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The Role of the Virtues in Christian Discipleship

in James Keenan SJ and William Spohn:

A Comparative Investigation.

by
Jane Borg

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Theological Studies)

School of Philosophy and Theology

Supervisor:

Rev Dr Thomas Ryan, SM

University of Notre Dame, Fremantle

May 2011

"I testify that this dissertation is my own work. It does not contain material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university or institution. To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation."

Jane Borg 23 May 2011

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Abstract

As Christians, the basis for our moral development and consequent actions is rooted in our relationship with Jesus Christ. To the extent that we respond to the love of God, open ourselves to ongoing conversion, allow of our consciences to be formed by His truth, recognise and repent of sin in our lives and strive to develop the virtues is the extent to which we will grow as disciples of Jesus. Both James Keenan and William Spohn have used virtues ethics to investigate various aspects of this call and our moral response. Keenan's principal concern seems to be the nature and practice of the virtues, especially that of wisdom in moral decision-making. Spohn looks at identity, perception and dispositions while using Scripture to argue how the person of Jesus Christ must play a normative role in how we reflect on and respond to moral issues. Common to both is the requirement of disciples to be lovers and imitators of Jesus Christ, not only for our own moral good, but for that of our wider church communities and our society.

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Chapter 1: Purposes and background of the proposed research

1. Research question:

What emerges by comparing the writings of James Keenan and William Spohn concerning the virtues and their role in Christian discipleship?

2. Why?

Reading moral theology during the past two years, one question that has emerged concerns why we humans make the moral decisions we do. Should we follow strict norms or rules or one of the various theories about what motivates our moral decision making? Or is it rather that those moral choices are about responding in love to God, to ourselves and to others out of love; a love empowered by the Holy Spirit and modelled through Jesus Christ?

As Catholic Christians, are we perhaps fearful of offering this solution to people struggling with life? The answer may not always be the logical secular solution or even the one suggested by some sections of our own Church. It may well be that someone genuinely seeking God and seeking to live a Christian life empowered by God will know the correct moral response or solution. Spohn suggests "[O]ur basic identity has great influence on what we perceive, and our main moral dispositions influence both what we see and who we think ourselves to be."[1] If our identity is

[1] William C Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics,* (New York, NY: The Continuum

that of a disciple of Jesus, then we will act out of that identity; not just out of formula following the rules, but out of a heart response to Jesus Christ, out of love for God and a desire to do as Jesus would do.

Having discovered the growing literature on virtue that stresses *who I am* not *what I do* as the core premise for moral decision-making,[2] I want to investigate this further and have taken as my focus the writings of James Keenan, SJ, and William C Spohn.

3. Structure of the Project

This first chapter will set the context in terms of defining and briefly discussing the main concepts developed later in the paper and outlining the value of the virtue ethics approach to moral decision making.[3] The second chapter will address Christian discipleship as the practice of the virtues in James Keenan. The third will discuss William Spohn's writings on Christian discipleship, concentrating on his ethics of character which links identity, transformation and the virtues. Finally, I

[2] This paper is concerned with the *underpinnings* of moral decision-making. An investigation into the *dynamics* and calibrations of that process warrants a further research project.

[3] There has been much written on the resurgence and value of virtue ethics in recent decades and, due to the spatial limitations of this paper, I have outlined only some of the reasons why this approach is supported. For further reading see for example Joseph J Kotva, Jr, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996); Romanus Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics,* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Richard M Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith, Foundations of Catholic Morality*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981); in addition to the many writings of the Keenan and Spohn cited in this paper.

will conduct a comparative analysis of these two approaches drawing out any implications for us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

4. Significant terms and concepts

The following terms and concepts are those that are common to both Keenan and Spohn.[4] Others specific to their approaches will be discussed in the appropriate sections of this paper.

Conversion

Although not the main focus of this paper, conversion underpins the approaches of both authors, for without conversion, there is no discipleship to Jesus Christ. According to O'Neil and Black, conversion is a change of heart, a turn away from sin, and a return to God's embrace.[5] Initiated by God, it is an encounter with the God of Love that can either be accepted or rejected. If accepted, we become disciples of Jesus and our conversion changes our heart, our vision of life and the way we act.[6]

[4] These terms are defined to a level that will give context to the discussions that follow. A detailed discussion of these concepts is outside the scope of this project.

[5] Kevin J O'Neil and Peter Black, *The Essential Moral Handbook: A Guide to Catholic Living,* (Chawton, Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications. 2003), 302

[6] O'Neil and Black, *The Essential Moral Handbook,* 102

Discipleship

Discipleship begins with conversion and, like conversion it is not a one-off experience. It is a daily response to the call of Jesus Christ to live by imitating Him and to grow in our identification with Him. Richard Gula suggests that discipleship "is the operative moral category for one who lives in the power of Jesus' Spirit and continues in one's own time the mission of proclaiming the nearness of God's reign."[7] Donna Orsuto describes discipleship as "a personal and intimate relationship with and total adherence to Jesus Christ."[8]

Sin

Sin can been seen from the perspective of objective or subjective morality. Under the first, sin refers to a moral fault or choice of a moral evil. From the perspective of subjective morality, the meaning of sin incorporates the notion of moral responsibility. In traditional act-centred moral theology, sin was the result of breaking the moral law.[9] More recently, and more relevant to this current investigation, sin is best defined in the context of our relationship with God, specifically about saying 'no' to God – 'no' to our conscience, 'no' to ongoing conversion, 'no' to stepping out in faith to develop the virtues. Importantly, the

[7] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith,* 190

[8] Donna L Orsuto, "The Saint as Moral Paradigm" in eds. Dennis J Billy, CSSR and Donna Lynn Orsuto, *Spirituality & Morality, Integrating Prayer & Action*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 137. She proposes discipleship as having three characteristics: the relationship is God's initiative and begins with a call, an invitation, from God; it requires a radical break from past attachments and commitment to Jesus' way of being and acting; and finally, accepting this new way of life comes with the power to carry on Jesus' mission. (Ibid)

[9] TH555 *Foundations of Moral Theology Unit Guide* UNDA 2009 p36

Catechism draws our attention to the perversity of sin; not only in terms of individual sinful acts but in terms of the damage to our character.[10]

Virtue

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* a virtue is an habitual and determined tending toward the good which disposes a person to do the right thing.[11] Hence "the goal of a virtuous life is to become like God."[12] O'Neil and Black describe virtues as "dimensions of one's moral character that make perception of what is good easier" and "dispositions, demonstrated in action which shape us as the people whom God has created us to be."[13]

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[10] **"**Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. [Homebush, NSW: St Pauls/ Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994], para 1865 [Henceforth *CCC*])

[11] Although Joseph Kotva is not speaking in specifically religious terms, what he says is also relevant to the definition of virtue. Kotva notes that there is a lot of disagreement between authors on nature and content of virtues, but offers five generalisations that are widely accepted. Firstly, virtues must be understood in relation to human good. "The virtues are those states of character that enable or contribute to the realisation of the human good. The vices are those that detract or hinder the realisation of the good." (*Kotva*, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 23) Secondly, the various virtues include both the intellectual part and the affective part of the self. Thirdly, the virtues include tendencies (react in characteristic ways), dispositions (seek certain ends and act appropriately to this) and capacities (ability to reason about means and ends). Fourthly, the virtues are not subject to whim but are stable aspects of one's character. Virtues and vices don't change overnight – they need education, continual practice/neglect, which results in incremental advance or decline. They need time and work. Finally, genuinely virtuous actions must be done for their own sake not for what they achieve. They must be ends in themselves (ibid). Spohn does not agree that virtue should be ends in themselves but this will be discussed further in chapters three and four of this paper.

[12] St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, 1:PG 44,1200D cited in *CCC*, para 1803

[13] Both quotes at O'Neil and Black, *The Essential Moral Handbook,* 41

Virtues can be classified as human (or moral) virtues or theological virtues.[14] The moral virtues are "stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance."[15] All other moral virtues sit below the cardinal virtues.[16] Moral virtues "grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them."[17] The theological virtues are infused into humans by God to dispose us to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. "They have God for their origin, their motive, and their object - God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake."[18] The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity. "They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them."[19]

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[14] Together, Cessario calls these seven virtues '*habitus'*, since "a *habitus* amounts to a real shaping of our character, virtue ensures that one actually does 'live righteously'" (Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics,* 53) A good *habitus* causes us as Christians to act in accordance with the ultimate good, which is God. Cessario relates the qualities of actions which theologians point out as being qualified by *habitus*: readiness to act, ease in performing the action, and joy or satisfaction while doing it. (Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics,* 46-7) Cessario tells us that both ordered and disordered *habitus* can exist within one person but that grace and Christian growth in virtue allows us to gradually move from one to the other (Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics,* 48).

[15] *CCC* para 1834. Keenan suggests that the cardinal virtues are what minimally define a virtuous person. Their task is to make a person rightly ordered so they can perform morally right action. He relates Aquinas as saying the cardinal virtues integrate both the person and the action. They are not the end point of virtue, but the beginning – they provide the hinge, the skeleton upon which all other moral virtues hang; right dispositions and right moral action (James F Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 709-729 at 714.

[16] Keenan has proposed consistently over the past two decades that these cardinal virtues need to be redefined to more appropriately reflect current thinking in virtue ethics. This will be discussed further in chapter two.

[17] *CCC* para 1839

[18] *CCC* para 1840

[19] *CCC* para 1841

Cardinal Virtues

Given that this paper is not a dissertation on the characteristics of the virtues themselves, despite that being an interest of Keenan, but rather on the role they play in enabling us to be better disciples of Jesus in the chosen authors, I will touch only briefly on the definition of the four cardinal virtues.[20] The most important cardinal virtue is Prudence.[21] Vivian Boland describes prudence as "both an intellectual virtue, a skill of knowing and judging, and a moral virtue, a skill of correctly ordering desire."[22] Prudence then governs the other three moral virtues. Justice orders our exterior actions[23] – the Catechism states that "justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbour their due."[24] With the affective virtues (those guiding and integrating the emotions), temperance (moderation and balance) and fortitude (firmness and constancy in pursuing good) order and form the affective responsiveness of a person. Thus, virtues like temperance primarily affect or shape the person, others such as justice primarily

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[20] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides thorough definitions and descriptions of each of the virtues (paras 1803 – 1845). Benedict XVI has recently released a collection of writings that also address the virtues [Pope Benedict XVI, *The Virtues,* (Huntington, Ind: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2010)]

[21] Keenan suggests that "prudence enjoys nearly the same function and authority over the moral virtues that charity does with the infused virtues: as charity unities the infused virtues, prudence unites the moral virtues." (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 144)

[22] Vivian Boland, "Dear Prudence, Politics and Classical Virtue", *The Tablet*, June 26, (2010): 4-5, at 4. Boland reports Aquinas as saying that prudence is needed "as no moral theory can cover every possible case in such a way that personal responsibility would be removed. We must think, judge, act, and accept credit (or blame) for our actions." (Boland, "Dear Prudence, Politics and Classical Virtue", 5)

[23] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 714

[24] *CCC* para1836

issue in actions; but all our actions somehow shape us to be a certain type of person.[25]

Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics emphasises a person's character (identity, attitudes, dispositions) rather than compliance with rules (deontological) or consequences of actions (consequentialism) as the central elements in moral reasoning and action. "'Being' precedes 'doing', but 'doing' shapes 'being'"[26] - we act out of who we are. Virtue ethics is not about ignoring what is the right action; rather it is the "realisation that right action, right judgment, and rightly ordered character are intimately linked."[27] According to Hursthouse, virtue ethics has three central concepts: virtue, practical wisdom and *eudaimonia* (or well-being)[28]. Kotva tells us it is "premised on the notion of a true human nature with a determinate human

[25] This distinction of moral virtues that concern actions and those concerning the emotions is discussed by Aquinas. He distinguishes between a virtue such as justice whose action terminates outside the person in an action (is transitive) and those such as fortitude and temperance whose operation terminates and remains in the moral subject, namely they are evaluated by how well or badly the agent is affected (immanent). See *Summa Theologiae* 1.2.60.2; 1.2.56.6 ad 1. (http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm) accessed 11 April 2011)

[26] Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 30

[27] Ibid

[28] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue ethics" *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/, 2007, accessed 25 April 2010

good or end or *telos*."[29] Some kinds of actions, habits, capacities and inclinations move us away from out true nature; others lead us towards our human good.[30]

This teleological virtue ethics is neither consequentialist nor deontological, however by necessity has a place for both rules and consequences.[31] Kotva explains that in virtue ethics, the *telos* "concerns the exercise of the virtues and participation in virtuous relationships."[32] Consequentialism rarely ranks these as central features; its focus is whether a thing or list of things is good and then evaluates an action according to whether this thing is produced and how much. It does not seek human excellence and it can justify any human action that achieves the right end. Kotva argues that this is not compatible with virtue ethics which could not support any action incompatible with pursuit of the virtuous life and virtuous relationships. Deontological theories, on the other hand, are based on predetermined rules or procedures; which are then the focal point of moral decision-making.

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[29] Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 17

[30] Virtue ethicists don't agree on the exact content of human good but do agree on a few points. Human good requires we develop and practice the virtues; it's a certain way of living. The virtues that lead us to *telos* are not just a means to get there but are part of the way of life – essential components of the *telos*. In practising the virtues you become a virtuous person – they are not just enacted but acquired. Human good is both individual and corporate. It is not just about an individual reaching human good but about the relationships and the corporate life of each person. Moral education and growth requires the input of others; relationships and shared activities are central to the human good; conversation and love have no meaning in a solitary setting – human life is social. (Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics, 20-21*)

[31] Good moral decision making has to take into account the effects of our decisions, For example, the virtues of justice, generosity and friendship involve being accountable for the decisions we make – our actions require us to weigh up the effects on others. (Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 34)

[32] Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics, 33*

This is not the case with virtue ethics, which has at its focus the kind of person you are becoming. Virtue ethics does require those seeking the *telos,* both as individuals and within community, to live within rules. The difference is that the rules are subservient to the virtues – not the other way round.[33] We need rules to guide us but following rules for rules sake is unlikely to bring freedom or a change in character. Following rules because they draw one closer to one's object of affection and loyalty results in a different motive for following rules and it likely to be transformative. The challenge is to develop norms that are based on Christ; norms that guide freedom rather than just constraining the moral agents - neither deontology nor consequentialism seems to be able to do this satisfactorily. Regardless of the approach adopted, Christ's life must be held as *the norm* and the basis of our discernment on living as a disciple of Jesus today.[34]

5. Why Virtue Ethics?

Joseph Kotva notes that much of modern ethical theory has concentrated on developing rules, principles, goods and exact methods for determining the status of specific acts.[35]

> In contrast, virtue ethics is more agent-centered and less concerned with the analysis of problematic actions. Virtue ethics moves the focus away

[33] Ibid, 33

[34] I am indebted to a reader of the original proposal for this project for these thoughts.

[35] Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 5

> from specific acts to "background" issues such as character traits, personal commitments, community traditions, and the conditions necessary for human excellence and human flourishing.[36]

Spohn believes that

> virtue ethics provides the most comprehensive account of moral experience and that it stands closer to the issues of moral life. As such it is superior to the other common ethical approaches - an ethics that focuses on obligation and one that emphasises consequences.[37]

The remaining discussions in this paper will look at how Keenan and Spohn use virtue ethics to expound their approaches to discipleship - Keenan using virtues as the path to discipleship; Spohn using transformation of character - perceptions, dispositions and identity.

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[36] ibid

[37] Spohn, *Go and do likewise,* 27. This support of virtue ethics is not, however, universal. Kotva addresses some common objections. In summary, to the accusation of its being narcissistic, Kotva argues that virtues ethics is too other-focused and that some amount of self-regard is necessary in our response to Christ's call to discipleship. (Mark Graham also addresses this criticism by stating that one characteristic of a morally good person is the ability to look into oneself and identify the negative characteristics that impede our ability to act rightly [Mark E Graham, "Rethinking Morality's relationship to salvation: Josef Fuchs, S.J., on Moral Goodness", *Theological Studies, 64,* 2003: 750-772 at 770-771]. Edward Vacek also has a discussion on ethical egoism that makes some good points on this matter. (Edward Collins Vacek, *Love Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics,* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994]: 219-223). To the charge of being incompatible with social justice, Kotva argues that true excellence requires us to reach out to others in love, both within and outside the Christian community, and cannot involve any type of exploitation. To the accusation of relativism, Kotva further questions how a theory based on honesty, truth and practical wisdom as well as having the notion of a *telos* – a determinant human good – can be accused on those grounds. Finally to the suggestion that other nonvirtue ethics better address Christian morality, Kotva argues "that nonvirtue theories are ill equipped and even averse to expressing the variety and complexity of convictions and modes of moral reasoning seen in Scripture and theology." (Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 143-159, quote at 159).

6. Methodology

The methodology for the project will be guided by the research question: what emerges by comparing the writings of James Keenan and William Spohn concerning the virtues and their role in Christian discipleship?

The investigation will have two stages:

a) an analysis of the relevant writings of Keenan and Spohn

b) a comparison of the results of that analysis.

Chapter 2: Christian discipleship as the practice of the virtues in James Keenan

Keenan's writing provides wisdom for living a moral life based on discipleship with Christ and flowing from this, the development of the virtues. He has written extensively on the fundamental need for each Christian to develop virtues and, among other things, has called for the cardinal virtues to be re-interpreted so as to apply more accurately to the relational nature of humanity. His writing spans from academic papers[38] through to more accessible books and articles directed at pastors and laity alike[39]. His writings provide wisdom that applies not just to those on an obviously religious journey, such as priests, religious and theologians, but for all baptised Christians and, arguably, for every human being of good will seeking to live a moral life.

[38] For example, papers pertaining to specific theories in virtues ethics such as Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 709-29; or those providing reflections on the inputs of various authors to the moral theological debate, such as James F. Keenan, "Towards an inclusive vision for moral theology. Part I: A look at the past," *Pacifica* 12, no. 3 (1999): 249-63; James F. Keenan "Notes on Moral Theology: Fundamental Moral Theology at the Beginning of the New Millennium: Looking Back, Looking Forward", *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 119-40; James F. Keenan "Notes on Moral Theology: Fundamental Moral Theology at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century", *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 99-119; or James F. Keenan "Fundamental Moral Theology: Tradition", *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 140-58.

[39] For example, James F Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*, (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1996); or J. Keenan, 'Are you growing up in the virtues?' *Priests & People*, (April 1998): 139-143

Keenan is strongly influenced both by Aristotle[40] and St Thomas Aquinas,[41] and by modern philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. In his 1981 book *After Virtue,*[42] MacIntyre posed three questions which, for Keenan, became central to his own teaching on virtue ethics: Who am I now? Who do I want to become? How am I going to get there? For Keenan, the answer to each of these questions refers both to discipleship and the virtues.[43] In these questions Keenan suggests "the person sees who they are and who they are called to be as a disciple of Christ. Knowing what she or he ought to do for Christ is effectively to prepare her- or himself for the tasks that lie ahead."[44] I will use these three questions as a framework for discussing Keenan's teaching on virtues ethics.

