NOTES ON MORAL THEOLOGY

Biblical Ethics: 3D

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Abstract
The past two decades have seen significant developments in the field of biblical ethics. The article looks at these in three dimensions so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the efforts of biblical scholars and Christian ethicists. The author perceives that a more integrated approach to biblical ethics, collaboration on various levels, innovation in our approaches, and humble learning from our colleagues worldwide can throw light on our search for future direction in the field.

Keywords
Bible, Bible and ethics, Bible and morality, biblical ethics, Christian ethics, globalization and ethics, morality, Scripture and ethics, Scripture and morality, scriptural ethics, theological ethics, virtue ethics

T
wo questions need to be raised at the outset: What is biblical ethics, and what does "3D" in the title stand for? The first question is better rephrased as, What is happening in the field of biblical ethics?[1] Although using Scripture as the sole authority for Christian ethics has for centuries distinguished Protestant from Catholic methodology, biblical ethics is not a new area of research within the Roman Catholic

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1. My survey focuses on developments in New Testament ethics over the past two decades. Though I write as a Catholic biblical ethicist, I consider both Catholic and Protestant contributions.

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tradition. Between the Council of Trent and Vatican II, for example, Catholic manualists often drew proof texts from the Scriptures.[2] During the 17th and 18th centuries, Catholic scholars called for a more biblical approach to moral theology.[3] In the middle of the 20th century, Catholic moral theologian Bernard Häring demonstrated that Scripture itself should furnish our moral thinking. A decade later Vatican II's *Optatam totius*, the Decree on Priestly Training, called for emphasizing the biblical-theological foundations of Catholic moral theology; this impacted, and was welcomed by, Catholic Scripture scholars and moral theologians.[4] In 2008, more than four decades after Vatican II, the Pontifical Biblical Commission published a document that aims to situate "Christian morality within the larger sphere of anthropology and of biblical theologies . . . [and demonstrate that] the Bible does provide some methodological criteria for progress along this road."[5]

In what follows, I propose a three-dimensional ("3D") analysis of the field of biblical ethics, looking at integration, collaboration, and innovation and beyond, through which a more realistic and comprehensive response to the first question can be suggested.

First Dimension: Integration

The late Daniel Harrington observed that, despite the welcoming attitude by both Scripture scholars and moral theologians toward Vatican II's statement in *Optatam totius*, the two branches "continue to operate separately without much cooperation, and that the integration of Scripture and theological ethics is far from satisfactory: moral theologians do not read much of what biblical scholars write, while few biblical scholars have interest in conversing with moral theologians."[6] Besides the lack of interest, the growing complexity of the two fields, the related issue of professional training and developing competencies, and the lack of communication between the two disciplines perpetuate notable obstacles.[7]

Nevertheless, attempts to advance the integration were continued in the 1970s and 1980s by scholars such as Christian ethicists James Gustafson and Thomas Ogletree,

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2. Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1999) 49.

3. Unfortunately, for various reasons the attempts failed. See Charles E. Curran, "The Role and Function of the Scriptures in Moral Theology," in *The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1984) 178–212, at 180.

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

5. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican: Vatican Library, 2008) 12–13.

6. Lúcás Chan, S.J., *Biblical Ethics in the 21st Century: Developments, Emerging Consensus, and Future Directions*, foreword by James F. Keenan, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 2013) 2. See also Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics* 13.

7. See Pheme Perkins, "A Note to the Reader," in *Love Commands in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1982) preface.

and Catholic moral theologians Charles Curran and Richard McCormick.[8] In the field of New Testament studies, Pheme Perkins and Sandra Schneiders were also important Catholic advocates.[9]

In the past two decades we have witnessed further developments advanced by scholars. They recognize that integration "can help rescue biblical exegesis from falling into antiquarianism and irrelevancy, and can at the same time help to enrich and enliven moral theology precisely as a Christian theological discipline."[10] Biblical scholars began to go beyond the exegetical task to engage in hermeneutics; theological ethicists similarly started to pay attention to their use of Scripture in ethical reflection. Within the North American English-speaking context, Methodist Richard Hays and Roman Catholic Frank Matera are two important contributors from the discipline of New Testament studies in the 1990s.

Efforts by Scripture Scholars

In *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* Richard Hays seeks to identify the "moral vision" of the New Testament and demonstrates how the values and practices of today's Christian community ought to be shaped.[11] He elaborates on the fourfold task of New Testament Ethics (NTE) that he developed earlier:[12] (1) an exegetical survey of the writings; (2) a discussion of the likelihood of a coherent and normative NTE; (3) an examination of contemporary hermeneutical proposals; and (4) an application of these methodological frameworks to certain ethical issues.

As a whole, *Moral Vision* is recognized for its comprehensiveness. As far as the methodology is concerned, Hays's approach goes beyond what conventional NTE scholars have done, by taking on the entire task from the descriptive to the normative, and from theory to practice.

Since Frank Matera's major work on NTE, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul*, was published in the same year as *Moral Vision*, the two studies are often compared.[13] Matera is concerned that traditional methods used in NTE

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8. See James M. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Interpretation* 24 (1970) 430–55; Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics: A Constructive Essay* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Curran and McCormick, eds., *Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*.

