Correlating Bible and Ethics: Tensions and Complexity

Robert L. Brawley

Albert G. McGaw Professor of New Testament Emeritus,
McCormick Theological Seminary,
Chicago IL
USA
E-mail: rbrawley1@nc.rr.com

Abstract

In a brief theoretical section this article advances the thesis that the task of correlating the Bible and ethics is necessarily diverse because it encounters two dialectical bridges. One is the tension between individual and communal perspectives; the other is the complexity generated by varieties in exegetical and hermeneutical methods. Following a partial demonstration of the diversity opened up by Gadamer's attention to the impact of history on interpretations by means of a description of Michael Wolter's innovative exegesis of Rom 7, the article makes an analogy between the competence stage in narrative structure and an ethical program that involves obligation, willingness, and the ability to perform what is necessary for resolving an ethical dilemma. The last section of the article samples and evaluates models of correlating biblical interpretation with ethics: Law; imitation of exemplars; cultivating a habitus of virtues; Richard Hays's proposal for descriptive and synthetic interpretation, hermeneutical correlation, and pragmatic embodiment of behavior; implicit ethics; and metaethics.

Unter Ethik verstehen wir die reflexive Durchdringung von Lebensweisen hinsichtlich ihrer leitenden Normen mit dem Ziel einer Bewertung. Sie vollzieht sich in vielfältigen Sprach- und Ausdrucksformen, sie ist kontext- und zeitgebunden. Sie ist intra- und intersubjektive Kommunikation. (Research Centre for Ethics in Antiquity and Christianity [*e/α*c])[1]

This article examines selected approaches to the function of the Bible in the tasks of determining and evaluating norms for what the epigraph refers to as ways of living, which I take to correspond to what Paul Ricoeur calls "an accomplished life."[2] The basic thesis is that various approaches encounter two dialectical bridges in particular. One is the tension between an individual and a communal perspective; a second is the complex tension provided by varieties in exegetical analyses and hermeneutical approaches.

To turn first to the latter, the interaction of norms of ways of living in relationship with consistent evaluation of the same is constrained to begin with multiplicity, corresponding in the epigraph to the accomplishment of ethics *in vielfältigen Sprach- und Ausdrucksformen* as well as the necessary condition that such endeavors are always tied up with temporal and cultural contexts. A diachronic approach to reflection on a philosophical level would at least include variety from Israel's Torah, which to say the least is not systematic,[3] to Aristotle (oriented toward teleology) and developments in antiquity before turning to Kant (oriented toward deontology) and more modern ethicists such as John Rawls, Alistair McIntyre, and Paul Ricoeur, so that of necessity we have to do with diverse approaches.[4] Further, biblical studies open up another domain that both expands and restricts the discipline, and when we add the qualification of Christianity, this increases distinctions between reflections on Israel's Scriptures and the New Testament. And with this, diversity increases exponentially. Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks appropriately to the point of multiple interpretations of texts: "The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is al-

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[1]   http://graduiertenkolleg.ethikmainz.de/thesen/. See also ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 12 = Eng. trans. The Logic of Love, 4.

[2]   RICOEUR, Oneself as Another, 170.

[3]   ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 11 = Logic of Love, 3.

[4]   See MACINTYRE, After Virtue, ix.

ways co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history."[5]

The very mention of teleology above affords an occasion to remark on the tension between individual and social perspectives. The epigraph for this essay hints at teleology under the term *Ziel* ("purpose," "goal"), but it leaves the determination of who performs the "evaluation" and the nature of the goal indeterminate. Who determines what and for whom an evaluation is positive? This is somewhat ambiguous also in Aristotle since the telos, which he refers to as a virtue or excellence (ἀρετή), is not merely subjective but presupposes both a social function in determining what is good and a social goal, such as excellence on behalf of the state (*Eth. nic.* 1094a1–1094b20). Nevertheless, for him the telos is still perceived from the individual perspective of reason. Indeed, "each man judges correctly those matters with which he is acquainted; it is of these that he is a competent critic" (*Eth. nic.* 1094b20). Clearly Aristotle reflects the tension between individual and social perspectives. Similarly, in the epigraph above, who determines what and for whom ways of living are good? Or when the epigraph also speaks of "norms," does it not imply a social determination of values beyond what is merely personal?[6]

Cases can be multiplied in keeping with the fact that the epigraph leaves unstated whether the focus of the interaction of ways of living with norms is on the level of either the individual or the social order. For example, in defining terminology Ricoeur regards the issue of ethics to be the aim[7] of an accomplished life.[8] To be sure, with the inseparability of the "self" from the "other" in Ricoeur, an accomplished life can never be divorced from life in relation to others. The latter, however, comes to the fore more forcefully in the approach of Stephen Fowl and Gregory Jones with their notion of the formation of individual character in the life of a Christian congregation.[9]

