love, a new human person and one liberated for greater things."<sup>43</sup> The antitheses, which are not law, are "addressed to everyone, inviting us to have extremely clear consciences and an unlimited capacity for understanding people, sympathizing with them, being tuned into

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<sup>42</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 264.

<sup>43</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 71.

them, and loving them with all their limitations and realizations.”<sup>44</sup> When people are liberated from the tentacles of the law that have kept them oppressed, they should also liberate others who are still oppressed.

The liberation Boff understands here is not only from personal sin but also from social and structural oppression. Boff says that there is a sin that is mortal, “the sin against the humanitarian spirit.”<sup>45</sup> He interprets Jesus’ invitation in Matthew 5:48, “You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect,” to mean that as God has showed his indiscriminate love without limits and as Jesus has lived out that love in his challenge to the oppressing structures of his era, his followers should also express and demonstrate this love by confronting the social oppression of their own era.<sup>46</sup> In Boff’s view, the situation in Latin America has striking parallels with the sociopolitical situation of Jesus’ time; Palestine too is suffering from unjust structures. Jesus preaches the kingdom of God and delivers his teaching in the antitheses as the start of a new age of liberation. In doing so, he aligns himself with the oppressed and takes on the Pharisees and the scribes who oppress people in the name of the law.

Boff illustrates the relationship between Jesus’ struggles to liberate the oppressed in his era and the same struggles people should have in their own era in his book, *Way of the Cross—Way of Justice*.<sup>47</sup> Written in blank verse, the book is a series of meditations on the stations of the cross, a traditional exercise of individualistic Catholic piety that Boff transforms into a communal exercise as well. He effects this transformation by offering

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<sup>44</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 93.

<sup>45</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 97.

<sup>47</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Way of Cross – Way of Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980).



meditations on each of the “stations” of Jesus’ original journey along the Via Dolorosa, all of which are followed by second meditations reflecting on the meaning of the station for Jesus’ followers in today’s world. The practice exemplifies Boff’s conviction that theology must have “two eyes,” one looking to the past “where salvation broke in” and the other looking toward the present “where salvation becomes a reality here and now.” The “way of the cross” focuses on Jesus’ struggles with the oppressed in his era, but the “way of justice” focuses on his followers’ struggles who continue Jesus’ passion today “in his brothers and sisters who are being condemned, tortured and killed for the cause of justice.”<sup>48</sup> The parallel between what Jesus suffered then and what his followers suffer today is meant to encourage the continuing efforts in liberating people from oppressing social structures.

If one is willing to follow Jesus, then one should also take on the social structures which oppress people so that they may be liberated. Boff calls this concern for the poor and the oppressed “the sacrament of brotherhood.” As a visible sign of invisible reality, Boff understands the sacrament of brotherhood to mean that one is a follower of Jesus whenever he or she joins the visible struggles to liberate the oppressed people, as Jesus has done. Boff interprets Mark 9:38-40 and Luke 9:49-50 to demonstrate that Jesus “feels his mission realized wherever he sees people that follow him and – even though there be no explicit reference to his name – do what he wanted and proclaimed.”<sup>49</sup> What Jesus wants and proclaims is the liberation of the oppressed. As Boff explains, on the Judgment day (Matthew 25:31-46), “the eternal Judge will not ask people about the canons of

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<sup>48</sup> Boff, *Way of Cross – Way of Justice*, viii.

<sup>49</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 95.

dogma, nor whether they made any explicit reference to the mystery of Christ while they lived,” instead, “He will ask if we have done anything to help those in need.”<sup>50</sup> Jesus Christ is for Boff the Liberator primarily for those who are socially oppressed and the antitheses are his call to engage in this liberation effort.

### **B. The primacy of social over personal**

Boff’s understanding of Jesus Christ as the Liberator and his call for social revolution in the antitheses is contextualized with the Latin America experience of poverty and oppression. This localized experience of poverty in Latin America provides a significant context for Boff and also predisposes Boff to deal with the social injustice as the first priority in his doing of theology.

While Boff recognizes corrupted individuals as the source of evil, he rather considers social structures as the principal carriers or motors of evil. For example, Boff acknowledges the personal aspects of sin (such as Paul’s list of sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21). He also believes that personal aspects of sin find their historical expression in the mechanisms of society, specifically that which tends to the accumulation of wealth by the few at the expense of the many.<sup>51</sup> For Boff, the personal aspect of sin is always imbedded within a social web of relations. He argues that individual consciousness cannot exist separate from the collective social unit:

There are not two conscious awareness, one individual (I) and one social (we). There is only one human awareness that finds elaboration and expression amid the reality of shared life with others (we). Individualism is a false understanding of the human being. The ego is always inhabited by others. The individual is always

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<sup>50</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 95.

<sup>51</sup> Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 99.

an abstraction. In concrete reality the person always shows up as a complicated web of active relationships.<sup>52</sup>

This is also evident when Boff, in his appropriation of the Sermon on the Mount as a Sermon from the Mount of Corcovado, does not at the first place argue for personal redemption of the oppressed from their personal sinful life. Instead, he puts in Jesus' lips this saying: "You are oppressed and victims of a corrupt society, so how can I expect you to live a life of perfect virtue or upbraid you for all your imperfections?"<sup>53</sup> Personal order will not emerge unless the heavy burden of social disorder and structural oppression is first lifted from the shoulders of the oppressed.

In Latin America context, Boff argues the structural evil which brings forth social injustice manifests itself in a socio-economic system called capitalism: "Latin America underdevelopment is not a technical problem nor a fated historical circumstance. It is the by-product of a socio-economic system that favors a small minority with wealth while keeping the vast majority of humankind in a state of dependence on the margins of societal life."<sup>54</sup> Churches in Latin America, in order to follow Jesus, the Liberator, as Boff explains, ought "to accentuate particularly the secular and liberating dimensions contained in the message of Christ."<sup>55</sup> These churches come to see that the problems they encountered are of a structural kind. Their marginalization is perceived because of the socio-economic character of the capitalist system. The desire for liberation is placed in a

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<sup>52</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace*, trans. John Drury (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 1942.

<sup>53</sup> Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Leonardo Boff, "Christ's Liberation via Oppression: An Attempt at Theological Construction from the Standpoint of Latin America," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 125.

<sup>55</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 46.

concrete, historical context. They look upon it not simply as liberation from sin but also as a liberation that has economic, political and cultural dimensions.<sup>56</sup> For Boff, the churches in Latin America are instruments of social change against the capitalist system. They are a liberating force that works for a new social order in which justice and equality prevail.

#### **IV. Summary and assessments**

##### **A. Summary**

For Boff the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount are not moral precepts or laws. Rather, these sayings of Jesus delineate a conscience liberated from the oppression of legal prescriptions so that the liberated people are able to make a creative decision in their life with love as their principle guidance. The antitheses are samples of Jesus' creative love and they invite people to be true themselves and marshal their creativity to imagine ways to love one another, including their enemies. They do not exemplify a new morality; instead, they are an exposition of how people, liberated from the oppression of exclusivism and authoritarianism of the law, should be. They call people to engage in social revolution.

##### **B. Assessments**

Three assessments are now in order. First is the question of a contextualized theology. Second is the primacy of social over personal. And finally, third is the contrast Boff posits between love and law.

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<sup>56</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1985), 8.

### B1. Liberation theology as a contextualized theology

Liberation theology attempts to interpret Scripture and Christianity from the perspective of the oppressed, especially poor people. In Boff's case, the social injustice in Latin America is the sole context of his doing theology. This is evident when Boff interprets the antitheses as expressions of love against the exclusivism and authoritarianism of the law which oppresses people. To interpret the antitheses or any biblical text solely from the perspective of the oppressed has its own risk. The risk is that liberation theology would not be biblically based but instead existentially based. Since the mandate for starting liberation theology is the need to address social injustice, then one can ask, is there a biblical basis for such a perspective, or does this perspective become the sole basis for scriptural interpretation? If the antitheses must *only* be read within the context of liberating the oppressed from social injustice, then taken at face value, this may indicate that the antitheses do not address the context of their own; rather, the context of social injustice determines the context the antitheses should address.

### B2. The primacy of social over personal

Even though Boff argues that the antitheses address a conscience liberated from the oppression of the law, he places more emphasis on their call to people to engage in social liberation. In treating the social dimensions of sin, does Boff also treat the personal dimensions adequately? Does oppression have only social manifestations, or are there not also personal dimensions of spiritual or Satanic influence (for example, the challenge of Spiritism in Brazil) that have not been given sufficient consideration by Boff? One wonders whether or not Boff's interpretation of the antitheses from the perspective of the oppressed is adequate and complete.

Furthermore, if liberation is primarily tied to social justice and theology has to primarily be committed to those socially oppressed, then Boff seems to argue that what God is doing among the poor constitute either a new or a continuing revelation of the acts of God, which in effect become the Word of God in the context of the poor. This historical contextualizing of God's revelation in the current existential situation, on the one hand, tends to negate any sense of concrete objective revelation, while on the other hand, tends to elevate the truth in the liberation theology to a position of objective revelation. Does the social reality of the poor determine our theology in any absolute sense? Does our interpretation of the antitheses pass only through the reality of the socially oppressed, or are there not also other biblical way stations that also ought to be taken into account? It appears as though Boff argues that biblical truth becomes meaningful only in the dynamic dialectic between the written Word and the historically rooted reflection of social liberation.

### B3. The contrast between law and love

Boff interprets the antitheses as free and creative samples of love. He explains that Jesus “subjects the Torah and the dogmatics of the Old Testament to the criterion of love, thus liberating human practice from necrophilic structures.”<sup>57</sup> This means that for Boff love is the only law there is since in ethics there must always be room for a basic imperative. Even though Boff does not actually deny other laws than love, for him love absorbs the law and virtually removes it from sight. Love relativizes all other laws, such as the Ten Commandments and the antitheses. As a consequence, Boff denigrates law, robs it of its importance, and renders it finally functionless.

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<sup>57</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 284.

By taking love as the only law there is, Boff minimizes law, reducing it to a set of rules which oppress people. This is an unwarranted denigration of law. Henry Stob points out that law and love should not be smelted together beyond recognition, but what is needed “is a loving obedience and an obedient love.”<sup>58</sup> Instead of contrasting to one another, one should embrace love and law mutually. Law, in order to rightly function as a guide, must be informed by love; just as love, in order to do the same, must be structured by law.

The next chapter on John Calvin will portray a contrast to Leonardo Boff’s hermeneutical option of liberation theology. In that chapter, I will discuss a hermeneutical option whereby John Calvin first puts the context of Scripture, in this case, the analogy of Scripture. He then argues against his opponents, the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics of his era, to establish the ongoing relevance of moral demands in the antitheses for everyone in personal Christian discipleship.

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<sup>58</sup> Henry Stob, *Ethical Reflections: Essays on Moral Themes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), 145.

## CHAPTER THREE: JOHN CALVIN ON THE ANTITHESES

### I. Introduction

John Calvin (1509-1564) is one of the most important Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century. One exemplary trait of Calvin as a Reformer is his passion for truth. W. Robert Godfrey claims the reason Calvin still matters today is because he is “a teacher of truth.”<sup>1</sup> To be more specific, Calvin is a teacher of the truth of God’s word. Richard Muller points out that Calvin understands himself as a preacher and exegete and the chief work of his life is to interpret Scripture.<sup>2</sup> He has produced commentaries on almost every New Testament book (except 2 John, 3 John and Revelation) and on much of the Old Testament, including the Pentateuch, Joshua, Psalms, and all of the Prophets.<sup>3</sup>

In one of his commentaries, *Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Calvin provides his most extensive exposition of the Sermon on the Mount (SM).<sup>4</sup> Several important studies investigate Calvin’s theological-exegetical method in his interpretation of the SM. Keith Boudreaux, for example, examines Calvin’s exegesis of the SM to show that Calvin is not promoting a stern and rationalistic approach to life and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Godfrey, “Calvin: Why He Still Matters,” *Evangelium*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2009): 2-4, 6-10.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>3</sup> See Donald D. McKim, ed., *Calvin and the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58-73.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956). In this chapter the quotations from the *Harmony* will not ordinarily be footnoted but referenced simply by noting in parentheses at the end of the quotation the page of the *Harmony* from which it is taken. The Latin text is available in the *Calvini opera* of the *Corpus Reformatorum* 73. 159-229. See W. De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 100 n.28. For a condensation of Calvin’s exposition, see Z. N. Holler, “Calvin’s Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Calvin Studies III: Presented at a Colloquium on Calvin Studies at Davidson College and Davidson College Presbyterian Church*, ed. John H. Leith (Richmond: Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1986), 5-20.



Christian faith.<sup>5</sup> Boudreaux's thesis counters Th. Engelder's claim that for Calvin Holy Scripture is the source and norm of theology only in so far as it agrees with human reason.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars, like Schlingensiepen,<sup>7</sup> Stadlund,<sup>8</sup> Holler,<sup>9</sup> and Spencer,<sup>10</sup> observe Calvin's broad competency as a biblical scholar in his handling of the SM. In their general assessments, they show Calvin's adeptness of patristic literature, his humanist training to uncover the original meaning of Scripture, and his dislike of allegorizing or spiritualizing interpretations. Holler specifically argues that Calvin's conviction of the unity of Scripture (the principle of the analogy of Scripture) underlies his frequent recourse to claiming Jesus' use of hyperbole in order to explain the meaning of the SM.<sup>11</sup> Spencer particularly discusses Calvin's handling of the SM as redaction critic, either noting that the SM comes from a variety of Jesus' discourses on a variety of occasions or emphasizing that Matthew gathered them together in literary collections.<sup>12</sup>

I will continue in the scholarship of several studies mentioned above through my analysis of Calvin's theological ideas and their applications in his exposition of a specific

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Boudreaux, "Calvin and the Sermon on the Mount: An Investigation into His Theological Method" (master's thesis, Regent College, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Th. Engelder, *Reason or Revelation?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 69-94.

<sup>7</sup> Herman Schlingensiepen, "Die Auslegung der Bergpredigt bei Calvin" (inaugural dissertation, Berlin, 1927).

<sup>8</sup> Von Hiltrud Stadlund-Neumann, *Evangelische Radikalismen in der Sicht Calvins: Sein Verständnis der Bergpredigt und der Aussendungsrede (Matth. 10)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Holler, "Calvin's Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount."

<sup>10</sup> Stephen R. Spencer, "John Calvin," in *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 129-52.

<sup>11</sup> Holler, "Calvin's Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount," 6.

<sup>12</sup> Spencer, "John Calvin," 137-9.

part in the SM, particularly the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48).<sup>13</sup> I will examine Calvin's exposition of the antitheses in the SM and argue two things. First, Calvin interprets the moral precepts in the antitheses to be binding on all people, and not just Christians. Second, he also understands the antitheses to apply individual persons but not to States or political governments.

## **II. Calvin's exposition of the antitheses 4-6 (Matthew 5:33-48)**

I will first examine Calvin's exposition of three antitheses: oaths (5:33-37); eye for eye (5:38-42); and love for enemies (5:43-48). Later, in part III I will contrast Calvin's interpretation with the Anabaptists on oath and on eye for eye. In interpreting the whole passage of the SM, Calvin explicitly refutes the Anabaptists by name in two contexts: the section on persecution "because of righteousness" (Matthew 5:10) and the section on Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37). The contrast will show that for Calvin the antitheses are applicable only to individual persons and not to States or political governments. On part IV I will argue for Calvin's universality of the antitheses by contrasting him with the Roman Catholics of his era on the interpretation of Matthew 5:43-48. Calvin's other adversary in his exposition of the SM is without doubt the 16<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholics. He explicitly refutes their theory of Christ's "advises" as opposed to commands in his exposition of love for enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

I will investigate two things from each of these three antitheses. I will first look at Calvin's confidence in the unity of Scripture when he explains and broadens the meaning of Jesus' commands in the antitheses. In other words, I will look at Calvin's hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture. And secondly, I will examine

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<sup>13</sup> Calvin's sermons on the Beatitudes have been translated recently into English. See John Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes: Five Sermons from the Gospel Harmony, delivered in Geneva in 1560*, trans. Robert White (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006).

Calvin's interpretation in each of those antitheses which will demonstrate that they are moral precepts for individuals to practice.

### **A. Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)**

It is obvious that to swear by the name of God and do it falsely is not a slight insult to God (Matthew 5:33). In this antitheses Jesus takes it further by saying "do not swear an oath at all" (Matthew 5:34). Calvin interprets it as a rebuke of an erroneous interpretation of the third commandment in Exodus 20:7 ("You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God") which applies only to perjurers and not to those who call on the name of God for trivial reasons. He argues that Jesus instead intends that "all promises and engagements which have been sanctioned by the use of the name of God" be honored (294). To understand the reason why Calvin does not take Jesus' command "do not swear an oath at all" to mean literally to *never* swear, I will examine Calvin's hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture and his interpretation of this antithesis to be a moral precept for individuals to practice.

#### A1. The principle of the analogy of Scripture

Calvin defines what an oath is within the context of Scripture. He argues that an oath, when duly taken, is a means of divine worship (it falls under the scope of the third commandment).<sup>14</sup> For example, in Jeremiah it is said, "If they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying 'As surely as the Lord lives' – even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal – then they will be established among my people" (Jeremiah 12:16). By appealing to the name of God and calling him to witness, one is justly said to declare one's own religious veneration of him. One acknowledges that God

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pu. Co., 1957), I.ii.23 (334).

is eternal and unchangeable truth and that one does not only call upon him in preference to others, as a proper witness to the truth, but also as its only underwriter, a discerner of heart who is able to bring hidden things to light. Since oath, as a means of divine worship, is lawful and even commanded in a case of necessity (for example, Exodus 22:11), Calvin argues that to take Jesus' command "do not swear at all" (Matthew 5:34) to literally mean to *never* swear will make God contradict himself, "by approving and commanding at one time" and "afterwards prohibits and condemns."<sup>15</sup>

Understanding that God would take oaths to be a means of divine worship, one must be careful that they do not contain insult or contempt. Calvin argues that Scripture cautions one's use of expressions such as "May God deal with me" (1 Samuel 14:44) and "I call God as my witness" (2 Corinthians 1:23).<sup>16</sup> Such expressions imply that one could not call God to witness without invoking the judgment-seat of God. For this reason Calvin admonishes that one should not only abstain from perjury, but also remember that an oath is not appointed or allowed for passion or pleasure, but for necessity, "where some purpose of religion or charity is to be served."<sup>17</sup>

#### A2. Calvin's interpretation of the antithesis "oath"

Calvin argues for taking an oath out of necessity for religious or charitable purposes because he understands humans in their fallen nature tend to abuse oaths. He even assumes swearing originates in the wickedness of human beings: "Whence comes the great propensity to swearing, but from the great falsehood, the numerous impositions, the unsteady and light conduct, so that hardly anything is believed?" (296). If honesty

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.26 (336).

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.24 (335)

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.26 (336).

prevails among human beings, if humans are not inconsistent and hypocritical, and if they maintain fairness, then there may be no longer any occasion for an oath.

Even though swearing or taking an oath has a wicked origin, Calvin argues that people should not condemn taking an oath in every instance: “It does not follow that it is unlawful to swear, when necessity demands it: for many things are proper in themselves, though they have had a wicked origin” (297). Everyone should indeed cultivate honesty and fairness in their words. Calvin says that Jesus’ command “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37) does not mean that people are not allowed to take an oath. What Jesus demands here is for individuals to practice “fairness and honesty” so that “there may be no longer any occasion for an oath” (296). When people can speak honestly, they do not need to always ask God to be their witness in ordinary engagements, affairs and promises. There are times, however, where circumstances demand people to formally ask God to be their witness. Calvin realize this and he gives some guidance on taking an oath, namely, as long as oaths “are not rash, indiscriminate, wanton or trifling, but that they may serve a just need, either to vindicate God’s glory or to further a brother’s edification, they are lawful.”<sup>18</sup> One example he gives is that if one’s reputation is imperiled because of others’ stubborn ill-will, one can without offense call upon God's judgment to make manifest one’s innocence in due time.<sup>19</sup>

### **B. Eye for eye (Matthew 5:38-42)**

Calvin recognizes that the *lex talionis* (Matthew 5:38) is a statute to be enforced by the magistrates. God commands judges and magistrates to punish evil-doers by

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<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.27 (394).

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.27 (394).

making them endure as much as they have inflicted (Deuteronomy 19:21). Calvin explains that in this antithesis Jesus corrects the error of using the *lex talionis* as an authorization for private revenge. According to Calvin, the subject of the antithesis here is personal retaliation. He distinguishes between two ways of resisting: first, “by warding off injuries through inoffensive conduct,” by which one prevents attacks from being made without doing ill to any person; and secondly, “by retaliation,” by which one renders evil for evil (298). The command, “do not resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:39), as he argues, means that Jesus “does not permit his people to repel violence by violence” (298). By forbidding personal retaliation, to resist violence by violence, Jesus intends to teach his followers two things (297-8). First, he teaches that Christians should not indulge in taking private revenge; and secondly, they should exercise patience since when they are injured or hurt, they should not break out into hatred or wish to make their offender endure as much as or even more the injury or hurt they have endured. To analyze the reason Calvin interprets the command in this way I will look at his hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture and his understanding of the precept “do not resist an evil person” to be a moral precept for individuals to practice.

#### B1. The principle of the analogy of Scripture

When Calvin explains that by the command “do not resist an evil person” Jesus teaches Christians should not indulge in taking private revenge, Calvin distinguishes between the evil one receives and the response one gives. To support this distinction, Calvin explicitly says that the best interpreter of this antithesis is Paul, who in Romans 12:21 admonishes Christians to “overcome evil with good” (298). Calvin argues that Paul

instructs them to respond to the evil they receive by doing good rather than doing the same thing or worse to the enemy who has done them wrong.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the instruction that Christians should not indulge in taking private revenge, Calvin explains that Jesus also commands them to exercise patience. Jesus gives one practical example in Matthew 5:40 that even when an evil person gives one an ordeal of lawsuits, one ought to be patient. Not only one should learn to forget the wrongs that have been done to him or her but also that even if the more the rage of evil people is inflamed and employs the lawsuits to oppress, one should be the more fully disposed to exercise patience. In Calvin's words, "when Christians meet with one who endeavors to wrench from them a part of their property, they ought to be prepared to lose the whole" (300).

Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:40 might appear to encourage Christians to denounce all lawsuits. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 Paul also seems to support the argument that lawsuits are universally condemned. Since Calvin is confident in the unity of Scripture, I will show why for Calvin Matthew 5:40 does not denounce all lawsuits and how 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 does not contradict his interpretation of Matthew 5:40.

Calvin argues that Matthew 5:40 does not denounce all lawsuits because if one always yields to the enemies what they demand, "such compliance would more strongly inflame the minds of wicked men to robbery and extortion; and we know, that nothing was farther from the design of Christ" (299). For Calvin, one is not entirely prohibited from engaging in lawsuits, provided one has a just defense to offer. With respect to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, Calvin explains that using this passage to support one's

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<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1947), 476-7.

disengagement with all lawsuits is false.<sup>21</sup> He argues the context of the passage shows that Paul does not denounce all kinds of disputes and lawsuits. Paul is only against a frenzy for legal actions prevailed in the church of Corinth to the point that they could not bear witness for the gospel to the unbelievers because of the intemperance of their dissensions. Their frenzy for legal actions also testifies that they are so easily moved by every kind of loss and not prepared for patience. Paul's exhortation in this passage in fact supports Jesus' instruction in Matt 5.40 because in this passage Paul teaches, as Calvin explains, "Christians should always feel disposed rather to give up part of their right than to go into court, out of which they can scarcely come without a troubled mind, a mind inflamed with hatred of their brother."<sup>22</sup>

## B2. Calvin's interpretation of the antithesis "eye for eye"

I have shown that there is unity of Scripture in Calvin's interpretation of not taking private revenge and in the exercise of patience. Now I will examine Calvin's moral precept in his interpretation of Jesus' command "do not resist an evil person" (Matt. 5:39). I will specifically look at his handling of "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Matthew 5:39) and on protecting oneself.

Calvin argues that the phrase "turn to them the other cheek" does not mean an encouragement for the evil person to continue doing their evil. He says, "Christ did not intend to exhort his people to whet the malice of those, whose propensity to injure others is sufficiently strong" (299). It would be unrealistic to interpret Jesus' command to mean that one should inspire the evil person to continue doing wrong or injury on him or her. Instead, Calvin argues that by this phrase Jesus shows "that the end of one contest will be

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iv.21 (668).

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iv.21 (668).



the beginning of another, and that, through the whole course of their life, believers must lay their account with sustaining many injuries in uninterrupted succession” (299). The upshot in acknowledging a possible successive suffering in Christian life is Calvin’s deduction that when one has been wronged in a single occasion, one may learn to be patient since such occasion often comes more than one time. This is one reason Calvin interprets Jesus’ expression “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39) to teach Christians to exercise patience. They are not only to bear patiently the injuries they have received, but also to prepare for bearing new injuries.

While Jesus’ command teaches one to be patient when wrong has been done; it does not invalidate the right to protect oneself by avoiding attack, particularly further attack. Jesus indeed “does not permit his people to repel violence by violence, yet he does not forbid them to endeavor to avoid an unjust attack” (298). Calvin explains that when one has in his or her power to protect oneself from injury, without exercising personal retaliation, Jesus’ command “do not resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:39) do not prevent one from “turning aside gently and inoffensively to avoid the threatened attack” (299). One example to protect oneself is Calvin’s exposition on Matthew 5:40 discussed above, namely, that Christians can engage in lawsuits as long as they engage with a just cause and without a desire to take a personal revenge. Otherwise, if Christians condemn all lawsuits, then to take that position would be to encourage robbery and extortion.

### **C. Love your enemy (Matthew 5:43-48)**

Calvin explains that with this antithesis Jesus brings forth the proper interpretation of the law in Leviticus 19:18, “love your neighbor as yourself, I am the

Lord.” Jesus is against the error of limiting the word “neighbor” only to “benevolent persons.” The word “neighbor,” as Calvin argues, includes the “whole human race” because “the charity, which God requires in his law, looks not at what a man has deserved, but extends itself to the unworthy, the wicked, and the ungrateful” (304). Calvin’s hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture and his interpretation of this command to love one’s enemies to be a moral precept for individuals to practice will explain the reason Calvin interprets the antithesis in this way.

#### C1. The principle of the analogy of Scripture

Calvin assumes that when God, in speaking of neighbors, includes all humankind because all humans are related by a common nature, namely, they come from one ancestor, Adam. Calvin refers to Genesis 29:14 and says, “Whenever I see a man, I must, of necessity, behold myself as in a mirror: for he is my bone and my flesh” (304). In his interpretation of Genesis, he explains that Laban should endeavor to assist Jacob because they are relatives. Calvin argues further that even though the bond between relatives is closer, the act of kindness, represented by Laban to Jacob, ought to extend more widely because the phrase “You are my own flesh and blood” (Genesis 29:14) points beyond the ties of blood between relatives to “all the sons of Adam.”<sup>23</sup> There are in Scripture itself, as Calvin shows, examples of the act of kindness beyond relatives to even enemies, such as, in Exodus 23:4 and Proverbs 25:21.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Calvin argues that when Paul brings under the rule of love in Romans 13:9 the two commandments, “You shall not steal” and “You shall not commit

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<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. John King, two volumes in one (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 128-9.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.56 (359).

adultery,” Paul must suppose that under this precept, “love your neighbor as yourself,” one is bound to love enemies just as friends.<sup>25</sup> One should not steal whether from a friend or an enemy and one should not commit adultery with regard to the wife of a foe not less than the wife of a friend. Calvin explains that if Paul does not understand the precept in that way, then Paul must contradict with Jesus’ command “love your enemy” (Matthew 5:44).<sup>26</sup>

## C2. Calvin’s interpretation of the antithesis “love your enemy”

Calvin substantiates his interpretation that the law “love your neighbor as yourself” does not contradict Jesus’ command “love your enemy” by looking at Matthew 5:45-47. Jesus’ command is based on God’s own character, namely, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Because God’s love is indiscriminate, Jesus’ command “love your enemy” is already within the scope of God’s command “love your neighbor.” Calvin explains, however, that Matthew 5:45 does not mean that “it would be becoming in us to do whatever God does” (306). He understands that “love your neighbor” includes “love your enemy” because one only needs to imitate God’s indiscriminate kindness to humans and does not need to wait until one becomes a god, which is in itself a blasphemy, in order to love indiscriminately. The command to love one’s enemy is a command which a human person able to obey without first requiring to become a divine.

Similarly, Calvin argues that in Matthew 5:45-47 Jesus employs “ordinary phraseology” to describe that “those who are devoid of humanity have some appearance of discharging mutual duties, when they see it to be for their own advantage” (308). He

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.57 (360).

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ii.57 (360).

explains that one should not understand those verses to imply that “tax collector” is the worst of all humankind and then concludes that one needs to become the worst in all humanity in order to love indiscriminately. Calvin clarifies that in those verses Jesus only shows that even greedy people, such as tax collectors who in Jesus’ era are the agents of the Roman Empire tyranny, can still love whenever convenient and advantageous for them (308). Since it is not strange for those kind of people to do that, it is practical for those who are called “children of your Father in heaven” (Mathew 5:45), Calvin argues, should practice to have “free and pure kindness, which is not induced by the expectation of gain” even to their enemies (308).

### **III. The antitheses are intended to govern the conduct of individuals**

I will now discuss Calvin’s understanding that the antitheses are intended to govern the conduct of individuals. This section will consist of three parts. In the first part, I will contrast Calvin’s exposition of oaths (Matthew 5:33-37) with the Anabaptists. I have examined and showed in the previous section that with his hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture, Calvin interprets the antithesis to be a moral precept for individuals to practice. He does not interpret Jesus’ command “do not swear an oath at all” to mean literally to *never* swear. The contrast with the Anabaptists’ interpretation will further establish that Calvin interprets this antithesis is for individuals to practice.

In the second part of this section, I will also contrast Calvin’s interpretation of the command “do not resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:39) with the Anabaptists to demonstrate this antithesis is for individuals to practice in two ways. First, Calvin argues that even though the antitheses are to govern the conduct of individuals, they do not

forbid Christians to engage in political affairs. Second, for Calvin the antitheses are not intended to govern the conduct of a State.

In the third and final part, I will examine Calvin's concept of the two kingdoms which gives the reason Calvin interprets the antitheses as individual moral precepts.

### **A. The contrast between Calvin and the Anabaptists on oaths**

#### A1. The contrast on the interpretation on oaths

I will analyze the contrast the way Calvin himself does. I distinguish between the image that Calvin had of the Anabaptists and the image that they had of themselves. It is the former perspective that is the subject of my project. I plan to limit my treatment to the image of the Anabaptists that Calvin has. I recognize that there are some historical questions, such as, whether Calvin distinguishes clearly between the various radical currents of the Reformation and whether he treats the Anabaptists properly.<sup>27</sup> Since my project does not aim to be exclusively historical, I have to lay aside those historical questions, however interesting, in order to achieve methodological consistency.

The Anabaptists reject and oppose the oath in strict obedience to the express prohibition of Jesus in Matthew 5:34. They conclude that all use of the oath was illegitimate for Christians.<sup>28</sup> Calvin disagrees with this interpretation. He argues that the Anabaptists have taken Jesus' words out of their context without carefully considering

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<sup>27</sup> The fact that Calvin does not cast into one mold the Anabaptists and the Libertines at least demonstrates that he intends to properly understand and fairly treat his opponents. See John Calvin, *Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982).

<sup>28</sup> W. Klassen claims that even though there are many Anabaptist groups of whatever theological position, the principle of non-swearing of oaths is "the one historic Anabaptist-Mennonite principle" (W. Klassen, "Oath," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement*, eds. Harold S. Bender and C. Henry Smith, vol. IV [Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1973]), 5 (2-8).

the occasion on which Jesus gives the command. He points out that the verse in question constitutes a correction to the error of those who misuse swearing an oath: “Our Lord Jesus in no way condemns lawful oaths that were permitted in the law; rather, he only repairs and corrects this license which the people, being badly taught by corrupt teachers, had given themselves.”<sup>29</sup> Calvin insists that by understanding the verse in the context of error-correction, the command does not categorically prohibit all use of the oath but instead only prohibits its misuse in perjury and unnecessary swearing.

Not only do the Anabaptists fail to consider the occasion in which Jesus gives the command, Calvin also points out they ignore the immediate context of the verse within the passage as a whole. He says, “The Anabaptists betray not only a rage for controversy, but gross ignorance, when they obstinately press upon us a single word, and pass over, with closed eyes, the whole scope of the passage” (295). Calvin argues that in the command “do not swear an oath at all” (Matthew 5:34) the phrase “at all” does not relate to the substance of the command but to the form and means, “neither directly nor indirectly” (294). Jesus immediately stipulates, following the command in Matthew 5:34, that one should not swear either in this or that way, namely, “either by heaven, for it is God’s throne, or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King...by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black” (Matthew 5:34-36). In other words, Jesus means nothing more than that all oaths are unlawful, which in any way abuse and profane the sacred name of God.

The contrast shows that the rift between Calvin and the Anabaptist comes in the area of hermeneutics. Calvin rejects the extreme approach of the Anabaptists in their

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<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 100.

interpretation of the antitheses, especially, on oaths. He indeed acknowledges that a misuse of the oath is shameful.<sup>30</sup> He does not go to the extreme like the Anabaptists, however, in using Matthew 5:34 to argue that the cure for the misuse of the oath is to condemn all use of the oath. Greed is a grievous sin too. But to forbid all use of money would be to insult God and censure him for his good gifts to us. The reason the Anabaptists take the extreme approach lies in their hermeneutics in which they set the New Testament in opposition to the Old Testament. Calvin, in contrast, emphasizes the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments.

## A2. Calvin on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments

For Calvin, the Old and the New Testaments differ only in the mode of administration, not in their substance.<sup>31</sup> Calvin's list of the five differences may be summarized in this way, that the New supersedes the Old: 1) by completing what was partial; 2) by exhibiting the substance instead of only the shadows of figures; 3) by a spiritual doctrine written on the heart rather than in literal and external form; 4) by liberty through deliverance from former bondage; and 5) by its universality in contrast with the older limitation to one nation.

Since the differences do not imply any changes on the substance of the two testaments, Calvin stresses the continuity of God's rule of life for his people. He believes that one should not understand Jesus' antitheses as an opposition of the gospel for Jesus' disciples against the law of God for Israel in the Old Testament. Calvin argues that Matthew 5:17-19 supports this continuity of the law between the Old and the New

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<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 93.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xl.1-11 (387-97).

Testaments (275-80). The specific references to the law and its continual practice and teaching until heaven and earth disappear in that passage make it clear that Jesus is not changing the law, but rather unveiling its proper requirements.

This continuity between the Old and the New Testaments guides Calvin to conclude that Jesus does not condemn the legitimate oath, but only censures the licentiousness of people with their foolish swearing. Jesus does not intend to abrogate the law of God given to Moses in the Old Testament. He does not add anything to the law but instead he interprets it in its true meaning.

In contrast, the Anabaptists claim that Jesus declares “the perfection of the law.”<sup>32</sup> Though the Old Testament is of divine inspiration, it was given only to the Israelite nation as a rule. It is the New Testament alone that is the rule for the Christian, for only the New Testament manifests the perfection of Christ. They argue that while in the Old Testament oath is commanded to be performed in God’s name; Jesus in the antitheses explicitly prohibits all swearing to his followers, whatever the reason might be. For The Anabaptists, the Old Testament law represents a lower level, inferior to the New, and has no authority for Christians.

Calvin is against the Anabaptists’ teaching that the Old Testament is totally different from the New Testament. He explains that the fulfilling of the law by Jesus (Matthew 5:17-19) does not mean an elevation to a higher level, but rather a progress in the history of salvation. “It has been a prevailing opinion,” Calvin says, “that the beginning of righteousness was laid down in the ancient law, but that the perfection of it is pointed out in the Gospel, but nothing was farther from the design of Christ, than to

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<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 95. See also *Schleitheim Confession*, article 7.



alter or innovate anything in the commandments of the law” (282). He especially dislikes the Anabaptists who scorn at Moses and the Old Testament law: “It is doing a grievous injury to God, the author of Law, to imagine that the eyes, and hands, and feet alone, are trained by it to a hypocritical appearance of good works, and that it is only in the Gospel that we are taught to love God with the heart” (283). Calvin challenges the Anabaptists’ insistence on Jesus as “the perfection of the law” by asking whether this same “perfection” had not also been required previously in the Old Testament. If not, then, for Calvin, to say that Moses, only partly and not perfectly, teaches Israel to honor and serve God is “a blasphemy.”<sup>33</sup> Instead of contrasting between the perfection of Jesus and of the law, Calvin argues one should understand perfection as “the grace of the Holy Spirit, through whom what is contained in the law is written and imprinted on our heart, in order that...not only we might hear what He commands us, but do it.”<sup>34</sup> Calvin acknowledges that the law can never bring fallen humans to perfection. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. In contrast to the Anabaptists, Calvin argues that the law, such as the command on oaths, as it was previously and as it is now, delivered and propounded by Jesus in the antitheses, has not changed. It remains to express God’s will for individuals to have a right living.

### **B. The contrast on the interpretation “do not resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:39)**

#### **B1. The contrast of socio-political engagement**

The Anabaptists argue that Jesus’ command “do not resist an evil person” obliges Christians to be nonresistant in their life.<sup>35</sup> Nonresistance is the proper way of life in

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 96.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 96.

<sup>35</sup> On the historical survey of the Anabaptist nonresistance, see J. Horsh, “An Historical Survey of the Position of the Mennonite Church on Nonresistance,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, vol. 1 (1927): 5-22.

obedience to the will of God. Retribution and vengeance have no place in the life of the Christian. As noted above, the Anabaptists are convinced that the Old Testament is inferior to the New Testament. Such conviction also lies behind their concept of nonresistance. In the Old Testament, civil law is on a lower level and leaves room for vengeance and retribution. But the spiritual blessing of the New Testament requires Christians to live according to the moral precepts of the New Testament, especially those delivered by Jesus, which supersede the Old Testament. Obedience to Jesus of the New Testament obliges Christians to refuse to serve in military forces. Pacifism expresses this nonresistant way of life. It becomes an essential aspect of the Anabaptist faith and life.

The Anabaptist conviction that the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament and that nonresistant is the proper way of life in obedience to the will of God results in the Anabaptist' insistence that Jesus' command "do not resist an evil person" obliges Christians to refuse taking part in political affairs. In their view, Israel of the Old Testament disciplines the disobedient with the sword and with the death penalty (for example, Exodus 21:12-17), the church of the New Testament, however, may punish only with the word of God and with the sword of Spirit.<sup>36</sup> The sword of the Old Testament theocracy is not transferred to the church. The Anabaptists concede that the sinful world needs a government that deals strongly with the evildoers. They view, however, the government, as ordained to maintain order in a world, is essentially evil. Calvin says that the Anabaptists believe "The office of the sword has no place at all in Christianity."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Schleitheim Confession*, article 6.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, *Treaties*, 80.

They consider state politics to lie outside the purview of the New Testament.

Consequently, they hold that a Christian may fill no role in the state.

In contrast, Calvin argues that in his command “do not resist an evil person” Jesus does not intend to forbid Christians to engage in political affairs. He argues that “our Lord Jesus was not to add anything to it, but solely to restore the true meaning of the law in its entirety, which the rabbis had reversed by their false glosses.”<sup>38</sup> As noted above, Calvin interprets that in this antithesis Jesus corrects the error of using the *lex talionis* as an authorization for private revenge. Calvin is against the Anabaptists’ use of Matt.5:30 to support their teaching that individual Christians should withdraw from their social responsibilities to the State. He argues instead, for example, that a Christian should not refuse to serve in the military: “The Christian man, if according to the order of his country is called to serve his prince, not only does not offend God in taking up arms, but also fulfills a holy vocation, which cannot be reprovved without blaspheming God.”<sup>39</sup>

## B2. The contrast of scope

Humans are by nature social. When one acts, others are unavoidably affected by the action. One’s choices and decisions have social consequences. Jesus’ command “do not resist an evil person” is interpersonal in this way since it concerns with one’s action toward others. The command is concerned with the moral response an individual makes to the neighbor who is immediately present to him or her. The response is not mediated through the structures and agencies of societies, but a response made directly and with a certain degree of intimacy. The problem I will discuss in this section is whether or not the

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<sup>38</sup> Calvin, *Treaties*, 78.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Treaties*, 73.

moral significance of the command can be extended beyond interpersonal relationship to institutional or super-individual community relationship. By contrasting Calvin with the Anabaptists, I will show that for Calvin the command “do not resist an evil person” is only concerned with individuals and not with States or political governments.

As noted above, the Anabaptists argue that Jesus’ command “do not resist an evil person” forbids Christians to use violence and weapons. Christians should not participate in their socio-political affairs since those affairs legitimate the use of weapon and violence. Calvin grants that the Anabaptist intention is good. He explains that the duty of Christians is “suffer patiently when someone offends us rather than to use force and violence” and that the weapons of Christians are “prayer and gentleness in order to pass their days.”<sup>40</sup> Calvin, however, rejects that the command in Matthew 5:39 implies such withdrawal from socio-political affairs.

The Anabaptists not only interpret Matthew 5:39 to forbid individual Christians to engage in political affairs, they also argue that with this command the juridical law in the state is eradicated because the more perfect law, delivered by Jesus, is established in his church. They say, “We hold that the sword is an ordinance of God, outside the perfection of Christ. Hence the princes and authorities of the world are ordained to punish the wicked and to put them to death. But in the perfection of Christ, the ban is the heaviest penalty, without corporal death.”<sup>41</sup> The Anabaptists consider Matthew 5:39 to have moral significance beyond interpersonal relationship to institutional or super-individual community relationship. While they concede the state must use weapon and violence,

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<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> *Schleitheim Confession*, article 6.

they universally condemn the use of weapon and violence by individual and institutional because Jesus Christ has come and delivered a higher and more perfect law which requires the dissolution of violence and the use of weapon.

Calvin explains that the Anabaptist acknowledgement that the state must use violence but at the same time also condemn the use of violence is “the convenient ruse” they use to show that they still “honored principalities and lordships” so that they can avoid the charge that they are “forms of brigandage.”<sup>42</sup> Calvin argues against this and he rebukes the Anabaptists that “to condemn the public sword which God ordained for our protection is a blasphemy against God himself.”<sup>43</sup> He argues that Jesus’ command “do not resist an evil person” does not mean to “mete out corporal punishment” because “his office is to forgive sins and to address His Word to the consciences of sinners.”<sup>44</sup> To understand the basis of Calvin’s argument, I will examine Calvin’s concept of two kingdoms.

### **C. A short analysis on Calvin’s concept of the two kingdoms**

Calvin believes that there are two kingdoms or governments with distinct purposes, yet that both are legitimate and divinely ordained. The spiritual kingdom pertains to heavenly and eternal matters while the earthly kingdom educates citizens for duties of citizenship and humanity.<sup>45</sup> The civil government or magistrates govern the earthly kingdom and the ecclesiastical government is to exercise authority over the

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<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 76-7.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 84.

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xix.15 (140).

spiritual kingdom. Calvin insists that to confuse these two kingdoms is to make an error of large proportions. He explains:

By attending to this distinction, we will not erroneously transfer the doctrine of the gospel concerning spiritual liberty to civil order, as if in regard to external government Christians were less subject to human laws, because their consciences are unbound before God, as if they were exempted from all carnal services, because in regard to the Spirit they are free.<sup>46</sup>

In opposition to the Anabaptists, Calvin believes that the formation of the church in the New Testament is not a testimony that the fallen created civic order is dispensable. Christians are to live and participate in this earthly kingdom even though it means that they live in a world infected with disorder.