9. See Pheme Perkins, "New Testament Ethics: Questions and Contexts," *Religious Studies Review* 10 (1984) 321–27; Sandra M. Schneiders, "From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture," *Horizons* 8 (1981) 23–39.

10. Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics* 13.

11. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

12. See Richard B. Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics," *Interpretation* 44 (1990) 42–55; and "New Testament Ethics: A Theological Task," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995) 97–120.

13. Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

are inadequate in disclosing the diverse ethical principles applied in the biblical texts. Thus, hoping to offer a systematic presentation of NTE, he presents an approach different from Hays's, one that examines the moral teaching ascribed to Jesus and Paul.

Both moral theologians and biblical scholars have commented on Matera's work and consider it a good supplement or alternative to Hays's. Its methodological orientation is encouraging, despite concerns raised that the ethical teachings identified by Matera do not satisfy an ethicist's expectation. In short, the works of Hays and Matera show us that biblical ethics is alive and well. The two authors also point out the need of a hermeneutics concerned with the text's meaning for today. Their efforts, however, also disclose some limitations: (1) the ethical claims are inadequate and even inconsistent; (2) the lack of reference to, or consultation of, the works of ethicists; and (3) the failure of grounding their claims on any major ethical framework, like virtue and duty. Simply put, Hays and Matera still stress the importance of the text more than the need for an ethical hermeneutics on a normative level.

A significant development occurs with Richard Burridge's *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*.[14] Burridge offers an alternative approach to NTE, grounded in the hypothesis that the genre of the four Gospels is one of ancient Greco-Roman biography.[15] Specifically, Burridge claims that the literary genre is crucial to the interpretation of the text. Subsequently, he stresses the need to focus on the subject in the text, the inseparability between the subject's words and deeds as presented in the text, and the turn to the subject's character that invites us to imitate the subject and appropriate the subject's virtues. These claims present important implications. A biographical approach to interpreting the text is not simply a method/genre within biblical studies. It is also a solid platform for ethical analysis; its emphasis on imitation, the subject's character, and virtues bears traits of virtue ethics.[16] In other words, Burridge implicitly employs a virtue framework for interpretation.

Burridge also engages literature normally employed by ethicists. From the perspective of biblical scholarship, his work hints at how biblical ethics can be advanced: a strategy that embraces the importance of ethical hermeneutics while attending to the importance of the biblical text, especially through building exegetical findings on a sound platform of ethical analysis or ethical theory.

Efforts by Christian Ethicists

Rosemary Radford Ruether and the late William Spohn are known by their colleagues as pioneers in integrating Scripture and ethics. Spohn surveyed the different models of

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14. Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).
15. See Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, foreword by Graham Stanton, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).
16. I have written before on Burridge; see Chan, *Biblical Ethics* 52–62.

using Scripture in ethics in *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?*[17] Later, in *Go and Do Likewise*, he engaged Scripture with ethics by first focusing on biblical narratives.[18] He claimed that narrative theology "can support a broader definition of ethics that recognizes the normative guidance that symbolic material brings to disposition and character."[19] He also employed analogical imagination to bridge the gap between the Bible's world and our own. Finally, Spohn advocated the use of virtue ethics as a hermeneutical tool. Scholars applauded him for engaging ethical reflection informed by the Bible and contemporary biblical studies.

Although Ruether is not an ethicist in a strict sense, her use of the Bible in carrying out the task of feminist interpretation sheds light on our discussion.[20] First, Ruether appeals to several biblical traditions (e.g., the Lukan Marian tradition) that emerge from selected texts to depict a liberating prophetic Christian faith that helps interpret ethical responsibilities, demonstrating the advantages of employing a specific means for interpretation.[21] Second, Ruether's turn to the expertise of Scripture scholars for insights needs to be acknowledged. It highlights the importance of the ethicist's need for exegetical assistance.

Both Spohn and Ruether demonstrate the need to engage in both exegetical and ethical hermeneutics. They also confirm the gradual shift from concern with principles and norms to Scripture's role in forming values and practices.

Their efforts, however, like those of Hays and Matera, reveal certain limitations: (1) a rather selective use of Scripture; and (2) the less than satisfactory exegesis and interaction with biblical scholarship. They are still concerned more about interpreting the text's meaning for the contemporary world than with first examining its original meaning to see whether the text can be rightly employed.

If Burridge helped improve the works of Scripture scholars, the late Allen Verhey, former president of the Society of Christian Ethics, demonstrated an impressive command of biblical materials and exegetical skill and was, in fact, recognized as a New Testament scholar.[22] Verhey developed an approach to NTE that stresses the need to remember Jesus, the role of the community, and the significance of practices.[23]

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17. William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1996).

18. William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

19. William C. Spohn, "Parable and Narrative in Christian Ethics," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 100–114, at 113.