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[40] In brief, for Aristotle the final end was *eudaimonia, loosely translated as 'happiness', but more appropriately 'human flourishing', which implies thriving. It was not a subjective concept to Aristotle rather an objective one – is one living and doing well? It is an activity of the soul and strongly linked to virtue. For Aristotle, virtues were those states of character that produce human flourishing. They were both intellectual (involving the rational part of the soul) and moral (involving both the rational and appetitive, or emotional, part) in nature. Virtues were acquired through practice not instruction.* (Curtis Brown, "Aristotle's Ethics" http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/intro/aristotle_ethics.html, 2001, accessed 28/09/2010)

[41] Aquinas, building on Aristotle, has a teleological approach to the moral life. Virtues and their correlative responses and actions either impede or promote fulfillment or happiness of the human person. However, Keenan, with Aquinas, understands this in the context of faith. The purposes that direct the virtues are not simply in relation to an immanent context, namely a purely human 'flourishing' but concern one that is transcendent, namely centered on a personal God. '"The best way of describing the moral considerations in the *Summa Theologiae* is not as virtue ethics, let alone as divine command ethics, but as an ethics of divine beatitude' (Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* [Oxford, UK: Blackwells, 2002], 133). What Fergus Kerr notes of Aquinas is also true of Keenan: his is not an ethics of virtue but of 'divine beatitude'.

[42] MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* cited in (among others) Daniel Harrington and James F. Keenan*, Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology,* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefied Publishers, Inc. 2005:24)

[43] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 711

[44] James F Keenan, 'Catholic Moral Theology, Ignatian Spirituality and Virtue Ethics: Strange Bedfellows', *The Way Supplement* 88, (Spring, 1997): 36-45, at 42

1. Who am I now?

The answer to this question can really only be given in the context of the second: Who do I want to become? Harrington and Keenan suggest that if the answer to the second question is that one wants to be a part of God's kingdom or wants to be in union with Jesus, then the answer to the first question must be "a disciple of Jesus, made in the image and likeness of God."[45] Thus, the primary identity of a Christian is a disciple; an identity which puts one not only in a relationship with Jesus but with other disciples because following Jesus is done in community.[46] In discussing this reality, Keenan introduces a 19th century theologian, Fritz Tillman, who held that "the Christian pursuit of good had to be within the framework of being a disciple of Jesus."[47] Unlike moral theologians of the manualist tradition, Tillman argued that the primary sacrament for moral theology was actually baptism, not penance, as it is through baptism that the Christian is recreated and graced with the Holy Spirit to live as a child of God. Baptism provides, therefore, all that is needed to live a moral life, that is, the call to walk in discipleship with Jesus and to constantly grow in one's love of God, neighbour and self. This call to holiness is therefore not reserved for those who have chosen to follow Christ in religious or clerical life, but for every baptised Christian.[48] Consequently, every

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[45] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 49

[46] ibid

[47] Keenan's discussion of Tillman draws on Fritz Tillman, *The Master Calls: A Handbook of Christian Living*, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960), cited in Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 54

[48] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 54-5

baptised Christian has a responsibility not only to live a moral life but, through walking as a disciple of Jesus, to seek to grow in the virtues.[49]

Keenan suggests the key virtues possessed by the historical Jesus were love, obedience, and mercy. Therefore the questions for each disciple become: do I love? Am I obedient? Am I merciful?[50] It is worth pursuing each of these questions.

Am I loving?

One cannot love unless one knows love. When Aquinas wrote of love, it was in terms of charity and union.[51] At its deepest level, love is with God, neighbour, self. Union is what we feel when we are in love. Keenan suggests it is important to maintain this visceral sense of love because union is what we seek; it is deeply instinctive.[52] It is easy to discuss various issues in moral theology and ignore or take

[49] Both Tillman and current moral theologian, Klaus Demmer, have as central to discipleship the need for self-knowledge. Jesus knew where He stood in relation to God. Jesus called God "Father" and hence if one accepts adoption as Jesus' brothers and sisters, which is what one does at Baptism, then the call to discipleship is a call into that same relationship with God. It is a call to participate in Jesus' self-knowledge; which means to open one's entire will to God's will; to walk the journey of the cross; to listen to Jesus and to follow in His footsteps. The ability both to enter this relationship and then to continue to pursue Jesus are graces given to Jesus' disciples (Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 56).

[50] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 93

[51] Love has various forms (eros, philia, agape). See footnote 62 for discussion.

[52] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 11-12

for granted the call to love, as Keenan states he once did;[53] to be more concerned with moral objectivity than the person. Yet as Pope Benedict XVI has emphasised from the beginning of his papacy, all teaching must start with love.[54]

So why be loving? Keenan identified three reasons.[55] Firstly, Scripture commands it. The two great commandments are to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. Secondly, love is how each person can understand God, because God is love. God creates each person so as to enter into love with us, to bring us into His kingdom and to redeem us (cf Jn 3:16). Through love of God, neighbour and self, each person is sanctified; and this fuels one's goal, which is to be united with God forever. This is the foundation of a moral life. Finally, human experience confirms that love, not freedom or truth, "drives, animates and moves".[56] Love looks for union and moves us towards freedom and truth. It "makes possible our search for a freedom for greater love and a truth to love rightly".[57] This love of God within each person is brought into us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Gilleman invokes Aquinas in calling "charity the mother of the virtues because it precedes

[53] Keenan recounts how when he initially taught an Introduction to Moral Theology course he made no mention of love as it was more a formal concept of God loving humanity and human beings loving God and responding with moral behavior. There was no mention of experience or feelings; no spiritual content to the course. Love was foundational to Keenan; but that he took it for granted. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 14)

[54] Keenan, Moral Wisdom, 14-15

[55] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 15-17

[56] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 17

[57] ibid

all other virtues by animating them and giving them life."[58] As Keenan states, love is the foundation of the Christian call; it is not simply the beginning of Christian life; it is the continuum of it.[59]

Jesus tells us we are to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul (Mt 22:37-39).[60] Keenan examines the writings of Edward Vacek on the different types of love.[61] Vacek argues that a person who does not believe and hence does not know the love of God would be incomplete. Humans "need the love of God to know the goodness of life."[62] This has two levels: the experience of being loved by God. But, more importantly for Vacek, that God is loved by us. In other words, God is worth

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[58] ibid

[59] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 18-19

[60] Ibid

[61] Keenan explores the description by moral theologian, Edward Vacek, of love being threefold; all-encompassing and comprehensive. It is *agape*, which is love for the beloved; *philia*, the love for the love or the union itself; and *eros*, the love that the lover experiences as lover (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 20). A more detailed discussion of the three kinds of love can be found in Edward Collins Vacek, "Love for God – Is it Obligatory?" *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 1996* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996): 203-22, at 210-12 and 215-16.

[62] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 21. Keenan has drawn from a number of Vacek's works. However an excellent discussion of the love of God can be found in Vacek, "Love for God – Is it Obligatory?" Vacek bemoans the lack of centrality given to the love of God in contemporary Christian ethics, especially given Jesus' statement that love for God is the greatest and first commandment (Mt 22:38) (at 203). He argues that "it is obligatory to love God and objectively wrong not to love God" (at 205). What we love fundamentally determines who we are and what we become; and it determines in what we place value. As we allow the love of God into our lives, God will move us towards goodness; in ourselves and in our relationships, which in turn will encourage each to enact the goodness we have (205-207). Vacek explains that as one progresses in the moral life, the number and depth of relationships grow; however, the one relationship that counts above all is that of 'friend of God'. This is the deepest part of our identity and as we grow in this, we bring into this identity all the other good features of our lives (at 214). It is therefore critical that all Christians develop a relationship with God and put God first in their lives. (at 218) The extent to which one allows this love relationship to inform actions, is the extent to which each will live a moral life. Vacek concludes that "love for God is the 'soul' of our moral life" (at 220).

loving for God's sake and not just for our sake. [63] This is different from the love each has for others. Keenan notes that some think one should love Christ in one's neighbour; which is true, however he also suggests that one also needs to love the neighbour. One needs to love God specifically and one's neighbour specifically as they really are. So too, each person is to love oneself as one really is. This is not to say that we won't discover Christ in loving our neighbour, but Keenan challenges that it is one thing to love Christ in Jack and another to love Jack himself.[64]

Am I obedient?

Obedience is not just correct external actions, but actions which result from a heart response to God's love. Keenan states that God's love and providential care are demonstrated in the Ten Commandments.[65] They serve both to increase our understanding of God and as a source of considerable moral wisdom for contemporary Christians.[66] Understood as imperatives driven by our search for

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[63] In prayer one encounters the exchange of divine and human love - one enters into union with God specifically. St Ignatius saw prayer as a way of receiving God, as being inflamed by God. Prayer is also an encounter with being beloved. After an encounter with the love of God, we love ourselves and these two loves make it possible for one to love one's neighbour. It is not necessary to think one is good before one can love oneself as God loved us while we were still sinners (c.f. Rom 5:8). "God does not love us in our goodness; God loves us in our entirety." (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 22) Similarly one should love one's neighbours in their entirety. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 21-2)

[64] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 91

[65] In his book *Commandments of Compassion,* Keenan examines each of the Ten Commandments and advises how living these will develop each person in both the virtues and in one's journey with Christ. He considers that "obeying and heeding the Ten Commandments is then a way of entering into the presence of our caring and giving God." (James F Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion,* [Franklin, Wis : Sheed & Ward, 1999], xiii; also *Moral Wisdom,* 109)

[66] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 107. Keenan notes that during the 1st century CE, Jews never saw their suffering as punishment from God. They took it as the effect of their sin, which Keenan suggests is a helpful way of looking at morality. The moral code [Torah] was seen as something

happiness, they can be seen as a blend of the deontological and the teleological. They do not depend on people acknowledging them and they are not up for negotiation. While there is an immanent side to morality (happiness and our own good) we cannot afford to lose sight of the transcendent dimension (the call from the God who is utterly 'other' and all holy). This is embodied in Moses, trembling as he ascended the mountain to meet God – he knew God's power and sovereignty.[67]

Keenan relates growing up with Catholicism based on sacramental and devotional practices and a sacramental God who was transcendent, yet still near. He suggests that today much of the vertical relationship is lacking. It has been largely replaced by a Catholicism focused on people's humanity and morality. Catholics are no longer known for our sacramental life but for our moral stance on abortion, contraception etc. Catholics have lost our bearings, often making an idol of our moral teachings.[68] He challenges us to "return to that Catholic instinct that at once revered the sovereignty of God and still testified to God's intimate proximity."[69]

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good for them - a gift that allowed them freedom and happiness. Aquinas argued similarly; that "God is offended by the action of human beings only when they act against their own welfare"[66]. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 108. Keenan cites Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.122, as quoted in Josef Fuchs, *Christian Morality: The Word becomes flesh* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987]: 47). Keenan argues that people seem to have lost this insight – the law was not about God's preferences, but our benefit. Although many treat the Ten Commandments as optional extras in life, Keenan makes it very clear that they are commandments – orders - not suggestions (ibid).

[67] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 109

[68] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 109-110

[69] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 110

Am I merciful?

"To realise that one has encountered mercy is to realise that one has encountered God."[70] Mercy is important because it is the experience people have of God. This experience empowers one to imitate God and practice mercy. Aquinas puts mercy second only to charity in terms of important virtues.[71] Charity unites us in love to God and through mercy we "exemplify God in God's actions and therefore, we become like God."[72] Keenan defines mercy as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of others so as to answer them in their need"[73]. This is what Jesus did - rescued us. We are called to do likewise: to let God live and act in us so that through us others are rescued. For Catholics, mercy is central to living as a disciple of Jesus. Keenan highlights four points to illustrate this centrality. Firstly, he cites the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37).[74] Secondly, Scriptures name

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[70] Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion*, 4

[71] Aquinas argues that when mercy is the subject of God, it is the greatest of virtues, yet when applied to anyone less than God, it is second to charity – "A virtue may take precedence of others in two ways: first, in itself; secondly, in comparison with its subject. In itself, mercy takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to mercy to be bountiful to others, and, what is more, to succor others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence mercy is accounted as being proper to God: and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly manifested.”..... "But of all the virtues which relate to our neighbor, mercy is the greatest, even as its act surpasses all others, since it belongs to one who is higher and better to supply the defect of another, in so far as the latter is deficient." (St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, SS, QQ30, http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm, accessed 28 Sept 2010)

[72] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 122

[73] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 118

[74] Keenan calls this parable a foundational explanation of the love commandment (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 119) and refers to William Spohn who suggested this parable has privileged position both in Gospels and in the Church where the Gospel is proclaimed. (William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics,* [New York: Continuum Press,1999] cited in Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 120) This parable will be considered in more depth in chapter four.

mercy as the condition for salvation.[75] Thirdly, our entire theological tradition is expressed in terms of mercy.[76] Finally, early Christianity defined itself by the practice of mercy.[77]

The Church has defined seven corporal works and seven spiritual works of mercy.[78] The corporal works of mercy are: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned, and burying the dead. The spiritual works of mercy are: give good counsel, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, console the afflicted, pardon offences and injuries, bear offences patiently and pray for the living and the dead.[79] These have traditionally been paralleled with the seven sacraments, the seven deadly sins, and seven virtues (four cardinal and three theological).[80]

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[75] When describing the last judgment in Matthew 25, the parable has everyone surprised by the judgement. The goats did not know what they had done wrong and the sheep did not know that they had done right. The Gospels remind us that we should know that we should be merciful. Similarly, the rich man in Luke 6 who stepped daily over Lazarus at the gates was condemned. Keenan reminds us that the "practice of mercy, whether we know it or not, is the measure of our judgement" (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 121)

[76] Keenan suggests helping anyone in need is entering into their mess. He relates that some people express concern that mercy is only temporary relief but that justice is needed for structural changes that oppress people – social change. But Keenan argues that unless we enter into the chaos and needs through mercy, we can't see what needs to change to relieve the suffering (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 133).Through the incarnation of Jesus, God stepped into our mess and promised order – "his pledge to return again is a pledge to deliver us from the chaos of our own lives. Every action of God is aimed at rescuing us".(Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 121)

[77] Mercy was commanded by the God of the Christians and the Christians' response to this command had a huge impact of the society of that day. In overcrowded urban areas, Christians offered hope, charity and hospitality – a sense of family for those who had none. (ibid)

[78] Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion,* 2-3

[79] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 118

[80] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 123

2. Who do I want to become?

If the answer to 'Who am I?' is 'a disciple of Jesus' then the answer to 'Who do I want to become?' is 'a better disciple of Jesus'. Keenan observes that Jesus constantly challenged people to consider who each would become – "by his grace, his disciples, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom."[81] He notes that who we should become, or what humans should aim at, was also the end point of all Thomas Aquinas' questions in his seminal work *Summa Theologiae.* Aquinas' answer was that "the end is charity, union with God, which is, in effect, the kingdom of God, where we all find happiness."[82]

In practice, what does that mean? Following from earlier discussions, this means becoming an imitator of Jesus, not only external actions but being transformed internally; conformed to His likeness.[83] By looking at who Jesus was and how He related we find direction on which virtues we need to cultivate. Keenan notes Athanasius' presentation of "Christ as the exemplar of virtue: to become like God in Christ is to acquire his virtues which would include ministering this fellowship to others."[84] For example, applying the cardinal virtues, if I ask the question 'who am I?' in terms of developing virtues, the question may become 'am I just, temperate,

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[81] James F Keenan, "What is virtue ethics?", *Priests& People,* November 1999: 401-05, at 401

[82] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 41

[83] "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." (Rms 8:29, RSV).

[84] Keenan, "Are you growing up in the virtues?" 141. Although Keenan does not use the language of Christ as the universal moral norm (as Spohn does – Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 2 and elsewhere), this language conveys a similar ideal.

brave and prudent?' Following this through, the answer to the question of 'who do I want to become?' becomes – more just, more temperate, braver and more prudent. This means to become Christlike I need to become a virtuous person.[85]

3. How do I get there?

Keenan reminds us that discipleship and the cultivation of virtues are an ongoing process. This is a journey with Christ through which one learns to know God and oneself better and discern which virtuous ends need to be pursued in one's life.[86]

The obvious challenge is how to close the inevitable gap between who I am now and who I am called to become? This is MacIntyre's third question. One has to start somewhere and Keenan suggests the most important virtue in terms of imitating Jesus is mercy. By mercy we were saved, by mercy we follow in Jesus' footsteps. Mercy was a hallmark of the early Christians who understood the teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan - the Christian call to show mercy to all.[87] It is against this background that we need to consider what hinders and helps us in 'getting there' through the practice of the virtues.

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[85] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 711

[86] Keenan, 'Catholic Moral Theology, Ignatian Spirituality and Virtue Ethics: Strange Bedfellows', 42

[87] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 92

What stops me from being virtuous?

Grace and the Holy Spirit (New Law) are central in this approach to the virtues. If we accept the call to discipleship and accept the accompanying graces,[88] walking in the way of Christ, what prevents us living perfection in Christ? The answer to this is sin. Keenan's theology of sin is far removed from the traditional categories of sinful actions and manuals that formed the basis of moral theology over the centuries. He argues that sin is the failure to love.[89] Keenan is not suggesting we trivialise sin but that we look to Scripture for a "more foundational understanding of sin."[90] Before doing this, however, Keenan stresses the need to be accountable for one's actions and acknowledge when sin does exist in one's life.[91] Without this acknowledgement it is not possible to live as a disciple of Jesus.

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[88] Grace plays a key role in Aquinas' theology of virtues. Although not discussed by Keenan in any detail, as a follower of Aquinas the significance of grace underpins Keenan's writings on virtues and discipleship. In explaining Aquinas' approach to theology, O'Meara notes that Aquinas saw virtues as flowing "fully and necessarily from a divine presence called grace, because the virtues of a life, even that which is the dynamic source of Christian action, must (in the perspective of Aristotelianism) like all potentialities and activities, have a ground or a 'nature'" (Thomas F O'Meara, "Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas", *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 254-285 at 258). O'Meara explains that humans are offered an eternal supernatural destiny by God and then endowed, through the Holy Spirit and a relationship with the Word Incarnate, with the ability to achieve this end. Thus grace is a Trinitarian reality. He cites Aquinas' description of grace as "participation in deeper levels of God's life" (at 261); which being a new nature, "brings with it coinfused habits and activities (virtues and gifts) that meet and interact with a personality and its acquired virtues" (at 261). Thus the foundation of a virtuous life is the new life of the Spirit within us, supported by (rather than foundational) the practices and disciplines that form our character and develop virtues directed at a particular areas of a person's life.

