WHY SCRIPTURE SCHOLARS AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICISTS NEED ONE ANOTHER
Exegeting and Interpreting the Beatitudes as a Scripted Script for Ethical Living

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Throughout this entire work I have been advocating for a more integrated approach for doing Scripture-based Christian theological ethics. For a variety of reasons – from the growing complexities of each field to the lack of communication and competency in the other's field to the problems in interdisciplinary exercise – Scripture scholars do not use much ethical theory, while theological ethicists do little actual exegesis.

Despite these difficulties, contemporary scholars from both fields agree that a better integration and cooperation between biblical studies and moral theology is much needed. Since the 1980s we began to see different attempts among these scholars to better bridge Scripture with Christian ethics and to address the relationship between the two. In my own attempt to propose a more integrated approach to scriptural ethics, I believe that only through careful observation of the contributions and limitations of these scholars that

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we can identify specific methodological insights that will rightfully shape the future of a Scripture-based ethics. Thus, this work begins with a review of the recent development by both biblical scholars and Christian ethicists in their attempts to construct an integrated scriptural ethics.

Three Scripture scholars from Europe and North America are important to examine: Wolfgang Schrage, Richard Hays and Frank Matera. Apart from these three major New Testament ethics scholars, feminist and non-western scripture scholars also attempt to study ethics in Scripture from their specific context and perspective. Two of them to be reviewed are Sandra Schneiders and Rasiah Sugirtharajah. In the case of theological ethics, I similarly look at the works of some major Christian ethicists who are representatives of their own contexts and perspectives, namely, post Vatican II manualist Bernhard Häring, liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, and the late Catholic ethicist William Spohn.

Among the works of contemporary biblical scholars we note a couple of contributions to and signs of methodological development. First and foremost, their exegetical task goes beyond traditional critical methods and attends to even the philosophical/ethical theory behind the text. They also show greater appreciation of the task of hermeneutics in their works. However, their hermeneutical and ethical claims are inadequate and unconvincing, for these claims are not grounded in any sustaining, sound ethical theory.

Christian ethicists likewise have offered certain methodological insights. They advance the field of Scripture-based ethics by not simply using Scripture but also attempting to understand the original meanings of the texts employed. Yet, their attempts are not without problems, especially regarding their exegesis that is either superficial or selective. Subsequently, they are still concerned more about interpreting the text's meaning for contemporary world than with first examining its original meaning to see if the text can be rightly employed.

In both cases, we can conclude that they still have either stressed the importance of the scriptural text or the importance of ethical hermeneutics. This lack of balance could lead to incomplete, inconsistent, or even incorrect interpretation of the text for to date's readers. I am thus convinced that a balanced view of Scripture as, using Allen Verhey's terminology, 'scripted' *and* 'script' seems to be the right direction toward constructing a more integrated scriptural

ethics:[1] As 'script', it means that Scripture is like a script to be performed by an actor and the performance itself becomes the interpretation of the script. In the context of a Christian community, Scripture directs us to what is repeatedly performed and practised, especially in the community's worship and ethics. Thus its focal point lies on the performance/practices and characters of the community. As 'scripted,' it means that Scripture is a written text produced at a particular time by certain writers; it is an object to the readers and its focal point is the text itself.

This conviction is shared by some scholars from both disciplines whose works have demonstrated what this new direction could be. Their advancement also reveals that the methodological goal that I am advocating is attainable. Thus, in the last chapter of the first part, I explore the works of Scripture scholar Richard Burridge and ethicist Allen Verhey, who seem to have demonstrated certain balance in their own investigations and point in the right direction in constructing a more integrated scriptural ethics that attends to *both* the importance of the text and the hermeneutics of ethics.

