

An Introduction to Fundamental Moral Theology

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INTRODUCTION

The book and its approach will be conditioned by the material itself. It will attempt a scientific study of the moral activity of Christian life, based on the teaching of Klaus Demmer (1931-2014). This is not philosophical ethics, but a wholly theological treatment.

This treatment presupposes fundamental theology, the Doctrine of God, Christology, Ecclesiology, the Synoptic Gospels and the Pauline Corpus.

This follows a classic scheme.

It firstly entails the **objective ethical state of the Christian**. This examines the Christological base of morality to which hermeneutical reflections and the discussion of the natural human law on the civil and ecclesiastical levels are added.

Secondly, it entails the **subjective ethical act of the Christian**. There is the problem of the Christian conscience, with its Christological and ethical dimensions. There is discussion of the hermeneutical problem in history as well as the development of moral truth. The problem of the moral decision as an individual act is also considered, as well as the concept of sin and conversion.

Formal Structure

The entire study is done in the light of Christological anthropology. One theme will prepare the groundwork for another. Primarily systematic and speculative, this study is concerned with Christian self-understanding, which guides moral decisions and leads to a greater self-knowledge. As a systematic study, there is an internal coherence of all the components. This coherence is not static but flexible in its historical dimension.

The scientific state of moral theology

How can a science of values be called a true science? From a Kantian point of view, one can establish that value judgements may be subjected to

scientific control using practical reason.¹ This is treated in Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Epistemology and Theology*.² It looks at the indispensable qualities of science (cf. Max Weber).³ Pannenberg also observes that exact sciences have the monopoly on scientific control. All sciences come to be measured against exact sciences.

There are four qualities of any science, according to Neo-Kantian thought.

1. A clear object must be determined in a proper science.

The object must be defined, and it must be well distinguished from other objects. This implies a definition of its own scientific competency. There is a necessary and exclusive relationship between the scientific competency and the object. There is abstraction in defining the object.

2. Methodology determines competency.

The methodology is determined by the object. There must be a permanent 'self-criticism' in the search for a proper method.

3. A language interrelated to the method must be created.

This proper language is artificial and differs from the current language which is ambiguous. It makes concepts precise and establishes a permanent definition.

4. The coherence of the system avoids internal contradictions.

Coherence reinforces every science which must be explained in its proper field. All particular objects must have a coherent, logical explanation. It must be in harmony with its own accepted laws.

The Amplified Vision

The classical authors of this theory of science are T. S. Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), F. Lakatos and S. Toulmin.⁴ Three points are generally agreed upon by these writers.

1. **Scientific reason does not exist without some basic pre-suppositions.** All sciences are historically conditioned. Scientific research depends on the multiplicity of choices (i.e. religious, ideological, philosophical, anthropological, or epistemological options). No science is absolutely autonomous. There is only relative autonomy.
2. **Research begins with a particular paradigm or model which contains a certain global/cosmic vision.** A relationship between the paradigm and the concrete results is then established. There is

also an internal bi-polarity and circularity (i.e., the paradigm opens the way to a particular research, which in turn refers to the paradigm).

3. **Every science is an open system.** In a system there are clear concepts and objects. The constitutive elements must constantly be examined and reviewed. There must be a permanent 'self-revision'.

Application to Ethical Science

The fundamental theses are that:

1. The various options of philosophy, anthropology, epistemology, ideology, and religion influence the object of science in an efficient manner. These options condition the scientific rationality. There is an interrelated 'new' between the scientific rationality and the various options.
2. Ethical science is not moderated by exact science but must have an amplified base (i.e. anthropology, epistemology etc.) which reflects the relative autonomy of mankind itself.
3. With this base one can obtain a clearer vision of ethical values.

Application to Theological Science

1. Theological Science is not seen exclusively in the manner of Christian revelation (i.e. moral truth is not equated with revealed truth).
2. Anthropological and historical mediations are used with revelation and reflections on faith.
3. Positive theology shows a bi-polarity between revelation and human comprehension.