[89] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 91. This approach recalls that of the early church which recognised that God saved us and invited us to walk with him in grace. Morality was defined in terms of whether that call was answered. Moral goodness was responding; moral badness was not bothering to respond. This notion of sin survived where ascetical theology existed, but disappeared from mainstream moral theology. (Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part I: A Look into the Past" *,* 252-3)

[90] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 98

[91] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 47. Acknowledging sin is critical to overcoming it. Keenan's discussions on sin revolve around its definition as a failure to love, however this self-absorption is only the

St Thomas Aquinas "believed we are capable, intelligent and free and therefore competent with our moral lives. He also held that we often act without responsibility for our lives and actions."[92] Keenan argues we have become a self-excusing people of God, ready to acquit one another from culpability. Why do we, both as individuals and as a society, do this? It is therapeutically important to claim responsibility for one's actions – morally, spiritually and psychologically.[93] Keenan provides an overview of moral thought over the past fifty years as an explanation of how we reached this current moral dilemma.[94] He suggests the need for a middle ground between preaching damnation and the moral goodness of humanity. "[P]revious generations recognised our sinfulness but failed to see the gift of grace, mercy and salvation."[95] Perhaps today we need to rediscover that we are sinners who are loved by God and that we need to be healed by that love.

Keenan does not put the total blame for ignorance of our sinfulness on deliberate actions of rebellion.[96] "To capture the breadth, depth, and pervasiveness of sin, I

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start of the condition. Spohn notes that if not addressed, it can lead to moral impotence which can only be addressed through grace and consequential radical transformation of the heart (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics, 29)*.

[92] ibid

[93] ibid

[94] We don't want to admit how morally bad we are, probably because of the historical view that mortal sins damned you to hell. In the 1960s, the church progressed to recognition that the Scriptures assure us of an offer of salvation – God was merciful if we call on him. Over the next generation (1970s-90s), the emphasis seemed to move to creation being good and humans, being in God's image, very good. Although scripturally true, it does not imply that people are morally good. The message preached was our goodness, an optimism that tended to ignore that we are also sinners. Consequently, many stopped going to reconciliation – if we are so good, why do we need to go to reconciliation? (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 48-9)

[95] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 49

[96] Keenan asserts that we have domesticated and trivialised sin, packaging it into categories and number ready for the confessional; looking at the outward weakness but missing the deeper

propose that sin is simply the failure to bother to love."[97] He writes about the pervasiveness of sin such that we often don't recognise the true sin in our lives. When we confess, we confess our weaknesses – where we fall short of our goals. Keenan suggests sin lies not in our weaknesses, but in our strengths.[98] When we suffer from moral weaknesses and do not try to overcome them, then we sin. But when we focus on the weakness, we avoid the real understanding of sin; those areas in which we are strong, where we could act but do not. Gospel tradition has sin resulting from strengths rather than weaknesses - the proud Pharisee (Lk 18:9-14); the miserly rich man (Lk 16:19-31); and those who were too busy or 'holy' to stop and help the injured man (Lk 10:25-37). Yet we always think we are weak when we sin; but this is not true. Are we so weak? Are we without knowledge, without freedom, without consent? Sin is deceptive and we are greater sinners than we think because we sin out of our strength. The sinners in the Gospels who are surprised by their sin did not recognise their own sinfulness. Keenan asks why we think we would?[99]

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causes where the real sin lays – hardness of heart, mean-spiritedness, pettiness, and resentment. We either hide this, or do not want to admit it is there, or we fail to look deeply enough to uncover it (*Moral Wisdom,* 53-4). It is not always easy to find sin. In some form or other it is coldness of heart and we need to identify areas where the heart is cold. The cold hearted sinners described in Scripture are blind to their condition – the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Pharisee (in comparison to the tax collector), the priest and Levite (the parable of the Good Samaritan) (*Moral Wisdom,* 58-9). It is to these people that Jesus draws our attention, not to the victims. The message is to open our eyes to the true sin in each story – not showing love to another. Keenan's thesis is biblical – each of the Gospels stories above refers to someone who could have done something but didn't. Our sin is not usually in what we did or tried not to do, but in where we are comfortable, where we don't bother, where we have found complacency – not in being loved but in feeling that we are better than others, our self-satisfaction. (*Moral Wisdom,* 56)

[97] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 55

[98] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 50

[99] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 50-2

Keenan gives us guidance in uncovering this deep sin so that it can be confessed. He draws on Franz Bockle who wrote on the effectiveness of recognising and confessing sin in our relationships and our lives. Bockle suggests when we become willing to acknowledge our moral faults and move towards reconciliation, we learn more about our sinfulness.[100] Until we do this, the real reconciliation[101] with God, others and ourselves is not possible.[102] This notion of sin opens up the concept of social sin, as all sin is social. We have responsibility to love as individuals but so do we as a society. Society fails to give us knowledge about the needs of others and routinely acquits us of any moral responsibility for the way we live and the effects our lives have on others. This in turn anesthetises our consciences.[103] As individuals, our failure is that we don't bother to find out what is going on and what we can do about it. We live in our comfort and complacency.

So faced with this reality of our sin, what do we do? Despair? Go away sad like the rich young man (Mk 10:17-31)? Are we prepared to love beyond our comfort zone? Jesus explained that what is impossible for us is possible for God. We

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[100] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 59; Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 100. Bockle argues that Christ's light shines on us to let us see how much we have sinned and how we could have loved. Until we recognise our sinfulness we cannot understand it. Real confession comes from not only naming the wrong we have done, but the ways we have not loved. We can only do this with the love of Christ, through his mercy. (Keenan, Moral Wisdom, 60).

[101] We may feel regret at doing wrong or causing hurt but not true repentance. Josef Fuchs, SJ, made this distinction. Where regret comes from within the person, repentance is a call from outside of the person. Where regret is usually about our weakness, repentance addresses our strengths – where we could have loved but chose not to love. (Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 101-2; also Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion, 93*)

[102] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 101.

[103] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 61

cannot win our salvation, but Jesus Christ did that for us. That is what sin teaches us.[104] When we glimpse our sinfulness, we can walk away or turn to Christ and be grateful for our salvation. Because of sin we need Christ. History is full of our selfishness and failure to love, which demonstrates that we need our redeemer and saviour. If we do not know that, we fail to recognise this need. When we do understand it, we open our eyes and see what we need to know and do.[105]

How do I get better at identifying sin in my life?

"The call to be a Christian is at once a call to grow."[106] Growth and discipleship are inseparable. Keenan illustrates this through examples from Scripture and Church tradition.[107] In the New Testament, the call to follow Jesus is always call to advance (for example, Phil 3:13-14).[108] The moral imperative to advance continued throughout Church tradition. Keenan quotes Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) who argued "to not progress on the way of life is to regress."[109] For such early

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[104] "Sin teaches us never to look back complacently but always to look forward in love and in hope" (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 65)

[105] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 64-5

[106] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 27

[107] ibid

[108] Paul uses this journeying image throughout his writings. His own experience of Christ was that of a journey that closely mirrored Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. He continued to travel extensively during his ministry, constantly having to press on, surrendering himself. As Paul followed in the footsteps of Christ, we too are we called to do as His disciples (James F Keenan, "Are you growing up in the virtues?" 140). Moving forward is a constant theme within the Gospels: the shepherds hurry to see the baby Jesus; Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus; the woman with a haemorrhage pushes past other people to touch Jesus' garment; and the prodigal son and father rush towards each other (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 28; Keenan, "Are you growing up in the virtues?", 140)

[109] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 29

theologians, the Lord who leads us expects us to follow.[110] It is not a matter of choice – we have been called and given the grace to respond.[111] It is a call to move, to grow; but in love. "The call to grow in love is a summons to pursue the right way for growing."[112] Keenan suggests we respond to this call by cultivating virtues. This enables both the harnessing of weaknesses and the development of strengths. "The agenda of the virtues is to promote a profoundly interpersonal and positive response to the call to grow and stands in sharp contrast to the later modern moral manuals that were so obsessed with avoiding sinful actions."[113]

"The call to grow, the call to move forward as disciples, the call to put on virtue is always heard in the Christian conscience."[114] Keenan suggests that throughout the history of the Church, conscience has always been defended and promoted wherever growth and virtue have been promoted. It is therefore not surprising that when Vatican II called for morals to be more deeply rooted in Scripture and discipleship, a more refined understanding of conscience started to emerge in

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[110] Keenan often refers to earlier theologians whose moral theology was based on discipleship, or responding to God's love through action. For example in one of his retrospectives, Keenan discussed among others, Bernard of Clairvaux whose spirituality drew deeply from the scriptures and led people towards a devotion to the person of Jesus. He also pointed to some 16th century saints such as Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and Frances de Sales whose spiritual writings are more in line with modern spiritual theologians. These writers challenged us to pursue good, not just avoid wrong, offering "Christians a way of becoming a disciple of Christ." (Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part I: A Look into the Past", 254-5)

[111] Keenan reminds us that this response is to be out of love; just as with Jesus who moved to Jerusalem; Mary who visited Elizabeth; Peter and John who ran to the empty tomb; and Mary Magdalene who ran to tell the disciples about the risen Lord (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 29)

[112] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 29

[113] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 30

[114] ibid

contemporary moral theology. Keenan appeals to the lapidary definition of conscience from *Gaudium et spes* as providing the framework for growth towards mature Christian discipleship.[115]

It is interesting that in an earlier article, Keenan noted a number of Australian theologians who "define the primacy of conscience specifically in the context of being mature Christians called in faith to make their lives a vital response to Christ's call to discipleship."[116] To grow in discipleship, one must therefore form one's conscience and listen to its voice. To guide us in this, Keenan examines the voice of conscience; the formation of conscience; and the erring conscience.

At the beginning of this discussion, Keenan makes an important distinction; that between the super-ego, the voice of authority from our past which supervises our actions, and our conscience. Super-ego is not a moral guide; it merely restrains us and keeps us safe. It recalls instructions given, which usually had with them the

[115] *In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged (2 Cor 6:10). Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths (Jn 1:3, 14) In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor (Eph 1:10). In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more right conscience holds sway; the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin*. [GS, paragraph 16], cited in Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 31

[116] James F Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future." *Pacifica,* Vol 13, No 1 (Feb 2000): 67-83, at 75

threat of punishment. From the superego comes the cycle: reprimand, punishment, isolation, guilt, negotiation, repentance and acceptance. The superego warns us to stay where we are. However, conscience calls us to grow. When the conscience is followed, moral progress occurs. It requires us to take risks and step forward, even if it means isolation and loss.[117]

Gaudium et spes states that conscience "holds us to obedience". Although an initial response to this could be that conscience restricts freedom, the reality is actually the opposite. It gives not the freedom to do what one wants, but to be able to heed the call of one's conscience. Conscience demands that we love God, ourselves and our neighbours. It dictates that one pursues justice and it is by one's conscience that each will be judged. Consequently the formation of our consciences is critical and it takes a lifetime.[118] Keenan argues that "because we are created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ, we can only take our call to discipleship seriously if we acknowledge the primacy of the conscience and the individual Christian responsibility to form it."[119] This formation comes from a variety of sources: the

[117] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 32-4. Superego then comes into play with feelings of guilt and isolation. Keenan explains that guilt can be both good and bad depending on its source. When feeling guilty one must ask: Did I do anything wrong? If yes, then it is the voice of conscience. If no, then the voice is that of the superego. The superego itself is not wrong, as we need to know basic safety messages such as not to run under cars and that we need to wash our hands, but conscience is a higher voice and it needs to be heeded (ibid).

[118] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 35

[119] Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 74

teachings of parents/teachers/friends/mentors; scripture; Church tradition;[120] local culture and lessons from our life experience. Keenan reminds us that it is not a matter of learning the Ten Commandments - what to do and what to avoid – rather it is a process of parenting ourselves; developing our relatedness in virtue – in justice, temperance, fortitude, fidelity and self-care.[121] As we develop the virtues we will form our consciences."[122]

To follow one's conscience however, does not mean one is right. Our conscience frequently errs, which has led to theological discussion and the development of tradition over whether one sins if one follows a conscience in error.[123] It is also important to recognise there is a difference between goodness and rightness.[124]

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[120] In terms of potential conflict between our conscience and the teaching of the Church, Keenan expects this to be rare. A formed conscience would in general adhere to church teaching and object only if it took a matter so seriously that it commanded us to disagree with the church. "The conscience is the seat of personal responsibility" and always binds us. If in conscience we disagree with the church's teaching we are bound to know exactly what the church teaches and once having done so whether there is still cause for disagreement. A person would then need to articulate why his/her way of acting is the more obliging way of loving God and neighbour than what the church teaches (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 37-8). In a 2006 note, Keenan discussed Cardinal George's position on the primacy of conscience, being that primacy cannot be given to conscience as a well formed conscience is hard to achieve and rather than err, we should follow a reliable authority – the church. (Keenan, "Notes on Moral Theology: Fundamental Moral Theology at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century", 105-106.) Pell's full reasoning can be found in George Cardinal Pell, "The Inconvenient Conscience", *First Things*, May 2005:22-26.

[121] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 35-6

[122] Keenan, *"*Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 77

[123] Keenan cites Thomas Aquinas' argument that it would be better to die excommunicated rather than violate our conscience. Scriptum super libros Sententiarum, IV,38.2.4 q.a. 3; see also IV. 27. 1. 2. q.a. 4 ad3; IV.27.3.3.expositio. Besides his *Commentary*, et passim. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom, 36,* citation at footnote 5, p 174*)*

[124] In *Commandments of Compassion*, Keenan explains that we can never know how good or bad we are but we can strive to find out what is the right thing to do. By responding to Christ's call on our lives and growing in virtues, we can bring about more rightness in our lives. That is our responsibility – to move forward, to seek to act rightly and to reflect on our actions when they

Goodness refers to the person's basic moral stance. Rightness refers to whether actions fulfil ethical requirements. A person can be good and act wrongly; similarly one can act selfishly in the right moral action. However, if there is no love, then the action is not good. The opposite of goodness is sin.[125]

What positive things can I do to train myself?

To recognise and accept the depth of sin in oneself requires the virtue of humility. The key to growing in virtue and discipleship is recognising that neither can be achieved in one's own strength and both require God's grace. Keenan turns to the theology and practices of ascetical spirituality to demonstrate how Scripture and prayer can lead us in developing virtues and consequently deepening in relationship with God and discipleship in Christ. In fact, Keenan sees the future of moral theology in spirituality.[126] God calls; the disciple responds in gratitude. As the disciple continues to open in relationship with God, the conversion that started with Baptism deepens and interiorises and becomes a driving force in the disciple's life. With a heart captured with the love of God, striving to love and

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are wrong. Although we may not understand the extent to which we are bad, two things are sure: we are, and that Christ though his mercy forgives us (Keenan, *Commandments of Compassion,* 101-4

[125] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 38-9. Sin is 'badness' not 'wrongness' (where we tried but got it wrong). "But if the real moral measure of our lives is moral goodness - that is, where we love, where we strive for the right - then sin is its opposite - where we are bad, where we fail to bother to love." (Keenan, Moral Wisdom, 58). Keenan's approach to the goodness/rightness question has stimulated debate in theological circles but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

[126] Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part I: A Look into the Past", 251

hence living a moral life becomes a response to love. Growth in the virtues becomes the vehicle for growth in discipleship.[127]

In the ascetical texts of the 12-16th centuries, exercises were the key to the growth in virtues. Keenan says

> [p]ersons did not become virtuous by intentionality alone or by simple wishful thinking, but only by the habitual practice of particular kinds of action that could eventually become for the practitioner a second nature. In fact, the virtues were basically strengths resulting from the right exercise of passion.

For Thomas Aquinas, after the theological virtues, the most important moral habits to develop were the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.

> Thomas wrote that these four virtues rightly order all our appetitive and intellectual powers that enable us to act: prudence orders our practical reason; justice orders the will, or our intellectual appetite; temperance and fortitude order our passions, which are divided into the concupiscible – desiring power – and irascible – struggling power – respectively. The four virtues are cardinal because they sufficiently order all the components within us that are engaging in moral acting.[128]

[127] Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part I: A Look into the Past", 259-62

[128] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 144; similarly Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 717

Although Keenan agrees with Aquinas on the centrality of the cardinal virtues, he argues strongly for re-definition of which virtues are cardinal in today's church.[129]

In his paper *Virtue and Identity*, Keenan argues that our human identity drives our pursuit of the virtues and that, as we better understand who each human person can become,[130] we are better able to reformulate the virtues. He sees the virtues as dynamic rather than static in nature.[131] He points to a constant interplay between a person's character and their ability to discern the virtues needed. Keenan argues that "[o]ur ability to perceive depends on our character, but we cannot develop the character rightly until we perceive."[132] Keenan proposes that our vision for human identity should be based on the cardinal virtues. He suggests however that the four cardinal virtues proposed by Aquinas are not actually cardinal.[133] Keenan suggests Aquinas' cardinal virtues are actually two: prudence and justice. Prudence is the most important as it is the virtue that sets our sights on the ultimate end and sets all other agendas to attaining that end and all

[129] This argument appears in a number of his writings on virtue ethics, for example, Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues"; *Moral wisdom,* 145-150; James F. Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 74-75; "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 78-80. It will also be addressed later in this paper.

[130] Having said this, Keenan says elsewhere that by studying great saints and heroes we can see that there is no single definitive description of what a human person should be. There is a variety of ways to be holy and that a person can only truly become morally excellent by being him- or herself. (Keenan "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 712-3)

[131] Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 69

[132] Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 72

[133] Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 78

intermediate ends. It helps us to "articulate the norms or moral action."[134] It unites and connects the moral virtues just as charity does the theological virtues. Prudence, in turn, is concerned with justice. Aquinas argued that justice governed all our actions. Keenan however argues that the other two cardinal virtues, temperance and fortitude, order us interiorly but are auxiliary to justice (they help us achieve justice) for they exist to make us more just people.[135]

In addition to the existing cardinal virtues being too hierarchical,[136] Keenan argues that they do not serve current thinking in virtues ethics. Beyond self-control or personal integration, the virtues are integral to our relationships.[137] Justice is not sufficient; it needs to be partnered with love.[138] Our human identity cannot be treated primarily as individual because in reality we are primarily relational.