Still, writing as a Catholic theological ethicist who does ethics by working with scriptural texts, I further my advocacy in concrete by suggesting a particular model for the construction. Plainly speaking, I take virtue ethics as a worthy hermeneutical tool for doing Scripture-based ethics. It has several unique characteristics that can complement other principle-based ethical theories, such as its teleological structure and those key yields of virtue that attend to not just the character formation and identity of individuals but also that of the moral community. Moreover, some pioneer Christian virtue ethicists have further convinced us that a Christian adoption of virtue ethics is possible – there exists theological links that help translate virtue theory's philosophical language into Christian ones.

Apart from those theological links, there is also a strong biblical link between the two: Scripture exposes us to and advocates for certain virtues, forms virtues, shapes moral character and identity, provides exemplary models, and reforms the faith community. Indeed, this explicit biblical link provides a very helpful argument for the virtue theory's suitability as the hermeneutical tool in our construction of a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics.

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[1]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, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 19-25.

Subsequently, after presenting the hermeneutical tool, I move on to consolidate my argument with a concrete illustration: Treating the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 as both 'scripted' and 'script.' In other words, I would offer both exegesis and interpretation of the text. In fact, by treating the Beatitudes as 'scripted,' we can be benefited by acquiring more accurate understanding of the original meanings of each of the macarisms and their corresponding eschatological blessings. We also gain certain overlooked/hidden insights that help guide our subsequent hermeneutics in the right direction. Specifically, I note that the entire Beatitudes bears an explicit Jewish influence; its macarisms form a tightly integrated and sophisticated whole; it depicts a radical ethical demand of the disciples; it highlights the need of God's grace and providence; and it has a communal quality. As a whole, it makes a substantial difference to the hermeneutical task that follows.

In the subsequent interpretation of the Beatitudes through the hermeneutics of virtue ethics for Christian moral living, I identify a new set of core virtues (and corresponding practices) that is not just for personal formation but also for the formation of the community, and effects social change: Humility, solidarity, meekness, obedience in our relation with God, mercy and charity, integrity and truthfulness, just peacemaking, fortitude, and gratitude toward God.

Whenever we see conceptual arguments endorsing one methodology over another, we are challenged to concretely show how it leads to actual benefits and improvements. Our twofold treatment of the Beatitudes as 'scripted' and 'script' only partially responds to this challenge. Thus, I conclude this work by bringing its fruits forward. In particular, I turn to my own Confucian Chinese culture and explore the possible reception of the Beatitudes and its virtues by the Confucian tradition. It is because – apart from the general view that Confucian ethics can be virtue ethics – methodologically speaking, Confucianism goes to the texts in its search of ethical teachings, that is, Confucian ethics is primarily the fruit of careful interpretation of their 'sacred' texts. Now that I have been arguing for greater attentiveness to the scriptural text throughout my advocacy for a more integrated Scripture-based Christian ethics, common grounds are thus created that can be helpful to make Christian ethics more explicable to Confucian society and more supportive of cross-cultural dialogue with Confucian ethics, for doing a cross-cultural ethics as such begins not with analogous generalities but very specific texts, and needs to be both text-based and interpretative.

Therefore, by way of demonstration, I explore how the Beatitudes as 'scripted script' can be compared to the virtues of the Confucian

tradition, and meaningful to its Confucian Chinese audience. By turning to the texts of the Confucian tradition and extracting their moral virtues I note that they match those of the Beatitudes in many positive areas. Still, dissimilarities in terms of specific contents and fundamental conceptions are also recognized. There exists a complex relationship between these findings and we have to take precautions and at times re-think our own presuppositions in doing cross-cultural ethics.

In sum, I am convinced that this comparative exercise can provide an opportunity to demonstrate the possible benefit resulting from the methodological shift into a more integrated scriptural ethics – one that is more capable of cross-cultural exchange. Being a Catholic theological ethicist who does ethics by working with Scripture and engage in cross-cultural dialogue within a Confucian context, I hope that this work does not only advocate further advancements in the field of Scripture-based Christian ethics within the Christian tradition but also encourages cross-cultural exchange with other ethical systems.