Conclusion

This treatment is an attempt to evolve and develop the fundamental elements of the self-understanding of the believing Christian. It is rooted in the historical Jesus. The idea of the scientific method has both anthropological and Christological structures which are interrelated.

FIRST PART

CHAPTER 1

THE CHRIST EVENT AND MORALS

What is the relation between a particular historical event (Christ) and the structure of the moral theme?

How does the historical dimension (narrative) lead us to the systematic dimension (prescription)? This brings into focus the problematic: what is the relation between narration (the Christ Event) and prescription (of moral truth)?

To understand this problem, it must be viewed in the light of our first premises.

1. The problem of scientific rationality.

Scientific rationality contains in itself an unquestionable implication of accessibility and communicability. Any concept which enjoys scientific constitution because of its rationality carries the possibility of being communicable.

Because of its rationality, which is understandable to anyone possessing reason, this concept implies universal communicability. Moral truth claims to be rational truth founded on the practical reason of man. Thus, the fact that anyone possessing reason can understand it implies the universal communicability of moral truth. Systematically, we can say that a moral claim which is founded on practical reason is accessible and also communicable to whomsoever possesses practical reason.

2. Moral rationality must recognize all the premises which enter into rational discourse.

Human reason is conditioned by a multiplicity of premises which condition the material content and structure of practical reason. Moral reason is characterised by its universality. Every person has the capacity to reason in the moral field. But many factors enter into the concrete development of this moral reason: anthropological factors, theological

factors, social factors. This supposes a rule of procedure which is indispensable. The accessibility and communicability of moral reason must be linked with the broadened vision of all the factors which historically condition it. Simple recourse to moral reason is not enough. One is dealing with two problems: i) the universal communicability of moral reason; ii) the historical conditioning of moral reason.

3. What is the contribution of Christian faith, and what is the relevance of the (historical) Christ Event for the content and structure of moral reason?

One can see the universality of moral reason which finds paradigmatic testimony in the tradition of the *ius naturale* in the moral field. Because the power of reason is shared by human beings, there is a common content of moral reason. This assists a community in arriving at moral convictions. Because of the shared nature of practical reason, there is a commonality of moral reason, and therefore of moral convictions. This also implies the possibility of universal communication. For example, the common convictions of respect for the dignity of the individual, or respect for human life, all show common elements which transcend differences of religion, culture, and ideology. Therefore, we see the *ius naturale* as a full form of common communication, notwithstanding many religious, ideological and other differences (cf. the work of Viktor Cathrein for the classical representation of the *ius naturale*).⁵

The historical context of the problematic

There emerges in our time a growing consciousness of moral pluralism. Notwithstanding a basic consensus, there is a deepening of moral sense which is conditioned by religious, anthropological, philosophical and other factors. This illuminates the historical context of the problematic within theological moral reflection.

The tendency of the Second Vatican Council “to follow Christ” is the central idea which guarantees the coherence of the system of moral theology as a scientific discipline. Fritz Tillman and Bernard Häring have been the main proponents of this tendency.⁶

This Christocentric structure is inspired by different factors.

1. A critical reaction against the imposition of the moral sense as the indisputable point of departure, while Biblical data is viewed simply as a subsequent affirmation of already certain data. It reacts against the imposition of the self-evidence of moral reason which views the data of the Sacred Scripture as only secondary proof.
2. The rebirth of exegetical work in the theological field. This is a rediscovery of the Sacred Scripture as well as the primordially of the Christological reflection. There is a rebirth of biblical thought which discovers the richness and originality of the Christological reflection.
3. Philosophy. There is a personalistic, existentialist factor currently affecting Catholic theology. The central idea of following Christ as a personal act is that man's actions are directed by relation to the historical Jesus. It has a vocational aspect and this gives rise to all the criteria and parameters of Christian moral reason.

This tendency is clearly discernible in the document *Optatam Totius* # 16: "Moral Theology: its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by Scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world."⁷

There are some deficiencies, however.