20. A more detailed work by Ruether that searches for an ethics of eco-justice is *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

21. See Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University, 1997) 178–98.

22. See James H. Burtness, review of *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, by Allen Verhey, *Christian Century* 102.19 (1985) 562–63, at 563; Michael J. Gorman, review of *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*, by Allen Verhey, *Interpretation* 57 (2003) 434–37, at 434.

23. Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

Methodologically speaking, his work is built upon a hermeneutic of remembering and an ethical model that bears the traits of virtue theory.

Verhey's competency and engagement in the Bible reminds us that, even as ethicists, we have to attend to the original meanings of biblical texts before applying them to post-biblical situations—a daunting but possible task. Furthermore, his construal of the Bible as "scripted script" is very helpful in summarizing our progress toward integration in biblical ethics.[24] The text as "scripted" refers to what was written at a particular time in the past and needs to be studied in that context. The text is understood as a "script," like the script of a play, and so needs to be performed, that is, interpreted. The tasks of exegesis and interpretation are thus almost inseparable in doing biblical ethics.

Reception

A growing body of literature tries, with varying degrees of success, to engage the integration of ethics and Scripture.[25] In the past decade at least seven books on the Ten Commandments have been published by biblical scholars, Christian ethicists, and rabbis, offering (direct or indirect) guidance for contemporary moral living.[26]

Besides the above-cited publications on the Decalogue, other studies have appeared that employ the Bible generally or the New Testament particularly to address concrete ethical issues. One outstanding example is Lisa Sowle Cahill's latest work on global justice. It contends that "the christological commitments enshrined in the New Testament" are crucial for our ethical response.[27] Cahill turns to certain New Testament writings for understanding the Word and Spirit Christologies and frequently invokes renowned biblical scholars and their works to clarify and support her arguments.[28]

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24. Allen Verhey, "Scripture as Script and as Scripted: The Beatitudes," in *Character Ethics and the New Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) 19–34.

25. See *New Testament Abstracts* and James T. Bretzke, S.J., *Bibliography on Scripture and Christian Ethics*, revised and expanded electronic version (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2014).

26. William P. Brown, ed., *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004); Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, eds., *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 2010); Mark F. Rooker, *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-first Century* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010); Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life*, foreword by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and James F. Keenan, S.J. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); Dominik Markl, ed., *The Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013); Robertson McQuilkin, and Paul Copan, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); and Rifat Sonsino, *And God Spoke: Ten Commandments and Contemporary Ethics* (New York: URJ, 2014).

27. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 2013) xi.

28. For example, in the chapter "Kingdom of God," Cahill cites almost 100 biblical texts, and regularly refers to the works of Seán Freyne, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, Gerd Theissen, Annette Merz, Daniel Harrington, and John Meier.

Other scholars reflect persuasively on the foundational questions in biblical ethics. Kyle Fedler, for example, explores not only how Christian ethicists can engage the Bible but also how the Bible can be used responsibly, especially by asking whether it should be employed as a rule book.[29] David Jones, on a different tack, claims that biblical ethics is all about the application of moral law as it is revealed in the Bible.[30]

Some of these scholars attempt to bridge the two fields not only in their writings but also in their teaching. John Donahue, for instance, offered a course in which he "examine[s] and discuss[es] select biblical themes and texts which help to provide a foundation for ethical and theological thought on social justice."[31] John Collins created a course that "examine[s] what the Bible has to say about several issues that are controversial in the modern world . . . and discuss[es] biblical attitudes to family values, ecology, gender and sexuality . . . and other issues."[32] While teachers of biblical studies offer many of these courses, they demonstrate the strong interest in integrating the two fields as a way to make sense of the Bible for the contemporary world.

Before moving to the second dimension of my 3D approach, it is worth noting that among the advances surveyed so far, several (e.g., those of Burridge, Verhey, and Spohn) have turned directly or indirectly to character and virtues in carrying out their hermeneutical task. For instance, Robert Brawley and I follow this approach.[33] This consensus is worth reflecting on, for many agree that the concept of virtue is found in the Bible, either explicitly or implicitly. Collins, for example, calls for speaking of values (and virtues) rather than laws in the Bible.[34]

Several dimensions of virtue ethics make it effective for interpreting Scripture.[35] The first is its turn to dispositions and character formation. Scripture orients believers

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29. See Kyle D. Fedler, *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

30. See David W. Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013).

31. John R. Donahue, "Biblical Foundations of Social Justice" (BSCE 2260 syllabus, Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, CA, Spring 2011). The syllabi have been removed from their server. However, course descriptions are still available at http://wiz.gtu.edu:7350/cgi-bin/wwiz.exe/wwiz.asp?wwizmstr=WEB.COURSE.DESC&course=4453&meeting=11448&term=12%2FSP. I too offered a graduate course on biblical ethics in the same year: Lúcás Chan, "Doing Biblical Ethics" (BSCE 4405 syllabus, Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, CA, Spring 2011), http://wiz.gtu.edu:7350/cgi-bin/wwiz.exe/wwiz.asp?wwizmstr=WEB.COURSE.DESC&course=4492&meeting=11509&term=12%2FSP. All URLs cited herein were accessed October 24, 2014.

32. John J. Collins, "What Are Biblical Values?" (REL 562b syllabus, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, Spring 2014); the syllabus is inaccessible to non-Yale users.