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[134] Keenan*, Moral Wisdom*, 144

[135] ibid

[136] Keenan argues a hierarchy where temperance and fortitude serve Justice; similarly prudence looks to recommend the just way to act. The result is that a virtuous person is defined as a just person, and this is not sufficient (Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 73)

[137] According to Keenan, the context within which virtues are developed has a significant effect on the type of person one becomes. He illustrates his argument with three contexts. He looks firstly at a moral theology based on avoiding sin where the virtues developed would be those that helped one avoid sin, e.g. self control, chastity, modesty. It would be unlikely to include virtues that encouraged passion, initiative or growth. The second context, within which St Thomas Aquinas would sit, encouraged human flourishment and discipleship. Virtues were not to inhibit but to perfect - fortitude and temperance perfected one's emotions; prudence produced actions that help one to be more just, temperate or courageous. In Aquinas' theology, perfection was for each individual power in each person, for example, prudence perfects reason. Theologians today realise that although people are individuals, they are fundamentally relational; creating a third context in which virtues perfect people in the context of relationships – with others in society, with special friendships, and with self. This final context is the one within which Keenan sets his virtue theology (Keenan, "Are you growing up in the virtues?" 142-3)

[138] Keenan's argument on possible conflict of virtues is discussed further in chapter four.

Keenan bases his proposal for restructured cardinal virtues around this relational status.

He argues that humans are relational in three ways: generally, specifically and uniquely, and that each of these ways "demands a cardinal virtue".[139] Generally: we are expected to relate to other humans equally and impartially regardless of personal opinion. Specifically: we must aim for both impartiality in justice, as well as the development of particular faithful, partial bonds (such as family, close friends). Uniquely: apart from these close relationships, each has a unique relationship with oneself. God commands us to love our neighbour as *ourselves.*[140] Although self-care involves physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual care,[141] Keenan considers the most important task of self-care is the formation of one's conscience as this is where we respond to the God who calls us.[142] Therefore Keenan proposes that "as a relational being in general we are called to justice; as a relational being specifically, we are called to fidelity; and as a relational being uniquely, we are called to self-care."[143] Keenan proposes that each of these is cardinal and should be pursued as an end in itself. None is auxiliary to another.

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[139] Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 78. This argument for restructured cardinal virtues is a major part of Keenan's approach. See among others, Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 77-80; Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 715-729; Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians,55-7*; Keenan, "Are You Growing Up in the Virtues?", 143

[140] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 146

[141] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 727

[142] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 147

[143] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 146

"The fourth cardinal virtue is prudence, which determines what constitutes the just, faithful, and self-caring way of living, intending, and acting in the ordinary life."[144] Prudence is central since it concerns judging wisely in relation to the other virtues. It has the job of integrating the three virtues into our relationships, just as it did in classical list of cardinal virtues, and helping each virtue shape its end as more inclusive of the other two.[145] "Prudence does not keep us in check but rather pursues the right realisation of the seeds that God has placed in us to be disciples of Jesus."[146]

Keenan suggests these proposed cardinal virtues stand true for all people in all cultures – they all recognise each person as being human; they all impose specific obligations in terms of relating with specific people such as parents, children, colleagues; and they require us to be responsible for our personal well-being. "Thus, wherever we are, these virtues call us to develop the three ways that each person is fundamentally relational."[147] These virtues do not describe the ideal person;[148] they "provide a skeleton of both what human persons should basically be and at what human actions should basically aim."[149] Underpinned by the

[144] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 147

[145] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 147-8

[146] Keenan, "Are You Growing Up in the Virtues?", 143

[147] Ibid

[148] I will address this in terms of Jesus as the moral norm in chapter four.

[149] Keenan, "Towards an Inclusive Vision for Moral Theology, Part II: An Agenda for the Future", 80; also Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 75

infused theological virtues, they are the foundation stones on which all other moral virtues are laid.

4. Summary

Keenan's approach to virtues and discipleship challenges us to be open to the call of God in our lives and to respond in love. He sees the path of discipleship as an ongoing process through which our lives are transformed through the development of virtues. Why virtues? Because as disciples of Jesus Christ, our aim is to be like Him and Jesus was the epitome of virtue. Through the grace available to us in Christ, we need to walk the path of discipleship from *who we are now* to *who we want to be*. We do this through addressing the sin in our lives, forming our consciences well, actively maintaining our spiritual lives through prayer and scripture, and with the strength that God gives us through these practices, choose to develop virtues in our lives. In terms of the moral virtues, primacy is given to the cardinal virtues, however Keenan suggests the cardinal virtues of temperance and fortitude should be replaced with the relational virtues of fidelity and self-care.

3. Christian discipleship: identity, transformation and the virtues in William Spohn

The central premise in all Spohn's writings on discipleship is Jesus' command to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Spohn holds Jesus, and his story, as the concrete universal for the moral life, "not as an abstract principle but as a distinctive way of life" in that through the exercise of "faithful imagination, his story becomes paradigmatic for moral perception, disposition, and identity."[150] Christians look to how Jesus lived and loved and through Christ and His Spirit they gain the power to love as Jesus loved. This power is accessed through spirituality,[151] which Spohn places at the roots of discipleship and hence of morality. "Morality is founded in spirituality because the power and motivation to follow the path of Jesus comes from his Spirit, which dwells in each member of the body of Christ."[152] Spohn argues that we are not just called to copy Jesus, as this would not always result in appropriate responses in our day and cultures, but to imitate Him,[153] using the narratives, the symbols and images, and the story of

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[150] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology" 36; also see Spohn, *What are they Saying about Scripture and Ethics,* 1995, 98-102; Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 2. In his endnote 2, Spohn cites William Wimsatt who describes "'the concrete universal' as a work of art or literature that presents 'an object which in a mysterious and special way is both highly general and highly particular' (The Verbal Icon: Studies in Meaningful poetry [Lexington, Ky: University of Kentucky Press, 1954], 71)

[151] Spohn uses the term spirituality to broadly mean traditional Christian practices of the Church. [Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*, 13] This term will be developed later in this chapter.

[152] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 25.

[153] To copy Jesus would be to forget that the strategies and responses of Jesus were based on the culture and resources of his a life as a Jew in first century Palestine. Our cultures and the issues we face are not necessarily identical to those faced by Jesus. Richard Gula suggests such a response would mean the death of creative response to new issues in a new era. However, to imitate Jesus requires us to let our imaginations be inspired with His words and deeds and to appropriate His message and style (Gula, *reason Informed by Faith,* 191). Spohn himself goes

Jesus to draw analogies to how we should live morally today.[154] Spohn's moral psychology[155] focuses not on the development of virtues but on transformation of both heart and identity. In this chapter, I will look at Spohn's approach to discipleship and the role of virtues in this transformation.[156]

1. Discipleship and Foundations of Transformation

Spohn's central premise is that the best way to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and, hence, to appropriate the moral vision of Jesus witnessed in the New Testament is through virtue ethics and spirituality. Thus, "[w]ho we understand ourselves to be and how we interpret what is going on will determine what we think we ought to

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beyond imitation, which could be interpreted as a largely (but not necessarily completely) external action, to identification with Jesus, which involves a total transformation from within, as will be discussed later.

[154] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 4

[155] Spohn defines moral psychology as "the habits, dispositions, and identity which lead to a distinctively Christian way of acting." (Spohn, "Spirituality and Ethics", 77) "It is more comprehensive than the other approaches since it addresses the whole person and not only behaviour. It better captures that complete transformation of the heart to which biblical ethics points. God's gift of love and healing sets the pattern for habits, character, and a whole way of life." (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 35)

[156] Spohn's approach appears to have developed from its first appearance in *What are they saying about Scripture and Ethics?* in 1984 to his later writings prior to his death in 2005. Similarly the categories he developed to discuss all other approaches in virtue ethics. The main categories can be traced from his original version of *What are they saying about scripture and ethics?,* through to an expanded and revised version of this book in 1995, (these are the focus of these two books) and later to a chapter "Jesus and Moral Theology" published in 2004. His overall premise was that some approaches focus on the moral action and some on the moral agent. His approach is the latter. In addition to those that may be picked up in more detail in this paper, Spohn has written a number of notes and articles in which he reviews, challenges, or builds on the writings or views of various other theologians/virtue ethicists. See for example, William C. Spohn, "Jesus and Christian Ethics", *Theological studies* 56/1, (1995):92-106; William C. Spohn, "Spirituality & Ethics: exploring the connections", *Theological studies* 58/1, (1997):109-23; William C. Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics". *Theological studies* 53/1. (1992):60-75; William C. Spohn, "Passions and Principles." *Theological studies* 52/1. (1991):69-87

do."[157] In other words, who or what we identify with will determine who or what we imitate. As Christians then, how we see and respond to contemporary moral issues (eg environment, sexism, injustice, racism) should come out of our call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. However, knowing the story is not sufficient. True discipleship results from an encounter with the risen Jesus and then personal engagement and mutual commitment.[158] If we confess a belief in Jesus Christ, Jesus should play a normative role in our moral reflections. As was noted above, it is through "faithful imagination" that the story of Jesus "becomes paradigmatic[159] for moral perception, disposition and identity."[160] The gospel is not a set of facts but God's self revelation that occurs through the eyes of faith. "Response to that revelation requires the action of the Spirit, personal decision, community, and struggle with the weakness and obscurity that faith never eradicates."[161] This Spirit engages in this process to link past and present, Jesus yesterday and today, and Church past and present.

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[157] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 3

[158] "The power to live this life comes from Christ. Morality is founded in spirituality because the power and motivation to follow the path of Jesus comes from his Spirit, which dwells in each member of the Body of Christ. God's gift to humanity was not simply a program for living, but also the healing and power to respond wholeheartedly to God and to join with others in the community of faith." (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 25)

[159] Moral paradigms are important in guiding a way of life because the development of the virtues happens within a particular culture, each of which is formed by its own stories and paradigms. New Testament scripture is full of examples of moral teaching through paradigms, with moral norms being defined through "paradigmatic events and encounters of Jesus' life" (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 32; see also pp32-33 for examples)

[160] Spohn, *What are they saying about Scripture and Ethics?*, 1995, 94

[161] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 12

The salvation story that runs through the Old and New Testaments leads us to a Christian identity; the sort of people we should be as individuals and as community – our Christian character. Who we are and how we relate to others and who we are intent on becoming defines our character. "Virtues and vices are dynamics of character, the habits of the heart that carry convictions into action and shape the way the person views the world and responds to it."[162] Spohn argues that spirituality[163] may contribute to the development of these virtues but spiritual practices were not developed for this end. Their true purpose is to deepen our relationship with God.[164] Christian spirituality uses the life and actions of Jesus to discern the actions that are right or wrong. The gospels invite participants into their ongoing reality; and guide us on how to live and how to respond to God's call in our lives.[165] To get guidance on our lives however, we have to know Jesus' reality – how he lived - so we need historical and contextual

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[162] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 13. Spohn acknowledges that unfortunately those moral philosophers and character ethicists who are willing 'to describe the structure of the good life usually shy away from describing its content.' Or if they attempt to provide 'definite content' they are 'often agnostic about *how* we can develop the prescribed virtues' (ibid). Adding Scripture and spirituality to the mix helps to counteract these two deficiencies. (ibid)

[163] Spohn uses the term 'spirituality' to refer to the classical traditions of Christian practices and community; not the various "idiosyncratic" activities that are called 'spirituality' in current times (ibid). Spohn bemoans the tradition rule-based vision for morality, which did not recognise that the Christian moral life is a way of life guided by the paradigmatic story of Jesus Christ (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 2,10; also Gula, *Reason informed by Faith,* 7) Gula supports Spohn's approach suggesting we are first called to be loving persons in imitation of Jesus Christ and out of this will come persons who do what is right (Gula, *Reason informed by Faith,* 7)

[164] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 36

[165] "The canonical text of scripture provides the ultimate norm for Christian spirituality and virtue ethics." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 16-7). According to Spohn, in recent decades, scripture has been read more through ethics than through history because history no longer meets our search for meaning – the truth to guide our lives. He considers history (by which he means facts, memory and chronicle) to be necessary as we need facts, supported by their historical interpretation and the memoirs of others reporting on the stories; but says we also need the perspective of the participants who enter the story today (ibid).

study.[166] But, Spohn challenges, this study is no good unless we are prepared to engage in it. We have to be prepared for self examination of where we are on the journey – how spiritually mature we are and identify our own biases and agendas. These things can block our ability to understand what we have not experienced and to interpret scripture differently from people with different experiences.[167]

Discipleship, for Spohn, is not instant but transformational. It is not just an external 'doing' but more so an internal 'being'. It is the growing identification with the 'person' of Jesus Christ. Paul puts great emphasis on our inability to move from who we are to who we should be. The gap is due to sin which, according to Spohn, results in "self-absorption and moral impotence"[168]. Although not always blamed explicitly on sin, New Testament scriptures continually refer to the need for radical change.[169] Each of the disciples started this transformation through an encounter with the person of Jesus. It was not an immediate full conversion for the disciples but a learning experience. Paul's conversion was more dramatic yet he recognised that transformation is a process and is dependent on

[166] The Jesus who we relate to in faith is the same Jesus who lived on earth and who is witnessed by the Gospels. We cannot presume to know who he is or was. He lived within a culture where religion was the foundation not an aspect of culture; where reputation was worth more than property; and where resources were limited (if one had more, it had to be at the expense of another). Spohn suggests that this is the opposite of our society, yet Jesus' words can equally challenge our culture (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 22). It could be argued that the limitations of Jesus' culture are still a reality in many third world nations.

[167] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 16-18

[168] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 29

[169] Spohn explains that philosophical virtue ethics, such as Aristotle's developmental model of character, cannot account for this conversion process (the gradual or dramatic reversal of life that defines character) as it does not usually 'address human evil' nor 'expose moral perversity and evil in the human heart.' (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 29).

"the patient grace of God that reconfigures interior dispositions to reflect the attitudes of Christ."[170] Paul urges Christians to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in this process (Gal 5:22).[171]

Spohn also points to the strong emphasis in the New Testament on the heart – the personal centre that gives acts their meaning. New Testament writers go much deeper than behaviour; they challenge the motivation and intentions behind actions; asking what sort of people believers are becoming under the influence of the Holy Spirit and through living in community.[172] Spohn argues that transformation requires more than a change in behaviour; it needs a change of heart and identity. Jesus does not command external obedience rather He calls each to develop the dispositions of the heart that draw us into a deeper level of obedience – mercy, gratitude, radical trust in God and non-discriminating love. Spohn asks how we develop these dispositions.[173] His comprehensive direction

[170] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 30

[171] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 30

[172] In Philippians, Paul tells the community that people need to change the focus of their lives, living for others not themselves; even if it means going to the cross. In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), Jesus does not require right actions, but a right heart. Similarly in the parable of good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees, bad fruit (Mt 7:16-18): good actions cannot be expected from an evil heart and resultant twisted character. The biggest transformation of heart happened in the disciples themselves. They were ignorant, confused, stubborn, argumentative, proud, competitive and unfaithful. They provide every human with something tangible to identify with in terms of their own lives. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 30-31)

[173] Spohn's concept of dispositions relates back to *habitus* as described by Cessario. He describes *habitus* as embodying ability for growth. It sits somewhere between having the inclination to act and actually acting, and it is necessary for voluntary action. He criticises authors who say *habitus* can be acquired through repetitious behaviour "like putting so many creases into a starched linen cloth" (Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics,* 35). Rather when virtue has become habitual, it is not burdensome, but freely chosen and delightful. (ibid)

commences with spiritual practices, which help us discern the movements of our heart – God's invitation to us and his direction.[174]

Spirituality and spiritual practices

Spohn defines spirituality as "the practical, affective, and transformative dimension of a religious tradition. It is accountable to the norms and convictions of a faith community. The practices that express spirituality are pedagogical[175] and transformational.[176] They are the basic repertory for an engaged reading of the story of Jesus."[177] Within the traditional church 'spirituality' means a way of living, praying and serving; it comes out of a search for the sacred and for personal

[174] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 31

[175] They are pedagogical because they provide a framework for the development of virtuous dispositions. When one repeats an activity regularly, over time it can develop into a habit and if the intention is right, this habit may develop the right dispositions within us and become virtuous. Similarly spiritual practices train our dispositions. "Both moral and spiritual practices set us up for the right dispositions. They channel good intentions into habitual behaviour, and those habits evoke and train the dispositions of the heart." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 39). If we reflectively enter into habits, they can shape our character. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 38-39)

[176] They are transformational because through the gospels we see that everyone who encountered Jesus was changed, whether they accepted his invitation or not. Each Christian is constantly given this opportunity to be transformed through the Spirit as one is involved in spiritual practices. "By integrating ordinary activities into the following of Christ, spiritual practices help the disciple infuse ordinary life with the gratitude, care, justice, and forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 41). However, Spohn argues that practices performed for selfish reasons will not be transformative; for example if we serve the poor in order to challenge one's self rather than to love the poor (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 42).

[177] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 33

transformation; but unlike popular forms,[178] it is situated within the tradition of belief, normative values and communal worship.

> Practices are the activities that make up a way of life, including the Christian way. The ritual of baptism, sharing life in community, solidarity with the poor, meditating on scripture, and mutual forgiveness are some of the concrete practices that make up a Christian way of life.[179]

They are worthwhile activities, good to do, can be done well or poorly, and we can always improve[180]. They form our characters when done well and lead us to a deeper relationship with Christ. Spiritual practices help us move from unauthentic to authentic ways of living – they transform us as individuals and communities.[181]

In discussing practices, Spohn makes an important differentiation between affections and feelings. He suggests that feelings are temporary and spontaneous, whilst affections are the deeper emotions and dispositions and can be taught and

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[178] Spirituality is loosely used in contemporary society as the search for some deeper meaning outside of institutionalized religion. It involves regular practices of some sort – walks on the beach, meditating, listening to music. The many new age practices that exist give spirituality a bad name and distract us from the significant interest occurring in mainstream churches, where worship is being supplemented by prayer, asceticism and service. However it can become a hunger for spiritual experience rather than for God himself – self-absorbing rather than practices for holiness and service. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 34)

[179] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 45

[180] 'Practices' are not 'techniques'. A technique is a skill that can be applied to a number of things and hence is an instrument used in achieving an end. A practice is worthwhile in its own right; it may involve skills but is a good in itself. There is not a clear boundary as a technique may become a practice - participating in the activity may make us part of it, changing our original intentions and motivations. It ceases to be something we just do and starts to captivate us, expanding our capacities and bringing us delight when we do well at them (whether it is playing a game of chess or befriending someone). (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 43)

[181] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 45

shaped by practices.[182] That is the basis for Paul's command for us to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:16-18). Paul is not commanding us to have feelings but to engage in practices that will deepen the dispositions of character.[183] Spohn reminds us that "God's intention is to form a certain sort of people distinguished by definite qualities of heart."[184] These affections lead to actions and the actions develop character. Thus we have a character-based readiness to act; a disposition towards, in this case, gratitude.[185]

At the heart of training our affections is prayer.[186] Spohn states that "prayer is the language of friendship with God."[187] Jesus shows us important features of prayer:

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[182] Spohn considers emotions play an important role in both our character development and moral response and operate in conjunction with our reasoning and training of our habits. Before we act, we perceive and affectivity is an integral part of what and how we perceive moral relevance. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 95). This will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter and again in chapter four.