With respect to ethical appropriations of biblical interpretations, not only do we have multiple exegetical perspectives on a host of texts, hermeneutical correlations of biblical interpretations with ethical living in contemporary contexts are also diverse. The consequence of such multiplicity has a substantial history of *conflict* in both the interpretation and the correlation with contemporary reality. Within the multiplicity, claims to one approach alone often attempt to establish priority. Indeed conflict over interpretations has at times been so aggressive that charges of *unethical* conflict in scholarly debate may be warranted. To give a case in point, Karl Barth's famous response to Emil Brunner's "Nature and Grace" has been called the loudest "Nein" ever heard, and it erupted into an angry disagreement. In contrast, I raise the question: According to the ethics of interpretation are we not rather obliged[10] to acknowledge the plausibility and legitimacy of a variety of exegetical and hermeneutical insights?

On the other hand, ethics itself attempts to establish a blessed order among human beings, and this order presupposes priorities of right over wrong, better over worse, or improving the status quo.[11] Thus, the academic rigor of critiquing both exegetical interpretations and hermeneutical correlations is not only warranted but positively beneficial.

What we cannot avoid, however, is that the social order itself inevitably gives priority to certain persons over others. In fact, the social order is filled with hierarchies of dominance that perpetuate injustice.[12] United States District Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer has spoken about the great deception in presumptions in the United States that the judicial system is fair. Although she appeals for attempts to achieve fairness, the judicial system itself is fraught with failures and inequities.[13] As in the case of her assessment, ethical reflection cannot avoid critiques of interpretations and correlations that are unfair.

Further, yet another aspect of the ethics of interpretation raises consternation. When biblical texts themselves display hierarchies of dominance, interpretations may be complicit in overlooking or even promoting injustices perpetuated by the dominance. Thus, in attempts to correlate the throne claimant in the parable of the Minas[14] in Luke 19 with Jesus, many interpreters find no problem in simply passing over the king's abusive dominance and violence. In fact he even describes himself as a brutal man who profits unfairly from what he does not invest and harvests what he does not plant, and he commands that his enemies be slaughtered in his eyesight (Luke 19:22, 27).[15] Do the ethics of interpretation not demand from exegetes a more reasonable awareness of unjust domination in biblical texts themselves?[16]

At this point I wish to state and explain that in my own approach I have virtually given up the use of the term "appli-

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[5] GADAMER, Truth and Method, 296.

[6] On the individual and community dialectic see ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 97–98, 106–8 = Logic of Love, 74, 80–82.

[7] Note the correspondence between the English term "aim" and the German "Ziel" in the statement of the Research Centre for Ethics in Antiquity and Christianity in the epigraph with implications of teleology.

[8] RICOEUR, Oneself as Another, 170.

[9] FOWL and JONES, Life in Communion.

[10] I note the deontological implications of this term.

[11] ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 12–13 = Logic of Love, 4–5.

[12] BOURDIEU, Distinction; ID., La domination masculine.

[13] Personal memory from her public lecture at the University of Chicago.

[14] Also known as the parable of the Talents.

[15] Thus, among others, Klyne Snodgrass takes the throne seeker's dominance over his slaves and exploitative profiteering as proper in ancient culture so that the inhumane king appropriately corresponds to Jesus (SNODGRASS, Stories with Intent, 532, 539).

[16] See BRAWLEY, "The Parable of the Minas," 226–42.

cation" with reference to how we correlate biblical exegesis with ethics. The enlightenment ideal of objectivity has proved to be a will o' the wisp. Exegesis is always an *interchange* between interpreters and texts. This is not to degrade philology, grammar and syntax, or historical studies, without which we cannot even begin to understand a text. But it means that from the beginning the human mind is in a *process* of appropriating the text in one way or another, positively or negatively or indifferently. On this matter I appeal again to Gadamer: "If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance that is characteristic of our hermeneutic situation, we are always already affected by history. It determines *in advance* both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what would appear as an object of investigation."[17]

The distinctions (1) between individual and corporate perspectives and (2) among exegetical and hermeneutical assessments hang over a number of other approaches, and I move to consideration of some of these. But first I wish to illustrate both the diversity of exegesis and Gadamer's attention to the impact of history on interpretations with Michael Wolter's astute study of Rom 13:1–7.[18] First, the article is dedicated to South African New Testament Scholar Jan G. van der Watt, and it presupposes the history of diverse interpretations of the text, especially in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa, as a context for both the development and the appropriation of Wolter's interpretation. Second, Wolter's study is an innovative interpretation that increases the diversity of interpretations of the text.