33. See Robert Brawley, ed., *Character Ethics and the New Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Chan, *Biblical Ethics*.

34. John J. Collins, "What Are Biblical Values?," in *Scripture and Justice: The Bible in Contemporary Struggles for Social Justice: Essays in Honor of John R. Donahue, S.J.*, ed. Gregory E. Sterling and Anathea Portier-Young, forthcoming.

35. For a detailed discussion on relating Scripture and virtue ethics, see Chan, *Biblical Ethics* 78–112.

around certain values and virtues that reflect God's self-revelation in Christ, shaping character and identity in a distinctively Christian way.[36] The second is the role of the exemplar. The Bible contains many "characters" who model for us distinctive Christian moral characters and virtues. The third is the shaping of the community and communal identity. Since character is "a process of communal formation of individual identity," the Bible, as originating in and from a community or communities, is relevant to the formation of the characters and identity of the community as well.[37] In fact, Scripture "forms community as much as community informs the reading of Scripture."[38] Moreover, the Bible forms a particular spiritual and moral community in the sense that it "render[s] a community capable of ordering its existence [in a way] appropriate to such stories."[39] These several strengths of virtue ethics complement the texts of Scripture.

Second Dimension: Collaboration

Some scholars have taken the challenge of biblical ethics a step further and work hand in hand with colleagues of the other discipline. In the early 1970s, biblical scholar Bruce Birch and Christian ethicist Larry Rasmussen coauthored a book in which they attempt to "bridge the gap between biblical studies and Christian ethics";[40] but very few coauthored books like this appeared in the following decade. One collaborative work of that period was *Christian Biblical Ethics*, edited by Robert Daly, who noted that the contributors, mainly biblical scholars, were well aware of "the theologically interdisciplinary nature" of their task in which "biblical exegesis . . . and Christian ethics are the central skills involved"; they therefore invited Charles Curran to offer his views as a theological ethicist during their preproduction discussion.[41] Despite this early contribution, not until the 1990s do we find collaborative authorship emerging in force.

Collaborative Teaching

David Hollenbach, the late William Spohn, and John Donahue pioneered in bringing collaboration to a higher level. In as early as 1981, with New Testament scholar Jerome

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36. Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values," in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. William P. Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 3–17, at 10.

37. Ibid.

38. Brown, ed., *Character and Scripture* xi.

39. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1981) 67.

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

41. Robert J. Daly et al., *Christian Biblical Ethics: From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 9–10.

Neyrey, Hollenbach structured a graduate course around selected major themes (e.g., the kingdom of God motif).[42] Two years later, he team-taught with Hebrew Scripture scholar Richard Clifford on the Old Testament and social ethics.[43] In both courses biblical perspectives on selected topics/themes were first presented, followed by ethical reflections and analyses with a focus on Christian social justice (e.g., just-war theory).

Spohn and Donahue also started team-teaching New Testament and Christian ethics in the 1980s with a particular approach, starting with a description of the ethics of the New Testament and then discussing the various interpretive methods employed by contemporary theologians.[44] These pioneers, however, did not engage in demonstrating how biblical scholarship and ethical reflection interact in concrete situations.

A more recent attempt at team-teaching was that of Harrington and Keenan. Several times in the past 15 years, the two had team-taught courses entitled "Jesus and Virtue Ethics" and "Paul and Virtue Ethics." They also offered a course on "John and Virtue Ethics."[45] Their approach was quite different from Spohn and Donahue's, in that they tried to accommodate each other dialogically into their own framework and reflection. Harrington and Keenan also applied their findings to contemporary situations.

Their joint effort, though remaining experimental, encouraged other teachers of both disciplines to take up this model. Between 2003 and 2012, Richard Clifford and social ethicist Thomas Massaro team-taught a course that "interpret[s] the social message of the Bible in a way that illustrates contemporary issues of social justice."[46] However, they focused on the use of Scripture and, despite regular reference to certain official church documents on Catholic social thought, they did not adopt any particular ethical framework.

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42. David Hollenbach, S.J., and Jerome Neyrey, S.J., "Faith and Justice: New Testament Perspective" (NT/MT 214, former Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Spring 1981).

43. David Hollenbach, S.J., and Richard Clifford, S.J., "The Old Testament and Social Ethics" (OT/MT 326, former Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Spring 1983). In 1990, they offered the same course with additional topics, such as economic justice and preferential option for the poor ("Social Justice in the Bible," OT/MT 354, former Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Spring 1990).

44. John R. Donahue, S.J., and William C. Spohn, S.J., "The New Testament and Christian Ethics" (NTCE 4301 syllabus, former Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, Spring 1990). See also William C. Spohn, "Teaching Scripture and Ethics," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1990) 277–81, at 277.

45. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and James F. Keenan, S.J., "New Testament and Ethics" (NT/MT 333 syllabus, former Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Fall 1996, 1998, 2000); "Paul and Virtue Ethics" (NT 330/334/TH 650/TM 713 syllabus, former Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Fall 2005, 2008, Spring 2011); and "John and Virtue Ethics" (TH 712/TM 762 syllabus, Boston College, Spring 2013). The syllabi are not available online. It was the last wish of Harrington that New Testament professor Thomas Stegman co-teach these courses with James Keenan in the future.