For Calvin, the two kingdoms are so distinct that when people think about one kingdom they should suspend their minds from thinking about the other. He explicitly states that “when the one is considered, we should call off our minds and not allow them to think the other.”<sup>47</sup> There are at least two implications of this view. First, the spiritual kingdom has nothing to do with earthly laws. This kingdom consists not in earthly delights, but in renouncing the worldly temptations. Christians can endure the horrible suffering of the present life because they know that the spiritual kingdom is only concerned with the life of heaven.<sup>48</sup> For now, Christians are pilgrims on earth, maintaining hope in a heavenly kingdom. Second, since the spiritual kingdom is by nature spiritual, Christians need not worry when Scripture fails to give guidelines about civil matters. For example, since the New Testament is concerned with establishing the

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<sup>46</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xix.15 (141).

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xix.15 (140).

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xv.3-5 (427-31).

spiritual kingdom rather than civil polity, the New Testament does not give a warrant for warfare. Calvin argues that the New Testament's silence is no objection to the legitimacy of war.<sup>49</sup> Christians need not think that the earthly kingdom must assume a particular form in order for the spiritual kingdom may flourish. They may abide in all sorts of earthly conditions without fear of separation from the spiritual kingdom.

The analysis of Calvin's view of the two kingdoms illumines the reason Calvin does not interpret Jesus' command "do not resist an evil person" to forbid Christians to engage in social-political affairs. Calvin argues that Jesus does not condemn the use of weapons, which is legitimate for the earthly kingdom. Instead, Jesus addresses the matters of spiritual kingdom, namely, the evil desires and the corruption of people, who make it necessary to use any weapon to retaliate, as demonstrated in taking a personal vengeance. This two-kingdom concept also grounds Calvin's interpretation that Jesus does not give laws to the earthly kingdom or political institutions in his antitheses. He explains that Jesus "did want to change anything about the government or the civil order...He made his office, for which He came into the world, that of forgiving sins."<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the Anabaptists who consider the antithesis "do not resist an evil person" not only to govern the conduct of individuals but also of States, Calvin interprets the antithesis only as an individual moral precept.

#### **IV. The antitheses are binding on all people**

I have shown in the previous section that Calvin, in contrast to the Anabaptists, interprets the antitheses to yield moral precepts for individuals. In this section, I will first

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xx.12 (661-2).

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Treatises*, 83.

contrast Calvin's interpretation with the Roman Catholics of his era on the command "love for enemies" (Matthew 5:43) to show that Calvin understands the moral precepts in the antitheses as binding on all Christians. I will then examine Calvin's understanding of morality to argue that the moral precepts in the antitheses are binding not only on Christians but also on everyone.

#### **A. The contrast on the interpretation of love for enemies**

The Roman Catholics of his era, as Calvin points out, understand that Jesus' teaching "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:43) is only an advice or a counsel (305). Since "love your enemies" is only an advice, a person is free to obey or disobey it. Christians are not obliged to observe it. The Roman Catholics argue for this interpretation because they think this teaching is too heavy and burdensome for Christians to conform. They only assign this as "the necessary observance" to the monks, "who were made more righteous than ordinary Christians, by the simple circumstance of voluntarily binding themselves to obey counsels."<sup>51</sup>

Calvin argues against this interpretation for three reasons. First, he explains that there is no distinction in the Scripture itself between laws and counsels. He shows that even in the Old Testament one is required, not advised, to love his or her enemies, such as to feed them or bring back their ox or donkey if one meets it going astray (Proverbs 25:21; Exodus 23:4). Calvin says that the Scripture clearly establishes "the Lord as a Lawgiver, not falsely feign him to be merely a counselor."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.56 (359).

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.56 (360).



Second, Calvin also argues that to distinguish between counsels and precepts on the basis of human weakness is in itself a weak reason. Calvin recognizes that by nature to obey God's law is difficult for fallen humans. It does not mean, however, that people should make an excuse from this to determine "what they owe to God and to his law" (305). The Roman Catholics of Calvin's era have made this mistake by interpreting the teaching on "love your enemies" on the basis of anthropological reason, namely, human shortcomings. Since they think Jesus' teaching "love your enemies" is a burden too difficult for Christians to bear, it is not a law for all Christians to obey. In reply, Calvin satirically asks them whether they should not also consider the teaching "to love the Lord with all the heart, and soul and strength" as an advice because "compared with this Law, there is none which may not seem easy, whether it be to love our enemy, or to banish every feeling of revenge from our minds."<sup>53</sup> In contrast to their anthropological approach, Calvin interprets Jesus' teaching "love your enemies" theologically. He argues that one should not employ human shortcomings as an excuse to disobey God because "the justice of God ought to stand higher in our estimation, than all that we reckon most precious and valuable" (291). If God remains to be God, human standard such as their shortcomings, should not become God's standard. Calvin strengthens his case by arguing that Jesus' words "but I say to you" in the antitheses can only mean "I command" (306). He says, "It is his to give what he orders, and to order what he wills."<sup>54</sup> If the Roman Catholics of Calvin's era identify "love your enemies" merely as an advice or counsel, then they need

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<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.56 (360).

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.56 (360).

to be consistent in their interpretation. Every teaching in the antitheses should be counsels and not precepts.

Third, Calvin finally points out that the consequence of the Roman Catholics of his era's distinction between counsel and precept on this antithesis is that "monks alone will dare to invoke God as their Father."<sup>55</sup> The logic is simple. Matthew 5:45, "that you may be children of your Father in heaven" immediately follow Jesus' command on "love your enemy." Calvin explains that Matthew 5:45 mean "whoever shall wish to be accounted a Christian, let him love his enemies" (306). If only monks are required to observe this teaching, Calvin then argues that "everyone who neglects it is struck out of the number of the children of God" (306). The further outcome is that ordinary Christians are basically "confined to heathens and publicans"<sup>56</sup> because Jesus in Matthew 5:46-47 explains that if one does not observe the command in Matthew 5:44, one is not different from tax-collectors and pagans.

### **B. Calvin's theological understanding of morality**

In contrast to the Roman Catholics of his era, Calvin interprets the antithesis "love your enemies" to bind all Christians. He rejects the distinction between counsels and precepts. In order to show that his rejection is an expression of Calvin's belief that any moral precept is binding not only to Christians but to everybody, I will now examine Calvin's understanding of morality to relate his view on universal moral obligation to Christian obligation.

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<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.56 (360).

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.viii.56 (360).

Calvin theologically assumes that the moral law is “the testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved on the minds of men.”<sup>57</sup> I will shortly analyze two arguments in Calvin’s description of the moral law. First, the moral law is the testimony of natural law, namely, it testifies a moral standard imprinted by God in human nature. Second, the moral law is the testimony of the conscience, a faculty which God has engraved in human mind, whereby we gain some knowledge of the moral law. After that, I will relate his view of this moral law to Christian obligation in the antitheses, especially in the command “love your enemies.”

First, the moral law is the testimony of natural law because the moral law is “the true and eternal rule of righteousness prescribed to the men of all nations and of all times.”<sup>58</sup> It is the law in God’s created order according to which the entire natural-social order is designed. The purpose for this law in creation is that “we are all to worship him [God] and mutually love one another.”<sup>59</sup> At the heart of God’s created order is a social design in which humans care for one another for the glory of God. Wherever humans observe the moral law, the order of creation is exemplified since there sharing of goods, services, and unimpeded communication among humans will come about.

Second, the moral law is the testimony of the conscience since it demonstrates the internal witness of human conscience which reveals its Creator’s moral righteousness. Calvin explains that conscience is “a kind of middle place between God and man, not

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<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xx.16 (664).

<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xx.15 (663). Calvin also employs the term “equity” univocally for “the law of God which we call moral” or the moral law (*Institutes*, IV.xx.16 [664]). VanDrunen further points out that for Calvin, the law of love, the rule of equity, the standard of natural law, and the testimony of conscience are “substantially identical” (David VanDrunen, “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,” *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 46, no. 3 [2004]: 522).

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xx.15 (663).

suffering man to suppress what he knows in himself, but following him out until it bring him to conviction.”<sup>60</sup> The moral law testifies to the engraving of God’s law on the human heart and mind. Calvin argues that the Decalogue is stamped on the human heart and thus can be naturally known.<sup>61</sup> Preaching on Deuteronomy 19:15, Calvin says: “This law has been admitted by men, without knowing that ever Moses spoke it. For indeed Our Lord had printed the things in men’s hearts, which he did set forth in writing to his people.”<sup>62</sup> Some scholars have noted this linking of conscience and natural law as one of the distinguishing features of Calvin’s natural law idea when compared to that of his predecessors.<sup>63</sup>

By linking the moral law with the God’s created order of nature and human conscience, Calvin does not understand morality independent from God. He looks at morality from above, so to speak, or theologically. The moral law reflects the moral righteousness of its Giver. It also indicates the purpose or design for which human beings are created. Humans ought to act according to the moral law because it expresses of what humans are intended or designed to be by God.

Since Calvin understands morality theologically, it implies that his theory of morality is a derivative theory in relation to a more inclusive theological design. While he

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<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.x.3 (415).

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.1 (317).

<sup>62</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy: 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Century Facsimile Edition* (Carlisle: the Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 699.

<sup>63</sup> David VanDrunen, “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,” 503-25; Irena Backus, “Calvin’s Concept of Natural and Roman Law,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 38 (2003): 7-26; Susan E. Schreiner, “Calvin’s Use of Natural Law,” in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 51-76; William Klempa, “John Calvin on Natural Law,” in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 72-95; Paul Helm, “Calvin and Natural Law,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 2 (1984): 5-21.

does have a theory of morality, he is not interested in developing a self-contained or independent theory of morality. Specifically, since Calvin is well aware of the fact that humans are fallen, his theological concept of morality deals with humans being who are in the state of rebellion against God. By all rights, human disobedience, represented by Adam, should have been followed by “the entire destruction of nature.”<sup>64</sup> Despite the nature of human beings having been “despoiled of the true good,”<sup>65</sup> as Calvin explains, God’s providence keeps humans from being entirely destitute of good. This is the reason that the order of human relationship and society after the devastating effects of sin is still preserved. Calvin says that in the perverted and degenerate nature of human beings “there are still some sparks.”<sup>66</sup> Certain vestiges remain to direct human action toward the good and to enable humans at least faintly to distinguish that good from its opposite. Humans even in their fallen state continue to possess – minimally, to be sure – some conscious awareness of the demands of the moral law.

Calvin argues that while God sees to it that the essential social character of human nature is maintained in their “impressions of civil order and honesty,”<sup>67</sup> fallen humans have no access to true community with God through morality. The knowledge of morality for Calvin is not a saving knowledge. Fallen humans only know enough of the moral law to maintain order in human society, to make them inexcusable before God’s judgment and to make them aware of their need for Christ. But because of their sin and corruption,

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<sup>64</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.17 (237).

<sup>65</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.15 (236).

<sup>66</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.12 (233).

<sup>67</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.13 (235).

they do not have a full and clear knowledge of God and his law so as to worship him properly and to embrace Christ in faith.

For Calvin, the moral law not only deals with the social relations between human beings (the second table) but also with our relations with God (the first table). The fallen human conscience has hardly any understanding of the first table of the law. Its knowledge of the second table, although certainly greater, is still very defective, subject to vanity and error.<sup>68</sup> The very fact that humans could simultaneously approve the second table and then in specific instances reject portions of it “inflamed with headlong passion” proves for Calvin “the weakness of the human mind, which, even when it seems right on the path, halts and hesitates.”<sup>69</sup> This is why Scripture is needed as the teacher and guide to have saving knowledge of the true God, Christ, our Mediator, and to know the way of life that is pleasing to God.<sup>70</sup>

Since the knowledge of morality is not a saving knowledge and sins have corrupted human knowledge of God, Calvin prefers to view morality primarily with the second table of the Decalogue. The first table “teaches us how to cultivate piety, and the proper duties of religion in which his worship consists” and the second table “shows, how in the fear of his name, we are to conduct ourselves towards our fellow-men.”<sup>71</sup> He believes that humans in their fallen state with respect to the second table “there is considerably more knowledge of them, inasmuch as they are more closely connected with

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<sup>68</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vi.1-2 (64-6).

<sup>69</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.13 (235).

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vi.3-4 (66-7).

<sup>71</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.11 (324).

preservation of civil society.”<sup>72</sup> By being concerned primarily with the second table in relation to human knowledge of morality Calvin prefers to discuss morality in terms of one’s relationships in society rather than one’s standing before God.

I have explained that for Calvin morality is universal because it is part of created order which humans are capable of knowing it naturally. He argues that even the Decalogue is stamped on the human heart and thus can be naturally known. For Calvin fallen human do have some knowledge of the moral law. But he insists that it is God who implants this in the human heart. When there is any conformity of the moral law comes from this natural knowledge with the one revealed in Scripture, it must be attributed to God’s preserving grace.<sup>73</sup> The knowledge of morality is indeed not a saving knowledge; though in God’s providence, humans, by having this knowledge, keep the order in their life from complete disintegration. I will now relate his view of the universality of morality to Christian obligation in the antitheses, especially in the command “love your enemies.”

On the surface, the command “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44) seems to only oblige all Christians and not necessarily all people. Deeper than this, however, is Calvin’s understanding of morality which qualifies that the antitheses, including “love your enemies,” oblige all people. His concept of morality demonstrates that the Decalogue is stamped in human hearts and can be known naturally. When Moses delivers the Decalogue to the Israelites, the people of God, he does not deliver something that has no basis in the created order. Similarly, when Jesus delivers the antitheses to Christians, the

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<sup>72</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.24 (243).

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.iii.3-4 (251-3).

people of God, he does not deliver something in contrary to the created order. He only corrects the misinterpretation in his era on the application of the moral law. This is the theological-ethical reason behind Calvin's argument that the antithesis "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44) is a universal moral precept "which had formerly been delivered to all the Jews" and then "delivered universally to all Christians."<sup>74</sup> It is a moral precept which is binding on all people.

## **VI. Summary and assessments**

### **A. Summary**

For Calvin, the antitheses are moral precepts for individuals to practice. They deal with individual relationships, in the intimate, immediately-adjacent circle of daily relations and not with the larger question of the duties of social groups in the order of politics. They apply only to individuals and not to States. They are also binding on all people. They are not revealed in the Scripture because they are then hidden and now made known only to specific people, such as Christians. Instead, they are revealed in the Scripture because sin and corruption have crippled human capability to naturally know the moral law God has already imprinted in human heart.

### **B. Assessments**

Two positive assessments are in order. First, it would be a mistake to imply that Calvin's view of the moral law, revealed in the Decalogue and in the antitheses, is an example of a legalistic exposition of God's will to human beings. Georgia Harkness has made this mistake by criticizing that Calvin "conceived of the will of God in terms of

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<sup>74</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.56 (359).



biblical literalism and set up a moralistic code.”<sup>75</sup> While Calvin recognizes that moral precepts, either in the Decalogue or in the antitheses, are binding on all people, he also recognizes the importance of the example of Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This is shown when he puts together the work of Spirit and the teaching of Christ in his exposition on Matthew 5:45: “the same Spirit, who is the witness (Rom.8:16), earnest (Eph.1:14) and seal (Eph.4:30) of our free adoption, corrects the wicked affections of the flesh, which are opposed to charity” and “Christ therefore proves from the effect, that none are the children of God, but those who resemble him in gentleness and kindness” (307). The significance of the moral law in the process of sanctification should not be understood in the life of a Christian apart from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. This qualification prevents, especially, Calvin’s exposition of the antitheses from becoming legalistic.

Second, Calvin does not interpret the antitheses in such a way which eventually weaken their demands. Stadland-Neumann has accused Calvin with this charge because of his polemic against the Anabaptists. In his concluding remark, Stadland-Neumann says that Calvin, in his eagerness to resist the Anabaptists, leans toward an ethical indifferentism in reference to his interpretation of the antitheses in SM.<sup>76</sup> Stadland-Neumann is wrong because Calvin’s realism flows from honest recognition of the shameful reality of human continuing sins. He realizes that the moral precepts in the antitheses are hard for fallen humans to obey. This recognition does not prevent him from arguing that while the antitheses are hard for Christians to obey, with the help of the Holy

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<sup>75</sup> Georgia Harkness, *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 63.

<sup>76</sup> Stadland-Neumann, *Evangelische Radikalismen in der Sicht Calvins*, 149, cf. 38.

Spirit they should make a beginning and make a daily progress toward that ideal Jesus describes in the antitheses. These moral precepts are indeed hard to obey but this does not mean that Christians should not obey them. He says in his exposition of Matt.5:31, “God, in prescribing a spiritual law, looked not at what men can do, but at what they ought to do. It contains a perfect and entire righteousness, though we want ability to fulfill it” (292). The ideal of perfect obedience to the demands in the antitheses, for Calvin, is not only a cause for hope for Christians to please God, but also serves to stimulate Christians to strive constantly toward that ideal.

While Calvin recognizes that the antitheses are moral precepts for individuals to practice, the next chapter will have a different approach from this. Helmut Thielicke will argue that the intention of the antitheses is not for individuals to practice. Instead, they are meant to bring despair to people of how hard for them to practice. As a consequence, people will seek hope and can find grace in Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER FOUR: HELMUT THIELICKE ON THE ANTITHESES

### I. Introduction

Born in December of 1908 in Barmen, Germany, Helmut Thielicke, a Lutheran theologian, described his life (1908-86) emotively in the title he chose for his autobiography, *Zu Gast auf einem schönen Stern*.<sup>1</sup> Included in his autobiography were his dismissal from his teaching post by the Nazis, his church teaching and preaching during the war, and his meetings and stories about many theologians, from arguments with Barth and Bultmann to sketches of his post-war colleagues at Tübingen and Hamburg. In the last paragraph, written about two years before he passed away, Thielicke concluded, “We are admittedly only guests on this beautiful planet, wayfarers on call and with sealed orders in which the day and hour of our departure are recorded.”<sup>2</sup> Even though he was only a guest on this beautiful planet, Thielicke was no passive passenger. Whatever his Maker bestowed upon him, Thielicke grabbed enthusiastically. Especially, he faithfully exercised the gift of rhetoric in his preaching. He received national attention for his sermon primarily through his proclamation at St. Michaelis Church in Hamburg. There he preached to groups of several thousand people.

Thielicke’s most widely read sermonic work is the book *The Waiting Father*.<sup>3</sup> It is through this book his popularity among the general public in the United States begins. H. George Anderson explains that Thielicke is popular through his sermons because of “his ability to meet a spiritual hunger among well-educated people who found the typical

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<sup>1</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Zu Gast auf einem schönen Stern* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 1984). English translation: *Notes from a Wayfarer: The Autobiography of Helmut Thielicke*, trans. David R. Law (New York: Paragon House, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Thielicke, *Notes from a Wayfarer*, 419.

<sup>3</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Collins Pub., 1959).

sermonic fare of the 1950s less than satisfying.”<sup>4</sup> Billy Graham’s revival camps could not address many church members and academics who find Graham’s appeal too simplistic. Other preachers of the 50s, like Norman Vincent Peale, emphasized too much positive thinking and as a result disregard human struggles with God, like the ones recorded in Scripture. Thielicke’s sermons were widely accepted because he filled the void between revivalism and religious self-help.

Even though Thielicke is best known in the United States for his many learned sermons, he is a major theologian in his own right. His three volumes *Theological Ethics*<sup>5</sup> and three volumes systematic theology (*The Evangelical Faith*<sup>6</sup>) still reward careful reading. In fact, Geoffrey W. Bromiley testifies that Thielicke “has been disconcerted rather than flattered that his incidental activity [as a preacher] became the basis of his reputation” in the United States, rather than his theological works.<sup>7</sup> Be that as it may be, Thielicke understands that theologians and preachers should be able to dialogue with common people. This is evident when he writes *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* in which he sends out a call to theologians and preachers to reclaim the task of seeking theological excellence and community responsibility.<sup>8</sup> This concern for common people allows Kenneth Vaux to comment that Thielicke “has been the preacher’s theologian of our generation” and he believes that as a preacher’s theologian Thielicke “has been to the

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<sup>4</sup> H. George Anderson, “Foreword,” in *Notes from a Wayfarer: The Autobiography of Helmut Thielicke*, xv.

<sup>5</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol.1-3, ed. William H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966). Hereafter cited as TE 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol.1-3, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974). Hereafter cited as EF 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Editor’s Preface,” in *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 1: 5.

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, trans. Charles L. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972).

modern German society and language what Luther was to the 16th century—the shaper of the popular idiom, conviction and value.”<sup>9</sup>

Thielicke’s lifelong concern that theologians should be able to address common people in their doing theology is also evident in his handling of the Sermon on the Mount (SM). He not only presents his theological understanding of SM in the first volume of his *Theological Ethics*,<sup>10</sup> but he also provides the practical treatment of SM in his sermons, *Life Can Begin Again*.<sup>11</sup> As Thielicke became more well-known, there have been some studies on his preaching and ethics.<sup>12</sup> I would like to advance the scholarship on Thielicke in his understanding of SM in general and of the antitheses in particular. In this chapter, I will examine Thielicke’s exposition of the antitheses in the SM and argue two things. First, Thielicke understands the antitheses primarily function as *usus elencticus* to show human helplessness in keeping the laws and reveal their sin. Second, he extends this *usus elencticus* of the antitheses beyond individuals to States.

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Vaux, “Review of Notes from A Wayfarer,” *Christian Century* vol. 112, no. 35 (1995): 1190-1.

<sup>10</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, esp. 332-54.

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again: Sermons on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), esp. 35-79. Hereafter cited as LCBA.

<sup>12</sup> For example: Matthew Rueger, “Individualism in the Christology of Helmut Thielicke’s Sermons: Analysis and Response” (PhD diss., University of Durham, 2003); Robert Smith, “The Christological Preaching of Helmut Thielicke” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993); Thomas Kurt Johnson, “Helmut Thielicke’s Ethics of Law and Gospel” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1987); James Clyde Vaughn, “Incarnating the Word: A Rhetorical and Theological Analysis of the Preaching of Helmut Thielicke” (Master’s thesis, Lincoln Christian Seminary, 1985); James Monroe Stinespring, “The Use of Hermeneutics by Selected Modern Preachers” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978); Heinz Ulbricht, “Die theologische Ethik Thielickes als Kritik ihrer eigenen Grundlegung: das Verhältnis der natürlichen Anthropologie zur theologischen Anthropologie bei Helmut Thielicke” (PhD diss., Mainz University, 1978); Bernard Lothair Green, “Law and Gospel in the Theology of Helmut Thielicke” (PhD diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1969); Stephen McQueen Huntley, “Concreteness in Preaching as Demonstrated in Selected Sermons of Helmut Thielicke” (master’s thesis, Columbia Theological Seminary, 1969); J. Sheldon Carlson, “The Preaching of Helmut Thielicke: Foundation Elements in Theory and Practice” (Master’s thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1968); and, Marvin J. Dirks, “Lay Expectation Factors in relation to the Preaching of Helmut Thielicke” (ThD diss., Boston University, 1968).

## II. The *usus elencticus* of the antitheses

To examine Thielicke's idea of the *usus elencticus* of the antitheses, I will first study his understanding of the law in general and then specifically his treatment of the three uses of the law.

### A. Thielicke's understanding of the law

Thielicke argues that "the doctrine of the Law must always be viewed against the background of the fall."<sup>13</sup> Whatever one says theologically concerning the nature of the law must take its standpoint from the Pauline statement that the law is "added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19). To understand the law in this way implies two things. First, there is a distinction between God's will in the creation and in the fallen world. Second, the law has significance only for a particular historical epoch within the salvation history, that is, only for the fallen world.

#### A1. From *Gebot* to *Gesetz*

Since the law must always be understood from the background of the fall, then the law for Thielicke is "the will of God as altered by the fallen world."<sup>14</sup> The law cannot be identified with the will of God viewed from the standpoint of the creation. Thielicke, as a consequence, distinguishes between the command or the original will of God for creation (*Gebot*) and the law of God for a fallen world (*Gesetz*). He contrasts Genesis 1:28 and 9:1ff to illustrate the distinction between *Gebot* and *Gesetz*: "If biblical evidence is sought for this 'refraction' of the divine *nomos* through the medium of this aeon, reference may be made to the way the command [*Gebot*] of God in creation (Gen.1:28) is changed into the law [*Gesetz*] of the Noachic covenant which has reference to the fall

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<sup>13</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 147.

<sup>14</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 147.

(Gen.9:1ff).”<sup>15</sup> There is an obvious similarity in those two passages. They both display God’s will for humankind to fill the earth. The will of God in the second instance (Genesis 9:1ff), however, is followed by a different situation. Fear and dread are also brought in during the exercise of human dominion on earth while in Genesis 1:28 nothing is mentioned about them. Thielicke interprets this different situation to show that the command of God (*Gebot*) has become the law of God (*Gesetz*) in the fallen world. One cannot understand the law in the fallen world simply as the “will” of God. Instead, the law is God’s will as it pertains in the “refracted” light of human particular situation. In Genesis 9:1ff, in contrast to Genesis 1:28, humans fill the earth and exercise their dominion through the fear and dread of other creatures on earth. The will of God for humans to fill the earth is refracted by the particular situation in the fallen world, namely, the fear and dread of other creatures toward human beings.

Thielicke further qualifies that we should not think the refraction or modification of God’s will in the fallen world in the sense that “man through the fall has forced God to abandon his original plan.”<sup>16</sup> He argues that God alone is the author of this modification. The change is a sign of his “gracious condescension.”<sup>17</sup> God undertakes this action in the freedom of grace. God could have chosen to do otherwise. Instead, he has chosen to stoop down to meet human beings on their own level. There would be only condemnation if God requires humankind, in their fallen state, to keep up with the original God’s will in the creation. In Thielicke’s own words: “If God were to maintain unswervingly the original command, if in his grace he did not reach out to us in the particular

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<sup>15</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 147.

<sup>16</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 149.

<sup>17</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 149.

circumstances of our fallen state...an intolerable situation would arise, and the unmodified command of creation would cause real misery.”<sup>18</sup> It is the miracle of God’s gracious refusal to let human beings perish.

Thielicke demonstrates more fully the distinction between *Gebot* and *Gesetz* in his treatment of divorce.<sup>19</sup> He explains that the allowance of divorce in the Mosaic law (Matthew 19:1-12) does not correspond to the original command of God in creation. Originally, the marriage should be permanent. In the fallen world, however, the presence of sin makes divorce a regulation of necessity. “It is clear that the legal ordinance of divorce is a mark of ‘this aeon,’” says Thielicke.<sup>20</sup> Because humans live in the fallen world, legal divorce is a poignant necessity. Since the legal ordinance of divorce is necessary in the fallen world as a refraction or modification of God’s original will in the creation, this regulation should never be seen as the true will of God.

Thielicke interprets Jesus’ reminder of God’s original will in the creation, namely, the indissolubility of marriage (Matthew 19:6), as a call to repentance addressed to those who are subject to the legal ordinances of divorce in this fallen world.<sup>21</sup> The law of divorce is adapted to fit human’s “hardheartedness” (cf. Matthew 19:8). As a result, if humans take the law as the standard of their understanding of themselves, they would not be orienting themselves upon the original will of God. They would be in a very dubious

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<sup>18</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 148.

<sup>19</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 101-98.

<sup>20</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 109. Here I have a slightly different understanding of the law of divorce in Matt.19 from Thielicke. He perceives the law of divorce in the passage as a moral law for *all* humanity. I prefer to perceive more literally the law as a civil law of Israel. There Jesus argues against the people of Israel who take pride of their civil ordinances and by obeying them they think they have satisfied God’s demands. As a consequence, they forget the original will of God appropriated by those civil laws.

<sup>21</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 164.



way overlooking the fact that they do not satisfy God's will and that God says "no" to their life as it is. Jesus' call to repentance is, as Thielicke points out, "a calling to remembrance of God's 'real' order of creation."<sup>22</sup> It is intended to startle humans out of their self-chosen defenses and to testify the fallen nature of human beings and the broken relationship of this fallen world and its ordinances to the original will of God.

#### A2. *Gesetz* is *only* for the fallen world

The law (*Gesetz*) is the command of God modified by God for the fallen world. The command of God (*Gebot*) can never become the law of this fallen world because it is not at all suited to function as law in a fallen world. This also means that when Jesus proclaims the original command or will of God (*Gebot*), such as in Matt.19:6, it cannot mean that "it is to take *place* of these legal ordinances, or better, that it is now to constitute a *new* law, a *new* code."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the meaning and purpose of the revelation of *Gebot* in Scripture is the call to repentance. The summons back to the original will of God in creation is not to eliminate or to replace but to relativize the legal structures of the fallen world. As one can recognize sin itself only against the background of the unblemished creation, so one can recognize the law which refers to sin only against the background of the pure command of creation. Thielicke illustrates this using the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32): "We must see to it – as the Bible repeatedly does – that the son remains aware of this approach, that he always views the Law which prevails in the far country (this does not mean simply whatever is the law of the land

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<sup>22</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 164.

<sup>23</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 165.

there!) against the background of the true Law which obtains in the father's house."<sup>24</sup> The law which pertains to the fallen world must always be put into contrast with the command of God in creation. In this manner, the law must be understood "in terms of its particular locus in salvation history."<sup>25</sup> For Thielicke, since the law is historically and in terms of its very substance connected with sin, the particular epoch within salvation history for which the law has significance is "the interim between the fall and the last judgment."<sup>26</sup> In other words, the law is *only* for the fallen world.

As a consequence, Thielicke opposes the idea of the law as timeless moral precepts since it will make the law no longer rooted in history. As he explains, "with respect to the Law there is no such thing as a continuum stretching from the beginning of creation across this interim to the eschaton; there is no such thing as a legal norm which could be neutral or indifferent toward differences in time, and hence itself timeless."<sup>27</sup> The law has significance only for a particular historical time namely that of the fallen world, over against the law of another time, the original state of creation. The notion of moral precepts imbedded in the creation order since the creation of the world, or the natural law, is not correct according to Thielicke. He argues that to apply the laws within the original creation before the fall to the completely different world after the fall is unreasonable. In order for the argument to be reasonable, as Thielicke points out, one must assume all conceptions of the natural law based on the presupposition that the fall

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<sup>24</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 149.

<sup>25</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 150.

has only “a comparatively accidental but not an essential significance.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, for Thielicke, to assume God’s laws revealed in the fallen world, for example the Decalogue, as already imbedded in the creation order since the beginning, is to take the fall lightly. One should instead regard the fall as a reality which characterizes human existence in its totality in which the imperfection of this existence is a complete qualitative revolt against God and not just some quantitative failures to reach any norm.

This does not mean that one should do away with the question of timeless moral precepts. Thielicke refuses to link this impulse to ask about timeless moral precepts with his rejection of timeless moral precepts itself. He allows that one raises such question because even when asked apart from faith, the question of timeless precepts is an antidote to the worst consequences of pride. This question conveys a kind of involuntary confession that, living in this fallen world, the good is something which has to be sought. The fallen world, being incompatible with the will of God, can no longer produce the good from within itself. The reason is because, in intention at least, its quest always reaches out beyond humankind. When genuinely put, the question leads one to repentance. To be sure, it can be genuinely put only when man recognizes the distance between the will of God and the orders of this fallen world.<sup>29</sup> When one contrasts a *Gesetz* with its *Gebot*, one sees the very existence of that *Gesetz* as a sign of one fallen nature. In the above example of divorce Thielicke gives, the contrast between the *Gesetz* of divorce with the *Gebot* of marriage allows one to see that not only divorce but even the legal allowance of divorce is questionable. This call to repentance functions as a

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<sup>28</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 444.

<sup>29</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 430.

“warning and preservative”<sup>30</sup> to prevent indiscriminate divorce, which might be allowed by the *Gesetz*.

## **B. Thielicke and the three uses of the law**

The contrast between *Gesetz* and *Gebot* reveals that the law to be part of this fallen world. While one should not confuse the command of God with the law of God, when one contrasts the law of God in the fallen world with the command of God in the creation, the contrast between the two brings forth a call to repentance. A brief look at the notion of three uses of law will further clarify Thielicke’s understanding of *usus elenchticus* of the law (*Gesetz*).

In the Reformed tradition, the law of God is frequently perceived as having three different functions. First, in its “accusing role,” or *usus elenchticus*, the law gives the knowledge of sin. Second is the political or civil use of the law. In its third use the law gives believers knowledge of God’s will so they know how to live in gratitude. Thielicke sees *usus elenchticus* as the primary use of the law. While he recognizes that there are other two uses of the law, he explains the other two uses of the law from the perspective of the first use.

### **B1. Thielicke and the first use of the law (the theological use)**

Thielicke argues that the true function of the law is “to serve as ‘gauze in the wound.’”<sup>31</sup> The accusing role of the law serves to remind humankind of their fallen nature and their need for redemption. Thielicke illustrates more clearly this role of law in

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<sup>30</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 125.

the framework of salvation history, “which God pursues with us in Law and Gospel.”<sup>32</sup>

Thielicke explains the relationship between law and gospel in this salvation history as follows:

This history, being on the one hand the action of the author of the Law towards us, confronts us in the first place with the impossibility of every good, and with the absolute incompatibility of our existence with the command of God. But since it is just as much as the action of the author of the Gospel towards us, this history in addition imparts to us for and the possibility of living before God in new obedience.<sup>33</sup>

In the salvation history, as Thielicke understands it, the law mainly has the function of disclosing what is wrong with human existence. The law gives the knowledge of sin necessary for repentance, but only the gospel gives the hope necessary to cope with this self-knowledge of sin which may lead humans into the depths of despair.

#### B2. Thielicke and the second or civil use of the law

Thielicke understands that the civil use of the law has to do with the preservation of society from destruction. The preservation Thielicke has in mind is the physical preservation of the world: “that God will not send another flood, that he will not destroy the human race physically, e.g., by giving it up to the chaotic forces latent within it (in the sense of Romans 1:24).”<sup>34</sup> In this function, the law has nothing to do with anything spiritual and can be exercised through the laws of society which apply regardless of a person’s relation to God. Because of this, God can remain anonymous although he is its author. Thielicke explains that “the civil or criminal code is in force whether I know the

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<sup>32</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 272.

legislator personally or only indirectly, and whether I approve or disapprove of his intentions.”<sup>35</sup>

Since the law must be viewed within the background of the fall, Thielicke clarifies that the civil use of law should not to be construed merely as the preservation of a certain structure given the world at creation. He argues against the preservation of existence in terms of orders of creation: “There is here no place for the idea that there are certain basic laws which are immanent in the cosmos since creation, and which must be maintained if the world is not to perish.”<sup>36</sup> Instead, he explains that the civil use of the law is the result of God’s patience. He says, “The relation to God to which the *usus politicus* points consists in the fact that God in his patience gives order even to disordered man, who since the fall has turned against God and thus brought himself into jeopardy.”<sup>37</sup> In his patience, God prevents fallen humankind to a total self-destruction.

Thielicke acknowledges that the civil use of law possesses a universal character in terms of “the technique of exercising power, the mechanics of operating the government and preserving the form of rule and organization.”<sup>38</sup> He further argues, however, that the moment one considers “the intention” present in the civil use of law, “this is very different among Christians on the one hand and pagans on the other.”<sup>39</sup> This does not mean to point to a very distinctive way of existence, like to establish Christian states or Christian economies. What Thielicke means here is that for Christians, because of their

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<sup>35</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 141.

<sup>36</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 274.

<sup>37</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 145.

<sup>38</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 144.

<sup>39</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 144.

recognition of God as the author of law, the intention behind the law in its civil use is “a constant and necessary reminder.”<sup>40</sup> It reminds Christians that there are still any unredeemed spheres whose relation to God of judgment and grace remains unrecognized or disregarded. Because they know the true function of the civil use of the law, they should also remind non-Christians of the fact that when people can appropriate law in its civil use without recognizing its Author demonstrates that even civil sphere is in need of cleansing. “The task of the *usus politicus* for the Christian is,” as Thielicke explains, “to remind us of this fact.”<sup>41</sup>

It is in being a reminder for Christians that Thielicke relates the civil use of the law from the perspective of its accusing role or *usus elenchticus*. He argues that the church has the task to show the fallen world that the civil use of law is more than for the sake of world betterment:

It is the task of the church, particularly in its preaching of the Law and in its office as watchman, to show how questionable is the thing thus demonstrated [the attempts for world betterment]. In this proclamation, in the preaching of repentance to itself and to the world, there must be heard the cry that the ax is laid to the trees (Luke 3:9), that this world which vacillates between God Satan, between obedience and hypocrisy, between longing for redemption (Rom.8:19) and rejection of it, between the service of God and self-love, that this world lives only by the longsuffering of God, and that by his grace and patience alone for the façade of this crumbling world order may at the same time be a circumscription, a surety, and – however faulty – a representation of God’s true order.<sup>42</sup>

The world is not getting more peaceful even though geniuses may have formulated their best political and economic plans. “It would not be difficult to recount from recent history dreadful illustrations of the ‘unredeemed’ and autonomous sphere of political,”

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<sup>40</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 146.

<sup>41</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 146.

<sup>42</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 270.

says Thielicke.<sup>43</sup> People are still longing for true peace. Why is that? Thielicke's answer is that the civil use of law points to something greater than merely attempts to make the fallen world a better place to live. It points to God's salvation at work in the physical existence of human beings.

Thielicke's choice of the first or theological use of law as the primary use informs him to arrive at the conclusion that the civil use of law does not have the physical safeguarding of social structures as an end in itself. The civil use of the law indeed displays God's patience, but more importantly it provides "the provision of a physical basis for the sphere of repentance."<sup>44</sup> For Thielicke, this is the proper basis for the civil or political use of law: "The *usus politicus legis* [the political use of law]...has its basis here and here alone, in its reference to the goal of salvation, not in an order of creation but in the order of salvation, not in the origin of the world but in the goal set for the world."<sup>45</sup> In its civil use, the law should remind humans of their fallen nature and their need of redemption. "If we are preserved by the divine commandments, not for own sake, but for the sake of this sonship," says Thielicke.<sup>46</sup> God in his patience preserves the structures of the fallen world with the law primarily to provide a physical sphere in which humankind may receive the salvation of God from the peril of their fallen nature.

In its accusing role, the law functions to lead people to recognize their sinful nature and their need of redemption. In its political or civil use, the law comprises external works and has nothing to do with anything spiritual. Regardless of one's relation

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<sup>43</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 277.

<sup>45</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 277.

<sup>46</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 278.



to God, all people can exercise this function of law through any positive law in society. Thielicke argues further, however, that for Christians, who recognize the true author of the law, even in its political/civil use the law still retains its accusing role. It is the task of Christians to inform non-Christians of their fallen nature and need of redemption using the law in this second function. The next issue Thielicke addresses is the third use of law, that is, the use of law in the life of believers.

### B3. Thielicke and the third use of the law

Does the law cease to function when one become Christian? To understand Thielicke's answer to this question, I will examine his appropriation of Luther's doctrine of *simul justus et peccator*: the three perspectives within justification.<sup>47</sup> The first perspective is to look *away* from oneself. In this perspective, one looks to God as the object of one's faith, to the God who justifies in Christ. Since one looks *away* from one's sinful nature and only looks to Christ who justifies, one is freed from the curse of the law. Second is to look *at* oneself. In this perspective, the law functions its accusing role to the fullest. The law leads one into despair because one is confronted by the persistent fallen nature of human beings. External righteous works cannot help and even crumble in one's hands. Here one stands before the eyes of the divine Judge. The third and last perspective deals with one's looking *back* to oneself as one whom God justifies. One still looks at oneself. This look, however, no longer plunges one into despair. Instead, this perspective of looking *back* to oneself again as one justified drives one to repentance. The repentance Thielicke has in view here is the repentance within the faith, not the repentance prior to faith. As he explains:

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<sup>47</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 127-8.

The “Woe to me!” turns into an imperative, specifically the imperative associated with the indicative (“nothing can separate me any longer from the love of God”). This third perspective thus places me at what for me is not the end, but the beginning, the point from which I have to advance.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, while the law still retains its accusing role, in the case of the justified ones, its accusing role no longer brings them to despair but it now becomes “a loving reminder” of their unredeemed areas which need to be cleansed.<sup>49</sup>

A loving reminder is Thielicke’s answer to the issue of the third use of the law or the continuing pedagogic significance of the law for Christians. As a loving reminder, the law retains its significance because even the justified ones in their life on this fallen world are always imperfect. As Thielicke explains, “That the Law continues to serve an educational function even in the justified is obvious in light of the fact that our Christianity is never something complete and finished but is constantly in process of becoming.”<sup>50</sup> This does not mean that the law now functions to *perfect* Christians. Instead, it functions to point Christians to “specific areas in which the question of obedience is acute.”<sup>51</sup> Thielicke understands obedience here as something already given to Christians in their state of justification.

At this point, one needs to look at Thielicke’s distinction between the “qualitative” and “quantitative” aspects of justification.<sup>52</sup> He does not talk about the qualitative justification as a firm state in human perspective. Instead, the justification he has in mind refers to God’s perspective, that is, God’s fixed manner of viewing the

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<sup>48</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 133-41.

<sup>50</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 126.

<sup>51</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 134.

<sup>52</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 126-33.

justified person. In this perspective, qualitative justification means a justified relationship with God, a justified standing before God, that one either has or does not have, regardless of how consistently one lives with that justification. If one is justified, then God qualitatively ascribes total righteousness and perfect obedience to them. In contrast, the quantitative aspect refers to how the justified consistently lives with his or her qualitative justification. “This way of viewing the matter has reference to progress in our Christianity, to the process of maturing spiritually,” says Thieliicke.<sup>53</sup> While Thieliicke equates this quantitative justification with sanctification in Christian life, he argues that sanctification is “really in the strict sense only re-enactment, repetition.”<sup>54</sup> It is a reenactment and a repetition of the point from which one has to advance because an entry into the new being (a qualitative justification) already includes the whole: “From the very first, it is granted totally and unconditionally.”<sup>55</sup> Thieliicke chooses to use the term “to be justified more and more” for Christians instead of to be sanctified more and more to demonstrate how the justified more and more consistently lives with his or her qualitative justification.<sup>56</sup> The reason is because one’s growth and progress are simply a constant beginning. As Thieliicke explains, “my growth, progress, and becoming take place as I constantly go back to the beginning.”<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that one needs to be qualitatively justified again and again in order to advance. Instead, since one has been qualitatively justified and thus receives total righteousness and perfect obedience, one

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<sup>53</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 128.

<sup>54</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 129.

<sup>55</sup> Thieliicke, EF 2, 232.

<sup>56</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Thieliicke, EF 2, 232.

now is able to advance. The advance one takes, however, must always be put in the perspective of his or her qualitative justification. One can only mature in spiritual life because one is justified once and for all.

Since obedience is something already included in one's qualitative justification, Thielicke argues that the law for the justified people has "a regulative significance," namely, to remind them of the way in which their given obedience may be actualized.<sup>58</sup> He gives the analogy of the stone lying in the sun to get warm.<sup>59</sup> One does not command the stone lying in the sun to get warm. For the stone to get warm under the sun is something that just happen of itself. It is only an actualization of the law of nature: something gets warm when it is heated. As in this case of a law in nature, when Christians obey the law, they only actualize the perfect obedience already given in their justification. As Thielicke explains:

It is in this sense that, for the justified, special significance attaches to the fact that the law of God is not simply done away, but retains its validity. The justified man must inquire of the particular laws whether and how far he has really given attention to the actualization of his faith in the particular spheres of life.<sup>60</sup>

Since Christians are not yet perfect in this fallen world, the law is still significant. It lovingly indicts them of the unredeemed parts of their life and gently tells them to always learn to apply their given obedience, their justification, to every sphere of their life. In short, for Thielicke the law in its third use demonstrates that "its imperatives tell me to be

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<sup>58</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 137.