A crucial part of Wolter's exegesis is the distinction between (1) a third person reference to the universal inevitability (πᾶσα ψύχη, Rom 13:1) of being subject to governing authorities (vv. 1–5) and (2) the shift to the second person plural in vv. 6–7. Accordingly, in vv. 1–5 Paul describes a general condition of what is involuntarily normative for subjects of the Roman Empire, which naturally includes his readers. But the object of the second person plural imperative to his readers in v. 6 (τελεῖτε) is the startling term φόρους, startling because tribute was required from foreign subjected people but not from residents of Rome such as Paul's readers. Wolter deduces from this incongruity that φόρος is pushed to a figurative level as a symbol of governing such that believers in Rome were subject to Roman authorities as if they were foreigners. That is, their allegiance to Jesus as their Lord gave them the character of foreigners with respect to imperial authorities. True, the text takes these authorities to be a part of the divine establishment of governing, but this is a widely distributed presupposition throughout diverse

cultures of Mediterranean antiquity. Furthermore, according to Rom 13:4 governing authorities do not represent God. Rather they are tools of God. Wolter's interpretive context is historically located and his interpretation expands the diversity of this much debated text.

My discussion depends on developing the epigraph beyond the initial levels of the interaction of ways of living and norms with the evaluation of the same. At this point I adapt stages in narrative structure in order to describe a process in moving from an ethical dilemma to its resolution. Narrative begins with a need that is to be resolved, but then moves through a *competence* stage in which a subject has to become obligated, willing, and able to perform what is necessary for resolution.[19] Subjects may be confronted with a need, but may fail in the competence phase by resisting obligation or persisting in unwillingness to undertake the resolution. But even when consenting to obligation and becoming willing to undertake action for the resolution, subjects may lack the empowerment (ability) to complete the resolution. Following this pattern, I refer to the perception of initial moral dilemmas as discernment and to the competence phase as motivation and empowerment. The entire progression of these components is necessary to attain pragmatic embodiment in accord with evaluations of ways of living in relation to their norms.

1. Sampling Models of Correlating Biblical Interpretation with Ethics

With a view toward the tension between individual and community, and toward the multiplicity of exegetical and hermeneutical diversity, I propose to reflect on selected approaches to biblical interpretation and ethics. The selection is admittedly arbitrary, but it also follows some patterns of simplicity to complexity as well as a history of developments. I once opined that the history of ethics could be written as a history of failure. I should revise that to speak rather of a history of deficiencies. This is to say that evaluations of the interaction between norms and ways of living both recognize inadequacies and attempt to redress them. Nevertheless, the cases that follow are selected rather arbitrarily.

1.1. Law

One response to ethical dilemmas turns to legislation. When the United States experiences another in its history of inexplicable mass murders, the discussion typically arises about legislation to control the easy and prolific availability

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[17] GADAMER, Truth and Method, 300 (emphasis added). See also MACINTYRE, After Virtue, 79.

[18] WOLTER, "Gebt allen, was ihr schuldig seid ..." 231–42. See also WOLTER, Der Brief an die Römer, 309–29.

[19] GREIMAS and COURTÉS, Semiotics and Language, s.v. "Program, Narrative." The distinction between willing and doing is of course very present in Paul (Rom 7:21–23), and also in Epictetus when he speaks about making errors when one wishes not to do so (Diatr 2.26, 1–4).

of firearms, as if civil law would be an effective response. Although an analogy between this and biblical law is imperfect, legal systems such as those contained in Torah can be understood as attempts to provide a better social order. On the side of an individual who aims at an accomplished life, biblical perspectives on keeping the law may be highly regarded. So, for example, in Luke 10:27–28, Jesus agrees with a lawyer that performing the double command in the law regarding loving God and neighbor is the way for him to attain an accomplished life ("do this and you will live," v. 28). Moreover, both agree on what this accomplished life looks like in a concrete case. Jesus poses the question to the lawyer, "Which of these three seems to you to be neighbor of the one who fell among brigands?" The lawyer then participates as a genuine interlocutor in providing the answer, "The one who performed mercy to him" (10:36–37). Then on the basis of this mutual agreement, Jesus tells the lawyer, "You go and do likewise" (10:37). Here law has a positive function.

From the perspective of social order, however, Paul finds law to be problematic. In Romans 2:12–13 he confirms something that is analogous to the agreement between Jesus and the lawyer in Luke 10. "For those who have sinned apart from law will also perish apart from law, and those who have sinned under law will be judged by law. For hearers of law are not rectified in God's sight, but doers of law will be rectified." However, later in the same chapter, Paul deals with what happens when law is inadequate: "For circumcision is profitable if you perform law, but if you are a transgressor of law your circumcision has become uncircumcision" (Rom 2:25). And when this is not hypothetical but real, then the law no longer distinguishes Israel's corporate life from that of non-Israelites.[20]

Insight into Paul's perspective on law can be expanded by turning to Galatians. On the one hand, in the figuration of a παιδαγωγός he comprehends a positive function for the law in restraining evil. At this point, the image of the παιδαγωγός reflects the *individual* pole of ethical behavior. On the other hand, the persistence of disobedience to law in *corporate* life puts Israel in the same boat as the nations. Emphatically, Paul does not abrogate law: "Is the law then against the promises? By no means" (Gal 3:21). But he does move beyond law[21] in the indispensably conditional statement: "*If you are led by the Spirit*, you are not under law" (Gal 5:18).[22]

1.2. Imitation

A widespread approach to ethical behavior is imitation. Prominent approaches to imitation discover especially in biblical personages aspects of action or character to emulate.