1. The model displays a certain formal and material Biblicism. This is an aspect which has the unfounded prior expectation of the response to a question.
2. Here emerges a problem, notwithstanding the fact that we wish to follow this model: the Sacred Scriptures and the Christ Event (because of their particularity), cannot always give immediate responses to current moral questions. There must be a sustained hermeneutical reflection which recognizes the historical context of the Sacred Scriptures and the particular situation present today from which questions will arise. This is the problem of a mediating hermeneutic.
3. The necessity of overcoming this Biblicism is affirmed in the Sacred Scripture itself.

The Relation of Christology and Moral Theology

Narrative Christology

There is need for hermeneutical reflection. What in the field of narrative Christology is the actual moral teaching of Christ, underlying the interpretation of it as reflected upon and thought out by the primitive community? We begin to answer the question by first considering the problem of the Torah. We examine its historical development, and the situation of the Christian who confronts the Mosaic Law.

Deuteronomy 5:17-20 demonstrates the continuity of the teaching of Jesus with the preceding history of the Old Testament: "Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets..." (Matthew 5:17).

¹⁷Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.¹⁸For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.¹⁹Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Old Testament Law is now the property of the Christian community to whom is attributed the authentic interpretation of the Law of the Old Testament. The Torah passes from the competence of the Synagogue to the early Christian community and the Church.

There are two places in the Old Testament which illustrate the tie between the theology of the Law and the theology of history.

1) **Deuteronomy 5:6**: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The beginning of the Decalogue, together with the self-introduction of YHWH confirms his providence, his dominion over the People of the Old Testament. So, the theology of the Law is part of the theology of history, a history which reflects the salvific providence of YHWH toward his Chosen People.

2) **Exodus 3:14**: "God said to Moses, 'I AM who I AM,' and he said, 'Say to the People of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'."

This is not a metaphysical self-definition of God, but it is an affirmation that God acts and works efficiently in the history of his own people.

YHWH is the one who is present in providence and salvific closeness in the course of their history.

When one speaks of a theology of history, one must view history as theophany. YHWH is translucent in history, working effectively for the good of his people. This theology of history transforms our approach to the theology of law.

The Decalogue, which Jesus Christ confirmed, must be interpreted in the light of the Christ Event. History as theophany finds its apex in history as Christophany. The Law has its fulfilment in the Christ Event.

The antithesis is in Matthew 5:21-46.

Concerning Anger

²¹ You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; ²⁶ truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

Concerning Adultery

²⁷ You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Concerning Divorce

³¹ It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Concerning Oaths

³³ Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

Concerning Retaliation

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;⁴⁰ and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well;⁴¹ and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁴² Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

Love for Enemies

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

This passage is perhaps a redactional addition of the early Christian community. It makes a central point. In these antitheses we must discern the originality of Jesus' contribution and that which properly pertains to Christian morals. Each antithesis is preceded by a critical affirmation, which then signals the contra-position of the morality of the Scribes and Pharisees.

This use of antithesis by Jesus signals a criticism of the interpretation of the Torah by presenting a better justice as a means for entering the Kingdom. This is modelled on the entrance into the Promised Land (cf. Deuteronomy 4:1; Psalm 14; Psalm 150), and is applied to the Christ Event.

Deuteronomy 4

4 And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, gives you.² You shall

not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

Psalm 14

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds,
there is none that does good.

² The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
to see if there are any that act wisely,
that seek after God.

³ They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt;
there is none that does good,
no, not one.

⁴ Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the LORD?

⁵ There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the generation of the righteous.

⁶ You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the LORD is his refuge.

⁷ O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion!
When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad.

Psalm 150

¹ Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!
² Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his exceeding greatness!
³ Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
⁴ Praise him with timbrel and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
⁵ Praise him with sounding cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

A formal structuring or stylistic mode is used in the redaction of these antitheses.

Each clearly has two members: a first part representing Old Testament morality begins with the affirmation: “You have heard it said....” This itself was a sign of a precise moral choice. The second part continues with “But I say to you....” This is not only contraposed to the first, but teaches a better justice and reveals the new authority of Jesus to interpret the salvific will of YHWH.

