VIRTUE ETHICS IN THE PRIMARY-THEOLOGICAL VISION OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICES, NARRATIVES AND TRADITION

Readings in Christian Ethics

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Introduction

The decades before and after the turn of the last millennium have been full of political and philosophical moral challenges. In fact, ethics as such has been under question in the world of change. This paper argues that the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has helped to bring a paradigm-shift into philosophical thinking, providing a new virtue-ethical perspective with which to look at traditions, narratives, practices and virtues as an interconnected whole. At the same time Christian ethicists, such as John Howard Yoder and James William McClendon, Jr., have re-confirmed their virtue-ethical argumentation deriving from their own historical tradition, narrative and practices of communities after the radical reformation. The following pages develop a trialogue (three way dialogue) between MacIntyre, Yoder and McClendon in order to create a fresh, virtue-ethical perspective for an examination of Christian communal practices in the development of a sense of virtue and a way of life.

1. On Virtue Ethics: Alasdair MacIntyre

This section highlights the role of MacIntyre and his philosophical perspective for *telos*-oriented virtue ethics in terms of traditions, narratives, practices and virtues. MacIntyre criticised the "Enlightenment Project," culminating in the 20th century when an international agreement was signed for humankind to follow a universal human codex of tradition-free *ought* and *ought not* principles.[1] Although the modern idea of universal moral law was born in the long-lasting pain of wars of both a political and philosophical nature,[2] the "Project" of modernity faced ultimately one critical question: Is there a safe *Noah's Ark* against the dangerous flood of ideologies or just another baneful *Titanic* to

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1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 2. See also the critique by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," in *Philosophy*, 1958, pp. 1-19.

2 Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, argues that the Enlightenment project was to conclude endless European wars by universal non-religious morality.

encounter the iceberg of traditions greater than imagined?

1.1. Ethics following MacIntyre

Modern ethics relies on a historical understanding of moral law.[3] Ethics in terms of virtues of character and virtuous communities in the Aristotelian sense was forgotten. Christian ethicists, like Yoder, McClendon, Stanley Hauerwas and others, began to research virtue as such and narrative virtue ethics as a relevant school for ethical thought.[4] MacIntyre, in publishing his *After Virtue*,[5] challenged the field of moral philosophy[6]. He argued that the modern "Enlightenment Project" depersonalised ethics. Rival modern theories claimed to be universal, but contradicted each other rationally.[7] Modern moral discourse was detached from the context of life.[8] Modern moral philosophy borrowed attractive ethical concepts like good, justice and duty from different

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3 Anscombe, "Modern," for instance, argued following her tutor Ludwig Wittgenstein that moral concepts, like duty or obligation, cannot apply meaningfully in the absence of a divine lawgiver.

4 "There has been a renewal of attention to the language of virtue. This is one of the major changes in the form of the vocation of Christian ethics," wrote John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: varieties of religious pacifism*, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1971, p. 130. See also: John Howard Yoder, *Peace without eschatology?* Scottdale, Pa.: A Concern Reprint, 1967; John Howard Yoder, *The original revolution: essays on Christian pacifism.* Impressum Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971; John Howard Yoder, *Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster.* Grand Rapids, Mi.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972; James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology. How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974; James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious* Convictions, Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975; Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue. Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*, Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1974; Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character. Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

5 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981. Second edition published in 1984, third in 2007.

6 See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990; *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues. The Annual Aquinas Lecture*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1990; *Marxism and Christianity*, London: Duckworth, 2nd ed., 1995; *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago: Open Court, 1999; *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1*, Cambridge University Press, 2006; *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Volume 2*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

7 For emotivism as "preference" see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, pp. 11-12.

8 Ibid.

traditions, but did not point to a socially embodied moral life. MacIntyre saw his task was to be more than critical. His meta-ethical discourse explored the historical conditions of moral life and ethical thought. Since traditions derive their moral logic from their own traditional concept of *telos* as the ultimate aim of life, any kind of abstract approach to morality ends up with a *telos-free* society questioning its universalised principles, rules and regulations. The modern world creates a moral vacuum. Without moral objectivity there are two options: the Nietzschean will-to-power ethics or Aristotelian virtue ethics. "There is no third alternative," claims MacIntyre.[9]

When the premodern ethics of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas were the *telos*-oriented ethics of being, ethicists developed an ethics of action. MacIntyre argues that merely searching for the right kind of action would not lead people in the right direction. Aristotle was seeking virtue, his human beings were *teleological* beings, human life aimed at a good end. The Aristotelian *telos* of human life was linked with certain social relationships connecting to the *eudaimonia*,[10] MacIntyre showed how a *telos* forms a moral vision for social life in the context of *practices*, *narratives*, *virtues* and *traditions*. Such concepts, in the MacIntyrean sense, could be defined only in terms of each other. So he extends the Aristotelian sense of virtue to his own "best account so far."[11] The sections that follow explore the virtuous concepts of MacIntyre.

1.2. Ethics of virtue in terms of MacIntyrean practice, narrative, tradition and *telos*

For the current paper and its argument there are four important terms in MacIntyre's virtue ethics. First, his concept of *practice*.

> By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[12]

Brad Kallenberg points to the typically lengthy MacIntyrean definition.[13] First, practices

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9 Ibid, p. 118.

10 It is "the state of being well and doing well in being well, of man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine." Ibid, p. 148.

11 MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," p. 141.

12 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, p. 187.

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are socially established and cooperative human activities, like medicine or music, which aim at a common goal. Second, practices have goods internal to the activity. Thus choir singing might bring joy to the participants at that activity. Third, practices have standards of excellence without which goods cannot be fully achieved. The joy of singing is in having sung well, and the excellence of singing well is defined by the historical community of practitioners. Finally, practices are systematically extended. The standards grow in time. Who would go to a dentist who does his practice "well" with a technique used in the 19th century? A practice may become an entire tradition in itself. Contemporary medicine and science have developed their own epistemology, authoritative texts, structured communities and institutions, and even their own history. Now, virtues are connected to practices as qualities cultivated by striving for excellence in those practices. MacIntyre defines virtue as "an acquired human quality, the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."[14]

Another key term is *narrative*. Human behaviour derives its meaning from contextual stories. MacIntyre reasons that if human actions are intelligible only with respect to the stories that contextualise intentions, then that which unifies actions into sequences and sequences into a continuous whole is the story of one's life.[15] The narrative provides unity to human life in his or her identity. The self has continuity in the course of time because it has played the single and central character in a particular story – the narrative of a person's life. One's life as a whole makes sense when the life-story is told: "For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity."[16] Hence, the MacIntyrean virtues are those qualities that assist a person in the extension of his or her story, and by extrapolation, the extension of the story of his or her community or communities, leading directly to the concept of tradition.

Tradition for MacIntyre is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition."[17] This means, first, a logical extension of the concept of narrative. As persons are narratively extended throughout their life-span, communities are "historically extended" as traditions in the course of human history. Second, traditions are "socially embodied," lived out only in communities who are bound to the same authoritative voice or text.[18] Communal life embodies a particular tradition's *persona* in time and space by a particular generation of

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Brad Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue," in Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues & Practices in the Christian tradition. Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997, pp. 21-22.

14 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, p. 191.

15 See: Kallenberg, *The Master*, p. 23.

16 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, p. 221.

17 Ibid, p. 222.

18 See chapter 18 in MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*

the same tradition. Third, traditions are necessarily long-standing "arguments" for a wider, narratively extended *telos*-oriented historical communal life. MacIntyre understands *tradition* as:

> an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.[19]

Ethical argumentation is always connected to a particular moral tradition, but some modernists, supposing universal, objective, traditionless ethics, have left it with only fragments of conflicting moral traditions. Post-modern philosophers and ethicists need to re-establish the goal or meaning of life towards which ethics is directed. But meaning can be established only in the context of a moral tradition, advocating a virtuous character. Traditions may vary and argue against each other.[20] Since "we are never in a position to claim that now we possess the truth or now we are fully rational,"[21] MacIntyre does not claim superiority either:

> The most that we can claim is that this is the best account which anyone has been able to give so far, and that our beliefs about what the marks of "a best account so far" are will themselves change in what are at present unpredictable ways. Philosophers have often been prepared to acknowledge this historical character in respect of scientific theories; but they have usually wanted to exempt their own thinking from the same historicity...[22]

Whereas "the individual may come to recognise the possibility of systematically different possibilities of interpretation, of the existence of alternative and rival schemata which yield mutually incompatible accounts of what is going on around him," a form of epistemological crisis would appear along with a crisis in human relationships.[23]

> When an epistemological crisis is resolved, it is by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agent to understand *both* how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs and how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them. The narrative in terms of which he or she at first understood and ordered experiences is itself made into the subject of an enlarged narrative. The agent has come to understand how the criteria of truth and understanding must be reformulated.[24]

Now, becoming "epistemologically self-conscious" would imply two conclusions:

> the first is that his new forms of understanding may themselves in turn come to be put in

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19 Ibid, p. 12.