<sup>60</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 138.

in all life's dimensions what I am indicatively: a justified man living now by justification."<sup>61</sup>

Strictly speaking, the first or theological use of the law allows one to receive the qualitative justification and the third use of the law, from the perspective of the first use, allows the justified one to exercise their quantitative justification. This shows that for Thielicke the law functions primarily in its theological use for both non-Christians and Christians. The similarity lies in its indictment for both Christians and non-Christians of their fallen nature and their need of redemption. The difference lies in that while for non-Christians the indictment may bring them to despair, for Christians it may take them to advance in their spiritual life. As Thielicke describes:

There are thus two relations to the Law, and two ways in which the Law is valid. There is first the Law which drives us, which judges and accuses us; from this Law we are delivered. Then there is also the Law to whose fulfillment we are impelled by the Holy Spirit, as those for whom Jesus Christ has already fulfilled the Law and who now live in a new bondage (Rom. 6:16).<sup>62</sup>

He also illustrates the relationship between the first and the third use of the law in the analogy of a sheep dog and a wolf. He says, "For in performing its task, in reminding us continually of things omitted and forgotten, it no longer kills us. Instead it is friendly; it helps us. After all, the sheep dog is anything but a wolf. The wolf kills; the dog tries to protect us from it."<sup>63</sup> As it will be shown below, Thielicke demonstrates this theological use (*usus elencticus*) of the law in his interpretation of the antitheses.

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<sup>61</sup> Thielicke, EF 2, 231.

<sup>62</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 138.

<sup>63</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 139.

### C. Thielicke's exposition of the antitheses

Thielicke provides through his sermons the exposition of the antitheses. There are three sermons which directly deal with the antitheses: "The Costs of Grace" (Matthew 5:17-32),<sup>64</sup> "Every Word an Oath" (Matthew 5:33-37),<sup>65</sup> and "No Retaliation!" (Matthew 5:38-48).<sup>66</sup> In each of this sermon, Thielicke appropriates his understanding of theological use (*usus elencticus*) of the law in order to show that through the antitheses Jesus invokes his hearers their helplessness in keeping the laws and their need for redemption: for non-Christians, their qualitative justification, and for Christians, their quantitative justification.

#### C1. "The Costs of Grace" (Matthew 5:17-32)

In his sermon "The Costs of Grace," Thielicke argues that Jesus, in his relationship to the law of Moses in the Old Testament, does not come to abolish the law of prohibiting murder, adultery and divorce, but instead he makes "its profoundest threat apparent."<sup>67</sup> Not only Jesus makes it clear to his hearers that God's demand lays claim not only upon their outward actions but even the inward thoughts of their hearts. Thielicke comments that in doing so Jesus makes the Law of Moses "so radical that the people's eyes filled with tears."<sup>68</sup> The reason for that is to bring people to recognize their hopelessness to perfectly obey the total demands of the law and thus recognize their fallen nature. If Jesus does not demonstrate the law in all its radical demands, which

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<sup>64</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 35-49.

<sup>65</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 50-62.

<sup>66</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 63-79.

<sup>67</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 37.

<sup>68</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 42.

covers both outward actions and outward desires, then, as Thielicke points out, people are in danger of deluding themselves and imagining that they are never “really so badly wounded and sick after all.”<sup>69</sup>

Thielicke first qualifies that Jesus demonstrates this severity of law as a kind of introduction to discipleship.<sup>70</sup> One needs to realize his or her sinful nature through the threat of law in its theological use so that one may further recognize the need for a savior. This accusing role of the law, however, does not stop even after God calls that person his child. Thielicke then adds that “there is a danger of being sure of forgiveness before one has become insecure because of one’s sins.”<sup>71</sup> In the life of Christians, the accusing role functions to show them two things. First, it reminds them that they are still sinners. There is always room for them to advance and grow. Second, this constant accusation allows Christians to always depend on God’s constant acceptance of their condition because of his grace. This will preserve them from pride and carelessness based on work-righteousness.

## C2. “Every Word an Oath” (Matthew 5:33-37)

Thielicke interprets Jesus’ saying “do not swear at all” to reveal that an oath in itself testifies the nature of fallen human. Swearing an oath makes the fallen human nature obvious because an oath is an exception and an expectation in this fallen world.

An oath is an exception that testifies human fallen nature because when one, in taking an oath, soberly “disassociate by means of an oath” a particular statement from

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<sup>69</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 44-5.

ordinary and everyday utterances.<sup>72</sup> This implies that the oath is an exception from what usually one does in life. One's everyday utterances do not have the same degree of bindingness and earnestness which one now wants to emphasize by taking an oath. In other words, one needs only be sincere in taking an oath and not in everyday speech.

An oath, as an expectation that testifies human fallen nature, is manifest because in this fallen world "there are cases in which one does not have to speak the truth, cases in which they may be a mental reservation" such as white lies.<sup>73</sup> Those words uttered in white lies are not to be taken seriously and have lost their specific gravity. Taking an oath is expected in this fallen world since otherwise people will not weigh every word carefully.

In short, Thielicke preaches Jesus' "do not swear at all" to mean two things. First, he interprets by this saying Jesus reminds his hearers that they are fallen people of unclean lips. This is evident because fallen people employ oaths to disassociate themselves from their reckless ordinary speeches. Second, this saying does not mean that one should not take oath at all. Instead, when one swears an oath, one is reminded that an oath is "a temporal necessity" which is expected in this fallen world. Otherwise, in a world shot through with lies there will be no area in this world which is marked off by way of exception the truth is to be told. God allows people to take an oath because of his condescending patience to prevent chaos caused by lies and rumors in this fallen world.

Understood from the perspective of the fallen world, specifically an oath as an exception and expectation in this fallen world, Thielicke argues that this saying will strike someone with a knowledge of his or her "own lostness" which allow one to cry out in

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<sup>72</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 56.



awe and confession: “Lord, I am a human of unclean lips.”<sup>74</sup> Jesus’ “do not swear at all” for Thieliicke reveals the sacredness of human word which has been depraved in this fallen world. It is sacred because “the Last Judgment will concern itself with them and will surprise us with a precise enumeration of every careless word we have uttered (Matt.12:36).”<sup>75</sup> This fact allows one to recognize his or her fallen nature and the need for the Word made flesh for their redemption. Even after they become the children of God, the fact that they may still take an oath testifies that they still have areas which need to be redeemed in terms of taking their words seriously in their ordinary lives. In Thieliicke’s own words, “whenever we demean our human speech to the level of stupid drivel and deceit and thus empty it of any weight, we are nothing less than throwing off from our words this precious burden of the Savior and consigning him to a second death.”<sup>76</sup>

### C3. “No Retaliation!” (Matthew 5:38-48)

Thieliicke begins the sermon by laying out the impression one may get from this passage. It is as if Jesus is describing an utterly different world from which one now lives. This sense of otherworldliness of the passage seems to make Jesus indulges in “visionary daydreams, unreal and alien to this world.”<sup>77</sup> Thieliicke argues that the fact this passage seems to describe a world that is not possible to have in this world we are now living even demonstrates that humans “absolutely *cannot* fulfill this command of Jesus”

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<sup>74</sup> Thieliicke, LCBA, 53.

<sup>75</sup> Thieliicke, LCBA, 50.

<sup>76</sup> Thieliicke, LCBA, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Thieliicke, LCBA, 64.

and that this world we are now living is “lost and estranged from God.”<sup>78</sup> The antitheses of this passage demonstrate an indictment of the fallen world.

The indictment is not at all about liquidating all law and order with one mighty principle, “love your enemy.” In this passage Jesus seems to challenge the completely legal and recognized juridical ordinances of the fallen world, namely, the counterbalance of values and reparation. If that is the case, then Jesus proposes chaos and anarchy. Thielicke argues against such interpretation. He interprets instead that in this passage Jesus is talking about the incapability of human law and justice to regulate “our relation to our neighbor as God wants it to be.”<sup>79</sup> The law of justice is still needed but only as a regulation of necessity, which is necessary in the fallen world, to prevent chaos and anarchy.

The knowledge of how fallen this world from what God originally intended to be brings people to acknowledge their fallen nature and their need of redemption. Moreover, for Christians, who have received that work of redemption, such knowledge also brings them to recognize the area of human relationship which needs to be redeemed, especially, one’s relation to his or her neighbor as God wants it to be. For example, Thielicke argues that to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39) does not mean that Christians are weak or coward. They turn the other cheek because they practice to be concerned with the spiritual well-being of other people. As Thielicke says, “In this world we Christians have our eyes opened to see that all who make life hard for us and all who give us a sour

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<sup>78</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 66.

<sup>79</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 69.

reaction are dearly bought and paid for by Jesus Christ.”<sup>80</sup> Like God is concerned with Christians and redeem them even when they are still in enmity with him, a Christian is concerned with non-Christians for their salvation even if he or she has the right to retaliate them. All of them, friends and enemies, the good and the bad, are beloved and straying children of the Father in heaven who is seeking them.

### **III. The socio-political implication of the antitheses**

Thielicke argues that the radicalness of the antitheses brings humans to realize their incapacities to obey God’s laws so that they may realize their sinful nature and need of a Savior. The *usus elencticus* of the law Thielicke appropriates in his understanding of the antitheses allows him to apply the demands of the antitheses to all people, non-Christians for their qualitative justification and Christians for their quantitative justification. This section will deal with the question whether the antitheses are then restricted only to address individuals concerning their sinful nature. Or, do they also address the super-individual entities, such as political governments or States? Based on his appropriation of Martin Luther’s two kingdoms, Thielicke argues the demands in the antitheses do not only address individuals but also super-individual entities. A brief review of Martin Luther’s two kingdoms is first in order.

#### **A. A brief review of Martin Luther’s two kingdoms**

One may find Martin Luther’s significant articulation of a two kingdom doctrine in his treatise “Temporal Authority,” of October 1522.<sup>81</sup> The two kingdoms doctrine, however, is not exclusively Martin Luther’s teaching. One is justified, as Franz Lau

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<sup>80</sup> Thielicke, LCBA, 78.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 81-139.

observes, in looking upon the doctrine as a common Reformation teaching.<sup>82</sup> Similar to Luther, Calvin speaks of two kingdoms when he deals with the civil kingdom in chapter 20 of the fourth book in his Institutes of 1559. David VanDrunen has further demonstrated the teaching as an expression of Luther's approach to the Christian's relation to the broader world that draws from the Christian tradition such as Augustine's two cities. Reminiscent of Augustine, Luther draws a stark contrast between two people in two kingdoms, the one marked by righteousness, the Spirit, and the lack of any need for the physical sword, and the other marked by wickedness and the dire need for the sword if any outward peace is to be maintained.<sup>83</sup>

At the beginning in his treatise on "Temporal Authority," Luther divides the human race into two classes, those belonging to the kingdom of God and those belonging to the kingdom of the world. The former, he explains, need neither law nor sword, but the latter do and are under their authority.<sup>84</sup> God has ordained two governments in order to establish his rule in these two kingdoms. The purpose of the spiritual government is for the Holy Spirit to produce righteous Christians under the rule of Christ and the purpose of the temporal government is for restraining the wicked by the temporal sword. Luther states that "one must carefully distinguish between these two governments" and yet affirm the existence of both, one to produce righteousness and the other to maintain "external peace" and "prevent evil deeds."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Franz Lau, "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran World*, vol. XII, no. 4 (1965): 355.

<sup>83</sup> David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), 55-62.

<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority," 85-88.

<sup>85</sup> Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority," 91.

Luther further explores in the second part of the treatise how far temporal authority extends. His principal claim is that temporal authority can enact laws only that “extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul.”<sup>86</sup> This implies that Luther does not treat temporal authority as an autonomous realm. He allows civil rulers to exercise their sword only within justice and within the limits of their authority.

To be sure, Christians are indeed under a spiritual government that does not bear the sword. They still live, however, in the fallen world and therefore they together with non-Christians are under a temporal government that indeed uses the sword to keep order among the wicked. Luther explains that though Christians have no use of the sword among themselves, they submit to its rule in this fallen world and even do all that they can to help the civil authorities, in order to benefit others and not for the purpose of their own vengeance. He even rebukes that if a Christian is not willing to serve for common good, then he or she “would be acting not as a Christian but even contrary to love.”<sup>87</sup> This, claims Luther, brings harmony to the Christian’s life in both kingdoms: “No Christian shall wield or invoke the sword for himself and his cause. In behalf of another, however, he may and should wield it and invoke it to restrain wickedness and to defend godliness.”<sup>88</sup> Luther thus makes clear that the temporal authority, which executes the legal and coercive government of the earthly kingdom, brings both Christians and non-Christians under its sway.

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<sup>86</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority,” 104-5.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority,” 94.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority,” 103.

The above brief review of Luther's two kingdoms suggests that his teaching is not about two separate and unrelated kingdoms, but rather about two different types of divine activity within one kingdom, namely, the kingdom of God. Craig L. Nesson finds it valuable to refer Luther's teaching as "two *strategies*."<sup>89</sup> God employs two strategies to work out his salvation on this fallen world in order to establish his kingdom. The first strategy or the spiritual kingdom involves the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the administration of the Holy Sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The second one or the earthly kingdom involves the establishment of just order in society through the institutions of the State, economy, laws and politics.

These two types of divine activity also imply that Luther's teaching of two kingdoms simply expresses the fact that human beings must occupy two distinct positions in their relationship to God. As Robert Kolb and Charles Arand put it, using Luther's language, "into theses [two kingdoms] we place the two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separate from each other."<sup>90</sup> In the earthly kingdom, the relationship is indirect (humankind's relationship to God's creation), while in the spiritual kingdom, it is direct (humankind's relationship to God). To be more specific, one's engagement in the earthly kingdom does not pertain to salvation, unlike his or her engagement in the spiritual kingdom.

### **B. Thielicke's appropriation of Luther's two kingdoms**

Thielicke appropriates Luther's teaching of the two kingdoms without any principal discrepancy. He agrees that Luther in his two kingdoms doctrine does not teach

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<sup>89</sup> Craig L. Nesson, "Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 306.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 128.

individuals to have a double standard of “official” and “personal” morality as if there seems to be two distinct classes of human beings belonging either to the one kingdom or to the other. Thieliicke says that to misinterpret Luther’s doctrine of two kingdoms in this way will suggest that “the Christian – who must also participate in the temporal kingdom as a father or a mother, a citizen or a soldier – surrenders, as it were, the identifying marks of his Christianity the moment he enters the worldly sphere.”<sup>91</sup> Christians, living in the fallen world, should engage in civil affairs like the rest of the people. The distinction is that they do not engage for the purpose of their own vengeance but instead for the benefit of others and of civil order.

Since Luther’s teaching of two kingdoms deals with two types of divine rule for individuals, Thieliicke rejects the idea of *Eigengesetzlichkeiten* (“laws unto themselves”). This idea suggests that two kingdoms doctrine implies that the world, human institutions, politicians, and everyday people are free from the power and the laws of God because the world has its own rules and ethical norms, which are produced by processes internal to the world.<sup>92</sup> Thieliicke instead argues that the State is indeed ordained by God to repel forces of chaos have been radically threatening the very existence of the world ever since the fall. Because of that the state is a normative instrument in God’s hand to protect humanity against the destructive consequences of sin. This does not mean, however, that the state has nothing whatever to do with God. Thieliicke points out that the State or politics, which are required in the fallen world, have meaning not in themselves but in relation to the divine purpose toward which they are directed, namely, to preserve human beings by restraining evil and to give humans the physical opportunity to attain to God’s

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<sup>91</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 362.

<sup>92</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 367.

goal in salvation history. In other words, Thieliicke believes that Luther's two kingdoms doctrine demonstrate that the State does not exist simply as a necessity in the fallen world. It is rather a "gift" and a "miracle" of God's preserving grace.<sup>93</sup> Without it the world would sink into the abyss of chaos.

God's purpose in the ordination of the state applies to all human beings. It is an order to provide the space in which humans may repent. Accordingly, one should not derive either the state or its norm from the Gospel or even from the Sermon on the Mount. As Thieliicke argues, one should expose himself or herself to "the temptation of confusing Law and Gospel, and of entertaining theocratic illusions."<sup>94</sup> Moreover, none but Christian is aware of this real purpose of the State. Thieliicke claims that "the Christian has a relation to the state which differs not ontically or ethically but noetically from that of the non-Christian."<sup>95</sup> Christians recognize the fact of this relationship of the state to God and to his preserving grace. This awareness allows them to assess the limits of the state, namely, they can "distinguish the areas of its actual competence and legitimate authority from all forms of idolatrous absolutization."<sup>96</sup> Christians are able to take this task because they are aware of the significance of the state as an instrument serving a particular purpose within God's salvation history.

It is at this point that Thieliicke advances Luther's concept of two kingdoms. Even though he calls it "the eschatological corrective" it is not as much a correction of error

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<sup>93</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 374.

<sup>94</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 374.

<sup>95</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 375.

<sup>96</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 375.



than an emphasis of eschatological perspective.<sup>97</sup> Thielicke points out that Luther is primarily concerned with the Christian's engagement within the two kingdoms standing side by side in this fallen world. He then argues that Luther should not also overlook the fact that "when the two kingdoms are regarded as succeeding one another, however, and the eschatological tension remains, then there is none of this putting oneself at ease, none of this geometrically calculated finality and sense of inevitability."<sup>98</sup> In other words, from eschatological perspective Christians should always bear in mind that a never-ending peaceful co-existence between the two kingdoms is thereby ruled out.

The basis for this eschatological corrective is Thielicke's understanding of the law. Since the Fall is always the background of the law, Thielicke argues that all ethics is "an emergency discipline following upon the fall – i.e., following upon the loss of our original state, our original fellowship with God – and yet taking place also within the promise and the dawning power of the new aeon."<sup>99</sup> This means the laws of jurisprudence and politics are enclosed within brackets behind and before: behind they are determined by the fact that the original fellowship no longer exists; and before they are determined by the fact that the promised dominion of God, with its new and total fellowship between God and his children, does not yet exist but is only dawning.

Christians are able to recognize the orders of the fallen world, such as the State, as "emergency" or "interim" solutions because they find out in Scripture how such orders fail to measure up to the radicalness of the divine requirement. Thielicke argues that this ability of the divine requirement to call radically in question the orders of the fallen world

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<sup>97</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 378-82.

<sup>98</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 381.

<sup>99</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 381.

is “certainly present in the Sermon on the Mount and must necessarily be brought out.”<sup>100</sup>

Now is the time to demonstrate how Thieliicke extends the *usus elencticus* of the antitheses not only to individual disorder but also to super-individual disorder.

### **C. Thieliicke’s extension of the scope of antitheses to states**

The background of fallen human nature determines human incapacibilities to obey the radical demands of the antitheses. They lay claim to humans, so to speak, as if the fall had never taken place, as if the whole human existence is not determined by this fallen world. They impose their demands upon humans as if the kingdom of God has been fully established on the earth. In so doing they would reveal how sick this fallen world is and that when God allows for any lack of perfect obedience; this is a sign of his patience and forbearance.

Obviously there are moral precepts that should order society and her institutes. The question now discussed is really whether Jesus’ demands in the antitheses express any of them. As discussed above, Thieliicke argues for the meaning and purpose of the radical demands in the antitheses as a call to repentance. He disqualifies any interpretation which suggests the demands of the antitheses should constitute a new law. Instead, he interprets such demands to show the contradiction between the conditional allowance of legal ordinances such as divorce and oath and the radicalism of the original will of God. In Thieliicke’s own words:

[T]he proclamation of the original will of God (*ap’arches*) over against the legal ordinances of this aeon cannot mean that it is to take the *place* of these legal ordinances, or better, that it is now to constitute a *new* law, a *new* code. This would be a completely wrong conception if only because a new law in the sense of a possible set of statutes simply cannot be derived from the radicalization of the Mosaic *nomos* in the Sermon on the Mount. These are simply not justifi[ab]le (Matt.5:21ff., 5:27ff., 5:33ff., 5:38ff., 5:43ff.). The meaning and purpose of the

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<sup>100</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 378.

call to repentance and the summons back to the order of creation is not to eliminate but to relativize the legal structures of this aeon.<sup>101</sup>

Thielicke is then able to extend the scope of *usus elencticus* of radical demands in antitheses not only to individuals but also to States for two reasons: the correlation between individual and institutional spheres of history and the institutional perversion of orders in the fallen world.

#### C1. Individual and institutional spheres of history

Thielicke argues that the requirements in the antitheses will not put the claim only within the individual spheres of one's history but also to his or her institutional spheres. As he argues, "Just as a firm line cannot be drawn between creation and sin in the individual heart, so it is impossible to draw any such line in the macrocosmic dimension."<sup>102</sup> The reason is because the guilt is transmitted from individual to institutional: "the supra-individual spheres of history do come within the magnetic field of human guilt in a particular way, and that they are thus to be interpreted as a zone to which this guilt is transmitted."<sup>103</sup> The very fact that the antitheses claim one as a whole makes it clear that one must include not only himself or herself but also those structures in society which are part of one's existence in this fallen world.

#### C2. The institutional perversion of orders in the fallen world

An institutionalized evil, in which injustice has taken on structural form, is not just a deviation from the true nature of God's original creation, but also an extreme example of a institutional perversion of this fallen world. This is what the world has

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<sup>101</sup> Thielicke, TE 3, 165. Emphasis original.

<sup>102</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 579.

<sup>103</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 438.

become after the fall, namely, in the extreme perversion of the orders and in times of crisis when sin is not merely present in individual acts, but has become crystallized within the institutions of the fallen world. Thieliicke perceives that the orders of the world, such as States, do not belong to “orders of creation” but rather “orders of the divine patience, given because of our ‘hardness of heart’ (Matt.19:8).”<sup>104</sup> Within States, God adapts the principles of the fallen world, such as fear, terror, and violence so that in virtue of his miraculous preservation and blessings such principles do not lead to the destruction of the world but instead preserve it. For example, God employs the egoism of the State to restrain the egoism of individuals and of groups. In plain words, God uses poison to prevent poisoning.

As a consequence, such orders of the fallen world are in reality an ordered disorder because they are as a matter of fact the structural form of fallen existence permitted by God and “cannot be described as having been created such as to be good by nature, or morally neutral in the sense of their belonging to a sphere of pure causal necessity as factual requirements beyond good and evil.”<sup>105</sup> They are merely orders of preservation in order to restrain evil rather than promoting good. For Thieliicke, to understand them more than that is to push to the point of absurdity, namely, to argue that the idea of a positive and describable good is implicit in the concept of evil.

Because of two reasons above, Thieliicke perceives States in this fallen world are part of the fallen existence and they also need gauze in their deep wounds. The demands of the antitheses bring into light how questionable the personal orders of human beings

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<sup>104</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 440.

<sup>105</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 440.

really are. Likewise, such radical demands also discloses disorderliness to which States of this fallen world is repeatedly prone.

Since perfect realization of these radical demands will only happen in eschaton, both the individuals and the States in their *de facto* action do not truly accomplish righteousness. It instead means that on the level of deeds what an individual does is only an imperfect likeness or copy of complete obedience. A person's concrete obedience in this fallen world has symbolical significance to the degree that it is always incomplete and improper. It also does not eradicate the actual incongruity which always obtains between what is demanded and what is achieved. Likewise, in the fundamental conception of an economic or political order set forth by a State, such an order is only illustrative and symbolically demonstrative of what God really intends to have in the eschaton (true justice and peace). In a just war, for example, we may say that the will of God which is at work is not his original will but a will which is accommodated for the sake of human beings by means of institutional and political laws to establish order and peace.

By encompassing the whole structure of human life, both individuals and States, Thieliicke understands the radical demands of the antitheses to constitute a continuing reminder of how fallen the world is and what is ought not to be. He interprets them to primarily function in their *usus elencticus*. The demand to have love for your enemies (Matthew 5:43-48), for example, is a reminder that a just war is not the way is supposed to be for any State to implement. It is because the world has fallen that such implementation is needed. Thieliicke explains in this way:

In this text there is an indictment of our whole world... This becomes especially clear when we consider that here Jesus' mercy is at odds, not merely with certain

degenerate aspects of the world, but even with the completely legal and recognized juridical ordinances of our world... In this stark, slashing, striking, and therefore unescapable way of stating it, Jesus is saying to us that human law and justice are incapable of regulating our relation to our neighbor as God wants it to be, but that the law is only a *regulation of necessity* which is necessary in our fallen world.<sup>106</sup>

This implementation will not last into eternity. It will disappear when the eschaton, the true kingdom of God established by Jesus' second coming, arrives. When that happens, there will no longer be any continuing reminder of what is ought not to be since there will be no wars in the world to come.

#### **IV. Summary and assessments**

##### **A. Summary**

Thielicke highlights the *usus elencticus* of the antitheses by which individuals may recognize their fallen nature and need for redemption. He also extends this function as mirror of human shortcomings not only to individuals but also to States. The basis of this is his assumption of the radical transformation the world has undergone after the fall. Since nothing good can be found in the totally corrupted world, States in the world are belonged to the fallen order of the world and also sinful. God in his grace has revealed his radical demands in the antitheses in order to show how corrupt human beings are, individually and structurally.

The summary signifies that Thielicke interprets the antitheses of the SM do not tell people what they can do but rather reveal to them the fallen character of the present world. They describe an innocence lost in the Fall and not yet regained, since the second coming has still not occurred. For the time being, one must in some way come to terms

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<sup>106</sup> Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, 66-8.

with this fallen world. The church needs to always look out on human history as constantly marked by human sin.

## **B. Assessments**

The risk of interpreting the antitheses primarily in this way, namely in its *usus elencticus*, and his insistence that law must be understood from the background of the Fall, may cause Thielicke to have, using George L. Frear, Jr.'s phrase, a "relatively dark understanding" of one's ethical options.<sup>107</sup> In regard to personal ethics, for example, Thielicke argues that "what the Law provides are really negative presuppositions in the sense of 'tearing down,' rather than positive foundations for a building up to completion."<sup>108</sup> His claim on the function of the law to "tear down," similar to his other term discussed above: the function to perform "gauze in the wound," has the risk to become too much emphasis. Since one must deal with the refraction of God's will in the fallen world, one can only compromise with the sinful world in his or her engagement with ethical options. The reason for compromise is not because one can find an ultimate norm which in fact is merely the average of two other norms more extreme than itself, an average which one can accept and so put himself or herself at ease. Instead, it is because one can never actualize the original or true will of God but only his will refracted by the fallen world. One must live with it in this fallen world. Even one must never make a virtue out of the necessity of so doing. At best, one can only see how far from the kingdom of God this present world is. As a result, any notion of positive and constructive

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<sup>107</sup> George L. Frear, Jr., "The Need for an Ongoing Dimension in Christian Ethics," *Journal of Religious Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1970): 20 (18-27).

<sup>108</sup> Thielicke, TE 1, 253.

engagement in one's personal ethics is minimal. One must only be content with the "refracted" will of God, no more and no less.

In regard to social ethics, for another example, Thieliicke interprets a State as an "emergency measure" in which God makes use of legitimate force against unruly violence in order to preserve the order in this fallen world and to provide a physical space for God to work out his salvation for sinful people.<sup>109</sup> Thieliicke is so persistent in this matter which may put him to have a grim outlook on constructive political possibilities. Though he holds that the state is a necessity, he wishes its role in education to be "minimal" and he considers the development of the welfare state with anxiety.<sup>110</sup>

While Thieliicke interprets the antitheses of the SM do not tell people what they can do but rather reveal to them the fallen character of the present world, the next chapter on John Howard Yoder will demonstrate a contrast. Yoder will argue that the antitheses do tell people to do something. Especially for Yoder, the church, whom Jesus directly delivers the antitheses, should practice the non-resistant way of life evident in the antitheses.

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<sup>109</sup> Thieliicke, TE 1, 141-6, 272-78.

<sup>110</sup> Thieliicke, TE 2, 256-88 ("The Minimal State in Education") and 289-317 ("The Minimal State in Welfare").



## CHAPTER FIVE: JOHN HOWARD YODER ON THE ANTITHESES

### I. Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss John Howard Yoder's interpretation of the antitheses. After a short survey on Yoder's background as a Mennonite, I will demonstrate that for Yoder the antitheses address Christians both as individuals and as a community. The scope of the antitheses comprises both personal and social ethics because the radicalness of the antitheses is a life of discipleship intended not merely for individual Christians but also for the church as a community as a whole.

John Howard Yoder is a Mennonite and a well-known pacifist. Being a Mennonite and pacifist Yoder may be misunderstood as a narrow-minded theologian who is limited in his engagement with other Christian traditions. Yoder's life is indeed shaped by a particular time and a particular people. His roots are Amish Mennonite. Reared in Oak Grove Mennonite Church, which was founded around 1816 just outside of Smithville in northern Ohio, Yoder was an heir to the Anabaptist heritage.<sup>1</sup> James Lehman narrates that Yoder's great-great grandfather, his great-grandfather, and his father together provided leadership at Oak Grove for over one hundred years.<sup>2</sup> The knowledge of such a background, however, should not bring one to misunderstand Yoder either 1) as a person who was born into a backwater, rural ethnic Mennonite world or 2) as a theologian who only seeks to establish his own sectarian groups.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Umble, "The Oak Grove-Pleasant Hill Amish Mennonite Church in Wayne County, Ohio, in the Nineteenth Century (1815-1900)," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 31 (July 1957): 156-219.

<sup>2</sup> James O. Lehman, *Creative Congregationalism: A History of the Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Wayne County, Ohio* (Smithville: Oak Grove Mennonite Church, 1978), 78-127, 237-78.

On the first misunderstanding that Yoder was only raised in a cloistered uncultured community of the Mennonites, Mark Nation wrote according to his interview with Yoder that Yoder came from one of the most liberal and cultured Mennonite communities.<sup>3</sup> His home church, the Oak Grove Mennonite Church, probably had more college graduates in its membership than any other Mennonite church, except for the churches at the colleges. Furthermore, after his family's move to Wooster in the summer of 1935, Yoder spent most of his childhood in a community and in a school that were not populated by ethnic Mennonites. In fact, as Yoder told Mark Nation, he was the only Mennonite in his classes at Wooster.<sup>4</sup>

On the second misunderstanding that Yoder was narrow-minded, Stanley Hauerwas points out that Yoder does not like to be "pigeonholed" as a blinkered Mennonite thinker.<sup>5</sup> He is indeed largely responsible for the fact that Mennonites are now on the theological map. Mark Nation points out that in American academic theology circles, "the name of John Yoder is largely synonymous with what it means to be Mennonites."<sup>6</sup> Yoder, however, in the introduction of his book, *The Priestly Kingdom*, writes that he does not want to marginalize what he has to say to merely "a Mennonite vision."<sup>7</sup> Instead, his passion is to share what he discovered from the tradition in which he was raised. He says that what is meant by the label "Mennonite" or "Anabaptist" is a

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 2006), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "When the Politics of Jesus Makes a Difference," *Christian Century*, vol. 110, no.28 (Oct 13, 1993): 984 (982-5).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, xix.

<sup>7</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 8.

“hermeneutic.”<sup>8</sup> This is to describe that he attempts to take his Mennonite heritage seriously, being faithful to it, while creatively reworking it in various ways. He works and reworks his own tradition in order to contribute in theological discussions among different traditions.

## II. The nonviolent<sup>9</sup> epistemology and the antitheses

The fact that Yoder’s theology has deep roots in Mennonite soils is beyond doubt. Coming from this Mennonite and pacifist background, as Ted Grimsrud points out, Yoder proposes to establish nonviolence not merely as an ethics but also as an epistemology.<sup>10</sup> It is for him not only “a spirituality” but also “a lifestyle,” as he writes in his posthumously published essay: “Nonviolence is not only an ethic about power, but also an epistemology about how to let truth speak for itself.”<sup>11</sup> For Yoder this means the commitment to nonviolence is a life-shaping conviction that shapes all other conviction. It is an epistemology because such commitment actually shapes how a person sees and understands the world in a certain way. In other words, Yoder’s commitment to nonviolence shapes how he arrives at knowledge and understands Scripture.

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<sup>8</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality,” in *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970), 5.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of discussion, I will use the term nonviolence and nonresistance interchangeably. Nonviolence for Yoder means both mentally and physically. One should not hate or despise, conquer and crush another inwardly and outwardly.

<sup>10</sup> Ted Grimsrud’s study on Yoder’s epistemology is available online: *Pacifism and Knowing: John Howard Yoder’s Epistemology*, <http://peacetheology.net/pacifism-with-justice/16-pacifism-and-knowing-john-howard-yoders-epistemology>, accessed 12/23/09.

<sup>11</sup> John Howard Yoder, “‘Patience’ as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship ‘Absolute’?” In *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Harry J. Huebner, Chris K. Huebner and Mark Thiessen Nation (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 28 n.9.

### A. The nonviolent epistemology of Yoder

The center of nonviolent epistemology is the decisive commitment to offer “good news for the other” in the willingness to respect others’ freedom either to accept or to reject.<sup>12</sup> The quest for truth is not to be taken as a competitive process based upon the desire to hold the power (“See, I am right, and therefore you are wrong”). Instead, one’s knowledge of truth depends upon one’s listening to others, even to the adversaries. For Yoder truth has much more to do with concrete expressions in life than with theories or abstract principles. “What it means to qualify statement as ‘true’ in the faith community,” Yoder argues, “is not an ontological statement about the status of a proposition. It is an historical judgment about the statement’s compatibility with the life directions and value insights, the narrative memories and the practices, of that community.”<sup>13</sup> Here for Yoder the quest for truth is not a matter of knowing either universally or particularly, but how to live in order to come to know the truth.

Yoder believes that one needs not to use coercion of any sort to ensure the survivability of truth. This truth is lived out and inseparably linked with non-coercive communication. In fact, if one does use coercion, one will in the end distance himself or herself from the truth. For Yoder, truth will speak for itself since it will ultimately be evident not by one’s careful and irresistible logic, but by the coherence between one’s walk and talk. He argues, “Ultimate validation is a matter not of a reasoning process which one could by dint of more doubt or finer hairsplitting push down one story closer to bedrock, but of a concrete social genuineness of the community’s reasoning together in

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<sup>12</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Meaning after Babbie: With Jeffrey Stout Beyond Relativism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 24 no. 1 (Spring 1996): 135.

<sup>13</sup> John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 40.

the Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Since truth must be lived, it is best embodied by witness, vulnerability and openness, not coercion and domination.

Churches’ efforts to witness this non-violent truth are largely dependent upon the people in the churches living consistently with this truth. That is, for example, if the church preaches “to love their enemy” as a core part of its understanding of “good news,” then in order for this message to be credible, loving their enemy must be a characteristic of the church’s internal life. Yoder exhibits this ecclesial testimony as a necessary condition for the church to demonstrate the visibility of her truth in his interpretation of the antithesis of Matthew 5:44-48, “loving your enemy.”

### **B. The interpretation of the antithesis “love your enemy” (Matthew 5:44-48)**

Yoder constructs his interpretation of the antitheses “love your enemy” (Matthew 5:44-48) from his understanding of the last verse, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” (Matthew 5:48). He argues that perfection in that verse is not about whether and in what sense Christians can and should try to be, or expect to be “perfect.” Loving one’s enemy to the point of perfection has nothing to do with a goal of absolute flawlessness or of having come to the end of all possibilities of growth. For Yoder, Jesus is not saying that one should expect to achieve perfection by loving the enemy. Instead, Jesus is saying that the reason for loving the enemy is because God does not only love his friends. Since God is indiscriminating or unconditional in his love, Christians are expected to imitate this character of love. This command of loving the enemy is not inconceivable or impossible. As Yoder argues, “We can stop loving only the lovable,

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<sup>14</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism,” in *Theological without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nations (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 83.

lending only to the reliable, giving only to the grateful, as soon as we grasp and are grasped by the unconditionality of the benevolence of God.”<sup>15</sup> Since loving one’s enemy is not a fruit of long growth and maturation, one can do it even today if one trusts oneself to Jesus in order to obey his commands.

Since this command is conceivable and possible, Yoder further argues that Christians should not engage in war and legitimate defense, for example, protecting oneself or significant others by killing the enemy. He qualifies, however, that Christians cannot require non-Christians to obey this command since they do not follow the non-violent way of life. In the fallen world, every argument which would permit the taking of life is in one way or another based on calculations of rights and merits. For non-Christians, they prefer the life of those dearest to them to that of the foreigner; or the life of the innocent to that of the troublemaker, because their love is conditional and qualified. Yoder interprets Matthew 5:46-47 to support this. Jesus recognizes the conditional love of non-Christians and points out that there is nothing new, nothing special, nothing redemptive or healing about it. In order to show something special, redemptive and healing about the conditional love in this fallen world, Christians should practice the command of loving the enemy. The way to practice this command for Yoder is the origin of the label “nonviolence” comes from.<sup>16</sup> Loving the enemy is a love not limited to those who merit it and it even goes beyond the unjust demands of those who coerce compliance with their will. This is not to encourage a resignation to one’s evil goals. This kind of love does not serve the enemy’s purposes but the enemy as a person

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<sup>15</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971), 48.

<sup>16</sup> Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 48.

who coerces. The violence Yoder renounces here is a returning evil for evil. It is not to promote a complicity in any evil design. Loving the enemy is, in Yoder's words, "creative concern for the person who is bent on evil, coupled with the refusal of his goals."<sup>17</sup> It is a special measure of love demanded by concern for the redemption of the offender. If Christians acts like non-Christians using violence, by engaging in war or legitimate defense, they would not be able to testify and demonstrate that they are the followers of Jesus whose love and benevolence knows no bounds.

### **III. The particularity of the antitheses**

Yoder believes that the antitheses are radical because they "refuse to measure by the standards of "common sense" or "realism" or "reason."<sup>18</sup> By the standards of common sense or realism or reason he means whether everyone agrees with or if a majority of people obey the antitheses. War and legitimate defense, for example, is the majority way of people doing in this fallen world. Christians by living out their love for the enemy demonstrates their refusal to follow the majority way of the fallen world. For in the life of Jesus' followers there is a radical difference, a quality of something more than the rest of the world. They are a particular people. The antitheses are the description of the order of this particular community that Jesus calls into the world.

#### **A. Christians as the recipient of the antitheses**

Yoder observes that Jesus follows up what God had done in calling Abraham and Moses in the Old Testament, namely, he gathers people and gives them his law so that a society comes into being like no society the world has ever seen. Like the Israel of the Old Testament which distinguished themselves from the rest of the nations with their

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<sup>17</sup> Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 38.

God-given laws, the church of the New Testament should distinguish herself from any other society in the world with the antitheses. Yoder says:

When He called His society together Jesus gave its member a new way of life to live. He gave them a new way to deal with offenders – by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence – by suffering... He gave them a new way to deal with a corrupt society – by building a new order, not by smashing the old. He gave them a new pattern of relationship between men and women, between parent and child, between master and slave, in which was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person. He gave them a new attitude toward the state and toward the ‘enemy nation.’”<sup>19</sup>

The radicalness of the antitheses Yoder understands is not like an academic gown or a clergyman’s collar which only tells people “here is somebody doing something distinct,” but it does not tell them why or how Christians should be particular or differ from the rest of the world. For Yoder, the radicalness with the antitheses, the radicalness which says something, is itself the message. He explains, “If I am the child of a Father who loves both good and evil children, if I am witness for a God who loves his enemies, then when I love my enemy I am *proclaiming* that love. I am not just obeying it; I am communicating it. And I cannot communicate it any other way.”<sup>20</sup> Jesus’ question, “What are you doing more than others?” (Matthew 5:47) is a refusal to the common discourse of ethics where one measures oneself by others in order to measure up to the average. The antitheses are going beyond what could be expected because when one does more as the antitheses require, the very event of exceeding the available requirements is itself a measure of one’s character. When Christians obey what Jesus tells them to do, like they tell the truth without oaths, they proclaim the sanctity of the name of God and of truthfulness. When Christians obey his command of non-retaliation, they preach that Jesus, and not the

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<sup>19</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1985), 52.



sovereign of the most-advanced nation, is the Lord of history. They demonstrate their particularity by living out the radicalness of the antitheses.

The antitheses are norms for those who confess Jesus as their Lord. They are in fact a call for a creation of a distinct community which acknowledges the lordship of Jesus with its own radical set of values in this fallen world. This theological observation implies that Christians cannot oblige the world to capitulate to the kingdom of God. What the church can do is to demonstrate its coming by her obedience. As a consequence, Christians should not expect of the fallen world that kind of moral performance which would appropriately be the fruit of their faith in Jesus Christ who inaugurated the coming of this kingdom.

Yoder explains that like in Jesus' days, the antitheses correct the mistakes of the Pharisees and scribes and undercut establishment religion of today. He interprets Matthew 5:46-47 as Jesus' call with a new dimension. He explains, "We can call people to the Jesus Christ of the gospel only by calling them away from the 'Christ' they already know – away from the official, conformist, power-related religion of the West."<sup>21</sup> Yoder explains that what Jesus meant by "fulfillment" (Matthew 5:17) is a full accomplishment of the intent of the earlier moral guides which the Pharisees and the scribes wrongly interpret by making "its standards fulfillable."<sup>22</sup> A conformist religion will say that one can perhaps still refrain from killing and adultery but one may still cherish lustful and hateful thoughts. Rigorously keeping an oath in the name of the Lord God himself is possible, yet one may still leave room to cheat a little when one swears by other things.

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<sup>21</sup> John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 45.

Loving one's neighbor is possible, yet one may still hate. As a consequence, one constructs for himself or herself a manageable morality, which one can handle, without repentance. Yoder is against this manageable morality. He believes that to assume a reasonable degree of legitimate self-interest by easily accommodating the moral law to the needs and desires of humans, such as do not lie – except to save your life or your country, do not kill – except killers, betrays Jesus' commands in the antitheses.

One might argue against this nonviolent interpretation of the antitheses on the grounds that it is quite unrealistic to expect States to follow this example. In response, Yoder explains that it does not matter even if States could follow the example since Christians are called by Christ to be different from the world and they do not wait for the world to be ready to follow them before they follow Christ.<sup>23</sup> Their non-resistant life, individually and communally as a church, does not depend on whether States are ready to lay down their weapons or not. "For Christians," as Yoder further argues, "to seek any government's interest – even the security and power of peaceable and freedom-loving democracy – at the cost of the lives and security of our brothers and sisters around the world, would be selfishness and idolatry, however much glorified by patriotic preachers and poets."<sup>24</sup> This does not mean that Christians should not engage in any state affairs. Yoder argues that, following Paul's instruction to pray especially for rulers and all those in authority so that we may lead a peaceful life (1 Tim. 2:2), Christians should pray and testify "concerning the folly of trusting in earthly arms, concerning the undermining of democratic government by peacetime military establishment, concerning the dangers of

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<sup>23</sup> John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 25.

radioactive contamination...and especially the hideous immorality of the weapons now being devised.”<sup>25</sup> The ground for this is that the church knows they are called to be faithful to Jesus. They confess that this same Jesus reigns over the world. The same one who calls them to deny themselves and follow him, to love their neighbors as themselves and to love even their enemies, is the One who reigns over all, including the state.