Waldemar Janzen finds this in heroic characters of Israel's Scriptures, and for other ethicists, such as Richard Burridge (more below) the same goes for New Testament characters, especially Jesus. The incident of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples in John 13 and the Christological hymn in Phil 2 are well-known texts to which appeals are made for imitation. Here I briefly examine cases that have to do first with biblical characters in both Israel's Scriptures and the New Testament, and then I turn to the two New Testament passages just mentioned—the foot washing and the Christological hymn, especially with respect to the tension between individual and community and exegetical possibilities.

(A) Imitation is often linked to the discovery and embodiment of virtues (which merits further discussion on its own below). Janzen develops a "paradigmatic" approach in which he discovers exemplars to imitate. He detects characters that model behavior that is pleasing to God. Significantly when he examines what is pleasing to God, he singles out virtues that are often expressed in abstract terms, such as holy, wise, good, fidelity, obedience.[23] On the one hand, when this approach discovers appropriate behavior in characters, it performs the important function of indicating concrete manifestations of ethics, although to my mind it dilutes the concreteness by expressing what is to be imitated as *abstract* virtues. Further, because it focuses on human characters, it tends to be individually anthropocentric.

With respect to the New Testament Richard Burridge has published an influential volume, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*,[24] which centers on the self-giving, boundary-breaking love of Jesus at its core. Unlike Janzen, he gives imitation a theocentric thrust by emphasizing God's love in Jesus. Still, like Janzen his basic perspective is that of an interpreter who identifies a hero.[25] To be sure, reminiscent of Aristotle, he balances the individual perspective in choosing the hero with the goal of establishing an inclusive community.

The dynamic of identifying a hero to emulate reflects a Cartesian approach in which the interpreter is an observer.[26] The process of ethical discernment occurs in the mind of the interpreter, which contrasts with discernment that originates from dimensions beyond the interpreter. This point can be demonstrated emphatically in a purely philosophical approach by Linda Zagzebski. She begins with *observation* by which the observer "points" to an exemplar of such virtues as goodness, charity, or justice. The observation is followed by admiration on the part of the observer: "... reflective admiration is the test for exemplarity ..." This is then followed by

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[20] See WOLTER, Paul, 345–66, 375.
[21] Cf. WILLIAM LOADER below.
[22] See BRAWLEY, "Contextuality," esp. 117–19.

[23] JANZEN, Old Testament Ethics, 7–20.
[24] BURRIDGE, Imitating Jesus.
[25] KECK, "Biblical Preaching," 142.
[26] See MACINTYRE, After Virtue, 33–35.

imitation.[27] A Cartesian observer is in the driver's seat at every step.

To return to Janzen, on the exegetical side a second issue can be illustrated by the fact that he himself recognizes that biblical characters lie and disobey, and a character as prominent as David is complicit in homicide and commits adultery, so that proper behavior has to be judged on the basis of preexisting concepts of virtue. In effect this means that the interpreter must eliminate parts of the biblical narrative that do not display virtue, which again Janzen himself clearly recognizes.[28] In other words, the basis for such cases of imitation is not exegetical after all, and in spite of the identification of positive qualities in certain biblical characters, they also are not heroic after all.

Perhaps at the opposite extreme, Burridge's case sets an extremely high standard in selecting Jesus as the exemplar. Further, if Jesus is a unique character, it is difficult to deny that emulation is nothing short of an impossibility. In fact, once at an oral presentation that Burridge made on the Gospel of Mark, I asked him how readers of Mark could expect to emulate Jesus when none of the disciples in the same narrative were able to do so adequately.[29] This means, as I will elaborate below, that on a meta-ethical level imitating Jesus neglects the problems of motivating and especially empowering behavior, problems that Mark also exposes in his story of Jesus.

(B) If the foot washing in John 13 presents an example to imitate, what is to be imitated? This too is often expressed in terms of a virtue, namely, humility. Indeed, Jesus performs a task that in the cultural repertoire is considered to be menial. Further, Jesus identifies what he is doing as a ὑπόδειγμα, which assuredly can be understood as an "example." But in this case a distinct exegetical alternative is also possible. If the term here indicates an example of humility to imitate, why would Jesus have informed Peter that he would not understand it until later (v. 7)? Is an example of humility not already clear? Further, ὑπόδειγμα can also mean something like "a pattern of revelation," as is the case in the *Letter of Aristeas* (143–48) or Ezek 42:15 LXX.[30] Also taking the foot washing as an example to imitate maintains the Cartesian perspective of an observer, whereas if it is a pattern of revelation, an additional factor enters the picture from beyond the observer.