20 MacIntyre, *Epistemological Crises*, pp. 138-157.

21 Ibid, p. 141.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, pp. 139-140.

24 Ibid.

> question at any time; the second is that because in such crises the criteria of truth, intelligibility, and rationality may always themselves be put in question.[25]

MacIntyre's life-story underwent a major change when he left his Marxist point of view for the Aristotelian-Christian one.[26] Now it must be noted that the MacIntyrean practice-oriented virtue-ethical understanding of traditions and narratives can be questioned, too.

1.3. Powerful practices and the virtuous life

MacIntyre's tradition-focussed moral theory has encountered a critique.[27] The following section shows that the practices of power are the issue of this questioning, and the response may not come from MacIntyre himself or from "traditionless traditions," but from the alternative tradition of the Anabaptist faith.

Susan Moller Okin points that "there is clearly a major "justice crisis" in contemporary society arising from issues of gender,"[28] and the MacIntyrean tradition-bound virtue ethics would not satisfy those outside of the virtuous "good life for man" (slaves, for instance, or women and children). She argues that "there is something fundamentally incoherent about the traditions themselves and that she will have to look elsewhere for answers to questions about justice and rationality."[29] Similarly, Michel Foucault would be pessimistic about the MacIntyrean approach to deriving ethics from the tradition of social practices.[30] Deriving from Nietzsche's critique of the totalitarianism of Christianity as the preserver of a moral consensus in Western human sciences, Foucault argued that socially accepted ideals in a particular culture along with their practices cannot be trusted.[31]

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25 Ibid, p. 141.

26 See Alasdair MacIntyre, "An Interview with Giovanna Borradori," in Knight, Kelvin, ed., *The MacIntyre Reader,* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998, pp. 255-266.

27 See, for instance, Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family.* New York: Basic Books, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1989; John Horton and Susan Mendus, ed., *After MacIntyre. Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

28 Ibid, p. 7.

29 Ibid, p. 60.

30 Michel Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed., trans. by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

31 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge, 1970.

Philosophers have to examine and change the regimes of power and to detach "the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time," argues Foucault.[32] Nancey Murphy can see how Foucault and MacIntyre would "both regard knowledge as originating from social practices," as the latter has specifically argued, but she suggests that “whereas MacIntyre takes such practices to aim intrinsically at truth, Foucault concentrates on practices of social control and aims to show how they distort human knowledge."[33]

Christian ethicists, like McClendon, Glen Stassen and David Gushee, have criticised the Macintyrean tradition-based virtue-ethical understanding "for setting practices as always good, over against institutions as always corrupting."[34] While MacIntyre sheds positive light on practices and the virtues derived from them, McClendon and others point out as well possible vices, inherent in the powerful practices.[35] If there are only powerful practices that define, form and develop traditions, virtues and vices may both play mixed roles in historical traditions. While certain practices of power can become a type of "authoritative text," the tradition as well as its ability to reflect upon moral life can have vicious deceptions. The very process of argumentation in moral discourse about the virtuous human life may be questioned. Okin notes that the Christian tradition accepted enslaving men and women from Africa, or has depreciated the dignity of women and children.[36] Yet, the very same tradition ruled out those practices. Murphy affirms that "an intriguing consequence of MacIntyre's historico-philosophical research is the hint that epistemological positions, such as theories of truth, are, in fact, dependent on theological accounts of reality."[37]

> As a current competitor to the Nietzschean view that all moralities need to be unmasked to reveal the interests behind them, MacIntyre offers his renewed version of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. Thus, he sees two live options for the future of academia: Thomas or Nietzsche. I, however, see three. I suggest that MacIntyre's account is, in a certain respect, typically Catholic, while the Genealogical tradition is in the line of descent from Augustine to the mainline Reformers. The fact that these two options can be associated with major theological positions suggests that we might find other possibilities by considering a different theology.[38]

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32 Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge*, p. 133.

33 Nancey Murphy, "Traditions, Practices, and the Powers," p. 89, in *Transforming the Powers. Peace, Justice, and the Domination System*, ed. By Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2006, pp. 84-95.

34 Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003, p. 123.

35 McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 162-173.

36 Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 1989, p. 7.

37 Murphy, "Traditions," p. 87.

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The Anabaptist tradition enables Murphy to see at least two major weaknesses in MacIntyre's proposal:

> First is the overly optimistic evaluation of social practices and thus of the capacities of the (socially embodied) intellect. A second is that he has not been able (in his own estimation) to provide conclusive reasons to reject the Genealogical tradition. I claim that his epistemological account can be repaired by two moves. The first is to *acknowledge* a measure of truth in the Genealogist's account, namely, the epistemic distortions caused by the will to power. The second is to provide a more nuanced account of social practices.[39]

Murphy proposes that Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* and McClendon's *Ethics* be used to question the generally optimistic and progressive ring of MacIntyre's overall account of practices by their concept of power.[40] With Walter Wink,[41] they connect the so-called biblical concept of *principalities and powers* with the McClendonian concept of *powerful practices.* In biblical times the understanding of power was linked with both the spiritual sphere of life and politics and society. According to Paul,[42] "the mission of Jesus is understood as conflict with and conquest of these Powers."[43] McClendon shows how "the contra-power that Jesus ... mounts against these is nothing less than the whole course of his obedient life, with its successive moments of proclamation, healing, instruction, the gathering of a redemptive community, and costly submission to the way of the cross and its death and resurrection."[44] Murphy adds that "although the social practices of research and education not only *can* be corrupted but (pace MacIntyre) are likely to be corrupted, they need not be (pace Foucalt) if only the will to power can be tamed."[45] She and McClendon look together at the Anabaptist tradition to "suggest that a set of social practices characteristic of the Radical Reformation heritage provides the remedy needed to curb and redirect the will to power."[46] For example, the communal activity called "Christian epistemic practice" aims at the pursuit of truth with certain "procedures and criteria for judging teaching, prophecy, and decisions as being or not being of the spirit of Christ."[47] Murphy points to four practices constituting together distinctive characteristics

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Ibid, p. 88.

39 Ibid, p. 89.

40 McClendon, *Ethics*, 173.

41 Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984.

42 Col. 2:15.

43 Murphy, "Traditions," p. 90.

44 McClendon, *Ethics*, 174.

45 Murphy, "Traditions," p. 91.

46 Ibid. See also McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 176.

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of Radical Reformation churches: pacifism, revolutionary subordination, free-church polity, and simple life-style.[48] For her "these activities meet the criteria for a social practice in MacIntyre's technical sense."[49] Those practices can be interpreted with scientific logic,[50] and the strategies can be traced directly to the teaching of Jesus.[51]

> It follows from these convictions that the communal discussion, which for the Radicals normally included all members of the church, must be broadened to include the voices of outsiders, those participating in rival traditions, as well. This is, in fact, what was seen in the public disputations, as practiced by Balthasar Hubmaier and others. In our own day, a dialogue with a broader range of rival traditions is called for, and here problems of incommensurability – that is, of different standards of rationality and discrepant conceptual schemes – are likely to be a factor. Thus, the procedures MacIntyre recommends for dialogue between rival traditions, including learning of the language of the other as an insider, will be a necessary prerequisite.[52]

MacIntyre has accepted that the Aristotelian virtue-ethical tradition was developed in the wider Christian-ethical perspective:

> One further aspect of narratives and their role in epistemological crises remains to be noticed. I have suggested that epistemological process consists in the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives and forms of narrative and that epistemological crises are occasions for such reconstruction.[53]

Pointing to the tension between the Aristotelian *polis* and *telos*, he argues that in the course of history the virtue tradition has critically overcome its narrow sense of *polis* as the context for the *telos* of human life. In medieval times Christian tradition, extended both the meaning of *polis* and *telos* of human life. As "every particular view of virtues is linked to some particular notion of the narrative structure or structures of human life,"[54] the good, at which human life aims, was perceived by Aristotelian thought to be a corporate good that could not be possessed by isolated individuals but only jointly in an earthly community. "This is why the notion of a final redemption of an almost entirely unregenerate life has no place in Aristotle's scheme; the story of the thief on the cross is unintelligible in Aristotelian terms," argues MacIntyre.[55] But the ancient *telos* of life was

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Murphy, "Traditions", p. 91.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 See Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, especially chapter 5.

51 See Walter Wink, *Naming*, chapter 9.

52 Murphy, "Traditions", p. 93.

53 MacIntyre, *Epistemological*, p. 142.

54 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, p. 174.