[183] In Gal 5:22, Paul urges the Galatians to co-operate with the fruit of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, gentleness, patience, kindness, faithfulness, generosity, and self-control. Spiritual practices will open opportunities for the Spirit to expand these fruits in our lives, and as these have affective components, they will deepen our commitment to Christ and his mission.

[184] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 41

[185] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 40-41

[186] We have the community framework of prayers and rituals that have been developed over time. As members of God's family we can pray the "Our Father"- this prayer contains the basis of all private and communal prayer – praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and repentance. This prayer, along with the psalms, prophets and stories of Israel teach Christians how to approach God, how to express ourselves freely, and what sort of response we are likely to get. At a more personal level, prayer transforms our intentions and self-understanding. What starts as a technique will become a practice if applied with consistency and discipline. Attention moves from self to God who is revealed through Christ; from obligation or ritual to spending time with a friend. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 46-47)

[187] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 45. It is central to a relationship with God and hence spiritual practices help situate our daily life within that friendship. Prayer is not a technique; it is an end in itself, the lifeblood of our relationship with God. It is this friendship which differentiates Jesus'

it draws us into a deeper communion with God and makes us more docile to the movements of the Spirit as he transforms each heart and mind. Scripture presents for us qualities which should emerge as we develop in our friendship with God: reverence, humility, gratitude, caring and hopefulness. "Christian prayer should engender the dispositions and actions of discipleship."[188] The biggest transformation prayer achieves is in our identity. Relationships are defined by the people in them thus Christian prayer should lead us as individuals and as community to be more closely conformed to the person of Jesus. Spiritual practices are regular concrete activities that tutor us in the ways of Christ.[189]

The Analogical Imagination

The analogical imagination enables us to take the words and actions of Jesus and, through reflection, apply them to contemporary situations in a way that is faithful to the story of Jesus.[190] It takes the background information we have (the Ten Commandments, parables, Bible stories, doctrine, and moral principles) and allows

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disciples from the usual Master/student relationships of his time. In John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples (and us) that they are no longer servants, but his friends (Jn 15:15). Jesus is not about giving orders, but invites the intimacy of friendship by revealing himself and his mission to them. (ibid)

[188] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 47

[189] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 47-48

[190] Analogical imagination plays a central role in Christian ethics as Christian discipleship is grounded in the person of Jesus conveyed through the Gospel story. We cannot develop theological concepts and dogmas and then throw out the story. Spohn reminds us that the gospels were written not to teach us lessons but to witness to a person and an event. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 61) Christians whose focal meaning is the story of Jesus Christ will be able to discern the point where the parallels no longer exist – this is harder for those with only a casual relationship with God. Spiritual practices sharpen our ability to discern appropriate analogies through shaping perception and moral dispositions. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 62-63)

us to discern a way of being faithful both to Jesus and the present call of the Spirit.[191] It is not the story that transforms our lives, but the reality that "God enters people's lives today in ways comparable to what is recounted in scripture."[192] The pattern is the same; the context different. The life of Jesus sets the pattern for the Christian way of life. It has authority over all ways of being Christian – all spiritualities, all communities. If not, discipleship would have no basis.[193] Without analogical imagination, we can't make the leap between the Jesus who announced the reign of God, healed the sick, reconciled the outcasts, and brought news to the poor; and our experience today. The command to "go and do likewise" would make no sense.[194]

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[191] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 50-51. Spohn illustrates this with John's story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet on Holy Thursday. When Jesus washed their feet, he was not intending that every Sunday, they should wash the feet of others. He was demonstrating his radical love and service of others that he expected of them and all disciples. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 51). Elsewhere he uses the story of Zaccheus as an analogy of our ideal response to the gift of Christ's call. We often know the right decision to make but lack the power to do it. Jesus' initiative brought healing into Zaccheus' life and enabled him to break from the sin that captured him. (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 29-30)

[192] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 30

[193] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 56

[194] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 59. Spohn discusses the work of David Tracy, who considers theology has two languages – the analogical imagination and the dialectical imagination. "While analogical reflection emphasizes the similarities in the relations ordered to the prime analogate, the dialectical stresses the differences." (ibid). Analogical reflection starts with an experience of God's grace in ordinary life and moves us to try to understand God. Dialectical imagination hears the Word of God exposing our alienation from God. Spohn sees a place for both. Analogical imagination helps us move the Biblical text from original Christians to now. Dialectical imagination unmasks our illusions and deflates our presumptions, but Spohn argues dialectical imagination is secondary to analogical imagination (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 60)

Imagination has two functions: reproductive (recognises images and patterns)[195] and productive (fashions metaphors, symbols and paradigms).[196] Of these facets, Spohn suggests that paradigm is the most important term for understanding analogy. "Paradigm is crucial for our discussion because the story of Jesus norms the lives of Christians as a paradigm."[197] Christians should always live in conformity to the life of Jesus. They embody Christ in communities and extend certain patterns into their families, businesses and societies. The move from text to life is intuitive rather than abstraction.[198]

Spohn also promotes metaphor as it is through this that Christians can make some sense of the concept of the Kingdom of God. He suggests that every attempt to define the Kingdom of God or God's reign has been inadequate – it is theologically imprecise and provides no moral guidance as to what needs to be done. Spohn believes God's reign is a metaphor which provides both a frame for the disciples' view of the world and a fruitful analogy for the parables of the kingdom. As a

[195] An image is a selective picture – picks up important elements and ignores others. A pattern is more abstract and not necessarily visual. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 63)

[196] Productive goes beyond the actual to the possible – one image is played off against another. One set of data is 'seen as' something else. A metaphor joins two things that originate in two totally different experiences – one is seen through the eyes of the other. A symbol is a compressed metaphor, possibly gestures, sounds, images or words that draw people into the object they refer to. A paradigm is a precedent or a model for action. "Biblical paradigms are used as analogies, not as strict examples to be copied." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 64)

[197] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 64

[198] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 64-65. For example Dorothy Day did not formulate a theory on hospitality to the poor before applying it; she saw a need and with the background of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' example of reaching out to the marginalised, she did what was needed. Her ability to discern the correct action came from a converted and generous heart. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 65)

frame, it gives context to everything in the Christian world. "The metaphor of the sovereign God returning the people from exile is the fundamental presupposition that lies behind the entire ministry of Jesus and the experience of his disciples."[199] Spohn argues that since that time, conversion to Jesus has resulted in a change to our basic metaphorical frameworks. Our old dispositions and actions are no longer appropriate within a new way of viewing the world.[200] As happened with the New Testament disciples, people find "a new identity in Christ that is more fundamental than the basic categories that have defined who we are."[201] The parables don't tell us what the kingdom of God is but they do provide analogies that give us insights into aspects of who God is and what is required of us in response – God is merciful therefore we should be merciful. There is no moral rule tacked on to parables rather we are challenged by actions within.[202]

2. Process of Transformation: Perception, Dispositions and Identity

Whether we can discern these analogies between scripture and life is largely dependent on each person's character and faith commitment. Christian discipleship affects and transforms the entirety of our beings, especially the

[199] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 66

[200] If viewed from within different frameworks, the analogies gained from Bible stories and images can support immoral actions. This has occurred time and time again throughout history leading to actions incompatible with Jesus' life and teachings – the suppression of women, the crusades, racial holocausts, and vindictive nationalism. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 70)

[201] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 67

[202] The actions and sayings of Jesus, however, are more direct in instructing us on God's reign as He tells us to do as he did with the same motivation (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 69).

capacities of moral perception, dispositions and identity. The gospel challenges, and spiritual practices tutors, each of these capacities.[203] There is a cognitive, affective and personal dimension to this process.

Perception

Although Jesus came to proclaim what all Israel has been waiting for – God in their midst, the coming of God's kingdom - many Jews did not perceive it.[204] It is the same for us walking the Christian journey. We are on it because God initiated an approach to us; our response will be dependent on how we perceive that approach.[205] Spohn defines perception as "the ability to notice the morally relevant features of a situation and the readiness to respond appropriately."[206] However, perception is not an objective term; although it does have an objective

[203] Spohn suggests that change in any aspect of a person's moral profile will affect all other aspects. For example, practising forgiveness shapes Christian identity and perception, the latter because enemies are seen through different eyes as people for who Jesus also died. He further suggests this practice would deepen Christian dispositions of gratitude, repentance, passion and non-violence. As with virtues, the transformation which would occur in the faithful is not an end in itself. Discipleship should be about the business of furthering the kingdom of God in the world whilst deepening one's own relationship with God. This is what Jesus called His disciples to do (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 74).

[204] The Jews were expecting the Messiah to reconstitute Israel and end the exile which had them under pagan rule. Forgiveness of sins, setting captives free, equality for the poor, return of land, and all nations coming to the Temple for formation and worship were very concrete realities that were to be set within time and space. Despite the centrality of the Torah for Jews, it was a political rather than a spiritual realisation of the prophecies of restoration. Jesus, however, did not limit God to the Torah or to the upright; nor did was God's reign limited to the heavens - it was to permeate all aspects of normal daily life. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 77-78)

[205] Jesus kept trying to draw attention to what was happening in their midst because God was about something new. This movement of God required a response – repentance, a reversal of mind and heart, and a taking up of the grace being offered Israel. The commencement of the reign of God drove Jesus with a sense of urgency, as it should us. Spohn argues that every time we respond to the invitation of God, His reign extends and a different way of life is possible – if we are willing to notice what is going on! (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 76)

[206] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 75

point of reference – what is true and good in the light of the Gospel. Our perception depends on our character, which determines how we see things, and is linked to our dispositions and identity, because our perceptions are determined by our habitual dispositions.

When Jesus announced the good news, Spohn suggests he was referring to an event not a way of life or a set of doctrines – the beginning of God's reign on earth or the Kingdom of heaven. What did this mean? Jesus spoke and acted in ways that brought God's power into direct confrontation with evil and then, like in the parable of the sower and the seed, some received the announcement of God's reign and some did not, in some it bore fruit and in others it did not.[207] However, when asked about his role in the kingdom of God, Jesus invited people to note the works he had been undertaking, and then to decide for themselves. They had to perceive what was happening. Those who could perceive were welcomed into the kingdom of God; those who could not see were excluded by their own response. "Perceiving God's action requires a willingness to be affected by what one sees, an

[207] Although many Jews were annoyed by Jesus' teaching, Spohn explains that it was his accusations of corruption in the Temple that was his undoing. When Jesus 'cleansed the Temple', banishing the money changers, what he was doing was removing the ability to make sacrifice in the Temple and hence removing the Temple as the means of contacting God. When he dined with sinners, forgiving their sins and reconciling them to God, once again he was performing Temple duties. "If Jesus is able to forgive sinners and reconcile them with the Lord, then the Temple is being reconstituted in his own ministry. It is no longer necessary to go to the Temple and perform the prescribed rituals under the guidance of the priests to ensure grace and mercy. Since sin had caused Israel's exile, this proclamation of forgiveness signifies that Israel has finally returned home and the Lord has returned to Israel. This could only mean one thing: in Jesus' ministry the climax of Israel's story is already occurring and the exile is over at last." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 82)

initial disposition to respond favourably to what is good and true."[208]

Spohn asks how faith in God's reign transforms our perception today. He answers that firstly, given faith allows us to trust that God will still act in power, it places all our experiences within this framework. Secondly, it enables within us a compassionate vision that allows us to see others as Jesus would. If we enter into God's reign and respond to God's invitation, we will be open to the moments when God breaks into the ordinariness of people's lives and act.[209] In this regard, Spohn defines two important capacities: empathy and compassion. Empathy is defined as the "affective, imaginative, and cognitive capacity that enables us to enter and identify with the experience of others."[210] Compassion is "the most active and engaged form of empathy, namely, that disposition directed particularly to those in great need or suffering."[211] Spohn explains that "compassion bridges the gap between perception and effective action."[212] Spohn uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate this. When the scribe asked

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[208] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 83. Luke's Gospel emphasises that the Kingdom of God would be socially transforming – Jesus presents himself in the Temple as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the coming of God's good news. All the synoptic gospels make it clear that God will not achieve this transformation unless we respond to his grace – it is an invitation. The writings of John and Paul make it clear that if we want to be transformed - conformed to Christ – we must go through the passage from death to life as Jesus did. Paul writes of the tension this causes in us as we struggle between life in the flesh (self-centred existence) and the spirit (God-centred existence). Although baptism starts our new life in Christ, the flesh has not completely disappeared because we are not yet raised with Christ. Spohn calls it the 'already/but not yet' quality in the kingdom. Paul's challenge was not just to us as individuals but as a community because God's reign is lived out in community. John picked up the 'already/but not yet' aspect of God's kingdom by categorising people into those who lived in the light or those who lived in darkness – who reject the light and who refuse to accept the truth. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 85-6)

[209] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 88-89

[210] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 90

[211] Ibid

[212] Ibid

"who is my neighbour?", Jesus turned the tables in his reply so that the question was no longer being aimed at the victim but at those who witnessed the incident – "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:36-37). It is not a matter of whether the person is my neighbour (who do I have to love?) but whether I am being a neighbour to those I meet (to whom can I show love?). Am I being empathetic and more importantly, compassionate?[213]

Moral perception starts with attention.[214] This means seeing only what is there – not what I expect or want it to be. "It is rooted in the values, dispositions, and habits of the perceiver, not in a separate faculty."[215] The morally astute person will use his/her perceptiveness and experience to chart through the courses of life. "Moral perception occurs before we consider what steps to take (deliberation) and actually decide on what to do (judgement)."[216] As we deliberate, perceptions may change as new information is added. Emotions co-operate with and inform our deliberations. They are 'evaluative perceptions' and input to our response to a particular situation.[217]

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[213] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 90-91

[214] "The main components of moral perception are habits of considerateness and attentiveness to the data, virtues of respect and empathy, imagination capable of understanding the others' hopes and fears, experience that has taught us how to place the situation in a larger perspective, honest self-knowledge about our preferences and prejudices, and humility to seek the advice of others to expand our own vision." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 98)

[215] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 93

[216] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 94

[217] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 95

Like conscience, perception is not a separate function; it is integral to our whole person.[218] Spohn describes moral perception as

> a function of the whole person which engages in reflective, emotional, and imaginative capacities. It includes honest assessment, sympathetic appreciation, attentiveness to relevant detail, memory refined into useful experience, social skills, virtuous dispositions, and practical 'know how'.[219]

Through imagination we can put ourselves in the position of another and empathise with them. We can also bring our experiences into the situation. This imagination can also be formed by the symbols and stories of Scripture, further enabling us to discern patterns and find creative solutions in new situations.[220]

The transformation of perceptions

The transformation of moral perception begins with us admitting we are blind and in need of conversion.[221] Spohn comments that virtue ethics does not contribute

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[218] Spohn uses the following definition of conscience. Conscience is "a personal, self-conscious activity, integrating reason, emotions, and will in self-committed decisions about right and wrong, good and evil." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 96)

[219] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 96

[220] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 97

[221] Spohn uses the metaphor of lenses in connection with moral blindness, however he argues that correcting moral perception isn't as easy as putting a new lens in your glasses. It takes skills to change moral perception and the whole process is made more difficult because we often don't recognise that we have selective blindness. We will be more morally alert in areas where we have developed virtue and less so in other areas. In situations and with people within our comfort range we can usually be compassionate, empathic and show goodness. Outside those people and situations, our moral response may be different. So it's not just a matter of changing lenses or views, but of opening our eyes to what is currently invisible to us. Our basic moral dispositions need to be changed. Education can help us in some areas, such as sexism or racism, but it is not always the answer. We can deliberately live a lie by refusing to face up to the wrong moral

much to the discussion on moral transformation and the disciplines that form moral perception. It does recognise, as does spirituality, that moral perception is sharpened indirectly as the person concentrates on more important concerns and commitments. Spohn looks at conversion and intercessory prayer as two spiritual practices that can shape a compassionate moral vision centred on God.[222]

Images and parables were used by Jesus to *convert* the imagination of listeners. He used Hebrew Scriptural images along with examples from daily life to show people that among the ordinary an amazing thing was happening. He got them to use their imaginations in new ways so they could see things they had missed. The metaphors become frames through which to see new aspects within their experiences. Our experiences frame everything we do and say, our assumptions and the habits we develop. If we are only prepared to look at Scripture through our customary frame, we will have a problem. Jesus used his stories to shock his listeners into realising God's ways were not the same as theirs.[223]

The New Testament supports two paths of *conversion* – the dramatic radical transformation portrayed through the hard sayings of the gospels and experienced by St Paul, and the gradual path of the disciples. Those from the school of

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decisions or frameworks we live within. Deep transformation is needed in these situations. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 106-108)

[222] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 101

[223] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 101-103

dialectical imagination see moral blindness as an alienation from God that can only be addressed though explicit conversion, yet Spohn questions whether the gospel requires radical reversal - a clear before and after in discipleship.[224] Unlike the hard sayings, the narratives of the Gospels present a different way of conversion. The disciples respond to Jesus' call in stages, which gives us something to identify with – their hope and fears, blunders and generosities. They are at times eager, confused, reluctant and obedient. They are slow to believe and even slower to get the message Jesus preaches through his parables and miracles. They do not understand that Jesus must enter his passion and are reluctant to follow Jesus to the cross.[225] Despite this the Risen Lord looks past their weaknesses, addresses them as brothers and commissions them to make disciples of all nations. In the gospel narratives, the disciples are never portrayed as morally impotent to change. It just takes them a while to realise they couldn't fit Jesus' teachings into their usual way of looking at the world. At no point are they dramatically

[224] Spohn notes that repentance is definitely needed; allegiance to 'other gods' definitely needs to be broken; old ways need to be put aside for God's ways – these speak of a radical break from our old life. Within dialectical theologies and spiritualities, there is no in-between and no sitting on the fence! As Paul taught, we can either live in sin or be liberated by the grace of God. The ability to break from sin and to be transformed comes from the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 110)

[225] Luke alone paints a more positive portrayal of the disciples, especially through Acts of the Apostles. But even in his gospel he lays the foundations for the power of the Holy Spirit, the inclusion of the gentiles in the kingdom and the universal nature of Jesus' message. "The call of discipleship is radical and costly, imitating Jesus in unconditional obedience to God, daily taking up of the cross, and opting for the poor and marginal." Even Luke's description of the radical transformation of Paul does not emphasise Paul but the power of the Spirit to transform; a power available to the apostles and to all who follow Jesus. In John, the first disciples are converted by learning who Jesus is through the signs that he works although many leave after Jesus' explanation of the bread of life, which offends many. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 111)

transformed. Their blindness is not total and they do not recover their sight miraculously.[226]

Spohn's discussion on *intercessory prayer* focuses largely on the Eucharist.[227] "The most important spiritual discipline for correcting perception is also the most common Christian public practice: coming together in worship."[228] He warns however that participating in these practices has wider consequences than sharpening perception: it also deeply influences disposition and identity as well. For example, entering into Eucharist and intercessory prayer causes us to grow in gratefulness, forgiveness, and justice, and builds within us our corporate identity as members of God's family and of the Body of Christ.[229]

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[226] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 110-112

[227] For Spohn, intercessory prayer and the Eucharist are integrally linked. "Every dimension of Christian moral formation flows out from community worship and congregating around the Lord's Table. Every spiritual practice done in private prepares Christians for the liturgical assembly, so none of them can be considered individualistic" (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 113). Christian worship services usually contain a time for intercessory prayer- this is to train us to expand our horizons. Spohn argues that persistent intercession for needs is not just a valuable technique but it deepens within us a faith and trust in God and in his care for us. It reminds us that God is intimately involved in our lives; that it's not a matter of fate. "So the practice of intercessory prayer tutors the Christian analogical imagination to see the world as the arena of God's care and action." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 118).