46. Richard Clifford, S.J., and Thomas Massaro, S.J., "Social Ethics and the Bible" (OT/MT 353 syllabus, former Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Fall 2003, 2006).

In 2010, Hebrew Scripture scholar Carolyn Sharp and Christian ethicist Willis Jenkins also team-taught "an interdisciplinary seminar that addresses the relation of scriptural interpretation and Christian responses to poverty."[47] They read and interpreted selected biblical texts related to poverty, employing various social ethics models such as social gospel, Catholic social teaching, and liberation theology.

A year later, Catholic ethicist Stephen Pope and biblicist David Vanderhooft offered a course that examines some major Hebrew texts on selected moral issues, such as war, stealing, and lying.[48] Vanderhooft first analyzed biblical texts exegetically; Pope then lectured on their use throughout the history of Christian ethics and offered ethical reflection on certain general ethical themes such as covenant, law, and virtues.

These team-taught courses and their respective approaches surely differ from one another. Though Sharp and Jenkins's approach is close to Clifford and Massaro's in concentrating on a particular ethical issue, none of the teachers used a specific hermeneutical method. In contrast, Pope and Vanderhooft, as Harrington and Keenan before them, took up first the task of exegesis and only afterward its ethical implications. Still, these experiments confirm the value of collaboration in doing biblical ethics prior to the generation of scholars formed with double competency.

Collaborative Writings

In their two coauthored books, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics* and *Paul and Virtue Ethics*, Harrington and Keenan set out a common framework built upon certain ethical themes, and employ virtue ethics as their methodological approach. They acknowledge that their work is a heuristic effort "at stimulating discovery and dialogue," hoping to "provide material for further and deeper conversations about the relationship between Scripture and moral theology."[49] Despite the absence of an ideal, seamless integration ("interaction between the authors") that would make their work a truly remarkable success, as some reviewers commented, many praised them for modeling and inviting further collaborative and interdisciplinary work.[50]

Protestant authors also contributed to the field. New Testament professor Andreas Köstenberger and Christian ethicist David Jones coauthored an integrative treatment of marriage issues and the Bible.[51] They first treat the nature of marriage and family

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47. Carolyn Sharp and Willis Jenkins, "Scripture and Social Ethics" (REL 564 syllabus, Yale Divinity School, Fall 2010).

48. Steve Pope and David Vanderhooft, "God and Morality: The Ethical Legacy of the Hebrew Bible" (TH 465 syllabus, Boston College, Spring 2011).

49. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and James F. Keenan, S.J., *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Latham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010) xii.

50. See George M. Smiga, review of *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*, by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and James F. Keenan, S.J., *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (2003) 636–37, at 637.

51. Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (2004; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); and *Marriage and Family: Biblical Essentials* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) is an abridgement of their 2004 text.

from biblical perspectives, then discuss corresponding ethical issues in the context of the church community.

As for methodology, Köstenberger and Jones each produce chapters written from their own perspectives, as do Harrington and Keenan, but by contrast they do not integrate the biblical texts into their discussions through a particular lens. As a whole, their project is seen by some as a useful "handbook that brings together biblical data and scholarly literature" on important contemporary ethical matters, but they do not provide a common foundational framework.[52]

The *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, a recent groundbreaking project, has brought together many experts from the two disciplines.[53] The volume's core editorial team is comprised of renowned Scripture scholars and Christian ethicists who have been relating the Bible and Christian ethics in their own research and writings for some time: Joel Green, Allen Verhey, Charles Cosgrove, and Bruce Birch. Over 230 contributors from various traditions and disciplines (mainly biblical studies and Christian ethics) have provided nearly 500 entries on a broad spectrum of biblical and ethical topics.

According to Green, the project is aimed at providing a reference tool that "will survey the literature and provide an introduction to the ethics of Scripture, . . . survey the relation of Scripture and ethics . . . [, and] provide an account of particular features of the other discipline that are especially relevant to the conversation between disciplines."[54] Despite the labyrinthine situation of bridging the two disciplines, Green hopes to "provide a map that will locate and orient conversations about the relation of Scripture and ethics . . . and [cast] a little light on the path."[55]

I agree with most reviewers that this landmark work is an excellent resource and serves the purpose of filling the niche and "a void in the arena of theological reference, [and] bringing topics of ethical importance into a single volume."[56] Some rightly point out, however, that certain entries in ethics lack a strong scriptural component, or that textual critical analysis or entries on biblical books do not really focus enough on their ethical relevance.[57] Needless to say, this mass collaborative work opens up and encourages further dialogue and interaction between the two disciplines.[58]

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52. David W. Loy, review of *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, by Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, *Concordia Journal* 33 (2007) 411–12, at 412.

53. Joel Green, ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

54. Ibid. 1.

55. Ibid. 2–3.

56. Dennis M. Swanson, review of *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, *Master's Seminary Journal* 23 (2012) 138–40, at 140. See also Robert J. Turner, review of *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, *Stone-Campbell Journal* 16 (2013) 106–7, at 106.