55 Ibid, p. 175.

extended in the medieval age beyond one's life itself. In turn, it allowed for the hope that if the achievement of human *telos* might counterbalance all evil, even evils of the tragic sort.[56] For MacIntyre "the virtues are then in this kind of medieval view those qualities which enable men to survive evils on their historical journey."[57] MacIntyre concludes:

> To move towards the good is to move in time and that movement may itself involve new understandings of what it is to move towards the good.[58]

Murphy, comparing the MacIntyrean and the radical-reformation perspectives, goes further:

> The difference, in the end, comes down to different accounts of the training in moral virtue required for the intellectual life. For MacIntyre, the virtue most needed is humility. For the Radicals, humility is important, but more important is learning to curb the will to power by participating in the practices of peacemaking, revolutionary subordination, and simple living and by distancing oneself from reliance on worldly power structures.[59]

So, the *telos* of human life, according to the MacIntyrean approach, is connected with the key concepts of *practices* and *narratives* and *tradition*, altogether providing a social context for reflecting and embodying the virtuous human life:

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good. We have then arrived at a provisional conclusion about the good life for man: the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.[60]

Roman Catholic moral theologians see that MacIntyrean virtue ethics offers "more resources than we ever imagined."[61] MacIntyre himself returned to the Roman Catholic

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56 "The narrative therefore in which human life is embodied has a form in which the subject - which may be one or more individual persons, or, for example, the people of Israel, or the citizens of Rome - is to set a task in the completion of which lies their peculiar appropriation of the human good; the way towards the completion of that task is barred by a variety of inward and outward evils. The virtues are those qualities which enable the evils to be overcome, the task to be accomplished, the journey to be completed." Ibid, p. 175.

57 Ibid, p. 176.

58 Ibid.

59 Murphy, "Traditions," p. 94.

60 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, p. 219.

61 Daniel S.J. Harrington, James S.J. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics. Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*, Lanham, Maryland & Chicago, Illinois: Sheed & Ward, S.J.,

tradition after his philosophical discoveries.[62] Others argue that "MacIntyre's work proved to be particularly useful as it provided the vocabulary for getting a handle on the family resemblance shared by ethicists."[63] For Murphy "no philosopher provides better resources for thinking about rationality and knowledge, at the end of the modern era,"[64] and his structure of moral reasoning is "especially helpful for Christian ethicists."[65] But her radical background provides also a critique of MacIntyrean Catholicism and its moral reasoning.[66] She argues that the Anabaptist vision, interpreted by Yoder and McClendon, may provide more resources for envisioning a Christian-ethical virtuous life. This current paper, seeking to interpret the sense of virtue in certain Christian communal practices according to the Anabaptist vision, can appreciate the MacIntyrean language of tradition, narratives and virtues not so much in its technical sense, but as a "holistic sensory system" to enable the analysis of what communal practices actually do to the sense of virtue in certain communities of faith. The Christian *telos* - *panta antropon teleion en Hristo*[67] - remains the apostolic vision for all church practices, powering and empowering, including the practice of teaching by creative (like hymnological) expressions.[68] Christian practices may guide people to not just seek virtue, but to aim ultimately at the *telos* in Christ.[69] The Macintyrean virtue-ethical perspective can help in philosophical reflection.

MacIntyre has argued that all ethical thought is indebted to some particular moral tradition – even the Enlightenment tradition of "traditionless reason."[70] If there are no universal principles, the post-modern world may grasp again the ancient ethics of virtue. MacIntyre has revived and extended the tradition of virtue ethics in the perspective of philosophical and ethical logic of *practices*, *narratives*, *virtues* and their *telos*. He leaves

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2002, p. 23.

62 MacIntyre, "An Interview with Giovanna Borradori," pp. 255-266.

63 Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, Mark Thiessen Nation, "Preface and Acknowledgments," in Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition. Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997, pp. xi-xii.

64 Murphy, "Traditions," p. 85.

65 Nancey Murphy, "Introduction," in Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues & Practices in the Christian tradition. Christian Ethics after MacIntyre,* Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997, p. 1.

66 Ibid, p. 2.

67 Col. 1:28, "everyone perfect in Christ" in NIV.

68 Compare to the doxology by Paul in Col. 1:15-20.

69 Compare Col. 1:28 to Eph. 4:10-16.

70 Murphy, "Introduction," p. 2.

the reader with a question, however, of how the virtue-ethical argument can be extended. Post-modern secular sceptics may doubt that Christian people would give up their power in order to live for a communal good. The Anabaptistic Christian ethicists' argument is to point to the radical alternative, historically embodied in the story of Jesus. Yoder, prior to MacIntyre, explored the radical alternative of the Christian *telos* for human life in the light of his eschatological interpretation of the Bible as the Christian-ethical "authoritative text." Yoder provides a moral vision for the Christian virtuous life in the *Politics of Jesus.*[71]

2. On A Moral Vision: John Howard Yoder

The story of Jesus provides a radical challenge for both the Christian community and "the Watching World," argues Yoder.[72] His story reveals the *telos* of history.[73] The world may not accept it. "*But We Do See Jesus.*"[74] In the Yoderian vision "our contribution to proving or bringing about his sovereignty is our faithfulness to Jesus."[75] The section that follows, about the Yoderian moral vision, reflects how his eschatological interpretation of the Christian "authoritative text" may reveal a radical alternative to misused power in social practices because of the virtuous Christ-like perspective for the course of human life and history.

2.1. Yoderian eschatological vision of ethics

"First of all, we must admit that only a clearly eschatological viewpoint permits a valid critique of the present historical situation and the choice of action which can be effective," argued Yoder already in 1953.[76] "Noneschatological analysis of history is

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71 See John Howard Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

72 See John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics. Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*, Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1992, p. vii.

73 See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster.* 2nd revised edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.

74 Compare Heb. 2:8-9 and John Howard Yoder, "But We Do See Jesus", in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, pp. 46-62.

75 Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, p. 51.

76 John Howard Yoder, *Peace without eschatology?,* Scottdale, Pa.: Concern, 1967, p. 16, originated in

unprotected against the dangers of subjectivism and opportunism, and finishes by letting the sinful present situation be its own norm."[77] When MacIntyre argues for traditional *telos* in *polis* of moral philosophy by using his "noneschatological analysis," then Yoder becomes the scripture-reading "seer" with the "eschatological viewpoint" who foresaw not only an epistemological crisis, but also a moral crisis if vicious power practices developed instead of virtuously excellent practices:

> Having seen how the crusader's thesis that the end justifies the means is finally self-defeating, and that the Constantinian heresy ultimately reverts to a purely pagan view of God as a tribal deity we must return to the New Testament eschatology for a new start. We shall ask not only what is required of Christians but also whether any guidance may be found in the realm of social strategy and the prophetic witness to the state.[78]

Yoder's *Ethics and Eschatology*[79] presents his methodology.

> "Ethics" is not an independent mode of access to the understanding of either ancient documents or ancient ideas; it is rather one subdiscipline of theology. It has to be constructed on the foundations laid by the community's prior history. In the mix of the disciplines it needs to listen to those other specialists who read texts in their settings.[80]

Yoder shows how "apocalyptic and prophetic literature does us the service of ignoring and thereby striking down our confidence in system-immanent causal explanations for the past, and, even more, in system-immanent causal descriptions of how the future is sure to unfold from the choice we are just now making."[81] In the Yoderian world-view, "the cosmos was not all knowable" and "transcendence could be expressed in terms of divine (or demonic) agency within the real world, rather than being restricted to some other dimension."[82]

> That frees us for the possibility that other than consequential modes of moral reasoning - founded for instance in virtue, in motivation, in obedience to *halakah* – not subject to being set aside on consequentialist grounds, might be admitted. The specific "other mode of moral reasoning" that is the most evident is hope.[83]

Through the biblical vision of hope (which in non-biblical circles is easily explained as social or psychological pathology, compensation for weakness, fear or defeat) the community of believers is sure that evil will be "swallowed up in God's larger story,

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1953.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid, p. 16.

79 John Howard Yoder, "Ethics and Eschatology," in *Ex Auditu*, 6/1990, pp. 119-128.

80 Ibid, p. 119.

81 Ibid, p. 122.

82 Ibid, pp 122-123.

83 Ibid, p. 123.

whereas our modern explanations try to do it the other way round, by subsuming God talk in our own visions of human dignity and therapy."[84] For Yoder the first-century believers developed their virtue of "faithfulness," meaning "much that we would call "ethical" by way of truth-telling, promise-keeping, sexual purity etcetera, yet the primordial ethical obligation is the cohesion of the believing community in the face of pressures working against its identity."[85] Both inside and outside pressures pushed their identity toward an epistemological crisis: from inside through schism or speculation or threatened destruction from outside through banishment or martyrdom. But their first imperative was to discern the temptation to deny the faith, and not to yield to it. In their moral vision it was "not enough to affirm the value of survival," since the death of Jesus' followers was "a part of victory."[86]

Yoder's eschatological vision shows an alternative perspective for ethics as such, and for Christian ethics in particular. While MacIntyre points to the "best so far," for Yoder this is not the best, so far.[87] "The vision will only support the ethos if the seer considers God and revelation to be real," argues Yoder.[88] Anabaptists saw themselves as continuing a movement that had begun with Jesus and the early church.[89] Yoder was influenced by his mentor Harold Bender[90] who saw "the culmination of the Reformation" in Anabaptists "seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles."[91] In *The Anabaptist Vision* Bender identified the defining marks of the Anabaptist church to be discipleship, voluntary church membership, and non-violence. But Yoder argued in 1952 that this was not enough.[92] For him the Anabaptist vision was not to regain original Anabaptism, but rather to challenge the

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84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid, pp. 125-126.