To properly explain how Christians can both obey the radical non-resistance of the antitheses and engage in the affairs of the State, Yoder makes a distinction between the orders of redemption and the orders of conservation.<sup>26</sup> The church belongs to the orders of redemption, and the State belongs to the order of conservation. The orders of redemption entail a radical break with the orders of conservation since the incarnated Christ breaks with the Jewish national community to be faithful to his mission. His incarnation proclaims the institution of a new kind of life, not of a new government. The State does not change with the incarnation of Christ; what has changed is the coming of the new order that proclaims the destiny of the old one. The consummation will mean the fulfillment of the orders of redemption and the collapse of the orders of conservation. It is in the light of this promised fulfillment that life in the new order through Christians, which seems so ineffective now, is nevertheless meaningful and right.

Because of this, Christians follow the example of the cross by refusing to use political means of self-defense. At the cross God demonstrates his love which seeks no effectiveness. Instead, God is willing to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of

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<sup>25</sup> John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 27.

<sup>26</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Peace without Escathology?” in John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994): 143-67.

obedience. Effectiveness and success have been sacrificed for the sake of love, but this sacrifice is turned by God into a victory that vindicates the apparent impotence of love. When the New Testament attributes the lordship over history and powers to Christ, it means that the essential change that has taken place is not within the realm of the old orders, like the State, where there is really no change; it is rather that the new order revealed in Christ takes primacy over the old, explains the meaning of the old, and will finally vanquish the old. Christians witness to the State this new order through their non-resistance way of life.

When Christians posit themselves non-resistantly in their engagement of State affairs and in their personal life, does it mean they comply with evil or to have a weak acceptance of the intentions of the evil one? To be precise, how should one interpret the command “do not resist evil person, if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39)? As individuals, the Christians should turn the other cheek, but how about in a society? Should they not be concerned with the protection of their neighbors, even to the point of using violent means to protect them? The non-resistant position needs to tackle this question of its contribution to the maintenance of order and justice in this way.

Yoder’s response to the question above is twofold. First, he argues that the doctrine of creation affirms that God made humans free, the doctrine of redemption says this freedom has been abused and the doctrine of hell lets sin free, finally and irrevocably, to choose separation from God.<sup>27</sup> Leaving humans free to separate themselves from God is part of the nature of God’s love itself. His love for human beings

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<sup>27</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Peace without Escathology?”, 151.

begins right at the point where God permits sin against himself and against others, without crushing the rebel under his or her own rebellion. This is not complicity on God's behalf; instead, it is divine patience. This, however, is not the final word. At the consummation, with judgment and hell, evil comes to its end and the fate of disobedient ones is exclusion from the new heaven and new earth. Since this final triumph over evil is not brought about by any human or political means, it also entails that the agent in judgment and protection against evil is not the church, for the church suffers nonresistantly. The task of the church is to obey, namely, to act nonresistantly. The responsibility for bringing about victory over evil is God's alone. God's intervention, not human action, is the vindication of human obedience in the face of evil. In fact, Yoder points out that "to crush evil adversary is to be vanquished by him because it means accepting his standards."<sup>28</sup> The Christian duty for protecting others from evil is to resist the temptation to meet it on its own terms.

Second, in its most defensible form, the above question implies that if one does not protect those being attacked, then one should share the guilt for the attack. It assumes that being guilty of defensive violence against the attacker is less evil than being passively guilty of permitting offensive violence for one of two reasons: either because the attacker is the aggressor or because the victim is a friend or relative or fellow citizen or perhaps a stranger for whom one has more accountability than for the attacker (the "lesser evil" argument). Yoder, however, argues that such contention that it is out love

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<sup>28</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Peace without Escathology?", 152.

for one's neighbor that one should protect a victim using violent means when others attack cannot be a defeater for the nonresistant position. He gives four reasons:<sup>29</sup>

- a. If one chooses to commit a defensive violence to protect the victim because he or she is "one's own" family, friends, compatriots, then it means one loves them more than one's enemy. On the contrary, Matthew 5:43-48 explicitly states the preference for the enemy over the friend as an object of the Christian's moral actions.
- b. To commit a defensive violence to the attacker means his life is worth less than that of the victim.
- c. The defensive violence against the attacker is perhaps an expression of love. It is love, however, in the sense of a benevolent sentiment but not of love as defined by the cross.
- d. Letting evil happen is not necessarily as blameworthy as committing it.

If those four reasons appear "scandalous," Yoder further argues, then it simply demonstrates that "how thoroughly the Western Christian mind-set has been Constantinianized, i.e., influenced by pagan and pre-Christian ideas of particular human solidarities as ethical absolutes."<sup>30</sup> The use of violence in this argument is for Yoder not biblically sound.

In addition, Yoder further points out that the "lesser evil" argument cannot adequately demonstrate that personal survival, which it tries to protect, would be a

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<sup>29</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Peace without Escathology?", 164.

<sup>30</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Peace without Escathology?", 164.

greater loss than what would be destroyed in the attack of an aggressor.<sup>31</sup> This is because personal survival is for the Christian not an end in itself. The cross is in fact the clearest evident to the contrary. One cannot be sure that personal survival (by committing the defensive violence) of one's neighbors is better than their personal harm (after doing the best one can without the authorization of the use of violent methods) due to the limits of human knowledge and to the distortion of objective truth by human pride.

The antitheses for Yoder are impossible to do only if the antitheses are abstracted from the new community made possible by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. He says Jesus' moral teaching in the antitheses is "not only understandable but possible; not only possible but the most appropriate testimony to the nature of God's love and his kingdom."<sup>32</sup> Since the character of this particular community is to exemplify their Savior's life, to live up the demands of the antitheses requires the patience that has been demonstrated in the cross. Yoder argues that the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the conviction that "the key to the obedience to God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience...The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship between cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the patience that exemplifies the cross is the patience to learn to be part of a community who has the time to take the time to live without resorting to violence to sustain their existence. By doing that, God's people as a particular community

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<sup>31</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Peace without Escathology?", 165.

<sup>32</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 52.

<sup>33</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 232.

in this fallen world will indeed live up to the radicalness of the antitheses and, as a result, they will be able to visibly demonstrate the challenges of the antitheses to the world.

### **B. Yoder on Christian particularity**

This vision of obedience, which is binding only on Christians, implies that their obedience to witness the kingdom of God cannot be tested whether or not they can ask everyone else to do the same thing. One of the logical repercussions of this is that, as Yoder points out, “we no longer hold ourselves to be morally or psychologically obligated to tailor our moral standards to the needs of the people who are running the world.”<sup>34</sup> This is in contrast with Immanuel Kant’s classic statement of categorical imperative, namely, “act only according to that maxim by which at the same time you can will that it becomes universal law.” For Yoder, Christian moral thinking is more realistic when it is done within the perspective of the kingdom of God embodied in Jesus incarnate. To base our moral thinking on the calculation that most of the world is going this way is not realistic because the world does not share Christian faith. Christians must not, for instance, assume that everyone will be interested in denying themselves and picking up their crosses. This costly form of ethical living only makes sense, and is only possible, in light of the resurrection and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, who is only available to those who have experienced regeneration.

One might object that Yoder’s view here of such an ethics which avows its particularity seems provincial. James Gustafson calls this “a sectarian temptation” because Yoder seems to isolate Christian ethics from critical external points of view in

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<sup>34</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 123.



order to maintain the unique identity of Christianity.<sup>35</sup> For Gustafson, while Yoder's position will provide distinctiveness in behavior and ensures a clear identity which frees persons from ambiguity and uncertainty, such a position will isolate "Christianity from taking seriously the wider world of science and culture and limits the participation of Christians in the ambiguities of moral and social life in the patterns of interdependence in the world."<sup>36</sup> This isolation could happen because Yoder's ethics might run the risk of becoming a descriptive rather than a normative discipline since it only adheres to the ethos of a particular historic community rather than participation in the patterns and processes of larger human life and society.

Gustafson's protest describes his approval of an old statement by Alasdair McIntyre: "Either it [moral theology] will remain within the theological closed circle: in which case it will have no access to the public and shared moral criteria of our society. Or it will accept those criteria: in which case it may well have important things to say, but these will not be distinctively Christian."<sup>37</sup> As a response to this objection, Yoder attempts to provide the third option. In his "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism and Validation," he argues that even though Christian ethics is particular, it is communicable and therefore it still has access to the public and has

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<sup>35</sup> James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University," *The Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Convention*, ed. George Kilcourse, vol. 40 (June 5-8, 1985): 83 (83-95).

<sup>36</sup> James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," 84.

<sup>37</sup> Alasdair McIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Company Limited, 1971), 23.

important things to say.<sup>38</sup> He begins his defense by showing that Gustafson's opposition to his position also assumes some objectionable standard epistemological contexts:<sup>39</sup>

- 1) There is assumed to be "out there" a singly publicly accessible system for validating statements of fact as being (at least) meaningful and (perhaps, ideally) as "true."
- 2) It is further assumed that that system can also validate statements about value or morality. Accepting the demands of that system is a prerequisite for what McIntyre has called, with Gustafson's approval, having "important things to say."
- 3) It is further assumed that in any given setting it is possible to ascertain by empirical readings, whether scientific or impressionistic, what is the normative public meaning framework.
- 4) By definition the notion of "public and shared criteria" is a real cliché. It is self-validated if trusted by everyone, and it is self-defeated if questioned by anyone. Thereby it partakes of the same self-confident ambivalence which regularly marks appeals to "nature," "self-evidence," and "consensus."

He then argues why the particularity of Christian ethics is necessary because if "public and shared criteria" is already present in every culture, then no Christian ethics would be needed, or possible.<sup>40</sup> The particularity of Christian ethics is communicable to the public

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<sup>38</sup> John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 285-300.

<sup>39</sup> John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 288-9.

<sup>40</sup> John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 292.

and has important things to say because it is not meant to be esoteric but missionary.<sup>41</sup> While its content needs to be faithful to its origin, by its very nature it must be shared, which invites all who hear it.

In addition, to safeguard against destructive provinciality of this particular Christian ethics, Yoder argues that such ethics forbids itself either to impose its identity or desires on others coercively or to withhold it from any as a privilege. He proposes that the content of this ethics “includes at its heart its affirmation of the dignity of the outside and the adversary in such a way that while the dangers of arbitrary narrowness can never be totally banned, they can at least be warded off.”<sup>42</sup> The loving posture of this particular ethics, neither imposing nor withholding, arises from its “election.”<sup>43</sup> What Yoder means by “election” here is the call of Abraham. With the call of Abraham, a part of the whole creation is separated from the whole on the basis not of its intrinsic qualities but by the peculiarly selective wisdom of a distinctively identifiable God. “If all the world is to be blessed,” Yoder explains, “it will be *through* the distinctive response of this man [Abraham] and his seed to their particular call.”<sup>44</sup>

When Yoder argues that the antitheses are only for Christians, his position does mean to deny the possibility of a universal moral order which applies to everyone. What he argues here is that in this specific text, namely the antitheses, the particularity of Christian ethics is most apparent. The antitheses, at the moment of their deliverance, are

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<sup>41</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics,” in *The Royal Priesthood*: 115 (102-26).

<sup>42</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics,” 115

<sup>43</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics,” 115.

<sup>44</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics,” 115.

taught by Jesus to his Jewish disciples. This suggests Christians should accept willingly, rather than grudgingly, as an affirmation rather than as a limitation, their rootedness in the particularity of Judaism and Jesus. For them to recognize this is to say, as Yoder explains, “that despite the possible or imaginable projections of something that *might* be ‘universally’ valid, these people are willing to live within the limits of the story of their faith and even to celebrate their faith in a form that hold its meaning open for others to join.”<sup>45</sup> Such affirmation should not make Christians embarrassed about the fact that its particular position is not ultimately subject to irresistible verification (or falsification) from outside its own system.

For Yoder, therefore, while there might be a universal moral order in place, for Christians to recognize the particularity of their ethics is to be true to themselves and their story. He explains, for example, with the teachings of murder (Matthew 5:21-26) and love for enemies (Matthew 5:43-48): “The idea that human life is intrinsically sacred is not a specifically Christian thought. But the gospel itself, the message that Christ died for His enemies, is *our* reason for being ultimately responsible for the neighbor’s – and especially the enemy’s – life.”<sup>46</sup> What Christians are required to do is to live up faithfully to their particularity so that the world can witness their deeds and may join them because after all this particular community is established by a God who became particular in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Yoder says, “‘Incarnation’ is not first a concept in communication theory; it is the code word for the uniquely theocentric Palestinian Jewish

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<sup>45</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics,” 113. Emphasis original.

<sup>46</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 42.

man Jesus, communicating God to us.”<sup>47</sup> They are not required to tell the world that they know the right thing to do universally. They are, however, opened to others’ critics, even when such critics claim to be based on a universal truth, as far as they will not betray their own particularity.

Why does Yoder choose to propose for Christians to live up to their particularity as their testimony to the fallen world instead of suggesting that Christians claim to know the universal moral order and tell others to follow? To be more specific, why does Yoder choose to posit the antitheses particularly for Christians, instead of taking them universally for everyone? One of the reasons is Yoder’s belief that there is no non-particular place to stand. He argues, “The theory of truth exemplified by and assumed ever since Lessing, which can claim to put the ‘particularity’ of others in a box only because it thinks that its own ‘necessary truths of reason’ are universal, is in fact no less in a box itself.”<sup>48</sup> This does not mean that since we are all boxed particularly, any critical discourse is pointless. Critical discourse and dialogue are important because they testify to “respect for those to whom one wishes to communicate” and “to the strength of anyone’s conviction that what one believes...is not only true for oneself.”<sup>49</sup> What Yoder argues is the need to recognize one’s particularity since what is universal has been arrived at historically, in one’s own setting and language.

Furthermore, Yoder chooses to be particular because he is against the coercive nature of the universal validation to which many have been accustomed: “We want

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<sup>47</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 295.

<sup>48</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 289.

<sup>49</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 290.

people to *have* to believe us...we are impressed by the power to convince which we see exercised by demonstrations in mathematics and logic, in the natural sciences, and in documented history...and we want our claims about God and morality to be similarly coercive.”<sup>50</sup> One tends to seek for any universal warrants because one wants others to capitulate to one’s position. By claiming the antitheses to be particularly Christian, Yoder does not intend to mean that this acceptance of one’s own limits implies one’s position to disregard the challenge of universality. Instead, he chooses to “restate the meaning of a truth claim from within particular identity.”<sup>51</sup> Yoder believes that by virtue of one’s uncoerced and noncoercive submission of one’s own particularity, one will not be easily tempted to coerce others to join one’s community because “rejection...is part of validation” and the price of one’s particular testimony of truth claim is to be ready to “suffer at the hands of the addresses.”<sup>52</sup> In taking seriously one’s particularity, the readiness to bear others’s hostility is also part of the risk of such position.

#### **IV. The institutionality of the antitheses**

Yoder perceives the antitheses are particularly for Christians. He also substantiates this claim by showing that Matthew 5:1-2 is akin to Exodus 19-20.<sup>53</sup> When Moses meets God at Mount Sinai and received from him the tables of the law, this law is for all the children of Israel. When Jesus from another mount proclaims again the statutes of his kingdom, it is to his disciples. The antitheses, specifically, are not a set of moral standards to be posed on everyone or non-Christians. Jesus does not propose that in order

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<sup>50</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 287.

<sup>51</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 290.

<sup>52</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 293.

<sup>53</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 39.

to achieve the state of happiness in this fallen world everyone must obey these standards. They are not “a prescription of what every man can and should do to be happy.”<sup>54</sup> As a consequence, non-Christians are not required to obey these standards. They can find their own way of happiness. Jesus in the antitheses does not address them. His concern is for his disciples. The precepts he sets forth in the antitheses are binding only upon those voluntarily enrolled in the band of his followers. They are, as Yoder says, “a description of how a man behaves whose life has been transformed by meeting Jesus.”<sup>55</sup> The antitheses are not a matter of earning a place in the kingdom of God, nor are they a guide of simple blind obedience. They are the norms by which Christians as a particular community communicate to the world around the coming of the kingdom of God.

By obeying the antitheses, the deeds of the church are a witness to the world. Yoder gives the emphasis on the communal aspect of one’s obedience instead of merely the personal one. One’s obedience does not, for Yoder, exist in a mere interpersonal relationship within private and social spheres, but also in an inter-institutional liaison. The visibility of the church for Yoder is, however, not an end in itself. The church exists to give testimony to Jesus Christ. To so testify requires that the church be holy. Sanctification names the way the church becomes visible because sanctification is not just something that happens to individuals, but also to the church as a community. In fact, the reverse in the case of the community of believers as a social group is more aptly correct. The church must be and is a social group of holiness without which individual sanctification is impossible. The antitheses serve to spell out and to describe the kind of

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<sup>54</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 38.

community they require. Jesus is clear that the law needs to be observed (Matthew 7:21-27). Murder, adultery, oaths, retaliation and hatred of enemy are therefore prohibited. This is not to say that the community Jesus calls into existence is merely determined by what it avoids to do, and as a result, becomes legalistic. On the contrary, it obeys and avoids what is avoided because its life has been transformed by Jesus and by this transformation its character is to exemplify his life.

#### **A. Yoder's response to Reinhold Niebuhr's social ethics**

In his critique of Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*,<sup>56</sup> Yoder argues that Niebuhr fails to properly consider the concept of the church as a social group.<sup>57</sup> Niebuhr sets forth the thesis that human communities are always more selfish and less moral than individuals, and that what is possible for society is even less good than what is possible for an individual. Thus even if the law of love were possible for individuals, it would still be an impossibility for politics and social organization, which remain the realm in which justice is sought through a balance of power between the various group egoisms which conflict. Although these egoisms are all to be condemned as contrary to the law of love, it remains true that some of them are closer to the interests of equal justice than others. Yoder argues against the inclusion of the community of believers as part of Niebuhr's thesis. "If being a perfectly loyal American, a freemason, or a bourgeois, identifies a man with that group egoism in such a way as to make him less loving than he would be as an individual," Yoder argues, "the contrary is true of being a member of Christ."<sup>58</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

<sup>57</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1968), 21.

<sup>58</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism*, 21.



church, as the body of Christ, differs from other social bodies in that it is not less moral than its individual members.

To be fair, Yoder concedes that Niebuhr's thesis has a degree of validity when it deals with any attempt to derive a general social and political strategy from a particular Christian ethics.<sup>59</sup> The reason is because Christians, who have spiritual resources for unselfish and rational action, cannot expect of societies, which have no such resources and make no claim to be fully interested, a Christian degree of unselfishness and love. Yoder explicitly says that "the doctrine of regeneration means that ethics for Christians and ethics for unregenerate society are two distinct disciplines."<sup>60</sup> The problem arises when one takes the risk to identify the church with a particular social order of other societies in the world. Since the church comprises all people of all different races and nations, Christian ethics cannot be limited to a particular culture, a race or a state. The church is a super-national society. When any church endorses a political action of a state where Christians kill Christians, Yoder explains, "The greatest possible offense against the unity of the body of Christ takes place."<sup>61</sup> This shows that the church is a distinct society governed with her own ethics distinguished from the rest of societies in the world.

### **B. The antitheses and the church as a community**

Yoder argues against the interpretation that Jesus' teaching of the antitheses is merely an ethics for "face-to-face personal encounters,"<sup>62</sup> in the sense that Jesus only addresses personal ethics, and as a consequence, one is not allowed to take the antitheses

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<sup>59</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 108.

as an example of social ethics. While Yoder concedes that the antitheses are “not a meditation on how best to guide society” in general,<sup>63</sup> the fact that Jesus came to establish a new community – namely, the church – the antitheses are nevertheless the description of the order of that new community. If the church as a community is to be seen as a visible alternative to the world, the antitheses should be read in that way. They give the form of the order of the Christian community’s upbuilding and constitution. It is only by striving to live the standard of the antitheses that the church can be the salt and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). They are laws given for a new society of people who acknowledge the lordship of Jesus.

The church, as a community, in living out the demands in the antitheses does not call for social cynicism or for withdrawal. Instead, it is a call for a profound intellectual reorientation. Yoder says that “the Christian community is the only community whose social hope is that we need not rule because Christ is Lord.”<sup>64</sup> Since the church’s hope is in Christ, the testimony which the church must represent through her social ethics in the world is not simply that she has a more sacred cause for the sake of which she can worthily push people around. For example, the church should not push any society around with the antitheses of “Oaths” and “Vengeance” (Matthew 5:33-42) nor she should have an ethical irresponsibility by withdrawing from the society because of such commands. Instead, three distinct elements explains how the social ethics of the antitheses show the church’s engagements in the society.<sup>65</sup> first, the non-resistance vision

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<sup>63</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 125-6.

<sup>65</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 75-9.

is not the prophetic vocation of a few individuals, but that every member of the body of Christ is called to nonresistance in discipleship and to abandonment of all loyalties which counter that obedience, including the desire to be effective immediately or to make oneself responsible for civil justice. Second, the church's confession, "Christ is the Lord," is a prophetic voice of the church to the State to obey and serve God by encouraging good and restraining evil, namely, to serve peace, to preserve the social cohesion in which the leaven of the gospel can build the church and also render the fallen world more tolerable. Yoder allows a local police action which aims not at annihilation but at a readjustment of tensions to preserve a proximate justice. Third, through the church's testimony of her social ethics, like honesty (the "Oaths" command) and brotherhood (the "love your enemy" command), Christianized morality can seep into the non-Christian society through example and through the education of children with the hope that the whole moral tone of non-Christian society is changed for the better and there are honorable and honest people available to run the government. Yet, Yoder reminds us, even such morality does not "make men ultimately better in the sight of God and no better administrators of the talents entrusted to them."<sup>66</sup> The point Yoder emphasize here is that as long as the state does not interfere, either through fascism or through violence which destroys the tissue of society, these moral by-products of Christianity will make the fallen world more tolerable for living.

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<sup>66</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 77.

## V. Summary and assessments

### A. Summary

In the analysis of Yoder's interpretation of the antitheses, the mission of the church constitutes the backbone of social ethics. The demands in the antitheses are not only for individual Christians but also for the church as a community. They call the believing community to live a life of discipleship which will be different from the rest of the world. Such a life is meant only for those who acknowledge the lordship of Jesus over their life, and thus by nature, the antitheses are only intended for Christians. To receive such commands, however, does not commend the church to claim a privileged handle on the social decision process. Nor, should the church retreat from the worldly engagements, whereby the fellowship patterns of the believing community are interested only in their own integrity or intensity. Instead, the church or the believing community is seen not as lordship but as servanthood to testify the kingdom of God to the world, not as privilege but as pointer of what life in the kingdom should be, not as achievement but as promise of the coming kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

By working out the demands in the antitheses, the church's presence of her discipleship constitutes a part of the promise that more is to come since the church communicates to the fallen world what God plans to do through the church. Yoder argues that the church is "pilot project, and podium, pedagogical base."<sup>67</sup> The effectiveness of the church's attempt to live out her mission as God's display to the fallen world, however, does not depend on the church herself or on her day-to-day faithfulness. That is one reason why the church imitates her Lord's nonresistance attitude. If the fallen world,

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<sup>67</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics," 126.

such as States, accepts the church's testimony, praise be to God. If they reject her, still praise be to God since the church follows her Savior's path and does not intend to imitate the way the fallen world deals with her. Part of the grace from which the church lives is the grace of her not needing to be responsible for the success of God's plan. What the church is responsible for is the consistency and congruence between her ministry and the kingdom of God which God has begun in her.

### **B. Assessments**

One positive assessment from Yoder's account of ethical Christian living is that he builds his nonviolent ethics on the foundation of Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus proclaim and embody the kingdom of God. Yoder perceives Christians, individually and as a community, as the testimony of the kingdom of God on earth. By living out the demands in the antitheses, the church testifies the eschatological hope of the God who brought about his kingdom in the suffering of Jesus. As Yoder puts it, the church is the "scaffolding service" of the coming kingdom.<sup>68</sup> This implies that in Yoder's ethical exhortations the person and work of Jesus is of central importance. In other words, Yoder's ethics stems from his Christology. This is not to say that for Yoder Jesus is merely a good teacher of ethical ideals. Instead, since for Yoder Jesus is the very presence of the kingdom of God, his person – encompassing both his life and teachings – is integral to how one should understand the kingdom of God. The reason Jesus is Lord is because of his faithful witness to the way of God is, even unto a cruel death. His life is the very witness of God's kingdom. It is what the kingdom looks like. The Sermon on the Mount, especially the antitheses, is for Yoder not only the espousal of good teachings; it

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<sup>68</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 11.

is rather the concrete announcement of a new social order in the kingdom of God. The fact that God's kingdom was brought about by a nonviolent witness means that for the church to be a foretaste of the kingdom, it must also practice nonviolence. It is in this nonviolent practice that the believing community acknowledges the lordship of Jesus, and it can be done no other way than the faithful following of Him in whom the kingdom came.

As stated above, the emphasis of the nonviolent lifestyle for Yoder is in the social practices of the church or believing community. This specific thrust within Yoder's ethics has both strength and weakness. The strength lies on Yoder's Christocentric ethics which recognizes the importance of Jesus' nonviolent lifestyle in Christian discipleship not only individually but also communally. This understanding is needed in a Christian world that has for the most part gives emphasis on the idea of the individual as the sole agent in the faithful Christian life. Yoder correctly sees that even if it is possible for an individual to live out the demands in the antitheses, it would be necessarily be unfaithful if and only if it is only individual, for the kingdom of God is inherently communal. He instead argues not only for an individual faithfulness but also for a communal one. The weakness in giving emphasis for such communal discipleship, however, lies on the risk that other important elements of Christian theology seem underrepresented. In this case, though Yoder states that the kingdom is something that came solely from God in Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and not by human works,<sup>69</sup> the emphasis on the church as *the* witness for the kingdom has the risk to imply that the community and not the continuing grace of God is the sustainer of such a witness. Certainly it is of the believing community's volition to bring the testimony of God's kingdom on earth. Still, Yoder should argue more explicitly

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<sup>69</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 55.

that it is only possible by the continuing grace of God. Otherwise, he would not give an adequate account of the pervasive nature of sin and the necessity of God's grace to even a communal attempt to live out the kingdom faithfully.

## CHAPTER SIX: ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERPRETATION OF THE ANTITHESES

### I. Introduction

The previous chapters deal with theologians from different theological traditions in their interpretation of the antitheses. While one's theological background influences one's biblical interpretation, it should not be assumed that such interpretation is *the* interpretation of the given theological tradition. For example, it is not correct to say that Calvin's interpretation of the antitheses is *the* Reformed interpretation of the antitheses. His interpretation is indeed part of the Reformed tradition but it is not to say that other Reformed theologians must follow the way Calvin interprets the antitheses in order to demonstrate their adherence to Reformed tradition. One should not look at Calvin as the exclusive standard by which to judge subsequent Reformed theology and biblical interpretation. To do that is to revive the setback of "Calvin vs. the Calvinists." Propping up Calvin as the one measure by which later Reformed thought must be assessed is troublesome in many respects, not least of which is the theological variety evident already in the earliest years of the formation of the Reformed tradition distinct from Lutheranism within the broader Protestant orbit.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to formulate a churchly interpretation of the antitheses. One way to achieve this purpose is to look at the Roman Catholic interpretation of the antitheses. The enduring hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) makes this attempt doable. The Catechism and the encyclicals of the RCC generally

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, Vol. 1: *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 38, 52-59.



exercise authority over the doctrine and life of her people.<sup>2</sup> The official Catechism itself is a source on which to base other catechisms and other expositions of Catholic doctrine.<sup>3</sup> It is given, as stated in the Apostolic Constitution “Fidei Depositum,” with which its publication is ordered, “that it may be a sure and authentic reference text for teaching catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms.”<sup>4</sup> Within the RCC itself there are also some individual comments on the antitheses.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will only indirectly consider them as far as they can make some allusions or comments pertinent to the interpretation of the antitheses set forth in the Catechism or the encyclicals.

There are six antitheses found in verses 21-48 of Matthew 5 and the Catechism, in its exposition of the Decalogue,<sup>6</sup> always juxtaposes any antithesis with a corresponding commandment in the Decalogue. The fifth antithesis (on Oaths) is put together with the second commandment (“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain”) and the eighth commandment (“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”). The

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<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that it is impossible to do, for example, the Lutheran interpretation of the antitheses. It only means that it is more difficult to formulate a denominational interpretation of the antitheses within Protestantism.

<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II (United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994). Hereafter is CCC.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Fidei Depositum on the Publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church prepared following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* in [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_19921011\\_fidei-depositum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_19921011_fidei-depositum_en.html).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Bernard Haring, “The Normative Value of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 no. 3 (July 1967): 375-385 and John Paul II, *Blessed are the Pure of Heart: Catechesis on the Sermon on the Mount and the Writings of St. Paul* (Boston: St. Paul Edition, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> There are different ways of numbering the Ten Commandments. The numbering in this chapter will follow the Roman Catholic numbering. The Jews ascribe much value to the prologue of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:2) that they make it the first commandment. They combine what the Reformed tradition takes to be the first and second commandments into one and then identify the third through tenth commandments in the same way as the Reformed and Greek Orthodox. The Roman Catholics and the Lutherans also combine the first and second commandments into one like the Jews and divide the tenth commandment, unlike the Jews, Greek Orthodox, and Reformed, into two commandments, the ninth and tenth commandments.

first (on Murder), the fifth (on Eye for Eye) and the sixth (on Love for Enemies) are with the fifth commandment (“You shall not kill”). The second (on Adultery) and the third (on Divorce) are with the sixth commandment (“You shall not commit adultery”).

By relating the antitheses to the Decalogue, the Catechism of RCC teaches two things. First, it argues that in the antitheses Jesus is not throwing down a gauntlet and relentlessly contrasting the instructions of Moses in the Decalogue with his own demands. Instead, Jesus is functioning here as the Old Testament prophets did and calling his countrymen to a faithful living out of the demands of the Mosaic Torah. Through the antitheses, Jesus is challenging contemporary Jewish rabbinical misinterpretation of the Decalogue. Second, the RCC considers that the antitheses are derived from the universal moral order – through which the Decalogue is also derived – and revealed to Christians to govern their individual moral conduct.

## **II. The antitheses and the Decalogue**

The RCC does not judge the antitheses to challenge the adequacy of the Decalogue in the texts themselves. This is evident in the teaching of the Catechism on the relationship between Jesus and the Law and on the correction Jesus gives through the antitheses to the corrupted interpretation of some commands in the Decalogue by the Pharisees and scribes of his time.

### **A. Jesus and the law**

The RCC’s position on this matter, that Jesus and Torah are in complete harmony when both are properly understood and interpreted, involves the broader question of Jesus’ attitude toward the Mosaic Law, not only in general, but specifically in light of his strong remarks reaffirming its authority immediately before presenting his antitheses

(Matthew 5:17-20). The RCC assumes that Jesus derives his commands in the Decalogue and intends his six antitheses to be reaffirmations of the Decalogue. As the Catechism explains:

In Jesus, the same Word of God, that had resounded on Mount Sinai to give the written Law of Moses, made itself heard anew on the Mount of the Beatitudes. Jesus did not abolish the Law but fulfilled it by giving its ultimate interpretation in a divine way: “You have heard that it was said to the men of Old...but I say to you...” With this same divine authority, he disavowed certain human traditions of the Pharisees that were “making void the word of God.”<sup>7</sup>

With the antitheses, as the RCC posits in the Catechism, Jesus is not contrasting an old Law with a new one. Instead, he is contrasting a Jewish interpretation of the Law with his own. This implies the targets of Jesus’ antitheses. If Jesus’ teaching is consistent with the Mosaic and prophetic revelation of old and yet is also against something, the only proper target of his argument is the rabbinical or popular interpretation of his day.

The RCC’s view is that the Pharisees and the scribes in Jesus’ day have lapsed into “hypocritical casuistry.”<sup>8</sup> They relentlessly try to determine a moral response appropriate to a particular case to the point that they only produce meticulous rules for outward actions to keep, forgetting the more important matters of the law. For example, Jesus condemns their teaching of giving a tenth of the spices which disregards justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). They interpret and apply the Decalogue to fit their situation. While this practical approach to morality is laudable, they take it too far in that their interpretation of the law replaces the law itself. With the antitheses, Jesus presents with divine authority the correct interpretation of the Law. Specifically, he makes it more explicitly internal as well as external conduct.

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<sup>7</sup> CCC, 149.

<sup>8</sup> CCC, 148.

The RCC understands the antitheses as new normative covenant Law: “At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus issued a solemn warning in which he presented God’s law, given on Sinai during the first covenant, in light of the grace of the New Covenant.”<sup>9</sup> The antitheses preserve the continuity with the old Mosaic Law. Both express the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. “Moral existence is,” the Catechism propounds, “a *response* to the Lord’s loving initiative.”<sup>10</sup> The Israelites of the Old Testament responds to God’s loving initiative in their obedient observance of the Decalogue. In the same way, as their response to their Lord’s loving initiative the Christians of the New Testament observe the New Law.

The antitheses, as the New Law, do not replace the Old Law. They are new in the sense that Jesus is stressing the transformation in the life of his followers. The Catechism expounds in this way: “The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law...does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between the pure and the impure, where faith, hope and charity are formed and with them the other virtues.”<sup>11</sup> The new Law set by Jesus in the antitheses points toward the complete inner renewal and transformation in the life of the believer as the goal. It is a total shift of the balance, of the point of view. Jesus’ followers are not confronted with the tablets telling them what to do. Mere external observance of the Old Law may bring people to lapse into hypocritical casuistry. This is evident in the rabbinical interpretation of the Decalogue in Jesus’ time. In contrast, the antitheses demonstrate that Jesus brings the

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<sup>9</sup> CCC, 148.

<sup>10</sup> CCC, 501. Emphasis original.

<sup>11</sup> CCC, 478.

Mosaic Law to its fullness by means of internal and external observance of the law. It is internally motivated as a response to the divine generosity and encouraged to imitate the perfection of the heavenly Father. This internal motivation expressed itself through external moral actions such as forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors. Jesus' followers are to obey the antitheses and the Decalogue because they still need, by the grace of God, to be perfected ("Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect," (Matthew 5:48).

The view of life transformation that the RCC has in the antitheses further demonstrates Jesus' teaching on the totality of morality in the lives of his followers. The Catechism does not regard the antitheses mainly as teaching an ethic of disposition, that is, an ethic which only emphasizes internal attitudes over against external acts. In this view, what matters is not the action but the motivation. One proponent of this ethic, for example, is Ernest F. Scott. He interprets the ethical teaching of Jesus in the antitheses as mere true inwardness: "Hence he [Jesus] declares that the good or evil of an act consists wholly in its motive and that the moral task is nothing else than the right ordering of the inner life."<sup>12</sup> For Scott, to have the right motive or a good attitude is the most essential element in evaluating the morality of an action. The RCC is against this over-emphasized inwardness in interpreting the antitheses.

In ethics, as the Catechism explains, motivation is concerned with the goal of an action. Motivation or attitude, theoretically, is a movement of the will toward an end and since it lies at the voluntary source of an action and determines it by its end, the motive resides in the acting subject. It aims at the good anticipated from the action undertaken.

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<sup>12</sup> Ernest F. Scott, *The Ethical Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 19.

Since motive is not only limited to directing individual actions, it can also guide several actions toward one and the same purpose.<sup>13</sup> In other words, one action can be inspired by several motivations. For example, a service done with the end of helping one's neighbor can be inspired by the love of God. One and the same action, however, can also have the motive of obtaining favor or the desire to boast about it.

The problem with an ethic which over-emphasizes motives over deeds, as Scott does, lies in the motives themselves. The RCC argues that a right motive does not make behavior that is intrinsically wrong, such as slander and murder, good or just. The end does not justify the means.<sup>14</sup> Obviously, Jesus also intends his followers to develop a new attitude in his teaching of the antitheses. But Jesus does not stop there. He also requires a new obedience, which includes the entirety, both motives and actions, of the life of his followers. A true attitude or motive should manifest itself in right behavior or moral deeds such as reconciliation with a neighbor and love for an enemy.

The RCC recognizes this totality of morality in Jesus' teaching of the antitheses since the Catechism defines the New Law, which finds its expression in the antitheses, as a law of love, a law of grace, and a law of freedom.<sup>15</sup> The New Law is a law of love because the motive of love, infused by the Holy Spirit, inspires the moral action. The right motive, in contrast to a wrong one such as fear, is the basis of the moral action in this law of love. It is a law of grace because it bestows the strength of grace to act. This law does not leave humans on their own to act but instead gives humans the grace and

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<sup>13</sup> CCC, 434.

<sup>14</sup> CCC, 434.

<sup>15</sup> CCC, 479.

strength needed to perform the moral action. It is a law of freedom because it sets humans free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Mosaic Law. This law of freedom also sets them free from the status of servants who “do not know what their master’s business” to that of a friend of Jesus, “For everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you,” (John 15:15), even to the status of children and heir (John 1:12). In summary, Jesus in the antitheses overcomes the wrong interpretation of the Mosaic Law which prevails in his era. The problem, however, is not with the Mosaic Law itself. The problem is with a kind of casuistry that builds up around the Mosaic Law and concentrates on finding or closing loopholes in the exterior observance of the law. In the antitheses, Jesus shifts the attention to human heart, the root of human acts, without simply doing away with the exterior moral precepts. The antithesis of “oaths” discussed below will demonstrate this.

#### **B. Jesus’ correction to the erroneous interpretation of “oaths” (Matthew 5:33-37)**

In the fourth antithesis (Matthew 5:33-37), Jesus mentions some of typical oath takings. Taking an oath by heaven, the earth or Jerusalem is a typical of Jewish practice. According to Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, oaths are to be taken in the name of God, but by the time of Jesus, pious Jews evidently would not utter that name. The oblique terms “heaven,” “earth,” and “Jerusalem” are used in oaths as metonymies, circumlocutions associated with God. Such oaths are mentioned in the Mishnah<sup>16</sup> (eg., *Sebi’it* 4.13 and *Sanhedrin* 3.2) and viewed as not binding by at least some authorities (for example,

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<sup>16</sup> Mishnah is the oldest authoritative collection of Jewish oral law, supplementing the written laws in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was compiled by a series of scholars over two centuries and was given final form in the 3rd century AD by Judah ha-Nasi.

Mishnah Nedarim 1.3).<sup>17</sup> If it was claimed by some of his era that oaths by heaven or earth or Jerusalem or one's head were not binding, then Jesus shows that an oath is an oath regardless of how oblique the reference to God (Matthew 5:34-36) by linking heaven and earth and Jerusalem to God.

The Catechism interprets Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:33-37 by looking at the fourth antithesis – “oaths” – from the perspective of the second commandment (“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain”) and of the eighth commandment (“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”). It juxtaposes the fourth antithesis with the second commandment to demonstrate that “Jesus teaches that every oath involves a reference to God and that God's presence and his truth must be honored in all speech. Discretion in calling upon God is allied with a respectful awareness of his presence, which all our assertions either witness to or mock.”<sup>18</sup> And the eighth commandment and fourth antithesis expose the same implication, which is, to call the members of God's people to “live in truth” in order to “bear witness to their God who is the truth and wills the truth.”<sup>19</sup> The Catechism does not interpret Jesus' saying: “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” to mean his followers should never take an oath. Instead, the saying is about living in truthfulness and sincerity.<sup>20</sup> Offenses against the truth by word or deed express a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness. Those offenses toward others are fundamentally offenses to God himself.

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<sup>17</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., ed., *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 82. For a sample of rabbinic regulation of oaths, see *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 354 (*Sanhedrin* 3:2), 411-20 (*Shebuoth* 3:1-7:8).

<sup>18</sup> CCC, 520.

<sup>19</sup> CCC, 591.

<sup>20</sup> CCC, 591-2.



In the Old Testament, oaths are permitted as long as irreverence and falsehood are not involved (e.g. Genesis 14:22; Joshua 2:12). If one's heart is right with God, upright speech will transparently represent what is in one's heart. Perjury and false witness will not occur. Oaths are to ensure the truthfulness of one's word and of one's resolve to follow through on obligations (Exodus 20:7; 1 Kings 8:31-32). The problem emerges when oaths are taken to distinguish two classes of utterances, one with a vow committing the speaker to veracity and the other without a vow, implying no such commitment. In Jesus' era, subtle casuistic distinctions between binding and non-binding oaths have further messed up things (cf. Matthew 23:16-22).

Matthew 23:16-22 reveals a highly developed Jewish casuistry in oath-making. Where verbal oaths provide the assurance, the precise location and accessibility of that assurance becomes important. If one swears by the temple, it is not binding, but if one swears by the temple's gold, it is. If one swears by the altar of sacrifice, it is not binding, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, it is. One set of oaths is not binding presumably because if a debtor cannot pay the debt, his creditor cannot place a lien on the assurance. The other set of oaths is binding because the gold or the gift on the altar can be seized in compensation for broken pledges. Jesus is against this wrong interpretation of taking an oath. As in Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus expounds that all oaths directly or indirectly appeal to God. All are therefore binding since they call on him to guarantee their fulfillment. Any deviation from truthfulness in speech, any desire to use speech, even an oath, to deceive another is prohibited.

Both Matthew 5:33-37 and Matthew 23:16-22 demonstrates that Jesus is concerned with the common oaths that were abundant in his society. He is not addressing

judicial oaths. Jesus himself did not refuse when he was put under judicial oath by the high priest: “I charge you under oath by the living God: tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63). Whether the words “I swear” were in his response or not, Jesus was still making a statement under oath when he responded, “You have said so” (v.64). This is the reason that the Catechism understands the fourth antithesis does not exclude “oaths made for grave and right reasons (for example, in court).”<sup>21</sup> It explains that since an oath is the invocation of the divine name as a witness to truth, one can take an oath only in truth, in judgment and in justice: “When it is truthful and legitimate, an oath highlights the relationship of human speech with God’s truth. A false oath calls on God to be witness to a lie.”<sup>22</sup> The Catechism sets forth at least two conditions which explicitly prohibit one taking an oath.<sup>23</sup> First, one should not take an oath and use it for trivial affairs. And secondly, one may refuse to take an oath required by civil authorities when it is required for purposes contrary to the dignity of humanity.

In sum, the RCC does not understand the “Oath” antithesis to mean a refusal to take court oaths. By connecting the antithesis with the second and the eighth commandments, the RCC argues for the importance of truthfulness. Although in the Old Testament the practice of oath taking was encouraged, or at least allowed, as a means of testifying God’s truth in one’s personal interactions with others, as it evolved, especially in Jesus’ era, it apparently often became a way by which many have avoided responsibility. Perhaps no one plans to corrupt the law, but the rabbis spoil the goal of

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<sup>21</sup> CCC, 520.

<sup>22</sup> CCC, 520.

<sup>23</sup> CCC, 521.

verifying truthfulness and substitute it with deceitfulness. Jesus is against this misappropriation and denies the subtle distinctions that some used to invalidate their oaths. Yet at the same time, the RCC understands that Jesus instead demands here a person's word which can be relied upon without qualification and without need of the further guarantee an oath might afford. Jesus shifts the attention to human heart, the root of human acts without all together abolishing all actions of taking oaths in different occasions or contexts. Where oaths are not being used evasively and truthfulness is not being threatened, it is a mistake to understand the antithesis to disallow people from taking an oath in a court of justice. For the RCC, the issue is nothing less than and nothing more than truthfulness which should be expressed either in everyday speech or even in an oath taking.