[228] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 113

[229] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 112-113. We do not seek to be experts in the virtue of forgiveness, for example, but to be reconciled with others and obedient to God. Growing in the virtue is a side effect of the practice – the practice gradually grows within us a disposition of reconciliation, allowing us to recognise our own need for mercy and see our 'enemies' as fellow travellers on a journey with God, members of God's family.

Emotions and dispositions

A Christian's perception is framed by the kingdom of God; however this does not necessarily provide direction on how to respond to each situation. Spohn argues that no virtue theory or moral principles will provide the answer in each specific situation, nor is there a checklist we can use to tell us the most appropriate action. "Well-ordered emotions, sensitive perceptions and sound habits, accountability to a sound moral community, the willingness to consider the most extensive ramifications of the action, self knowledge about one's biases and preferences – all these skills anchor practical reflection in the actual situation."[230]

Emotions have an important role to play, both "in sharpening one's moral perceptions and in evoking novel approaches to moral problems."[231] Spohn differentiates emotions and sentiment (which are self-focus not other-focus). "Emotions are the more conscious expressions of *dispositions*, which are habitual character dynamics that become motivations for specific actions. Virtues have an emotional component because they are inclinations as well as abilities to act in certain ways."[232] Spiritual practices enable us to use biblical images and stories as effective paradigms for moral dispositions, that is, they tutor our emotional tendencies so we respond in a way that is consistent with the story of Jesus. This is essential because the rules and principles set out in the New Testament do not

[230] Spohn, "Passions and Principles", 81

[231] Spohn, "Passions and Principles", 83

[232] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 121

give us all the moral answers. Spohn argues that although they give us the fundamentals, "they do not chart the full path of discipleship."[233]

Biblical images and encounter stories of the Gospels engage and shape our dispositions and emotions. In prayer we use images and names we have gained through Scripture. The names we use have the most basic impact on our affections. They address God's character and convey assessments about him. When we address God using a particular image, it comes with an emotion and this emotion gradually changes the image as the language we use becomes habitual. Prayer therefore shapes our emotions.[234] How we address God has moral consequences as we cannot speak of his holiness and reign without being committed to bring about this holiness and justice into the world. When we praise God's attributes we are making a moral claim – these attributes should be emulated. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he used language that confirmed them as his family – no longer Yahweh, but Father[235]–an intimate, trusting relationship, one in which the Father is accessible to his children.[236]

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[233] ibid

[234] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 122. We can pray the same psalms as Jesus did, and as we engage in these, we learn to personalise them – to let them give rise to our deepest concerns and longings. They help us to identify our emotions and evoke them. We learn to move from image to emotion back to image as repetition and endorsement within the psalm cause saturation of the image within our hearts and our emotions. The endorsement causes us to take a stance. For example "My God in whom I trust" (Ps 91:2) – this would then lead us to think about a time when we did put our trust in God and we experienced God as our refuge at that time. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 123) The psalms also rectify our emotions because when we speak of fear, sadness and abandonment, we are drawn back into the presence of God.

[235] The *Our Father* expresses both a longing for God and a response to his kingdom. The first three petitions describe God's kingdom – one where God's name is kept holy, his kingdom is invited and welcomed, and where God's will is done. The next three petitions detail our response

The encounters Jesus had with people in the Gospels are paradigms for how people continue to meet, follow and respond to the Risen Lord. God's reign breaks into the world through these encounters but also through encounters between people. The analogical imagination becomes both a mirror into the disciples' world and a mirror that reflects back on us. We learn how to respond by observing how others respond. Through this observation we learn virtues but not just to be shown them but to enter into the very meaning of them.[237]

Through regular disciplines of prayer, community, study and action, these paradigmatic encounters with Jesus are incorporated into our emotions. These practices bridge New Testament scriptures and the virtues needed to live the Christian life. Although one-off encounters can change us for a lifetime, it is usually the regular discipline that moves these dispositional representations into habits of the heart. Meditation on the scriptures will lead to transformation as the gospel stories form a single narrative and all emotions and dispositions of the

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– we ask for sustenance, we ask for forgiveness (as we also must show mercy), and we seek to be saved from the time of testing. Although this prayer addresses God as Father, the emphasis is not on the gender but on the context of God's reign. Jesus would have prayed using many OT scriptures, some of which use more feminine images, and our using such a range of images will expand our image of God. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 125)

[236] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 123-126

[237] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 127-128. Christian virtues depend on the stories of Jesus and draw meaning from his life, death and resurrection. These scenarios give a new context for moral dispositions as they enter and change them; they shape and confirm our experience of ultimate reality. This is not a matter of 'imagining' while you know it could not really happen. Analogical imagination uses the aspect under consideration and applies it to something else – something real to us. This draws into the process our emotions, which could not engage if the exercise was fantasy. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 135)

Christian life are components of the "mind of Christ".[238] If we bring this internalised norm to bear on relations and decisions, we have the practice of Christian discernment.[239]

Dispositions and Discernment

"Christians need to bring the dispositions that have been shaped by discipleship into practical assessment and expression. Discernment is the name for practical moral wisdom in the Christian life."[240] It is being able to bring our commitment to Christ into everyday situations – not just about the right action but about the most appropriate one; the one indicated by our formed analogical imagination and the dispositions of the heart as prompted by our relationship with Jesus. Sometimes discernment is deliberate, sometimes it is intuitive. Our dispositions automatically guide us in most situations as we frame things with the story of Jesus. The gospel writers have structured each gospel around Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem where he meets the fate of all prophets. Jesus makes it very clear to his disciples that following him means sharing his destiny. The cross of Jesus represents the whole life and ministry of Jesus and is the norm of Christian

[238] There are many different methods of meditation but Spohn provides a simple and practical method using the Gospel stories. It requires one to focus, enter into the story, savour the scene, and then to either converse with God or sit in the silence. Whether it seems fruitful to us or not is irrelevant as real prayer is not about reward and self-satisfaction but just about wanting to be with God on God's terms. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 138-141)

[239] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 136-142

[240] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 142. "Christian moral discernment is the spiritual practice that brings together actions and ways of living with the normative pattern of the story of Jesus. It seeks practical ways to live in a manner appropriate to the gospel." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 152)

discipleship.[241] To discern what it means to model our life on Christ's, to imitate him, we must use analogical imagination, which for Spohn, puts analogical imagination at the core of Christian discernment.[242]

Spohn also explains that discernment is both the deliberate testing of options and the gift of wisdom that listens for the invitation[243] and presence of God. It is akin to finely tuning our ear so that is can detect minor deviations in our lives from the mind of Christ.[244] This perfect pitch is not innate – it requires conversion, healing and the sanctification of God's grace received through a faithful community. "The

[241] Throughout the ages the stories of Jesus have been interpreted through cultural lenses; not all of which stand up to scrutiny when you consider the total story and especially the ending – Jesus died on a cross. These final scenes define the whole of his life. For Paul, "the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27) did not refer to all the stories but to what he did for humanity by his death on the cross and his resurrection. Paul connects "sin, death and cross on one side with morality, life and resurrection on the other" (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 150); so where Jesus died physically, we die morally to sin. Our new life in the resurrection requires us to live a faithful, moral life. The life we live expresses itself in dispositions and relationships that are conformed to Christ. However, Paul is mainly concerned about the power to live our lives rather than us knowing what to do. It is not ignorance but impotence that is our problem; but this is why God gave us his Spirit. This spirit is what helps us conform to Christ provided we co-operate and live it in disposition and action. This is where the analogical imagination is important. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 150-152)

[242] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 145-152

[243] Spohn frames his whole discussion in his article "Jesus and Moral Theology" around discipleship being a response to the gift of Jesus' invitation to follow him. In this article, he argues against the response of 'what is God requiring me to do?' in favour of 'what is God enabling and requiring me to do?' As we are lured by Jesus in our relationship with him and recognise God's self-gift in Jesus, our response follows. (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 28-31). As Spohn says "The gift confronts us with an urgent and wonderful invitation to accept God's love. His call to change how we live and believe spells out how to accept that gift in our lives" (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 28).

[244] To find God in all things, Spohn reminds us that we need to know who we are seeking. "We become disciples by committing our lives to the Lord and taking seriously what Jesus took seriously. His attitudes take root in our dispositions and emotions: inclusive love, compassionate service, radical trust in God, gratitude, forgiveness, courage, a thirst for justice, nonviolence, freedom from anxiety, dependence on God, obedience." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 154) Meditation may nurture these dispositions but they do not take root in our hearts until they are practiced and become habitual.

spiritual practice of discernment, therefore, presupposes a heart that is being transformed by the gospel, a willingness to hear the call, and a community that is faithful to its calling to be the Body of Christ."[245] As we become more attuned to God, we recognise God and God's enabling spirit in our daily lives, and our experiences become 'with God' not 'of God'; transforming our identity to that of a disciple of Jesus. [246]

Identity

Spohn defines identity as "the conscious dimension of character, the deliberate core of personal experience that is shaped by our most basic commitments and convictions."[247] It is the sense of who we are; not inward focused but best captured by examining our most important relationships. It is not something with which we are born but it develops as we make conscious commitments and express faithfulness to others. In other words, we identify ourselves with persons and values outside our selves.[248] For Spohn, identity is the most basic aspect of moral psychology because our actions and relationships flow from who we think we are. Our identities strengthen as we mature and develop the virtue of integrity,

[245] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 154

[246] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 157-162

[247] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 24

[248] Part of our identity is formed by the significant people, roles, commitments, and narratives in our lives. People we identify with set an intuitive standard for us and have the potential to call us beyond the normal. Specific roles we have held also contribute to defining who we are, and the more important of these are usually tied to significant relationships, eg father, mother, husband, wife. God gives us gifts to enable us to fulfil these roles and contribute to the Body of Christ. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 170)

which allows us to be consistent in whom we are regardless of the environment.[249]

Christian identity is not formed around a doctrine but around a God who calls us by name[250] - a personal call from God. As we understand what God has done for us, we can take on the identity that requires from us to do as Jesus did. We must 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 13:14) in every aspect of our lives, conforming them to the way of Jesus. "Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ changes the individual at the very core of her being."[251] The question is no longer who am I? but whose am I? to whom do I belong? to what am I committed? Once in this new relationship with Christ, the individual no longer travels alone but with Christ and the community of the Body of Christ.[252]

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[249] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 163

[250] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 163-165

[251] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 163

[252] Identifying with a community means identifying with the narrative of that community. This locates people in time and space, and to a framework within which they can grasp their personal story. Spohn reminds us that humans need a story to give some unity to the various aspects of identity. We need to be able to place ourselves within some identifiable framework, some narrative. Conversion moves us from our old narrative to a new one, where through analogical imagination, we are part of the stories in the Scriptures and they apply to us in our own time, space, culture, gender. The path of discipleship still moves us from a call towards the cross and to reconciliation, just as it did for the disciples in Biblical times. Salvation comes through Jesus' human story that enables forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and a future of justice, peace and communion with God. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 174)

This adds to our question of identity the one of 'who are we?' as Christian identity is relational rather than individualistic.[253] Christians have been claimed by God and a community and hence our destiny is bound with others.[254] The Spirit gifts each person in the Body of Christ so that it can work together, both to deepen each individual's relationship with Christ and to bring God's reign into the world.[255] For Catholics, *the Lord's Supper* forms both the paradigm and the way for moving from one identity to another.[256] When we come together at the Lord's Supper we recognise our hunger and need for conversion. We are fed by the Lord so that we can feed others.[257] We come in thanksgiving and recognition of the undeserved grace that identifies us with Christ and others on the same journey. Spohn discusses three practices within the Lord's Supper that identifies the community

[253] To identify as a Christian, one has to identify with the person and message of Jesus Christ, as well as with the others he calls to be disciples. It is a package deal – God and God's community, but no community lives up to the ideal as they are made up of sinners. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 173)

[254] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 163. The community to which we belong provides our moral bearings and forms our consciences. This is where we form our identity, our inspiration and accountability to live a moral life (Spohn, "Conscience and Moral development", 126)

[255] Spohn suggests that as people use their gifts within the community of faith, they will grow in holiness. This requires discernment of how each is being called to live – in career, in vocation, in relationships and friendships and in lifestyle. (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 39-40)

[256] Although Baptism is necessary and preaching and witnessing important to the Christian community, the central practice is the celebration of the Eucharist because it responds to Jesus' command to 'do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor 11:24-26). Not only does it identify Christians but it provides regular opportunities for moral formation of the Christian community. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 175)

[257] Spohn relates that unfortunately there is much disunity and division within the Body of Christ yet this replicates the disunity at the early celebrations of the Lord's Supper and allows for the practices of forgiveness and solidarity which are necessary within the Eucharist. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 166)

with Christ – forgiveness,[258] solidarity[259] and entering into the oppression of others.[260]

3. Summary

Spohn's moral psychology is grounded in the person of Jesus and our call to follow him, individually and corporately. His writings look at the contribution of Christian ethics in calling us "to take seriously what Jesus took seriously"[261] and virtue ethics, which "challenges the discipline of Christian ethics to move to the roots of vision, emotion, and character. Unless we are engaged with the reality of Christ at these levels, specific decisions are unlikely to be appreciated in terms of the gospel."[262] He discusses the spiritual practices which enable Christians to engage with the person of Jesus and through following his call, to be transformed into disciples. We are taught the importance of using the analogical imagination to

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[258] The reality of relational identity is that we hurt each other and are required to remain in the committed community relationships. It is an inherent value in the Eucharist and in Christian service. It is also central to the Lord's Prayer – it is the only command in the prayer and the tense is past (forgiveness must already have taken place). The modern translation requires that forgiveness be ongoing – 'as we forgive those'. We are to follow the pattern of God's mercy towards us. God will never withhold his mercy to us however we can only receive it if we are open and unforgiveness creates hardness in our hearts that blocks God's gift. If we open to forgiveness, we will be changed. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 176-177) Forgiveness takes the initiative to remove barriers that separate people. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 178-179)

[259] The second practice of a worshipping community that touches identity is solidarity. Spohn defines this as the union of compassion and justice that overcomes economic and cultural divisions. Eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood means giving of oneself to others – this has lasting moral implications. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 180-182)

[260] A final way of engaging in solidarity is immersing oneself in a situation of oppression, such as going on pilgrimage, on mission, engaging in third world community work, or providing financial assistance to those in need. (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 183)

[261] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 186

[262] Ibid

identify patterns within the gospel; patterns which function as norms for the Christian. We understand that

> paradigms highlight certain features for moral perception to illume *what* we should pay attention to. Story-based scenarios establish a distinctive set of dispositions that help us know *how* to act and to be. Finally, narrative forms the normative basis of the Christian's personal identity, of *who* we are to be. Committed action integrates these dimensions of moral psychology into character.[263]

This is the aim of our discipleship: to develop the character of Christ; to become like him so that we can "go and do likewise".

[263]Ibid

Chapter 4: Comparative Analysis

Working on the assumption that virtue ethics provides the best framework for discipleship, the question arises from this investigation whether Keenan or Spohn offers the better model. While their approaches have similarities, this investigation shows significant differences in the two authors concerning the role of virtues in Christian discipleship together with the language they used to describe the discipleship journey. Principally, Keenan frames discipleship around conversion, conscience (and sin), and virtues. Spohn uses the language of moral psychology – perceptions, dispositions, character and identity. There appear to be advantages and disadvantages in each approach. The argument of this chapter is that both approaches are needed. Taken together, they illuminate the role of virtues and provided a solid and fully rounded framework for discipleship. In this chapter I will compare these two approaches to illustrate where they are complementary and different; and then provide a scriptural example to support the analysis.

1. Complementary

From our investigation of virtue ethics in Keenan and Spohn, it appears to be a case of 'similar but different'. Both come from the school that has the focus on the moral agent rather than the action. This statement is based on the following considerations. Although Keenan's virtues-based approach could appear to be focussed on the moral action, an examination of Spohn's and Gula's writings

indicate this is not the case. Spohn's final classification of approaches to virtue ethics was *ethics of obligation* and *ethics of purpose* concerning moral action, and *ethics of character* concerning the moral agent.[264] My understanding of Keenan's approach suggests he fits more comfortably in the ethics of character model than ethics of obligation, given his emphasis on love and conversion and the transformational effect on character that results through developing the virtues.[265] Gula's description of the 'ethics of being' (or character) seems to support this assessment, as he argues that this model encompasses the habits we acquire, values and beliefs, intentions, dispositions, and the affections which move one to do what one believes is right.[266]

Again, both Keenan and Spohn base their approach on the importance of spirituality – Jesus calls us and we need to respond to that personal call in the depth of our being, to the point where our whole perception and character is changed to reflect our discipleship. Keenan's moral wisdom revolves around God's love for us and how we respond to that love. Through prayer, we enter into an exchange of divine and human love between God and an individual. This encounter enables us to love ourselves and makes it possible for us to love others.[267] If we respond by imitating Jesus' witness and commitments as

[264] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 33-5

[265] The ethics of purpose approach is a characteristic of, for example, liberation theology, which has no bearing on this discussion.

[266] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith, 7*

[267] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 21-22

presented in the Scriptures, through grace and the Holy Spirit, then that love, and the associated virtuous actions we undertake, transforms us. If we do not respond to God's love and choose our selfish actions, we commit sin and withdraw ourselves from the transforming power of God's love. As we respond more to Christ's invitation of love, various gifts are bestowed on us which allow us to move forward in discipleship, both individually and as part of the body of Christ.[268] In terms of spiritual practices, apart from prayer, Keenan would argue the most important is the development of virtues.