57. See Craig L. Blomberg, review of *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22 (2012) 458–60, at 459.

58. Aaron Perry, review of *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47 (2012) 233–34, at 233.

Third Dimension: Innovation and Beyond

The bridging between biblical studies and Christian ethics is by no means limited to North America. In Europe, British moralist Brian Brock, for example, seeks to reframe the whole discussion of relating Scripture and ethics in terms of the role the Bible plays in God's regeneration of a holy people and their participation in that regeneration. He rightly argues that engagement in the exegetical tradition is central to theology and ethics.[59]

In his latest book, Italian ethicist Giuseppe de Virgilio analyzes the relationship between the Bible and moral theology in the context of interdisciplinary dialogue and the formation of believers' biblical morality.[60] He first addresses the foundation issue upon which the Bible–moral theology relationship builds, that is, its theological and epistemological bases. De Virgilio then analyzes various models of relating the two based on the role the text plays in the elaboration of moral theology. The book is recognized for its richness in both quality and content.

Collaborative Writings

Colleagues in Europe have been actively engaged in collaborative writing for almost a decade now. Italian moral theologian Aristide Fumagalli and prolific biblical scholar Franco Manzi coauthored a volume on biblical hermeneutics and Christian ethics.[61] Fumagalli has written on various scriptural-ethical issues in the past, such as the perspectives of biblical ethics.[62] His work is praiseworthy, going beyond the study of the ethics in Scripture to explore how greater attention to, and familiarity with, Scripture will impact ethical reflection. Moreover, Fumagalli and Manzi's willingness to work collaboratively demonstrates the virtue of intellectual humility.

Beginning in 2009, German scholars launched a multivolume project on *Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik*. In its second volume, the contributors focus on the interrelatedness between morality and its language in the New Testament.[63] They explicitly refer to analytical moral philosophy in order to address certain foundational questions. Although the bridge built here is with philosophy rather than theology, the volume affirms the need and benefit of consistent use of a particular ethical

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59. See Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); his biblical focus is on the Psalms.
60. Giuseppe de Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale: Paradigmi ermeneutici per il dialogo interdisciplinare* (Rome: Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, 2014).
61. Aristide Fumagalli and Franco Manzi, *Attirerò tutti a me: Ermeneutica biblica ed etica Cristiana* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2005).
62. For articles and books written on the Bible and ethics, see Fumagalli's bibliography at http://www.teologiamilano.it/ppd/documenti/documento.jsp?t=ATTACH&id_docente=13&id_allegato=913.
63. Ruben Zimmermann and Jan van der Watt, with Susanne Luther, eds., *Moral Language in the New Testament: The Interrelatedness of Language and Ethics in Early Christian Writings* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

framework/philosophy for interpretation. The fourth volume specifically engages biblical studies with Aristotelian virtue ethics.[64]

Besides this multivolume project by our German colleagues, an international Catholic ethics network that focuses on the world church has also launched a book series. One of its volumes will be on the Bible and ethics.[65] Almost equal numbers of biblical scholars and Catholic theological ethicists from various continents will reflect on three areas of doing biblical ethics: foundational issues, perspectives, and applications. Distinctive is the fact that all the contributors will take into account their specific cultural contexts.

Conferences

Several of the above-mentioned publications originated in academic conferences. Daly's *Christian Biblical Ethics* stems from a continuing seminar on NTE proposed and organized by the Catholic Biblical Association in 1975.[66] In recent decades, both the Society of Biblical Literature and the Society of Christian Ethics have set up units/ interest groups in their annual conferences to provide platforms for conversations between the two fields with a view to subsequent publications.[67] The volume on moral language in the New Testament is likewise the result of a Humboldt-Kolleg conference held at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, in 2008.

These conferences provide another window for assessing advances in biblical ethics within national and international contexts. In 2004, a group of ethicists from Germany and Switzerland organized a symposium at the University of Bern on relating the Bible and ethics: Die Ethik in der Bibel—die Bibel in der Ethik.

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64. Friedrich W. Horn, Ulrich Volp, and Ruben Zimmermann, with Esther Verwold, eds., *Ethische Normen des frühen Christentums: Gut–Leben–Leib–Tugend* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). In 2010, a group of German-speaking ethicists published a collected work on the role of the Bible in Christian theological ethics. However, they simply examined certain biblical motifs and surveyed commonly employed biblical traditions and did not engage in conversation directly with their biblical colleagues. See Marco Hofheinz, Frank Mathwig, and Matthias Zeindler, eds. *Wie kommt die Bibel in die Ethik? Beiträge zu einer Grundfrage theologischer Ethik* (Zurich: Theologischer, 2011).
65. Lúcás Chan and Ronaldo Zacharias, eds., *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, forthcoming).
66. Daly et. al., *Christian Biblical Ethics* 3.
67. These presentations were published in their respective journals. See http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=34&hid=5&sid=768eada4-39f3-417e-9d86-0943f0811de7%40sessionmgr4&bquery=(SO+(society+of+christian+ethics))+and+(scripture)&bdata=JmRiPW9haCZkYj1yZmgmZGI9dmFoJmRiPXJ2aCZkYj1qcGgmZGI9cGhsJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d; and http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=17&hid=5&sid=768eada4-39f3-417e-9d86-0943f0811de7%40sessionmgr4&bquery=(journal+of+biblical+literature))+and+(SU+(ethics))&bdata=JmRiPW9haCZkYj1yZmgmZGI9dmFoJmRiPXJ2aCZkYj1qcGgmZGI9cGhsJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d.