### **III. The extent of the antitheses**

The previous section on Oath is an example showing that the starting point for the RCC's discussion of the antitheses is typically their relationship to the Decalogue and that the RCC does not understand the antitheses to supersede the Decalogue. The Catechism teaches that the New Law, which is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, "refines, surpasses and leads the Old Law to its perfection."<sup>24</sup> This means that for the RCC there is no abrupt discontinuity between different epochs of the law. There is rather a progressive penetration of the law into the human person, beginning at creation with the natural law, proceeding through the covenant at Sinai, reaching its summit in the Sermon on the Mount. The Catechism explains in this way: "The New Law or the Law of

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<sup>24</sup> CCC, 478.

the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed.”<sup>25</sup> The New Law does not abrogate the Old Law but instead perfects it. The natural law is not superseded any more than the old law is. Here one can see the RCC’s doctrine of the natural law in play. At this point, the RCC’s teaching on the natural law will be briefly explored in order to understand appropriately the extent of the antitheses, whether they are universal and whether they are intended to govern the conduct of individuals.

#### **A. RCC’s teaching on natural law**

The Catechism explains that there are different expressions of God’s law and all of them interrelated: 1) eternal law – the source, in God, of all law; 2) natural law; 3) revealed law, comprising the Old Law and the New Law, or the Law of the Gospel; and finally, 4) civil and ecclesiastical laws.<sup>26</sup> On the natural law, the Catechism teaches that it is a participation on the part of human beings in the eternal law since through the natural law a human person participates “in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good.”<sup>27</sup> All humans receive their being from God since they are created in the divine image. They participate in divine reason by being created in God’s image. As a result, they possess the natural light of reason and know the primary precepts of the natural law through the natural light of reason. The natural law is expressed in the original moral sense which enables humans to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie. This law is therefore called “natural” because it properly belongs to human nature.

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<sup>25</sup> CCC, 477.

<sup>26</sup> CCC, 474.

<sup>27</sup> CCC, 474.

Humans are enabled to understand that God commands the precepts of natural law because of the way in which God has created humanity.

According to the Catechism, the natural law has the following characteristics: 1) it is universal; 2) it is immutable; and 3) it is established by God for the common good of humanity:<sup>28</sup>

1. It is universal and “present in the heart of each man and established by reason.”<sup>29</sup>

Its authority extends to all people since it expresses the dignity of a human person, created in the image of God. It lays down universal principles for human action that all humans recognize as binding. Application of the natural law may differ greatly. It can demand reflection which should consider conditions of human life according to places, times and circumstances. Nevertheless, in the diversity of cultures, the natural law remains as a rule that binds humans among themselves and imposes on them, beyond the inevitable differences, common and cultural principles.

2. It is immutable and “permanent throughout the variations of history.”<sup>30</sup> It does not change over time or from culture to culture. It still subsists under the change of thoughts and traditions. It remains substantially valid and cannot be removed from the heart of humans even when it is rejected in its very principles.
3. It is established by God for the common good of humanity and it “provides the necessary basis for the civil law with which it is connected, whether by a

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<sup>28</sup> CCC, 475-6.

<sup>29</sup> CCC, 475.

<sup>30</sup> CCC, 475.

reflection that draws conclusions from its principles, or by additions of a positive and juridical nature.”<sup>31</sup> As the natural law prompts humans to pursue the common good, they discover that the good to be pursued is the good in itself, God. The Catechism explains that the natural law “shows man the way to follow so as to practice the good and attain his end...It [the natural law] hinges upon the desire for God submission to him, who is the source and judge of all that is good.”<sup>32</sup> It is the natural law that directs human beings toward God as the goal of all their activities.

By the natural law, humans could know moral truth. They have the ability to perceive the basic moral principles necessary for peaceful coexistence. The Fall, however, has damaged and weakened this ability, though it was not utterly destroyed or obliterated or incapacitated. The Catechism teaches that because of the Fall sinful humans need grace and revelation so that moral and religious truth may be known “by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.”<sup>33</sup> Because of the Fall humans need the revealed law in order to properly understand the natural law which is written and engraved in the heart of every person. Even though the Fall has caused the precepts of the natural law cannot be perceived by everyone clearly and immediately, through the natural law God has prepared a foundation for human beings to receive his revealed law and grace, namely, the ability to discern the good and the evil, the truth and the lie. This kind of relationship between the revealed and the natural

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<sup>31</sup> CCC, 475.

<sup>32</sup> CCC, 474.

<sup>33</sup> CCC, 475.

demonstrates that the revealed law, like the natural law, expresses many truths naturally accessible to reason which humans have been hindered to recognize because of their sinful nature.

Summing up the RCC's position on the natural law and the need of the revealed law, John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor*, teaches that the natural law is simply the eternal law implanted in rational beings. Since the Fall has damaged the faculty of human reason, reason must be enlightened by revelation, beginning with the commandments on Sinai, or the Decalogue.<sup>34</sup> The Catechism concurs in this way: "The commandments of the Decalogue, although accessible to reason alone, have been revealed. To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needs this revelation."<sup>35</sup> In other words, the Decalogue discloses a privileged expression of the natural law. Even though it is revealed specifically to the Israel of the Old Testament, they are universally binding because they express the natural law. They teach all people the true humanity of human beings. They bring to light the essential duties of what it means to be a human being, which implies they show the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person.

### **B. The antitheses are universal and individual**

The RCC understands the New Law, expressed in the antitheses, perfects the Old Law, which expresses the natural law and is articulated in the Decalogue. Again, the Catechism says, "The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth

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<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Splendor of Truth* (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1993), §44 (p.60).

<sup>35</sup> CCC, 503.

of the divine law, natural and revealed.”<sup>36</sup> The encyclical letter of John Pope II confirms this position by stating: “The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ – a sermon which contains the fullest and most complete formulation of the New Law (cf. Mt. 5-7), clearly linked to the Decalogue entrusted by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.”<sup>37</sup> The Decalogue obliges all people, not only Israel, because even though it is privilegedly expressed to Israel, it also expresses the natural law. In the same way, even though the antitheses, which are part of the New Law, are privilegedly revealed to Christians, they are universally binding since they are also the expression of the natural law.

The RCC also considers the antitheses are for individual Christians in their daily activities. The Catechism never considers making them into laws for a State. In every discussion of an antithesis and its counterpart in the Decalogue, the Catechism thinks of the lives of individual Christians and not of States. This is evident, for example, in its teaching on the sixth or last antithesis: “love for enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48).

### **C. Love for enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)**

The Catechism contrasts between Jesus’ teaching on love for enemies with hatred of the neighbor.<sup>38</sup> Hatred of the neighbor is when one intentionally wishes others evil. The Catechism links love for enemies with the fifth commandment of the Decalogue because when anger reaches the point of an intentional desire to murder or seriously injure others, it is against the command of love, including love for enemies. The

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<sup>36</sup> CCC, 477.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, *Splendor of Truth*, §12 (p.23).

<sup>38</sup> CCC, 554.



command on love for enemies, like the fifth commandment, forbids the denigration of human life and dignity of human persons.

While love for enemies forbids the intentional destruction of human life, the Catechism explains that public authorities “have the right and duty to impose on the citizens the *obligation necessary for national defense*.”<sup>39</sup> The Catechism here distinguishes between individual moral conduct expressed in the antithesis “loving your enemies” with the State obligation to establish justice. The antithesis “loving your enemies” is not a moral obligation for the State to comply. This explanation is not for the RCC an exception to the prohibition against denigration of human life and dignity of human persons which the command on love for enemies calls for individuals to practice. There are two reasons. First, the RCC recognizes the doctrine of legitimate defense; and secondly, the doctrine of just war.

The Catechism argues that love toward oneself is a fundamental principle of morality.<sup>40</sup> It is legitimate to insist on respect for one’s own right to life. Someone who defends his or her life is not guilty of murder even if he is forced to deal his or her aggressor a lethal blow. Thus, it is a legitimate defense. For the RCC, this doctrine is not only a right but also a duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The Catechism further explains that the defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm.<sup>41</sup> This is the reason for those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggressors against the

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<sup>39</sup> CCC, 555. Emphasis original.

<sup>40</sup> CCC, 545.

<sup>41</sup> CCC, 546.

civil community entrusted to their responsibility. It is also called a legitimate defense by military force or a just war. This leads to the second reason, the doctrine of just war.

The Catechism gives four “rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy” at one and the same time in order for a State to engage in a just war.<sup>42</sup> Those conditions should be at one and the same time because such a decision to engage in a just war is only the last resort. The doctrine of just war gives four painstaking conditions: 1) the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the defender must be lasting, grave and certain; 2) all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; 3) there must be serious prospects of success; and 4) the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated.

The RCC also argues that even individuals can still practice the command on love for enemies while they are having a legitimate defense or participating in a just war. The Catechism explains that the command is incompatible with hatred of one’s enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil one does as an enemy.<sup>43</sup> Love for enemies only calls for charity towards humans as a person and not towards their evil deeds. One can therefore, as a soldier, engage in a just war to kill the aggressors because of their evil deeds but still love them as fellow human beings.

The Catechism further recognizes that “public authorities should make equitable provision for those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms; these are nonetheless obliged to serve the human community in some other way.”<sup>44</sup> In the RCC’s teaching, a State or nation should allow some of its citizens, because of their conscience,

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<sup>42</sup> CCC, 556.

<sup>43</sup> CCC, 469.

<sup>44</sup> CCC, 556.

to refuse to be enlisted in a military draft. The command on love for enemies demonstrates charity towards humans as a person and not their wicked actions. Because of this charity, for some people, whether they are Christians or not, their conscience forbids them to engage in killing others in a war. By suggesting that the state should not draft those who refuse to kill because of this command, the RCC understands the command on love for enemies is intended to govern the conduct of individuals and not of States.

#### **IV. Summary and assessments**

##### **A. Summary**

The RCC understands that Jesus' view of the law as valid until the end of time means that his teaching of the antitheses is in true continuity with the past. The antitheses do not abolish the Decalogue. Jesus alone and not the Pharisees can interpret the Mosaic Law finally and authoritatively. This is the explanation of the teaching of Jesus in the antitheses which cuts through the casuistry of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus' commitment to the whole law is no less serious than theirs, but he alone in a position to properly demonstrates the intended meaning of the Mosaic Law. The RCC therefore contrasts Jesus' exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Decalogue with the more common, rabbinic understanding of the commandments. The antitheses indeed involve no annulment of the law but represent the goal and fulfillment of its intended meaning. In this way the RCC demonstrates the significance of the antitheses which involves a departure from common understandings of the law in Jesus' era.

By relating the antitheses to the Decalogue in the Catechism, the RCC also demonstrates the extent of the antitheses. They are universal (binding on all people) and

individual (intended to govern the conduct of individuals). As the Decalogue contains the privileged expression of the natural law, the antitheses also express the natural law. In this matter, even though the New Law is privilegedly revealed to Christians, they are universally binding. While they are binding universally, RCC further recognizes that the antitheses are ethics directed more to the conduct of persons, rather than States. That is, these demands are to govern the conduct of individuals and not intended to guide the conduct of States.

## **B. Assessments**

Roland H. Worth, Jr. in his book, *The Sermon on the Mount: Its Old Testament Roots*, lays out two basic approaches to the question of Jesus' intent in the antitheses.<sup>45</sup> The first approach is that Jesus and the Mosaic Law are in complete harmony when both are properly understood and interpreted. The second is that Jesus contrasts the Mosaic Law and gives a new and contradictory teaching. The position of the RCC in this matter is clear. The RCC approaches the question of Jesus' intent in the antitheses from the first perspective. When Jesus offers his contrasts ("But I say to you"), he is not contradicting the Law but offering his own interpretation over against the interpretation of scribes and Pharisees in his era.

The RCC has also maintained the universality of the antitheses by way of the natural law doctrine. Even though the antitheses are revealed to Christians, they are universally binding. This position implies that one should not claim the antitheses to be exclusively Christian in the sense that they are something revealed *only from the context* of Christianity. In fact, for example, the command on love for enemies, as John Nolland

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<sup>45</sup> Roland H. Worth, Jr. *The Sermon on the Mount: Its Old Testament Roots* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 22-9.

points out, “has in one form or another wide province and a long history.”<sup>46</sup> The ancient Babylonian text *Counsels of Wisdom*, lines 41-45, teaches: “Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer...smile on your adversary.”<sup>47</sup> The antitheses are indeed distinctively Christian since they are revealed and recorded in Christian Scripture, but they are not exclusively Christian.

When the RCC argues for the universality of the antitheses, they also demonstrate the antitheses are *precepts* to govern individual moral conducts. The RCC still recognizes the distinction between precepts-counsels.<sup>48</sup> The distinction is established in relation to charity, the perfection of Christian life. The purpose of precepts is to remove whatever is incompatible with charity. The counsels are intended to remove whatever might hinder the development of charity, even if it is not contrary to it. Precept has as its object an unconditional obligation. Counsel is an invitation or suggestion which does not oblige, but leaves the decision up to the one invited. In their teaching of the antitheses, the RCC do not encourage their members to understand that some of the antitheses are precepts and others are counsels. Nowhere in the Catechism there is the teaching that, for example, loving enemies is not a command but only a counsel. They consider the moral demands in the antitheses are precepts which oblige everyone to obey.

There is here a development approach taken by the RCC in their interpretation of the antitheses throughout history. In the era of Reformation, as Chapter 3 of this dissertation on Calvin shows, that the RCC of his time interprets the antithesis of loving enemies as a counsel. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to trace the development

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<sup>46</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 128.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 128.

<sup>48</sup> CCC, 479.

of the RCC's interpretation of that antithesis from the Reformation era to the present day. At least here, as the chapter demonstrates, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church the distinction of precepts and counsels in the interpretation of the antithesis of loving enemies no longer exists.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ANTITHESES ARE BINDING ON ALL PEOPLE

### I. Introduction

The interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, as Graham Stanton points out, may be divided into five sets of overlapping questions.<sup>1</sup> One of those five sets is the question of audience: to whom is the Sermon on the Mount addressed? To women and men in general, or only to those committed to the way of Jesus?<sup>2</sup> The introduction and conclusion (Matthew 5:1 and 7:28) imply that Jesus addressed the sermon to the crowds, but Matthew 5:2 notes that when the disciples had gathered around him, Jesus began to address them.

Especially with the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48), the question of audience involves some ethical issues. While the question of audience is not determinative (since Jesus may address the disciples with the crowd in his mind or vice versa), it can become a factor in how to interpret the sense of oughtness in the antitheses. If Jesus only intended the antitheses for his disciples, then his demands would only be binding on those committed to the way of Jesus. If Jesus intended the antitheses for the crowds, however, then his demands would be binding on everyone, regardless of whether they were committed to the way of Jesus or not.

The study of previous chapters has shown that there is no one voice with respect to the answer of how to interpret the sense of oughtness in the antitheses. Here I will offer

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<sup>1</sup> Graham N. Stanton, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount," in *Fundamentalism and Tolerance: An Agenda for Theology and Society*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Peter Wexler (London: Bellew Publisher, 1991), 52-3.

<sup>2</sup> The other four are the relationship between Jesus and Moses, the relationship between the Sermon on the Mount and Paul's teaching of grace, the question of practicability and the issue of eschatology in the Sermon on the Mount.

a brief summary of each to demonstrate the different voices in the interpretation. A more detailed analysis will come later.

Leonardo Boff's concern for the reality of the socially oppressed seems to cause him to dismiss the scriptural teaching of the antitheses as moral norms binding on all people, rich and poor alike. While Boff argues that the antitheses should not bind especially the poor to obey, both John Calvin and Helmut Thielicke argue that the antitheses are binding on all people. Against the interpretation that the sixth antithesis (Matthew 5:41-48) is exclusively for the monks, Calvin argues instead that the command to love one's enemies "had formerly been delivered to all the Jews" and then "delivered universally to all Christians."<sup>3</sup> Calvin is suggesting here that the antitheses are like the Decalogue. While the Decalogue is delivered to the Israelites, they are binding on all people, Israelites and non-Israelites. Commenting on the Decalogue, Calvin says: "This law has been admitted by men, without knowing that ever Moses spoke it. For indeed Our Lord had printed the things in men's hearts, which he did set forth in writing to his people."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Calvin suggests, while the antitheses are delivered to Christians, it is binding on all people, Christians and non-Christians. While Calvin employs an argument by analogy,<sup>5</sup> Thielicke employs the *usus elencticus* of the law to apply the demands of the antitheses to all people. As I have shown in chapter 4, Thielicke argues that for non-Christians the antitheses call for their qualitative justification and for Christians the

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.56 (359).

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy: 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Century Facsimile Edition* (Carlisle: the Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 699.

<sup>5</sup> Arguments by analogy argue "from *one* specific case or example to another example, reasoning that because the two examples are alike in many ways they are also alike in one further specific way" (Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992], 23, emphasis original).



antitheses focus on their quantitative justification. The similarity lies in its indictment the antitheses have for both Christians and non-Christians of their fallen nature and their need of redemption. The difference lies in that while for non-Christians the indictment may bring them to despair, for Christians it may help them to advance in their spiritual life.

Similar to Calvin, the Romans Catholic Church also believes that the antitheses are not something only for Christians, even though they provide moral norms for the Christian life. The Roman Catholics also employ an argument of analogy, – arguing that the antitheses affirm the same general moral precepts of the Decalogue, which are binding on all people. The chapter on John Howard Yoder, in contrast, has shown that for him the antitheses are Jesus’ teachings only for Christians. In this specific text, namely the antitheses, the particularity of Christian ethics is most apparent. Yoder chooses not to make the argument that they can be binding on everyone, even though he may think so. The antitheses, at the moment of their deliverance, are taught by Jesus to his Jewish disciples. Clearly they are given to Christians. Yoder is therefore going with what is explicit in the original setting.

Later in this chapter I will consider the study of previous chapters in a more detailed way as I argue that the antitheses are binding on all people. I will first explain two premises which, if shown to be true, establish the thesis of this chapter: (1) what is moral is binding on all people and (2) the antitheses are moral; therefore, the antitheses are binding on all people. I will then compare and contrast the thesis with the study of previous chapters. Finally, I will provide a specific example, the sixth antithesis, to illustrate what it means to say that the antitheses are binding on all people.

## II. Morality and the antitheses

This section consists of two parts. Each part explains one premise of the thesis. First, what is moral is binding on all people. Second, the antitheses are moral. Therefore, the antitheses are binding on all people (the thesis).

### A. On “what is moral is binding on all people”

In order to explain the first premise I will elaborate one the word “moral” used here. By definition, it is true that something moral is binding on all people. Below is the explanation.

#### A1. On morality

The word “moral” is derived from the Latin word *mos* (the plural is *mores*, the adjective is *moralis*), which is interrelated with *metiri*, to measure. The Latin *mos* has the same meaning as the Greek *ethos*.<sup>6</sup> The Latin *mores* has come into the English language without modification. English dictionary speaks of the *mores* of a group, meaning thereby, as the Oxford English Dictionary says: “The shared habits, manners, and customs of a community or social group.”<sup>7</sup> It expresses how people do conduct themselves *locally*.

In this chapter I will distinguish the sense of the word “moral” with small *m* from the word “Moral” with the capital M. The term “moral”, with small *m*, refers to local norms imbedded in local mores. In English usage the Morals of a people or the Morality of a group, is not the same as its morals or morality. The Morality of an individual or a

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<sup>6</sup> J. Douma, *Christian Morals and Ethics*, trans. John P. Elliot and Andrew Pol (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Premier Publishing, 1983), 2.

<sup>7</sup> “mores, n.”. OED Online. June 2011. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/122201?redirectedFrom=mores> (accessed September 07, 2011).

group is not the way a person or a community does act locally, but the way a person or a community thinks all people ought to act universally. The word “Moral” and “Morality” has reference not in the first place to local practice, but to the universal norms and standards that govern local practice, particularly to proximate norms and standards. The Oxford English Dictionary recognizes this distinction when it defines Moral and Morality in this way:

“moral, adj.”: of or relating to the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings.

And

“morality, n.”: the quality or fact of being morally right or wrong; the goodness or badness of an action.<sup>8</sup>

The noun and the adjective in the English use show that the word “Moral” deals with universal norms for behaviors.

From the study of the origin of the word, the English word “Morals” deals with universal codes of behavior and is used much as a synonym for “Morality.” In contrast to the small letter *m* of “morality” as a local norm, “Morality” with the capital *M* stands for universal precepts and principles. It is evident, however, that the practices of an individual or group may be either better or worse than the individual or group’s Morality. A person may on occasion fall into immorality and even for a period live an immoral life and yet have high Morals or be committed to a high type of Morality.

I would also like to draw attention to the fact that not every action has a Moral property. I classify this kind of actions which are differentiated from Moral as non-Moral or *amoral*. Non-Moral or *amoral* actions also differ from immoral actions. Committing

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<sup>8</sup> “moral, adj.” and “morality, n.”. OED Online. June 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/122093?redirectedFrom=morality> (accessed September 07, 2011).

massacre is said to be immoral but the question whether it is immoral is in fact a Moral question; it is one of the questions in the domain of ethics. It is different, however, with an action such as whether one puts his right foot or his left foot down first when he gets out of bed in the morning. This kind of action is non-Moral or amoral and is no concern of this dissertation.

Another example is a student who writes a chapter of her dissertation. The advisor evaluates such an action, in the first place, in terms of defensible and indefensible. When the student makes all sort of mistakes and shortcomings, the advisor does not yet say, “That is immoral and evil,” but, “That is indefensible and needs improvement.” A person may falter intellectually without having to be reprimanded ethically. A mistake or even a blunder in a chapter of a dissertation is still not immoral or in the same class as a massacre. Or take some children who do their arithmetic exercise. The teacher would judge such an action, in the first place, in terms of correct and incorrect instead of in terms of Moral and immoral. When those children make all sorts of mistakes in their calculation, the teacher would not say, “That is immoral,” but “That is incorrect.”

The above examples show that while Morality simply puts a question or issue into the category of ethics as opposed to other questions which are not in this domain, one should recognize that there is a limit to what kind of actions ethics will deal with. Where is the line, then, between Moral and non-Moral/amoral questions to be drawn in ethics? This is a difficult question to answer, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.<sup>9</sup> At

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<sup>9</sup> Several moral philosophers have tried to identify a modest list of criteria to distinguish between moral and nonmoral considerations. The criteria are supremacy, universalizability and human welfare. The first two are formal. They refer to the form rather than the content of moral principles. As such, if used alone they may allow too many action-guides to be counted as moral. The third one is thought to be an important supplementary criterion. See G. Wallace and A. D. M. Walker, *The Definition of Morality* (London: Methuen, 1970); William K. Frankena, *Perspectives on Morality*, ed. K. E. Goodpaster (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976); chaps. 10, 15; James F. Childress, “The Identification of

least this dissertation is concerned with the study that when an act-type, for example lying, is to be considered as a Moral question, this usually means that one needs to refer the act of lying to standards or rules according to which an action should be regulated, in this case the standard of telling the truth.

From the etymology of the word, Morality is often used to refer to universal action-guides to prescribe behavior, that is, Moral precepts. This is also to recognize the broad scope of the concept Morality and how pervasively it may be infused into the expectations one has for proper individual and social practices. This recognition is pertinent for this dissertation project as it attempts to demonstrate a systematic study of Morality. In this case, this dissertation limits its studies to Morality from Christian perspectives. It especially attempts to reflect on the universal action-guides to prescribe behavior in the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48). In this chapter, this dissertation will attempt to establish that they are binding on all people and not only Christians.

In addition, I would also like to point out that from Christian perspectives, there is a distinction between Moral and spiritual.<sup>10</sup> A spiritually good action understood here is an action which is pleasing to God, in this case, the triune God Christians have faith in. On the one hand, a human being might act Morally to other human beings but this act might not be spiritually good or pleasing to God. This might be the case because Christians believe that one can be Morally good but still spiritually corrupt. All humans

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Ethical Principles,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 5 (Spring 1977): 39-68; and Tom L. Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), chap. 1. Even if none of those three criteria is either a necessary or a sufficient condition of morality, each may be relevant in mapping the terrain of morality. That is, one may use one of those as a marker to help identifying what is moral, though not an infallible or essential marker.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin Van Reken, “Basic Christian Ethics” (classnotes, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005).

are sinful and alienated from God (cf. Romans 3:23). This implies that there is nothing humans can do to please God unless their fallen status is first elevated. On the other hand, a person might think that his or her action pleases God while such an action might also be immoral. For instance, a Christian in a crusade for his or her religion might think that he or she is doing something pleasing to God while ending up participating in killing many innocent people.

To be more specific, the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 91 explains that a good deed arises out of true faith, conforms to God's law, and is done for his glory.<sup>11</sup> For a Christian the goodness of a good deed has both a Moral and a spiritual dimension. Truly spiritually good deed can be done only by Christians. They cannot be done by non-Christians since non-Christians lack the true faith in God. This implies that even doing a Moral action according to the norms prescribed in the Decalogue is sin when it lacks faith and God's glory. While it is still Moral, it does not please God. For Non-Christians, they can be Moral (vs. immoral) specific to conduct, even apart from faith. This distinction between Morality and spirituality is relevant to this dissertation project since it allows me to limit the discussion of the demands in the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48) to the realm of Morality, in this case, the realm of inter-human relationships and not to expand itself to the realm of spirituality, the realm of the relationship between humans and God.

## A2. On the nature of morality

Morality, with the capital *M* as defined above, refers to a universal standard of right or wrong for human conduct. Not everyone accepts this axiom, of course. Gilbert Harman, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even claims that the question whether there

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<sup>11</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988), 54.

is a single true Morality is “an unresolved issue in moral philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> There will always be two camps. On one side are relativists, sceptics, nihilists, and noncognitivists. On the other side are those who believe in a Morality that applies to everyone. To argue for moral relativism is to argue something like this: that the dictates of morality arise from some sort of convention or understanding among people, that different people arrive at different understandings of what constitutes morality, and that there are no basic moral demands that apply to everyone. In this view there are no universal Moral truths and also everyone ought to follow the dictates of his or her own group. In other words, moral relativism believes that there are only many moralities but there is no one Morality.

In this section, I will delineate first moral relativism, its advantages and disadvantages. Then I will argue for Morality, also recognizing its advantages and disadvantages. What I am trying to do is that while I admit that I do not belong to the relativistic camp, I would like to recognize their position and attempt to fairly present their argument.

#### A2a. On moral relativism

People do sometimes talk about Christian morality, Nazi morality, or about the morality of the Greeks. When morality is used simply to refer to a norm of conduct put forward by any actual group, including an entire society, then it is being used relatively. Moral relativism appeals to this observable fact of moral diversity. People at different places and times have widely divergent views about right and wrong. As George, one of the main characters in the play *Jumpers*, says: “Certainly a tribe which believes it confers honour on its elders by eating them is going to be viewed askance by another which

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<sup>12</sup>Gilbert Harman, *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 78.

prefers to buy them a little bungalow somewhere.”<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Harman also argues that members of different cultures often have different beliefs about right and wrong and often act differently on their beliefs: “Some societies allow slavery, some have caste systems, which they take to be morally satisfactory, others reject both slavery and caste systems as grossly unjust.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, moralities can differ from each other quite extensively in their content and in the foundation that members of the society claim their morality to have.

This diversity is also evident even on those matters of morality where one would expect people to agree with each other. Ruth Benedict illustrates this in her *Patterns of Culture*, a classic introduction to the understanding of anthropology:

We might suppose that in the matter of taking life all peoples would agree on condemnation. On the contrary, in the matter of homicide, it may be held that one is blameless if diplomatic relations have been severed between neighbouring countries, or that one kills by custom his first two children, or that a husband has a right of life and death over his wife, or that it is the duty of the child to kill his parents before they are old. It may be that those are killed who steal fowl, or who cut their upper teeth first, or who are born on a Wednesday. Among some peoples a person suffers torments at having caused an accidental death, among others it is a matter of no consequence. Suicide also may be a light matter, the recourse of anyone who has suffered some slight rebuff, an act that constantly occurs in a tribe. It may be the highest and noblest act a wise man can perform. The very tale of it, on the other hand, may be a matter for incredulous mirth, and the act itself impossible to conceive as a human possibility. Or it may be a crime punishable by law, or regarded as a sin against the gods.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1972), 54.

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thompson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publisher Inc., 1996), 8. Harman also notes on the same page that “burping after eating is polite in one culture and impolite in another” and that “some people are cannibals, others find cannibalism abhorrent.” This combination of examples might leave one wondering whether cannibals find burping polite or abhorrent after meals.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 45-6.



These examples show that what is right in the eyes of one people may not be so in the eyes of another, and moral relativists argue neither side can claim real truth for its particular standard of moral norms. A different way of putting it would be that any particular set of moral standards is purely conventional (like the example of taking life should be considered condemnable above); where the idea of convention implies that there are other equally proper ways of doing things. The moral relativist camp employs these diverse examples to demonstrate their case for moral relativism. According to this position, morality only refers to a norm of conduct put forward by a society or some other group, such as a religion, and accepted by an individual for her own conduct. In this view, morality is always relative to some culture and society and there is no such thing as universal right and wrong for all people.

So instead of having anything to do with Moral universals, moral relativism simply asserts that there are only different moralities of different communities. This camp often gets a very bad caricature. Simon Blackburn observes that the “freshman” moral relativist is “a nightmare figure of introductory classes in ethics, rather like the village atheist (but what’s so good about village theism?).”<sup>16</sup> David Wong wryly points out that those in the moral relativism camp are even sometimes portrayed as having committed a crime such as “falling but a few slippery steps short of collaboration with the Nazis.”<sup>17</sup> Yet there is an attractive side to moral relativism. There are at least two ways in which moral relativism can be appealing.

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<sup>16</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Being Good: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>17</sup> David B. Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xi.

First, moral relativism encourages toleration of different ways of living. By definition moral relativism cannot make judgments of others outside the group, so those who defend this view should be less arrogant and intolerant of other groups. This view can make one less judgmental of others since it makes one disposed to accept without any verdict the moral conduct of others. Moral relativism motivates one to have a permissive attitude toward moral opinions and moral practices that differ from one's own. It may even free one from bigotry, a stubborn and complete intolerance of any belief or practice that is different from one's own.

Second, moral relativism rules out moral imperialism. Most people are not comfortable with the blanket of moral imperialism that there is only one way of doing things morally right, and that other people need to be forced into that way. For example, female circumcision, the partial or total cutting away of the external female genitalia, has been practiced for centuries in parts of Africa, generally as one element of a rite of passage preparing young girls for womanhood and marriage. Critics of this practice abhorrently call it female genital mutilation (FGM).<sup>18</sup> On the surface, female circumcision sounds like sexual abuse: it is the removal of a young woman's clitoris practiced by some African cultures as an initiation ritual. While FGM has been roundly condemned by many Western women, several African female scholars are arguing in favor of the ritual. Dr. Fuumbai Ahmadu of Sierra Leone is one of the scholars who are pro-FGM, and even had her own clitoris cut with fellow members of the Kono ethnic group as an adult. Ahmadu says that some of her Western feminist sisters "insist on

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<sup>18</sup> See John Tierney, "A New Debate on Female Circumcision," November 30, 2007 in *The New York Times* online, <http://tierneylab.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/a-new-debate-on-female-circumcision/>, accessed September 13, 2011.

denying us this critical aspect of becoming a woman in accordance with our unique and powerful cultural heritage.”<sup>19</sup> The moral relativist camp would agree with Ahmadu that in this FGM debate many Western women have imposed their moral values on African moral values. Moral relativism believes that if one culture does something moral in its own way, then in any event no other culture should impose different moral values from outside and force them to submit and to give up their own way of doing things. In the thought of moral relativism a more pluralistic and relaxed appreciation of moral diversity is often a welcome antidote to an embarrassing moral imperialism.

As appealing as moral relativism is in encouraging tolerance and dispelling moral imperialism, it suffers some serious drawbacks. There are at least two: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, recognizing the fact of moral diversity does not strictly entail moral relativism. Practically, taken to its limit moral relativism can become moral subjectivism, even moral nihilism.

Theoretically, there should be a distinction between any universal requirement and its local enactment.<sup>20</sup> Moral relativists base their claim that there is no universal moral standard on the fact there is a multiplicity of moral codes. But moral diversity does not prove that there are no moral universals. A universal standard can be locally enacted in different ways. It is conventional, for example, to drive on either the right (the American way of driving) or the left (the Indonesian way of driving). While moral relativism might argue this example shows there is no universal standard, it is not

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<sup>19</sup> Fuambai Ahmadu, “‘Aint’ I a Woman Too?’: Challenging Myths of Sexual Dysfunction in Circumcised Women,” in *Transcultural Bodies: Female Genital Cutting in Global Context*, eds. Ylva Hernlund and Bettina Shell-Duncan (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 308 (278-310).

<sup>20</sup> Calvin Van Reken, “Basic Christian Ethics” (classnotes, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005).

necessarily so. Certainly, from the example, there is here only the law of custom. But in each country there has to be one universal rule to drive safely, or chaos would reign on the street and traffic would grind to a halt. One culture may implement this universal standard differently from others, but the universal standard is still there and remains the same.

To be fair, the theoretical response to moral relativism does not necessarily also entail Morality or moral universalism. It is because the standards do not have to be fundamentally the one and the same. In other words, there is not necessarily *one* true universal Morality. It is possible that there are instead *many* universal Moralities. This is another version of moral relativism.<sup>21</sup> Moral relativism can still argue for a pluralistic morality, that there is more than one actual morality and no one set of moral standards that can be properly considered the one true Morality. David Wong expresses this kind of relativistic view.<sup>22</sup> Different societies have different moral standards and they are deeply influenced by their own culture and background.

Even if one concede with Wong and Harman that different moral practices in societies may demonstrate many universal moral standards, this view, though it denies that there is *one* true Morality, does not entail the impossibility of Moral knowledge or, especially, of justification for Moral claims. As a result, this moral relativistic view still leaves open the possibility that there might be only one true Morality, expressed in different ways relative to the people and culture of the time. One may even use empirical

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<sup>21</sup> There are also at least two other versions of moral relativism here. The ontological version is that there is no universal morality. The other version admits there may or may not be such but people do not know it or cannot agree on it.

<sup>22</sup> David B. Wong, *Natural Moralities*, e.g. 68-70.

evidence proposed by Benedict, quoted above, to support the claim that differences in moral standards are indeed minor. While one may need not condemn the local enactment of how a society conducts in taking its member's life (like one kills by custom his first two children, or that a husband has a right of life and death over his wife, or that it is the duty of the child to kill his parents before they are old), one may certainly question whether taking one's life *pointlessly* is morally right or wrong. This shows that in all the differences of the way in taking the life of others within different societies and cultures, there might be an underlying universal moral principle, namely, that one should take the life of others *pointlessly*.<sup>23</sup> As Patrick Nowell-Smith once argued, that the more one studies moral codes, the more one finds that they do not differ in major principles.<sup>24</sup> Behind all those differences, it is possible that they are in accord with and give expression to the one true Morality.

The practical response to moral relativism might be more appealing than the theoretical one. Moral relativism argues that the only moral standards against which a society's practices can be judged are its own. Such a position may indeed commend tolerance and promote non-judgmental attitude toward others. As a theory for justifying moral practices and beliefs, however, moral relativism would leave unresolved moral disputes or even fail to recognize that some societies may have better reasons for holding their views than others. This is evident when one considers some serious moral dilemmas.

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<sup>23</sup> I am putting aside the question of whether or not there is indeed a universal moral standard of "do not take other's life for any reason." Here I am only arguing for the mere possibility that a universal moral standard exists, whatever it is.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (London: Penguin Books, 1954), 18.

There is this saying, “when in Rome do as the Romans do.” But what if the Romans go in for some rather horrid doings? For example, there are societies whose norms allow the systematic oppression of many groups within their own: societies that tolerate *sati* (a Hindu custom in India in which the widow was burnt to ashes on her dead husband’s pyre), societies that methodically deny education and other rights to women and children, societies where there is no freedom of political expression, societies where distinctions of religion or language bring with them distinctions of legal and civil status, or even societies which abuse children and even toddlers by forcing them to do manual labor. Can moral relativism still think “if those societies do it that way, it’s OK for them and in any event none of my business?” If the answer is positive, then moral relativism is basically saying, “right or wrong is relative to a particular moral code.”

The problem is that while a statement like “doing X is right” or “doing Y is wrong” is clearly a judgment or normative statement (how things ought to be), a moral relativist statement like “doing X is right or doing Y is wrong is relative to a particular moral code” is only a descriptive statement (how things actually are) that carries no evaluation, judgment or normative import whatsoever. It just characterizes what is claimed by a particular moral code. This is evident because everyone, regardless of their views about doing X or doing Y, will agree on the statement that doing X is right or doing Y is wrong relative to a particular moral code actually put forward and accepted by some society, group or individual. If one is not a member of that society or group, and is not that individual, then accepting a descriptive statement like this has no implications for how one should behave. For example, “taking other’s life pointlessly is wrong” is a normative statement. It does not only describe the pointless act of taking other’s life, but

also evaluates it. “Taking other’s life pointlessly is wrong relative to Chinese-Indonesian people,” however, is only a descriptive statement and has no normative or evaluative sense. Everyone will not have any objection to this statement and it will not have any implication for how everyone should behave. Moral relativists can embrace such an argument which has no normative content because they reject Moral universals. They believe everything moral is relative to a particular people. This rejection of Moral universals by moral relativism would lead to moral subjectivism and eventually to moral nihilism.

Suppose moral relativism recognizes this point and has to admit that there have to be some universal Moral norms in order to avoid moral subjectivism and moral nihilism – the position David Wong takes, that there is more than one actual morality and no one set of moral standards that can be properly considered the one true Morality. They could still ask, “Why couldn’t everyone say that, with respect to any morally pertinent question, what one ought to do should depend on what the local conventions are?” In other words, moral relativists can argue that even though there are Moral universals, they are still always relativized locally. The problem with this position is that once moral relativists recognize that there are some universal Moral norms, this will eventually lead them straight out of relativism and back into the quest for the Moral universals. They cannot maintain their pure moral relativism, free of any commitment to Moral universalism, since this position is basically moral nihilism. Otherwise, there would not be any philosophical significance whatever. The following example will show how moral relativism could be like that.

Consider this example. Imagine someone X argues, “Torturing children for fun is wrong.” In moral relativism she should be understood to be saying “Torturing children for fun is wrong relative to (my) moral framework X.” Her husband, Y, might reply by saying “Torturing children for fun is not wrong” (that is, it is permissible relative to (my) moral framework Y). In this example anyone who is sincere is of course voicing their own opinion . But the point here is that for an opinion to be authentic, it should be put forward in order to be agreed with, or at any rate to be taken seriously or weighed for what it is by the audience. X, in this example, is basically saying, “This is my opinion, and here are the reasons for it, and if you, my husband, have reasons against it we had better discuss them.” If X’s opinion is to be overruled, the next move by Y should be, “I don’t think you should say that because...” If X thinks torturing children for fun is wrong, but Y thinks otherwise, they had better talk it through and do what each can to persuade the other or find a compromise. The alternatives may be force or divorce, which are a lot worse. This is what a practical ethical conversation which has a philosophical significance should be. Moral relativism, however, tends to dismiss such conversation. If a moral relativist should be consistent with his or her framework of moral relativism, he or she can imagine X shrugging at Y’s remark that there is nothing wrong with torturing children for fun, “Well, that’s just your opinion” and that is all. It is like a conversation such as “I like cheesecake,” “I don’t,” where the difference does not matter. Even Harman admits that in his proposal how to express basic disagreement in moral relativism, such as “X is WRONG if and only if X is wrong in relation to the morality relevantly associated with my current values,” his critics might claim that “it only allows such people to appear to disagree with each other!”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, they might. And in my

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<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thompson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, 34, 36.



reflection, if not in reality, X and Y's conversation will not be like that. In their conversation the difference is a real disagreement and does matter. Unfortunately, this kind of conversation involving moral disagreements cannot occur between people who are moral relativists.

This reflection on the above imaginary example is not to deny that there are hard cases where it is not easy to find what the correct answer to a moral question is. I also recognize that while at one moment moral relativists might shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, it is just an opinion," at other moments they might demonstrate the most intense attachment to a particular opinion, especially when the issue is something they care about, like child abuse, abortion, rape, murder etc. I do not want to use my reflection to caricaturize moral relativism as something which only belongs to ignorant and uncaring people. Moral relativist scholars like Gilbert Harman and David Wong are not only passionate about their view but also respectful toward others. While their passionate attachment to some Moral standards may itself be evidence against their relativist stance, my point here, instead, is to emphasize that there seems to be no good substitute to thinking that when one is in bewilderment about what the answer to a hard moral question is, one is in bewilderment about what the correct universal Moral answer is. Unless, of course, one is a pure moral relativist.

But even if moral relativism is rejected, one should acknowledge that this view raises important issues. It implies that being tolerant with other cultures should encourage one to explore the reasons underlying moral practices that differ from one's own. It also challenges one to examine one's own reasons underlying one's morality. With this note, I will continue to the next section to argue for Moral universalism.

## A2b. On moral universalism

Moral universalism, which this dissertation adopts, argues for Morality that applies to all people, regardless of culture, sex, religion, and nationality. In this view Morality is binding on all of humanity and transcends culture and personal whim. This does not imply that Moral universalism merely means a universal acceptance of Morality. For example, the prohibition on torturing children for fun is a valid universal Moral rule because it is based on a conception of what is worthy of human beings. In particular the states of affairs in question here are the states of children as human beings. The validity of this rule does not depend on whether or not it is universally accepted. Morality is binding on all humans not because everyone accepts it but, as Alan Donagan asserts, by virtue of their nature as rational beings and because Morality can be known to human beings by the exercise of natural human reason.<sup>26</sup> This view allows one to speak in the public square. For example, Christians can make moral judgments about non-Christians.

There is another meaning of Moral universalism which deserves attention, namely, to say that Morality is universal is to say that it has no exceptions. If the Moral rule “it is wrong to lie” is a universal Moral norm in this sense, then one must never tell a lie no matter what the circumstances. It follows that it is one’s obligation to keep not lying, even if doing so brings suffering to innocent people. It means, for example, that a head of a family who is hiding some Jews should say, “Yes,” to Nazis who ask if he is hiding Jews. According to this kind of Moral universalism, if one sees a child run into an alley to escape a serial killer who is trying to kill her and the killer asks the person, “Where is she?” then the person should not send the killer on a wild goose chase to

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 6.

protect the child, but tell the truth about the child's whereabouts.<sup>27</sup> Extreme cases like these show that, at least in ordinary unreflective moral judgment, the Moral rule "it is wrong to lie" has exceptions and therefore Moral universalism, in the sense of no exceptions, is not true of that particular Moral rule. In fact, this case is often cited to show that there are exceptions to Moral rules or that some act-types can be right in one situation but wrong in another.<sup>28</sup>

Are there any Moral rules or principles which are universal in the sense of no exceptions? It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to answer this question and to figure out which Moral rules or principles are absolute, having no exceptions at all.<sup>29</sup> For the present purpose it is important to notice the rational independence of the two meanings in Moral universalism. The first holds that Morality is binding on everyone, no matter what norms are actually accepted in a given society. The second claims that at least some Moral norms allow for no legitimate or justifiable exceptions. The first meaning does not necessarily entail the second. In this dissertation Moral universalism is understood in the first sense. This dissertation only attempts to establish that the antitheses in Matthew 5:21-48 are binding on all people and it is not concerned with whether or not any moral norm in the antitheses is without exception in practice. It may

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<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant seems to endorse this when he argues that one is not even permitted to lie to a would-be murderer concerning the whereabouts of his intended victim (Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives," in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, ed. T. K. Abbot [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909], 361-65). Some commentators argue, however, that Kant's ethical system does not commit him to an extreme position of exceptionless moral norms. On this point, see H. J. Paton, "An Alleged Right to Lie: A Problem in Kantian Ethics," *Kant-Studien* 45 (1953-54): 190-203.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Paul W. Taylor, *Principles of Ethics: An Introduction* (Encino, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), 2.