(C) Something similar occurs when the Christological hymn in Phil 2:5–11 is understood in terms of imitating Christ. In one understanding of the encomium, Jesus gives up divine status, empties himself, and takes on the status of a slave, and this becomes a manifestation of humility that observers are to imitate.[31] In this case also, I point to an exegetical distinction that depends heavily on how the Greek is construed. In the first place, the translation of τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν as "have this mind in you" is quite problematic. Syntactically τοῦτο refers most naturally (and virtually certainly) back to what Paul has said in Phil 2:1–4, that is, it refers to the mutual regard of the Philippians for each other.[32] It can hardly refer to something like "this mind," corresponding to Jesus's mindset, which is to be located in individuals. Indeed, what is translated as "mind" in English is expressed in the verb φρονεῖτε, and given Paul's previous exhortations in vv. 1–4, a strong probability is that ἐν ὑμῖν should be understood as "among yourselves:"[33] "Have this orientation among yourselves as those who are in Christ Jesus."[34]

Moreover, the hymn itself can be understood as a precis of the history of Jesus that climaxes in his exaltation as Lord,[35] an exaltation that assuredly is not an accomplishment that readers can emulate. In fact, Jesus's obedience to the point of crucifixion as a slave is also anti-heroic in terms of conventional social priorities (see e.g. 1 Cor 1:18–25).

Once again I point to the focus on a Cartesian observer who identifies virtue in the behavior of another. But if by contrast Paul is encouraging the *assembly* to live in mutuality as those who are in Christ Jesus, who is Lord of all and their Lord, then rather that a Cartesian observation, group norms of those who are in Christ Jesus shape the discernment, motivation, and empowerment for ethical performance. Nevertheless, I reiterate how essential it is to see concrete manifestations of ethical behavior that imitation ethics emphasizes. That is, ethical behavior is inevitably embodied, but this too takes shape in a variety of ways.[36]

Finally, Leander Keck has a thoroughgoing critique of imitation ethics.[37] In the first place, exemplars who are to be imitated achieve heroic status precisely from the Cartesian perspective of the imitator. In fact, the goals that are admired are the desires and values to achieve heroic status in terms of one's culture. Such imitation has the capacity to reinforce established social values, but it woefully lacks the capacity to challenge and transform the values that are embodied in what is established by the individual and society. To my mind the

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[27] ZAGZEBSKI, Exemplarist Moral Theory, esp. 60–65, citation p. 63. See also her "Exemplarist Virtue Theory," 51–52. I am grateful to Steven Kraftchick for introducing me to Zagzebski.

[28] JANZEN, Old Testament Ethics, 8.

[29] On the deficiencies of the disciples in Mark see TOLBERT, Sowing the Gospel.

[30] See BRAWLEY, "Jesus as the Middle Term," 124–25.

[31] JOUBERT, "The Kenotic μορφή of Christ."

[32] Elsewhere in Paul τοῦτο always refers to what precedes. See LOHMEYER, Kyrios Jesus, 13.

[33] So also ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 95. Logic of Love, 72, reflects the NRSV translation instead of the German, "Seid so unter euch gesinnt ..."

[34] See BRAWLEY, "Alternative Community," 239–45.

[35] Ibid. Cf. ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 95–96 = Logic of Love, 73.

[36] MACINTYRE, After Virtue, 27–29.

[37] KECK, "Biblical Preaching," 137–56.

notion of following and living in response to Jesus who has become Lord is quite different from and takes precedence over imitation. More along this line of thought follows below under the heading *Metaethics*.

1.3. Virtue

For a third approach to be considered I return to virtues as the basis for formation, that is, the notion that virtues are to be practiced for the development of a habitus. This has close affinity to imitation ethics because again the virtues are embodied in social heroes, but it is also distinct in that the virtues become abstract and thus detached from any heroic role.[38] Aristotle emphasizes purposeful choices (προ-αιρετικαί) with regard to virtues (*Eth. eud.* 1228a), and a good disposition is formed by rigorous training (*Eth. nic.*1103a–1103b), that is, by the purposeful cultivation of virtues. But in history and cultures, virtues too exist in multiplicity such that Alasdair MacIntyre declares, "... there are just too many different and incompatible conceptions of a virtue ..."[39] On the other hand, he attempts to reduce virtue to a unity by means of what he calls "a practice," which is "a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity ... and standards of excellence [for] the achievement of goods."[40] Such multiplicity, therefore, is yet another basis for the plausibility of a variety of approaches in ethics.