A few months after the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 2008 publication of *The Bible and Morality*, the Accademia Alfonsiana of Italy organized a full-day event to study and respond to this document.[68] Faculty members and students (of both disciplines) from institutions in Rome discussed the document from various perspectives.[69] The concluding remarks of Klemens Stock, the secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, were particularly encouraging. He said that while the Commission had made a joint effort of listening, applying, and actualizing the integration of Scripture and morality, it is for moral theologians to determine whether and to what extent this attempt was successful and useful to Christian moral reflection and action in our contemporary world. Following suit, some of the Alfonsiana professors have continued to examine the relationship between Scripture and morality and presented their research at the second international Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church conference held in Trento in 2010.[70]

That same year, a four-day international conference on the Bible and justice was held at the University of Sheffield in England.[71] While the specific objective was to explore how the Bible can play an active role in addressing contemporary social issues, the overarching purpose was to "promote bridges between the academic field of biblical studies and the various endeavors for a just world."[72]

In London, an international and interdisciplinary conference on the Ten Commandments was held at Trinity College of Oxford University in 2012.[73] Although the conference primarily examined this biblical text through the lenses of history and culture, some discussions engaged the ethics discipline directly, such as its role as moral charter for contemporary society. One contribution traced the Decalogue as the central organizing principle for moral teaching in the three centuries prior to Vatican II; another explored the medieval interpretation of the Ten Commandments in terms of natural law.[74]

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68. For more details, see <http://www.alfonsiana.org/cac/gstudio_1108/gstudio_evento_201108.htm>.

69. The conference papers were published as *Parola di Dio e morale, Studia morala supplemento* 4 (Rome: Alphonsianum, 2009).

70. Their papers were later compiled and published: Viva Vincenzo and Gabriel Witaszek, eds., *Etica teologica nelle correnti della storia: Contributi dall'Accademia alfonsiana al secondo Congresso mondiale dei teologi morali cattolici* (Vatican: Lateran University, 2011).

71. The conference papers were published in Matthew J. Coomber, ed., *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges* (London: Equinox, 2011).

72. James Crossley, "The Bible and Justice Conference," *Earliest Christian History* (blog), http://earliestchristianhistory.blogspot.com/2007/10/bible-and-justice-conference.html.

73. For details on "The Influence of the Decalogue: Historical, Theological and Cultural Perspectives" conference, see http://www.crhb.org/conferences/Decalogue%20programme.pdf.

74. See James F. Keenan, "The Decalogue and the Moral Manual Tradition: From Trent to Vatican II," in *Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence* 216–31; Randall B. Smith, "Thomas Aquinas on the Ten Commandments and the Natural Law," in ibid. 148–68.

Last but not least, in September 2014 in Berlin, an Italian group held a six-day seminar on the Bible and discrimination. Indeed, the choice of Berlin, a city where the memory of discrimination is fresh, highlighted the focus of the conference, which was to explore the theme of discrimination on the basis of religion (persecution of Jews and Christians), gender and sexual identity (homosexuality), and ethnicity (Gypsies). Here, scholars were challenged to reflect on the roles of the Bible in each ethical issue within a postbiblical period.[75]

Thinking Outside the Box

The development and future of biblical ethics need not be limited to integrating Scripture and ethics. Other inter- or multidisciplinary approaches are also proposed. As early as the mid-1990s, for example, French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet examined the individual relationships that sacramental theology has with the Bible and ethics.[76] For him, "they are not two isolated pairs of mutual relationships but . . . there exists integration (albeit tensions) among [the three]."[77] The integration of these disciplines forms the structure of Christian identity by providing a fundamental anthropological structure of cognition–recognition–praxis. In *Go and Do Likewise*, Spohn similarly argues that the New Testament, virtue ethics, and spirituality are interrelated as sources for reflection on Christian discipleship.

Cahill's *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics* further brings together ethics, biblical studies, and systematic theology. Cahill "argues that theology and biblical interpretation are already embedded in and indebted to ethical-political practices and choices."[78] Specifically, biblical narratives of Jesus contour Christian social ethics, while key christological formulations provide its inspiration and reasoning.

The additional fields to be included go beyond spirituality and other theological disciplines. Damjan Ristič explores the interrelationship between the Bible, the psychology of imagination, and moral life.[79] And Richard Hiers expands his research to bring biblical studies, social ethics, and legal theory together, stressing that the underlying values of justice and compassion integral to biblical law can serve as a base for matters of civil law.[80]

75. For details of the Abitare la memoria: Bibbia e discriminazioni conference, see http://www. biblia.org/programmi-2013-2014.html.