88 Ibid, p. 126.

89 "In their writings they grounded themselves in Scripture and identified with dissenters throughout history who had challenged the alliance of empire and church, while their departure from orthodoxy had a sense of being new, this newness was born of a desire to better relate the story of Jesus," writes J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of post-modernity. A Proposal for the Third Millennium*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2000, p. 107.

90 See Stanley Hauerwas, Alex Sider, "Introduction," in John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2002, pp 11-15.

91 Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944, pp. 13, 20.

92 See: Hauerwas, "Introduction," pp. 12-13.

surrounding culture.[93] His provocative speech *Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality* in 1969,[94] critically analysing Bender, envisioned Anabaptism for the next generation and beyond.[95] *The Politics of Jesus* later offered his vision for "a late ripening, in the field of ethics, of the same biblical realist revolution, in which precisely ecclesiology and eschatology come to have a new import for the substance of ethics."[96] In mainstream ethics, "Jesus is not the norm."[97]

> Once again if Jesus is the Christ we must refuse this choice. The Kingdom of God is a social order and not a hidden one. It is not universal catastrophe independent of the will of human beings; it is that concrete jubilary obedience, in pardon and repentance, the possibility of which is proclaimed beginning right now, opening up the real accessibility of a new order in which grace and justice are linked, which people have only to accept. It does not assume that time will end tomorrow; it reveals why it is meaningful that history should go on at all.[98]

He argues that human history is not controlled by human beings. The eschatological *telos* does not provide a managerial moral measure in a closed causal nexus. The cosmic causality revealed in the slain Lamb reveals the dramatic reality of divine and human active, not reactive love. The Yoderian eschatological vision is derived from the Apocalypse of John.[99] He describes "revolutionary subordination" in human and social relationships as a strategy for righting injustices without the use of any power other than that of the imagination.[100] The Yoderian vision is radical enough to envision the *telos* in Christian ethics not as an academic argument, but as the socially embodied reason for living in faith by faithful communal practices. For instance, the Lamb may live even in the communal singing of hymnody, but even more so in the communally lived meaning of history. Yoder's sense of virtue is challenging because only "the Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power!"[101]

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93 Ibid, p. 13.

94 John Howard Yoder, "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," in Klassen, A. J. ed., *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology*, Fresno, Cal.: Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970, p. iii.

95 John D. Roth, "Living Between the Times: "The Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality" Revisited," p. 324, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* 69 no 3 Jl, 1995, pp. 323-335.

96 Yoder, *The Politics*, p. X.

97 Ibid, pp. 4-8.

98 Ibid, p, 105.

99 Ibid, p. 232.

100 Ibid, p. 185.

101 Ibid., p. 232.

2.2. Virtuous practices of the faithful community

The following is Yoder's account of practices, as differing from MacIntyre's. "On the basis of the New Testament texts," Yoder argues, there are "particular kinds of behaviour that our faith requires."[102] For him practice is a visible community action that is morally normative or authoritative because it is derived from the work of Jesus Christ in relation to the Holy Spirit and God the Father.[103]

> The Christian community, like any community held together by commitment to important values, *is* a political reality. That is, the church has the character of a *polis* (the Greek word from which we get the adjective political), namely, a structured social body. It has its ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out tasks. That makes the Christian community a political entity in the simplest meaning of the term.[104]

The Christian community is more than a human *polis*. "The will of God for human socialness is prefigured by the shape to which the Body of Christ is called. Church and world are not two compartments under separate legislation or two institutions with contradictory assignments, but two levels of the pertinence of the same Lordship. The people of God are called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately."[105] But "the difference between church and state or between a faithful and an unfaithful church is not that one is political and the other not, but that they are political in different ways."[106] Christian corporate practices witness to the state.[107] Yoder focuses on five sample ways in which the Christian church is called to operate as a *polis*:

1) binding and loosing - or the practice of redemptive dialogue according to "the Rule of Christ" (*Regel Christi*) in moral discernment, conflict resolution and mutual forgiveness;
2) disciples breaking bread together - or the practice of fellowship, sharing a common meal as an act of celebration of thanksgiving, worship and economic ethics;
3) baptism and the new humanity - or the practice of the formation of people in unity over differences in social relationships;
4) the fullness of Christ - or the practice of organic interdependence with everybody

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102 Yoder, *Body*, p. vii.

103 Stassen, *Kingdom*, p. 123.

104 Yoder, *Body*, p. viii.

105 Ibid., p. ix.

106 Ibid.

107 John Howard Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998.

having and serving with their gifts;

5) the rule of Paul - or the practice of everyone's right to speak in a decision-making process.

"There could well be others,"[108] he admits,[109] "but the five cases should suffice to make the pattern clear."[110]

> Around each of our five topics we shall see that there is a social practice lived out by the early Christians, under divine mandate, which at the same time offers a paradigm for the life of the larger society.[111]

While "these practices are described in the New Testament as derived from the work of Jesus Christ," today "they have a social meaning at the outset," and "doing them is what makes a group what it is."[112]

> By its very nature, without any complex argumentative bridge being needed either to explain or to justify, these practices can be prototypes for what others can do in the wider world. Beyond the faith community it is possible to resolve conflicts and make decisions by conversation, to feed the hungry, and to build interethnic community by inclusion. They are not only political in that they describe the church as a body with a concrete social shape; they are also political in the wider sense that they can be commended to any society as a healthy way to organise.[113]

For instance, Yoder argues for organic giftedness "that has not yet had its reformation," and its "adequate concrete form has still to be retrieved:"[114]

> The Pauline vision of every-member empowerment is one fragment of the gospel vision that has yet to find its reformation, and it might be, by the nature of the case, that if it did happen it could not sweep across the map as some other reformations have.[115]

Similarly he argues for the practice of everyone's right to speak:

> Because God the Spirit speaks in the meeting, conversation is the setting for truth-finding. That is true in the local assembly as in wider assemblies, in the faith community and in wider

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108 Ibid.

109 A "schematic summary of marks of the church" presents "eight specific functions." See the chart presented by Michael G. Cartwright in John Howard Yoder's *The Royal Priesthood*, ed. and introduced by Michael G. Cartwright, pp. 12-13.

110 Yoder, *Body*, p. ix

111 Ibid., p. x.

112 Ibid., pp. 44-46.

113 Ibid., p. 46.

114 Ibid., p. 59.

115 Ibid., pp. 59-60.

groups.[116]

Yoder says that all five practices "can be spoken of in social process terms," but also "can be translated into non-religious terms."[117]

> All of these five practices – fraternal admonition, the open meeting, and the diversification of gifts, no less than the other practices of baptism and Eucharist – are worship, are ministry, are doxology (praise), are celebratory, and are mandatory. They are actions of God, in and with, through and under what men and women do. Where they are happening, the people of God prove to be real in the world.[118]

Christian social ethical witness in the Yoderian sense must be defined not by its independence from the witness of the faith community but by its derivation there-from:

> The believing body is the image that the new world – which in the light of the ascension and Pentecost is on the way – casts ahead of itself. The believing body of Christ is the world on the way to its renewal; the church is the part of the world that confesses the renewal to which all the world is called. The believing body is the instrument of that renewal of the world...[119]

The presence of "renewal" is real through social-ethical practices. In such reflection of communal practices congregational "modes of prayer, meditation, counseling, devotional practices, and spiritual direction," as Yoder puts it, "make the Christian life a matter of direct attention and intention."[120] Such communal practices, if not so much in the technical sense of the MacIntyrean philosophy, then in the Yoderian theological (and the McLendonian ethical) perspective, are to make the people of God "real in the world" (not of the world), and to be aware of her social-ethical eschatological vision. Aiming at this goal, believers have to become the community of hermeneutics for interpreting the Scriptures and expressing the meaning of its *telos* in Christ.[121] The next section shows how Yoder envisions this.

2.3. Yoderian alternative community of hermeneutics

Yoder argues for a communal interpretation and application of the Scriptures. The following shows how it would change the church if it were to be a Bible-reading community but also the way in which the reading and interpreting community would

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116 Ibid., p. 70.

117 Ibid., p. 72.

118 Ibid., pp. 72-73.

119 Ibid., p. 78.

120 Ibid., p. 73.

121 Compare Col. 3:16-17.

practice its faith altogether.