<sup>29</sup> John Finnis argues there are at least three of them: 1. The Golden Rule, 2. The principle that injury is not to be met by injury, and 3. The principle that evil may not be done for the sake of good (John Finnis, *Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision, and Truth* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press], 1991, 55).

be that all Moral norms valid for everyone in any society are norms that allow for legitimate exceptions in special situations, whenever those situations occur.

One problem for Moral universalism is in the area of epistemology. How does one know what it is? What is its content? What are its boundaries? One should admit some epistemological hesitance as to the depth or resolution of one's familiarity with the entire contents of Morality, but the basic contents are knowledgeable. The knowledge which humans have of this Morality may vary with their place in history and with their background, but at least some knowledge of this Morality all humans do possess. Moral universalism should not be understood as an attempt to establish self-evident contents of Morality. Instead, it attempts to argue that the contents of Morality are capable of being known by all human beings.

Human beings are capable of knowing the basic contents of Morality because this knowledge is founded in "the way things are," in ultimate structures of creation order that are explicitly contrasted with the human conventions that find expressions in ordinary rules and customs. The justification for Moral universalism in "the way things are" in the creation order is called the Natural Law theory.<sup>30</sup> The Natural Law theory is an ontological ground for Moral universalism, evident in the conviction that there is a criterion, beyond the rules and conventions of human societies, by which these may be judged. For example, one may see this in court appeals. There is always, so to speak, a higher court of appeal, a hierarchy of justice. There may be appeals through a whole series of courts, but even when the highest court of appeal has pronounced its ruling, it

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<sup>30</sup> John Macquarrie, "Rethinking Natural Law," in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 133 (121-45).

still makes sense for someone to say that its verdict is unjust. It would be hard to see how this could be the case if justice has a purely empirical origin, explicable merely in terms of sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology and similar sciences.

The Natural Law theory argues that Morality belongs to the very nature of things in the creation order and is not just superimposed on an amoral reality by the human mind. The Nazi regime should remain as a terrible warning against the complete slide into relativism and nihilism in which Morality has been entirely cast adrift from an ontological basis. The notion of human responsibility and accountability implies an order which humans do not create but which rather lays a demand on a human person. While science can explain the actual empirical forms in which Morality appears psychologically, sociologically, and anthropologically, it does not explain the ultimate demand of Morality. As an ethical concept, the Natural law theory is distinct from any scientific law of nature, such as the law of gravity and the law of inertia.<sup>31</sup> It is true that some moral philosophers, especially those belonging to evolutionary and naturalistic schools of thought, try to derive Moral laws from biological laws.<sup>32</sup> The problem with such an approach is that one may confuse the *ought* and the *is*. One cannot just proceed from statements of fact to value judgments, unless one may have already assumed a

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<sup>31</sup> The famous explanation of Newton describes why an apple falls to the ground instead of falling upward and calls this phenomenon "Gravity." The law of inertia is the law that requires a force to be exerted on matter for it to accelerate or to rise to a higher space energy level. Galileo discovered this phenomena and Newton wrote down the mathematical formula  $F \text{ (force)} = M \text{ (mass)} \times A \text{ (acceleration)}$ . The forces at work on objects equal to the multiplication of the mass of the object by the acceleration of the object. This formula best explains how a body of matter, acts under this law, relative to other bodies. If there was no law of inertia, the universe would have a much different condition (a person perhaps would not have to wear inertial seat belts in a car, etc.).

<sup>32</sup> For example, Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Philip Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 163-85; Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 109-66; and Marc D. Hauser, *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2006).

value-judgment in the alleged statement of fact. If science is able to demonstrate that some DNA in humans cause a homosexual orientation, it does not necessarily entail that homosexual activity is natural for human beings and therefore encouraged. Theodosius Dobzhansky is correct in saying that what can be established biologically is not the content of an ethic but simply “the capacity to ethicize.”<sup>33</sup> It is a fundamental mistake to understand the Natural Law theory as if, as John Finnis remarks, the argument runs from “natural” to “therefore reasonable and right,” rather than from “reasonable and right” to “therefore natural.”<sup>34</sup> The foundation of Morality is not bound within the data of scientific discoveries but is ontologically imbedded in the creation order so that, as Richard Hooker has expressed it, humans are not so much the maker of laws as their discoverers.<sup>35</sup>

The acknowledgment of a Natural Law that judges every human law does not necessarily imply a definitely theistic understanding of the world. It is possible to hold a Natural Law theory without basing it on a theological formulation. Alan Donagan’s discussion of the fundamental principle of Morality that it is impermissible not to respect every human being, oneself or another, as a rational creature is a case in point. He asserts that such a principle is independent of any theological presupposition even though it has been expressed in Scripture in the command “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew

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<sup>33</sup> Theodosius Dobzhansky, *The Biology of Ultimate Concern* (New York: New American Library, 1967), 86.

<sup>34</sup> John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153 n. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, vii, 3 (London: J. M. Dent, Everyman’s Library, 1907), vol. 1, 95.

22:39).<sup>36</sup> Likewise, David Copp argues that “it is natural to hold that our moral ‘convictions’ are *beliefs* in just the way that beliefs about the weather are beliefs – although, obviously, they have a different subject matter.”<sup>37</sup> In this sense, every ethics which is based on an objectively valid rational order, which grounds moral values just as it does logical values, belongs to the Natural Law theory tradition.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the Natural Law theory also points to an ontological interpretation of Morality which has at least some kinship with the religious interpretation. For example, the Stoics argue for a Natural Law theory based on somewhat pantheistic terms, as the demand of the *logos* dwelling both in humans and in the cosmos. In his theological interpretation of Natural Law, viewed within the context of Stoic philosophy, Cicero writes: “There is indeed a true law, right reason, agreeing with nature, diffused among all men... the same law, everlasting and unchangeable, will bind all nations at all times; and there will be one common lord and ruler of all men, even God, the framer and proposer of this law.”<sup>39</sup> Another example is the Chinese *tao*. Even though it is not necessarily derived from a transcendent deity, it is universal in the sense that it is everywhere and consists of impersonal principles which permeate human life.<sup>40</sup> In each case, theologically or non-

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<sup>36</sup> Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality*, 65-6.

<sup>37</sup> David Copp, *Morality in a Natural World: Selected Essays in Metaethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6. Emphasis original.

<sup>38</sup> See Philip E. Devine, *Natural Law Ethics* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>39</sup> Cicero, “De Republica,” III, 22-23, trans. John Salmond in *Jurisprudence* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1930), 28.

<sup>40</sup> The *tao* here is both in the Confucian and the Taoist sense. In the Confucian sense, the *tao* refers to “the total normative sociopolitical order as well as to the objective prescriptions of proper behavior in ritual, ceremonial and ethical order.” In the Taoist sense, it refers to Heaven’s way (天命, *t’ien ming*, the mandate of heaven) both in the human and non-human universe. More detail can be found in Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 62-63 and James T. Bretske, S.J., “The Tao of Confucian Virtue Ethics,” *International Philosophical*

theologically, it is supposed that the foundation for Morality is taken to have an ultimacy and objectivity about it. Morality is not just human convention.

Christianity also recognizes this ontological interpretation of Morality or the Natural Law theory. Paul teaches in Romans 2:14-15 that all humans everywhere do have by nature an awareness of this Morality, and not only of its existence, but also in some measure of its content and provisions. He says, “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (Romans 2:14-15). Douglas Moo interprets “things required by the law” as “a general way of stating certain of those requirements of the Mosaic law that God has made universally available to human beings in their very constitution.”<sup>41</sup> By this Paul does not mean that Gentiles need nothing to guide them, but that they attest to knowledge of Morality. Paul’s point that those without special revelation still have the capacity (through conscience) to distinguish right from wrong is illustrated in the appendix to C. S. Lewis’s *Abolition of Man*: moral codes of many cultures across the ages are similar at key points – honoring parents, being faithful in marriage, not stealing, not murdering, not bearing false witness and so on.<sup>42</sup> Lewis further supports this knowability of Moral universalism in his writing, *The Case for Christianity*, by pointing

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*Quarterly* 25, No. 1 (March 1995): 34-8.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 150.

<sup>42</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: Harper and Collins Pub., 1944), Appendix.



out “right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe.”<sup>43</sup> When disagreements or quarrels develop between people, the thing to be determined is who is in the right and who is in the wrong. The parties may differ radically as to their respective positions on this issue, but they have a clear sense of what is right and what is wrong. Similarly, despite the great differences in laws and customs among peoples around the world, according to Lewis, what unites them in a common humanity is the recognition that some things are right and others are wrong.

Everett Harrison supports the above interpretation of Romans 2:14-15 and argues that Paul can say that Gentiles, who do not have the written law, have the basic requirements of Morality in their hearts because even though humans are fallen, they are made in the image of God.<sup>44</sup> Because they are made in the image of God but now fallen, Paul declares that the conscience of humans “bears witness” to a Morality recognizably binding on them (Romans 2:15), and accuses when they act contrary to the light available to them (Romans 2:16). With reference to Romans 2:15-16, C.A. Pierce writes, “That the everyday language of the Gentiles contains a word for confessing to feelings of pain on commission or initiation of particular acts – feelings which carry with them the conviction that the acts ought not to have been committed – is first hand evidence that the Gentiles are subject, by nature, to a ‘natural law’ as the Jews, by vocation, are to the Torah.”<sup>45</sup> Whether they are revealed in the Torah for the Jews or written on their hearts for the Gentiles, Scripture teaches the view that there are Moral requirements widely

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<sup>43</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 3-30.

<sup>44</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 31.

<sup>45</sup> C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 86.

recognized and honored in humankind generally. This is not to say that the contents of the Moral order are self-evidently known to all, but to assert that these content are capable of being known by all. God has made universally available the knowledge of Morality to human beings in their very constitution since they are created in the image of God.

Two objections are raised against the idea that Morality is grounded in the creation order – a theoretical one and a practical one. On the theoretical level, Christian ethics is the Christian view of a universal and objective Moral order. To study Morality from Christian perspectives using the Natural Law theory may have the risk of eradicating the distinct and particular Christian contribution. On the practical level, religion often employs the Natural Law theory to justify its inhuman elements, practicing cruel and degrading rites.

Theoretically, since the natural law theory argues for a common ontological basis for Morality, it implies that any person can reason with any other, regardless of the person's cultural formation, religious beliefs, or political allegiance. H. L. A. Hart states that "there are certain principles of true morality or justice, discoverable by human reason without the aid of revelation even though they have a divine origin"<sup>46</sup> and Edward Collin Vacek even observes that the Natural Law theory "can proceed under a rubric of 'methodological atheism.'"<sup>47</sup> For this reason, some Christian theologians are hesitant to accept that the Natural Law theory can become the basis for Christian study of Morality since it may eradicate the distinctiveness of the Christian contribution to such study. In

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<sup>46</sup> H. L. A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 156.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Collin Vacek, "Divine-Command, Natural-Law, and Mutual-Love Ethics," *Theological Studies* 57 (December 1996): 638.

his debate with Emil Brunner, Karl Barth argues that there is a radical discontinuity between secular ethics based on natural reason and Christian ethics based on Scriptural revelation. He argues that Christology and revelation make no room for natural reason in comprehending God's will for proper human living.<sup>48</sup> Alistair McGrath even contends that Christian morality should not be based on a universal Morality since it is only for those belonging to the Christian faith, and to apply such a morality to those outside of the community is useless unless they first join the Christian faith.<sup>49</sup> Stanley Hauerwas also claims that the content of Christian morality is fundamentally different from that of non-Christian moralities. He argues that Christian morals are not for non-Christians but only for the church and as such Christian ethics is not concerned with providing Moral guidance for humanity in general but instead it intends to build a genuinely Christian community as an alternative society.<sup>50</sup> This objection needs to be considered since equating the content of Christian ethics with that of the Natural Law theory would seem to imply that Christians have nothing distinctive to offer.

While it is an understandable objection, to overemphasize the uniqueness of Christian ethics can give way to moral relativism. James Gustafson argues that when Christians give up interactions with secular moral points of view in order to maintain its pure religious identity, they run the risk of sectarianism in which Christian ethics escapes

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<sup>48</sup> Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, the Centenary Press, 1946), 106-9.

<sup>49</sup> Alistair E. McGrath, "Doctrine and Ethics," in *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, *Theory and Method*, eds. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1994), 85-90.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 100-8.

accountability to secular criticism and inevitably abandons its mission to responsibly relate to the secular world.<sup>51</sup> Taken to its limit, in order to be consistent with its own paradigm of ethics such a position requires one to admit that one's own morality bears no significance for others. It may be relevant within one's own community, but not necessarily relevant to other communities. Why should people think that other people's moral life is better than their own? As a consequence, Hauerwas's project to have an alternative Christian community which provides a moral life capable of influencing this world is not convincing. Why should other communities think, in the first place, such a moral life is better than their own?

To be fair, in Hauerwas's objection to the Natural Law theory, he admits that there are commonalities between Christian morality and other moralities but he goes on to add that these "are not sufficient to provide a basis for a 'universal' ethic grounded in human nature *per se*. Attempts to secure such an ethic inevitably result in a minimalistic ethic and often one which gives support to forms of cultural imperialism."<sup>52</sup> Certainly, one can disagree about the extent to which Christian ethics might be compatible with a secular one. Yet, Hauerwas's disagreement is based on the fundamental presupposition that Scripture and the Natural Law theory must represent two opposing sources for Christian ethics. This is where Hauerwas seems to be mistaken. While a secular ethics might be incompatible with Christian ethics epistemically (considering the noetic effect of sin<sup>53</sup> in humanity), the ontological sources of both ethics might not be necessarily or

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<sup>51</sup> James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, Vol. 40 (1985): 83-94.

<sup>52</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 60-1. Emphasis original.

<sup>53</sup> The noetic effect of sin assumes that human fallenness impairs human knowledge. The created

fundamentally contradictory. The Natural Law theory and Scripture may ideally complement each other as two distinct sources for Christian ethics which reveal the existence of a universal and objective Morality. Jean Porter explains in this way: “Revelation [Scripture] does not just confirm our independently established theories about natural law; rather, it reveals the existence of a natural law in and through indicating its significance within a more comprehensive theological framework.”<sup>54</sup> Seen in this context, the ideal of the truly human person and the ideal of the uniquely Christian person, and correlatively, between an ethic centered on the church community and an ethic that is open to a pluralistic world are not necessarily contradictory. With this understanding one may call into question Hauerwas’s proposal of the dichotomy between Scripture and the Natural Law theory.

Furthermore, properly human forms of moral goodness should reflect the divine goodness so that they are not wholly alien to God’s goodness. On this basis, one can have confidence that God’s call and judgment will not be wholly at odds with the best ideals for humanity. This is to say that there is some congruence between human Moral ideals and God’s Moral will for humanity, even after the fall.<sup>55</sup> Otherwise, one may begin to project one’s own moral standard onto God and in the process lose the sense of the absolute qualitative distance between God’s goodness and one’s own. Those who

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order remains; it is simply that humanity’s capacity to know it has been impaired by the Fall. In the case of moral knowledge, the Fall confronts humans with the fact that they do not want to hear of moral order. On the one hand, humans cannot fully ignore it, because its first letters are written in human hearts. On the other hand, humans resist the inscription, and the letters burn, so to speak. Even when humans are looking for the moral order, they will be looking in the wrong place.

<sup>54</sup> Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapid: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 328.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver O’Donovan also makes this point, albeit with reference to a theology of the created order, rather than the natural law theory as such (*Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986], 31-52).

completely confine morality within their own community and sever it from any universal Morality run the risk of overemphasizing the uniqueness of their own community's morality. Taken to its limit such a position seems to judge God by human standards since it may encourage one to think that his or her own community is the only one which knows what God wants for humanity. This is where the second objection to the Natural Law theory, the practical one, begins.

It is practically understandable for Hauerwas, as mentioned earlier, to object to the Natural Law theory based on this bad record, which causes one to have a minimalistic ethic and encouraging one to become a cultural imperialist. The Natural Law theory may indeed cause one to be arrogant, judgmental, and intolerant. For example, if Chinese or American moral norms allow for something against the universal Morality, then such a particular norm is unjust and wrong. This kind of judgment often makes everyone very nervous. To claim that there is a right and wrong that is binding on everyone runs the risk that one is either labeled as judgmental, intolerant, and arrogant or that one even becomes judgmental, intolerant and arrogant. The debate on FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) previously addressed can be claimed by the moral relativists to be an example of such moral imperialism by American women against African ones. Yet a Christian maximalistic ethic (in contrast to Hauerwas's objection to a minimalistic ethic), so to speak, in overemphasizing its Christian uniqueness may also encourage moral and cultural imperialism. The same bad rapport has also been attached to those who confine morality to Christianity. Adolf Hitler once said that only Christianity can shape one's moral character: "A general moral instruction without a religious foundation is built on air; consequently, all character training and religion must be derived from faith...we need

believing people.”<sup>56</sup> Those words came out of a person who authorized the genocide of a nation.

The practical objection to the Natural Law theory demonstrates that in its practice the noetic effect of sin in humans is so pervasive that either one can reduce the Natural Law theory to a mere humanitarian campaign or transform it into a violent religious crusade. But it should not be so. It is false to assume that people without religious faith always lack an understanding of Moral rights and wrongs and that people of religious faith are more virtuous than atheists and agnostics. It is also mistaken to assume that religious people are always abusive and that they often think they are the only holders of the correct Morality.

While it would be mistaken for religious people, in this case Christians, to be overly confident by thinking they know what God wants for humanity, Christians have reason to hope that through Scripture God has begun to reveal which of many different configurations of human nature are to be preferred, or at least, which are most congruent with the life of the church. Again, this does not mean that other ways of human living are necessarily immoral and evil, but it does mean that an appeal to human nature alone as the basis for Morality is not sufficient to determine God’s will in Moral matters. Human nature indeed offers a set of starting points for action and reflection, as the Natural Law theory asserts, and these are not simply averted by theological considerations. Nonetheless, the fallen nature of humanity requires that such starting points must be given direction and shape by theological reflection in order to be translated into an adequate study of Morality.

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<sup>56</sup> Adolf Hitler, April 26, 1933, from a speech made during negotiations leading to the Nazi-Vatican Concordant of 1933, in *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler April 1922 – August 1939*, Norman H. Baynes ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942).

When the Christian study of Morality through Scripture confirms the existence of the Natural Law, this need not imply that the knowledge of the Natural Law depends solely on special revelation. Conversely, however, it would be a mistake to conclude that Scripture simply confirms the best independently established theoretical formulations of the Natural Law. Scripture not only confirms and supplements what one knows or thinks one knows about Morality, it also indicates the proper significance of God's existence with respect to one's understanding of Morality and in the process transforms even those elements that could be independently established. It is here, in the process of moving from a reflection on a Morality based on the Natural Law theory to a theological Morality, that Christian study of Morality will have its most immediately apparent practical impact. Since Christian study of Morality recognizes its starting point from the natural givens of human life, it will not be wholly discontinuous or unintelligible, seen from the standpoint of other moralities. At the same time, however, insofar as this study of Morality from Christian perspectives assumes a theologically informed construal of human nature, set in the framework of a particular understanding of the meaning of human life, it will not simply be equivalent with a naturalistic, anthropological, evolutionary or even biological morality. This is the reason why Christians may argue, albeit in gentleness and respect for others (cf. 1 Peter 3:15), that the nature of their study of Morality, its binding force, extends not only to its own community of faith but also to everyone.

### **B. On the morality of the antitheses**

In this section, I will first argue that the Decalogue is Moral and then by comparing the antitheses with the Decalogue, I will show that the antitheses are Moral.



For Christians, the Decalogue conveys the basic content of God's will for human life. A survey of more than 25 catechisms of the fifteenth century discloses that the Decalogue was the basis for Moral teaching of the church.<sup>57</sup> The underlying principle in those catechisms is that the Decalogue is taken as the point of departure for an exposition of Christian understanding of Morality. While the Decalogue is hardly all one needs to know about the rule of God in one's lives, it is a starting point for one to discover, or to rediscover, just what it is God's will in one's life.

As God's will for human life, the Decalogue has been associated with or seen as a kind of Natural Law. John Calvin argues that the Decalogue is stamped on the human heart and thus can be naturally known.<sup>58</sup> In agreement, K. Owen White explains that in the Decalogue are found "the great basic principles which underlie the whole structure of human morals and ethics."<sup>59</sup> Patrick Miller observes that the Decalogue, especially the second table, is "present in various ancient Near Eastern legal codes and widely assumed as normative in all societies."<sup>60</sup> The equation of the Decalogue with some kind of Natural Law, or Moral law available to humankind, allows one to focus on it beyond its function within the community of faith, whether Jewish or Christian. Unlike the specific commandments of Judaism, such as the ceremonial laws in Leviticus 1-7, the Decalogue

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Pierce Butler, "Must We Teach Morality According to the Decalogue?" *Worship* Vol. 37, No. 5 (April 1963): 294 (293-300). Cf. Johannes Geffcken, *Der Bildercatechismus des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts und die catechetischen Hauptstücke in dieser Zeit bis auf Luther* (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1855), vol. 1: *Die Zehn Gebote*.

<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.1 (317).

<sup>59</sup> K.O. White, "Introduction," in *The Ten Commandments in the New Testament*, ed. John M. McBain (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 4.

represents a universal Moral law which has not been superseded with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Calvin also says that the first table “teaches us how to cultivate piety, and the proper duties of religion in which his worship consists” and the second table “shows, how in the fear of his name, we are to conduct ourselves towards our fellow-men.”<sup>61</sup> Calvin evidently further prefers to discuss Morality in terms of one’s relationships in society rather than in terms of one’s standing before God. One reason he gives is that while all the commandments of the Decalogue can be considered as Moral, in terms of representing “conformity to the character and will of God,”<sup>62</sup> fallen humans are spiritually dead. Calvin argues with respect to the second table “there is considerably more knowledge of them, inasmuch as they are more closely connected with preservation of civil society,” but this is not the case with respect to the first table since fallen humans are deprived of spiritual knowledge.<sup>63</sup> Here Calvin recognizes that because of the Fall humanity cannot mend their standing before God but they can still do something about their relationship with one another.

Calvin’s distinction between one’s relationships in society and one’s standing before God can also be stated in terms of Morality and spirituality. This is because fallen humans cannot mend their standing before God by only doing Moral actions apart from faith in the true God. There is a distinction between immorality and sin. Moral actions, in distinction from spiritual ones, represent the Moral obligation binding upon all people by

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.11 (324).

<sup>62</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. Co., 1983), 85.

<sup>63</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.24 (243).

virtue of their common humanity and accountability to God. Because of this, even though the Decalogue was given to Israel, its content, especially its second table, was not binding exclusively on Israel. The universal Morality prescribed in the Decalogue is indeed binding on all people. Even the first coming of Jesus Christ did not alter the content of this universal Morality. It is binding on Abraham and Abraham Lincoln. But doing what is Moral is not all that is required to please God.

In the New Testament, Jesus' teachings and other provisions of the New Testament do contain laws which embody the Decalogue of the Old Testament. There is continuity between the Moral law taught in the New Testament and the Decalogue of the Old Testament. This does not mean that in the New Testament there is any passage which cites the entire Decalogue word for word. Lidija Novakovic observes that the New Testament never quotes the entire Decalogue verbatim, but only the commandments from the second table that deal with interpersonal relationships.<sup>64</sup> The only references to the Decalogue as a whole are through the double commandment to love God and one's neighbor (Matthew 22:34-40). The point here is, nevertheless, that the New Testament accentuates ethical relationships that should be informed by the Moral laws of the Decalogue, especially the second table which deals with interpersonal relationships. According to Dan Liroy, this is evident when one compares the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount (Mathew 5:21-48) with the second table of the Decalogue.<sup>65</sup> The Moral law

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<sup>64</sup> Lidija Novakovic, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* vol. 35, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 373 (373-386).

<sup>65</sup> Dan Liroy, *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 190-4. See also Reginald H. Fuller, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 43, no. 3 (July 1989): 246-7 (243-55).

taught in the antitheses is in accordance with the Moral law in the Decalogue of the Old Testament.

The antitheses have a series of statements from the law, introduced by such words as “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago” (Matthew 5:21, 33) or, more simply, “You have heard that it was said” (Matthew 5:27, 38, 43) or “it has been said” (Matthew 5:31). There then follows a comment by Jesus introduced by the words “But I say to you” (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). The topics are murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation and love for enemies.

The first two can be seen as a straightforward deepening of the commandments to include the corresponding attitudes of anger (which leads to murder) and lust (which leads to adultery). In this way, the requirement of the law is directed not only towards outward behavior but also is a matter of the heart. The sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17) is a prohibition of murder. Likewise, in Matthew 5:21, Jesus makes specific reference to this injunction. He goes to the heart of the matter by stressing that even the presence of malice against someone else is a violation of the commandment. The seventh commandment is about adultery (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). In Matthew 5:27, Jesus refers to this commandment. He stresses that a man who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart with her. He also emphasizes the importance of eliminating all sources of sin in a person’s life (Matthew 5:28-30). The understanding of adultery is deepened to include not only sexual acts but also sexual desire. Adultery is not only the transgression that undermines the marriage relationship; divorce could also destroy marital union, fidelity and stability (Matthew 5:31). Also the comments that a husband divorcing his wife makes her an adulterous

woman and a man who marries a divorcee is himself an adulterer are further applications of the seventh commandment. Marriage to an improperly divorced person is an act of adultery (Matthew 5:32). Prohibition of adultery is frequently linked to the prohibition of divorce because divorce and remarriage in the gospels are regarded as special forms of adultery (cf. Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:3-12; Luke 16:18).

The topic of oaths in Matthew 5:33 (“Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made”) draws on Leviticus 19:12 (“Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God”), Numbers 30:2 (When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said”) and Deuteronomy 23:21 (“If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin”). In this antithesis Jesus stresses the importance of maintaining the integrity of speech, Matthew 5:34 (“But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all”). While Jesus’ antithesis on oaths may be taken to refer to the third commandment, against taking the divine name in vain, it may also be taken to refer to the ninth commandment, the prohibition of false witness, for both the ninth commandment and the antithesis on oaths enjoin the integrity of truth telling. Here Jesus’ antithesis on oaths reflects the ninth commandment by summoning one to practice truth-telling. This practice is also invoked throughout the New Testament. In John, for example, the devil is called “a liar and the father of lies” because “there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). Paul appeals to God, who “knows that I am not lying,” in 2 Corinthians 11:31. In Colossians 3:9 Paul summons Christian readers to “not lie to each other.”

The antithesis on retaliation follows a quotation (“Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth”) from either Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 or Deuteronomy 19:21 that sought to limit retaliation to that which had been suffered. This antithesis of Matthew 5:39, “Do not resist an evil person,” is not directly based on the Decalogue. This does not mean, however, that Jesus makes up a completely new Moral law. The antithesis on retaliation, as Reginald H. Fuller points out, is in fact an articulation of the antithesis that follows, love for enemies (Matthew 5:44), which in turn is an interpretation of the love commandment (Leviticus 19:18).<sup>66</sup> These two final antitheses, in which Jesus gives greater force and meaning to the command to love one’s neighbor, reveal the tendency evident in the New Testament toward generalization and the use of Leviticus 19:18 as a summation of the second table of the Decalogue. There are three examples for this: Romans 13:8-10, James 2:8-11 and Jesus himself.

In the first example, Romans 13:8-10, Paul addresses the question of mutual love and explains that loving one’s neighbor is the fulfillment of the law. He exemplifies the requirements of the law by quoting the seventh, the sixth, the eighth and the tenth commandment of the Decalogue. He then concludes by asserting that these, and any other commandment, are summed up in the requirement of Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9), because “Love does no harm to its neighbor” (Romans 13:10). Paul’s list of individual requirements is therefore not exhaustive but illustrative of a more general principle of neighborly love found in Leviticus 19:18. David Flusser notes here that the command to love one’s neighbor is “on the one hand presented as a summary of the whole Torah, and on the other hand, it is called a summary

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<sup>66</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, “The Decalogue in the New Testament,” *Interpretation* 43, no. 3 (July 1989): 247 (243-55).

of the second half of the Decalogue.”<sup>67</sup> Paul’s general conclusion that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10) is also found in Galatians 5:14, where he asserts that “the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The second example of the use of Leviticus 19:18 as a summation of the second table of the Decalogue is from James 2:8-11. The author calls Leviticus 19:18 “the royal law” (James 2:8). He then argues that the entire law should be kept and not just a few commandments at the expense of others and further illustrates this with the seventh and the sixth commandments of the Decalogue: “For he who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker” (James 2:11). Not unlike Romans 13:8-10, these two individual commandments serve the purpose of illustrating the neighborly love mentioned at the beginning of the passage.<sup>68</sup> In this letter the author also emphasizes that violating one commandment is equal to violating them all.

The final example is Jesus himself. He seems to recognize this use of Leviticus 19:18. Both Mark 12:28-34 and Matthew 22:34-40 record Jesus’ response to the question of one of the scribes concerning the great commandment of the law, which appears in the context of Jesus’ final days in Jerusalem. In Mark, the scribe asks Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” (12:28). Jesus answers by first citing Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one,” and Deuteronomy

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<sup>67</sup> David Flusser, “The Ten Commandments and the New Testament,” in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, eds. Ben-Zion Segal and G. Levi (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1990), 227.

<sup>68</sup> See Luke T. Johnson, “The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101, no. 3 (1982): 391-401.

6:5, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30). In Mark’s version, this joined quotation represents the first commandment. Jesus then adds the charge, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) which denotes the second commandment (Mark 12:31). In Matthew’s version, Jesus quotes only Deuteronomy 6:5 and declares that loving God is “the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37). As in Mark, Jesus continues by asserting that loving one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) represents the second commandment. Lidija Novakovic explains the basic function of this double commandment of love: “loving God represents the summation of the commandments that regulate the human-divine relationship, while loving one’s neighbor represents the summation of the commandments that regulate interpersonal relationships.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, for Jesus Leviticus 19:18 stands as a summary of the second table of the Decalogue.

These three above examples demonstrate that Jesus employs the last two antitheses to illustrate the neighborly love in Leviticus 19:18. Yet it is not only that. Jesus deepens and broadens the extent of neighborly love in his antitheses. In the fifth antithesis Jesus underscores the importance of people’s dignity in his teaching of reconciliation and not seeking revenge. This is not necessarily advocating a purely passive response to aggression. Steve Moyise argues that turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39) can be a form of passive resistance, by reversing the balance of superiority.<sup>70</sup> One may use the example of Matthew 5:41 to illustrate this. The person

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<sup>69</sup> Lidija Novakovic, “The Decalogue in the New Testament,” 377.

<sup>70</sup> Steve Moyise, *Jesus and Scripture* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010), 37.



who forces one to go one mile – such as a soldier ordering one to carry his or her bags – wishes to end the transaction as the superior. By offering to go another mile, the balance changes, for the person is now in one’s debt, even if it goes unacknowledged. Whether Jesus intends to encourage passive resistance or not, the point of the fifth antithesis here is that one should not return evil with evil even when one has the opportunity and the means to accomplish it. One instead should be patient even when unjustly treated. This patient love is also not limited to one’s own circle of friends and relatives. The final antithesis broadens the fifth where one is to be kind and conciliatory even toward his or her enemies (5:38-48). One’s love toward others must extend beyond one’s immediate family or work colleagues (tax collectors in the example). By using these two antitheses as a comment on Leviticus 19:18, Jesus shows that he does not come to abolish the Decalogue (cf. Matthew 5:17), in this case its second table, but instead he gives the proper interpretation of what it means to love one’s neighbor as the Decalogue obliges one to do.

The comparison between the Decalogue and the antitheses confirms that the antitheses are Moral. Just as the Decalogue constitutes the Moral law in the Old Testament, so too the antitheses restate the Moral law in the New Testament. C.H. Kang explains that “As Moses proclaimed the law for the new life in the promised land, so Jesus manifested his law for the life in the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>71</sup> Some also hold that the Moral law in the Sermon on the Mount provides Christians with “missionary ethics” by which they are to act in the world so that “by their extraordinary living men are

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<sup>71</sup> C. H. Kang, “The Literary Affinities of the Sermon on the Mount with Special Reference to Deuteronomical Features” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987).

attracted to the saving message of Jesus.”<sup>72</sup> This ethics is only possible when the Moral law lived out by Christians is also binding on others, non-Christians. J. Phillips, reflecting this sentiment, observes that “even the greatest of the world’s moral, religious and philosophical statements blush and stammer in the presence of this sublime declaration.”<sup>73</sup> This does not mean that the entrance into the kingdom depends upon personal Moral attainments. The larger context of the antitheses (e.g., the grace of the beatitudes) forbids such a conclusion. Entrance into the kingdom is God’s gift; but to belong to the kingdom means to follow Jesus’ teaching. David Holwerda explains that if Jesus’ own fulfillment of the Moral law is essential for both understanding and obeying the Moral law’s righteousness, then the focus falls on Christ, and the Moral law is relevant for his disciples only in the form and manner by which it achieves fulfillment in him.<sup>74</sup> The Christological focus on the Moral law is the remedy for legalism and the suggestion that the entrance into the kingdom of God is based upon personal Moral attainments.

Matthew 5:19-20 is evidence of this Christological focus. Before his teaching on the antitheses, Jesus had warned his hearers that “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19-20). John Nolland comments that the passage “is not designed to encourage specific calculation or measurement. It is rather more likely that the desire is to encourage an exuberant engagement with the demands of the will of God made known

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<sup>72</sup> R.S. McConnell, *Law and Prophecy in Matthew’s Gospel: The Authority and Use of the Old Testament in the Gospel of St. Matthew* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionverlag, 1969), 8. Cf. David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995).

<sup>73</sup> J. Phillips, *Exploring the Gospels: Matthew* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1999), 84.

<sup>74</sup> David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* 130.

through the Law as unveiled by Jesus.<sup>75</sup> Jesus clearly calls people to a way of righteousness, but it is a way that rests upon the proper interpretation of the Moral law now delivered by Jesus, the Messiah.

This call underlines the importance of living out in practice the righteousness to which the Moral law directs. The righteousness Jesus speaks of, however, does not come through a greater preoccupation with the minutiae of the Moral law that outdoes even the Pharisees and the scribes. The ethical teaching presented by Jesus in the Gospel can hardly be said to do that. Instead, Jesus expects, as the antitheses to follow show, a new and higher kind of righteousness that finds its definition and content in his authority as the Messiah who has the definitive and authoritative exposition of the Moral law.

With the antitheses Jesus shows that God's will for humans remains one and the same, that is, righteousness and not wickedness. The antitheses, just as the Decalogue in the Old Testament, are the Moral law which reveal God's will in the New Testament for human beings. They reveal the knowledge of universal Morality to human beings, which obscure this knowledge by their fallen nature.

### **III. A reconsideration of previous chapters**

Now is the time to compare this understanding of the antitheses as Moral, binding on all people with the studies of the previous chapters. I will revisit Leonardo Boff, John Calvin and Helmut Thielicke, the Roman Catholic Church, and John Howard Yoder. I will first provide a short summary of the study done for each and then analyze their interpretation of the antitheses, especially the question of whether the antitheses are

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<sup>75</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 225-26.

Moral, or something only meant for Christians. I will also attempt to provide an objective comparison whenever a disagreement arises.

### **A. Leonardo Boff**

The chapter on Leonardo Boff shows that in his contextualization of the Sermon on the Mount for the poor and the oppressed, Boff depicts Jesus as saying: “You are all blessed, all you who are poor, hungry, sick and without hope. You are oppressed and victims of a corrupt society, so how can I expect you to live a life of perfect virtue or upbraid you for all your imperfections?”<sup>76</sup> Boff also interprets the antitheses as “a catechism of comportment for a disciple of Jesus, for one who has already embraced the good news and is seeking to construct norms that conform to the tidings brought by Christ: divine sonship.”<sup>77</sup> As a catechism of comportment, the antitheses only provide guidance or a model for one to practice his or her love to God and others in each given moment. Boff believes that it is easier to live within laws and prescriptions that determine everything than it is to create a norm inspired by love for each moment.<sup>78</sup>

By giving some guidance in the antithesis, and not Moral laws, as the source to find the will of God, Boff believes that Jesus is able to treat humans as human and help them to be true to themselves. As he explains, “In the important questions of life, nothing can substitute for the human person: neither law, nor tradition, nor religion. People must

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<sup>76</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 1.

<sup>77</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Times*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 72.

<sup>78</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 69.

decide from within, before God and before others. Because of this they need creativity and liberty.”<sup>79</sup>

The above summary demonstrates that for Leonardo Boff in the antitheses Jesus does not teach Moral laws which demand people, especially the poor and the oppressed, to obey. Instead of Moral laws, he argues that the antitheses should only constitute a catechism or serve as guidance for disciples of Jesus (Christians) to practice their love. The poor and the oppressed have been burdened by poverty and oppression all their life. For Boff, it is unreasonable that Jesus should burden them anymore with the demands of Moral laws. As a consequence, the antitheses are limited in whom they bind: in this case, they are not binding on the poor and the oppressed, so they cannot be Moral. An event in Boff’s life demonstrates this.

Boff regrets his refusal to make love once with a poor woman who begged him to give her that pleasure. He records the woman’s plea in this way: “You are a well-fed, handsome, strong, and attractive man. I have just known ugly, sick, and mal-nourished men. Give me this happiness. Make love with me! Just once.”<sup>80</sup> He regrets his refusal because he believes that in order to treat her as a human being and to relieve her of her burden of poverty at least temporarily, he should have cared for the life of this poor woman by making her desire come true. His consent to her plea would somehow have enhanced her psychological-emotional life.

By interpreting the antitheses not as Moral laws but instead as some guidance for one’s love in action, Boff seems to understand that Morality only consists of one absolute

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<sup>79</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 78.

<sup>80</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Braza sob Cinzas: Estorias do Anti-Cotidiano*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1997). Quoted in Luiz Roberto Franca De Mattos, “An Analysis and Critique of Leonardo Boff’s Theology and Social Ethics” (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2001), 166, n.160.

law: the law of love. Boff's emphasis on love to inform Morality is not wrong in itself. Jesus himself says, summarizing the Decalogue, that the greatest law is to love God and one's neighbor (see Matthew 22:37-40). Nevertheless, the problem with Boff's view is that it seems for him the law of love is the only Moral law there is, especially love for the poor and the oppressed. Love for the poor and the oppressed is the *only* Moral law. Love and law here unite. To be more specific, although he does not actually deny any Moral law, he really disposes of it by identifying it only with love for the poor and the oppressed. When Jesus explains that to love God and one's neighbor is the greatest law, he does not mean that this law disclaims other moral laws such as those in the Decalogue and the antitheses. In contrast, Boff appears to argue that the love for the poor and the oppressed absorbs other Moral laws and virtually removes them from sight. This one law relativizes all others. As a consequence, Boff does not seem to view the antitheses as Moral laws, binding on all people, regardless of their status in life, rich or poor.

His emphasis that love for the poor and the oppressed is the only Moral law rests on his belief that if the antitheses are meant to be taken as Moral laws which demand obedience, then Jesus would put an extra burden on the poor and the oppressed. Jesus would not do such a thing for those who are already burdened with their poverty and oppression. This belief seems to lead Boff to play Jesus off against himself in order to maintain the consistency of the socio-political liberation agenda. He appears to contradict what Jesus explains in Matthew 5:18, "Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law, until everything is accomplished." Boff's determination to liberate the poor and the oppressed seems to obscure the Moral laws of the antitheses

which are binding on the rich and the poor alike. The second antithesis (Matthew 5:27-33), for example, is a Moral teaching not only for the rich but also for the poor.

Regardless of one's stature in life and society, Jesus commands everyone to practice sexual purity and not to commit adultery. For Boff, however, committing adultery with a poor woman is allowed. He does not take the antitheses to be Moral laws even for the poor. His concern for the reality of the socially oppressed seems to cause him to dismiss the scriptural teaching of the antitheses as Moral laws.

Boff's interpretation of the antitheses does not threaten the thesis of this chapter. He opts to obscure the universal sense of oughtness in the antitheses in order to relax the Moral demands on the poor. He seems to be mistaken, however, in his interpretation. His denial that the antitheses are binding on all people is based on a truncated view of Morality, which is clearly inconsistent with Jesus' teaching. His position presents no valid obstacle to the truth of the thesis of this chapter.

### **B. John Calvin and Helmut Thielicke**

Calvin and Thielicke support the thesis of this chapter. They both argue the universal bindingness of the antitheses on all people. While Calvin argues the antitheses reveal God's Moral will for all people, Thielicke explains that the antitheses posit a challenge for all people of their Moral shortcomings.

In relation to the thesis that the antitheses are Moral, I would like to further analyze Calvin and Thielicke's use of the antitheses in individual Christian life. There are three basic uses of the Moral law: (1) the political or civil use; (2) the elenctical or pedagogical use; and (3) the didactic or normative use.<sup>81</sup> The civil use (*usus politicus sive*

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Muller, "usus legis," in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 320-1.

*civilis*) of the Moral law serves the commonwealth or body politic as a force to restrain sin. The elenctical or pedagogical use (*usus elencticus sive paedagogicus*) shows people their sin and points them to mercy and grace outside of themselves toward Christ. In Muller's summary, this is "the use of the law for the confrontation and refutation of sin and for the purpose of pointing the way to Christ."<sup>82</sup> The didactic or normative use (*usus didacticus sive normativus*) is for those who trust in Christ and have been saved through faith apart from works. It "acts as a norm of conduct, freely accepted by those in whom the grace of God works the good."<sup>83</sup>

In terms of the use of the Moral law, Calvin puts the emphasis on the third use of the law for the antitheses. They provide a norm of conduct, freely accepted by those in whom the grace of God works the good. Thielicke lays stress on the second use of the law. The antitheses provide a norm of conduct for the confrontation and refutation of sin and for the purpose of pointing the way to Christ.

In terms of the third use of the law, the antitheses address the fruit of good works which the regenerate life must spring forth and bear. For Calvin, while the antitheses are part of Christian Moral life, this does not mean that the antitheses are only binding on Christians. In his comment on Romans 2:14-15, Calvin argues that all people are culpable for breaking God's Moral will for human beings because their conscience dismisses any ground for rationalization based on ignorance of the written law's demands. All people are obligated to act in accord with the written law because of the engraved knowledge of

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<sup>82</sup> Richard Muller, "usus legis," 320.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Muller, "usus legis," 321.



what it requires of them.<sup>84</sup> Calvin also states that the Decalogue and this engraved knowledge of God's Moral will (the inward law) teach essentially the same general Moral precepts: "Now that inward law, which we have above [II.2.22] described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tablets."<sup>85</sup> With this understanding of Morality, Calvin can argue that the antitheses and the Decalogue teach essentially the same general Moral precepts.

In terms of the second use of the law, for Thieliicke the antitheses primarily intend to tear open and lay bare the great Moral need of humanity. He believes that one should understand the antitheses less on "the piercing radicality of its directions" and more on "the definite purpose" Jesus had in view when "he speaks in these radical terms."<sup>86</sup> He explains this "definite purpose" of Jesus in the antitheses as follows: "At the very beginning and as a kind of introduction to discipleship Christ makes us feel the implacable severity of the law and thus leads us to death."<sup>87</sup> Thieliicke does this to impress upon one's conscience the permanent realization that one's battle with sin is not a battle with something alien to oneself. "*I myself* am the antagonist," says Thieliicke, alluding to Romans 7, "*That's* why the law must remain in all its severity! It must remain like gauze in the deep wound in our heart to keep it from healing too easily and forming an invisible scar that would fool us into thinking that we are not wounded and sick at all

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<sup>84</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.22.