76. See Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995) 159–316. See also E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch before God: Essays in Honor of Don E. Saliers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998).

77. Quoted in Chan, *Biblical Ethics* 116.

78. Cahill, "General Editor's Preface," *Global Justice* xi.

79. Damjan Ristič, "The Bible, Imagination, and Moral Life," in *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, ed. Lúcás Chan and Ronaldo Zacharias (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, forthcoming).

80. Richard Hiers, *Justice and Compassion in Biblical Law* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

Finally, bridging biblical studies and Christian ethics inevitably considers ecumenism as does Italian theologian Placido Sgroi. He convincingly argues that an ecumenical reading of Scripture can contribute to better ethical consensus among Christians.[81]

So far I have not explored any discrete innovations and initiatives from our colleagues in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.[82] However, Rasiah Sugirtharajah, a Sri Lankan professor of biblical hermeneutics, deserves mention. Although he does not write on biblical ethics as such, his advocacy for using a postcolonial and Asian/Developing Nations perspective in biblical interpretation can be illuminating for engaging biblical ethics in the Global South.[83] Sugirtharajah's approach raises serious methodological questions that challenge the entire biblical studies enterprise. This approach holds promise by providing a "location for other voices, histories and experiences to be heard" so that new methodology to biblical ethics may emerge.[84]

In a recently published volume based on a conference in Africa, two biblical scholars, Chantal Nsongisa and Paul Béré, reflect on the role of the Bible in doing African theology along the lines described above. Although neither author addresses African moral theology per se, their insights are pertinent to my discussion here. For example, Nsongisa argues that an intrinsic link exists between exegesis and Christian experience (of faith), and insists that it is the task of exegetes to collaborate with other theological disciplines, especially by considering "the hermeneutical task of understanding this experience."[85] Béré suggests that reconnecting exegesis and biblical theology can be helpful to understand and dialogue with theology, including moral theology. He further claims that "exegesis should be in tune with our cultural and social mindset" if a Scripture-based African theology is to be worked out.[86]

The insights of Sugirtharajah, Nsongisa, and Béré point us to another innovation for advancing biblical ethics, namely, engaging in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue.

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81. Placido Sgroi, "Etica e Scrittura: Una prospettiva ecumenica," in *Fondamenti biblici dell'etica cristiana: Prospettive ecumeniche, Quaderni di studi ecumenici* 16 (2007) 13–78. See also Sgroi, *In cammino verso la comunione morale: La riflessione sui problemi etici nel dialogo ecumenico* (Tricase: Youcanprint, 2010). Australian biblical scholar Francis Moloney will also be writing on the Bible and ethics in the context of ecumenism in Chan and Zacharias's forthcoming *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics*.

82. In the forthcoming *Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics*, 12 scholars from Africa, Asia, and Latin America will be writing from their specific ethnic and cultural contexts.

83. See Rasiah Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1999); *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University, 2002).

84. Rasiah Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: The Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (New York: Cambridge University, 2001) 272.

85. Chantal Nsongisa, "The Role of the Scriptures: The New Testament in African Theology," in *Theological Reimagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, ed. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator (Nairobi: Paulines, 2014) 73–82, at 73.

86. Paul Béré, "Scripture Studies and African Theology: A Critical Overview from an OT Perspective," in *Theological Reimagination*, ed. Orobator 63–72, at 69.

Many major religions and traditions search their sacred texts for ethical guidance and teachings, and their ethics are primarily the product of careful interpretation of these texts. Thus, greater attentiveness to the Bible on the part of Christian ethicists leading to a more integrated biblical ethics will provide common ground that can make Christian ethics more understandable to other religious communities and more supportive of interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue on ethics. Developing an interfaith or cross-cultural ethics begins not with analogous generalities but with very specific texts.

For example, Christian ethics is sometimes compared to Confucian ethics from a virtue ethics approach. Still, dialogue between the two (religious) ethical traditions will be more beneficial if our understanding of Christian virtues is grounded in biblical texts (e.g., the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes), just as Confucian virtues are extracted from their sacred texts (e.g., the Four Books and Five Classics). In this way, Christian virtues will be more explicable to their Confucian Chinese audience. A concrete example from a Gospel text and a Confucian text highlights the need for the virtue of humility. An exegetical and hermeneutical reading of Matthew 5:3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven") calls for the virtue of humility toward God. A text from the *Analects* also calls for humility: the Master said, "Meng Chi-fan was not given to boasting. When the army was routed, he stayed in the rear. But on entering the gate, he goaded his horse on, saying, 'I did not lag behind out of presumption. It was simply that my horse refused to go forward.'"[87]

Biblical ethics has gone through significant developments in the past two decades. I hope that by creating a 3D experience, though artificial in its construction and small in scale, those interested in biblical ethics may be able to sense the depth (integration), length (collaboration), and width (innovation and beyond) of these developments so as to acquire a more enhanced, realistic, and comprehensive understanding of the field worldwide, and to see where we need to go in the future.

Author biography

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87. Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Classics, 1979) 6:15.