What MacIntyre refers to as a practice, Reformed theologian Brian Gerrish dubs "habitus" or "habit." He espouses the goal of training, as in Aristotle (*Eth. nic.* 1103a–1103b; 1119b–1120a), to be the formation of good habits in the virtues of truth, diligence, and independence. To be sure these are governed by "cleaving to Christ," which is determined by a biblical metanarrative embodied in Scripture, the equivalent of what Gerrish distills as the "gospel" that the Word has come.[41] Doubtless this alludes to John 1:1–14, but as indicated above from Gadamer, the biblical metanarrative is mediated through the history of the Reformed tradition.

As Keck has demonstrated, like imitation, virtue ethics also reinforces established values and is feeble with respect to challenging and transforming them. On the other hand, Stanley Hauerwas poses the thesis that the narratives of the Bible that are told again and again are "bearers of rationality and innovation" opening the way for transformation.[42] This is especially true of the story of Jesus who although he does not withstand the world of violence, transforms life by means of trusting truth and love.[43] Hauerwas speaks of Jesus's procla-

mation of God's βασιλεία, which he equates with the "kind of community" that Jesus calls into existence, a community that forms those who belong to it by means of its narratives. At this point I would be tempted to say that the zeal for virtues such as truth and love vaults over another level of what the Synoptics call God's βασιλεία, which also means living in and from a relationship with the God who has come near in Jesus. Hauerwas approaches this level, although I find that he is quick to represent this βασιλεία not as a dynamic relationship with God but as the kind of social relationships that flow from God as ruler of creation. So for example the strength to love comes not from an encounter with God (more below), but from the communal practice of loving, although to be sure it is "as God has loved through Jesus."[44] This is dramatically positive on the level of embodying ethics, with the necessary qualification that the primary embodiment is not first of all the individual but the life of the community that is shaped by its retelling of biblical stories. Needless to say the emphasis here lies on the community that engenders the formation of its members.

1.4. Richard Hays's Fourfold Task

In the middle of the last decade of the twentieth century, Richard Hays produced a major work on New Testament ethics[45] in which he proposed four tasks that constitute a valiant effort to embrace the tensions that I proposed at the beginning of this essay, namely, the two poles of individual and community, and the multiple dimensions of exegesis and hermeneutical appropriation. For this Hays prescribed the following tasks: descriptive (close exegesis), synthetic (fitting the text into its canonical context), hermeneutical (correlating the interpreted text to the contemporary historical context), and the pragmatic task of ethical embodiment. In addition he views these tasks through three "focal images" of community, cross, and new creation, and this synthesis forms a canopy over his entire project, as his subtitle indicates.

Hays's fourfold task are somewhat paralleled by his former colleague at Duke Divinity School, ethicist Allen Verhey († 2014).[46] Verhey subsumes Hays's first two categories in what he calls script, that is, "exegetical interpretation," and the second two in what he calls scripted, namely, "performance interpretation." One distinction is that Hays gives greater weight to the communal pole and Verhey more to the individual who performs what is scripted.

To call attention once more to temporal and contextual diversity (see the epigraph above), I cite a case in which Hays published two different *hermeneutical* appropriations of a text in which his *descriptive and synthetic* tasks remained the same. In 1986 Hays published an article in which he inter-

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[38] MacIntyre, After Virtue, 121–45, esp. 132–33.

[39] Ibid., 181.

[40] Ibid.,187, 190. See 191.

[41] Gerrish, "Tradition in the Modern World."

[42] Hauerwas, Community, 26.

[43] Ibid., 35.

[44] Ibid., 48–49.

[45] Hays, Moral Vision.

[46] Verhey, "Scripture."

preted Rom 1:19–32 as the most crucial text in the New Testament regarding same-sex erotic relationships.[47] A decade later he maintained the same exegetical work in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* by which he read Paul on the descriptive and canonical context tasks as condemning homosexual behavior.[48] In the 1986 article, however, he used the exegetical work to argue *against* the ordination of self-avowed non-celibate gays and lesbians to ministry in the church whereas in his 1996 book after noting that Paul uses the case of same-sex erotic relationships as part of a diagnosis of the disordered human condition, he then argued that same-sex eroticism does not single out any particular person from others who are to be ordained, because everyone participates in a common human condition.[49]

1.5. Implicit Ethics

Within the limits of my own awareness, new dimensions of the enterprise of New Testament ethics have arisen with the development of implicit ethics by Ruben Zimmermann and Jan G. van der Watt.[50] As Zimmermann indicates, ethics can no longer be bound to exhortations and imperatives but extends to such things as motivation or illocutionary statements that bring about the blessedness they proclaim or hierarchies of norms or innovation over traditional norms as in the Sermon on the Mount.[51] To give a case in point, action is the strongest determinate of character, but action alone is ambiguous,[52] and so Paul repeatedly defends his action on the basis of his *motivation*. If he is constrained by the love of Christ (see 2 Cor 5:14), his action implicitly embodies that love, and his motivation distinguishes his action from his own arrogance. Moreover, characters in narratives or in parables embody ethical behavior, or equally significantly characters may fail to embody ethical norms. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a case in point for both. A Samaritan embodies love of neighbor, a priest and Levite do not. Or Peter's denial of Jesus, related in all four Gospels, embodies the violation of group norms. But, the only ethical evaluation of this is Peter's own sorrow (Matt 25:75 // Mark 14:72 // Luke 22:62). Even this does not appear in the Gospel of John where Peter's violation of group norms is nevertheless implicitly evident.