Exegetes have frequently observed that the first member is a stylization of Old Testament morality. This stylistic approach has an evident purpose, namely a contraposition to the ‘New’ Law, and is presented in clear juridical terms: as apodictic or casuistic law. This formulation in juridical terms is in line with the theology of the Covenant in so much as the covenant is a juridical reality. It is profoundly theological.

The purpose of this juridical formulation is to shed light on the function of the Torah

The Torah as parallel to the law gives it a finality which is profoundly defensive. It is considered as the foundation, bulwark and rock of the salvific will of YHWH. The Torah stands as a rock against the threat of evil.

A new view of the theology of history enters here. It is a history of conflict between good and evil. Torah functions as the prime depository of good, as protection against evil. The central point here is that the Law protects a free space in which the doing of good works is possible. This space must be protected against the permanent aggression of evil, by a vision of the Torah in a history of conflict.

A central point: Jesus Christ is found near to Pharisaic thought regarding the Law

However, in Pharisaic thought there is a theologoumenon which is characterized by theology of law and theology of history. The Law is viewed as a prophetic force in history. The strict observation of this law is the focal point by which YHWH protects his people. Thus, it is that which moves history to its fulfilment in salvation. In this version of the Law as bulwark, the Christ Event is important, for the Law finds its definitive

fulfilment in Jesus.

The function of the Law as bulwark points to an internal problem in the Law. Jesus sheds light on the problem by his approach to casuistry. In Judaic tradition, casuistry serves a double function. It tries to overcome the abstractions of the law through its application in practical terms (i.e., by particularization).

The second function of the Law is that of implying in itself an existential aspect. This shows the internal dilemma of the Law. Casuistry tries to establish limits for moral living. An example of this casuistic establishment of limits is found in Matthew 18:21: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" The number seven was the established number of times that reconciliation had to be offered. After the seventh time, the Law permitted the use of other means (e.g., violent response). The condoned use of violence was an acknowledgement of the reality of evil in the world. Legal casuistry circumscribes the legitimate application of violence. Jesus' answer to this question implicitly asserts the ineffectiveness of the casuistic response (Matthew 18:22: "I do not say to you seven times but seventy times seven"). Jesus' response suggests that Peter's question (and the casuistic interpretation) is absurd because it ignores the better justice of the Messianic Kingdom.

A conclusion emerges: the problem of the immanent dilemma of the Law itself. On the one hand, the Law is a bastion, a fortress against the permanent aggression of evil. It is a space of freedom in which good can work for positive results. On the other hand, however, the Law always remains a line of defence which attempts to contain and to control evil, but which cannot radically overcome the efficacy of evil.

This dilemma is clearly perceived in the casuistry of the Old Testament. Casuistry attempts to particularize the abstractions of the Law to particular, concrete situations. It also defines the limits of moral duty and obligations. In defining its lines of demarcation, casuistry does not account for all the circumstances of the human condition. Casuistry tries to indicate limits within which one finds freedom in this fallen world. However, this freedom is not found in realizing the good without some limits. Rather it is always conditioned by aggression against evil, and as a result, violence is inevitable. One needs to condescend to the level of evil and adapt one's actions to respond to evil. Violence is born of injustice. This is seen, for example, in the case of self-defence. One arises to fight against injustice.

Evangelical radicalism, on the other hand, attempts to restrict and negate this vicious circularity and constriction in which the freedom of the individual is found. The anti-Pharisaic approach attempts to overcome these features in the practice of the Mosaic Law. This becomes the core of Jesus' polemic. The Law of the Old Testament and its practice contain this casuistic dilemma. Jesus, with a new authority, looks at this dilemma in a radical manner. He attacks this fundamental weakness in the Old Testament Law. In looking at the central problem in the light of exegetical literature, there are two classes of antitheses which develop, both of which have different purposes.