<sup>85</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.8.1.

<sup>86</sup> Helmut Thieliicke, *Life Can Begin Again* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), xiii.

<sup>87</sup> Helmut Thieliicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, 40.

and that we do not need anyone to die for us and to forgive and to heal us as a Savior.”<sup>88</sup> For Thielicke, the interpretation of the antitheses needs to take into account the fact that while Jesus intended his demands to be fulfilled, fallen humans cannot fulfill them. To this Moral predicament he applies a theological solution that provides the framework for affirming Christianity without being embarrassed by Jesus’ Moral teaching. As a result, Thielicke seems to say that in the interpretation of the antitheses one does not need to obey Jesus’ demands, but instead one is only required to understand that the purpose of the antitheses is to tear open and lay bare the great Moral need of human beings.

Thielicke’s emphasis on the second use of the law in his interpretation of the antitheses is indeed warranted. It has been true in the past and remains true today, as Harvey K. McArthur points out, that those who read the Sermon on the Mount with seriousness are overwhelmed with the awareness of their inadequacies.<sup>89</sup> Even though repentance may not be part of the original purpose of the antitheses, it can remain a function which the antitheses perform. Beneath the antitheses’ scrutiny, human complacency and self-assurance disappear and one comes to know oneself for what he or she is, a person who needs God’s grace.

As chapter 4 has delineated, the basis of Thielicke’s emphasis on the second use of the law in his interpretation of the antitheses is his distinction between *Gebot* (the command of God) and *Gesetz* (the law of God). With respect to Moral universalism stated above, one can see that Thielicke’s distinction causes him to have a limited view of Morality. While the antitheses are Moral, they are only Moral in the fallen world but they

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<sup>88</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, 44.

<sup>89</sup> Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 144.

do not bind Adam and Eve before the Fall. This distinction assumes that the Moral law has significance only for a particular historical time, namely that of the fallen world over against the law of another time, the original state of creation. He argues that to apply the laws within the original creation before the fall to the completely different world after the fall is unreasonable. One should instead regard, in Thielicke's understanding, the fall as a reality which characterizes human existence in its totality. The imperfection of this existence is a complete qualitative revolt against God and not just some quantitative failures to reach any norm.

There is a problem with Thielicke's limited view of Morality. He is right about the fallen nature of humanity, but it only leads to sin and not necessarily immorality. One can be a moral person but still sinful. Thielicke, however, seems to coalesce immorality and sin. If this is correct, Thielicke's interpretation of the antitheses does not accept the distinction which this dissertation recognizes between immorality and sin. To coalesce immorality and sin could lead one to deny that humans are capable of any Moral actions. If this is also correct, Thielicke may contradict Jesus himself. In Matthew 5:46 Jesus shows that even a tax collector can love others whom he or she also loves. Moral actions between those who love one another are possible even for non-Christians.

Thielicke himself seems to recognize the problem that he may contradict Jesus in this way. This is evident in the way he treats the guilt of his parishioners for their role in the holocaust or World War II. He hesitates to be consistent with the theological loci of the *usus elencticus* pattern he employs. His parishioners were haunted by the ongoing denazification trials. The whole world seemed to stand in judgment of the Germans for having fought under the wrong banner, and people were depressed by the awareness of

collective guilt for the world tragedy.<sup>90</sup> Facing this situation, Thielicke preached that “life can begin again” on the foundation of God’s Word (Matthew 7:24-25) and emphasized that “it is not the Word of God as such that becomes this rock foundation for us but only the Word of God that we *do*, the Word that *we take seriously in our life*.” He explains that to take seriously the Word in life and to do it means “to live” with it, “to dare to be obedient,” and “to anchor, fasten, and moor the Word of God in every situation of my life.”<sup>91</sup> His adamant sermon on obedience demonstrates that Thielicke still recognizes that people can do some Moral good, even though they are sinners. This recognition seems to undermine his belief on human incapability to do any Moral good. As Bauman points out, Thielicke’s call to his refugee parishioners to rebuild their broken lives is somehow “confused” by his unresolved ambivalence in neither denying that humans are able of any Moral good nor acknowledging that humans could do the Moral good if they would and therefore should.<sup>92</sup>

### **C. The official Roman Catholic Church and the antitheses**

The official position of Roman Catholics also supports the thesis of this chapter. They argue that the Decalogue and the antitheses are binding on all people. The encyclical letter of John Pope II states that “The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ – a sermon which contains the fullest and most complete formulation of the New Law (cf. Mt. 5-7), is clearly linked to the Decalogue entrusted by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.”<sup>93</sup> John

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<sup>90</sup> Clarence Bauman compares this situation with that of Greek tragedy in which the presence of the Sphinx haunted the city with the awareness that a terrible crime had been committed and which demanded atonement. (Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 196).

<sup>91</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, 212-3. *Emphasis added*.

<sup>92</sup> Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 196.

<sup>93</sup> John Paul II, *Splendor of Truth* (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1993), §12 (p.23).

Paul II further teaches that since the Fall has damaged the faculty of human reason, reason must be enlightened by revelation, beginning with the commandments on Sinai, or the Decalogue.<sup>94</sup> The Catechism concurs in this way: “The commandments of the Decalogue, although accessible to reason alone, have been revealed. To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needs this revelation.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, the Decalogue discloses a privileged expression of the natural law. Even though it is revealed specifically to the Israel of the Old Testament, they are binding on all people because they bring to light the essential duties of what it means to be a human being.

Since the Decalogue is binding on all people, the antitheses, which express the same Moral laws, are also binding on all people. The Catholic Catechism calls the Decalogue the Old Law which is not superseded by the New Law in the New Testament. The Catechism explains that the New Law, which is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, “refines, surpasses and leads the Old Law to its perfection.”<sup>96</sup> This means that for the Roman Catholics there is no abrupt discontinuity between different epochs of the law. There is rather an incessant revelation of the Moral law to human beings, beginning at creation with the natural law, proceeding through the covenant at Sinai and reaching its summit in the Sermon on the Mount.

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<sup>94</sup> John Paul II, *Splendor of Truth*, §44 (p.60).

<sup>95</sup> CCC, 503.

<sup>96</sup> CCC, 478.

#### **D. John Howard Yoder and the particularity of the antitheses**

Yoder's particular interpretation of the antitheses does not necessarily contradict the thesis that the antitheses are binding on all people. He seems to recognize the possibility that the antitheses can be Moral, binding on all people. Yoder, however, chooses not to make the argument that the antitheses are Moral, even though he may think so. The antitheses, at the moment of their deliverance, are taught by Jesus to his Jewish disciples. According to Yoder, this suggests Christians should accept willingly, rather than grudgingly, as an affirmation rather than as a limitation, their rootedness in the particularity of Judaism and Jesus. For them to recognize this is to say, as Yoder explains, "that despite the possible or imaginable projections of something that *might* be 'universally' valid, these people are willing to live within the limits of the story of their faith and even to celebrate their faith in a form that holds its meaning open for others to join."<sup>97</sup> Such an affirmation should not make Christians embarrassed about the fact that its particular position is not ultimately subject to irresistible verification (or falsification) from outside its own system. As a result, Yoder chooses to argue for the particularity of the antitheses instead of arguing that the antitheses are Moral, binding on all people. For him, the antitheses are given to a particular people, in this case Christians. This fact for Yoder implies that their obedience to the antitheses in order to witness to the kingdom of God cannot be tested from without the Christian system. Christians have no way of determining whether or not they can ask everyone else to obey the antitheses as they do.

One of the reasons which prompts him to choose to interpret the antitheses as only binding on Christians is his dislike of the attempt by people to dominate others by means

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<sup>97</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics," 113. Emphasis his.

of the coercive nature of something universal. He says, “We want people to *have to* believe us...we are impressed by the power to convince which we see exercised by demonstrations in mathematics and logic, in the natural sciences, and in documented history...and we want our claims about God and morality to be similarly coercive.”<sup>98</sup>

Yoder believes that one tends to seek for any universal warrants because one wants others to capitulate to one’s position. By claiming the antitheses to be particularly Christian, Yoder does not intend to say that this acceptance of one’s own particularity implies that one’s position disregards the challenge of universality. Instead, he chooses to “restate the meaning of a truth claim from within particular identity.”<sup>99</sup> Yoder believes that by virtue of one’s acceptance of one’s own particularity, in this case the acceptance of the position that the antitheses are meant for Christians, one will not be easily tempted to coerce others. Instead, they will be willing to suffer at the hands of those who oppose the position. Yoder says, “[R]ejection...is part of validation” and the price of one’s particular testimony of a truth claim is to be ready to “suffer at the hands of the addressees.”<sup>100</sup> The readiness to bear others’ hostility and rejection are part of the risk of taking seriously one’s particularity.

It is fair to question Yoder’s approach to the antitheses at this point. He chooses to interpret the antitheses as exclusively for Christians. This choice, however, tends to promote a sectarian approach to Morality. Although Yoder does not intend to do this, his interpretation that the antitheses are only for Christians inevitably tends to promote a

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<sup>98</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 287.

<sup>99</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 290.

<sup>100</sup> John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 293.

non-universal view of morality. This view of morality will in one way or another hinder Christian participation in the public discourse of Morality. Voices as diverse as Gilbert Meilaender,<sup>101</sup> Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten,<sup>102</sup> and Roman Catholic social critics George Weigel<sup>103</sup> and David Schindler<sup>104</sup> offer a useful assessment of the sectarian approach to morality, which in its practice, they worry, wittingly or unwittingly discourages responsible Christian participation in society. Yoder is quite sensitive to the criticism from the outside that his sectarian approach engenders social withdrawal (see chapter 5 of this dissertation in the section of the debate between him and James Gustafson). However forceful Yoder's protest, his sectarian approach, in its practice, has tended to engender social withdrawal from precisely those social institutions that need the leavening effect of Christian participation. This does not mean that Yoder is a total social withdrawer. At least, his debate with Gustafson demonstrates his willingness to participate in public discourse. But since he does not admit to any universal norm when he participates in public discourse, his argumentation lacks persuasive power outside his own circle. One lesson to be learned from Yoder's approach is that Christian participation in public discourse of Morality must rest upon universal norms – norms which are binding on all people. Apart from the conviction that basic Moral principles, assumed by and standing in agreement with biblical revelation, are accessible to all people by virtue

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<sup>101</sup> Gilbert Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 90-1.

<sup>102</sup> Carl Braaten, "Protestants and Natural Law," *First Things* (September 1992): 20-6.

<sup>103</sup> George Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 196-200.

<sup>104</sup> David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio, Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996).



of God-given reason, secular people may easily dismiss and challenge Christian participation in public Moral discourse.

#### **IV. The moral teaching of the sixth antithesis**

The comparison of the thesis with the studies of previous chapters shows how the thesis that the antitheses are binding on all people stands up when compared with some major interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount. The antitheses of Matthew 5:21-48 consist of six test-cases of Moral instructions – murder, adultery, divorce, taking an oath, retaliation, and loving enemies. In relating to murder, Jesus commands people to practice reconciliation toward others. Concerning adultery, Jesus commands sexual purity. And this prohibition of adultery is linked to the prohibition of divorce because divorce and remarriage are regarded as special forms of adultery (Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:3-12; Luke 16:18). The prohibition against adultery takes precedence over the permission to divorce, which is viewed as a temporary concession.<sup>105</sup> In the case of taking an oath, Jesus demands one's honesty in talk. Concerning retaliation, Jesus requires one to be patient. And in the final test-case of loving enemies, Jesus stipulates positive actions towards them. I will now explain the Moral teaching of the sixth antithesis as a test-case to further support the thesis.

Jesus' teaching on the love of enemies is framed in terms of the traditional command to love neighbors (Matthew 5:43), taken from Leviticus 19. To recognize this framework in Jesus' teaching is edifying. J. Daryl Charles points out that not infrequently the "ethics of Jesus" is approached from a presumed discontinuity between the Old and

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<sup>105</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, "The Decalogue in the New Testament," 246.

New Testaments.<sup>106</sup> A closer examination of Jesus' teaching dispels this presupposition. Jesus' indebtedness to the Jewish tradition is apparent. M. Bockmuehl even argues that "all the main features of Jesus' ethics are deeply conversant [and in continuity] with Jewish moral presuppositions."<sup>107</sup> This demonstrates that Jesus' teaching on loving enemies does not simply appear out of nowhere. Romans 2:14-15, quoted in the previous section, warrants this conclusion since the parallel between Jesus' command on loving enemies and the ethical teachings of non-Christian antiquity testifies that this Moral principle is already written on the hearts of all people. William Klassen argues that alongside with Jesus, ancient Greek wisdom and Judaism have recognized the obligation to extend love or to show positive actions to enemies.<sup>108</sup> Luise Schottroff further points out that the parallel between Jesus' command and the ethical teachings of non-Christian antiquity eliminate any attempt to demonstrate the novelty and uniqueness of Jesus' command.<sup>109</sup> One may imply, as Charles does, that because this Moral teaching is common knowledge to people, loving enemies is an abiding Moral law, "woven into the very fabric of creation."<sup>110</sup> The conscience of the writers of non-Christian antiquity testifies to the Moral law of loving enemies. Their teachings clearly express this Moral law.

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<sup>106</sup> J. Daryl Charles, "Do Not Suppose That I Have Come," 48.

<sup>107</sup> M. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches, Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 1. In contrast, Richard Hays' highly acclaimed work seems to fail to discern Jesus' continuity with the Jewish moral tradition and the function of law in ethics (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [San Francisco: Harper Pub. Co., 1996], 158-68).

<sup>108</sup> William Klassen, "The Authenticity of the Command: "Love your Enemies," in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 395.

<sup>109</sup> Louise Schottroff, "Non-Violence and the Love of One's Enemies," in *Essays on the Love Commandment*, trans. Reginald H. and Ilse Fuller (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978): 16.

<sup>110</sup> J. Daryl Charles, "Do Not Suppose That I Have Come," 48.

Jesus' Moral teaching to love one's enemies also contrasts with certain rabbinic investigations of the law of love (Leviticus 19:18) which conclude that "love your neighbor" implies "hate your enemy." Neither Leviticus 19 nor any other Old Testament passage, however, commands hate for one's enemy (eliminated by Leviticus 19:17; Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 24:17-18; 25:21-22). The reference here (Matthew 5:43) to a command to hate is to a misinterpretation and restriction of the neighbor command from Leviticus 19:18. The misinterpretation probably reflects typical human behavior as well as debates about the identity of a neighbor. Those who do not fulfill the roles of good neighbors are understood to be enemies to whom love is denied.<sup>111</sup> Jesus' command in Matthew 5:44 on the love of enemies rejects such treatment of enemies. Jesus defines "neighbor" to include enemies.

The theological justification for such treatment follows in Matthew 5:45. God's indiscriminate goodness is the basis for this command. God's goodness is expressed by continually making available to all the blessings of creation that sustain life – the sun and the rain. This account of the relation of Morality to God's activity in creation shows that there is an epistemological connection between Moral obligation and creation. For if the Moral law is attested in the creation, such testimony will influence the ethical thinking and Moral decisions even of those who do not acknowledge the Creator. All people are somewhat likely to recognize it, whether or not they recognize the lawgiver.

Both Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church have also argued that the Moral obligation of loving enemies is binding on all people. Calvin argues that this command

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<sup>111</sup> See the discussion in Hans D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 301-9.

“had formerly been delivered to all the Jews” and then “delivered universally to all Christians.”<sup>112</sup> The Roman Catholics argue that all human beings enjoy an equal dignity by virtue of being created in God’s image. This entails respect for the rights of humans based on their dignity as creatures. The respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle of “the duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them,” including enemies.<sup>113</sup> As God has revealed his love to all people indiscriminately in creation, Jesus also expects one to love others, including enemies.

## V. Summary

Some theologians answer differently the question whether the antitheses are binding on all people. Leonardo Boff opts to obscure the universal sense of oughtness in the antitheses in order to relax the moral demands on the poor. John Calvin and Helmut Thielicke both argue the universal bindingness of the antitheses on all people. While Calvin argues the antitheses reveal God’s Moral will for all people, Thielicke explains that the antitheses posit a challenge for all people of their Moral shortcomings. Yoder’s particular interpretation of the antitheses does not necessarily contradict the thesis that the antitheses are binding on all people. He seems to recognize the possibility that the antitheses can be binding on all people. Yoder, however, chooses not to make the argument even though he may think so. For him, the antitheses are given to a particular people, in this case Christians. By relating the antitheses to the Decalogue in the Catechism, the official Roman Catholic Church argues that the antitheses are binding on all people. As the Decalogue contains the privileged expression of the natural law, the

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<sup>112</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.56 (359).

<sup>113</sup> CCC, 469.

antitheses also express the natural law. In this matter, even though the antitheses are privilegedly revealed to Christians, they are universally binding.

In this chapter, by comparing and contrasting different approaches by some theologians above, I have demonstrated that the antitheses are universal, binding on all people. Even though the antitheses, as the rule of daily life, are revealed to Christians, they are at the same time, as Carl Henry explains, “the moral claim of the Creator addressed to humans on the basis of creation, the Decalogue, and the future judgment.”<sup>114</sup> The antitheses mark neither departure from the natural law theory, nor from the law of the Old Testament. The Natural Law theory and the Decalogue testify that what is Moral is binding on all people. The antitheses are also Moral and therefore they are binding on all people too. They are binding on all people even though the context from which they come from is particularly Christian.

Obviously, the antitheses do not contain “thou shalt not” commandments as their characteristic pattern. Some negations do appear (for example, “do not swear” and “do not resist an evil person,” Matthew 5:34, 39). This does not mean, as Carl Henry points out, that the antitheses are not relevant as the Moral standard for human life.<sup>115</sup> The antitheses are merely not using the prohibitory form, as in the Decalogue. They indeed have some hard sayings, such as bodily mutilation (Matthew 5:29-30) and turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). These hard sayings and their extreme impressions are Jesus’ way of asking one to do more than one thinks one can do. Just as an athletic trainer expects his trainees to exercise even though they are unfit, Jesus expects all people to

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<sup>114</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), 309.

<sup>115</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 301.

obey the antitheses even though they are spiritually unfit. Duncan Derret says that Matthew's listeners were like athletes, seventy –five percent of whom were unfit.<sup>116</sup> According to this view, Jesus is calling many people by means of the antitheses to join an exercise class. Jesus indeed means for his hearers to obey the Moral teaching of the antitheses. They have in view God's rule over human life. It is due to the human predicament as a sinner that one thinks one cannot practice them.

Moreover, to speak of “the ethics of” something in Scripture is to imply a theological affirmation. To speak of the ethics of the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48) is to analyze a portion of Scripture from an ethical perspective in which one must interpret the passage of the divinely revealed truth under investigation. To use the word “ethics” in the interpretation of the antitheses, in this case, is to focus upon the sense of oughtness that flows out of the Christian's relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This relationship is further illuminated by the text of the antitheses. Since the antitheses are binding on all people, Christians should practice them to testify to the world what it means to live out a Moral life according to God's will. This testimony, however, is not merely a universal humanitarian endeavor to impress the world but it is also particularized within a Christian context. One needs to remember that the antitheses are recorded in the context of the “Gospel” according to Matthew. One should not forget that Jesus' Moral teachings in the antitheses are the words of the crucified and risen Lord. The ethics of the antitheses are not works salvation but “salvation ethics,” which is “the underside of the biblical doctrine of atonement and mediation and of the work of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification and

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<sup>116</sup> J. Duncan Derret, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Manual for Living* (Northampton: Pilkington Press, 1994), 25.

glorification of the believer.”<sup>117</sup> A Christian, though redeemed, still is required to determine between right and wrong directions of love in action through an objective Divine outline. The biblically revealed ethic of antitheses provides such content.

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<sup>117</sup> Carl Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 289.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE ANTITHESES ARE FOR INDIVIDUALS AND NOT FOR STATES

### **I. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the analysis of the antithesis of loving enemies (Matthew 5:43-48), as a test case, has demonstrated that the antitheses are binding on all people, and not something only for Christians. In this chapter, I will argue that the antitheses are intended to govern the conduct of individuals and not of States or political institutions. An institution, as Oxford Dictionary defines, is a group of people established for a particular purpose.<sup>1</sup> From this definition, even a group of two people, such as a husband and a wife with the purpose of establishing a family in a marriage, is an institution. Since institutions can range from two people to many, many more, such as business, education, charity, and religious organizations, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to argue whether or not the antitheses can be a prescription of moral conduct for each different institution existing on this vast globe. I will limit the discussion of this chapter to one single large institution which can be called the epitome of secular human institutions on earth, namely, the civil and political government or the State. The thesis of this chapter is a response to the question which surfaces as soon as one moves out from individual moral discipline to contemplate the roles and responsibilities of the person as a member of a State. Does this individual moral discipline have a civil-political dimension? If it does, of what kind? To be more specific, does the moral teaching and practice of the antitheses necessarily have any civil-political sphere of reference, in this case, the conduct of States? Below is an illustration of such a question.

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<sup>1</sup> “institution, n.”. OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/971110?redirectedFrom=institution> (accessed January 16, 2012).



Suppose X and Y are States and not individuals. X prepares to attack Y. When Y holds a parliamentary meeting to determine its policy in the face of this aggression, one individual Christian parliament member urges non-resistance on the basis of the antitheses in Matthew 5:38-48 (non-resistance and love of enemy). The Christian assures the fellow doubting statesmen that the spiritual gain will offset any other loss. If they refuse to heed this advice, then it is no longer possible for the aggression of State X to be met with a policy based on Matthew 5:38-48 and the Christian will now have to decide how to act in this new situation. The Christian would even agonize if it is clear that his or her decision to participate or not to participate is going to affect the outcome of the struggle of State Y. Regardless of the choice the Christian makes, it is clear that the decision to meet the aggression of State X with a policy based on the antitheses of Matthew 5:38-48 is a very different thing from the individual decision of a Christian to withdraw from State Y's struggle to defend itself when State Y has decided to meet the aggression of State X with force.

The above illustration shows the struggle this chapter is wrestling with. This chapter will deal with the question whether or not the antitheses are intended to govern the conduct of States. As for the second question, while an individual may not practice what he or she believes, at least how an individual understands the antitheses will inform the decision whether or not to participate in the defense of State Y using force against State X's aggression. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, this chapter will not further discuss the second question. I will instead show that the focus of attention in the antitheses is on the individual X-to-Y relationship. They do not deal with the conduct of States. I will then reassess the chapters on three theologians with whom I disagree,

comparing and contrasting them with the thesis of this chapter. Acknowledging the contribution from the study of Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church done in the previous chapters, I will finally close with a reflection on the antitheses and the place of social ethics in Scripture.

## **II. The antitheses and their ethical scope**

The thesis of this chapter, that the antitheses are for individuals and not for States, rests on two premises. The first premise is that the relationship between individual human beings, which is based on love, is a direct personal relationship rather than a relationship which is based on justice. Love deals with the person *qua* person. Justice deals with the person *representing* an institutional-structural realm, such as a State. For example, a judge as a person should love the defendant who is also a person but a judge as the bearer of court and social order of the State should also treat the defendant, who is the offender of structural order, according to the principle of justice. The highest requirement of judicial systems in the States is that they should be just, although it is also required of any person representing the State that the person, as an individual, should meet his or her fellow human beings in love.

The second premise is that the antitheses are moral teachings on the relationship between human beings which is based on love. Since the first premise is that the relationship between individual human beings, which is based on love, is a direct personal relationship, then the antitheses are therefore personal, that is, they govern individual personal conduct. To argue for the thesis, I will first explore the distinction between love and justice. I will then argue that the antitheses are moral teachings based on love and therefore for individuals. I will also employ the specific example of a

political government or the State to make the case that the antitheses are a prescription of moral conducts for individuals and not for States.

### **A. Love and justice**

There are things which an individual would never conceive of doing in a personal capacity, but which suddenly become thinkable, even obligatory, when he or she assumes official responsibility representing the State. For example, one should never conceive of killing another person by electrocuting them to death. But an executioner, appointed by the State, is obliged to make sure that the death sentence via the electric chair is performed successfully. Can there be any theological justification for this? While one may insist that the Christian faith has as many implications for the way society is run as for the way a Christian lives his or her personal life, the possibility of a legitimate distinction between different spheres of activities should not be discounted. I will present this distinction in terms of the differentiation between love and justice. Love deals more with the realm of private or individual morality, while justice deals with public or State morality. To recognize this differentiation does not mean the severing of the bond between them. Instead, this differentiation recognizes that while there is a bond between love and justice, in the sense that they are related, they are not the same. In this section, I will first delineate the understanding of love and justice employed in this dissertation and I will then show how these terms are related and yet different.

#### **A1. Understanding love and justice**

Love is complex because there are many different kinds of love, and the word “love” has many different meanings. There are many different kinds of love. Love of the child for the mother or of the mother for the child, for example, differs from the kind of

love one has for the nation one belongs to. There are also many different meanings of the word “love.” When people speak of “making love,” they do not mean the same thing as when they speak of “falling in love” or “being in love” with someone. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to make an exact definition of what love is. For the present purpose, this dissertation will argue that at least there is a kind of love which Scripture portrays as divine love.

The prophet Hosea in Scripture portrays this kind of love. His own human experience is a parable or description of divine love. Hosea loved his unfaithful wife, who had given herself up to whoredom. Though his wife might deserve to receive a divorce sentence, Hosea did not divorce her and did not give up on her. That was God’s way of revealing to Hosea the nature of divine love. As Hosea loves his wife who has become utterly unworthy of his love, God loves those who have become utterly unworthy of his love. He loves them not for their lovableness or worth, but in spite of their being what they are.

According to this kind of love, one does not love because of the quality of the beloved. One loves the other in spite of the other being so and so. A particularly clear example of this love is found in the antithesis of “loving one’s enemy” (Matthew 5:41-48). If one loves those whom one would naturally hate, then it is obvious that it is not the quality of the beloved that motivates love. Here is clearly love for an individual, not because of what the individual is, but in spite of what the individual is. Loving one’s enemy is giving to the enemy positive actions and attitudes he or she does not deserve to get.

Justice is also as complex as love. William Werpehowski argues that “specification of justice requires specification of criteria appropriate to the nature of the relationship in question.”<sup>2</sup> In the economic realm, for example, justice based on merit must play a significant role in an individual’s effort to maintain and increase productivity. Without effort and productivity human need is not met, and justice is not rendered. When it comes to political rights, housing, and educational opportunities, however, an egalitarian justice seems to be most appropriate. Justice is not rendered when one group occupies a disproportionate amount of political power for the sake of securing that group’s interests. For example, the apartheid system which prefers the Europeans and denigrates the Africans is clearly an unjust system. Such an approach clearly stereotypes a given group in society as having only one set of perspectives or interests and hence destroys the dignity of each individual. It may be helpful therefore to recognize that different senses of justice may apply to different activities and spheres of reality. Karen Lebacqz recognizes this complexity and offers at least six different theories of justice.<sup>3</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delineate all the different senses of justice. At its most basic meaning, this dissertation understands justice as rendering to the other what is his or her due, as classically defined by Aristotle *suum cuique*, “to each his due.” This formal notion is widely accepted in both theological and philosophical circles. As Emil Brunner points out, “From time immemorial the principle of justice has been defined as the *suum cuique* – the rendering to each man of his due.”<sup>4</sup> This definition is to

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<sup>2</sup> William Werpehowski, “Justice,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. John MacQuaire (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 331.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Lebacqz, *Six Theories of Justice: Perspectives from Philosophical and Theological Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order* (London: Lutterworth, 1945), 23.

be distinguished from justice as a personal virtue, namely, as one of those habits which are part of the character of a person. As a personal virtue, justice is one of the four cardinal virtues, the others being prudence, fortitude and temperance.<sup>5</sup> It is also beyond the scope of this dissertation to specifically discuss the relation between justice as a personal virtue and justice as classically defined. For the present purpose, while justice can also be a personal character trait, it points to a dimension of social relationships. In this sense, a social practice or arrangement as well as a specific social interaction may be just or unjust. In fact, this understanding of justice is the more fundamental concept, as Nicholas Wolterstorff argues, “For the just person is the person whose habit it is to pursue justice in social relationships.”<sup>6</sup> Justice may prevail in a certain regard within a certain group of people, or it may fail to prevail. Justice is present among persons, groups and institutions when their rights, their legitimate claims, are honored. Justice is all about human rights. This shows that human rights exist before justice does. The very idea of justice occurs only because humans already have rights. And the fact of justice, in real life, occurs only if human beings receive whatever their rights are.

Scripture also recognizes justice in this way. It describes, for example, God “who executes justice for the oppressed” (Psalm 146:7) and is especially concerned for the plight of all those unable to ensure their own fair treatment (Exodus 22:21-27). Oliver O’Donovan claims that the Hebrew word *mishpat*, often translated into English as justice

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<sup>5</sup> Peter A. De Vos, “Justice,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973): 360-2.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Justice and Peace,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, eds. David J. Atkinson, David F. Field, Arthur Holmes and Oliver O’Donovan (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 15.

and paired with *tsedega* or righteousness, refers to judicial performance.<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff concurs that talk about *misphat* in the Scripture rarely leaves judicial contexts and decisions behind. He further adds that God's demand for justice has to do both with appropriate judgments and with a deeper notion of justice. In other words, human rights are based on the dignity of human beings as created in the image of God, and when these rights are not honored, injustice is present.<sup>8</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop a biblical conception of justice, I agree with Wolterstorff. God's demand for justice in Scripture gives a powerful reason for Christians to confirm the existence of human rights. Human beings are all created in the image of God. For this reason, when one talks of justice, one is talking about an enduring human reality, the reality of human rights.

Since justice deals with human rights, the debates about justice can be boiled down to the question: what does one actually owe people in a given situation of life? Or, what is due other people? The detailed answer to this question is again beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the present purpose, the nature of such questions demonstrates that justice has to do with arranging things in human society so that individuals and groups or institutions respect each other's rights. There are different kinds of social relationships in which people can press their rights on each other. I will describe some instances below.

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37-41.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 68-75.

Sometimes, justice can be individual. For example, one may make a contract to paint a portrait, for which the payment would be \$500 when the job is done. Justice is honored when the portrait is finished and the payment of \$500 is made. Other times, justice can be institutional, either the relationship between an institution and an individual or between an institution and another institution. For instance, a State should treat its citizens justly by giving a fair share of the many goods that it distributes to its members, like the country's natural resources, life, land, air and water. Justice is done when everyone gets a fair share of these kinds of wealth. Just as a citizen has a right to share in a State's goods, a State has a right to some of a citizen's goods. A citizen owes a share of taxes, respects public property and obeys laws. Justice is done when every citizen gives to the State what is due. An example of justice between institutions is evident in export and import treaties between States. Justice is done when each State gives to one another its due.

These examples show that justice is somehow impersonal in that it does not depend on one's personal attitudes toward other individuals. Justice is honored when one gives to others their due whether they are acquaintances or strangers, even regardless of whether they are friends or enemies. Lewis Smedes further explains that this impersonal nature of justice has an advantage since it means justice can be measured.<sup>9</sup> For example, a spouse may bicker interminably with her husband about whether or not he really loves her and nobody could step in to adjudicate the dispute. But if the wife starts to claim that her husband has done her an injustice, an outsider could help arbitrate whether or not an injustice has been done.

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1983), 25.



More importantly, the impersonal nature of justice gives more weight to the first premise of the thesis, namely that love is individual and justice is institutional. Justice can indeed be individual. For example, one can ask other individuals the question of how just they are. The impersonal nature of justice, however, tends to take justice beyond the individual scope to the institutional one. Because of this, one can also ask an institution such as the State the question “how just is a State or nation.” This question is legitimate since one can measure whether or not a State or nation is pursuing justice among its citizens and with other States. But one cannot ask of an institution how loving it is. To ask of an institution the question “how loving is a State or nation” is meaningless because it is difficult to recognize and measure the love, which a State is required to show. It is more appropriate to ask the question of justice with regard to a State. The question about loving others is more individual in its scope.

#### A2. When love and justice embrace one another

In theological discussion, love and justice are often compared and contrasted with one another. In this dissertation, love has been defined as giving people something they do not deserve to get, and justice as giving people their due. To focus the discussion of how justice and love relate to one another in this dissertation, I will specifically analyze the thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr. By looking at the strength and the weakness of his view, I hope to demonstrate that love and justice, while they are different, can complement one another. Let love and justice begin to embrace one another.

Reinhold Niebuhr recognizes that love and justice are distinct. They are distinct in the sense that love is individual and justice is institutional. But he also points out that love and justice are often in tension with one another. In the last chapter of his *Moral*

*Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr argues that the ethics of love, especially Christian love, could never be a guide in rough human social life.<sup>10</sup> The reason for this is that human social life consists of competing claims and interests between institutions, societies and even nations. Love cannot be a guide in such bitter competitions and for Niebuhr even the *agape* love which Scripture prescribes, which he understands as a self-sacrificial love, might actually do harm. Only justice can be a guide in such competition in human social life. This is especially true in the quest for a just balance of power among competing interests.

According to Niebuhr, Christian love, self-sacrificial love, is an “impossible possibility” and never achievable in human social life of this fallen world. He says, “[I]t is not even right to insist that every action of the Christian must conform to *agape*, rather than to the norms of relative justice and mutual love by which life is maintained and conflicting interests are arbitrated in history. For as soon as the life and interest of others than the agent are involved in an action or policy, the sacrifice of those interests ceases to be ‘self-sacrifice.’”<sup>11</sup> Justice is all one can hope for. It is only through justice that a tolerable harmony between the competing claims of a sinful world is achievable. This implies that institutions must strive for justice even if they are forced to use means, such as resistance, coercion and even resentment, which cannot gain moral sanction from the standpoint of *agape* love in individual relationships.

Reinhold Niebuhr is therefore satisfied to let love and justice stand in tension. The strength of this position is in his distinction between the nature of individual and

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<sup>10</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 257-78.

<sup>11</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. 2: Human Destiny (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 88.

institutional morality. Justice is the norm which is more likely to receive practical application in the sphere of institutional morality, while love, *agape*, is the norm which is to be practiced in the arena of individual morality. Here Niebuhr is certainly correct to highlight the centrality of love and justice for Christian ethical thinking.

Niebuhr's position is not without problems, however. One problem surfaces when one begins to assume love and justice as totally compartmentalized because they are in tension with one another. In other words, there is a danger of separating love and justice to the point where they are not related at all, and perhaps even contradictory. As a result, institutions, like States and business organizations, could claim a disturbing amount of license to use questionable means to achieve a desired end in the name of justice. An example from Niebuhr's treatment of the problem of war may illustrate this danger.

With regard to the bombing of enemy cities in the Second World War, Niebuhr wrote in the summer of 1943: "It is not possible to engage in any act of collective opposition to collective evil without involving the innocent with the guilty...Once bombing has been developed as an instrument of warfare, it is not possible to disavow its use without capitulating to the foe who refuses to disavow it."<sup>12</sup> While Niebuhr admits that the bombing policies can be carried out without rancor or self-righteousness, recognizing that "no man has the moral freedom to escape from these hard and cruel necessities of history,"<sup>13</sup> his position seems to display a thrust of "the end justifies the means." This becomes evident when later in 1944 Niebuhr appeared to be open in

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<sup>12</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Bombing of Germany," in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D. B. Robertson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972): 222.

<sup>13</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Bombing of Germany," 222-3.

principle to the use of indiscriminate means in warfare: “The necessity follows from the possibility, because once the instruments of a total war are unloosed they will guarantee defeat for the side that *fails to use* them, whether from want of resolution, or failure of organization, or moral scruple.”<sup>14</sup> While Niebuhr is supporting a war fought in the name of justice, in pursuing it he seems to tolerate the injustice of allowing the killing of innocent non-combatants because the end justifies the means.

To be fair, Niebuhr is not a consequentialist ethicist where everything goes as long as the end is achieved. While he seems to allow injustice to be done to the innocent non-combatants, he rejects the use of nuclear weapons in any actual battle, though not the possession of such weapons, because he believes to use such a means of warfare would inflict a heavy burden of moral guilt on the nation which has deployed it.<sup>15</sup> This talk of actions which are tainted with guilt shows that Niebuhr still retains his moral scruples or conscience. It appears that for him the use of certain weapons does have something intrinsically objectionable about it, even when such use might be justified on purely consequential grounds. The yardstick by which the moral guilt is being measured is presumably a non-consequentialist one. This shows that Niebuhr is perhaps confused in his ethical methodology, especially in his application of the ethical principles of love and justice in the problem of war.

Niebuhr’s apparent inconsistency in his dealing with the problem of war is an example of the risk in making love and justice strangers to one another. For Niebuhr, love

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<sup>14</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Airplanes Are Not Enough,” in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D. B. Robertson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 190 (189-91). Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Nuclear Dilemma – A Discussion,” *Christianity and Crisis* 21, no. 19 (November 13, 1961): 202.

and justice seem always in tension and cannot be sufficiently interrelated. Love and justice, however, should not be complete strangers. In the case of war, a just war may be interpreted as an “in-principled” application of Christian *agape*.<sup>16</sup> To engage in a war can be an expression of one’s love in defending others who are under attack by evil forces. Also in terms of protecting innocent non-combatants, Niebuhr may employ the principle of double effect as an attempt to ensure that justice is done when love for one’s neighbor seems to demand drastic measures.<sup>17</sup> During a fight in the battlefield, it may be hard to avoid harming innocent non-combatants. However, such harm should never be the intention. But the indiscriminate bombing of cities involves the intentional killing of innocent non-combatants. That Niebuhr can defend such intentional indiscriminate killing reveals the weakness of his position – a weakness caused by Niebuhr’s failure to sufficiently relate love and justice to each other.

The discussion on the strength and weakness of Niebuhr’s view on the relationship between love and justice is illuminating. While love and justice are distinct, even perhaps sometimes in tension, they should not be mutually exclusive. In fact, they should complement one another. Love needs justice and justice also needs love. Love without justice can become a mere sentimentality (whenever one feels love, the thing one does is therefore a loving action). Justice without love can become a mere consequentiality (whenever one thinks of a just end, use of any means becomes a just thing to achieve that just end).

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<sup>16</sup> See Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1961).

<sup>17</sup> The principle of double effect is a set of ethical criteria for evaluating the permissibility of acting when one's otherwise legitimate act (for example, killing an enemy soldier in the battlefield) will also cause an effect one would normally be obliged to avoid (for example, the death of an innocent non-combatant because of stray bullets during the fight in the battlefield). This principle can be traced at least to [Thomas Aquinas's](#) treatment of homicidal self-defense ([Summa Theologiae, IIa-IIae Q. 64, art. 7](#)).

One way to show the mutual relationship between love and justice is through the distinction Niebuhr points out. Love is individual and justice is institutional. But unlike Niebuhr who seems to emphasize the tension between love and justice, love and justice must actually embrace one another. An example from the issues of race relations could make this evident. Recall how the dissertation understands love and justice. One loves the other in spite of the other being so and so. Love is giving the other what is not the other's due. Justice is giving the other his or her due. A State may call for procedures and policies that warrant no racial discrimination in jobs, education and political positions in society. Justice calls for this and ensures that policies, laws and structures render to people their due, regardless of their ethnic background, simply because they are created in the image of God. Justice can even be sensitive to past wrongs and seek to overcome them through better policies and laws. This role of justice is institutional. But such justice may not improve actual relations among the individuals of various ethnic or racial groups. Stopping at just policies, laws and structures will not achieve God's vision for humanity, for God desires that in human racial differences people may learn empathy, understanding, and mercy. This is where love, which is personal, plays its role. Love calls for individual engagement among the various ethnic groups so that prejudices might be overcome and reconciliation might occur. A person should learn to love others even though the others with their prejudices have mistreated that person. But again, to stop only at loving interaction between ethnic groups will not bring the justice required for addressing the wrong done in the past or the mistreatment continuing in the present. Love and justice should embrace one another. When they do, they nurture each other and guard against the excesses of pursuing only one or the other.

## **B. The antitheses, their institutional implications, and the state as a test case**

From the previous section on the understanding of love and justice, this dissertation understands love as giving to others things not their due or what they do not deserve to receive, and it understands justice as giving to others their due or what they deserve to receive. This does not mean that love and justice are contradictory. Instead, they should be complementary. One way to understand how they complement one another is to recognize the roles of love and justice in human life. Love *personally* deals with the individual-to-individual relationship, while justice *impersonally* handles the relationship between human beings in the State through structural arrangements or social establishments.

A cursory reading of the antitheses demonstrates that the focus on the antitheses is about love. In fact, some of them are about giving others what they do not deserve to get. Jesus commands people how to personally handle their individual relationships even when the person at the other end of the relationship does not deserve to get the treatment. For instance, he commands that one should not retaliate even when the other individual deserves retaliation (Matthew 5:39). He even gives an example of doing more than the other asks or deserves to get: “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles” (Matthew 5:41). Love for enemies (Matthew 5:44) is perhaps the clearest expression of love in terms of giving others what they do not deserve. The focus on love in the antitheses therefore demonstrates that the antitheses are intended to govern the conduct of individuals and not of States.

A close reading of the antitheses also reveals that loving others is not in tension with justice, because love complements justice. The first antithesis on murder includes

the example that one should express love to others through reconciliation without an appeal to the court of justice (Matthew 5:25). An example of the fifth antithesis shows that an expression of love is giving others more than they deserve to get through the justice system (Matthew 5:40). One reason God gives for loving enemies is egalitarian justice. We are to treat human beings, good and evil, in the same way that God deals with human beings. God treats human beings in terms of natural or earthly order because all human beings are fundamentally equal – they are all created in the image of God (Matthew 5:45).

All these examples show that in the antitheses Jesus does not intentionally separate love and justice. There are times when love informs one to let go of justice as in Matthew 5:25. Other times love encourages one to treat others more than they deserve to get with justice (Matthew 5:40). Also in individual relationships, Jesus' command to love one's enemy, to give one's enemy something the enemy does not deserve to get, is modeled on God's just action toward his creation (Matthew 5:45). The connection of love and justice in the antitheses demonstrates that love and justice, while they are distinct, are complementary to one another. But since the focus of the antitheses is love, it appears that here Jesus teaches how love supplements justice in moral actions, especially in individual relationships.

The teaching of the antitheses on how love should supplement justice can help answer the question concerning the institutional implications of the antitheses, especially for the conduct of States. The antitheses are indeed for individuals. Since love and justice are related, however, individuals should consider how the antitheses should govern a



person's actions toward other persons even when the person represents the State. I will use a specific example to show how this can be done.

An institutional moral conduct of the State is, for example, how State Y acts morally toward State Z. State Y acts morally toward State Z when Y does justice to Z, namely, Y gives Z its due, whatever the due is. Now, a male-president of Y acts justly toward a female-president of Z when he, as a leader of Y, gives her, as a leader of Z, the due of Z as a State. If Y has a financial debt toward Z, for example, then the male-president should pay the female-president the debt when it is due. Imagine that the two leaders are still young. The male is handsome and the female is beautiful. While the male-president acts justly as the leader of Y in giving the female-president of Z what is due her State in terms of financial debt, is the male-president allowed to commit adultery with the female-president as long as justice is done between their States? In their individual relationship, love provides the needed direction. The second antithesis on adultery, especially, obliges both leaders as individuals not to commit adultery, even not to look at each other lustfully (Matthew 5:28). Jesus forbids that kind of immoral action. However, one cannot stretch this immoral-individual conduct to imply an institutional one. If a male-president of state Y looks lustfully at a female-president of state Z, does it also imply that State Y is looking at State Z lustfully? This kind of logical conclusion seems absurd.