These cases are rather obvious. But in addition, behind ethical constraints, how are ways of living warranted and evaluated? In the midst of concrete dilemmas ethics is not merely a matter of how one behaves but a search for the ground and justification of strategies for resolution.[53] Here I recall my previous language of obligation, motivation, and empowerment. But there is a further parallel in literary theory. Just as in literary theory real readers are able to determine an "implied reader" from literary features, so also an interpreter can discern implicit ethics in a text.[54]

1.6. Metaethics

By a metaethical perspective Zimmermann means reflections on the use of reason to evaluate or to determine significance, and rational argumentation.[55] Beyond this, as a metaethical issue, I indicate above how I have appropriated a description of the competence phase of a narrative program in which in order for a subject to accomplish the resolution of a narrative need, the subject has to be obligated, willing, and capable of acting.[56] In other words, before ethical action occurs, there is a competence phase on a metaethical level regarding how discernment of proper behavior (obligation), motivation (willingness), and empowerment (enablement) come about.

With respect to motivation and empowerment, both John and Paul understand ethics as deriving from an *encounter with God*. In John faith is relational and ultimately related to the person of Jesus. This is to say that believing is a "dynamic relationship mediated by Jesus from which the works of God derive (e.g. 6:28–29)."[57] Discernment, motivation, and empowerment occur by means of being led by the Paraclete (John 14:16) or by the Spirit (Gal 5:18). Volker Rabens focuses on the one issue of how Jesus's disciples are empowered for ethical living in John. He scores a particular point on an exegetical level with respect to the full statement of the love command in John 13:34 where the καθώς that introduces the second part is *causative*. The relationship that disciples have with Jesus because of his love for his own has an empowering effect on their love for one another. Experiencing love empowers love for others.[58] This means that the relationship of believing can never remain merely individualistic. This relationship is necessarily communal.

Karl Weyer-Menkhoff pushes the relationship that produces ethical behavior in John one step further back. "Not

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[47] HAYS, "Relations."

[48] HAYS, Moral Vision, 383–87.

[49] Ibid., 400–3.

[50] Briefly put implicit ethics derives from "coherent reflection on values and behavior" and how texts "reveal an underlying value system and ethical reflection ..." VAN DER WATT and ZIMMERMANN, "Preface," in Rethinking the Ethics of John, X.

[51] ZIMMERMANN, "Sermon on the Mount," 262–71.

[52] ALTER, Biblical Narrative, 117.

[53] ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 14 = Logic of Love, 5–6.

[54] ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 16–17 = Logic of Love, 7.

[55] ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 12–13 = Logic of Love, 4–5.

[56] See n. 19 above.

[57] VAN DER WATT, "Ethos and Ethics," 147–76, 158. On the linking of human behavior to God's work in John 6:28 see also ZIMMERMANN, "Ethics in the Gospel of John," 53.

[58] RABENS, "Johannine Perspectives," esp. 115, 120–32. Jan G. van der Watt also emphasizes relationships in John, divine and human, in which ethical "functions" occur, and accordingly he understands God as the source for love ("Ethic and Ethos").

even Jesus accomplishes the works of God autonomously but rather responsively"[59] (that is, in response to God). For both Rabens and Weyer-Menkhoff traditional sources and norms, prevailing grounds and legitimation, and existing presumptions of right and wrong, motivation, and ability to act are transcended. In John the Paraclete is the source of discernment, because this is the Spirit of truth that will teach Jesus's disciples everything, including the memory of what Jesus has said (John 14:16, 26). Furthermore, motivation and action also derive from the relationship of believing that transcends existing norms because Jesus promises that when he goes to the Father, his disciples' works will surpass his own works (John 14:12).