1. The Primary Antitheses (Matthew 5: 20-38)

There is a radicalization of the Torah which results in a process of interiorization. There is a passage from the written text of the Law to an interior motivation from the heart. Many examples of this interiorization can be found in Matthew 5:20-38. One example is the commandment "Thou shall not kill". With Jesus' teaching, the interior motivation underlying the command becomes primary and one must rid oneself of anger or insults of one's brother before approaching the altar.

Those primary antitheses are a confirmation of the Torah, and the principal line of Torah is defended against any external legalism. The movement towards the heart and internal motivation emerges. But these primary antitheses are only a preparation for the secondary antitheses.

2. The Secondary Antitheses (Matthew 5: 38-48)

This contains within itself both the newness and the heart of Jesus' teaching and, as such, it is explosive material. There is a stylization of the Old Testament Law to characterize the dilemma of the Old Testament. "You have heard that it was said...hate your enemy" (Matthew 5:43). This passage is not found in the Old Testament but is meant to show the radicalism of Jesus' teaching.

Against this stylization, Jesus places his new demands for unconditioned and unlimited love of one's neighbour (including enemies). Enemy here refers to any and every class of enemies possible, i.e., national, personal, religious etc.

This love (unconditioned and without limit) is illustrated at the level of a new casuistry. It is formulated by the means of a prophetic literary trope, namely **hyperbole**. This stylized exaggeration puts into focus its objective.

Some examples of this are evident,

- Mt 5:39 “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”.
- Mt 5:10 “...and if anyone would see you and take your coat, let him take your cloak as well”.

Thus, there is a complete reorienting of the immanent dynamics of thought in the Old Testament. Jesus is emphasizing the importance of not resisting evil. This is contrary to the Old Testament use of law as a fortress and permanent defence against evil.

The casuistry of the Old Testament presumes the inevitability of defence against evil. The new casuistry of Jesus finds itself encountering evil in an attempt to overcome the limits placed by the constriction of evil. Thus, a new dynamic arises: a better justice. This new justice tries to overcome the immanent dilemma of the Old Testament Law. This is the radical point of change in the message and thought of Jesus.

There are some illustrations of this new dynamic.

At the base of the teaching of Jesus is found a classic problem of Old Testament thought. This is the *Lex Talionis*: the Law of Retaliation (“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20, Deut 19:21 cf. Mt 5:38). This law went through an evolution and purification. It is not simply a morality of vengeance or battle. Rather one sees the necessity to contain one’s personal vendetta. There was a protection against frenzied uncontrolled vengeance.

It became an attempt to humanize juridical practice and penal law. The punishment inflicted was measured by the degree of the crime. The punishment must be in strict connection with the transgression of the law where the restitution befits the crime.

Thus, in the concept of the *Lex Talionis* there is a paradigm in the Old Testament to control evil and contain restitution within certain limits. This is seen in the Old Testament in the Prophets Jeremiah (31:31) and Ezekiel (20:36; 22:28). Jesus meets all this preceding history and serves as its fulfilment.

Jeremiah 31:31

³¹ Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Ezekiel 20:36

³⁶ As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 22:28

²⁸ And her prophets have daubed for them with whitewash, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken.

The Beatitudes shed light on the meaning of the better justice of Jesus (Matthew 5:3-13)

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

The style derives from that found in Wisdom Literature. The content and meaning of the Beatitudes are now based on the novelty of the Kingdom. They are a proclamation of the reality of the Messianic Kingdom which surpasses the ethics of the Old Testament. This reality received its primary significance from the First Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. This is the hermeneutical key to all the rest. There is a reference here to the poor of the Old Testament (Isaiah 14:32 “the poor of his people shall trust”; 66:1 “to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit”; Zechariah 11:11 “the poor of the flock waited on me”). But the poverty of the Old Testament is given a new interpretation by Jesus.

‘Poor’ does not refer simply to an economic social poverty. In fact, in the Prophets, it refers to those who are subject to social injustice. But that is not all. The ‘poor one’ is also a reference to him who puts his faith in the justice promised by YHWH (*anawim*). The poor are those who know the unlimited need of the richness and experience of God.