For Spohn, the transformational process of discipleship occurs through engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, service, and community life serve to deepen our understanding of God and strengthen our commitment to living as disciples of Jesus Christ. Once God bestows the gift of friendship with Christ on us, we need to develop that friendship as we would a human one – through regular communication. Spohn reminds us that all those who encountered the historical Jesus were changed – either because they accepted his invitation or rejected it. As we engage in spiritual practices, we are constantly challenged by Jesus[269] and the power of Christ to respond to his friendship in our everyday activities,[270] infusing

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[268] Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians*, 22. "The call to strive, to grow, is not a matter of choice. Rather, Christ has called us and given us the grace that commands us to respond." (ibid)

[269] John Paul II also reminded us that "the gift does not lessen but reinforces the moral demands of love." (John Paul II. *Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor*, *Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching*. 6 August 1993, para 24)

[270] Keenan shares this recognition that morality is concerned with everyday activities. "Because the moral life is concerned with ordinary life, morality cannot be reserved to a few actions of great significance. Every human act is a moral act. The way we talk, spend our time, the plans we make, the relationships we develop all constitute the moral life. Morals is not primarily the study

us with the virtues that Jesus demonstrated. This continual re-entry into the story of Jesus, along with our committed response, gradually transforms our character.[271] How this change is effected and the role of virtues in this change is where Keenan's and Spohn's approaches differ significantly.

Finally, both recognise the necessity that discipleship occurs within relationships; not just in relationship with Christ but in community. In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor,* John Paul II reminds us that Scripture explicitly states genuine love of God is not possible without love of neighbour.[272] Along with the importance of love, Keenan sees relationships as the framework for discipleship, formation of conscience, and the true driver of the cardinal virtues.[273] Discipleship is a communal call. Scriptural virtues call us not to a private holiness but to one that recognises our need for each other – reconciliation, mercy, charity, hope, humility.[274]

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of grave actions; rather it is the study of human living." (Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians,* 4)

[271] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 40-41

[272] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor,* para 14

[273] Keenan's proposed relational cardinal virtues are discussed more fully in chapter 2 and in the following section of this chapter.

[274] Keenan, "What is Virtue Ethics?", 404 and Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 54 "They provide ways of helping us forge forward on the way of the Lord, recognising that we should never outdistance one another, but rather that we should strive together for the finish line." (ibid) The Catholic community gives us an identity and a rich, living tradition through which we learn and understand more about Christ through gratitude prompted by liturgy, shared narrative and communal practice. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 167-168 and "What is Virtue Ethics?", 404)

Similarly, Spohn argues that the community of believers is shaped by the same narratives and commitments impacting individual believers. Just as each individual is gifted by the Spirit to follow Christ, so the whole community is provided with the gifts it needs to be the Body of Christ in the world.[275] Echoing Keenan, Spohn suggests that each individual gift serves the community and as they work together, Christians discover Christ more fully and are able to bring his message and his healing to the world.[276] There is, however, a difference in how Keenan and Spohn see these relationships and their impact on the development of virtues and our growth in discipleship.

2. Different

Perhaps part of the appeal of Keenan's writings is his affirmation of the need for personal accountability in our faith – the need to form our consciences, to acknowledge and deal with personal sin, to strive to overcome social and structural evils,[277] and to consciously work at developing virtues in our lives – all in response to the love that God has freely poured into our lives. Jesus commands us to love the Lord with our whole heart, mind and soul. Although there are rules to

[275] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 38

[276] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 40 "Christians are called to holiness not in some general way, but through exercising their specific talents in the community of faith." (ibid)

[277] In fact, personal sin is usually the root cause of social sin, a point made by Pope John Paul II. He also reminds us that sinful human structures and social bodies mirror and embody both humanity's sinful condition and the sinful choices made by individuals. While no social or cultural structure can force someone to sin, they can make it easier to sin. See John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1984), par. 16. Also, Judith A Merkle, 'Sin' in ed. Judith Dwyer, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 883-888 at 886-7.

be obeyed, they should be followed out of love and with acknowledgement of the freedom they bring. Similarly, Keenan argues, through the virtues we seek to become better people, more Christlike because we identify ourselves as disciples of Jesus – the epitome of the virtuous person.

For Keenan, the role of virtues is central to growth in discipleship, namely in moving from who we are now to who we want to become. Herein lies one of the fundamental differences between Keenan and Spohn. Keenan's moral wisdom challenges us to move from *who we are* to *who we want to become* by engaging in virtuous practices. Alternatively, Spohn, through his moral psychology, challenges us to use Scripture to enter into the narrative and stories of Jesus by way of spiritual practices so that our perceptions, dispositions and identity are transformed to be more Christlike. While Keenan describes the particular virtues which we should develop, Spohn describes what we need to do to be internally transformed into the person for which these activities would be the normative response.

In order to move from *who I am now* to *who I want to become*, Keenan suggests the question to answer is "In which virtuous practices ought I to engage in order to attain that goal?", in other words, how does one achieve discipleship through the virtues?[278] This leads Keenan into his examination and restructuring of the

[278] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 711 "The task of virtue is defined, therefore as the acquisition and development of practices that perfect the agent into becoming a moral person

cardinal virtues in relation to contemporary society and current virtue ethics.[279] As a follower of Aquinas, Keenan sees the development of the cardinal virtues in one's life as the way of discipleship. He reinforces the overarching significance of prudence as guiding all other virtues and of justice in ordering our external actions (through our will and intellectual appetite). Although he recognises the importance of temperance and fortitude in ordering us interiorly (perfecting the passions), Keenan argues they are subordinate to justice[280] and not "hinge" virtues. Keenan argues that cardinal virtues are only the skeletal material of our moral life – being virtuous is more than habitual moral action; it "means having a fundamental set of related virtues that enables a person to live and act morally well."[281] These virtues must integrate the person with their actions.

> [V]irtues do not perfect what we have or what we do; rather they perfect who we are in the mode of our being, which is as being in relationships. Virtues do not perfect powers or "things" inside of us, but rather ways that we are.[282]

Keenan is alluding to 'faculty' psychology as in found Aquinas. One criticism of this model is that the 'faculties' (intellect, will, virtues etc) tended to take on a life of

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while acting morally well. Through these practices or virtues, one's character and one's actions are enhanced." (ibid)

[279] Keenan points out that Aquinas believed that we become what we do and if we plan but do not act, we can never realise what we can become. Thus we need to be proactive in attaining these virtues, we should intend ways of acting that shape us into the type of people we want to become – prudent, just, temperate and fortitudinous (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 143)

[280] This argument is based on justice's role in ordering all exterior actions and that when applied to oneself, plays out as temperance and fortitude as we pursue them in order to become more just. (Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 719)

[281] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 714

[282] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 723

their own, apart from the subject. The debate on this matter is beyond the scope of this project. Suffice to say that 'faculties' tended to be seen as potencies rather than as acts. This is an important shift in emphasis since, as Fergus Kerr points out, for Aquinas, things become (and reveal themselves) in what they *do*. Keenan is trying to bring focus back on the person as subject who exists in a network of relationships and, from whom, action flows.[283]

It is because Keenan sees this critical link between relationships and virtues that he proposes to restructure the cardinal virtues. His need to do so revolves around evidence that virtues can conflict;[284] these conflicts resulting from the many relational claims made on our lives. Keenan gives an example where justice and fidelity can conflict within a family where the views of some are considered unjust by others; yet fidelity to these relationships stops us from severing ties.[285] Keenan suggests the central role of prudence in such circumstances becomes even

[283] See Kerr, *After Aquinas,* 48, citing *Summa Theologiae* 1.105.5 'omnes res [sunt] propter operationem.'

[284] This is a debated issue amongst virtue ethicists whether from a philosophical or theological perspective. Aquinas taught unity of the cardinal virtues (Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues" 721). However, Spohn appears to support Keenan in this opinion that virtues could and probably do conflict (see footnote 285). There are actually two questions that could be raised here: first, are there occasions when there is a conflict between virtues – between claims of justice and self-care, for instance; second, there is Aquinas' teaching of unity of the virtues – if a person grows in one virtue, do they grow in all of the others at the same time? There is much debate on these questions and while acknowledging them, they are outside the scope of this comparative analysis. Further discussion can be found in Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 138-146; .Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Virtues*, (London:SPCK,1994), 121-22; Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics", 70-2.

[285] Not only are the ties maintained, but there may be no objection made to unjust remarks because to do so would damage the fidelity of the relationships, without any change in family members who held those views. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 146). Spohn also gives an example of possible conflict. He suggests that where mercy and justice are independently derived, there may be conflict; but that it is not necessarily the case because mercy "can temper justice without violating it" (Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics", 71).

greater as it would not only need to identify the claim of each virtue (justice and fidelity) but assign a priority to it.[286] According to Wadell, when "in a situation in which there are many possibilities of action, a prudent person discerns what best enables the flourishing of the good."[287] He says further that "prudence gives ingenuity to love";[288] that although charity is preeminent,[289] it is not sufficient and needs to be guided by prudence.[290]

Keenan argues that given we relate in three main ways – uniquely, specifically and generally – each of these ways should be assigned a cardinal virtue. Our general relating is covered by justice; however the other two need new cardinal virtues. He proposes fidelity for specific relationships and self-care for unique relationships.[291] The advantage for Keenan in these re-defined cardinal virtues is

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[286] Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues", 722

[287] Wadell, "Virtue", 1005

[288] Ibid

[289] Keenan reiterates Aquinas' description of Charity as the mother of virtues because "it precedes all other virtues by animating them and giving them life." Human experience confirms that love, not freedom or truth, "drives, animates and moves". Love looks for union and moves us towards freedom and truth. It "makes possible our search for a freedom for greater love and a truth to love rightly." (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 17; also see Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians,* 47-51). Keenan notes that the role of charity in uniting the infused virtues is held by prudence with respect to the moral virtues. (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 144) Spohn makes no comments in his writings on the primacy of charity, although he does make brief mention of Aquinas' ordering of love and that charity surpasses justice (Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics", 74). Despite the lack of a clear statement, it would be reasonable to conclude that Spohn agrees that love underpins all virtues and that prudence guides them.

[290] The good intentions flowing from charity need prudence to guide on how to bring them to fruition. Yet, like all virtues, "prudence is at the service of charity" (Wadell, "Virtue", 1005) and as such, it provides an overall vision for life – one that seeks to move us into deeper relationship with God. (ibid)

[291] Spohn also discusses the importance of relationships and specifically friendships as a moral issue. He holds up Aquinas' concept of a hierarchy of relationships against which we assess the

their applicability in any culture, including any religion.[292] Each culture will put flesh on the skeletal cardinal virtues according to how they are interpreted within that culture.[293] Keenan thus suggests there is no one picture of a morally ideal person – it will vary with culture. While on the surface, this would appear to put him at odds both with his own 'confession' of Jesus as the epitome of virtue and Spohn's description of Jesus as the moral norm, Keenan's suggestions for his cardinal virtues need to be taken in context of the universality of his proposed cardinal virtues, that is, they are not intended to be explicitly Christian. However if a comparison is made between Keenan and Spohn in terms of Christian virtue, both would have Jesus as central to the model of virtue. Where Keenan sees this within a broader range of discussion, Spohn's dominant focus is on the Christian life and hence on Jesus as the 'concrete universal of Christian ethics'.[294]

Yet for Keenan, this re-examination of cardinal virtues is essential in what he describes as the anthropological vision for human identity. Cardinal virtues provide the outline for this identity. Keenan considers this new framework incorporates important aspects of humanity that many virtues ethicists see as missing from traditional understandings of the virtues. He argues that the traditional understanding sees virtues that concern our affective life as *controlling*

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many calls on our charity, which must concentrate first on love of God and flowing from that, love of self which necessarily includes love of neighbour (Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics", 74).

[292] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 148

[293] Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 75

[294] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 2

the passions (emotions) rather than engaging and promoting them.[295] Keenan reminds us that Aquinas saw virtues as perfections – they were "not to keep our emotions in check but rather to integrate them so that we could be more fully just, charitable and happy."[296] Where Aquinas and Keenan have human flourishing as an objective of the moral life, a dominant strand in the Christian tradition has seen such virtues as a tool for "caution, reluctance and self-restraint".[297] After the 16th century, little was promoted about virtues that would encourage growth or initiative, such as friendship, imagination, creativity or wisdom.[298] He also includes mercy in this list, although elsewhere he suggests that mercy is especially significant for Catholics as it is our trademark. Mercy is also important for Catholics as it thickens our understanding of the virtues, especially justice; as mercy prompts justice so that we can see the chaos of others and enter into it to assist them.[299]

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[295] Keenan gives the example of a Jesuit chapel in the USA where the stained glass windows are each dedicated to a particular virtue. He commented that each of the virtues proposed was 'conformity-inducing'. The cardinal virtues were missing, as were any virtues that would encourage individual initiative or growth. This sent a message – 'subdue your emotions', 'keep your passions in check' or 'do not be different'. He argues against any ethics that tries to stop people getting worse as this will inhibit passions, initiative and growth. (Keenan, "Are you growing up in the virtues?" 142)

[296] Keenan, "Are you Growing up in the Virtues?" 143. Despite Keenan's recognition that emotions are an integral part of virtues, little of Keenan's writings explicitly discuss affectivity in virtues. Given Keenan's wisdom stems from Aquinas' theology, this appears somewhat surprising. Even more so when argued, as Ryan does, that emotions must be considered in a relational context – as interactive responses involving the self, others, the world and God (Tom Ryan, "Aquinas' Integrated View of Emotions, Morality and the Person", *Pacifica* 14:1, February 2001, 55-70 at 58). These are the relationships around which Keenan has built his re-structure of the cardinal virtues. This is in contrast to Spohn, who spends considerable effort on explaining the role of emotions in our moral transformation.

[297] Keenan, "What is Virtue Ethics?" 402

[298] Ibid.

[299] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 151

Our identity is therefore strongly linked both to the virtues we develop and the perspective we have on humanity. Keenan thus suggests there is a relationship between our ability to perceive and our character whereby each informs the other. Our character affects which virtues we perceive as necessary yet we cannot perceive unless our character is developed.[300] Yet perception, character and identity do not feature explicitly as major themes of Keenan's writings, even though they underpin his approach to moral wisdom. Keenan is obviously interested in how we perceive the world and how we respond to it in terms of our relationships with God, others and self. His focus is on what fosters and hinders discipleship[301] – the movement to authentic identity through the virtues, the need for conversion, overcoming the effects of sin, and solid formation of our consciences.

Spohn also sees discipleship coming out of relationships, firstly with Jesus Christ and then within Christian community. The relationships create and then form how we perceive ourselves, others and God and with whom we identify. Spohn frames

[300] Keenan, "Virtue and Identity", 72

[301] Although Keenan discusses hindrances to discipleship and the need to acknowledge passions, his writings give more emphasis to the reason and will than to the influence of passions. This becomes an issue when you consider the significant influence in today's society of 'bad' passions – drive for wealth, human greed, racial hatred, self indulgence, and so on. In our secular world, these passions are not seen by all as bad and hence impact on an individual's formation of conscience; what actions, if any, they perceive as sinful or wrong; and at a deeper level, their vision of happiness. Keenan's emphasis on morality coming out of freedom of will could also be questioned in this context as Keenan does not explore the impact that beliefs, circumstances and emotional dispositions has on a person's freedom to make moral decisions which align to Christ's teachings. (I am indebted to one of the readers of this project for these observations.)

discipleship around Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom of God because it is this Kingdom that frames Christian perceptions. Jesus spoke to many people, all saw his deeds, yet few perceived. For Spohn, the Kingdom of God was an event, not a way or life or a set of rules. Everyone who answers the call of Jesus into personal relationship experiences the Kingdom of God in their lives and embarks on a process of transformation or conversion. For some, this experience will involve radical change, as with Paul; for others it will be gradual, as it was with the disciples. The rest of our lives become a journey of discipleship which transforms our whole character –our perceptions, dispositions, and identity – to be more Christ-like. Our dispositions incline us to act and, where we do, the virtues develop; not because we have set out to become more virtuous but because we have responded to Jesus' invitation to follow him and to be transformed through that relationship and those in Christian community. Although Keenan acknowledges we cannot become more virtuous without a relationship with God, Spohn places a much stronger emphasis on the action of God in our transformation. Where Keenan challenges us to turn away from sin and to expose ourselves to good formation so that we are more able to undertake virtuous acts and to make good moral decisions, Spohn directs us to spiritual practices that deepen both our understanding of the story of Jesus and our relationship with God; and, through his Spirit strengthen our identity within the Kingdom of God. Spohn's reference to characteristics of specific virtues is minimal.

Where Keenan asks 'who do I want to become', Spohn asks '*whose* do I want to become'.[302] Spohn's catch-cry, "go and do likewise", is central to his approach; one that interlinks spirituality with character transformation, through relationship with Christ and his Spirit. Looking at MacIntyre's questions adopted by Keenan (and recognised by Spohn),[303] the move from *who I am* to *who I want to be* is a matter of character not just actions. It comes out of who we understand ourselves to be and how we interpret or perceive what is going on. It also comes out of who or what we identify with. Christian discipleship is based on an encounter with the risen Jesus and personal engagement in and mutual commitment to Christ and his mission, bringing the Kingdom of God to others.

Thus, for Spohn, it is a continual process of transformation whereby the primary identity of a Christian as a disciple of Jesus Christ informs our perceptions, drives the development of virtues (and the associated dispositions), moulds the character and hence deepens the transformation, which in turn further tunes our perceptions, emotions, dispositions, and identity as a disciple of Jesus. Spohn proposes that the road for transformation is spirituality, which he defines as the classical traditional Christian practices and community.

[302] Italicisation is added

[303] MacIntyre posed three questions: Who am I now? Who do I want to become? How am I going to get there? (McIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*). These are discussed in more detail in chapter 2 of this paper.

Spiritual practices transform not just our behaviour (transient virtuous actions) but tutor our emotions and develop dispositions within our character that draw us into obedience and true imminent virtue. Spohn suggests that all virtues have an emotional or affective component because virtues are not just actions; they are also the inclination to act.[304] Each time we perceive and make judgement about the importance of an event, of people, or opportunities (the cognitive component), emotions are produced which incline us to act in a particular way (dispositions – the affective component). It could be argued that even justice has an affective component – justice is necessarily fuelled by emotions such as anger, empathy, and love. If one follows Spohn's argument of emotions being evaluative perceptions[305] and his advice for tutoring the emotions so that they dispose us to respond in a manner consistent with the story of Jesus,[306] then regardless of whether one accepts that all virtues in themselves have an affective component, there is a strong argument that all virtues are impacted on in some way by emotion.