In Yoder's theology and ethics the cosmic apocalyptic eschatology of the Scriptures is a determinative feature. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus there is a revelation of the shape of the cosmic and moral order. Deriving from the Pauline apocalyptic vision, Yoder affirms that God is sovereign over the cosmos and that this sovereignty is none other than the rule of the crucified Jesus. "The church is the people which is called to participate in God's cosmic reign by itself living a cruciform life," says the Yoderian confession of faith.[122] "People who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe," comments Stanley Hauerwas.[123] Yoder shows how the early church hymnody is teaching the church in her *telos* to sing the song of the Lamb, despite the oppression of the world:

> To sing "The Lamb is worthy to receive power," as did the early communities whose hymnody is reflected in the first vision of John, is not mere poetry. It is performative proclamation. It redefines the cosmos in a way prerequisite to the moral independence that it takes to speak truth to power and to persevere in living against the stream when no reward is in sight.[124]

Yoder appreciates how the church today can narratively participate in the story of earlier generations who kept the "song of the Lamb" alive:

> ... the believing community today participates imaginatively, narratively, in the past history as her own history, thanks to her historians, but also thanks to her poets and prophets. As that story becomes her own story she retrieves the posture of her precursor generations and discovers in her own setting something quite original yet essentially like what the faith had meant before.[125]

Michael Cartwright argues that Yoder's discussion of the apocalyptic, found both in his essay *Armaments and Eschatology* and in *Ethics and Eschatology*, was only justified by those who invited him to present the perspective, and "beyond the occasions of these and other papers, it should be noted that Yoder does not provide foundationalist epistemological justifications for using apocalyptic categories."[126] But he is teaching the

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122 Douglas Harink, "The Anabaptist and the Apostle: John Howard Yoder as a Pauline Theologian," p. 277, in *A Mind Patient and Untamed. Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz, Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004, pp 274-287.

123 Yoder, John Howard, "Armaments and Eschatology," p. 58, in *Studies In Christian Ethics*, 1/1, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, pp. 43-61. This quote supplied Hauerwas with the title of his 2001 Gifford Lectures, *With the Grain of t he Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural* Theology, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001.

124 Yoder, "Armaments," p. 53.

125 Ibid., p. 51.

126 See Michael G. Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," p. 7, note 12., in John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood. Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, edited with an introduction by Michael G Cartwright, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald

church to be the "community of hermeneutics" with a distinctively Anabaptist approach to the Scriptures.[127] Yoder argues that "to see history doxologically is to own the Lamb's victory in one's own time."[128] Much like Martin Luther King Jr, the community of faith is to accept, interpret and live life to "have a dream," a christologically interpreted hermeneutical perspective.[129] So, despite his critique, Cartwright has to admit that "Yoder pushes Christians" to "re-imagine the possibilities for social embodiment of precisely the same apostolic practices in relation to which the *otherness* of the church was not only visible once upon a time but can become visible again as "the new world of the Kingdom on its way" in our own time and place."[130] Murphy confirms that Yoder seeks to change the world, not only the world-view:

> The church acts as an agent of change in the world by showing the world alternatives to its coercive practices. While it is simply a fact that the world does not and cannot operate as the church does, there are still vast differences among the powers in terms of the degree to which they approximate the will of God. The church, as an ethical laboratory, can teach the world better ways.[131]

Other authors, like Hauerwas[132] or Stassen,[133] have learned from Yoder. Hauerwas finds the Yoderian account of the church fitting the kind of community "required by an ethics of virtue,"[134] although not identifying himself with the kind.[135] Stassen developed his *transforming initiatives for justice and peace* as certain practices for following Jesus in

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Press, 1998, pp 1-49.

127 John Howard Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," MQR 41, October, 1967, pp. 291-308; John Howard Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," in Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, pp. 15-45.

128 Yoder, *The Royal*, p. 137.

129 Ibid.

130 Cartwright, "Radical Reform," p. 49.

131 Nancey Murphy, "John Howard Yoder's Systematic Defense of Christian Pacifism," p. 61, in *The Wisdom of the Cross. Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, pp 45-68.

132 "Perhaps Hauerwas could be described as wanting to do things as Yoder wanted them to be done," writes Paul Doerksen, "Share The House: Yoder and Hauerwas Among the Nations," p. 187, in *A Mind Patient and Untamed. Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz, Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004, pp 187-204.

133 See Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking.Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992.

134 Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, xxiv.

135 Stanley Hauerwas, "Reading Yoder Down Under," in *Faith and Freedom*, 5:1,2, June, 1996, p. 41.

the contemporary context in order "to unthink the necessity of violence."[136] Some find this too challenging.[137] Others see a fragmentary collage for peace in "a series of sketches designed to reveal certain tendencies."[138] Yoder was able to write on a variety of topics, from biblical studies to historical and systematic theology as well as from church history to ecclesiology and ecumenism.[139] But his ultimate concern was ethical: his hermeneutical community was to embody the Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" in a lived-out eschatological vision for Christ-like self-sacrificial love and non-violent peace witness.[140]

Bible-reading and interpretation within the Yoderian community of hermeneutics connect the storied lives to an alternative narrative in human history - His story.[141] Yoder points to the godly politics concerning Israel and the nations, Jesus and his followers, the world and its history. There is a greater story of mission to carry out in the Yoderian eschatological perspective.[142] Christianity, after its split with Jewish tradition and fusion with Hellenistic tradition, and after the conversion of the Roman Emperor and the so-called "Constantinian shift", replaced the early vision of a persecuted minority with the privileged so-called Christian society. Anyone living in such a culture is mostly concerned with how to run a society, not how to carry out Christological mission in an eschatological perspective. The so-called Just War theory replaced the pacifism of the early church. The understanding of justified military defence gives space to "divinely ordained violence" of crusaders, and to wars for one's own country and nation. Mainline

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See Stassen, *Kingdom*.

137
A. James Reimer, *Mennonites*, "Christ, and Culture: The Yoder Legacy," in *Mennonites and Classical Theology. Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Pandora Press, 2001, pp. 288-299.

138
Chris K. Huebner, "Patience, Witness, and the Scattered Body of Christ: Yoder and Virilio on Knowledge, Politics, and Speed," p. 58, in *A Mind Patient and Untamed. Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz, Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004, pp 56-74.

139
See Yoder's bibliography hereby and in Mark Thiessen Nation, "A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder," in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, No. 71, January 1997, pp. 93-145. See also A. James Reimer, "Mennonites, Christ, and Culture: The Yoder Legacy," in *Mennonites and Classical Theology. Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Pandora Press, 2001, pp 288-299.

140
See Yoder, "Peace without eschatology?," 1967; "Ethics and Eschatology," 1990; "Armaments and Eschatology," 1988.

141
See John C. Nugent, "Old Testament Contributions to Ecclesiology: Engaging and Extending the Insights of John Howard Yoder," A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009.

142
Compare Phil. 2 to Nugent, "Old Testament Contributions to Ecclesiology."

Christian traditions were concerned with how to run the world. Jesus' ethics of love and pacifist attitudes seemed more and more irrelevant, unrealistic, irresponsible. Only some medieval Christian "sectaries," the Anabaptists, the Mennonites, the Quakers, the Brethren and other dissenters, kept the pacifist tradition alive. Along the way of clerical-political decision-making and the process of institutionalisation of the church the simple moral-ethical challenge of Jesus' life, teaching and ministry was removed from the centre of the Christian faith. Dissenters were considered heretical.

The Yoderian hermeneutical argument is that the Christian community cannot turn back the times, but can turn back to the initial Christ-event for renewal and reform in her faith.[143] This is what the believers' church tradition has done, he argues. The free church tradition of faith provides an alternative to the Constantinian tradition. In many ways Christian faithfulness resembles the exilic and medieval Jewish faithfulness. Similarly, contemporary Christian faithfulness would not be concerned with running the world, making history turn out right, but rather living out the eschatological vision and witness in and to the world of the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Christian norm is the Lord Jesus Christ, incarnating the way of self-sacrificial, non-violent love in the world. The entire world cannot live like that, but only people voluntarily joined into a community in the faith of Jesus.

> The New Testament sees our present age – the age of the church, extending from Pentecost to the Parousia – as a period of overlapping of two aeons. These aeons are not distinct periods of time, for they exist simultaneously. They differ rather in nature or in direction; one points backward to the human history outside of (before) Christ; the other points forward to the fullness of the kingdom of God, of which it is a foretaste. Each aeon has a social manifestation: the former in the "world," the latter in the church or the body of Christ. The new aeon came into history in a decisive way with the incarnation and the entire work of Christ. Christ had been awaited eagerly by Judaism for centuries; but when He came he was rejected, for the new aeon He revealed was not what people wanted. ... Thus Christ's claims and His kingdom were to them scandalous.[144]

Yoder died in 1997.[145] It was three years before McClendon[146] who on his death bed held his last (but not least) book, coming right from the printer[147] to complete his three-volume work in systematic theology: *Ethics* (1986), *Doctrine* (1994), *Witness* (2000). His narrative perspective of the baptistic *vision* complemented Yoder and his community of

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143 See Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 2002.