When Leonardo Boff, Helmut Thielicke, and John Howard Yoder argue that the antitheses are not only for individuals but also something for the State, they do not come to such an absurd conclusion. Boff believes that the antitheses are a call to engage in a socio-political liberation from oppressive social, political or economic structures of

States, particularly within the Latin America context. Thielicke argues that the antitheses are a reminder or mirror for States to see their shortcomings. Yoder insists that the antitheses are a model for States to emulate. Each supports his argument with reasons. They seem, however, to be mistaken in this case, and I will show what kind of mistake they may have made.

### **III. An evaluation of Leonardo Boff's socio-political liberation agenda of the antitheses**

The chapter on Leonardo Boff's interpretation of the antitheses has shown that for Boff, Jesus, by means of the antitheses, displays a conscience liberated from the oppression of legal prescriptions. The antitheses pave the way for liberated people to be able to make creative decisions in their lives with love for the oppressed and the poor as their principle guide. The antitheses are samples of Jesus' creative love, and they invite people to be true to themselves and marshal their creativity to imagine ways to love one another, including their enemies. The antitheses do not exemplify a new morality. Instead, they are an exposition of how people, liberated from the oppression of exclusivism and from the authoritarianism of the law, should engage in social liberation. The antitheses are a call to participate in a political-institutional agenda to liberate the oppressed from their oppressors.

How Boff interprets the antitheses highlights his Christological reflections.<sup>18</sup> One overall theme of these reflections is that Jesus gives privileges to the marginalized, who are nearer the kingdom than all others and who follow Jesus because they have nothing to gain from an established order that cannot save them from their oppression and

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<sup>18</sup> Thus, the title of the book in which he deals with the Sermon on the Mount is called *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978).

alienation. In Boff's formulation, Jesus' preferential option for the marginalized does not mean that they are "special" or "more," but rather means that those who are marginalized must be loved *first*. Boff argues: "to make a preferential option for the poor, then, means to love the poor primarily, as Jesus does – and then, *starting with* the poor, to love everyone, calling all of the others to deliver themselves from the mechanisms that produce the wealth of some and the poverty of others."<sup>19</sup> This understanding of preferential option underlies Boff's approach to the antitheses. In the antitheses, Boff attempts to see the meaning of the person of Jesus in terms of his identification with the marginalized.

The marginalized exist in relation to the institutional structures of exploitation. This implies that the question of the specific function of Scripture (hermeneutics) for the church can only be answered in terms of the primacy of the social over the personal or the institutional over the individual. As Boff argues:

The question [of hermeneutics reflections] cannot be posed merely within the dimensions of a personal conversion. There are structural evils that transcend individual ones. The church, whether it likes it or not, is involved in a context that transcends it... Like Jesus, it ought to give special attention to the nobodies and those without a voice. It ought to accentuate particularly the secular and liberating dimensions contained in the message of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

How Boff accentuates the institutional-political liberating dimensions contained in the message of Christ is evident when he interprets the antitheses as a call to social liberation. He means that Jesus loves the marginalized by combating not simply the people who are controlling and powerful, but the socioeconomic mechanisms that make these powerful

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<sup>19</sup> Leonardo Boff, *When Theology Listens to the Poor*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 25. *Emphasis* added.

<sup>20</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 46.

people exploitative at the expense of the marginalized. The antitheses are a call to engage in this struggle to liberate the marginalized from the structural-institutional evils within the State.

The preferential option for the marginalized appears to predispose Boff to interpret the antitheses as a whole in a way which will illumine and build on this paradigm. He seems to use the antitheses to support an ethical argument defined by the paradigm, that is, the call for institutional-political liberation. Theologians do not indeed live in the “clouds,” as Boff himself argues.<sup>21</sup> They are social actors with a particular place in society. They are indeed framed within the overall social context. In that sense, the emphases of a given biblical interpretation flow from what seems relevant to the theologian on the basis of his or her social standpoint. For Boff, it is Latin America social oppression. While it is not wrong to be relevant to one’s own context in interpreting Scripture, what is decisive is whether one gives the last word to one’s own paradigm or to Scripture. The fact that one accepts all of Scripture as the Word of God does not mean that one would not do any selecting. But selecting scriptural data to advance one’s agenda is a methodology which is unfaithful to Scripture as God’s Word. The way Boff handles the antitheses is perhaps what Douma describes as “[Scripture] texts made room for themes or – formulated in more contemporary fashion – for paradigms.”<sup>22</sup> The problem with Boff’s selection of the antitheses to support his institutional-political liberation paradigm or agenda is that Boff seems to ignore any scriptural data which is irrelevant to

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<sup>21</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 265.

<sup>22</sup> Jouchem Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (New Jersey: P&R Pub. Co., 1996), 361.

his own agenda, without advancing from Scripture itself well-grounded reasons for his decision.

Here is an example to clarify this point. Boff argues, “The God of Jesus is no longer the God of Torah, the Law. He is the God of mercy, of unlimited goodness, and of patience for the weak who recognize that they are weak and start on the road back to God.”<sup>23</sup> He then further argues that in the antitheses Jesus reveals himself as one who is liberated from a conscience oppressed by the law of the Old Testament and is now free to bend the law to the higher purpose of love, even loving enemies (Matt.5:43-48). The lesson of the six antitheses from Matt.5:21-48 is the “liberty and nonconformity” of Jesus with regard to the law.<sup>24</sup> As a consequence, while one may understand that Jesus is not completely against the law, one must realize that Jesus considers the law something which can easily be discarded, in Boff’s term, as “a crutch,”<sup>25</sup> once a person, like Jesus, no longer needs it. Boff’s interpretation contradicts what Jesus says in Matthew 5:18, “Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law, until everything is accomplished.” This interpretation makes Boff play Jesus off against himself in order to maintain the consistency of the socio-political liberation agenda. His interpretation of the antitheses appears to pass only through the lens of liberation for the socially oppressed. Other biblical passages which are not related to the reality of social oppression are left out and not taken into account.

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<sup>23</sup> Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer: the Prayer of Integral Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 77.

Boff believes that the antitheses are without doubt an authoritative source for his paradigm of a socio-political commitment to deal with the situation of the oppressed and to liberate them from the structural evils of the State which perpetuate the situation. But to say that the antitheses are authoritative for socio-political liberation practice does not of itself assure that Boff has arrived at an appropriate theological-ethical formulation. Even if a theologian were to agree with Boff that the antitheses are authoritative, the given interpretations of the authoritative text could still lead to different theological-ethical proposals. An analysis of Boff's mistaken interpretation of the antitheses teaches an important lesson.

The lesson is that what a struggle theologians must go through to distance themselves as much as possible from the cultural background which they bring to Scripture so they can hear every biblical message clearly. In Boff's case, his move from interpretation to application, from Christology to ethics, should also be guided by a faithfulness to give the last word to Scripture. It seems, however, that he allows the cultural background of Latin America's oppressive situation to become the paradigm which excessively controls his interpretation of the antitheses. Boff respects the authority of Scripture, but his interpretation of the scriptural text of the antitheses is mistaken.

Consider another example. Boff interprets Jesus' invitation in Matthew 5:48, "You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect," to mean that as God has showed his indiscriminate love without limits and as Jesus has lived out that love in his challenge to the oppressing structures of his era, his followers should also express and demonstrate this love by confronting the structural oppression of their own

era.<sup>26</sup> In Boff's view, the situation in Latin America has striking parallels with the sociopolitical situation of Jesus' time; Palestine too is suffering from unjust structures and institutions. Jesus preaches the kingdom of God and delivers his teaching in the antitheses as the start of a new age of liberation. In doing so, he aligns himself with the oppressed and takes on the Pharisees and the scribes who oppress people in the name of the law.

Boff also interprets the "perfection" in Matthew 5:48 in terms of structural good and evil and believes that this text supports his paradigm of socio-political liberation agenda. The problem is, however, that he reads into the verse something which Jesus did not mean to say. As this dissertation has argued, here Jesus is only concerned with individual conduct which demonstrates the moral principle of loving people indiscriminately. Jesus' concern here is with individuals and not with the perfection of any socio-political structure of the State or how the State should handle the marginalized and the oppressed.

#### **IV. An appraisal of Thielicke's *usus elencticus* pattern of the antitheses**

The chapter on Helmut Thielicke's interpretation of the antitheses shows that he employs the theological use of the law, the *usus elencticus*, to interpret the antitheses. He extends this function of the law in the antitheses as a mirror of human shortcomings not only for individuals but also for States. The basis of this is his assumption of the radical transformation the world has undergone after the fall. Since nothing good can be found in the totally corrupted world, all States in the world belong to the fallen order of the world and are also sinful. God in his grace has revealed his radical demands in the

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<sup>26</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 97.

antitheses in order to show how corrupt human beings are, individually and institutionally.

The way Thieliicke interprets the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount does not tell people what they can do but rather reveals to them the fallen character of the present world. They describe an innocence lost in the Fall and not yet regained, since the second coming has still not occurred. For the time being, one must in some way come to terms with this fallen world. Christians always need to view human history as constantly marked by human sin.

This paradigm of *usus elencticus* allows him to interpret the antitheses not only as a reminder of inadequacies for individuals but also for States. The demand to love enemies (Matt.5:43-48), for example, is a reminder that even if a State declares a war for a just cause, it is not the way it is supposed to be. It is because the world has fallen that such implementation is needed. Thieliicke explains in this way:

In this text there is an indictment of our whole world... This becomes especially clear when we consider that here Jesus' mercy is at odds, not merely with certain degenerate aspects of the world, but even with the completely legal and recognized juridical ordinances of our world... In this stark, slashing, striking, and therefore unescapable way of stating it, Jesus is saying to us that human law and justice are incapable of regulating our relation to our neighbor as God wants it to be, but that the law is only a *regulation of necessity* which is necessary in our fallen world.<sup>27</sup>

This implementation will not last into eternity. It will disappear when the eschaton, the true kingdom of God established by Jesus' second coming, arrives. When that happens, there will no longer be any continuing reminder of what ought not to be since there will be no war in the world to come.

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<sup>27</sup> Thieliicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, 66-8.



By stretching the scope of the antitheses not only to individuals but also to States, Thieliicke seems to allow the *usus elencticus* pattern to become the overarching paradigm which controls his interpretation of the antitheses. In the above example, he stretches the use of the law as a reminder of the individual fallen nature to the structural-institutional fallen nature. It is theologically sound to say that in the eschaton, when the true kingdom of God is established, there will not be any war. But to use the antitheses to support this doctrine seems wanting and pressing something which might not be the emphasis of the antitheses. It appears that Thieliicke forces his paradigm on the text, instead of letting the text speak for itself. The message of the text is clearly focused on individuals – such as an offended brother (Matthew 5:23), a woman lustfully looked at (Matthew 5:28), a wife divorced (Matthew 5:32), a person swearing by his head (Matthew 5:36), a person helped (Matthew 5:42), and a brother greeted (Matthew 5:47). Using the *usus elencticus* pattern to say that these teachings to individuals also apply to the State is a stretch.

#### **V. A review of Yoder's non-violent model of the antitheses**

The chapter on John Howard Yoder's interpretation of the antitheses explains that for Yoder, the antitheses are for the church, both as individual members but also as a community. His use of the term "community" for the church, however, seems ambiguous when one attempts to understand the term in the light of the distinction between church as organism and church as institution. Yoder himself seems to leave it for his readers to define. In his pamphlet, *The Christian Witness to the State*, Yoder only states that "it is possible for the Christian or the Christian church to address to the social order at large or to the state criticisms and suggestions concerning the way in which the state fulfills its

responsibility for the maintenance of order.”<sup>28</sup> The Christian church in the quote can mean both the church as an organism and an organization or institution. Regardless of the ambiguity, one can at least be sure that for Yoder the scope of the antitheses is for individuals and beyond. This is evident in Mark Nation’s comment that for Yoder it is by looking at Jesus that Christians know not only what behavior Jesus desires for them, but also what he desires for the State.<sup>29</sup> When Jesus desires Christians, for example, as an individual and as a community (whatever the term “community” might mean for Yoder) to love their enemies, he also desires the same for the State.

The basis for Yoder’s interpretation is the paradigm of non-resistance. As a renowned pacifist, Yoder argues for the epistemic value of non-resistance. He writes that non-resistance is “an epistemology about how to let truth speak for itself.”<sup>30</sup> This means that for Yoder the commitment to non-resistance is a life-shaping conviction that shapes all other conviction. This is the epistemic value of non-resistant conviction, namely, that it shapes how a person sees and understands the world. Yoder’s paradigm of non-resistance shapes how he arrives at knowledge and understands Scripture. This is evident when he insists that Christians should imitate Jesus.

The basis for Yoder’s paradigm of non-resistance is Jesus. Jesus lives his life non-resistantly; so should Christians. Christians must know that they are called to be faithful to Jesus; that is, they must know what faithful living means primarily by looking at the

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<sup>28</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 162.

<sup>30</sup> John Howard Yoder, “‘Patience’ as a Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship ‘Absolute’?” In *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Harry J. Huebner, Chris K. Huebner and Mark Thiessen Nation (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 28, n.9.

life of Jesus and responding to his call upon their lives. They confess that this same Jesus, the Christ, reigns over the world. The same one who calls them to deny themselves and to love even enemies, is the One who reigns over all “dominion, authority and power” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24). Jesus is the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, and this cannot be abstracted from the life of Jesus; his life is the very witness of the kingdom – it is what the kingdom looks like. It can then be seen that Jesus’ ministry is the embodiment of God’s kingdom – not simply ideals to be followed, but the concrete announcement of what God’s reign looks like.

This reign of Jesus over all dominion, authority and power without doubt includes the State. This is the reason why the norm for Christians is also the same norm for the state. Yoder declares that “The reign of Christ means for the state the obligation to serve God by encouraging the good and restraining the evil, i.e., to serve peace, to preserve the social cohesion in which the leaven of the Gospel can build the church, and also render the old aeon more tolerable.”<sup>31</sup> If Christians are called to be non-resistant, then the norm by which Christians are obliged to obey is also the same for the State. If the State cannot obey this norm, then it is not because the State must have a different norm. Instead, it only shows that the State responds differently from Christians. In Yoder’s words, “The difference between Christian ethics for Christians and Christian ethics for the state is therefore due to duality not of realms or levels, but of responses.”<sup>32</sup> For this reason, Christians can call upon the government to implement policies that pursue justice and minimize the use of violence.

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<sup>31</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 32.

Yoder here suggests that the Christian life is guided more by example than by precept or command, especially the example of Jesus. Jesus came into the world not only to redeem but to be an example of holy, obedient living. To have the example of Jesus as a norm for the Christian life is in itself noteworthy. Herman Bavinck comments that “examples often have greater persuasive power than mere doctrines of law” and furthermore, while “the law itself cannot change us, redirect us or renew us...from Christ, who is both our Savior and our example, proceeds reforming recreating, renewing power, a power that makes us like him and completely restores the image of God in us.”<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that one should just have a general concept of living like Jesus in the New Testament. Yoder concurs with this since he rejects a naïve outward replicating of the shape of Jesus’ life. He calls living barefoot like Jesus in the New Testament, for example, “a red herring.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, he argues for one normative pattern which “holds in every strand of the New Testament literature,” namely, “vulnerable enemy love and renunciation of dominion in the real world.”<sup>35</sup> By this one and only pattern is one bound by the New Testament to “be like Jesus.” Since Jesus lives out his life non-resistantly, which is clearly demonstrated by his death on the cross, Christians must follow the same way of life. They should have a non-resistant way of life.

For Yoder, the non-resistant way of life is the concrete way Jesus reveals the nature of his reign over the world. While his death on the cross is the clearest demonstration of this way of life, Jesus also expresses this in his Sermon on the Mount.

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in John Bolt, “Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 61-2.

<sup>34</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), 133.

<sup>35</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 131, 133.

This theological emphasis allows Yoder to make the antitheses a norm both for Christians and the State. The reason is the nature of God's kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount, including the antitheses, is the concrete announcement of this reign, and it constitutes a new social order.<sup>36</sup> Yoder argues that Jesus applies this reign to the political as well as the civil order since in Jesus "God judges the present order and promises another one."<sup>37</sup> The antitheses apply not merely to the individual realm but also beyond since they hold unconditionally for the public domain of institutional-political and social life in terms of national and international freedom. Justice and peace can only be realized to the extent that the reign of Jesus or the kingdom of God is realized. To proclaim its coming and to strive for its fulfillment in this fallen world is therefore the mission of the people of God.

In seeing Jesus' life not only as perfect, but also as the concrete representation of God's rule, Yoder is able to see what Jesus' reign should look like when it is embodied in the Christian life. The fact that Jesus' reign was brought about by a non-resistant witness means that for Christians to be a foretaste of God's kingdom, they must also practice non-violence. In the same way, since the announcement of God's kingdom by Jesus led to his death at the hands of the governing authorities, Christians must also be fully aware of the fundamental opposition to the non-violent way of life by the State.

Since this new social order makes political claims, its faithful members will likely meet with opposition, for, as Yoder states, Jesus calls people into a "community of voluntary commitment, willing to take upon itself the hostility of a given society."<sup>38</sup> Jesus

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<sup>36</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 105.

<sup>37</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1977), 18.

<sup>38</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 37.

is seen as calling people to a different way, a way that is not less political or social, for it is exactly this way of being which will cause political opposition. This political statement is not political for its own sake, and certainly not a new way to achieve political power, but rather it is an eschatological recognition that in Jesus God promises a better social order. This is therefore a revolutionary political statement, rooted in the eschatological kingdom. And for Yoder, such recognition has far-reaching implications, as it did for Jesus, both for the life of the people who want to follow Jesus' example, as well as for all their social and political relationships, especially in relationship to the State. This is why Yoder argues that both Christians and the State should have the same norm. This is the reason why Christians should witness to the world and its political States concerning this new social order established by God through Jesus, especially in his teaching of the antitheses.

I have two concerns with Yoder's interpretation of the antitheses. The first one is a general one concerning Yoder's position on the relationship between the church and the State. The second is specifically on Yoder's paradigm of non-resistance in his interpretation of the antitheses – a paradigm which he imposes on the State.

#### **A. Yoder on the church and the state**

As noted above, Yoder argues that Christians should indeed call upon the government to implement policies that pursue justice. Such engagement is not wrong. Christians can engage the government in such a way because Scripture has something to say about God's purposes for government. For example, Scripture says that a State or civil government is to restrain evil and promote good (Romans 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-14; and, Genesis 9:5-6). At least, Christians can ask their government or State to govern and

make its society more just and peaceful. In short, Christians as individuals can engage and help the State to make a better or more just society. I agree with Yoder so far.

Yoder, however, seems to conflate the method by which the church engages the world with the content of the gospel which the church proclaims to the world. To argue that the church should be a city on the hill by means of a non-resistant lifestyle which the State should follow (whether or not the State will comply is no concern here) implies that the main task of the church is not bearing witness to the gospel of grace for individuals. This gospel is indeed delivered non-resistently by Jesus on the cross. But to argue that this method of non-resistance should become the core of the church's witness, as Yoder seems to do, does not automatically bring out the content of the gospel. One should not confuse the content of the gospel with the method by which it is delivered. One consequence of confusing the content with the method is that the church becomes like other secular or worldly organizations. This betrays the nature and purpose of the church itself. There is nothing the church can offer to the world which the world does not have, except the gospel of grace.

### **B. Yoder, the non-resistant paradigm, and the antitheses**

Yoder argues that the non-resistance vision is not the prophetic vision of a few individuals, but that every member of the body of Christ is called to non-resistance in discipleship. Every member is called to abandon all loyalties which counter obedience, including the desire to be effective immediately or to make oneself responsible for civil justice.<sup>39</sup> Yoder employs the antitheses, such as Matthew 5:39, to justify this position. He indeed allows a local police action which aims not at annihilation but at a readjustment of

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<sup>39</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 75.

tensions to preserve a proximate justice.<sup>40</sup> Such allowance, however, does not soften Yoder's position. For Yoder, Christians can neither endorse nor participate in any violent action taken by the State. This position seems problematic.

One indeed dissipates the Christian witness if one throws Scripture away in the discussion of Christian participation in establishing civil order of a society, yet one should not go beyond Scripture. The question one should ask of Yoder in his interpretation of the antitheses is this: is it a fair reflection of the proper interpretation of Scripture? The problem with his interpretation seems that he reads into the antitheses something that might not be their focus or intention. This is evident when he argues that the norm of the antitheses, such as not resisting evil, is not only for Christians but also for the State to obey. Yoder does say that the church should not order the State around and tell it to become a non-resistant State. Rather, he calls Christians to live lives of non-resistance as a witness. Still, whether the church should explicitly tell the State what to do or implicitly tell the State what to do by her example, the point remains the same. To apply such an antithesis to the State seems wanting because in the antitheses Jesus trains his disciples in personal holiness and not in how to govern a society. There are two reasons for this.

First, Douma points out that advocates of pacifism face the temptation to quote the Sermon on the Mount, but to ignore what the rest of the Old and New Testaments say about violence that is exercised by God or permitted by him.<sup>41</sup> In fact, in Luke 22:36 Jesus actually commands his followers to carry a sword (which is intended for self-defense and protection from robbers). In Yoder's case, his use of a non-resistant

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<sup>40</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 384.



paradigm seems to cause him to highlight the antitheses at the expense of other biblical teachings. Yoder interprets the antithesis “do not resist evil” (Matthew 5:38-39) to mean that the State should also be non-resistant. The reason for this is that the Christian life is guided more by example than by precept or command, especially the example of Jesus. What Jesus desires for Christians is also what Jesus desires for the State. Yoder’s form of argument, however, seems to place too much emphasis on the example of Jesus, especially his teaching on the antitheses. One should not restrict Christian ethics to the teachings of Jesus in the four Gospels. Other parts of Scripture talk about civil government – e.g. Genesis 9:5-6, the historical narratives and laws contained in Exodus to Deuteronomy and in Judges to 2 Chronicles, Romans 13, and 1 Peter 2:13-14. When Christians downplay those passages and place too much emphasis on following Jesus’s example, they may misunderstand what the *whole* Scripture says about civil government. Christians should not contrast the authority of Jesus with the authority of Scripture in moral matters. Jesus does not put himself in opposition to the teaching of the whole of Scripture (see Matthew 5:17-20).

Second, even if one concedes that the Sermon on the Mount constitutes a new social order and embodies the non-resistant way of life, this does not necessarily mean that the scope of this social order, as exemplified by the antitheses, is also intended to order the relationship of any State Y to another State Z. Christians, for example, may engage the State by urging it to make better civil laws concerning pornography because they want to obey Jesus’ moral teaching in Matthew 5:27-30 the antithesis concerning sexual purity. This does not betray Jesus’ intention in the antitheses. One may stretch the application of the antitheses to civil laws which regulate individual relationships. But that

is as far as the scope of the antithesis may go. Yoder seems, however, to stretch this scope to political relationships between States. For example, Yoder argues that when Christians engage in a war between States, they are violating Jesus' demand to turn the other cheek and to love enemies, because when "Christian kills Christian the greatest possible offense against the unity of the body of Christ takes place."<sup>42</sup> This argument, however, that the church is a global community and a war would mean that Christians would fight and kill Christians is unconvincing.<sup>43</sup> The argument indeed assumes no qualitative differences in the wars in which a Christian might fight. However, if the just-war theory is defensible, one may not fight in just any war. Some Christians might fight on the side that is not just. If so, they may be killed (even by Christian opponents), but in this case their killing is not unjust. Being a Christian does not exempt one from punishment for wrongdoing, even if the instrument of punishment is another Christian.

In terms of the relationship between love and justice, Yoder here seems to fail to properly relate love and justice. He tends to tilt towards love and stay there. He does not appear to think highly of justice. Yoder should not separate love and justice completely. As an individual, one may turn the other cheek when unjustly attacked. Loving others, as this dissertation understands, is to give others what they do not deserve to get. One's responsibilities, however, are different when one stands in the position of a guardian of a third party as a civil magistrate. Because one is responsible for the lives and welfare of the people, one must resist, even with force, unjust aggression against them. Being just, as this dissertation understands the term, is to give others their due. This is the duty of the

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<sup>42</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1968), 21.

<sup>43</sup> See John S. Feinberg, Paul D. Feinberg and Aldous Huxley, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996), 357-58.

State as it stands in this third party relationship with its citizens. Again, Yoder's emphasis on the use of a non-resistant paradigm may cause him to think lightly of justice which in practice often exists to resist evil. As a result, Yoder highlights the antitheses at the expense of other biblical teachings. He takes Jesus' moral teaching about individual conduct in loving enemies and mistakenly applies it to the conduct of the State – thus undermining the explicit teaching on civil governments in other parts of Scripture. In the book of Romans, for example, Paul writes that the State should “bear the sword” to oppose evildoers and execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer (Romans 13:4). At least here, in his interpretation of the antitheses Yoder seems to confuse the roles of love and justice in ethical matters.

In sum, Yoder lets his non-resistant paradigm excessively control his interpretation of the antitheses and have the last word. As a result, he does not clearly distinguish the roles of love and justice in his interpretation of the antitheses. The critical distinction between love, which is individual, and justice, which is institutional, appears to be lost in Yoder's teaching. He takes Jesus' moral teaching on matters of individual personal conduct and – mistakenly, in my view –applies them to the realm of the State. Now is the time to address as a whole the interpretation of the antitheses as Jesus' moral teaching to individual persons. This interpretation will also serve as a case to further clarify the place of social ethics in Scripture.

## **VI. The antitheses and the place of social ethics in Scripture**

As the Introduction of this dissertation explains, social ethics refers to how an institution morally manages or governs its structural life. As argued above, the antitheses are for individuals and not for the State. They are meant to govern the moral life of

individuals. They are not concerned with giving a prescription for States on how to morally manage or govern their structural life.

The study on Boff, Thielicke and Yoder and their interpretations of the antitheses has demonstrated that they seem to allow their interpretative paradigm to determine what Scripture says. Even though no one reads Scripture without a paradigm, what is decisive is whether or not one gives the last word to Scripture or one's own paradigm. Those who give their paradigm the last word eventually undermine Scripture as a whole. The fact that one accepts the whole of Scripture as the Word of God at least restrains one to yield Scripture to one's own paradigm. In ethics, especially, as Douma points out, Scripture functions to "reveal to us the law of God as it has been given within a history of redemption in Christ."<sup>44</sup> Paying attention to the whole canon in the study of Christian ethics means that both Old and New Testaments have canonical authority. One reads the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, but also the reverse may apply: one must not use the New Testament without the light of the Old Testament.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, one needs to evaluate critically one's use of all of Scripture when reflecting on the interpretation of the antitheses.

As the chapter on Calvin illustrates, Calvin employs the analogy of Scripture as a paradigm to interpret the antitheses. He does not isolate the antitheses in themselves but compares them with other passages in Scripture in order to understand their message.

This approach does not put into opposition, for example, the Old Testament against the

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<sup>44</sup> Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 383.

<sup>45</sup> Childs provides an example of allowing the entire canon to resonate when treating a particular subject. He shows the different (but not contradictory) ways in which Proverbs 7, the Song of Solomon and 1 Corinthians 7 talk about the subject of marriage and sexuality. He explains, "Once Paul's remarks were cut loose from their Old Testament setting in the process of Christianizing the Greco-Roman empire, a new stance to sex and marriage emerged that was completely alien to the Old Testament" (Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970], 199).

New Testament or Jesus versus Paul. Jesus himself recognizes the validity of this approach since in the antitheses he gives many allusions to the Old Testament. Even in the preceding verses (Matthew 5:17-20) he emphasizes that he does not undermine the authority of the Old Testament canon. This approach also does not undermine the authority of the New Testament canon. For example, Jesus' teaching "do not resist an evil person" (Matthew 5:39) does not prohibit States from exercising the right and responsibility to carry out punishments for crimes like premeditated murder. Other New Testament passages aid in such understanding. This passage is similar to Romans 12:19, where Paul prohibits personal vengeance, while it differs from Romans 13 which explicitly addresses the responsibilities of States. By allowing Scripture to speak as a whole, one has a good reason, as Calvin does, to argue that Jesus is not telling governments in the antitheses how they should act, in this case, with regard to the punishment of crime. The focus of attention in Jesus' teaching in the antitheses is on the individual Y-to-Z relationship. At least, one may legitimately point out that the State Y-to-Z relationship poses questions with which Jesus does not deal.

The chapter on the Roman Catholic Church also argues that the focus of the antitheses is on the individual Y-to-Z relationship. By placing the antitheses alongside the Decalogue in teaching morality to the people of God in their Catechism, the Roman Catholic Church does not undermine the authority of the Old Testament canon in their interpretation of the antitheses. In this case, they recognize that as the Decalogue, especially the second table, regulates the relationship between individuals, the antitheses also regulate the relationship between individuals. The Roman Catholic Church does not pit Jesus against Moses. They also admit that sometimes love and justice can be in

tension for an individual, especially when justice is sought by waging war between States. An individual may struggle in his or her conscience whether to participate in a battle since it means killing others. The Catechism suggests that if this happens then the individual may not participate in the war but instead should serve the State in some other way. This recognition demonstrates that the Roman Catholics understand the interplay between love and justice in fallen human life – that sometimes some individuals may experience a tension between them in their conscience. This also reveals that the focus of the antitheses “do not murder” and “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:21-26, 43-48) is on individuals. When the individual duty of a citizen seems to be in tension with the institutional duty of a State, the Catechism does not suggest that the State should obey the antitheses but instead highlights their personal-individual nature by suggesting that the individual should opt-out from the war and find different venues to serve the State.

While Calvin and the Roman Catholic Church support the thesis of this dissertation, there are two cautionary remarks this dissertation acknowledges in order to show the strength of the thesis. In discussing relevant biblical data for how a State should morally manage its structural life, John S. Feinberg explains that two words of caution must be remembered.<sup>46</sup> First, the distinction between description and prescription must restrain one from the tendency to absolutize everything one sees. Descriptions of governmental practices and believers’ actions in relation to the State do not prescribe moral obligations. This means there is little direct biblical instruction on many of the matters. To argue that the antitheses are for individuals is to show that the antitheses are one of those biblical instructions which do not directly pertain to State conduct. The

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<sup>46</sup> John S. Feinberg, Paul D. Feinberg and Aldous Huxley, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 384.

antitheses are prescriptive in matters of individual conduct, but not in matters of State conduct. This interpretation recognizes that in matters of governing the structure of a State the antitheses should not be the source of moral conduct. While the citizens of a State should love one another, they should also treat one another justly. The antitheses have their focus on love, which is individual and personal in its nature, namely how to treat others in ways they do not deserve. This implies that the antitheses do not deal with the question of justice, namely how to give others their due or what they deserve. The danger of making the antitheses the source of moral conduct for States is to conflate love and justice. While love and justice are closely related, they cannot and should not be considered one and the same principle in governing human moral life. The antitheses are eventually about love in actions toward people at an individual level. And at the level of States, the loving thing to do is sometimes to uphold justice toward people. A State may even declare a war towards other States for just causes.

Second, Feinberg adds that one must not draw timeless absolutes from Old Testament Israel's experience under the theocracy, for that was an unusual situation.<sup>47</sup> God literally was the ruler in Israel. God was directly in charge of both spiritual and political matters. The Old Testament nowhere teaches that this was to be the arrangement for Gentile nations, nor does the New Testament show that this is the format for saved or unsaved after the time of Christ. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament does not prescribe the government arrangement of States. This implies that arguing that the antitheses provide prescriptions for governing States is akin to arguing that the Old Testament prescribes that States be theocratic today.

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<sup>47</sup> John S. Feinberg, Paul D. Feinberg and Aldous Huxley, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 385.

## VII. Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the antitheses are intended to govern individual moral conduct. The basis of the argument is that in the antitheses Jesus teaches what it means for one to love others. Loving others means giving them something they do not always deserve. This is the scope of the antitheses. They are for individuals. To apply the antitheses to States are clearly forced and unnatural. The antitheses on adultery and divorce (Matthew 5:27-32), in particular, are so specific to manage relationship between a man and a woman that applications to States are unconceivable.

Some theologians, however, attempt to stretch the scope of the antitheses to States. Leonardo Boff, Helmut Thielicke and John Howard Yoder, each with their own paradigm of interpretation, have argued that the antitheses are not only moral teachings for individuals but are also for States. Boff argues that the antitheses call for socio-political liberation engagement against oppressive structures of States. Thielicke suggests that the antitheses should become a reminder or mirror for States to determine how corrupt their structures and politics are, and how far they have fallen. Yoder insists that the antitheses demand that States should be non-violent. While a portion of Scripture may legitimately be applied to different contexts, there is a danger of eisegesis when one attempts to argue for something which is not intended in a given passage or not dealt within a given passage in the first place. The antitheses are clearly about loving others and focus on individual X-to-Y relationships. To argue that they are more than that in their scope runs the risk of eisegesis.

John Calvin and the Roman Catholic Catechism support the thesis of this dissertation. They interpret the antitheses as meant for individuals and not for States. I



would also like to add that this does not mean that there are no other parts of Scripture which do not talk about States or governments. Scripture's treatment of them, however, is largely descriptive and not prescriptive. Scripture does not give a detailed guideline on how to best govern or manage a socio-political government. The important thing is that order is preserved and justice is present within society.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have argued, by way of a theologically informed systematic ethical defense, that the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48) are binding on all people and intended to govern the conduct of individuals and not of States or political governments. In this concluding chapter I will reaffirm the argument of this dissertation and offer some reflections on the project of the dissertation for further study and for its contribution to the ministry of the church.

### **I. Summary of the argument**

This dissertation contributes to the scholarship of the Sermon on the Mount by addressing two problems in the study of the antitheses. The first concerns the nature of the moral demands in the antitheses. The second deals with their scope. I inspect the two problems by examining some of the hermeneutical options to see how the nature of their presuppositions predetermines the logic of their conclusions in the interpretation of the antitheses. Those hermeneutical options are given by Leonardo Boff, John Calvin, Helmut Thielicke, John Howard Yoder, and the official position of the Roman Catholic Church.

Leonardo Boff opts to obscure the universal sense of oughtness in the antitheses in order to relax the moral demands on the poor. They do not teach morality. Instead, they are an exposition of how people, liberated from the oppression of exclusivism and authoritarianism of the law, should engage in social liberation. He is mistaken, however, in his interpretation. His denial that the antitheses are binding on all individual people is based on a truncated view of morality, which is clearly inconsistent with Jesus' teaching. Boff also believes that the antitheses are without doubt an authoritative source for his

paradigm of a socio-political commitment to deal with the situation of the oppressed and to liberate them from the structural evils of the State which perpetuate the situation. But to say that the antitheses are authoritative for socio-political liberation practice does not of itself assure that Boff has arrived at an appropriate theological-ethical formulation. It seems that he allows the cultural background of Latin America's oppressive situation to become the paradigm which excessively controls his interpretation of the antitheses. Boff indeed respects the authority of Scripture, but his interpretation of the scriptural text of the antitheses is mistaken.

John Calvin and Helmut Thielicke both argue for the universal bindingness of the antitheses on all people. While Calvin argues that the antitheses reveal God's moral will for all people, Thielicke explains that the antitheses posit a challenge to all people concerning their moral shortcomings. They differ, however, in their approach to the problem of whether the antitheses can apply to States. Thielicke stretches the scope of the antitheses by arguing that they also posit a moral challenge to States, not only to individuals. This is not the case with Calvin. By allowing Scripture to speak as a whole, Calvin argues that in the antitheses Jesus is not telling governments how they should act. The focus of attention in Jesus' teaching of the antitheses is on the individual Y-to-Z relationship. One may legitimately point out that the State Y-to-Z relationship poses questions with which Jesus does not deal.

Yoder's particular interpretation of the antitheses does not necessarily contradict the thesis that the antitheses are binding on all people. He seems to recognize the possibility that the antitheses can be binding on all people. Yoder, however, chooses not to make the argument even though he may think so. For him, the antitheses are given to a

particular people, in this case Christians. This choice, however, tends to promote a sectarian approach to morality. Although Yoder does not intend to do this, his interpretation that the antitheses are only for Christians inevitably tends to promote a non-universal view of morality. This view of morality will in one way or another hinder Christian participation in the public discourse of morality. Yoder also seems to let his non-resistant paradigm overly control his interpretation of the antitheses and have the last word. As a result, he does not clearly distinguish the roles of love and justice in his interpretation of the antitheses. The critical distinction between love, which is individual, and justice, which is institutional, appears to become lost in Yoder's case. He takes Jesus' moral teaching on matters of individual personal conduct and – mistakenly, in my view – and applies them to the realm of the State.

By relating the antitheses to the Decalogue in the Catechism, the official Roman Catholic Church demonstrates the extent of the antitheses. They are universal and individual. As the Decalogue contains the privileged expression of Natural Law, the antitheses also are an expression of Natural Law. In this matter, even though the New Law is revealed to Christians in a special way, they are universally binding. While they are binding universally, RCC further recognizes that the antitheses are ethics directed more to the conduct of persons, rather than nations. That is, these demands are revealed to individuals and not intended to guide the conduct of States.

In this dissertation, by comparing and contrasting these hermeneutical options, I have argued that the antitheses mark neither departure from Natural Law theory, nor from the law of the Old Testament. Natural Law theory and the Decalogue testify that what is moral is binding on all people. The antitheses are also moral and therefore they are

binding on all people too. They are binding on all people even though the context from which they come from is particularly Christian. I have also demonstrated that the antitheses are intended to govern individual moral conduct. The basis of the argument is that in the antitheses Jesus teaches what it means to love others. Loving others means giving them something they do not always deserve. This is the scope of the antitheses. They are for individuals. To apply the antitheses to States is clearly forced and unnatural. In sum, in this dissertation I have established that the antitheses constitute moral teaching, which God specially reveals to Christians in Scripture, and as such are universal and binding on each human person. They are also intended to prescribe moral conduct of individuals and not of States.

## **II. Areas for further study**

There are at least three possible areas for further study. First is the area of theological study. Second is the area of hermeneutical study. The third and last one is the area of ethical study.

### **A. The area of theological study**

The thesis of this dissertation, that the antitheses are binding on all people, is a positive answer to the question of whether Christian ethics can be universalized. This does not mean, however, that the antitheses should become a non-Christian ethics. J. L. Houlden notes that the New Testament never presents ethics autonomously.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the antitheses pose the question not only whether the Christian can speak to or affect universal moral values, but also the question of what is the nature of discipleship of a believer who perfectly imitates the Father as Jesus did (cf. Matthew 5:48). This is a

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<sup>1</sup> J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 66, 125.

question related to the kind of discipleship, in which the believer identifies with the needs of the other, neighbor or enemy. The theological implications of such questions can be explored.

### **B. The area of hermeneutical study**

The principle of interpretation used in this dissertation is focusing on a particular pericope (Matthew 5:21-48) within a broader context, in this case the passage known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This principle of interpretation recognizes that the antitheses should not be removed from its setting in Matthew. But this principle of interpretation does not resolve all the difficulties of the Sermon. Many pericopes in the Sermon are still puzzling. For example, how does Jesus' command to let "your light shine before others" (Matthew 5:16) relate to his demand, "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness in front of others, to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1)? What are the pearls which are not to be thrown to the pigs (Matthew 7:6)? Such questions can stimulate further research which focuses on hermeneutical issues.

### **C. The area of ethical study**

In this dissertation I only argue for the nature and the scope of the antitheses. They are binding on all people. They are intended to govern the conduct of individuals and not of States. One further matter for ethical research could be a practical issue. For example, are there any exceptions, in practice, to the moral demands of the antitheses? This is a way the practicality of the antitheses can be explored.

### **III. The contribution of the project to the ministry of the church**

Serious students of Scripture sometimes lose sight of the fact that the study and interpretation of Scripture should never be an end in itself. George Ladd reminds every

student of Scripture that “when a gulf exists between the lecture-room and the pulpit, sterility in the class-room and superficiality in the pulpit often results.”<sup>2</sup> God has given His written Word for the practical purpose of enabling the church to minister to the world: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

In this dissertation I have given much attention to the systematic and ethical study of the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48). But this dissertation should never be an end in itself. Instead, this dissertation can be used to remind the church, the people of God, that they are called not just to listen to the commands of Jesus in the antitheses, but also to understand the moral life as discipleship, as following Jesus in his obedience to the Father.

When the people of God encounter the will of God in the moral demands of the antitheses, they should realize that they have not yet come to the end of the history of redemption or to the end of their own personal journey as followers of Jesus. The people of God are still on the way, as in Romans 6:5, “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” The hearts of God’s people should be set to obey the commandments of God whose face they have seen in the crucified and risen One. Their hearts are ready to obey because the grace of God enables them, along the way, to make progress in the life of discipleship.

At least since the seventh century, Christians have been praying, in the words of the Collect for Peace used in vespers: “O God, from whom come all holy desires, all

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<sup>2</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973), 7.

good counsels, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments.”<sup>3</sup> This dissertation can become an ethical-theological system or construct for the people of God which, in effect, encourages such a prayer or suggests, even if only implicitly, suggests that it is not wrong to pray in this way.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Gilbert Meilaender, “Hearts Set to Obey,” in *I Am The Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 253 (253-275).



## THESES

### THESES RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

1. Leonardo Boff obscures the universal sense of oughtness in the antitheses in order to relax the moral demands on the poor. He also argues that the antitheses are an authoritative source for his paradigm of a socio-political commitment to deal with the situation of the oppressed.
2. John Calvin and Helmut Thielicke both argue for the universal bindingness of the antitheses on all people. While Thielicke stretches the scope of the antitheses by arguing that they also posit a moral challenge to states, not only to individuals, Calvin argues that in the antitheses Jesus is not telling governments how they should act.
3. John Howard Yoder argues that the antitheses are given to a particular people, in this case Christians. He also interprets Jesus' moral teaching on the antitheses to apply to the realm of the state.
4. By relating the antitheses to the Decalogue in its Catechism, the official Roman Catholic Church demonstrates the extent of the antitheses. They are universally binding on all people and for the conduct of individuals.
5. By comparing and contrasting these hermeneutical options, the antitheses mark neither departure from natural law theory nor from the Decalogue in the Old Testament. The antitheses are binding on all people. The antitheses are also intended to govern individual moral conduct.

### THESES RELATED TO COURSE WORK

6. Rudolf Bultmann's conception of the revelation of God as ultimate, supra-temporal, and critical makes preaching as an event intended to confront the hearer with a crisis of decision.
7. Contrary to certain scholars, George Whitefield is a passionate preacher with a character of integrity. His marketing strategy and theatrical performance are means of presenting the gospel truthfully in his ministry, instead of examples of his spiritual weaknesses.
8. John Chrysostom has high expectations for pastors, not because they are fated to be some elite, upper crust of exemplary Christian, but because their vocation, as leaders of God's people, demands a certain character of morally strenuous attributes.

9. By examining and comparing a series of biblical loci, Herman Witsius argues against those who believe that it is more probable that the moon is inhabited than that it is not.
10. Calvin's principle of accommodation in his interpretation of Scripture and his respect toward science reasonably entail that he would have a positive consideration toward Copernicus' revolutionary theory.

#### THESES RELATED TO PERSONAL INTEREST

11. A preacher should never shoot above the listeners' heads. Instead of making easy things hard, a good preacher makes hard things easy and avoids obscure argument in a sermon.
12. When a preacher stops learning to preach, shallowness in the pulpit often results.

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