Citing multiple positive reflections on law in John, William Loader demonstrates that the values of Torah are still presupposed in the Fourth Gospel. But with Jesus and the Paraclete, developing dimensions of discernment exceed Torah so that it alone no longer suffices.[60] In Galatians as well to be led by the Spirit produces discernment, motivation, and empowerment beyond law[61] (see the discussion on Galatians under the heading *Law* above). Suggestively along these lines, Zimmermann calls the "new commandment" (John 13:34) and the "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) creative metaphors that presuppose Jewish law but imply new normative entities within a complex context of Scripture and other norms that defy the capacity to delimit what the creative hermeneutical potential is.[62]

In both John and Galatians, this function of the Spirit is nothing short of an encounter with God, although the encounter may be mediated. In John, the earthly Jesus is the middle term in a relationship of those who in him abide with God.[63] Mira Stare perceptively demonstrates that in John life itself is relational. Life is the outcome of a response in a reciprocal relationship with God in and through Jesus Christ.[64] However, Jesus's prayer in John 17 prepares his disciples for a relationship with God when he will no longer be with them. Rather, they are united with Jesus and thus brought into God's presence (see esp. John 17:23–28).[65] In Galatians believing a proclamation results in an encounter with the Spirit (3:2), which in turn is nothing less than the experience of an encounter with God as a child to a parent, as in the assembly's acclamation: αββα ὁ πατήρ (4:6).

What is more, there is a sense in which the experience of the God who has come near in Jesus can and has been replicated. A criterion of scientific verification is whether or not a matter to be verified can be replicated. In analogy to this criterion Peter Lampe argues cogently that the experience of the presence of Jesus as one whom God raised from the dead is reiterated, first of all from Peter's initial vision, then for the twelve, then for more than 500 (1 Cor 15:5–8). Although the perception is no longer visionary as in this tradition, experiences of the presence of the God who has come near in Jesus have been replicated in subsequent centuries so that such experiences have the character of social confirmation. To be sure, this social confirmation lacks the verification of a scientific experiment in the sense that according to experimental methodology, if the conditions are replicated, then the results should follow as cause and effect. The context of the replication of the experience of the presence of Jesus as one whom God raised from the dead is consistently a gathering of followers of Jesus, which is the case in Paul's account of resurrection appearances in 1 Cor 15:5–8, perhaps with the exception of his own experience. What is more, the conditions of worship, proclamation, and celebration of the eucharist do not invariably produce the affective experience of the presence of the risen Jesus as cause and effect. Nevertheless, encounters with the God who has come near in the βασιλεία that Jesus proclaimed are replicated again and again for assemblies of believers and individually affirmed with ways of living in a new construct of reality as a consequence.[66]

2. Conclusion

This essay has attempted to reflect on and evaluate several approaches to the correlation of biblical interpretation and ethics. Such correlations as described in terms of dialectical tensions between individual and communal perspectives and tensions in a wide variety of exegetical results and hermeneutical appropriations are thoroughly in keeping with the description of ethics in the epigraph *in vielfältigen Sprach- und Ausdruckformen*. This itself constitutes an appeal for affirmation of the plausibility and legitimacy of varying perspectives and distinct exegetical and hermeneutical results. Along with this affirmation, evaluation in scholarly critiques is a desideratum for the development of both an accomplished life and a beloved community.

In focusing on reflection and evaluation of norms, the epigraph emphasizes what this essay has designated as discernment, and stops short of additional stages in the process from ethical dilemma to concrete embodiment in behavior. Discernment and evaluation alone overlook the problem of motivation. Moreover, as important as motivation is, a motivated subject may still lack the ability to arrive at a resolution of an ethical dilemma. The problem of slavery in the United States may serve as a further example. In the nineteenth century before the Civil War in the United States, Quakers especially advocated the abolition of slavery with significant

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59   WEYER–MENKHOFF, "The Response," 163–66, citation 164.
60   LOADER, "The Law."
61   BRAWLEY, "Contextuality," 117–19.
62   ZIMMERMANN, Logik der Liebe, 68 = Logic of Love, 51.
63   SCHNEIDERS, Written That You May Believe = "John 20:11–18."
64   STARE, "Ethics of Life," esp. 222–27.
65   DODD, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 422.
66   LAMPE, New Testament Theology, esp. 147–57.

success in Pennsylvania and New York. In addition, they had a measure of success in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. But in Charleston, South Carolina, abolitionists including Quakers were subject to lynching. Their perception of the evil of slavery and their motivation to end it faced opposition that curtailed their capacity to act to eradicate slavery as a social institution. In fact, the opposition was so violent that it took a war to bring it to an end.

The ethical enterprise can fail at any one of the pressure points of discernment, motivation, and empowerment. So I make one final appeal for affirmation of a full range of approaches that cover these dimensions. Given the diversity of approaches outlined above and the tensions between individual and community, and between diversity in exegetical interpretations and hermeneutical appropriations, plus the multiplicity inherent in ethics as an evaluation of the interaction of ways of living in relation to norms, ethics can hardly be reduced to a fixed program. Especially if ethics is taken to be temporally and contextually dependent, and if ethics involves motivation and empowerment from external sources, such as in the Johannine and Pauline encounter with God, then it is constrained to be an ongoing, dynamic enterprise.

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