Integral to the development of each aspect of character, Spohn discusses in detail practices which assist us in training our emotions to be properly disposed. This advice gives us a clear 'how' to move along the transformation continuum of who we are now to whom we want to be. This approach is very different to Keenan,

[304] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 120-121

[305] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 95,

[306] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 120

whose model of virtues is based on that of Aquinas in which emotions are connected with 'affective' virtues (temperance and fortitude). - Justice is primarily about reasoned judgment on fairness and prudence's role concerns judgment that guides all the virtues. Keenan appears to imply deeper emotional involvement in virtues in the redefinition of the cardinal virtues yet, although he puts forward a reasoned argument for the new cardinal virtues shaping our relationships, Keenan does not give guidance on how this shaping would happen. He talks about these virtues 'developing our relationships', helping them to 'grow', but does not clarify what he means by these phrases. Ryan explains how an emotion is an 'interactive response' within a relational context. If this is accepted, then one could argue that 'developing our relationships' would seem to need an increasingly sensitised level of being attuned, receptive and responsive to the world around us, especially that of other people and their needs and desires.[307] On that understanding, one could further argue that relationships grow because the people become more aware of each other and hence are better able to anticipate the needs of others. If this role of emotions is part of Keenan's approach, he does not appear to develop this concept; even with those virtues he would consider deal with our emotions. Perhaps Spohn's more inclusive approach accommodates this better?

[307] Tom Ryan 'Positive and Negative Emotions in Aquinas: Retrieving a Distorted Tradition': *The Australasian Catholic Record* 78:2, April, 2001, 141-152 at 143-4. Also Tom Ryan, 'Aquinas' Integrated View of Emotions, Morality and the Person', 68-69

3. Developing virtue on the road of discipleship

Virtue and discipleship involve both the sort of person we must be *and* the sort of actions we ought to perform. Both Keenan and Spohn see discipleship as a way of life that results from responding to a personal invitation to relationship from and with Jesus Christ. Virtue plays a role in both of their approaches to discipleship, yet the authors differ concerning the significance of this role and how those virtues are developed.

For Keenan, discipleship with Jesus is a call to love and a call to grow in love and hence it is set in a framework of ongoing conversion. He sees virtues as the way to grow in love and to overcome the weaknesses in our lives. This call starts in the Christian conscience, which when formed correctly, guides us in developing appropriate virtues which flows onto correct moral decision-making, and hence discipleship. Formation of conscience is a lifelong process that requires both individual and community input.[308] As conscience works to identify both good and bad moral decisions, we can discern which virtues to develop and which sins exist and need repentance. Given Keenan's definition of sin as a failure to love, development of conscience and repentance of personal sin are key steps along the road to developing virtues.

[308] This relates closely to what Spohn calls discernment – "the capacity to bring the commitment to follow Christ into the stuff of everyday relations and situations." (Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 142). It is the living out of the moral wisdom. Spohn calls discernment a spiritual practice, which has both an individual and communal inputs, similar to Keenan's discussion of forming the Christian conscience. Keenan suggests "[V]irtuous practices become the exercises for the formation of conscience." (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 35). Spohn suggests formation of conscience involves more than undertaking virtuous habits. It is also affected by personal maturity, emotional stability, and social awareness – which with virtuous habits, make up a personal character.(Spohn, "Conscience and Moral Development", 125)

Although Keenan argues this definition allows for every sin, it seems to lack some of the 'meat' that would assist further understanding of the nature of sin. Sin is cyclical in nature – once we choose to sin, some freedom is lost that helps us choose not to do it again.[309] God's grace not only frees us from sin but from a certain kind of life where the fruits of the spirit and virtues are inhibited. Grace allows us to make good choices and to become a certain kind of person by the choice of activities, practices, and disciplines which will shape us in a manner consistent with the gospel. Keenan's approach concentrates on the activities (the acts of love that he discusses as virtues) but as Kotva reminds us, virtues ethics involves a relation between 'being' and 'doing' – 'being' precedes 'doing' – "people with certain dispositions, attitudes and beliefs will tend to act in certain kinds of ways."[310] It appears Keenan's definition of sin as a failure to love may not provide sufficient direction in the underlying requirement to 'be' – how do I develop the perception, the dispositions, and the virtues that form my character to be loving, merciful and obedient as Jesus was and is? Further, one wonders whether it resolves the matter of 'content' noted earlier concerning moral philosophers and virtue ethicists.

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[309] Kotva suggests sin involves both a "personal turning away from God and the corporate power of corrupted social structures, institutions, and relationships." (Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 90) We need liberating from sin and this freedom is a gift from God – "True freedom comes only in response to God's self-giving grace." (Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 91)

[310] Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics,* 127.

Whilst we are co-operating with the Holy Spirit to grow in our relationship with Jesus and to remove the spiritual barriers in our lives, Keenan emphasises the need to know what it actually means to be a disciple of Jesus.[311] What virtues do we need to develop to be able to follow Jesus? Who am I called to become and hence how am I going to get there? Naturally, the foundation is in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. For Keenan, one gets 'there' by developing the virtues Jesus demonstrates. By studying Jesus in the New Testament, we come to know and trust both the historical Jesus and the Risen Christ of faith. The stories point to the identity of Jesus and transform us in a way that enables us to discern how we should be and what we should do. These moral virtues demonstrated by Jesus reinforce the Ten Commandments which God originally provided to form a people and a nation. Although Jesus fulfils and embodies all that is in these laws, to follow them is not optional, and Keenan sees them as central to the development of the moral virtues.

Spohn also sees discipleship as a response to a call – an invitation from Jesus to personal relationship – which will start one on a transformational journey that brings one's attitudes, habits and identity into union with those of Christ.[312] Spohn

[311] Although the emphasis in Keenan's writings on virtue is the cardinal virtues, he does acknowledge that understanding Jesus and following him does not just happen - in addition to the grace that comes from God, we need to cultivate our internal disposition and our practices. We do this through the virtues and we discern which virtues by asking who we want to become (Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 93). Although the 'knowledge' of what to become as discussed by Keenan is largely cognitive, he is also aware of internal transformation that needs to occur – that is clear through his discussions on spirituality. The moral psychology of the journey as described by Spohn appears to sit underneath Keenan's wisdom, at least to some level.

[312] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 38

reminds us that personal transformation does not occur automatically[313] – it needs 'spiritual practices'.[314] For Spohn, sin is the rejection of the gift of new life through Jesus and it is rooted in fear.[315] It is the gap between who we are and who we should be and results from self-absorption and moral impotence.[316] Although it is acknowledged that sin hinders our transformation, it does not receive the attention in Spohn's writings as afforded in Keenan's.

Developing virtues is only one part of the process for Spohn. Although virtues are a worthwhile pursuit in themselves, Spohn does not see them as the driving force for this transformative process; rather they develop naturally as we seek to do as Christ did and be as Christ is.[317] We do not undergo this transformation merely by developing and practising the virtues, but by engaging in spiritual practices that enable us to enter into the Gospel narratives and Jesus' stories analogically. The resulting paradigmatic encounters with Jesus incorporate our emotions, tutoring them and shaping our moral dispositions. Both our cognitive and affective selves

[313] Spohn reinforces that "virtues do not spring up in the character instantly. They become operative to the degree that the person grows in Christian holiness; they become internal principles by reflection, worship, articulation and action. Dispositions shaped by biblical paradigms can tutor the imagination, enabling it to discern an appropriate response with ease and joy." (Spohn, "Jesus and Christian Ethics", 105)

[314] "The attention we pay to others, the choices we make, the sacrifices we make for them, and the love we receive gratefully from them all for habits deeply imbedded in our character. Spiritual practices like prayer, forgiveness, discernment, Eucharistic worship and serving the poor need to become part of the fabric of each Christian's daily life. Through these practices that make space for the transforming action of God, God's self-gift in Christ not only changes our behaviour, it radically shapes our character (Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 39)

[315] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 30

[316] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 29

[317] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 13

are being transformed, and through this we are able to discern Christ's message and accompanying actions in the moral situations we face today. In this way we can continue to bring God's reign to the world, which was Jesus' mission.

> We become disciples by committing our lives to the Lord and taking seriously what Jesus took seriously. His attitudes take root in our dispositions and emotions: inclusive love, compassionate service, radical trust in God, gratitude, forgiveness, courage, a thirst for justice, nonviolence, freedom from anxiety, dependence on God, obedience.[318]

Thus, when we truly identify with Jesus, Spohn's question of 'whose am I' can be answered – I am a disciple of Jesus; I belong to Jesus.

Spohn's moral psychology of transformation is consistent with the doctrine of divinisation as developed by the early Church. This doctrine is rooted in the Scriptures stating the Christian life is a sharing in the life of Christ (such as Gal 2:19-20; 2 Pet 1:4), particularly the Trinitarian life. It is Christocentric because by becoming a member of Christ, we enter into the Trinitarian divine reality[319] The French School of Spirituality describes Christocentrism as conforming ourselves to Christ, especially his interior dispositions through which he lived faithfully. Although Jesus' actions were transitory on earth, his dispositions are not. They are

[318] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 153

[319] Michael Dodd, OCD 'Divinization' in Judith Dwyer, (Ed), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought,* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 285

permanent and available to us through his Spirit.[320] This role of the Holy Spirit is critical to any discussion on both virtues and discipleship. Spohn has a much stronger emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit than Keenan. He explains that "the Christian gets wrapped up in the life of God through the gift of the Spirit."[321] As we open up to and co-operate with the Spirit, participating in spiritual practices such as prayer, repentance, worship and generosity, our values and desires are gradually reformed. "Through these practices that make room for the transforming action of God, God's self-gift in Christ not only changes our behaviour, it radically reshapes our character."[322]

Another aspect here is that Spohn refers to Christian morality as "spirituality in its deepest sense"' – "life in the spirit".[323] "A deep interiority, a conscious friendship with God, is made possible by the Spirit who dwells at the heart of believers' experience."[324] Although Spohn's psychology is not explicitly Trinitarian, it is strongly grounded in spirituality and the realisation that when believers pray "they are lead by the Spirit to cry 'Abba' as Jesus did."[325] Through the Spirit, we are joined with Christ to approach God. Through the gift of God's Spirit, we "have the

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[320] Lowell M Glendon, "French School of Spirituality" in Michael Downey, (Ed), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press), 420 to 423 at 420-1

[321] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 38

[322] Spohn, "Jesus and Moral Theology", 39

[323] Ibid

[324] Ibid.

[325] Ibid

mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16)."[326] Spohn champions an ethics that is less based on obedience, especially as mediated through the Church, and more on central themes from the New Testament – "the resurrection, the sending of the Spirit, the gradual 'conformation' of the individual and community into the *imago Christi*."[327]

Keenan acknowledges the Holy Spirit as the presence of God's love within us[328] and bases his moral wisdom on us developing virtues in response to that love. He discusses the importance of having God's love for us and our response to that love as the foundation of the moral life.[329] Not only at the beginning of our journey but throughout the whole of it.[330] He speaks of the threefold love of God, self and neighbour and about entering into a union with God through prayer.[331] Keenan also notes that the grace to live out Jesus' command to love comes from the Holy Spirit, given to us at Pentecost, who accompanies us as we follow Christ. With the grace of the risen Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter understood what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ and he was then free to preach Jesus Christ and to follow him. So too for us, the Spirit leads us in discipleship. Although Keenan does not explicitly discuss the Trinity, if one notes the thoughts of O'Neil and Black on

[326] Ibid

[327] Spohn, "Jesus and Christian Ethics", 101

[328] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 17

[329] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 17

[330] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 19

[331] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 21

the implications of Trinitarian love for our moral lives, Keenan's wisdom sits comfortably within this description.

> Ultimately Trinitarian life marks our moral lives by the communion of love in all our relationships, that is, our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others and with all of creation. The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love. Trinitarian life is the model for this exchange of love, and it is the same Trinity which graces us to live it.[332]

4. Discipleship – A scriptural example

It is useful to demonstrate the different approaches of Keenan and Spohn by way of an example drawn from discussions by both writers on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37).

Keenan discusses the parable of the Good Samaritan to highlight the virtue of mercy. He reminds us that Jesus had just issued the commandment to love one another and used the parable to answer the question about who is my neighbour. Keenan suggests when listening to the story we may be tempted to think our neighbour is the one who lay wounded, yet he points us to the neighbour who assisted and challenges us not only on how we should act but on who we are called to be. According to Keenan, this parable is not only about how to treat others, but a summary of the entire Gospel and he notes that Spohn concurs with

[332] O'Neil and Black, *The Essential Moral Handbook*, 6

this view.[333] Christ has been our personal Good Samaritan and we should respond to His mercy and our healing by attending to others.[334]

As discussed in chapter 2, Keenan uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the distinctiveness and centrality of mercy, especially in the Catholic tradition. Jesus challenges us not to look for someone to love but to be a neighbour who loves. We are taught to 'be' before we 'do'. Both Spohn and Keenan agree on the importance of this parable. Keenan reports that tradition has interpreted it as "first a narrative of Jesus' redemptive work and *then* a call to imitation."[335] Jesus is the neighbour who entered our chaos and lived a life of mercy in order to rescue us. "That life of mercy is what the disciples of Jesus are to live as they follow the one who goes before them; the one who challenges his disciples to 'go and do likewise' (Luke 10:37b)."[336] For Keenan, this means 'be virtuous as Jesus is virtuous'.

For Spohn, the call to "go and do likewise" is expressed in different terms. Spohn calls the parable of the Good Samaritan "a classic paradigm of perception and blindness."[337] The scribe was asking who was covered by the love command. For

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[333] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,* 118-120

[334] Keenan, *Moral Wisdom,*168

[335] Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics, 58*

[336] Ibid

[337] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 89

the priest and the Levite, although they see him they cannot allow themselves to perceive the reality of his condition as it would threaten them and their journey. Spohn challenges us to use our imagination to reflect on times we may have avoided needy strangers. What the Samaritan had and the others lacked was compassion – they did not let themselves be affected by what was actually a desperate situation. Spohn calls this state "emotional immunity".[338] The compassion of the Samaritan compelled him to act. Spohn explains that compassion is much deeper than pity; it is the most engaged form of empathy – a disposition that "bridges the gap between perception and effective action."[339] This compassion is not just for the moment but the Samaritan looks ahead to meet the ongoing needs of the injured man. It is above and beyond the care that would have been expected of a fellow countryman of those times, let alone a stranger.

This parable does not answer the original question asked by the scribe because Spohn argues that it was the wrong question. The right question throws the light on each of us – which of the three was the neighbour to the injured man? Instead of 'who do I have to love?' it becomes 'to whom can I show love?' There is no-one who I do not have to love! Karris suggests that the scribe was being challenged from his understanding of having to show mercy to a member of God's chosen people (the Jews) to a new understanding that as a member of God's chosen people, he was bound to show mercy to all who needed it. By showing mercy, the

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[338] Ibid

[339] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 90

Samaritan indicated he was a member of God's chosen people even though he was an outcast of the Jews. Jesus thus defined his chosen (his disciples) not according to birthright/national status but according to his response to the chaos that confronted him - love.[340] This comment supports aspects of both Keenan and Spohn's teachings. Keenan teaches the importance of mercy and entering into the chaos of those in need – it is practical and augers well with Keenan's practical wisdom. Spohn is supported by the lesson that is offered to all God's chosen people and on behalf of all God's chosen people - Jesus did not tell the scribe what to do or who to, but he left it up to his imagination. Similarly, 'likewise' is up to us to work out in each situation we face.[341]

[340] Robert J Karris, OFM, in (Eds) Raymond Brown, Joseph A Fitzmyer, Roland E Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1990, 43:126)

[341] Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 91

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In his exploration of spirituality, Sheldrake notes the move in focus of Christian ethics from actions to human agent and with it the awareness of the commonality and unity between spirituality and ethics.[342] The work of Keenan and Spohn is indicative of more integrated approach to spirituality and the moral life. They both make a significant contribution to one aspect of this shift in focus –

> how we understand 'virtue' (that is, what enables a person to become truly human within a commitment to Jesus Christ and aided by the action of grace) and 'identity' (what moral theology classically referred to as 'character'), or what we should *be*, rather than do, if we are to become fully human persons.[343]

This paper commenced by asking: what emerges by comparing the writings of James Keenan and William Spohn concerning the virtues and their role in Christian discipleship? I think a number of points have become clear. Most importantly, both Keenan and Spohn present strong models with the same underpinning advice – to be a disciple, one needs to become an imitator of Jesus, not only external actions but being transformed internally; conformed to His likeness.[344] The way each author would have us achieve this conformity is the difference.

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[342] Sheldrake tempers this claim of unity with the position that although both spirituality and Christian ethics are grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit, spirituality "includes the whole of a person's or group's spiritual experience or orientation. In that sense, spirituality overlaps with ethics but cannot be reduced to it." Phillip F Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice* (New York: Mahwah, Paulist, 2010), 14

[343] Ibid

[344] "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." (Rms 8:29, RSV).

For Keenan, the development of virtues is central to discipleship. Keenan suggests by looking at who Jesus was and how He related, we find direction on which virtues we need to cultivate. He uses MacIntyre's questions to challenge us on the pathway to virtue: who am I? Who do I want to become? And how am I going to get there? Keenan's answer to 'who' is a 'disciple of Jesus' and his 'how' is by developing the virtues. "Virtue, being transformative, leads inevitably to action." [345] His whole approach revolves around which virtues will achieve that transformation and what factors inhibit it – sin, unformed conscience. Although Keenan has an emphasis on love as the motivation for virtue, real love and virtue will only come by being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Spohn places little emphasis on the virtues themselves – they are but part of the transformative process. For Spohn, virtues develop as our perceptions, and then dispositions and emotions, align with our growing identification with Jesus. As we act on these virtuous dispositions, our identity is deepened and our character transformed. Spiritual practices facilitate this transformation through every stage, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Spohn provides disciples with a point of identification – if we commit to the person of Jesus Christ, and by default, the wider Body of Christ, our energies should be addressed towards becoming like Christ internally and externally.

[345] Keenan, "Notes on Moral Theology: Fundamental Moral Theology at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century", 114

What emerges from this investigation is that we can benefit from both approaches. While Keenan describes the particular virtues which we should develop, Spohn describes what we need to do to be internally transformed into the person for whom these activities would be the normative response. Keenan presents a theology that calls us back to the richness of Catholicism – restoring our vertical relationship with God, recognising the reality and consequences of sin, and challenging us to form our consciences well. His restructuring of the cardinal virtues attempts to address what he sees as deficits in their definition in the light of today's society and church, and despite theological positions on this proposal, what he achieves is raising our awareness of the critical need for us to be virtuous people.

Spohn contributes the deeper need for us to be totally transformed in our character. To answer God's call to discipleship of Jesus Christ, under the grace of the Spirit, we need to open to ongoing internal transformation (conversion) through engaging in spiritual practices. Practices are not merely interior but integrate actions and commitments with convictions that are deeply rooted in the person's emotions and intellect. Thus, we need to respond to the Spirit's daily promptings to live virtuously. We cannot avoid 'doing' until that transformation has occurred as action is part of the transformative process. Nor can we perform actions without developing the deep commitment to Christ, the 'being' that makes both virtue and discipleship authentic.

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