144 Yoder, "Armaments," p. 47.

145 Yoder lived from December 29, 1929 to December 30, 1997.

146 McClendon lived from March 6, 1924 to October 30, 2000.

147 Oral testimony by Dr Steve Jolley, in his presentation on McClendon's "biography as theology" approach in a comparative study of Yoder's and McClendon's theological methods to contribute to the emerging "baptist hermeneutics" at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Directors' Conference on *Doing Constructive Theologies in a baptist way*, facilitated by Dr Parush Parushev and Dr Nigel Wright, Prague Czech Republic, June 18-24, 2003.

hermeneutics with "the story *now*" becoming part of "the story *that*" Jesus and his apostles lived while envisioning "the story *then*," at the very *eschaton* of all things completed in Christ.[148] The next section will lay this out.

3. On Convictional Communities: James William McClendon

McClendon spoke of contemporary virtue ethics as "the ethics of character-in-community" in 1974, when he referred to Hauerwas' unpublished writings.[149] Both of them are now well known Christian virtue ethicists, like Yoder and MacIntyre. But McClendon began to make a link between Christian ethics and theology, convictions and doctrines, community narratives and biographies.[150] His gradually developing works enriched the MacIntyrean-Yoderian language of ethics and his methodology.

3.1. Narrative theology and ethics: McClendonian convictions

McClendon provides insights that complement MacIntyre and Yoder in his understanding of Christian ethics.[151] While MacIntyre's understanding of virtue is bound to certain practices in certain traditions, and Yoder stresses Christian practices and virtues in the eschatological body of Christ, McClendon finds his understanding of virtue somewhat in between. In his view "many virtues have their home in connection with particular practices whose pursuit evokes exactly those virtues," but "the lives of those who do engage in these practices must have at least enough continuity and coherence to permit the *formation* of those virtues and *sustaining* of those intentions – in a word, their lives must take a narrative form."[152] A church can be understood as having a set of social and powerful practices living a redeemed life before God in a Christ-like communal embodiment in the perspective of his resurrection. McClendon's "analysis of the powers is a necessary biblical corrective to Alasdair MacIntyre's overly positive evaluation of

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148 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 84.

149 James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology. How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974, pp. 28-31.

150 See McClendon's bibliography, especially James Wm. McClendon, "Theology," in M.Pinson, Jr., and Clyde E. Fant, Jr., eds., *Contemporary Christian Trends*, Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972, pp. 170-185.

151 McClendon, "The Practice of Community Formation," pp. 85-110.

152 McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 169-171.

practices."[153] For him "the rules are not arbitrary additions we might very well discard."[154] In a game-like life "people participate by playing roles," and they do not complain since "it is exactly the rules that constitute" the practice.[155] Social in character, formative to the character, the McClendonian concept of practices relates "to the actual tasks at hand."[156]

> My claim is that for Christians the connecting link between body ethics and social ethics, between the moral self and the morals of society, is to be found in the body of Christ that is the gathered church. The place where conscience comes to light in a baptist ethic is not in solitary or Kierkegaardian introspection, nor is it in the social concerns of individual private citizens who happen to be Christian as well (not even in their widely held and in that sense "common" concerns). Rather the link is found in congregational reflection, discernment, discipline, and action, whose model is nearer to the Wesleyan class meeting or the Anabaptist *Gemeinde* than to the denominational social action lobby agency or the mass membership churches of today's suburban society. It is such gathering sharing (so goes my thesis) that issues in directives for the pilgrimage of each *and* issues in a shared witness to the outside world.[157]

McClendon is able to leave behind the MacIntyrean awe before traditions and practices of power as things in themselves,[158] as well as a narrowness of sectarianism for which the Yoderian-Hauerwasean type of virtue ethics has often been criticised. By *practice* McClendon means "a complex series of human actions involving definite practitioners who by these means and in accordance with these rules together seek the understood end."[159] Hauerwas argues:

> McClendon candidly acknowledges that he must claim his theology to be an exemplification of the practice called teaching, which is integral to the church's very being. The material content and the form of presentation of the content cannot be separated. McClendon therefore seeks, not to provide us with more information, but rather to help us live more faithfully as Christians through learning to read with him.[160]

For McClendon theology cannot be separated from practice. "Christian practices, and the specific practice of the church in its teaching, are at the heart of this work," explains

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153 McClendon, "The Practice," p. 94.

154 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 163.

155 Ibid., pp. 163-166.

156 See Stanley Hauerwas, "Reading James McClendon Takes Practice: Lessons in the Craft of Theology," in Hauerwas, *Wilderness* Wonderings, pp. 171-187.

157 McClendon, "The Practice," pp. 87-88.

158 See Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, pp. 59-60; Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, pp. 22-23.

159 McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 8.

160 Hauerwas, "Reading," p. 172.

Hauerwas, "McClendon acknowledges his stance in that community of constitutive narrative practices called "church," and "we should therefore not be surprised when this "baptist" theologian identifies as closest to his own approach those Catholic theologians who see the authority of the magisterium deriving from its consultation with the *census fidelium*."[161] As a "High Church Mennonite"[162] Hauerwas faces a question: "*Can a Baptist be a Catholic?*"[163] But he can find his answer in McClendon himself:

> One of the engaging aspects of McClendon's work is its openness to the breadth of Christian tradition. Nevertheless, he not only tells us, in both the *Ethics* and the *Doctrine*, that he writes as a Baptist, but that this "baptist" identity makes a difference for what he writes. Do we have to become Baptist to be good readers of McClendon? I have a colleague who refuses to use McClendon's *Ethics* on grounds that we ought not to subject people preparing for the Methodist ministry to Baptist theology... Can McClendon have it both ways? Can he be a Baptist yet mine? (...) In short, I suspect that McClendon believes, or at least hopes, that God has now brought Christians to a point where we can only survive in the world by using our past differences as a source of our unity.[164]

Hauerwas is right to point out that McClendon sees and advocates a special moral vision in the baptist(ic) way to relate to the Bible and life in the community of faith. McClendon claims in his *Biography as Theology*:[165]

> I believe that the living out of life under the governance of such a vision is the best way to conceive of "religious experience" insofar as the latter can be a datum for theology.[166]

McClendon argues that "theologians may do better" by paying "attention to compelling biographies," but "a key to these biographies is the dominant or controlling images which may be found in the lives of which they speak."[167] Images play a vital role in the spiritual and moral formation of a faith community. Certain images linked to certain biographies may help “to embed" and expand consciousness of the church about her own convictions.

> Now "convictions" is a term in common religious use, and in a rough way, we all understand this everyday term. But what, more exactly, are convictions? How may they be defined, identified, and separated from the other things one knows, or believes, or believes one knows? ... Convictions may be distinguished from principles – the latter are of the head, the former of the gut; principles are more often consciously formed, convictions more often unconsciously lived by or lived out. Convictions in this view are affective and volitional as

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161 Ibid., pp. 175-176.

162 That is a figurative description of (in fact) Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas' convictions, described in Hauerwas, *Wilderness*, pp. 183-186.

163 Ibid, pp. 183-185.

164 Ibid.

165 The book is "indebted both to my friend and sometimes writing partner James M. Smith, and to Stanley Hauerwas," says McClendon in *Biography as Theology*, p. 31.

166 Ibid., p. 90.

167 McClendon, *Biography*, pp 89-90.

> well as cognitive; they represent the stake of the convinced person (or convinced community) in the world; his bet in life.[168]

McClendon believes that "every conviction is in principle expressible."[169] In this case "certain aspects of the general structure of language may provide us with a way to understand the structure of convictions generally, and the intellectual tools with which we analyse language are or correspond to those with which we discover the shape of particular human character and particular human community."[170]

> The fact that human life is lived by convinced men is the central fact which makes what we call theology possible. Theologians are concerned with convictions not as bare propositions but as those propositions by which men live. Therefore theology in attending to convictions is in position not only to learn which convictions govern particular men and groups but also to discover which ones we must live by. In more conventional terminology, Christian theology seeks to understand the faith by which we are justified, if justified we are.[171]

Now, for example, in the songs that a faith community has "canonised" to sing, the believers are expected to express the convictions according to which they live their narrative. But the hymnal texts and narratives need to be read critically avoiding so-called autobiographical *self-deception*.[172] This needs addressing.[173] The Anabaptist prisoners' lives created the narratives about facing possible martyrdom. One can ask if such a vision could have had a *self-deception,* similar to the Hauerwasean *Third Reich* insiders?[174] McClendon shows how a vision can make a difference. If a life-story related to the story of Christ should overcome self-deception, how much more so when facing death?

> For a biographical theology (though it acknowledges that the lives it attends to each incorporate convictions) the center must be the lives themselves, or more accurately must be one life, *the life of Christ*. (...) The stories of the saints' lives are thus a part of the life of Christ.[175]

The Bible tells the church to remember the biographies and to teach each other by communicating in singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.[176] McClendon explains that

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168 Ibid., p. , 194.

169 Ibid., pp. 194-195.

170 Ibid., p. 195.

171 Ibid., p. 195.

172 See Stanley Hauerwas, David Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Theological Reflections on Speer's Inside the Third Reich," in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2/1974, pp. 99-117.

173 See Riall, *The Earliest*, pp. 1-38.

174 See Hauerwas, "Self-Deception," p. 117.

175 McClendon, *Biography*, p. 198.

176 Heb. 13:7-8; Col. 3:16-17.

"the lives of our saints significantly participate in the life of Christ; telling their stories is a part of telling *that* story." A Christian life-story is interpreted in the vision of Christ's story. In his life-story McClendon, too, develops his own *this is that* hermeneutic of the Bible and of the narratives of life.[177] Convictions are central for their holders.[178] "If doctrines are convictions, to change them is substantially to change their holders."[179] McClendon argues that this is the "one factor the absence of which surely hinders the development of a contemporary ethic of Christian character, for this factor is one which will lead us directly to the connection between Christian ethics, Christian theology, and biographical study."[180]

> Consider, then, the suggestion already made, that convictions, as well as traits, are integral to character, and to the existence of Christian community. Is this the necessary missing element? We may roughly define convictions as those tenacious beliefs which when held give definiteness to the character of a person or of a community, so that if they were surrended, the person or community would be significantly changed.[181]

Character is paradoxically both the cause and consequence of actions:

> To have character, then, is to enter at a new level the realm of morality, the level at which one's person, with its continuities, its interconnections, its integrity, is intimately involved in one's deeds. By being the persons we are, we are able to do what we do, and conversely, by those very deeds we form or re-form our own characters. Only a man of (some) generosity will act generously, as a general rule; but also as a general rule the man who acts generously on this occasion is shaping himself along generous lines.[182]

Convictions are the persuasive, life-shaping core of a person and community:

> A conviction is a persistent belief such that if X (a person or a community) has a conviction, it will not be easily abandoned, and it cannot be abandoned without making X a significantly different person or community than before.[183]

If convictions as something persistent in a person and in a community are narrated by life-stories, the church needs to connect her story in life to certain narrative images for realising her convictions, characters and practices in order to live better the story of Christ.

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177 See James Willim McClendon, Jr., "Embodying the 'Great Story,' An interview with James W. McClendon by Ched Myers," 2000, http://www.thewitness.org/archive/dec2000/mcclendon.html viewed 30.10.2009.

178 James Wm. McClendon, Jr., James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975, p. 192.

179 Ibid.

180 McClendon, *Biography*, p. 34.

181 McClendon, *Understanding*, p. 192.

182 McClendon, *Biography*, pp 30-31.

183 McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 22-23.

3.2. Narrative theology and ethics: *primary* and *secondary* sources

McClendon accepts that theology discovers and renovates its own narrative voice in a conversation not only with philosophy or the Scriptures, but also with hymns, liturgical content and ministry practices.[184] For him "by theology or theoretics [terms to be distinguished in what follows] we mean the discovery, examination, and transformation of the conviction set of a given community, carried on with a view to discovering and modifying the relation of the member convictions to one another, to other (non-convictional) beliefs held by the community, and to whatever else there is."[185] In Anabaptist theology "the primary testimony comes not from the published writings of scholarly Reformers or from a protracted council of bishops, but from the preserved criminal court records of much of Europe and from surviving tracts, some old hand-written chronicles, and a few early songbooks."[186] McClendon shows it to be part of the communal practice of teaching when "the church teaches in many modes," for instance, "by the hymns it sings."[187] If so, communal hymnody, collectively created, sung, collected and reflected upon, should give "primary testimony" to her convictions. Also "it helps to distinguish between primary and secondary theology," says McClendon.[188]

> Primary theology is the church trying to think out its own convictions, and this gets expressed in sermons, prayers, hymns -- the sources of its ongoing common life. Eventually, primary convictions by which it tries to live get written down in creeds and confessions of faith or expressed afresh in new hymns and new sermons or simply lived out in the lives of existing members of the community. Secondary theology, which is the main thing that universities are concerned with, is theology about theology. It tries to take a step back from primary theology and ask questions about justification, truth, legitimation, and the significance of primary theology. Very often it forgets that there is primary theology and simply ends up talking about its own justification, truth, and verification, which is a regrettable lapse, a diminishing.[189]

If the communal hymn singing, prayer, testimonies and sermons make up its members' primary understanding of their convictions, those practices may form people of God similarly to the systematic Bible-reading, teaching or liturgical language. Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger bring an example from their Mennonite tradition in which communal singing plays a more formative role:

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184 McClendon, "Embodying."

185 McClendon, *Understanding*, pp 191-192.

186 McClendon, *Witness*, p. 346.

187 McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 23.

188 McClendon, "Embodying." For more comprehensive discourse see McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 17-46, and *Doctrine*, pp. 21-62.

189 McClendon, *Understanding*, pp 191-192.

> It is not surprising that a familiarity with biblical and poetic texts in song also forms the theology of those who sing. Both theology in abstract as well as functional theology – the beliefs that shape people's everyday experience of God – are often derived from the songs they sing. Hymn texts are quoted in daily life with the same practical authority as scripture; they are used to comfort, to explain God's ways, or to affirm one's faith.[190]

Hymns, prayers, sermons and other texts created in the corporate life of the faith communities reflect their "primary" and "secondary" theology,[191] or the "first-order" and "second-order" language of religion.[192] Gerard Lukken and David Power refer to the early church, especially in the East, where the worship was known as "*theologia prima*" and doctrinal formulation as "*theologia secunda*."[193] Christian faith was first of all expressed in worship, providing the primary source from which the Christian teachings were derived, shows Alexander Schmemann.[194] The primordial meaning of the word "orthodoxy" was 'right praise' (in Greek *ortho* and *doxa*), only later 'right teaching.' Susan White points out how worship may be "the primary context" for the development of one's own theology since "the theology implicit in the hymns, prayers, and preaching gives worshippers 'food for thought' as they form their Christian worldview."[195] Christopher Ellis, distinguishing between primary and secondary theology, argues that if worship is the original source of all theology, then theological expressions should be nourished from communal worship experiences before God,[196] including communal singing.[197] Like Don

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190 Marlene Kropf & Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Herald Press, 2001, p. 74.

191 McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 17-46; *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, pp. 21-62.

192 See: Murphy, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the Baptist Vision," in *Theology Without Foundations. Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. by Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, Mark Nation, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994, pp. 245-270; Stanley Hauerwas, "The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord; Or, In a World Without Foundations: All We Have is the Church," in *Theology Without Foundations. Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. by Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, Mark Nation. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994, pp. 143-162. Paul S. Fiddes, "Theology and a Baptist Way of Community," in Paul S. Fiddes, ed., *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000, pp. 19-38, distinguishes the "first order" and the "second order" theology, and p. 24 argues the "first" found in "the confession of the church in its worship, its creeds, its preaching, its works of love and its testimony through individual believers."

193 Gerard Lukken, "The Unique Expression of Faith in the Liturgy," in Herman Schmidt and David Power, eds., *Liturgical Experience of Faith*, Concilium, 82: Religion in the Seventies, pp. 19-20; David Power, "Two Expressions of Faith: Worship and Theology," in Herman Schmidt and David Power, eds., *Liturgical Experience of Faith*, Concilium, 82: Religion in the Seventies, 1973, pp. 95-103.

194 Alexander Schmemann, "Liturgy and Theology," in Thomas Fisch, ed., Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann, Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1972/1990, pp. 49-68.

195 Susan J. White, *Groundwork of Christian Worship*, London, Epworth Press, 1997, p. 16.

196 Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition*, London: SCM Press, 2004; Christopher J. Ellis, "Understanding Worship: Trends and Criteria," in Keith

Saliers, he uses the term "primary theology" to refer to worship in the liturgical sense (corporate) as a theological act.[198] William Hendricks states

> Theology grows out of worship. Worship precedes theology. But in turn, theology returns to critique the worshipping community and to inform it.[199]

McClendon argues that the academic type of theology is a second order discourse that describes and sometimes helps reform the first order language of religion – its praying, preaching, confessing, but the first-order language is primary, and a theology that does not enrich preaching is of no value.[200] In short, neither theology nor ethics as such can exist in vacuum. The sense of virtue is developed in the context of a community.

> The character we investigate in a biographical study is always character-in-community. None of the persons we examine can be understood unless we understand his participation in ("participation" does not exclude controversy with and alienation from) communities of faith, and other human communities as well. Thus the convictions of our saints are convictions formed in connection with life in community; the theologian in examining such a life must have this communal dimension of his study always in mind, and the theological results of the inquiry are normally addressed to the community from which his interest first grows.[201]

For McClendon, "to think about our convictions is already to be engaging in some degree in primary theology -- whether my primary convictions are about God or something else."[202] His narrative theology and virtue ethics "is always character-in-community" type. He does not see secondary theology apart from the primary. There is no theology apart from ethics either. The McClendonian virtue-ethical vision grew out of his own "biography as theology."[203] For him virtues and virtuous characters develop in the community of practices where the primary theology takes place in different modes. It represents a certain language of culture in which the process of narratively extended communication takes place. The secondary theologians and ethicists should be conscious

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Jones and Parush R Parushev, eds., *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today*, Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2007, pp. 25-39; Christopher J. Ellis, "Worship at the Heart of Life," in Keith Jones and Parush R Parushev, eds., *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today*, Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2007, pp. 41-57; Christopher J. Ellis, *Approaching God: A Guide for Worship Leaders and Worshippers*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009.

197 Ellis, *Gathering*, pp. 150-175; Ellis, *Approaching God*, pp. 82-100.

198 Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994.

199 William L. Hendricks, "Church Music as a Shaper of Baptist Theology," in *Baptist History and Heritage*, 21, July 1986, p. 3.

200 Murphy, "Introduction," p. 25.

201 McClendon, *Biography*, p. 202.

202 Ibid.

203 See McClendon, "Embodying."

of the power of the primary theology to usher them into sacred territory.[204] Moving beyond literal scriptural texts, one can find how the primary-theological image-filled texts create a vision of living God relating to his people.[205] Learning to "listen" to the primary theology, McClendon was enabled to provide a certain baptistic *vision* on the "second-order" language of religion. One can conclude: to be better readers of McClendon may not provide so much more information, but rather help us to live more faithfully as Christians.[206]

3.3. Narrative theology and ethics: the *baptist vision*

McClendon called himself a "small "b" baptist."[207] He saw different communities of faith united despite their diversities "in their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, their own communal practices, their own guiding vision."[208] It is "the baptist vision which is really at the centre of this way of life and belief."[209] In his short version McClendon summarises it:

> As I tried very hard to spell out in *Ethics*, the "baptist vision" has two mottoes: first, "This is that"; and, second, "Then is now." Each needs some explanation. "This is that" is taken from the King James Version of Acts 2:16, where Simon Peter on the day of Pentecost reads from the prophets and then says to the audience, this -- in other words, what his listeners see here today -- is that. It's what the prophet was speaking about. So the right way to read prophecy is not just as a historical record of the past, but as a disclosure of the meaning and significance of the present. In a sense, the first century (the New Testament period) is the 16th century, and the Reformation (and especially the radical Reformation) is our own century. "Then is now" tries to do the same thing. The "end times" about which we read in Scripture is not just information about how things may come out in some remote distant time. It is information about what is of final importance here and now. Eschatology is what comes last, but it is also what lasts, because it is enduring. The thing that strikes me about the radical reformers is that they were so varied. There is no one person that baptists look to as their founder, no Luther or

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204 Kropf, *Singing*, p. 74.

205 Ibid.

206 Hauerwas, *Reading*, p. 172.

207 McClendon, "Embodying," tells: "Yoder brought to the surface the things I had believed in as a Baptist and made me confront them. My efforts at ecumenism to that point had been to try to seem more Protestant rather than to be who I am. So I seized upon the idea of baptists with a small "b." This refers not just to those who label themselves as Baptist, but Christians of any sort (including Episcopalians) who see the radicals of the 16th century -- the so-called Anabaptists -- as their spiritual forbears, even if not direct progenitors."

208 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 26.

209 Ibid., p. 27.

> Calvin. And this is not accidental; there were so many leaders of such different sorts. For example, Menno Simons was indeed an important figure, but Mennonites would still be Mennonites without Menno. Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, Conrad Grebel -- these were each different people with different concerns. What they had in common was this baptistic *vision* that shaped their lives and often caused their deaths, because they were a martyred people. Indeed they believed that the story of the cross is the story of every Christian's life.[210]

In his *Ethics* McClendon's *baptist vision* was laid out as follows:

> I will now make another attempt to show how these marks of the Radical Reformation draw together. It, too, may be inadequate. It is important to remember, in assessing it, that a main test of its adequacy will be the capacity of the vision not only to generate a theology but also to shape a shared life in Christ Jesus. If the shared life of the communities of the vision (the baptists) consists in what they suffer and do and feel and practice, the theological task of discovering and unfolding their vision will find its true meaning only in the arena of that life itself. That is the hard test my proposal – or any other – must survive. In this spirit, consider the following suggestion: The role of Scripture is indeed the clue. (...) Scripture in this vision effects a link between the church of the apostles and our own. So the vision can be expressed as a hermeneutical principle: *shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community*. In a motto, **the church now is the primitive church and the church on judgement day**; the obedience and liberty of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth is our liberty, our obedience, till time's end.[211]

According to Murphy, "in this motto we find the missing piece of the contemporary hermeneutic puzzle."[212] McClendon argued that the *baptist vision* served both the 16th century radicals as well as their direct and not-so-direct contemporary heirs for "the unity that arises by use of the vision is nevertheless sufficient to define an authentic style of communal Christian life, so that participants in such a community can know what the church must teach to be the church."[213] It is a creative task. Theologians receive the heritage and by transforming it create new possibilities for the shape of shared convictions.[214] Such a task needs philosophical sources and aesthetic models that imagination may invoke, but also needs "the very life of the theologian-in-community and the theologian-in-dialogue."[215] For Paul Fiddes it is an open dialogue of interdisciplinary communication between literature and theology,[216] eschatology[217] and

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210 McClendon, "Embodying."

211 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 30.

212 Murphy, "Textual," p. 270.

213 McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 46.

214 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 40.

215 Ibid., p. 40.

216 See Paul S. Fiddes, *Freedom and Limit: A Dialogue between Literature and Christian* Doctrine, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1991, repr. Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1999.

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spirituality.[218] McClendon shows how the Scriptures of the early church have revealed to the (Ana)baptists "a vision that shows *how* the church sees itself as that people."[219] The baptistic people project their authoritative texts and their own roles through the prism of *baptist vision* into the life of their own age and contexts. A narrative-like drama has been and will be going on.[220] It is linked with an eschatological vision.[221] McClendon argues that the baptist "is" in *this is that* is a mystical and immediate vision which "might be better understood by the artist and poet than by the metaphysician and dogmatist."[222]

> We may call this way *figural* or *typological*. I have called it "the prophetic vision," because it is much used by the prophets. Especially in postbiblical application, I call it "the baptist vision" after the sixteenth-century Christian radicals. Neither Catholic nor Protestant, spurned by both sides, they called themselves simply "brothers and sisters," or *Täufer*, "baptists." The baptist vision is the way the Bible is read by those who (1) accept the plain sense of Scripture as its dominant sense and recognise their continuity with the story it tells, and who (2) acknowledge that finding the point of that story leads them to its application, and who also (3) see past and present and future linked by a "this is that" and "then is now" vision, a trope of mystical identity binding the story now to the story then, and the story then and now to God's future yet to come.[223]

For McClendon the *baptist vision* realises itself by *this is that* and *then is now* paradigm of life in the faithful community of hermeneutics.[224] John L. Ruth has interpreted it as the "sameness" in the continuing narrative identity.[225] He argued that the collected stories

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Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End. Eschatology in Theology and Literature*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

218 Paul S. Fiddes, *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture. Eight Novelists Write about their Craft and their Context,* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.

219 Ibid., p. 32.

220 Ibid., p. 171. See also, for instance, Tieleman Jansz van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, From the Time of Christ to the Year A. D. 1660. Compiled From Various Authentic Chronicles, Memorials, and Testimonies, by Tieleman J. van Braght, Translated from the Original Dutch or Holland Language from the Edition of 1660 by Joseph F.* Sohm, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Mennonite Publishing House, 1951; Tieleman Jansz van Braght, *A Martyrology of the Churches of Christ, Commonly Called Baptists, During the Era of the Reformation. Translated From the Dutch of T. J. van Braght. Edited for The Hanserd Knolleys Society, by Edward Bean Underhill*, Volumes 1 (J. Haddon, London, 1850), Volumne 2, (J. Haddon and Son, London, 1853). See also "Martyr Books," in *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M37855.html, viewed 30.10.2009.

221 Hauerwas, "Reading," p. 179.

222 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 33.

223 McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 45.

224 McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 31-33.

225 John Ruth, *Mennonite Identity and Literary Art*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Helard Press, 1978, pp. 9-10.

accumulate until "they form a saga teaching morals and a world-view."[226] "What is wanted," for McClendon, "is exactly the theological appropriation of such rich materials."[227] To be integrated with it is to be integrity with it. Narrative theology and ethics requires virtue. When the post-modern world may doubt "the official given history" – as well as the official theology and ethics in the name of Christ – as an ideology, there is an expectation of "another side to the story" – and "maybe even truer."[228] The virtue-ethical “sameness” of the primary-theological communities of faith in the name of Christ enables them to embody their convictions and live them out in the vision of Jesus as their Lord in its rich fullness.[229]

Conclusion

226 Ibid., p. 11.

227 McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 39.

228 Rudy Wiebe, in Shirley Neuman, "Unearthing Language: An Interview with Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch," in *A Voice in the Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe*, ed. W. J. Keith, Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981, p. 230.

229 Compare Di Brandt, *Dancing Naked: Narrative Strategies for Writing Across Centuries*, Stratford, Ont.: The Mercury Press, 1996, and McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 238-239.