In Matthew one reads “poor in spirit”. This is a confirmation of the above-mentioned concept of poverty. It also teaches that this is the condition for a disciple of Jesus. This will be the reality in which the true disciple of Jesus finds himself. It is not a norm of obliteration but a description of the disciple’s condition.

The New Commandment synthesizes in itself all that has been said. Mt 5:44 “But I say to you: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you”. In Moral Theology this commandment is defined as the sum and synthesis of Christian morality. It is the durable nucleus of the evangelical message.

Motivation

One is called to fulfil this New Commandment. It is in reference to the Heavenly Father and his providence in raining down upon the just and the unjust alike, as he searches for mankind. This is not a new theme, but a familiar one from Wisdom Literature. The significance is new, however, in that it enters into the context of the antithesis. The motivation does not contain within itself an element of resignation. Rather it represents the significance of ‘superseding the limits’.

So this motivation finishes with a fundamental exhortation: “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48 cf. Lev 19:1 “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You

shall be holy for I the LORD your God am holy”). This is the key in that the message of Jesus opens up access to the Father. It is the summation of Christian morality. However, it is not enough to speak of moral theology and the new commandment in and of themselves. They must be seen in the light of the antitheses and the Beatitudes.

Speculative Christology

In Synoptic Theology there is no question about the practicability of this radical behaviour as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. But in Matthew 18:15 Jesus instructs: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone...”

Here we have the first elements of domestication of this radicalism in the primitive community. With a hierarchy of procedure to take when injustice is committed against a brother in the community, here we find traces of Old Testament casuistry. But ultimately, if he does not listen, treat him as a sinner or a publican.

The significance of the procedure must be distinguished from the Old Testament thought. In the New Testament, there is never a definitive statement, nor are there limits set. Rather there are always moves towards reconciliation and peace. There are no other domestications of evangelical radicalism.⁸

The moral message of Jesus found in other texts (Matthew 6:19; 7:1; 7:13)

6:19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal,

7:1 Judge not that you be not judged,

7:13 Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

1. Jesus assumes some elements from the Wisdom Tradition. An example of this is Jesus' occasional use of proverbs (e.g., Mt 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged”).
2. Jesus frequently employed parables to communicate his moral message (e.g., Lk 10:39-37 The Good Samaritan).

3. Jesus' conduct of life. He programmatically sought communion with sinners (unlike the Pharisees who increase the distance). Throughout his entire existence, he introduces the reality of the Messianic Reign in the midst of evil in the world.

The symbolic gestures of Jesus point to the Messianic Kingdom realized in his very self.

In Matthew and Mark (especially Mark 2:9 where Jesus cured the man's withered hand) the healings are done on the Sabbath. The Jewish Sabbath was the core of the Law and the celebration of a religious and political identity in participation with the Torah. The Sabbath observance was identical to 'spiritual circumcision'.

The object of Jesus' teaching was the Torah itself. The problem centres on the relation of the Jewish tradition (the place of the Law) and the institution of the new Messianic Reign which is the culmination of the Old Testament. Disrupting tradition, the Sabbath healings take on a symbolic element in that they strike the Old Covenant and institute the new Messianic Reign.

1. A first element here is that Christian morality centres upon this point.
2. We see Christian morality arising out of the continuity from the traditions of the Law and the Synagogue to the competence of the Christian community. Matthew attempts to re-vindicate the proper object of the Law, thereby affirming continuity with Tradition.
3. The anti-Pharisaic attack is not always directed towards a legalism, but to something deeper: the situation in which we find the Law. The Law is considered a way of life bonded to the promises of YHWH. But the problem remains in that strict observance of the Law does not overcome the reality of evil. This is the secondary antithesis: the novelty of the Messianic Reign.

Practicability

The problem of practicability does not emerge in the Synoptic Gospels. Therefore, one can proceed to ask how the early Christian community lived the evangelical radicalism. How did the early community approach evangelical radicalism in the practical formation of its social life? This problem was faced by the early community on three different levels: