Abstract

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# Without Elimination:
# With and Beyond Oliver O'Donovan on Eschatology and Ethics

This study offers a sustained, full-length engagement with the Anglican theologian Oliver O'Donovan. Though it ranges widely, it does so with an especial focus upon O'Donovan's construal of the relationship between eschatology and ethics. Tracing this theme throughout his work, it demonstrates its significance as an area of real tension in his vision of moral theology. Therein opening O'Donovan's thought up to critical analysis, the study places O'Donovan in conversation with a wide set of other thinkers throughout. It registers, comments upon, and assesses his influence upon ethicists writing today, and makes comparative links to other thinkers who serve variously to support, query, and refine his thought as a resource for contemporary theology.

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Declaration:
None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. The thesis is my own work.

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# Introduction

'Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit …'

- T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets.*

This study offers a sustained engagement with the Anglican theologian Oliver O'Donovan. Though it ranges widely, it does so with an especial focus upon O'Donovan's construal of the relationship between eschatology and ethics.[1]

Why this theme? 'Every Christian ethics', writes Jürgen Moltmann, 'is determined by a presupposed eschatology'.[2] Moltmann *would* say that (more on him later), but on this point he is essentially correct. Left unelaborated, though, it is a somewhat uninteresting claim. We could equally observe that every Christian ethics is determined by a whole host of other dogmatic *loci*, and besides those by philosophical, sociological, and psychological assumptions – at least. The claim becomes markedly more interesting, and begins to invite further enquiry, when we start to suspect that there is an 'eschatological squeamishness among many Christian ethicists'. (So David Elliot, in a recent book *Christian Ethics and Hope*).[3] It becomes more intriguing still when we realise that the field of theological ethics has recently seen renewed attention to doctrines of creation, typically unmatched by any comparable recommitment to thinking through the moral import of Christian teaching about the kingdom of God, or other eschatological affirmations. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, and many of the reasons are good; plenty will become evident in what follows. Yet they have not seemed to me

[1] A biographical note: Revd Prof. Oliver O'Donovan FBA FRSE (1945-), Tutor, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford (1972-1977), Assistant then Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Wycliffe College, Toronto (1977-1982), Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford (1982-2006), Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology, Edinburgh (2006-2013) Professor Emeritus (2013-). Now Honorary Professor, St. Andrews, Canon Provincial and Provincial Theologian of the Province of York in the Church of England. Past President of the Society for the Study for Christian Ethics. For a list of his publications see *The Authority of the Gospel: Explorations in Moral and Political Theology in Honor of Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. Robert Song and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 285-91. The sheer number of pages it takes to catalogue such output (and more items could be added from the last couple of years) says much about O'Donovan's ability to consistently produce work of the highest order: fifteen books, eight ethical booklets, thirty-eight contributions to collections, forty-one journal articles, and seventeen magazine articles; and all this, on top of the teaching and supervision of students, university administration, and ecclesial service.

[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 9. Moltmann's own typology (9-41) of different constellations of eschatology-in-relation-to-ethics does not seem to me particularly accurate. Issuing from a similar context but generally more reliable, I think, is Gerhard Sauter, *What Dare We Hope? Reconsidering Eschatology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

[3] David Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1.

sufficient cause for the relative neglect of this important point of doctrinal and moral-theological reflection.[4]

Why this theme in this thinker? Most obviously: because in O'Donovan's work the question of eschatology and ethics is rarely far from the surface. Its appearances amount to no small collection of material, spanning as they do more than four (prolific) decades of writing. Besides that, however, on my reading his understanding of this question also plays a significant role in sculpting the theological foundations undergirding the many topical edifices of his moral and political thought. Those foundations are worth paying attention to for at least two reasons. First, while O'Donovan is justly known in part for those topical forays, having pursued a vocation as a professional practitioner of the discipline of Christian ethics, he has always been 'a theologian at heart' (as he described his own teacher Paul Ramsey).[5] O'Donovan has much to say about the doctrinal bases of moral theology, then. Second, careful consideration of his particular doctrinal commitments promises to make the topical forays more intelligible. Any serious attempt to reckon with O'Donovan's arguments about matters as diverse as just war, biotechnology, or ecclesial disagreement over sexuality requires patient reflection on the shape of these theological commitments along with the ways they play out. Needless to say, moreover, the reverse is also true. The performance of ethical judgment about 'issues' illumines the antecedent theological convictions. And to say 'antecedent' may itself mislead; in more-or-less methodologically acknowledged ways, the peculiarities of contextual discernment shape the deployment of those convictions and the convictions themselves. In this investigation, I try to be alert to their mutually conditioning character.

Why, more bluntly, devote so much space to O'Donovan more-or-less *alone*? Two motivations are worth stating here, one academic and one autobiographical, though the two are hardly separable. The particulars of the academic rationale should become clear in the summary of my argument (just below), and more fully displayed as we go through. As it turns out, tracing eschatology's place in O'Donovan's thought is also a vehicle for entertaining some wider discussions in contemporary moral theology, because it raises a wide range of pressing questions. Still, why centre the investigation upon his thought? It is reason enough, perhaps, that as Rowan Williams writes, O'Donovan 'is a difficult, enriching writer, the stimulus of whose work is exceptional for all those who have engaged with it'.[6] For those who have engaged with his thought, however, his powerfully idiosyncratic vision has proved difficult to place into conversation with other significant voices. This difficulty may partly explain some ethicists' indiscriminate appropriation of O'Donovan's doctrinal instincts, besides deployment of his

[4] In what follows, I use the terms 'Christian ethics', 'theological ethics', and 'moral theology' more or less interchangeably, though with some responsiveness to the way they are used variously across theological traditions.
[5] O'Donovan, 'Paul Ramsey: 1913-88', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1:1 (1988): 82-90.
[6] Rowan Williams, foreword to *The Authority of the Gospel*, viii. O'Donovan's thoughts on Williams can be gleaned in 'Archbishop Rowan Williams', *Pro Ecclesia* 12:1 (2003): 5-9, and his foreword to *On Rowan Williams: Critical Essays*, ed. Matheson Russell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), ix-xi.

moral-theological and theopolitical judgments. In that appropriation, I will argue, a particular figuration of salvation history goes more untested than it might, were it exposed to a broader set of theological interlocutors. The difficulty also surely accounts for a wider lack of critical engagement with O'Donovan's thought. With this twofold situation in view, my study seeks to remedy the lack of critical engagement by providing an interrogative redescription of his work and analysis of it. By so doing it hopes to contribute, in a focused way, to a broader conversation.

The autobiographical motivation will no doubt also become evident throughout, whether intentionally or not, but I will make one direct comment on it here. My ecclesial background, like O'Donovan's, is British Anglicanism of a largely evangelical cast.[7] Discovering his work a little way into my first studies in theological ethics, I found a project which appeared against this formation both familiar and strange: a peerlessly sober and sophisticated expression, perhaps, of my tradition's convictions wrought in moral-theological conceptuality, yet one seemingly under-determined by some of that tradition's characteristic commitments. Though other traditions have since informed my own theological instincts besides evangelical Anglicanism – itself composite – and though others also inform O'Donovan's, my impressions have not much shifted about some puzzling features of his thought. This study is the occasion for me to dwell with the puzzlement awhile, so as to see what clarity might be found. If critical engagement is therefore the predominant mode, it represents the kind of high praise given not merely by reproducing a master's work but by contemplating the qualities and limitations of its palette alongside the works of others; by trying to make a measured assessment of what, by the viewer's lights, look to be the flaws as well as the accomplishments.

## SUMMARY

How, in short, does this thesis go about the task of that assessment? Chapter 1 lays out the basic moral theological vision of O'Donovan's early article 'The Natural Ethic', which I argue expresses a number of fundamental convictions with signal intent.[8] I relay O'Donovan's criticism of what he regards as Protestant ethics' besetting errors: the confusion of ontology and epistemology, and the parallel confusion of creation and redemption. I also lay out his proposed solution. With an unsatisfactory then-contemporary polarisation into 'creation ethics' and 'kingdom ethics' in view, O'Donovan suggests that balance should be struck between creation and eschatology, and, correlatively, between nature and history. Seen in context, O'Donovan's

[7] In what follows, this disposition produces a theological approach which makes frequent recourse to the biblical text – an approach held in common with O'Donovan and for which I make no especial apology besides that of being no academic specialist in biblical studies. 'Here, in this life', wrote Yves Congar, 'all that we can do is to rely on Scripture and stammer a few sentences'. (*I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Herder and Herder, 2015), 2.68).

[8] O'Donovan, 'The Natural Ethic', in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, ed. David F. Wright (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 19-35.

proposal was a uniquely brilliant attempt to 'let the fly out of the fly bottle', as it addressed seemingly intractable debates roiling evangelical theology. He sought to honour all that must legitimately be honoured, but still managed, in so many words, to say '"Perhaps you could think of it this way"'.[9]

Yet, I show that for all its bold insight and real promise, 'The Natural Ethic' does not itself achieve the balance it proclaims, because the doctrine of creation is afforded much more weight than is eschatology; indeed, the title suggests as much. Eschatology's entry into O'Donovan's thought is ambivalent, then, and I illustrate the way it gets caught up in a critique of historicism, presented as the cause of moral theological distortion, as much as anything positive. It seems to me that strictures are placed upon eschatology at this point by a 'natural ethic', and that these strictures are worth dwelling upon, because they are never sufficiently overcome in O'Donovan's work, despite later amelioration. I try to establish why the strictures are there, and find close connections between O'Donovan's sense of the priority of creation over redemption in Christian confession, his discernment about the broader cultural milieu and the necessary Christian response to it (a discernment I locate also in *Begotten or Made?*), and his particular focus on salvation as restoration.[10] To be sure, the shortcomings of 'The Natural Ethic' highlight a difficulty not peculiar to O'Donovan, of doing justice in ethics to the full scope of doctrinal concerns. Indeed, his article actually ends by asking a question which seems to gesture beyond its own conclusions: 'If we cannot *balance* creation ethics and kingdom ethics, what can we do with them?'

Taking a lead from this question, chapters 2 and 3 of my study follow the lines of enquiry begun in chapter 1 through O'Donovan's first major book, *Resurrection and Moral Order*.[11] What 'The Natural Ethic' announces in brief compass this work, in essential continuity, declares more expansively.

Chapter 2 considers, first, the notion of moral realism and its anchoring in a particular construal of the created order. It also examines O'Donovan's choice of the resurrection as the central motif of his ethics. As I see it, with this choice – and the book's programme as a whole – O'Donovan attempts to answer the question with which 'The Natural Ethic' concluded. The answer turns on the resurrection's two aspects, both in a sense 'eschatological': one looking 'backwards' in the restoration of created order, and the other looking 'forwards' to its transformation.

In the final analysis, however, it is this 'backwards' look which determines *Resurrection*'s ethics, once more effectively subsuming the more strictly 'eschatological' under a somewhat monolithic account of created order. (To adopt T. S. Eliot's turn of phrase, what could be

[9] These two sentences borrow Bishop Robert Barron's commendation of the writing of Edward Oakes on nature and grace (the 'fly' image is Wittgenstein's). So Barron, 'Foreword' to Oakes, *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), xi.
[10] O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
[11] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd edn. (Leicester: Apollos/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Hereafter *Resurrection.*

presented as 'Without elimination, both a new world | And the old, made explicit', seems in actual fact to be 'the old, made explicit' at the expense of 'a new world'). Particularly noteworthy here are the effects of interpreting the resurrection primarily as the 'vindication of created order', which not only accounts for O'Donovan's way of understanding the 'backwards look' but also affects the 'look forward', which is accordingly usually described in terms of very strong *continuity*. And though a more transcendent, discontinuous eschatological element is sometimes present, emphasis upon it is repeatedly qualified by reference to the 'backwards look'. Moreover, I find O'Donovan's case for a confidently continualist eschatology in this way driven by *prima facie* moral theological concerns for the stability and normativity of the natural order, and partly dependent on conclusions which are not as dogmatically self-evident as his argument assumes. All told, *Resurrection* like 'The Natural Ethic' falls short of its integrative ambitions; ultimately, eschatology's extended reappearance here is still ambivalent.

Having examined the book's topography of the metaphysics of morals in chapter 2, and found it over-determined by the groundwork of a natural ethic, chapter 3 fills in some of the contours of this text O'Donovan calls an *Outline for Ethics*. While it interprets passages which might help us towards a constructive account of eschatology's place in ethics, it also observes continued tensions, working to shed light on them by employing the terms established by the analysis in chapter 2.

A wide range of *Resurrection*'s other themes are treated here, including freedom, love, and authority; the question of sin and knowledge; and the ethical implications of historical novelty. Consideration is also given to the relationship between the divine command and the order of creation, and to the moral-theological corollaries of the relationships between pneumatology and christology, and between eschatology and ecclesiology. I also explore O'Donovan's imagination of the moral life, particularly his understanding of conversion and character, and of obedience's texture in light of cross and resurrection. Though I have queries to raise about some of these aspects, I do find that the *present* moral import of eschatology now begins to be expounded, especially as a pneumatological determination of the Christian life comes to the fore. The benefits of this start to be seen in *Resurrection*'s emerging accounts of human agency, and of ethics' ecclesial dimension. After this set of thematic explorations, I investigate the book's final, directly eschatological flourish and its promising invocation of the great Pauline triad faith, hope, and love. These features are certainly welcome, yet O'Donovan's treatment of them is inhibited by a familiar reticence, which curiously straitens the role of hope.

Chapter 4 focuses on O'Donovan's mid-career theopolitical writings, especially the important monographs *The Desire of the Nations* and *The Ways of Judgment*.[12] In many ways these books put O'Donovan's basic theological commitments to work, and I observe the same tendency to explicate the resurrection's moral import in terms of the 'vindication' of created

[12] O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Hereafter *Desire* and *Ways*.

order – here, 'Restoration'. Yet, as I also show, in O'Donovan's maturing ecclesiological meditations – closely associated with his reading of Augustine's *City of God* – there is continued development of eschatology's subtly specified connection to the Church. I note, too, the way this impacts upon a pair of key themes in his theopolitics: judgment and the secular. Still, I find that the impact of eschatology is in some ways still curtailed. Furthermore, I suspect that these books' discernment of the times in which we live helps explain the curtailed impact found in the earlier works.

Accordingly, my suggestion in this chapter is that critics of 'O'Donovanian' political (and moral) theology would do well to attend more carefully to the symbiotic relation between his contextual judgment and his theological presuppositions, which determine and are determined by it. Here I draw links back to 'The Natural Ethic', in order to probe the adequacy of O'Donovan's contextual judgment and to limn its links to and effects upon those theological presuppositions. I also contemplate the consequences of those presuppositions and judgments evident in a book heavily influenced by O'Donovan: Joshua Hordern's *Political Affections*.[13]

Finally, concluding chapter 4, I touch on debates about O'Donovan's postlapsarian grounding of political authority, showing how eschatology, besides creation and providence, figures differently in his theopolitical thought than in his moral theology. If the tone of the ethics is set by an interpretation of the resurrection as creation's already-achieved vindication, allied with an assured expectation of creation's 'total restoration' in the eschaton, then the tone of the political theology is set by another eschatological consideration. Aside from *Desire*'s articulation of an ecclesial ethic, the theopolitical vision's mood owes more to the provisionality and penultimacy of the present state, given an apophatic eschatological focus upon the horizon of the Last Judgment. For O'Donovan, politics is rightly understood as located in this order of sin's taint and providential endowment, rather than created nature or the kingdom of God.

My final chapter, chapter 5, chases a number of the foregoing leads through *Ethics as Theology*, bringing the treatment up to date.[14] I propose that we understand this trilogy as a recalibration of O'Donovan's moral theological vision, and as regards our subject that we particularly appreciate the enlarged role for hope, in a fuller treatment of the Pauline triad, along with the concomitant phenomenological meditation upon time. Up to this point, I say, we have found in O'Donovan's eschatology a *past* element – the resurrection's vindication of creation – and a couple of future strands – confident ascription to the eschaton of the restoration of creation and more apophatic ascription of judgment and transformation. With the reconfiguration of *Ethics as Theology*, however, space is allowed for consideration of the *present* import of eschatology.

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[13] Joshua Hordern, *Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[14] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), *Finding and Seeking: Ethics as Theology vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), *Entering into Rest: Ethics as Theology vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

Yet in the first and second volumes, *Self, World, and Time* and *Finding and Seeking*, there seems to be continued cordoning off of eschatology from moral reason, sometimes stated even more baldly than before. I suggest that one of the reasons for this is O'Donovan's concern for the distinction between dogmatics and ethics. The intentions of this are laudable, and particularly the fitting sense of Christian doctrine's doxological excess over practice, especially apposite in the case of eschatology. It is worth observing, moreover, that his description of the dialectical movement of Christian ethics between generic moral thought and theology proper has an apologetic bent, seeking to show how moral reason, though possessing its own shape and logic, necessarily opens up to a word of revelation (including the disclosure of eschatological reality). Nevertheless, I trouble the way in which O'Donovan often draws the distinction so as to marginalise the material rather than formal ethical import of eschatology. I worry that it tends to marginalise what Scripture and tradition understand as eschatology's structuring of ethical discernment. While O'Donovan elucidates quite exquisitely, in a *formal* sense, how we might understand hope to open up the present moment of deliberation-to-action, we find that he seems to have little time for the ways others have understood hope in the kingdom of God to also direct our attention and conduct in rather more concrete ways.

The critique of Jürgen Moltmann in *Finding and Seeking* for confounding hope and anticipation is a case in point here. Despite its general perspicacity, O'Donovan's critique betrays this oversight as it evinces a marked failure to sympathise with the priorities of Moltmann's eschatological ethics. That oversight, as I present it, is one reified in the omissions in the same book's treatment of the biblical epistle of James – the particularity of moral responsibility in light of the kingdom of God (a particularity expressed in that epistle in terms of responsibility toward the poor) is simply skipped over.

These oversights stand in some tension with those parts of O'Donovan's work which show that eschatological imagination can, and should, inform moral reasoning in thoroughgoing fashion. Chief among those parts is, in fact, the final instalment of the trilogy, *Entering into Rest*. Quite self-consciously it allows eschatological themes curtailed earlier more space, and again does so especially in relation to the ecclesial dimension of ethics. Despite and perhaps because of these developments, however, one is left wondering whether the earlier strictures – even or especially in the first two volumes of *Ethics as Theology* – were coherent or legitimate. I intimate that they were not.

The chapters of the study conclude, then, with a great deal gleaned from O'Donovan along the way, but without arriving at a unqualified affirmation of any of O'Donovan's works, as regards his handling of the moral import of eschatology. In view of this, the brief Conclusion makes a simple case for that import, and proposes a few ways in which we might begin to characterise it.

## A NOTE ABOUT READING AND WRITING

Before we begin, I want to record a pair of general features of O'Donovan's work, and in so doing help to explain further why my study has turned out the way it has. It is almost platitudinous to say that a particular author writes in a singular style, or that an audience's experience of reading that author will affect the reception of the ideas so expressed. But both really are true in this case, and this leads to the first point. If you are going to read O'Donovan, or read about O'Donovan, you need to know what you are in for. John Milbank, not himself a theologian renowned for accessibility, writes that O'Donovan possesses a 'characteristically elusive profundity'.[15] 'No one', some American admirers acknowledge, 'has ever accused O'Donovan of writing too simplistically, and his impact has been, so far, perhaps unduly limited by the impression of rebarbative indirectness and obliqueness that marks his prose'.[16] As Michael Banner puts it, most frankly:

> O'Donovan's work is intensely focused and concentrated, and makes few concessions to the neophyte. O'Donovan reaches the mountaintop without seeming even to pause to catch a breath and from there surveys the terrain with magisterial scope and authority. The rest of us will likely be struggling up, very far behind, and even at base camp may have a touch of altitude sickness.[17]

Yet those same American admirers see in O'Donovan's mode of communication something deliberate, proposing that it may be precisely here that he has most to teach us: 'we anticipate that the slowness of … impact – in recent years, however, gathering steam – is due more to the impact it is designed to make than to any failure on his part to communicate. For his aim is not simply to give us *content*, but to introduce us to a way of thinking'.[18]

That may be so. O'Donovan's 'austere and dense prose' doubtless results 'in a great deal of elegance in expression and conceptualisation', as Lewis Ayres says.[19] Still, as Ayres continues, 'there are ways in which his use of this style hinders clarity, not least that 'it is often extremely difficult to discover O'Donovan's sources or particular engagements'; O'Donovan sits light to academic conventions to an extent which in 'a less well-known author … might simply be thought a nuisance'.[20] And, to be quite honest, where footnotes *do* appear in O'Donovan's texts, they are themselves daunting, exhibiting almost singular breadth of erudition besides astonishing linguistic prowess. In *Ways* alone there are engagements in Hebrew, classical and *Koine* Greek, and citations in Latin, French, German, Italian, and Irish.

Second, besides his actual prose, O'Donovan's mode of argumentation is not always easy to settle into. Quite often he approaches topics dialectically, considering two or more distinct trends of thought on a particular matter – only occasionally personified – before presenting his

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[15] From the dust-jacket recommendation to O'Donovan's *Church in Crisis: the Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008). Hereafter *Church in Crisis*.
[16] Philip Lorish and Charles Mathewes, 'Theology as Counsel: The Work of Oliver O'Donovan and Nigel Biggar', *Anglican Theological Review* 94:4 (2012): 717-36, 721.
[17] Michael Banner, review of *The Authority of the Gospel*, *Theology*, 119:3 (2016): 208-9, 208.
[18] Lorish and Mathewes, 'Theology as Counsel', 721. Italics original: as in every quotation throughout this study, unless noted otherwise.
[19] Lewis Ayres, 'In the Path of thy Judgments', *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 4:4 (1997): 25-34, 25-6.
[20] Ibid., 34.

own solution. Real strengths inhere in this style, not least the ability to consider questions in the round, turning them this way and that. A related merit is that O'Donovan is able to unearth the genealogical roots of moral positions more-or-less patiently and sympathetically. When the critique of any position is dispensed, it is thereby regularly acute. On the other hand, at least one danger is attendant upon O'Donovan's approach. I say attendant, because I take it that the main risk is one for his readers, and even more so for second-hand readers, as much as it is one that affects his own conclusions. To render it in Banner's imagery, the danger is this: if the reader does not try to struggle up the slope for themselves, they can seem to arrive so easily with O'Donovan at the mountain-top (indeed some seem to *begin* there!) that they might be given to assume that the terrain he sketches from the top has been covered with consistent evenness and impartiality. Now, achieving both sweeping overviews and exhaustive treatment of all relevant particulars is simply impossible, and I do not doubt O'Donovan is well aware of the impossibility. But responsible appropriation of his thought needs to recognise it, too. Neither beginning from the mountain-top nor only following in his footsteps, we will instead need to struggle up, very far behind, working carefully to see where we might have to forge our own paths.

I should make a third point, which derives from the first two. This third challenge is not so much about O'Donovan's work as it is about responding to it in one's own. In view of his prose style and his dialectical argumentation, writing fairly about O'Donovan's thought is no easy task. It is because of this that I take time with the texts, sometimes quoting at length, seeking to acknowledge as many of his complex manoeuvres as I can. There are, I grant, an overwhelming number of these twists and turns in his writing, each of which that I neglect could be cited in response to any one of my lines of critical enquiry. Yet my critical enquiry does itself rely on the contention that simply being able to point out that a thinker at some point treats every element deemed necessary does not necessitate assent to the relative weight given to each element *overall*, or the particular role each is allotted. It is not nothing to show how a particular swing of the dialectical pendulum can be problematic: especially if the counterpoise is regrettably remote, or muted. To put it more directly: just because you can find everything you think is right somewhere in O'Donovan, it does not mean that O'Donovan says everything just right.

These three points are so much as to say: O'Donovan is difficult to read, difficult to understand well, and difficult to write about – especially analytically. Still, the wager of this piece of work is that these tasks are worthwhile.

# 1.

# Groundwork: 'The Natural Ethic'

## INTRODUCTION

I begin my exploration of O'Donovan's writings with his contribution to the 1978 National Evangelical Conference on Social Ethics: a paper entitled 'The Natural Ethic'. Though the piece might be regarded as juvenilia, it has been seen as 'a manifesto for his later work' and I suggest that the way it envisions moral theology continues to be determinative for his thought.[21] More specifically, it commends itself as a place to begin because here eschatology makes an unsatisfying appearance among a constellation of broader concerns fundamental to O'Donovan's thought. The strictures placed upon it – deliberately or otherwise – are never sufficiently overcome, despite later amelioration. Or, at least, that is what I shall try to show in later chapters. First we need to consider the promise and limitations evident in the confident early proposal 'The Natural Ethic' represents.

To that end, this chapter examines the article in some detail. It begins by exploring O'Donovan's account of Protestant ethics' besetting error, which is to confuse epistemology and ontology and just so to misapprehend the relation between redemption and creation. Then, it observes eschatology's ambiguous entry into the presentation: caught up in critique of historicism, eschatology seems tarred with the same brush, portrayed as the cause of ethical irresponsibility. Nevertheless, with an unsatisfactory then-current polarisation of 'creation ethics' and 'kingdom ethics' in mind, O'Donovan proposes formally that balance should be struck between nature and history – between creation and eschatology. I argue, however, that 'The Natural Ethic' itself fails to achieve that balance. The doctrine of creation is afforded more weight than eschatology; the title suggests as much. Accordingly, I probe the reasons for the restriction of positive eschatological import, locating them in i) a sense of the priority of creation over redemption in Christian confession; ii) a discernment about the broader cultural

[21] Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality and Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 89 n.16. Hereafter *Hospitality*.

milieu and faithful Christian response to it (a discernment shared by *Begotten or Made?*); and iii) a notion of salvation as restoration. This early attempt's limitations illustrate for us from the start the difficulty of doing justice, in moral theology, to the full scope of Christian doctrine. O'Donovan's article itself recognises the difficulty, apparently looking beyond its own answer when it ends by asking a weighty question: 'If we cannot *balance* creation ethics and kingdom ethics, what can we do with them?'.[22]

## THE BREAKDOWN OF THE NATURAL ETHIC

The natural ethic at issue was 'the accepted view of mediaeval Christianity, which got it from Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy'.[23] Yet O'Donovan assumes his audience may find the ethic unfamiliar, even problematic, not least because it 'has had little favour in Protestant cultures' and the audience is, presumably, evangelical Protestants.[24] More fundamentally, though, it is because they are people of modernity, who live therefore after the fragmentation of the earlier consensus. On O'Donovan's analysis, this fragmentation has had profound results for moral theory, denying ethics a unified conception of nature – namely, one conceived of as possessing morally significant kinds and ends, replete with natural meaning. On O'Donovan's reading, confidence in nature's inherent order and its morally normative implications has been undermined, and it ought to be recovered.

The revolutionary movement that bequeathed such a legacy, we read, consisted in a potent combination of two radical philosophical innovations: voluntarism and nominalism. *Voluntarism* suggests that moral value is ultimately decided by God's will, not God's intellect, *contra* the classical tradition: 'Nature, as the expression of God's mind, was value-free; questions of good and evil turned on what it was God's will from time to time to command'.[25] The sundering of fact and value followed. *Nominalism* expresses the sceptical assessment that language of natural 'kinds' is constructive, not empirical; it holds to a metaphysics of singulars. Now, worth noticing here is not O'Donovan's gestural metanarrative as such.[26] It is his theological gloss on voluntarism in particular that merits closer attention: 'Another way of expressing it would be that God's purposes are to be known only in his providential work in

[22] 'The Natural Ethic', 35.
[23] Ibid., 21.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 22. 'The Natural Ethic's account of voluntarism appears in Andrew J. B. Cameron, *Joined-up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Works* (Nottingham: IVP, 2011), 150 – an Australian introduction demonstrating wide familiarity with a range of O'Donovan's texts.
[26] It bears family resemblance to prominent approaches like Charles Taylor's and Alasdair MacIntyre's – though note its early date. O'Donovan addresses 'modernity critique' directly throughout his work. See *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 46-8, and *Ways,* where he speaks of 'that flurry of intellectual restlessness and suspicion variously called "post-liberal", "post-modern", or "modernity-critical"' (174). 'Modernity', he writes in its final chapter, is 'that great carcass around which a shoal of shark-toothed narratives forever wheels and hovers'; nevertheless, there he makes another attempt to trace modernity's origins, which he argues incisively are tied up 'in part' with 'the fate of the spiritual tradition' (298).

directing history, not in his creational work which precedes history'.[27] We see already *in nuce* O'Donovan's acute sensitivity to the danger of forgetting the doctrine of creation. More complexly, we also find the insightful suggestion that neglect of creation can coexist alongside putative remembrance of a notion of providence.

## PROTESTANT ETHICS' BESETTING ERROR

The voluntarist-nominalist innovations fostered scientific thought – O'Donovan's comments on this aspect of its heritage need not detain us – but also inspired the Reformers, lending them philosophical 'tools', with which 'to attack the Thomist epistemology which allowed that in principle (and in fairness to St. Thomas one should stress the phrase "in principle"), natural man might perceive natural values and natural meanings without the aid of revelation'.[28] They responded with a 'powerful and authentically Christian stress on the decisiveness of revelation', crystallised in Christological emphasis.[29] It *was* apt for them to emphasise what might have been occluded: that 'the bestowal of meaning is part of God's saving work in history'.[30] But Protestantism mistakenly took as corollary of this that 'in nature man can discern no meaning', and has frequently focused solely upon 'revelation in history', which though 'certainly the lynchpin of Christian epistemology' is not ethics' only proper focus.[31] It did so at the expense of clear-sightedness about the *ontological* question, and, 'in making the epistemological issue supreme over the ontological, has often tended to upset the balance that the Fathers struck'.[32] This confusion of epistemological and ontological issues leads Protestants to misattribution: 'God's creation should not be held responsible for a fragmentation which is really due to the problem of *knowledge* in fallen mankind'.[33]

In view of these confusions, O'Donovan offers some semantic clarification. 'Nature' as a concept properly denotes *two* things in Christian theology, either 'contrasted with "revelation" as an epistemological programme, or contrasted with "history" to make an ontological distinction'.[34] Clarifying this renders pellucid what Reformational instincts blurred:

> The important epistemological points that the Reformation had to make must not be allowed to shelter a destructive and semi-Christian ontology. It is one thing to say that until the Word became incarnate, man could discern no meaning in nature; quite another to say that until the Word became incarnate nature had no meaning. Revelation is the answer to man's blindness,

[27] 'The Natural Ethic', 22.
[28] 'The Natural Ethic', 25. Assessment of these claims, of course, is immensely complex. They are contested on a number of levels. For up-to-date references to the relevant literature, if unconvincing conclusions, see Silvianne Aspray, 'Louis Bouyer and the Metaphysics of the Reformation', *Modern Theology* 34:1 (2018): 3-22.
[29] 'The Natural Ethic', 25.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 25, 26.
[32] Ibid., 27.
[33] Ibid., 34. O'Donovan's language is often regrettably unreconstructed. We read of 'mankind', 'man', and the moral theologian as 'he'. He defends the former couple of constructions in *Finding and Seeking* (62ff.), by which time he should have known better. I have not redacted any quotations, but try to avoid the same usages myself.
[34] 'The Natural Ethic', 26.

> not to nature's emptiness. True, man's blindness is itself part of a disruption within nature, which we call the fall. But the very fact that nature can be called disrupted and disordered shows that it cannot be inherently meaningless.[35]

A postscript on '"The Natural" in Theology' further elaborates these distinctions. There are, he reiterates, two proper uses of the term 'natural'. A third use in which it stands for 'fallen' is inadmissible and muddies the waters. He recognises that the second permitted use of 'natural' – naming ontological context – is contested, but defends it against the counter-proposal that the category of creation is more fitting for this purpose.[36] Key to his defence is the contention that God's preserving and sustaining work, not simply initial establishment, must also be included in this wider term: 'We need a term broader than "creation", one which will include also what has commonly been designated in Christian theology as "providence"'.[37] This talk of 'natural', then, is properly speech about 'a natural order', incorporating assumptions of 'providential dispositions' undergirding 'the political realm, for example'.[38] Put differently: the 'natural' does not refer simply to features of the Edenic scene, but also to post-lapsarian provisions nonetheless built into the very fabric of things. For O'Donovan, a particular error issues from failure to speak of the natural order in this way: the constructivist assumption that 'these secondary forms of natural existence' – presumably those providential dispositions for fallen humanity – are sheerly man-made, an erroneous, 'quite untheological' position.[39]

So much for a sketch of the article's basic assertions. It detains our interest in terms of the import of eschatology for ethics because eschatology appears explicitly in these discussions, framed by the argument I have just relayed. As I seek to show in what follows, it does so in a problematic, but instructively problematic, way.

## ESCHATOLOGY'S AMBIVALENT ENTRY

The ambivalence of eschatology in this piece owes primarily to the unclear context in which it makes its appearance. On my reading, at least *four* things are going on in the paragraphs that come under the heading 'History – Revelation and Eschatology'.[40] In short: O'Donovan continues affirming something of the Reformers' stance, he paraphrases their position, he delineates the problematic effects of this position – or at least of its ideological descendants –

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[35] Ibid., 26-7.
[36] By using the term nature O'Donovan in this way makes a similar affirmation to conservative Catholic moral theology. For instance, see Romanus Cessario, who argues on the basis of a doctrine of creation (no mention here of providence, though it is implicit): 'Because the believer knows that God created in wisdom and love, no Christian should engage in the popular suspicion about the reliability of nature as a theological category … despite the strong prejudice found in many modern theologians against using nature as a theological category, contemporary Catholic thought reaffirms the classical natural law tradition'. Cessario, *Theology and Sanctity*, ed. Cajetan Cuddy (Ave Maria: Sapientia Press, 2014), 181. Confidence in the notion of nature based on affirmation of the doctrine of *providence* marks much recent Reformed retrieval of natural law reasoning, on which more below.
[37] 'The Natural Ethic', 32.
[38] Ibid., 33.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 25.

*and* he introduces his own opinion. Yet even a close reading of these passages fails to clarify exactly where O'Donovan's various 'voices' are employed, or how they relate. I quote here the three paragraphs in full. They follow immediately after the sentence quoted already, about the Reformers' conviction that meaning is bestowed as 'part of God's saving work in history, for in nature man can discern no meaning'.

> What the Christian doctrine of revelation does for natural meaning, its eschatological expectation does for natural purpose. Within Christianity one cannot think or speak about the meaning of the world without speaking also of its destined transformation. The problem of evil is met, not by asserting a profound cosmological order in the present, but by confident announcement of God's purposes for the future. He who has come to earth as the meaning, has come also as the Purpose or Fulfilment. To understand the first coming of Christ it is necessary to expect the second coming.
>
> There are, of course, notoriously, two ways of living in expectation. We can believe in the value of intermediate transformation, "preparing the way of the Lord", and so commit ourselves to a life of activity; or we can feel that the ultimate transformation renders all penultimate change irrelevant, and so resign ourselves to a life of hopeful suffering. But what these two attitudes have in common is far more important than what differentiates them. They both take a negative view of the *status quo*. There is no natural purpose to which we can respond in love and obedience. The destiny of nature has to be imposed on it, either by our activity or by God's. The purpose of the world is outside it, in that new Jerusalem which is to descend from heaven prepared as a bride for the bridegroom.
>
> This description of the Christian impact on the natural ethic would meet with fairly wide acceptance, among those who deplore it as well as among those who welcome it. Yet I am bound to think that there is much of importance that it leaves out.[41]

At this point O'Donovan goes on to detail Protestantism's failure to distinguish epistemology and ontology, in passages I quoted earlier. Because of that sequence, and because of the context before it, the first paragraph seems to contribute to the rehearsal of the Reformers' position, which is itself part affirmation and part report of the deleterious results of Protestantism's confusion of epistemology and ontology. The register in which each point is made is not transparent, particularly clouding the treatment of eschatology. Its appearance as a theme is followed immediately, as though explicating the prior paragraph, by the aside elucidating two problematic modes of eschatological anticipation. Both ways are deemed fundamentally mistaken; no positive account is given of any faithful Christian way of 'living in expectation'.

Perhaps it is unfair to note the form of eschatology's appearance here, in early writing dedicated to another topic. Nonetheless, I think there is a troubling pattern here worth highlighting, and worth keeping in mind when reading O'Donovan's later work. Since eschatology is under suspicion as the prime cause of doctrinal imbalance and concomitant ethical irresponsibility, it serves as a foil for O'Donovan's own retrieval of the natural ethic. Given this, any case O'Donovan could make for eschatology and its ethical normativity would need to be salvaged from the distorted account of its advocates, if made at all. Curiosity about the rationale behind this presentation only intensifies when we learn that O'Donovan continues to extol the virtue of balance. Specifically, he is adamant that along with clarity on the issue of

[41] Ibid., 25-6.

ontology and epistemology, we need equity between nature and history. We turn to that claim now.

## BALANCE

O'Donovan's prescriptive suggestion is simple enough, on the face of it. 'Balance between Nature and History' must be maintained. There is a particular 'Christian balance' between the two, and it is imperative to register both 'meaning given in the natural order' and 'meaning revealed in the course of history'.[42] Failure to do so results in two errors: 'static naturalism' and 'an indeterminate belief in progress'.[43]

Static naturalism issues in an ethic 'with which Christianity can have nothing to do'.[44] Analysed theologically, 'respect for given orders can easily become a form of idolatry'.[45] And there are all kinds of 'givens' that may falsely 'command our love and allegiance … Much has been honoured as "natural" that is purely conventional, the product of certain passing historical circumstances, and in this way great oppression has been laid on the souls of men'.[46] Though O'Donovan does not explicitly distinguish between them, according to his analysis naturalism makes two main errors. One allows 'respect for given orders' – genuinely given natural orders, that is – to overextend to the point that they become controlling absolutes. The other perceives natural orders where there are none, venerating as divinely created that which is humanly constructed, ossifying the transient as if eternally binding. Even so, O'Donovan is keen to distinguish his critique of naturalism from more thoroughgoing scepticism. The second postscript engages 'The Views of T.F. Torrance':

> Torrance's objection to natural teleology is that it fails to distinguish the creation from the creator, an objection which is valid against some, but certainly not against all versions of the theory. In return we must object that the value supposedly conferred upon nature by divine grace is a mere abstraction unless it can be recognised, with or without the help of revelation, in the purposive interconnectedness of kinds. Only so can we see that the universe is an "order", and affirm, with the creator, that it is "very good". Without the possibility of this discernment, the doctrine of creation is destined to drop out of sight, and man's autonomous will-to-mastery must take over, imposing human purposes where God apparently omitted to impose divine ones.[47]

O'Donovan does not want the ontological distinction between Creator and creature to scour the concept of nature of its classical teleological implication.

Still, his effort to distance the natural ethic from pure naturalism nuances his approach a little, and he raises at least one pressing question for any 'natural ethic'. Even in situations where we rightly discern it, nature's claims may be 'generic' in form, and we may find

[42] Ibid., 27.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 27-8. Comparable here are the kinds of natural law reasoning John Bowlin distinguishes from his own proposal, in 'Notes on Natural Law and Covenant', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 28:2 (2015): 142-9, 144.
[47] 'The Natural Ethic', 34.

ourselves obligated by multiple natural 'is-ought' demands. He admits, then, that even if our natural ethic were properly directed to nature's salutary features challenges would still present themselves. And his recognition that the plurality of possible moral goods which confront ethical deliberation can seem cacophonously, incoherently diverse is welcome. The point that emerges from this acknowledgment is that moral reasoning therefore requires guidance from another source. The circumscribed problematising of static naturalism thus opens the door for a circumscribed embrace of history. Just so, of more precise interest for my purposes, it opens the door for consideration of the theological narration of human history. The way 'The Natural Ethic' treats that narration's implications for morality is worth pausing over here, because it has an eschatological component.

O'Donovan concedes, now, that 'in our actual situation in salvation history, we are dealing as fallen men with a fallen nature' – no doubt to his audience's relief:

> Both we and nature come under the judgement of the God who created us, and that judgement is reflected in an ascetic series of duties and vocations which stand in paradoxical relation to natural goals and functions. Thus we are required to "hate" our father and our mother, our wife, children, brothers and sisters, and even our own life, in order to be Christ's disciples. Allowing for the element of rhetoric in this, we must still recognise a demand which falls quite outside the scope of the natural order, and, because the natural order itself is in rebellion against God, runs counter to it. Again, there is the possibility of a calling to singleness, "making ourselves eunuchs", as Jesus puts it, for the kingdom of heaven's sake; and here too we have to recognise an eschatological demand which runs counter to the course which nature indicates.[48]

The ambiguity of this passage again underscores the difficulties of O'Donovan's article, and the broader task it approaches. It is easy to comprehend that singleness can be fittingly understood as a correlate of eschatological reality. And it is surely intuitively correct, if this is what O'Donovan means to suggest, to recognise that eschatologically-ordered duties and vocations fall outside the natural order's scope. But it is another, more difficult task to identify how they relate *to* it.

The mention of the natural order's fallenness is again welcome, since in his writing this admission is rare. (He can also write, earlier, that 'the world was an ordered creation tragically spoiled').[49] Welcome, too, is the suggestion that nature must stand under divine judgment – presumably nature in the sense of 'fallen' nature, since the two, he says, should not be taken as synonymous. This does indicate that O'Donovan accepts the problem of the fall as more than solely epistemological; if nature needs to be judged, then humankind's inability to see and implement nature's claim aright is not the only morally significant effect of sin. Without much of a positive account of living in expectation, though, eschatology's vocational demands seem to be connected only with God's judgment on the fallenness of the natural order.[50] In other

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 27.
[50] The sense in which singleness 'embodies a judgment against the limitations of familial affinities' is developed in Brent Waters, *The Family in Christian Social and Political Thought* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 237 – originating in a DPhil thesis supervised by O'Donovan.

words, there is little expression here of the way those callings are alongside and in some manner beyond those primarily associated with creation. O'Donovan is quite right that God has not abandoned creation's primeval form; but we may affirm that while also holding that the quality of life eschatology bespeaks is not chiefly an infralapsarian counterweight.

To be sure, there is a certain delicacy of treatment necessary in articulation of the place of the realities moral theology deals with – here kinship and singleness – in redemption history. Moreover, the salvation-historical emplacement of each is contested. If with this piece O'Donovan does not attain a rounded account, that is no great crime. It is not wrong to say that the state of celibacy is in some way signpost to the fall's negative effects, though it is also witness to the life of Christ, his Church, and his coming kingdom. (Neither is marriage itself purely correspondent to natural goals and functions, since though not at all untouched by the fall, it perdures through creaturely rebellion due to providential grace, is refigured in the coming of Christ, and is ascetically disciplined in light of his coming kingdom).[51] But I wonder whether the awkward treatment of singleness suggests an unresolved grappling with creation, fall, salvation, and consummation. That O'Donovan cannot yet satisfactorily render eschatology's import for the moral life is further apparent when we realise that giving articulation to calling, in particular the most plainly eschatologically-oriented, in an account governed by *topoi* of corruption and its judgment, is surprising for a theologian so concerned to first present morality in relation to natural realities judged very good.

In this short presentation, understandably, it is never explained what exactly might be fallen and thereby judged about the natural order, or how this fallenness and judgment might relate to the perduring divine pronouncement of its goodness. Questions pertinent to our theme continually arise – apparently unanswered – from O'Donovan's gnomic formulations. Are the structures of created order compromised, or are they simply now opaque to us? Is the reality to which Adam and Eve's pre-lapsarian action conformed without remainder the self-same reality to which *our* action ought to conform? O'Donovan already hints that it is not, given that providential ordering is ingredient in the 'natural order' in addition to the protological fundament, given that we ought to recognise those 'secondary forms' as morally binding, and given that the 'eschatological demand' seems more than the restatement of a mandate native to Eden. But we are still seeking answers to a set of questions any 'natural ethic' will have to answer from Christian theology: questions both ontological, like these, and epistemological,

[51] For an account sensitive to the way Augustine's views on these matters are informed by his understanding of salvation history see Jana Marguerite Bennett, *Water is Thicker Than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), originating in a PhD thesis supervised by Hauerwas. Waters suspects Bennett of stretching the concept of household too far, and thus of muting 'the witness of marriage and family to the goodness of God's creation', which he characterises as 'providential witness' in contrast to the church's 'eschatological expectation' (Review, *Modern Theology* 29:2 (2009): 341-3). That kind of suspicion typifies O'Donovan's worries about Hauerwas; equally, Hauerwas' worries about O'Donovan would be typified in the suspicion that could be raised of Waters' book from Bennett's perspective – that it has too optimistic and undialectical an understanding of the natural order's normativity. I return to both books below.

about the degree of self-evidence the natural order has for us, and about how it might function normatively. We will have the chance to address them in chapters 2 and 3, but they need to be acknowledged even before we consider those questions this investigation must add about how eschatological goods might be discerned, by whom, and with what authority; and about these goods' relation to created goods. O'Donovan is not innocent of these challenges, as the rejection of 'static naturalism' shows. But in this piece he commits to establishing the place of the natural in moral reasoning prior to such concerns, proffering for his audience an order of exposition more familiar to Thomists than Barthians.

Overall the discussion does show that O'Donovan is clear in disavowing static naturalism, and that naturalism as such cannot merit Christians' sole allegiance in ethics. It is not evident at this point, though, whether he would allow that a more sophisticated kind of naturalism (perhaps contemporary Aristotelian) could represent a cogent metaethical approach for those who do not see fit to reckon with revelation, once nature's complexities and some room for cultural accretion were granted. We could not, therefore, be sure about his position on non-theological natural law. Either way, O'Donovan's suggestion that the Reformers were accurate in their critique of Thomist (though truly sub-Thomas) naturalism operates on the grounds that they, like his audience, sought to be thoroughly Christian in their moral reasoning. They were not mistaken about this: 'We cannot allow ourselves, then, to champion an ethic in which everything is given in nature, nothing is to be revealed in history'.[52]

For O'Donovan the antidote is not flight from nature into unbridled historicism – the article is entitled 'the Natural Ethic', after all, and a sharply critical appraisal of historicist thought follows the assessment of naturalism. Eschatology reappears here, for this historicist 'other route' involves 'abandoning altogether the given values in favour of a solely eschatological outlook'.[53] 'Belief in progress', he says, echoing a widespread and plausible interpretation, 'can be thought of as "salvation history" without salvation'.[54] Such belief generates optimism about history's direction, but lacks another historical sensibility: an understanding 'of history as the restoring of what was lost, the recovery of things as they were always supposed to be'.[55] What should we make of these claims? We might worry that describing historicism as 'a solely eschatological outlook' again seems to insinuate that eschatology itself is responsible, even if reading the doctrinal category onto secularised philosophy may yield a valid judgment on the a-theological or partially-theological character of modern philosophies of history and their denial of nature. If my hunch is correct, we will find that O'Donovan is typically more careful to

[52] 'The Natural Ethic', 28.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid. The classic account is Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1949). Henri de Lubac's vast, untranslated studies of Joachim of Fiore and Joachim's legacy offer an even grander narrative. For English-language reception, see Joseph S. Flipper, *Between Apocalypse and Eschaton: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2015) and Cyril O'Regan, 'A Theology of History', in *T & T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 289-306, 301-6.
[55] 'The Natural Ethic', 28.

distinguish doctrines of creation from secular or quasi-theological ethical naturalism than doctrines of eschatology from historicism. But for now the last line quoted in particular demands theological reflection.

The statement that 'history' is 'the restoring of what was lost, the recovery of things as they were always supposed to be' admits of different interpretations and raises significant considerations for our enquiry. First, given the article's emphasis on providence, we might ask about the role of providence in salvation-history, and about the eschatological restoration – in history – of created order. For both O'Donovan and the historicists, I think, one can speak of history's positive directionality. And for O'Donovan, here, history seems to be always-already eschatological, too, albeit with the predominant sense of a movement of recovery: the possibility of return to 'things as they were always supposed to be'. This might invite the counter-question of whether eschatology properly signifies the healing of creaturely realities beyond history, not through it. If it does, the line's ambiguity poses a problem. Strictly understood on this outlook, the 'history' in which what was lost is restored is the 'history' of new creation, temporally after or dialectically co-temporal with history as such (in the sense of overlapping ages). Historicism, if so, is mistaken not just in denying salvation in history, but precisely because as parody salvation-*history* it seeks pre-emptively to resolve that which will only be resolved at or after history's denouement: the current order is irremediably the vale of tears, the myth of redemption in history nothing but false consolation. But this is not what O'Donovan has in mind, since he prefers stronger historical continuity between providence and eschatology. For him, God's redemptive work in history *is* truly eschatological, already beginning to restore 'what was lost,' recovering 'things as they were always supposed to be': new creation must already be afoot.

We are beginning to see that O'Donovan's constellation of the paired terms nature/history and creation/eschatology turns on the idea of salvation history as restoration. My questions may at this point seem over-determined or inconsequential, but we will have ample cause to revisit them in later chapters. I grant that his is an uncontroversial view – or that the attendant epistemological claim is. That God begins to heal in history the vision of human creatures who cannot see clearly is unlikely to be disputed theologically; we continue, though, to see 'in a mirror, dimly'.[56] But theologians might disagree about the ontological and just so moral implications of his claim about recovery, about whether we are to presume the restoration of natural order in this time between the times. O'Donovan himself has told us not to confuse epistemology and ontology. It is not difficult to appreciate that differing judgments about these implications will have consequences for myriad areas of Christian ethics. Doctrinal decisions about the relation of creation, sin, providence, salvation, and new creation determine moral decisions about the normativity of nature (and history, as we shall see), obviously affecting how one thinks about questions of technology, sexuality, ecology, politics, and more besides. But

[56] 1 Cor. 13:12.

apart from the indication that political authority is to be comprehended as rooted in divine dispensation, in 'The Natural Ethic' O'Donovan does not yet adumbrate the consequences of his understanding 'of history as the restoring of what was lost'.

Ambiguities aside, O'Donovan's reflections on historicism *are* insightful, and here we do find fleeting mention of authentic hope, in suggestive comments about historicist denial of it. While 'hope requires some point of identification between the thing hoped for and the one who hopes for it', in historicist conception the ineluctable drive of progress means 'the future is known only as the negation of what is … not as the more profound affirmation of its true structure'.[57] What is to come therefore cannot be the object of hope, only existential fear or dread.[58]

O'Donovan is especially sensitive to historicism's moral results. When nature's givenness is discarded, we are told: 'Value and meaning now arise from the very fact of transformation itself; there is no other criterion, other than the simple fact of change, by which we can judge good and evil'.[59] The forward thrust of 'progress' separates those on the 'right' and 'wrong' sides of history, with pejorative labels attached to those opposing change, and badges of honour to those engineering it: '"Progressive" and "reactionary" become the standard terms of praise and blame'.[60] This progressivism, O'Donovan reports, is the era's regnant attitude. At this point I think we discover the rationale for what turned out to be the lack of balance in treatment of creation and eschatology, despite the claims of parity between nature and history. If, given the cultural milieu, his audience tend towards historicism – towards a 'solely eschatological outlook' – then his 'natural ethic' tells the other side of the story. I return to this point below.

## ORDER

We have seen O'Donovan's concern for balance between nature and history and his eschewal of pure naturalism and historicism. Along the way we have noted both instructive and ambiguous passages, and an ambiguity in his treatment of eschatology which is instructive regarding his thought. We may by now also have realised that O'Donovan's concern for the balance between his subjects is not indifferent to the order that obtains among them. In fact I think grasping this concern for *taxis* is crucial for understanding the shape of the ethic on display, more so than his expressed goal of balance.[61] He does not intend to place nature and history or creation and

[57] 'The Natural Ethic', 29.
[58] On my reading, historicism also seeks to secure itself against the future, trying to outflank anxiety by replacing hope with ironclad certitude. Cyril O'Regan describes Hegel's conception of providence to this effect, 'a proposal in which knowledge has been substituted for faith, certainty for hope, absolute transparence for the ambiguity of history …'. O'Regan, 'On Hegel, Theodicy and the Invisibility of Waste' in *The Providence of God: Deus Habet Consilium*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2009), 75-108, 76.
[59] 'The Natural Ethic', 29.
[60] Ibid.
[61] That goal – balance – is often ascribed to Anglican theology, and there is certainly something of that Anglican disposition in O'Donovan's writing. But of course the ascription, there as here, does not yet tell us much materially or evaluatively until we look much closer at what the component parts are taken to be,

eschatology squarely side-by-side, as metaphysically or taxonomically coeval. Noticing the way O'Donovan understands the interrelation of doctrines also helps explain the reticence exhibited about the natural order's fallenness. Speech about that nature's fallenness is a in a sense a secondary subset of more fundamental confession of creation's goodness. Evil, traditionally conceived, is privative; it has a parasitic, categorically asymmetrical relationship to the good, being neither temporally nor ontologically equiprimordial with it. Though not all Protestant theology has always remembered to state it, meaningful speech about creation's condition *post lapsum* presupposes the world's created goodness.

For O'Donovan, though nature 'is not a part of salvation through Christ, neither is it opposed to it, for it is the work of the same God, the creator and sustainer of all. In either case the natural is presupposed by, and redeemed through, the work of salvation: natural knowledge is restored by revelation, the natural order of things by saving history'.[62] We analysed this second sentence above, but here the longer quotation exemplifies his concern for dogmatic coherence. When he says elsewhere in the paper that 'Christian eschatology … has to be seen in the light of the doctrine of creation' he is likewise airing that concern, and expressing a core conviction.[63] The principle often provides the criterion by which he identifies (alleged) theological errors. Here he describes dualism's failure to observe the orthodox logic:

> Redemption is not to be understood dualistically as the triumph of a good redeemer-god over an evil creator-god. It is because God is the creator of nature that he does, and will, redeem nature from its state of corruption. He who is the Saviour of the world is also the "Logos", "through whom all things were made". He is the Second Adam, restoring that which the First Adam lost. Creation and redemption are not in hostile antithesis, but in complementarity, each providing the context on which we understand the other.[64]

There is much theological good sense in this description, which as a refrain in O'Donovan's thought will be revisited in subsequent chapters. The familiar, valuable point made about the self-identity of the God who acts in creation and redemption sets bounds responsible theology should operate within.

Nevertheless, I want to stress already that those bounds do not necessitate one or other particular account of redemption's relation to eschatological consummation, nor one or other account of that relation's moral import. The notion of redemption-as-restoration O'Donovan invokes by proposing that 'natural knowledge is restored by revelation, the natural order of things by saving history' is unobjectionable enough. But it does not yet tell us how more precisely to relate consummation to redemption history's restoration of the natural order of things – in particular, how much 'more' there is to consummation than restoration, even if we should not understand redemption to consist in less than that. If for O'Donovan a conception of

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and how they are being synthetically combined. Only then will be able to say whether any particular *via media* is a 'strikingly balanced witness' (as Michael Ramsey described Anglicanism in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 2nd edn., repr. (London: SPCK, 1990), 220) – or not.

[62] 'The Natural Ethic', 32.

[63] Ibid., 27.

[64] Ibid.

consummation as without remainder the completion of restoration might sometimes appear to follow seamlessly, the mention that we saw of an eschatological demand does seem to point to a loftier understanding with more disjunctive ethical significance. Would this loftier understanding unsettle the strongly continuous creation-redemption scheme which licenses a particularly untroubled appeal to the moral normativity of nature? And does this mean the doctrinal argument for the 'natural ethic' is not as secure as O'Donovan makes out? Chapter 2 pursues these questions. By interrogating the particular shape of his theological ethics with them, I aim to show also the latitude available to answer faithfully in a different way. To indicate, also, that more extensive consideration of eschatology's significance beyond nature's 'recovery' does not by definition endanger a unified doctrine of God.

Leaving that thought for now, we can finish treating 'The Natural Ethic' on its own terms. His all-encompassing anxiety is that if creation and redemption are not thought together and in that order, attempts will be made to develop theologies from either pole. Just so, if moral positions are derived solely from either pole they will themselves be disproportionate. On either side, lop-sided constructions will fail to bring the full scope of Christian doctrine to bear on the matters of the moral life – the task O'Donovan envisions himself undertaking. This failure is not mere theoretical or typological possibility. He meets exactly such bifurcation of ethical programmes in the circles the paper addresses, where there are disagreements 'between those who urge upon us a "kingdom" ethic and those who support a "creation" ethic'.[65] Given the foregoing account of complementarity O'Donovan unsurprisingly criticises both: 'Neither kingdom nor creation can be known independently of each other. He who is called the King of kings is also called the second Adam: nature and history in him are not divided. We would be foolish to allow ourselves to be polarised in this way'.[66] And he also proposes his audience would do well not to map 'creation ethics' and 'kingdom ethics' onto political clichés of 'right' and 'left'.

He is, nevertheless, mindful of the potential pragmatic reasons 'naturalist and historicist camps' have formed:

> We have to proclaim the gospel in different cultural and philosophical contexts. Many of us have deep sympathy with the problems of the Third World, tyrannical regimes, oppressive family and tribal structures, maldistribution of resources, and so on, and, speaking

[65] Ibid., 30. For background, see Chris Sugden and Oliver Barclay, *Kingdom and Creation in Social Ethics: Grove Booklet E:79* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1990). For context see the longer tale as pertains to Anglicanism in Jonathan Chaplin, 'Evangelical Contributions to the Future of Anglican Social Theology', in *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision Today*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), and Jeffrey P. Greenman. 'Anglican Evangelicals on Personal and Social Ethics', *Anglican Theological Review*, 94:2 (2012): 179-206 – the conclusion of which begins by quoting O'Donovan's *Resurrection* as the baseline for Anglican evangelical ethics. More broadly see Nigel Biggar, 'Evangelicalism and Social Ethics', in *Evangelical Anglicans: Their Role and Influence in the Church Today*, ed. R.T. France and A.E. McGrath (London: SPCK, 1993), 108-19. Biggar writes: 'contemporary evangelicals are much more inclined than their Victorian predecessors to conceive of economic and social life as the proper objects of divine redemption … indicated by their appeal to the incarnation as the basis of Christian social involvement, and by their emphasis on the social nature of the kingdom of God' (108).

[66] Ibid.

> authentically to the static naturalisms which have produced and aggravated such problems, will talk eschatologically of transformation, even with a daring but possible expropriation of language, of "revolution". Others of us are concerned chiefly with the problems of the Western world, the abuses of technology, the threat to the family, the dominance of financial power, and so on, and find themselves needing constantly to point to the *data* of created nature. No doubt there is a temptation here: it is easy for the one group to think of the other as "conservative" or "radical". But whenever we do this we exclude one side of the nature-history balance, and condemn our own stance to being less Christian for lack of that balance.[67]

This passage too is instructive, further contextualising O'Donovan's thought on the relationship of creation, eschatology and ethics. It places the question of doctrine's import for ethics parallel to a broader one about discernment of the times, though at the very same time it points to and might reify a reductionistic explanation of the ethical take-up of particular doctrines.[68] Either way, at root O'Donovan's intention is to enjoin his contemporaries to 'grasp the Christian metaphysic in its wholeness and realise its significance for ethics': to urge his hearers into a deeper understanding of the theological framework that can shape moral action.[69] And 'realise' here could coherently be taken both in the sense of cognisance and of actualisation, both comprehension and the carrying through of this comprehension in a theological ethics shaped by the whole. But it is also clear that he thinks such deeper understanding will yield 'the Natural Ethic', and that title, it seems to me, already grants privilege to one contextual discernment over another.

For confirmation that O'Donovan's discernment of the times stacks the deck in favour of creation we need only consult 1984's *Begotten or Made?*, in which a number of parallel judgments emerge as foundational for the more particular ethical argument. The theme of nature's givenness features prominently there too, where acknowledgement of it is contrasted with our technological culture's construal of all activity as making. That cultural misperception 'imperils what it is to be human … deprives human existence itself of certain spontaneities of

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[67] 'The Natural Ethic', 31.

[68] What difference would outliers make to the typology – 'conservative' eschatological ethics or 'progressive' creation ethics? Still, recognition of these possibilities might strengthen O'Donovan's case inasmuch as he troubles neat mapping of 'left' and 'right' onto particular doctrinal concentrations, albeit it would necessitate more typological sophistication. In some circles, both Catholic and evangelical Protestant, those who emphasise creation's moral import *are* thought 'progressive' over-against an escapist eschatologically-driven conservatism reducing matters of faith to thinly-conceived spirituality or soul-saving for heaven. The picture is complex in this sense, which O'Donovan recognises when he criticises dualisms. *Resurrection* has been taken up with relish by some evangelicals as offering the possibility of positive theological accounts of worldly activities like work and politics, and broader definitions of mission – even ecological concerns. I have no desire to disparage this, nor such readers of O'Donovan from pursuing a reading of him to that end. In their case they may be reacting not so much to *kingdom* ethics but to a purportedly eschatologically-based rationale for what is really *anti*-ethical quietism. This investigation simply wagers that asking the question of Christian ethics' relation to doctrine with some latitude from this pressing contestation is of scholarly and long-term ecclesial benefit, and might ultimately allow one to come to slightly different conclusions, without denigrating the real gains afforded to more thoughtful evangelicals by O'Donovan's work. If my reading is at times critical, it is sympathetic in hoping to articulate a place for eschatology in a thoroughly Christian moral metaphysics that can help evangelical ethics avoid its perennial pendulum swings.

[69] 'The Natural Ethic', 31.

being and doing, spontaneities which depend upon the reality of a world which we have not made or imagined, but which simply confronts us to evoke our love, fear, and worship'.[70]

The genealogical sketch in *Begotten or Made?* also ratifies this reading of 'The Natural Ethic'. Its aim is the depiction of the 'Liberal Revolution' then thought to be approaching its zenith in the late-twentieth century. Given the work's precipitating bioethical topic – artificial human fertilisation – it is primarily narrated so as to unearth fundamental cultural shifts disturbing medical self-understanding and practice, though O'Donovan is, as ever, tracking political consequences. His defence of the designation of changes in modernity as a 'revolution' epitomises his sense of the danger inherent in historicist talk of the future: 'revolution' is appropriate because it denotes 'a community [seeking] to act together *en masse* in such a way as to fashion its own future'.[71] He goes on to detect in that final phrase, over and against the more modest 'acting together', the relinquishment of belief in divine providence. To seek to fashion the future is 'to refuse to let one's act go … to strive to extend one's control even to directing the stream of history … to assume a totalistic responsibility for what will happen, to treat the whole course of events as an artifact which one can mould in one's hands'.[72]

Turning directly to theological resources in his conclusion to the chapter just quoted, O'Donovan gives primacy to doctrines of creation and providence:

> Christians should at this juncture confess their faith in the natural order as the good creation of God. To do this is to acknowledge that there are limits to the employment of technique and limits to the appropriateness of our "making". These limits will not be taught us by compassion, but only by the understanding of what God has made, and by a discovery that it is complete, whole and satisfying …
>
> Secondly, Christians should at this juncture confess their faith in the providence of God as the ruling power of history. To do this is to acknowledge that there are limits to man's responsibility with regard to the future, to deny that it can be an artifact which we can mould in its totality. This would be to recover the possibility of "acting well", of contributing to the course of events a deed, which, whatever may become of it, is fashioned rightly in response to the reality which actually confronts the agent as he acts.[73]

These discernments may have been accurate – may still be. But reading *Begotten or Made?* alongside 'The Natural Ethic' shows unmistakeably that the prominence of creation and providence in O'Donovan's thought is tied to these discernments. That is not to say creation and providence are not appropriate remedial resources with which theology should respond to the context. But it does unsettle any impression that 'The Natural Ethic' is the freestanding expression of balance which it seems at points to present itself as.

## CONCLUSION

[70] *Begotten or Made?*, 3.
[71] Ibid., 7.
[72] Ibid., 7, 8.
[73] Ibid., 12-13. For a later topical work deploying the insights of *Begotten or Made?*, see Brent Waters, *Reproductive Technology: Towards a Theology of Procreative Stewardship* (London: DLT, 2000), especially 48-9, 89.

'The Natural Ethic' is accompanied in its published form by four 'Questions for Discussion,' presumably supplied by O'Donovan himself:

1. Are there matters of fact which carry with them a moral demand?
2. Is scientific description bound to over-simplify the truth?
3. Is what we see through Christ in nature different from what we would see otherwise?
4. If we cannot *balance* creation ethics and kingdom ethics, what *can* we do with them?[74]

The fourth is especially relevant. Its particular phrasing may strike us as slightly surprising – it seems as if O'Donovan has been advocating precisely *for* balance in the article. His sense of the need for both perspectives in Christian ethics suggests as much, and while we have found that he is clearer about what happens if a doctrine of creation is lacking, he shows keen awareness of the pitfalls awaiting those who slough off either pole. Sean Doherty, drawing on 'The Natural Ethic' in a subsection of his book entitled 'Should Social Ethics Be Based on Eschatology?', can write that 'O'Donovan's solution is therefore a "balance" between nature and history, between creation and eschatology'.[75] Yet with this concluding question it seems like O'Donovan gestures towards an account that integrates the concerns of creation and kingdom ethics *without* balancing them: without simply adding so much of one and an equal amount of the other.

'The Natural Ethic' already attempts an integrative account in trying to seek balance under the aegis of a natural ethic, entertaining creation *and then* eschatology, rather than any artificially neutral combination of both. (Or creation and *providence*, and then eschatology). O'Donovan's first doctrinal conviction that determines the ethic, then, is one about the ordered relationship obtaining between doctrines of creation and eschatology, in which the second presupposes the first. He does not really intend a fifty/fifty balance – and the unease this ethic would engender in Barthian quarters, for instance, might be exactly about tipping the scales towards creation. Undoubtedly this early presentation does at times employ his contemporaries' static poles of creation ethics and kingdom ethics, affording more significance to the former and integrating the latter on its terms. It is clear that O'Donovan could *not* as easily imagine a balance of the two under the heading 'The Historical Ethic'. And we are certainly still searching for an adequate treatment of the direct import of eschatology.

I have established that this imbalance is caused by a sense of creation's priority over redemption in Christian confession, and by a related sense of the pressing moral matters, which itself favours creation. O'Donovan's sensibility is formed by both judgments; each appears to symbiotically determine the other. Strengthening this first doctrinal conviction, though, is a second – that redemption, as ethics knows of it, is restoration. This reinforces the imbalance, but is also the catalyst for a presentation of Christian ethics which 'does' something with creation and kingdom ethics other than balance them. For if 'restoration' is the definitive eschatological

[74] 'The Natural Ethic', 35.
[75] Sean Doherty, *Theology and Economic Ethics: Martin Luther and Arthur Rich in Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 162.

act – or at least conveys eschatology's *moral* meaning – then O'Donovan's own recognition of kingdom ethics will pretty much entail the simple restatement of creation ethics. as we are about to see, it is arguably this conviction that drives *Resurrection.*

# 2.

## Topography:
## *Resurrection and Moral Order*, a first look

### INTRODUCTION

We turn now to *Resurrection* (first edition 1986). Such is its significance for my topic of eschatology and ethics that I devote two chapters to discussion, examining salient features with regard to that theme. O'Donovan's preface to the second edition (1994) suggests that the book has 'three principal orientations', nicely encapsulating the argument:

> Purposeful action is determined by what is true about the world into which we act; this can be called the "realist" principle. That truth is constituted by what God has done for his world and for humankind in Jesus Christ; this is the "evangelical" principle. The act of God which liberates our action is focused on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which restored and fulfilled the intelligible order of creation; this we can call the "Easter" principle.[1]

My reading, mindful of each orientation but animated by the question at hand, divides its attentions as follows. This chapter focuses initially on questions of moral realism and created order. It then considers the motif of resurrection, first in its relation to the created order and human agency and second in its relation to eschatology, which enters expanded but still ambivalent. Finally, it shows how the concentration upon the resurrection is an attempt to answer 'The Natural Ethic's concluding question: 'If we cannot *balance* creation and kingdom ethics, what *can* we do with them?'. Having explored *Resurrection's* foundations in chapter 2, chapter 3 for the most part takes up the book's other major subjects topic-by-topic, evaluating passages particularly germane to the issue of eschatology's moral import. Beyond this, a subchapter directly examines the work's eschatologically-inflected final chapters, before a section of concluding analysis addresses *Resurrection* in its entirety. As alluded to in the Introduction, my sense is that here O'Donovan continues to grapple with some of the same tensions evident in 'The Natural Ethic' – marshalling considerable resources to attempt a definitive statement that effects those tensions' resolution. Yet, as I also suggested and intend now to demonstrate, they are not by this point much closer to being resolved.

Worth adverting to before we begin is that I have found comparison especially helpful with O'Donovan's 1980 monograph *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine,* 1986's *On the Thirty-Nine Articles*, a 1993 article 'Evangelicalism and the Foundations of Ethics', and a collection of his Oxford sermons, *The Word in Small Boats*.[2] I draw on each of these from time-

[1] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, ix. All references to this edition.
[2] O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1980), hereafter *Self-Love*; *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (London: SCM, 2011), hereafter *Thirty-Nine Articles*; 'Evangelicalism and the Foundations of Ethics', in *Evangelical Anglicans*, 96-107, hereafter 'the Foundations of Ethics' – an essay substantially similar to

to-time, periodically interleaving resonant quotations; other relevant passages which I am unable to review are recorded in footnotes. The moral theology outlined in *Resurrection* is also foreshadowed and reinscribed in discrete treatments of particular ethical issues O'Donovan made around the same time. I do not focus on these, but do hope my exposition here could serve to contextualise them.[3]

## MORAL REALISM AND CREATED ORDER

The subject of moral realism and created order in O'Donovan's thought merits substantial reflection in itself. As indicated in chapter 1, a cluster of questions unavoidably ramify from a commitment like his, and – more to the point – are also unavoidable for anyone wishing to consider eschatology's role in ethics. It is necessary to say something about all that here, though much of further interest will necessarily be left for another day.

However we interpret the account's details (various interpretations will be aired in what follows) it seems to me that *Resurrection* occupied a singular position in respect to these subjects; a position apparently acquainted with Thomist affirmations and Barthian rejections of natural law, but easily classifiable as neither.[4] Certainly, plenty of commentators have noted an affinity with natural law modes of moral reasoning. The Catholic moral theologian Jean Porter, painstaking historian and prominent contemporary advocate of its Thomistic expression, notes in her book *Natural and Divine Law* that 'a growing number of Christian ethicists' are taking up 'the problem of the moral significance of human nature', counting O'Donovan as one of these congenial figures since he 'recently argued that an evangelical theology is not at variance with, but to the contrary implies an attentiveness to the natural order as the basis for Christian ethics'.[5] (More recently still, she writes that her own 'overall theological approach to creation and redemption is indebted to O'Donovan … in particular [*Resurrection*]').[6] Fergus Kerr, another Catholic theologian, traces 'recent theological accounts' of something like natural law, finding *Resurrection* 'one of the most interesting'.[7] In a similar vein, David McIlroy writes that

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*Resurrection* that does not actually engage any evangelical Anglicans; *The Word in Small Boats: Sermons from Oxford*, ed. Andrew Draycott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), hereafter *Small Boats.*

[3] A full list is found in *The Authority of the Gospel*.

[4] See *Resurrection*, 85-7.

[5] Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 27, a book O'Donovan calls 'admirable' (Review, *Theology* 104:817 (2001): 60-1). Earlier, she wrote: 'surprisingly, the neo-orthodox theologian Oliver O'Donovan admits that nature may offer a limited but real source of moral guidance'. *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 27. She refers to *Resurrection* in both cases. Porter's description of O'Donovan as neo-orthodox is forgivable, if amusing, especially given his comments on neo-orthodoxy cited below. This mis-description betokens misunderstandings which sometimes still characterise Catholic interaction with Protestant ethics, and *vice versa*, as is her reference to 'liberal evangelism' (presumably meaning evangelicalism in the sense of Protestantism) in some comments on neo-orthodoxy's rejection of virtue ('Virtue Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, 2nd edn, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 87-102, 97.

[6] Jean Porter, *Ministers of the Law: A Natural Law Theory of Legal Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 57 n.110.

[7] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 102.

another scholar 'is right to describe [O'Donovan] as presenting "the most theological view possible of the doctrine of natural law"'.[8] Yet it is also true, as McIlroy detects, that O'Donovan 'is so chary of the overloaded meaning of "natural law" that he tries to avoid using the term'.[9] And indeed still others write that to 'innocent readers', *Resurrection* appears 'a curiously compound work, at times highly scriptural, at other times verging on sounding like a work in natural law'.[10] That impression, too, is surely right – though both the presentation of natural law which Porter finds in scholastic theology and, as we shall see, the presentation which O'Donovan offers, ground a Christian defence of a natural ethic in an appeal to scriptural bases. The matter is not straightforward, then. How can we locate O'Donovan's view?

The place to begin, plainly enough, is 'Part One' of *Resurrection*, entitled 'The objective reality', which can be seen to revisit and expand upon themes 'The Natural Ethic' introduced. Gerald McKenny summarises the basic argument of this section well:

> O'Donovan articulates the norm of conduct in terms of a metaphysical order of natural kinds and teleological relations while arguing that the privileged disclosure of this order is found in biblical revelation. The moral order is cosmic: O'Donovan does not understand it in terms of human nature or reason; rather, he understands human nature and reason in relation to man's ordering in the cosmos. Still, the norm of human conduct lies in this natural order even if its knowability as well as its normativity are ultimately grounded in Christ.[11]

As this distillation of *Resurrection* suggests more precisely than Porter's comments, O'Donovan's moral realism concerning the natural is primarily cosmic before anthropological, though without doubt takes in the normativity of human nature too.[12] On my reading his basic disposition owes more to a Reformed sense of wonder at the ordered beauty of God's creation than to a more circumscriptive concern for the morally-significant features of human nature (particularly human reason).[13] In and behind this Reformed awe, O'Donovan's sensibility cherishes an assertion in the Psalms' theology of creation, often quoted: 'The world is established, it shall never be moved' (Ps. 96:10, also 93:1).[14] I return to the theme of creation

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[8] Ibid.
[9] David McIlroy, 'What's At Stake in Natural Law', *New Blackfriars*, 89:1023 (2008): 508-21, 514.
[10] Lorish and Mathewes, 'Theology as Counsel', 723.
[11] Gerald McKenny, *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth's Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 138 n. 37.
[12] On moral realism in conversation with O'Donovan see Rufus Black, *Christian Moral Realism: Natural Law, Narrative Virtue, and the Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[13] All of this might be instructive to think in relation to James Gustafson – in profession also Reformed, extremely worried about anthropocentrism, but who seems to resolve these anxieties differently, indeed in a troublingly ever less-Christological way. Reviewing Gustafson's *Theology and Ethics*, O'Donovan wrote: 'The search for a natural ground of ethics has thus led him into paths far removed from the traditional Christian humanism of natural law, to an austere religion where the fabled cold wind of Reformed fatalism blows with a keener edge'. *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 35:1 (1984): 275-9, 277. Besides Christology, Gustafson's so-called 'theocentric' ethics was 'prepared to jettison traditional eschatology', as P. Travis Kroeker notes in 'Eschatology and Ethics: Luther and the Radical Reformers', now republished in Kroeker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 98 n. 5.
[14] *Resurrection*, 61. Cf.'The Foundations of Ethics', 99, *Desire*, 40. Also important for O'Donovan in this regard is the Creator's answer in Job 38-41. See e.g. O'Donovan, 'Where were you … ?', in *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*, ed. R.J. Berry (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 90-3.

below, and the cosmic scope of O'Donovan's moral realism will also prove determinative of the shape of his eschatology, as we shall see.

What else might we add to McKenny's summary in abridging *Resurrection*'s core claims about morality's relation to created order? Essential to understand and in keeping with 'The Natural Ethic' is O'Donovan's concern to establish that human actions are not sheerly creative undertakings. A robustly realist ethics, perceiving that action does not occur in a vacuum, will understand that right action is properly undertaken in conformity – or response – to created order, and hold that true moral judgments 'are founded on reality as God has given it'.[15] As he writes later, moral reflection involves discerning 'the good of human action which conforms to the truth of the created order', 'the structure of the world in its objectivity, which includes … its authority to evoke our action'.[16] As before, O'Donovan makes much of the kinship of this realism with classical ethics: 'In this assertion [ethics' founding on reality] we can find a point of agreement with … Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics [who] treated ethics as a close correlate of metaphysics. The way the universe *is*, determines how man *ought* to behave himself in it'.[17]

If ethics must take account of the givenness of things, and comportment with this created order (often synonymous with '*moral* order') constitutes fitting moral action, then moral agents cannot be thought of as principally *homo faber* – as we saw in *Begotten or Made?* and will see again below, O'Donovan sees that self-understanding as causative of much moral disarray.[18] Of course, we might like to think of ourselves like that, construing moral reasoning in purely subjective, constructive terms. That is what, in his view, those familiar philosophical views voluntarism, nominalism, and historicism tend to do, each rejected here as in 'The Natural Ethic, positing freedom for moral action over-against nature's morally-irrelevant contours. But, O'Donovan stresses in a now-common rejection of Cartesian solipsism, there is something 'there', other than my consciousness. If understood correctly, ethics has an authoritatively objective referent.[19] Freedom is then not from conformity to what is given, but for it.

The best way to see how O'Donovan upholds these claims, and in so doing to begin assessing whether they are vulnerable to theological critique, is to pause and trouble

[15] *Resurrection*, 17.
[16] Ibid., 125, 191.
[17] Ibid.,17.
[18] Described elsewhere as a view which stresses 'the innovative powers of human resolve and will to mould and shape reality'. O'Donovan, 'A Summons to Reality', in *Understanding Veritatis Splendor*, ed. J. Wilkins (London: SPCK, 1994), 41-5, 43.
[19] A most prized moral-theological possession, to be sure, but one searched for and applied in different ways. In some cases the quest for – or assertion of – an objective referent seems especially pressing for those who see contemporary culture in the throes of militant secularism's rampant relativism. I hope there is more to the (remarkable) return to natural-law reasoning in American Reformed precincts than the abutment of predetermined culture wars agendas. The relevant literature includes Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Bowlin suspects some fellow Protestant natural lawyers of just that abutment. See 'Contemporary Protestant Thomism', in *Aquinas as Authority*, ed. Paul van Geest, Harm Goris, and Carlo Leget (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 235-52, 251. At any rate O'Donovan, despite any formal similarity and some similar instincts, is not to be too quickly associated with their endeavour.

*Resurrection* with a question that should be pressed of any moral theology built upon claims about nature's normativity: what is *theologically intelligible* about this kind of moral realism? To evaluate *Resurrection*'s basic position we need to ascertain what doctrinal convictions enable Christian ethics to be grounded in this way. Here a moment's reflection on the book's subtitle, *'An Outline for Evangelical Ethics'*, alerts us that its author anticipates this kind of question. *Yes*, O'Donovan would have us think, moral realism grounded in created order can be theologically intelligible; more than that, can be an attractively 'evangelical' ethics. In fact, he seems to say, this approach to morality is not just intelligible in light of the evangel but irrefragably implied by particular dogmatic commitments attendant upon it. That he intends to make a defence of his ethics in doctrinal terms might seem barely worthy of comment but cannot be taken for granted when seen in its setting. Considered against the backcloth of the moral theologies he must have seen presented as viable options in his early reading in the field, O'Donovan's ethics is of unashamedly confessional, theological character.[20]

[20] I do not mean to be uncharitable, presenting the earlier state of Christian ethics as parlous. Figures faded from memory quickly become totemic of a bygone age's foolishness (Joseph Fletcher a prime example). But evidence from both Catholic and Protestant quarters is sufficient to assume that things weren't as healthy as they might have been. Potted histories of twentieth-century moral theology are supplied, by-the-by, in lots of works concerning specific aspects of Christian ethics, as well as in many introductory books, and in the likes of *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) – especially Part IV entitled 'The Structure of Theological Ethics: Books that Give Shape to the Field'. They tend to be written by Americans, telling stories about American Christian ethics. Among the most delightfully polemical is Stanley Hauerwas's – found, among other places, in 1983's 'Keeping Theological Ethics Theological', reprinted in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (London/Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 37-50. This essay can profitably be read alongside Hauerwas's 1997 sketch of the discipline's longer history, 'How "Christian Ethics" Came to be', reprinted in the same volume (37-50), originating as 'Doctrine and Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-40. D. Stephen Long, 'Protestant Social Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, ed. Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 88-108, and Brian Brock 'Christian Ethics', in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly Kapic and Bruce McCormack (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 293-319, both put Hauerwas himself into the story. Long-form, though no less partisan, narrations include Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) and James Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010). A different kind of report than Keenan's on the state of Catholic moral theology in the twentieth century is Servais Pinckaers' – see *Morality: The Catholic View* trans. Michael Sherwin (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), presenting accessibly the findings of his *magnum opus, The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) – and in a scholarly work made possible by Pinckaers: *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2002), especially Part Three, 'The Twentieth Century Legacy'. Daniel Westberg, *Renewing Moral Theology: Christian Ethics as Action, Character, and Grace* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015) is attentive to the development of Anglican moral theology in the twentieth century. For a dose of acerbic commentary on twentieth century malaise, if lately lacking actual engagement with much moral theology, see Michael Banner's work: *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially the first chapter 'Turning The World Upside Down and Some Other Tasks for Dogmatic Christian Ethics'; *Christian Ethics: A Brief History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), especially final chapters; and *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) premised on a pretty lugubrious reading of 'the state we're in' (albeit for slightly different reasons than earlier).

Many early readers were struck by the work's doctrinal determination. Among them, some, like James Gustafson, were unsettled by the theological self-confidence. We will return to his comments below.[21] Gene Outka wrote – I presume positively, though perhaps ambiguously – that *Resurrection* 'is an unapologetic restatement of orthodox Christianity and the shape ethics must take if such orthodoxy is to govern'.[22] In it, suggested Timothy Sedgwick, 'the logic of Christian moral concepts is given in the theological use and understanding of those moral concepts so that the meaning of the concepts is grounded in reality itself. The shape of Christian ethics is, therefore, determined first of all by systematic theology'.[23] Alister McGrath in particular enjoyed this self-assurance, commending *Resurrection* in simple terms for its conviction that ethics 'rests upon doctrine', finding especially agreeable the idea that 'Christian ethics rests upon a proper understanding of the objective order imposed upon creation by God'.[24]

O'Donovan himself suggests that many theologians had become content to leave the field of ethics to philosophers' 'great formal theories', in response to which vacation *Resurrection* constructs a theological base followed by more strictly ethical treatise, itself organised theologically.[25] Whatever we make of *Resurrection*'s details, in terms of seeing its accomplishment it is worth recalling that mainline Protestant moralists operated with diluted theological presuppositions and that there was no scholarly evangelical ethics to speak of. Neither was Catholic moral theology in a state of consensus about how it might be informed by doctrine, and its distinctiveness was an especially live question in the era of the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath.[26] O'Donovan, clearly familiar with the work of Protestant ethicists, and Anglican predecessors like Kenneth Kirk and Lindsay Dewar, tracked Catholic debates carefully too. (A little later I note his interaction with the new natural law of John Finnis and Germain Grisez, which garnered some attention from Protestant theologians, but he also engages Karl Rahner and Josef Fuchs).[27] If one of the contributions of his teacher Paul Ramsey to moral theology was 'to follow Karl Barth and make room for the truth of Christian doctrine as that which would once again render intelligible the moral good', nobody has 'developed

[21] James Gustafson, review, *The Journal of Religion* 68:1 (1988): 131-3.
[22] From the first edition's dust jacket.
[23] Timothy F. Sedgwick, review, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57:2 (1989): 419-21, 419. Cf. Maurice Reidy's review: *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42:1 (1989): 131-4, 131
[24] Alister McGrath, 'Doctrine and Ethics', in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34:2 (1991): 145-56, 145. *Resurrection*'s notion of created order is taken up elsewhere in McGrath's work, e.g. *Scientific Theology: Nature, vol. 1* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 217-18; *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* 2nd edn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 89-90.
[25] *Resurrection*, 181.
[26] See e.g. *Readings in Moral Theology,* vol. 2: *The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).
[27] Ibid., xii, 50. Cf. O'Donovan's pointed reviews of volumes by Fuchs, a thinker deeply critical of what he called 'the false Christianising of morality' undertaken in the Council's name (*The Journal of Theological Studies* 40:1 (1989): 331-7); and John Mahoney (*The Journal of Theological Studies* 39:1 (1988): 348-50), showing familiarity with Bernard Häring's work, too.

Ramsey's insights better than … O'Donovan'.[28] If another was Ramsey's pioneering ecumenism – at the time of his passing he was 'arguably the only example … yet … of an ecumenically eclectic Western Christian moralist' – then O'Donovan also took up that mantle.[29]

In *Resurrection*, to come to the point, we should expect to find a *theological* account of nature's normativity – indeed, one enriched by a longer tradition than twentieth century Protestant social ethics – which can itself be evaluated on theological terms. As 'The Natural Ethic's denial of pure naturalism already suggested, the ethic advocated for cumulatively in *Resurrection* will not be intended as merely positivistic or unhermeneutically naturalistic. Christian ethics, O'Donovan announces, 'must arise from the gospel of Jesus Christ'.[30] This assertion illumines the particular semantics of the book's subheading, and his wider project's claim to be 'evangelical'. That term is nearly always meant in the etymological sense:

> the word "evangelical" is used as the adjective corresponding to the noun "Gospel"; so that "evangelical ethics" … is all Christian ethics as it understands its relation to the Gospel correctly, not the concern of a single movement or party within the church. I have no objections, of course, to the use of the term to designate such a movement by those whose business it is to chart the ecclesiastical currents through which we sail; nor do I resist being counted in, if those whose business it is to judge that I belong to it. But I must insist, it is not *my* business![31]

The starting point of ethics, then, must be nothing other than the proclamation of the prophets and apostles: the gospel is not tangential to the sphere of human striving and struggling, but has something vital to say to it. When the Church raises its voice to proclaim this *euangelion* in the realm of morality it does not speak in another register, more severe or prohibitive. Its tenor remains that of glad tidings.[32]

In view of O'Donovan's own claims we can press our question again, this time more precisely, asking what is good news about *Resurrection*'s elucidation of objective reality and thus moral realism. The adequacy of his attempt to answer this question by speaking of the impact of the *resurrection* is the burden of the rest of this chapter. But before progressing to that consideration I want to highlight the significance of the doctrine of *creation* in the book. This is in fact O'Donovan's supreme doctrinal commitment, presupposed in the notion of resurrection.

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[28] D. Stephen Long, 'Moral Theology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Iain Torrance, and Kathryn Tanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 456-75, 465.
[29] 'Paul Ramsey', 84. Besides engagements with Catholic theologians and Papal documents in print, note O'Donovan's service from 1983-1994 as member of, then consultant to, the second round of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (known as ARCIC II).
[30] *Resurrection*, 11.
[31] O'Donovan, 'How Can Theology Be Moral?', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17:2 (1989): 81-94, 94 n.2. The article was part of the journal's profile of 'evangelical ethics'. Even in the article 'Evangelicalism and the Foundations of Ethics' the word is more often than not meant like this. Alongside other surveys cited in this study which place O'Donovan in the context of evangelical thought, see Dennis Hollinger and David P. Gushee, 'Evangelical Ethics: Profile of a Movement Come of Age', *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000): 181-203. Jonathan Chaplin's editorial in the April 2017 issue of *Crucible: The Journal of Christian Social Ethics* – an issue entitled 'Evangelical Social Ethics' – O'Donovan as 'the most significant and original British evangelical social ethicist (and moral theologian) of our generation' (5).
[32] *Resurrection*, 12. O'Donovan commends *Veritatis Splendor* for shaping 'the moral discourse of the Church as an evangelical proclamation'. 'A Summons to Reality', 42.

However we evaluate his articulation of the other moments of the divine economy it is clear that the case for the objective basis of ethics is underwritten by appeal to creation. As we have begun to see, *Resurrection*'s basic claim based on the doctrine of creation is this: if the moral order's objective reality is revealed as created order, then the form of creaturely existence tells us of its Creator's purposes.[33] That it is both *created* and *ordered* is part of the good news. Entailed in this and of first importance in O'Donovan's thought is the significance of the divine pronouncement identifying and commending creation's *goodness.* And thus, we might say, its reliability as foundation for the moral life.

From these affirmations a more detailed picture unfurls. Consequent upon the conviction that creation is not formless or void are the account's most important details: those about creation's definite, definitive characteristics, which McKenny's summary already began to lay out. At the outset, O'Donovan analyses two classical ways of characterising natural order.[34] Platonic conceptualities, first, are found hierarchical in a way inimical to Christian understanding. Not wrong to understand the world as teleologically ordered, their ontological schemas overemphasised 'higher' and 'lower' distinctions among forms, establishing teleological relations between them without regard for the true creatureliness of the very least. The Aristotelian version O'Donovan reviews more favourably, though he deems taxonomies concerning genus and species over-determined. But a broadly Aristotelian framework does make it through the analysis with some Platonic supplementation. As McKenny says, *Resurrection*'s moral universe does contain 'a metaphysical order of natural kinds and teleological relations'. In O'Donovan's idea of right moral reasoning, consideration of kinds, which correspond to generic relations, and ends, which correspond to telic relations, is imperative. In receiving the two classical elements into a theological approach he self-consciously follows the lead of Scholastic theologians whose achievement he sees as integration of Aristotelian insights with Platonic teleology beyond the natural.

In preserving a place for supernatural teleology alongside immanent teleologies of created order we might expect *Resurrection*'s moral vision to possess an overtly eschatological dimension. That dimension, we might anticipate, imagines human creatures as always embedded within the world yet most basically longing for more, and creation as a whole directed by its (supernatural) final cause towards its ultimate end. To put it that way is to employ an idiom I think O'Donovan would be content with: in *Self-Love* he writes that for Augustine the 'teleological thrust reaches its term in God alone'.[35] *Resurrection* certainly shares this understanding. Nevertheless – and here is what I want to notice – any inclination to develop this dimension is repeatedly controlled by reminders that humankind's progress 'towards a life

[33] O'Donovan uses the language of creatureliness less than might be expected, at least for someone influenced by Barth. My treatment of *Resurrection*, however, draws heavily on this helpful vocabulary.
[34] This paragraph paraphrases *Resurrection*, 73-5.
[35] O'Donovan, *Self-Love*, 41.

which goes beyond this world' does not negate this world.[36] Our 'pilgrimage' to that 'supernatural end' is conducted here, in 'the reality of creation'.[37]

It makes sense, then, that *Resurrection*'s definition of teleological ethics, while appraised of its reliance on 'the ontological conception of God as the *summum bonum*', characterises it predominantly as an approach 'in which it was the task of moral reasoning to recognise and respond to the ordered structures of being and good'.[38] As I will seek to show, O'Donovan's appropriation of teleology is principally evident in its contention that moral reasoning's task is recognition and response to 'the ordered structures of being and good'. In the final instance, he does share teleology's interest in the eschatological *telos* of consummation to which creatures are drawn, but Christian ethics is left (oddly) somewhat as it would be *without* eschatological dimensions. That this can be the case, I argue, is explained by a particular *type* of eschatological commitment O'Donovan holds besides this other, more transcendent one: a commitment instantiated in his all-determining theory of the resurrection to which we turn in a moment.

Before doing so, I want to make a further suggestion about creation's prominence in O'Donovan's project. When, in the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, he laments two proclivities inherent in Protestantism – to eclipse pneumatology, and to eclipse the doctrine of creation in the shade of a doctrine of fall and sin – he names two prongs of *Resurrection*'s reparative agenda. The attempt to remedy the pneumatological eclipse (an emerging concern) I consider in chapter 3, and build upon in later chapters. The eclipse of creation was already at issue in 'The Natural Ethic'. As there, *Resurrection*'s remedial effort is stimulated by doctrinal convictions O'Donovan holds, and by his impressions of contemporary Protestant piety and practice; convictions and impressions that are mutually conditioning. I return to the question of culture-critical discernment of the times later, too, so focus here on further demonstration of the reasons why, and way in which, O'Donovan has sought to recover consideration of natural order in Protestant ethics and, concurrently, to discredit overstated Protestant theological positions he understands to have hindered it.[39]

A closer look at *Thirty-Nine Articles* is beneficial – it devotes a chapter to deconstruction and repair of what O'Donovan labels the Articles' 'Concealment of Creation'. Symptomatically Protestant, this 'widespread malaise was to afflict the understanding of creation in later Protestant theology', and the concealment:

> facilitated the development of science negatively, by bringing into disrepute some earlier theologies of the world which conceded too little to the distance between the creature and the creator, and by putting nothing in their place. Instead of a strong recovery of the patristic *creatio ex nihilo*, what the Reformation as whole offers us is a gap between God and the world, true, but one which permits of no ordered perceptions of the world, because it is

[36] *Resurrection*, 15.
[37] Ibid., 123.
[38] Ibid., 138.
[39] Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Natural Life', in *Ethics*, DBWE 6, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 171-218. E.g. 171, 173: 'The concept of the natural has fallen into disrepute in Protestant ethics … the concept of the natural must be recovered from the gospel itself'. (N.B. *Resurrection* does not engage Bonhoeffer at all).

> characterised solely by sin and fallenness. The opposition of God and the world becomes swallowed up into the opposition of good and evil.[40]

He excuses Calvin, but on this score Cranmer's theology, O'Donovan says,

> represents a theological culture which was careless about defining itself against tendencies towards Manichaeism, which did not view the fact of moral struggle hopefully, as a sign that God's Spirit was at work combating the indiscipline of the fleshly instincts … it had lost its hold on a strong doctrine of creation, the belief in the primordial goodness of all nature and the reality of corporate human solidarity. [41]

As a constructive work, then, *Resurrection* is not conceived in azure isolation but within a tradition, reparatively.

## THE CHOICE OF RESURRECTION

An observation by McKenny again serves to introduce our present theme: 'Moral theologies can be identified in part by the aspect of Christology they take to be fundamental for ethics, and debates in moral theology often turn on claims made for the centrality to ethics of the incarnation, the cross, or the resurrection'.[42] Identifying O'Donovan's moral theology according to these kinds of distinctions is straightforward and among other early readers James Gustafson did just that:

> for all of its "orthodox Christianity", [*Resurrection*], like any systematic account, bears the distinctive stamp of its author. One could have quite orthodox Christian ethics in which the crucifixion rather than the resurrection is featured (crucifixion is absent from this book), in which a divine command theory of ethics is defended, in which the historical ordering is more positively stated than is the created order, and so forth.[43]

Now, the question of historical ordering in relation to created order has been touched upon in chapter 1 and will return shortly. Moreover, there certainly *is* an element of divine command

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[40] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 66. The understanding of science O'Donovan sets out in both major monographs and topical studies could fruitfully be brought into conversation with metaphysically-ambitious engagements with natural science issuing from Radical Orthodoxy (Conor Cunningham, Simon Oliver, Michael Hanby. No less interesting to compare is Gerald McKenny's *To Relieve the Human Condition: Bioethics, Technology, and the Body* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), especially the book's account of modernity's technological 'Baconian project' and its distorting pressure on understandings of medicine.

[41] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 72. O'Donovan's basic kinship with the excused Calvin in terms of creation's significance for morality can be confirmed. Says Guenther Haas:

> The foundational theological doctrine for understanding Calvin's view of Christian ethics is creation. In the act of creation God brings into existence, not only all creatures, but also "the very order of things" directing them. This ordering is the means by which God governs all of his creation. Creatures in their diversity obey God by submitting to the "order of nature" that he has determined for them. This is also the case for human beings. Though … distinct from all other creatures in that they are made in the image of God, their lives are still governed by the order of nature. It prescribes their relations to God, to one another, and to the rest of creation. The entry of sin and evil into the world has not changed that.

'Calvin's Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 93-105, 93.

[42] McKenny, *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth's Moral Theology*, 10.

[43] Gustafson, review of *Resurrection*, 133.

theory in *Resurrection* – an abstract term, as O'Donovan would maintain.[44] And crucifixion is certainly *not* absent from the book, as we shall see.

Evidently not all readers paid much attention to a small-print section clarifying the claim about the resurrection's centrality. That centrality is a 'theological proposition since it cannot be substantiated directly by quoting from the text of the New Testament':

> Looking elsewhere we can find other "ifs" that reinforce our commitment to the moral life … In the ethical instruction of the New Testament there is great freedom in reaching for aspects of the Christian kerygma that will afford us a motive for Christian obedience. The advent of Christ, his death, resurrection and ascension, his sending of the Spirit and his expected return to judge, all these can and do incite believers to ethical seriousness. Even the simple example of Christ can incite us to imitate him …We are not attempting to deny the richness of the New Testament's ethical appeal; but it is the task of theology to uncover the hidden relation of things that gives the appeal force.[45]

O'Donovan is not unaware that things could have been otherwise, pre-empting readings like Gustafson's with these and other comments. He knows that each aspect attracts systematic theological reflection and is not ethically irrelevant. But for O'Donovan the other moments orbit around the resurrection, the kerygmatic lodestar.[46] He takes as his express focus the disciples' testimony that it changes everything.

Or, rather – with more accuracy as regards O'Donovan's own sense of the resurrection's supremacy – what this seems to mean is not so much that it changes everything but that everything *hinges* on it. In the book's terminology of choice, the resurrection is a '*vindication*' of creation.[47] Because we can confidently identify the God who raises Jesus from the dead as the Creator of the world, the event resoundingly reaffirms the given order of creation against dissolution: against corrosive effects of creaturely rebellion. This is O'Donovan's primary discernment of 'the hidden relation of things that gives the appeal force' that 'it is the task of theology to uncover'. But even if it is theology's task we should recognise that O'Donovan's case for the resurrection's centrality *is moral-theological* as much as, or before, it is a dogmatic one; it is of the utmost significance for *ethics* that this order is proved to be beyond the jeopardy it seemed to have been in. Moral realism can lay claim to being good news because 'the gospel … is God's last word about man's ambiguous relation to the created good', and as we have seen that word bespeaks, for O'Donovan, the restoration and fulfilment 'of the intelligible order of creation'.[48] Given the luminous restatement of the divine intention that the created order stably endures it ought no longer be a matter of doubt that we must take heed of its structure in our

[44] I say a little more below about divine command theory and natural law in O'Donovan, locating him within some recent work.
[45] *Resurrection*, 13. We might add the transfiguration, following Orthodox thought, or the election of Jesus Christ from all eternity, following Barth; following liberation theology and looking back to the Old Testament, we might add the Exodus.
[46] Cf. *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 27. That book may be 'a work of high catechetics rather than scholarship' as O'Donovan suggests humbly in his preface to its second edition – no doubt wary of trespassing upon the territory of historical and dogmatic theologians – but its 'confident and voluble voice' allows readers useful insights into his doctrinal instincts at a similar time to *Resurrection* (vii).
[47] Drawing in this paragraph largely on *Resurrection*, 13-15, but the theme recurs.
[48] Ibid., 178, ix.

moral deliberation. If morality is 'participation in the created order', 'Christian morality' is 'glad response to the deed of God which has restored, proved and fulfilled that order, making man free to conform to it'.[49]

Questions carried from 'The Natural Ethic' concerning epistemology and sin rightly resurface in relation to this account of created order and its vindication, but we must postpone investigation of them to chapter 3. The point to grasp for now is that O'Donovan suggests moral theology should above all pay attention to God's faithfulness to creation, the chief moment of which faithfulness is Christ's resurrection. One question we can address now is about the repeated use of the term *vindication*, consistent cipher for the redemptive act of God. To be sure, it is a strong term capturing something of Scripture's dramatic presentation of salvation. Other moral theologians have clearly picked it up in the wake of O'Donovan's use (I observe that below in relation to Joshua Hordern).[50] It seems to suggest, initially, God's refusal of our refusal of the goodness of creation. Does it suggest *more* than that? Those who have taken it up have seen its promise as a comprehensive and imaginatively captivating motif. But the query is valid whether vindication as controlling concept obscures as well as clarifies because, at risk of reciting a truism, shorthand terms for salvation inevitably foreground certain aspects of God's work of grace over others. Furthermore, the term itself would normally be used in connection with, say, vindication of the Psalmist, of Israel, of the oppressed, of the servants of the LORD, and of the LORD himself.[51] In other words: never directly in relation to the order of creation. That is not of course to say that such an association is illicit, but it *is* another instance of O'Donovan's tendency of showing salvation's import for the natural order before its import for God's people.

We therefore need to consider, going through, how created order's vindication might relate to other concepts; not least restoration, renewal, and transformation. It is always difficult to discern the pressures that influence the choice of vocabulary but 'the problem has a far greater fascination than if it were merely a matter of sighing over terminological loose ends in the work of a single theologian'.[52] It is of great moment for how we think of creation and eschatology in theological ethics. And noticing how essential to his project this piece of O'Donovan's vocabulary, I submit, shows as clearly as any sentence can that O'Donovan's case for the centrality of the resurrection is at its heart moral-theological: what is vindicated in the created order is ethics' objective basis. That his case for the resurrection's centrality is ethical, however, is equally evident from his argument that mutually implicated in the vindication of objective

[49] Ibid., 76.
[50] See e.g. Gilbert Meilaender, *The Freedom of a Christian: Grace, Vocation, and the Meaning of Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 39; Andrew J. B. Cameron, 'How to say YES to the World: Towards a New Way Forward in Evangelical Social Ethics', *Reformed Theological Review* 66:1 (2007), 23-36; and John Wyatt, 'The New Biotechnology', a chapter added in the fourth edition of John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 419-42. Stott himself draws on O'Donovan in earlier chapters of that widely influential book.
[51] See e.g. Deut. 32:36; Ps. 24:5; 37:6; 98:2; 103:6; Is. 61:1-2; Jer. 51:10; Mic. 7:9.
[52] O'Donovan himself on Augustine's use of self-love language. *Self-Love*, 1.

order is the vindication and reaffirmation of *human agency*. This chapter has focused first on the objectivity of created order in which and with which we find ourselves, and I take up the theme of agency in chapter 3. But we should already note the close link in *Resurrection* between objectivity and moral agency.[53] O'Donovan sees the goodness of given order not just in that creaturely *things* are ordered generically and teleologically, but also in that our *actions* have kinds and ends, and that our *reasoning-to-action* can be orderly.[54]

Reflection upon human agency, indeed, is the task that O'Donovan proposes as paradigmatic for ethics in particular.[55] By making focal the resurrection's reaffirmations, he understands himself to be offering resolution to the moral theologian's characteristic search for a properly theological footing for this endeavour. For him, the resurrection can anchor an account of human freedom because it represents the moment freedom was secured once-and-for-all.[56] This account is not unpersuasive. It is both conceptually elegant and dogmatically substantial. Its merits notwithstanding, I will raise doubts later on about the account's effects which arise from the suspicion that O'Donovan presumes, *a priori*, the task of vouchsafing free human action to such extent as to subtly distort the proportions of his theology. As a result, some *moral* implications of doctrines of eschatology and sin tend to be denuded. But at this point we should continue to address *Resurrection*'s claims about human action on its own terms.

Paramount in O'Donovan's understanding of the resurrection's significance for ethics are the figures of first and second Adam. The resurrection's meaning 'is that it is God's final and decisive word on the life of his creature, Adam': God's 'No' to Adam's decision that left him mired in sin and destined for death, encompassed by God's 'Yes' to created order. Humankind's rebellion against God and God's world has not been allowed to win out but has been overcome by Jesus Christ, the second Adam. This recapitulatory divine action unerringly restates the

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[53] By 'with which' I denote, e.g., our somatic form, as well as the nature of other creatures. O'Donovan's conviction about the givenness of bodies is applied in his *Transsexualism and the Christian Marriage* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982 [reissued 2007]). For two different responses to that book, see Brian Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 331-5, and Robert Song, 'Bodily Integrity Disorder and the Ethics of Mutilation', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26:4 (2013): 487-503 (reprinted in *The Authority of the Gospel*).

[54] Andrew Errington writes: 'The notion of generic kinds of action is the most important goal of O'Donovan's account of created order', 'Every Good Path: Wisdom and Practical Reason in Christian Ethics and the Book of Proverbs', PhD. diss., University of Aberdeen (2017), 162. That may overstate it, but the fundamental insight is astute. If other goals are as important they are mutually implicating. O'Donovan's sense of the resurrection's restatement of morally-normative reality with which moral deliberation must contend is tightly bound to his sense of wisdom's relation to generic moral rules and principles.

[55] In a list of desirable features for renewed moral theology, Westberg writes under the heading 'Catholic and Evangelical' that 'O'Donovan, as an Anglican, provides a clear model (and challenge) in keeping before us the call to be evangelical and christocentric, but at the same time to have the patience to work through the details of practical reasoning and the analysis of action associated with Roman Catholic ethics'. *Renewing Moral Theology*, 27-8. For O'Donovan's most direct account see 'Christian Moral Reflection', in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson and David H. Field (Downer's Grove: IVP, 1995), 122-8. In particular, its perspicuous formulation of 'moral reflection' and 'moral deliberation' has gained currency.

[56] *Resurrection*, xviii.

Edenic orientation of the Adamic – toward life. There is not space to explore O'Donovan's implicit christology in depth here, but we will get the gist of it (and its power) if we understand that at its heart is Reformed understanding of *representation*.[57] The essential point of that understanding to fathom for his *moral* theology is this. It was possible, before Christ's resurrection, to wonder whether 'creation was a lost cause', whether 'God's handiwork was flawed beyond hope of repair' by the creature's consistent action 'to uncreate itself, and … the rest of creation'; but Christ *has* been raised, and 'in the second Adam the first is rescued', he 'has not been allowed to uncreate what God created'.[58]

That image of representation is therefore important for O'Donovan's theological anthropology and its relation to his cosmology (for want of a better term), as we will see in a moment. First, though, we should consider his anthropology's pivotal thesis. Both Eastern and Western Christian traditions, *Resurrection* argues, emphasise the existence of a specific human nature, and we should too.[59] As older theologies espoused, this human nature is established in the act of creation, replete with native excellences and virtues. O'Donovan deliberately enlists this traditional principle in preference to what he castigates as 'ectoplasmic' formulas of more nebulous modern attempts to detail humanity's definitive character. [60] Taking 'radical freedom' as one such insubstantial specimen, he is caustically sceptical about any such bid to discern and describe the nature of humanity without reference to circumambient natural realities, insisting that humankind finds its dwelling within a broader universe of fellow-creatures, and that the two concepts in fact are 'actually inseparable'.[61]

For O'Donovan the *redemption* of the two is likewise inseparable. Because Christ represents Adam and his kin, and in and with them the whole of creation, the restoration of humankind entailed in the resurrection is also inexorable vindication of the order of things in which humankind took its place and in which it continues to dwell. The moral implication is once more the reaffirmation of the created order as the place of our moral action; redeemed creatures no less than pre-lapsarian ones live and move and have their being in that ordered world.

Up to this point we have witnessed *Resurrection*'s pressing concern with created order in its proposal about the resurrection, a concern imperative to comprehend if one is to understand

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[57] In confirmation, see *Thirty-Nine Articles* (78-9), and 'Oliver O'Donovan-Moral Reality,' in Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009). For ramifications in the theopolitical work, see e.g. *Ways*, ch. 9 (149-63, especially 157-8 for the theological element).

[58] *Resurrection*, 14. Murray Rae takes up these passages appreciatively, but seems to entertain more seriously the challenge that 'considered in itself' history 'is left with that verdict'. His account of how 'the alteration to history' effected in the resurrection manifests itself in the world today focuses on themes of witness and intercessory prayer. Behind this subtly different sensibility is, I think, a different (more Kierkegaardian) judgment about the relationship of faith and history. Rae, 'Salvation and History', in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray Rae (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 89-103, 97, 100-3.

[59] *Resurrection*, 17.

[60] Ibid., 18.

[61] Ibid.

the kind of claims being made (and not made) for eschatology's import in ethics. We are now in a position to make an initial comment upon it. It might be expected that talk of the resurrection would go on at least partly in an eschatological register. But in the first movements of *Resurrection*'s argument that kind of language is firmly indexed. Formally, this is simply because – like 'The Natural Ethic' – O'Donovan's presentation moves carefully and sequentially from one affirmation to another. Like the earlier article, the way the sequence plays out seems to prioritise the affirmation of created order. Materially, we have seen that *Resurrection*'s variety of moral realism adjudges the resurrection massively significant but that it registers that significance initially in relation to existing order.

Gauged from one angle, while resurrection seems to be a symbol of vast importance, it appears by the same token to be of primarily epistemological consequence. This may seem a strange comment given O'Donovan's concern for reality beyond the human mind and for ethics' objective basis. Yet in this first strand of *Resurrection*'s argument, the resurrection does not seem to change but to reaffirm reality and to redirect our moral gaze towards it. Decisively for ethics, its significance does not look to be in its commendation of a new order that norms our action but in its function as noetic condition of possibility for true comprehension of existing order. It commends that order to us in a sovereign gesture of re-presentation, of re-authorisation; 'We must speak about creation, because in Jesus' resurrection God has given back the created world'.[62]

The objective referent of Christian ethics is from this angle no different than the one which confronts humankind in general. All bump up against the world's reality, which has been vindicated. This interpretation of the resurrection entails a number of strong claims.[63] Because natural order as such was reaffirmed, moral theology centred in the resurrection speaks about that order not merely as niche intellectual discipline but as something with universal reach. One does not 'opt in' to this tradition of inquiry and way of seeing the world; it spans all things and their deepest reality, possessing unique propensity to illuminate the widest range of moral circumstances.

These kinds of claims are made in assorted ways by various moral theologians, and it is worth considering, briefly, how *Resurrection* might compare to one or two. Proponents of natural law are of course among them, and in just this way natural law is thought to be attractive in its latitude, its relevance to the entire sphere of human affairs. (Considered especially attractive is the way it attends chiefly to the rational evaluation of intramundane goods and is thereby thought to offer grounds for moral consensus across traditions). Herbert McCabe provides the most memorable, if characteristically hyperbolic, articulation of the universality claimed by a natural law approach:

> there is no such thing as Christian ethics. There is just ethics. Christians may have contributed quite a lot towards our understanding of ethics (as well as contributing a certain amount to our

[62] Ibid., xvii.
[63] Ibid,, 17.

> misunderstanding), but ethics, like all other human knowledge, belongs to mankind. It cannot be the secret doctrine of a sect. This, incidentally, is what Catholics are talking about when they speak of natural law: they want to emphasise that ethics a matter of our common humanity, and not of some esoteric teaching.[64]

O'Donovan clearly shares an instinct here, and inasmuch as *Resurrection*'s argument is *materially* concentrated upon the implications of the doctrine of creation for the discipline of ethics it may be motivated in similar fashion doctrinally. If natural law claims are typically based directly on creation without the kind of refraction through resurrection that is O'Donovan's starting point, then it is not immediately apparent what difference the two starting points make. Nevertheless, the instinct about universality McCabe utters in a deflationary way can sometimes sound more aspirational when made by O'Donovan, because his approach to ethical universality is at times of a more explicitly *Christological* cast than McCabe's. If *Resurrection* tries to hold together universal claims with those of a more particularist, postliberal character, it is usually by funneling the universal through the particular:

> In the sphere of revelation, we will conclude, and only there, can we see the natural order as it really is and overcome the epistemological barriers to an ethic that conforms to nature. This nature involves all men, and indeed … does include a certain "natural knowledge" which is also part of man's created endowment. And yet only in Christ do we apprehend that order in which we stand and that knowledge of it with which we have been endowed.[65]

Chapter 3 will afford a closer look at epistemological issues, and the chance to plumb what that 'in Christ' might mean for morality. But for now let us consider the way O'Donovan draws a distinction in *Resurrection* between his position and another natural law position, because he intends it to lend clarity on these questions:

> The difference between Finnis and myself, then, seems to amount to this: while I believe that a distinct behaviour is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus, he believes that the same behaviour is demanded which was demanded anyway, but that the demand is clearer and more cogently perceived.[66]

O'Donovan's statement of his own position is attractive. But from what we have read it has certainly seemed like the resurrection's impact is precisely to make 'the demand' of the created order 'clearer and more cogently perceived'. What occurs in the conversion of moral reason appears to be the Christological 'thematisation of what has always been the case'.[67] To be sure, we will see O'Donovan in *Resurrection* allow for the possibility of 'distinct behaviour … demanded by the resurrection of Jesus'. And it would therefore be more accurate to say that he seems to believe *both* what he attributes to Finnis *and* what he attributes to himself. Yet at this

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[64] Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), 19. Cf. Victor Lee Austin, *Christian Ethics: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 36-9.

[65] *Resurrection*, 20. Samuel Wells and Ben Quash place O'Donovan, alongside Hauerwas and Milbank, in the (favoured) category 'Ecclesial Ethics', distinguished from 'Universal Ethics' and 'Subversive Ethics'. They note, however, that because, for O'Donovan: 'The sources of Christian ethics are available to everybody and binding on everybody … yet they are derived from authorities only Christians recognise … O'Donovan is a kind of bridge figure between ecclesial ethics and universal ethics'. Wells and Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 191.

[66] *Resurrection*, ix.

[67] Borrowing the phrase from Christopher Steck, who uses it to describe misperceptions of Rahner's view. Steck, *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2001), 100.

stage it is not clear what that 'more' might be, and how it might relate to that re-presentation of created order.

I have called the resurrection a symbol of vast importance for O'Donovan, but I do not of course mean by this that his understanding of the resurrection as an event is a symbolic understanding of any Schleiermacherian, Bultmannian, or Tillichian kind. The *moral* significance of it aside, located in the doctrinal context of twentieth century theological discussion O'Donovan's understanding of the resurrection is squarely realist. In the terms of David Fergusson's heuristic it is 'traditional' rather than 'radical' or 'liberal'.[68] Samuel Wells and Ben Quash are not wrong to characterise his view of the resurrection as 'normative' in contrast to Bultmann's 'illustrative' view, or to say that on that view the implications for ethics are 'enormous, perhaps definitive'.[69] More precisely, if located within George Hunsinger's typology, O'Donovan's understanding would likely be placed at the antipode of that space occupied by Schleiermacher, Bultmann, and Tillich, in the 'second type', represented by Pannenberg and N.T. Wright – two figures with whose work O'Donovan is familiar.[70] *Resurrection* holds, for instance, that 'the authority of God is not incommunicable, interior and removed from public view, but is located in the public realm in an event of history which may be told': that is, the resurrection.[71] In *Thirty-Nine Articles* he cautions *against* 'giving the resurrection a merely noetic or explanatory function … at the cost of overthrowing the character of redemption as history'.[72]

The more minor claim I am making operates on something of a different level, though carries its own provocation. It is that despite O'Donovan's historical realism, which indubitably licenses and implies attribution of significant ontological gravity to the resurrection (i.e. it really happened, and it really had an effect), that ontological aspect is couched so much in terms of *continuity* that the only thing that can possibly be *new* about the resurrection is its efficacious work in securing knowledge where there was doubt.[73] It makes possible right apprehension of what was obscured but has always been there just the same. In other words, O'Donovan's presentation of the resurrection *is* at risk of giving it 'a merely noetic or explanatory function' when considered in its implications *for the determining metaphysics of morals*.

Though this is the claim I wish to defend, a stronger, more provocative one could be made. Might O'Donovan sometimes write as if Christ's resurrection is not just the first fruits of but

[68] David Fergusson, 'Interpreting the Resurrection', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38:3 (1985): 287-305.
[69] Wells and Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 19.
[70] George Hunsinger, 'The Daybreak of the New Creation: Christ's Resurrection in Recent Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57:2 (2004): 163-81. Hunsinger considers these theologians' approach laudable, but as 'elevating history at the expense of transcendence' (163). Moltmann, Hans Frei, and Barth comprise Hunsinger's favoured third type. I return to similarities between the work of N.T. Wright and O'Donovan later.
[71] *Resurrection*, 141. Though note in a different context O'Donovan's critique of Pannenberg's historicism, mentioned below.
[72] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 28.
[73] Here, too, a comparison with Wright may be apt. See Samuel V. Adams, *The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with N.T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 153-6.

has already effected the general resurrection and cosmic renewal traditionally counted among the 'Last Things'? Consider again the past tense of the line about 'the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which restored and fulfilled the intelligible order of creation', or these sentences from 'the Foundations of Ethics', an article condensing *Resurrection*'s argument:

> The resurrection of mankind in Christ is the reversal of that slide from created order into dissolution that began in Adam's disobedience. The resurrection of the race means that we may live, but not merely live in our disordered state but live in a renewed order. Renewal is not hope for isolated individuals alone; it means participating in a world that has been renewed.[74]

The image of representation operative here would appropriately allow one to speak in the present tense of the 'resurrection of mankind in Christ'. The sense of participation it carries does even allow us to speak in a meaningful way of the 'resurrection of the race' already accomplished, though stated alone that might mislead. It might also be possible to speak fittingly in the present tense of 'a renewed order', if we indicate by that proleptic anticipation of new creation – perfectly in the life of Christ, falteringly in the life of his Church. But to speak of 'participating in a world that has been renewed' in a strong sense we would need to understand as already realised the fulfilment and perfection of created order that Scripture seems to await as future manifestation of Christ's achievement.[75] I grant that the ambiguity of each of O'Donovan's sentences' temporal reference is to a point understandable given the tensions created by biblical eschatology. Even so, he either parses the 'now' and 'not yet' – the 'already' and 'still more'[76] – of eschatology with an unhelpful degree of obscurity, or, if we read those lines as an over-realisation of eschatological fulfilment, a degree of clarity we are not given to confess.

What we seem to find is O'Donovan implying *either* that created order has not been marred by sin in any significant sense, *or*, if it was, that it has already been restored materially. In the first case, the resurrection is the decisive declaration, to the falsification of human pretensions to have effectively tampered with it, that creation is good. In the second, it effects an ontological restoration and makes newly possible that epistemic rectification. However, the claim we *should* charitably understand O'Donovan to be making is something like this: the Christian, believing in the resurrection as 'the already commenced and yet-to-come restoration of Creation as Creation', being freed from conformity to the disorder of sin, lives 'as if' that restoration was already fully actualised,[77] 'reaches towards the coming consummation and glorification, acting

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[74] *Resurrection*, ix, 'the Foundations of Ethics', 97.
[75] e.g. Rom. 8:18-25. O'Donovan does at times recognise this; in *Resurrection* (243) he speaks of 'the non-human creation await[ing] its redemption' in Christ, but the point is typically made to highlight the scope of redemption rather than its futural element.
[76] So Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 34.
[77] John Milbank, 'Can Morality Be Christian?', in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 219-32, 229. The passage reads as follows:

> To believe in plenitude is to believe in the already commenced and yet-to-come restoration of Creation as Creation … This belief is belief in resurrection. As resurrection cancels death, and appears to render murder non-serious, it restores no moral order, but absolutely ruins the

in and upon the world as the reality which it will be'.[78] To say that, though, I have had to quote another theologian or two. And, to complicate matters appropriately, we must recall that living 'as if' in witness to creation's eschatological consummation involves precisely using 'as if not' the world in its current state.[79]

## TOTAL RESTORATION

I have drawn attention to the past tense employed in these statements about the resurrection's vindication of created order. But *Resurrection*'s depiction of eschatology's relation to creation does not just comprise an 'already' of past restoration and fulfilment – what O'Donovan calls the resurrection's backwards looking aspect – but an articulation which looks to the future, too. 'The sign that God has stood by his created order implies that this order, with mankind in its proper place within it, is to be totally restored at the last'.[80] The force of the assured 'is to be' is about securing confidence in the *past* tense restoration so as to reinforce the *present* normativity of that order. It certainly lays bare the repercussions for eschatology when the principle of created order's restoration is pushed to its outermost logical extremity. But this is not the only articulation of the resurrection's forwards looking (or 'upwards looking') aspect. In O'Donovan's pithy summary of the backwards and forwards aspects we read that as a 'new affirmation of God's first decision that Adam should live, the resurrection of Christ is also an affirmation that *goes beyond and transforms the initial gift of life*'.[81] Surely we can already mark the palpable tension between this second aspect and the first, as *Resurrection* has presented it.

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> possibility of *any* moral order whatsoever. That is to say, any reactive moral order, which presupposes the absoluteness of death. For the Christian, murder is wrong, not because it removes something irreplaceable, but because it repeats the Satanic founding of *instituting* death, or the very *possibility* of irreplaceability, and absolute loss. But in the resurrected order there need be no law even against such Satanism, because it is so manifestly senseless, because this possibility occurs to no one, because here the only law is that of *nature*, that of *life*, but specifically human life which consciously partakes of the creativity of God. Here, at last, in the Resurrection, there is only natural law (and in *this* sense I concur with Oliver O'Donovan). For in the resurrected order, in the life of our vision of God in his final Christic manifestation, the occasion for the exercise of death-presupposing virtue (as Paul says) drops away, and only charity – gift and counter-gift – remain.

Milbank himself is not particularly clear about the temporal reference of his statements, for instance the 'Here, at last' – but we should take them as having present *moral* implication as the phrase 'as if' indicates a little higher on the same page.

[78] John Webster, 'Hope', in *The Oxford Handbook to Theological Ethics*, 291-306, 304.

[79] 1 Cor. 7:29. Cf. Kroeker, 'Living "As If Not": Messianic Becoming or the Practice of Nihilism', in *Messianic Political Theology*, 15-33.

[80] *Resurrection*, 15. Reformed theologian Douglas J. Schuurman, an appreciative reader of *Resurrection* who calls himself a 'restorationist', espoused a similar position in fierce criticism (unsurprisingly) of Moltmann, and (more surprisingly) Brunner. See *Creation, Eschaton, and Ethics: The Creation-Eschaton Relation in the Thought of Emil Brunner and Jürgen Moltmann* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). For the debate between Schuurman and Miroslav Volf, see Volf, 'Eschaton, Creation, and Social Ethics', *Calvin Theological Journal* 30:1 (1995): 191-6, and Schuurman, 'Creation, Eschaton, and Social Ethics: A Response to Volf', 144-58 of the same edition.

[81] *Resurrection*, 13.

We are bound to ask what relation obtains between the 'transformation' or 'going-beyond' of the gift of life mentioned in this last quotation and the 'total restoration' of the creation featured in the first. After all, it seems that if God had stood by his created order in such a way as to suggest it will be 'totally restored at the last', then transformation might be too discontinuously teleological a term for what eschatological consummation will involve. Moreover, if created order is to be without remainder restored at the last, and if that order has not been substantially impinged upon by sin (or if it was but 'has been renewed'), then what we could see of that restored order now would be more than a promissory and proleptic foretaste. The world would in a comprehensive way already *be* new creation. These are, to be sure, fiddly matters for any theologian, but O'Donovan does not take much trouble to unravel them.

Related, but much more straightforward to interpret, a refrain echoing throughout the corpus that the resurrection of the creature Jesus Christ disallows 'gnostic' yearning for rescue from the created realm. Hoping for redemption *from* rather than *of* the world, it follows, contradicts the world-affirming implication of the Christian confession of creation's redemption.[82] From a contemporary standpoint (like mine) that sees ecological responsibility as a priority for moral theology, the wide horizons of O'Donovan's view of salvation are agreeable. Though he does not typically prioritise ecological concerns, they are not unmentioned. Credit for prescience is certainly due.[83] He accentuates scriptural themes of creation's renewal and redemption: emphasis now routine in plenty of preaching, and, in a certain manner of speaking, practice. Praise of the Orthodox tradition for its refreshingly cosmic vision, as in *Resurrection*, is now commonplace, too.[84] And in a concrete way O'Donovan's account is not just congruent with but lies immediately behind pioneering work in environmental theology and ethics.[85]

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[82] Ibid., 14. Opposing the Christian theology of creation and redemption to 'gnosticism' is commonplace in Christian moral reasoning about all kinds of things. See, among multitudes, O'Donovan's student Robert Song's *Human Genetics: Fabricating the Future* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002), 67-8. Song also draws on *Begotten or Made?* and *Resurrection* in 'Knowing There Is No God, Still We Should Not Play God? Habermas on the Future of Human Nature', *Ecotheology* 11.2 (2006): 191-211, 206-10.

[83] For all-too-brief indication of how O'Donovan relates the fundamental insights of his work to the ecological crisis, for instance the genealogy of voluntarism, nominalism, and historicism, see 'Where were you …?'.

[84] *Resurrection*, xv, 55, 243. O'Donovan participated in Anglican-Orthodox discussions during the 1980s.

[85] The work of O'Donovan's Edinburgh colleague Michael Northcott is self-consciously indebted to O'Donovan's thought. *Resurrection*'s basic contentions in particular undergird the argument in Northcott's earlier *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. chapter 5, 'The Order of Creation', and 6, 'Creation, Redemption, and Natural Law Ethics'. *Resurrection* supplied evangelical scholarship on ecological issues with a framework, too. See e.g. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, 'Christ's Resurrection and the Creation's Vindication', in *The Environment and the Christian: What Does the New Testament Say About the Environment*, ed. Calvin B. DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 57-72; Douglas J. Moo, 'Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:3 (2006): 449-88, 486.

It is not hard to see the ethical attractiveness of his construal of resurrection as restoration, or parallel proposal that when we speak of redemption, we must 'stress the fact that it presupposes the created order':

> "Redemption" suggests the recovery of something given and lost. When we ask what it is that was given and lost, and must now be recovered, the answer is not just "mankind", but mankind in his context as the ruler of the ordered creation that God has made; for the created order, too, cannot be itself while it lacks the authoritative and beneficent rule that man was to give to it … We cannot speculate on what "redemption" will imply for the non-human creation. And yet Scripture speaks of such a redemption. For redemption is what God has done for the whole, and not just for a part of that which he has made.[86]

It is intriguing that O'Donovan waxes apophatic here. Patristic authors speculated quite freely about this wider scope of redemption, and contemporary theology sees bold attempts to speculate in this area, too – notably from Paul Griffiths, and more particularly regarding non-human animals, David Clough.[87] More to the point, we might argue that while O'Donovan claims the impossibility of speculation he himself speculates about these aspects of redemption, in the sense that *Resurrection*'s case for nature's moral normativity appears buttressed by assertion of nature's eschatological continuity. The moral account relies on the assumption that generic and teleological features of the world's realities, which instruct us in our proper interaction with them, are materially consistent through creation-fall-salvation-eschaton.

O'Donovan's maximalist statements about redemption's total restoration of the created order look especially appealing as doctrinal premise for moral theology's interest in realities beyond the human creature and commendation of an ethos of attentiveness to ecological challenge. At first blush this kind of maximalist position might even seem imperative. There is an undeniable, persuasive simplicity to the line of argument which runs that because God will renew the whole world – *this* world – we should take better care of it. Pragmatically speaking, I am therefore wary about trying to unsettle readers' confidence in accounts like O'Donovan's; broadening ethical engagement in some circles does seem to run together with ever-growing doctrinal confidence in redemption's range beyond the *anthropos*.[88] Accounts like this are also

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[86] *Resurrection*, 54.

[87] David Clough, *On Animals* vol. 1 *Systematic Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), especially Part 3 'Redemption'; Paul Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), especially Part VI. As Clough will demonstrate further in vol. 2 (*Theological Ethics*, forthcoming), these questions are of real moral significance. By saying 'speculation' I do not intend disapprobation, just clarity about the necessity of distinguishing between it and core confession.

[88] Similarly I do not wish to dispute – quite the opposite – that moral theology must take the present givenness and particularity of other creatures seriously, recognising their dignity in light of the doctrine of creation. Non-human animals are fellow creatures of God, and were this facet of their theological intelligibility readily recognised so as to determine the formation of Christians' affections, this would be enough for sincere repentance, and for patterns of consumption to alter drastically. But is a strong sense of eschatological continuity a necessary prerequisite for the possibility of renewed faithfulness in these things? Besides Willis Jenkins' sensitive portrayal of the pluralism of Christian environmental ethics, I find great promise – in terms of my effort to uncouple the two – in his claim that Anabaptist theology 'keenly appreciates worldly evil and intensely anticipates a new creation', but expresses it in 'Christian communal practices' which show how 'nature … shapes the faithful living of a particular people in a particular place': a legacy which 'suggests that redemptionist soteriology, even accompanied by strong

absolutely right in thinking that future-oriented Christian eschatological hope should not be imagined as inimical to ecological concern.[89] Moreover – and here I draw on Willis Jenkins' *Ecologies of Grace* – O'Donovan is exemplary in being capable of showing both the limitations inherent in 'stewardship' language, and the inextricability of the redemption of human creatures from the redemption of creation. He senses that the 'management ethos' of stewardship 'may dull the gracious awe by which nature humbles humans before God' and, 'without an account of nature's relation to God … remains unaccountable to the manifold flourishing of earth's creatures and vulnerable to bad anthropocentrisms'.[90] But, alongside this important sense of nature's relation to God outwith our possession and construction, he can also maintain that in the restoration of humanity God restores creation: 'On this … hangs the project of any fully Christian environmental ethic'.[91]

Be that as it may, the solid affirmations about Christian theology's anti-escapist notion of redemption should not distract us from the distinctively maximalist character of *Resurrection*'s view of eschatological continuity. To repeat the second quotation: 'The sign that God has stood by his created order implies that this order, with mankind in its proper place within it, is to be totally restored at the last'. For all this statement's obvious *prima facie* potential for a steadfastly this-worldly morality, a doctrinally precise response must say that this sign does not necessarily imply that total restoration, if applied to a very fixed conception of created order.

Disentangling them is a delicate undertaking. The problem is surely not with the language of restoration *simpliciter* (or any *re-* language as such), but with its limited valence when applied to an apparently static notion of what is to be restored in the eschaton. That application, though presenting itself as logically necessary, is not the only biblically responsible and doctrinally coherent interpretation of new creation. For instance, it would not entail contradiction to believe that God created, sustains, and will perfect everything that is, embracing these truths as morally significant, and to also hold that such perfection will involve a transformation of the material order beyond our expectations. Too much preeminence should not be afforded to the language of restoration because it simply does not have the conceptual elasticity to stretch to a meaningful notion of transformation. Despite the real continuity in such transformation – the genuine identity (personal, social, cosmic) of the realities made new – on that view there will be a significant discontinuity, too: the new creation will exhibit ineffable difference from the current order, a difference shown by the shifting images of Scripture's

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senses of worldly evil, need not dislocate humanity from nature'. *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91-2.

[89] Unfortunately some *do* think it intrinsically inimical, among them see e.g. Catherine Keller, 'Women Against Wasting the World: Notes on Eschatology and Ecology', in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader,* ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 282-94.

[90] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 90-1.

[91] Ibid., 91. See later comments (235) indicating how Reformed 'covenant theologies' can balance 'the responsibility of stewardship with the created orders of ecojustice' (two approaches considered separately in the book's typology).

eschatological imaginary.[92] Besides, it might be said, what is continuous in God's gift of new creation will surprise even the saintliest. We might call this view of discontinuity 'positive'. Eschatological transformation would then be ill-captured by the shorthand of 'the total restoration of created order', if we take created order to be the world as it now is. In other words, conceivable within Scripture and tradition is a more apophatic hope as regards the persistence of this world as presently constituted. That apophasis does not denote any lack of trust that God will restore the fortunes of God's vindicated people (a conspicuous prophetic theme) or that the Lord Jesus will return, inaugurating a 'time of universal restoration' (Acts 3:21). Nor is it at all incompatible with belief in the resurrection of a 'spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15:44), or in the 'new heavens and the new earth' (Rev. 21:1). It simply recognises that 'what we will be has not yet been revealed' (1 Jn. 3:2). O'Donovan, all that to say, wants to indissolubly fuse two claims that can be deemed separable without lapse into any kind of 'gnostic' *contemptus mundi*.

Fuller cases for this positive stronger sense of discontinuity have recently been made by Matthew Levering and Margaret Adam, the latter with ethical sensitivity. They show, in the company of large swathes of Christian tradition, that belief in the resurrection of the body is compatible with hope in the beatific vision, and that imagining eschatological discontinuity does need not to be ethically enfeebling, despite caricatures.[93] Both works engage N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope* critically – a book which, as I suggest below, shares some instincts with *Resurrection*.[94] It is worth underlining that Levering makes his case while being a theologian who can hold to salvation's restoration of creation, quite happy to quote *Resurrection* saying that 'in his resurrection the moral order was publicly and cosmically vindicated'.[95] Indeed, he is much more interested than I am in constructing an account of natural law.[96]

More precisely, Stephen N. Williams expressed reservations about O'Donovan's cheerfully continualist eschatology in his review of *Resurrection,* though from a perspective of analytic rigour intending to preserve the possibility of belief in the world's eschatological destruction (2 Pet. 3:10).[97] We should not airbrush away that text, which may or may not be plausibly annexed by an overall understanding of continuity. But my intention is first to preserve space for positive

[92] See, for instance, Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1999), 77-80.
[93] Margaret Adam, *Our Only Hope: More than We Can Ask or Imagine* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2014); Matthew Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), especially ch. 7, 'Bodily Resurrection and Beatific Vision,' 109-26. For an account of what the redemption of bodies might mean see the final chapter of Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[94] Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007)
[95] Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death*, 150 n.37. Cf. *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), esp. ch. 7 on atonement and creation.
[96] See Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[97] Stephen N. Williams, 'Outline for Ethics: a Response to Oliver O'Donovan', *Themelios* 13:3 (1988): 86-91.

discontinuity – eschatological transcendence – as a legitimate doctrinal reception of the various eschatological scriptural texts and a true and valid object of Christian hope.[98] And, what is more, to conceptually uncouple theologically-motivated concern for the body and for nature (shared by Christians of all eschatological stripes) from a particular strongly continualist construal of new creation.

There is another kind of challenge that can be raised to O'Donovan's position. It is one that would urge us to ask ourselves the sober question of whether we think God would allow humankind to so destroy this good home that any eschatological continuity will *necessarily* presuppose a high degree of transformative discontinuity materially: of *re*-creation. If we answer that in mysterious divine wisdom there may be such a possibility, then real destruction is not unthinkable. By answering like this we would not of course be implying that we human beings have the power to hasten 'the Day of the Lord' in that destruction. Neither would we imply diminished regard for our bodies, or dismiss efforts to preserve the natural world as futile.[99] Nor would we infer that new creation's form will make any concession to creaturely sin; disorder's only mark there may be the wounds of Christ, and he bears them having triumphed over it. In overcoming sin's effects consummation *will* truly and totally 'restore' creation. The Father's steadfast, loving purposes for the blessing of creation *are* unshakably secured in the Son's mission to reconcile creatures who have brought ruin upon themselves, and will be moved to completion in the Spirit's mission to perfect those reconciled creatures. It is true that 'all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast', for God 'has united himself definitively to our earth'.[100] The thought, rather, that we would be entertaining is that human beings have the power to gravely damage this world. But it seems to me that O'Donovan's account of redemption contains as a supposition the thought that within the patience of the divine economy God *would not* allow creatures to mar the form of creation in any thoroughgoing way – it is given, it is vindicated, and its form will be restored.

For those less sanguine than him about nature's resilience against the damage humankind can do, this does not mean projecting some kind of process-theological vulnerability of divine plan to human caprice. Rather, it could follow from a commitment to divine sovereignty that, following a possibility apparently allowed for by the scriptural witness, can envisage God giving us over to our sin and its consequences to an extent more impactful upon creation's form (including ourselves) than the already far-reaching horrors world history has already known. Alternatively it might issue even less hypothetically, from realisation of the great 'Devastation'[101] of this order already effected in ecological degradation and damage to fellow creatures. Or, most mundanely and modestly of all, from pondering how the 'sum total' of

[98] See Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018) and R. Michael Allen, 'The Visibility of the Invisible God', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 9:3 (2015): 249-69 – part of his longer study *Grounded in Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).
[99] See Adam's response to Ellen Ott Marshall in *Our Only Hope.*
[100] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 244, 245.
[101] Griffiths' term.

'zoological and botanical' nature of many millennia could be said to perdure together in continualist total restoration, without necessarily strong discontinuity.[102]

Something like these points are perhaps the strongest 'negative' cases for discontinualist reserve. I am more interested in pressing the 'positive' case, frankly. But both the positive and the negative considerations indicate that even if we *can* subscribe to O'Donovan's view of total restoration, he has moved readers a little too fast to that conclusion.

Still, as I have sought to stress, these qualifications of O'Donovan's metaphysic for morals should not be thought to invalidate his understanding as a whole. My argument is this: though O'Donovan's most (over)confident expressions of eschatological continuity redouble his creation-based 'natural ethic' rhetorically and insulate it from the pressure of other doctrinal *loci*, those expressions *can* be seen as something like an auxiliary hypothesis. Moreover, if they are a flying buttress which might be taken away leaving the essential edifice intact, then the goods of ecological commitment and commitment to the dignity of human being's embodied nature (for instance) already stand on the basis of more modest claims. And if *that* is the case, then it seems as though those aspects of Christian moral teaching already established can be unproblematically placed alongside more extended moral reflection oriented towards eschatology proper – reflection which O'Donovan sometimes seems to think would gainsay those aspects.

There is another objection which arises. Like the first two, if it is at least partially salient it does suggest that it is incautious to assert that the resurrection primarily signifies the 'vindication of created order', and that eschaton primarily signifies this order 'totally restored at the last'. This third objection – which again would entail only a partial modification – would remind us that it is customary for theology to speak of the vindication of God's *covenant* before its implications for the natural order. To this end Christopher Holmes wonders 'whether creation at times usurps the place of Christology in O'Donovan's text', since 'the language of covenant and its necessary correlate election seem to be displaced'.[103] To speak of covenant first is not to make an 'historicist' move, of course. It simply reflects a responsive undertaking of theological reason, in seeking to find divine self-disclosure where the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – God the Father of Jesus Christ – has promised most clearly to be found; an undertaking of *moral*-theological reason to discover where God's character and will is displayed most directly in its elicitation of faithful creaturely conduct and judgment of creaturely conduct gone astray. Indeed, in *Thirty-Nine Articles* O'Donovan writes that 'the biblical God … makes himself known by acts in history, whose self-revelation, therefore, must take the form of

[102] Williams, 'Outline', 88-9.
[103] Christopher Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2012), 95 n. 86.

history. This is not to embrace modern historicism, with its denial of eternal truths and its opposition to metaphysics'.[104]

What *Resurrection* understands as made known in those acts is not least creation's restoration in Christ, and this would likely form the basis of his reply to Holmes' objection. Covenant and creation, O'Donovan might say, are mutually informing concepts, however we relate them. The moral theologian can approach them from the angle of creation, just as the biblical theologian can from the angle of covenant. (In chapter 5 we will examine O'Donovan's segregation of theological subdisciplines). And we can see how his claims might unfold unobjectionably: the vindication of Christ's humanity is the vindication of creatureliness, and as the Logos, Christ redeems the creation made through him, restoring its rationally-intelligible form.

One of the tasks O'Donovan seems intent on performing as an ethicist is a metaethical movement of translation from a discursive idiom informed by the careful tracing of Scripture's material narratives into one equipped for conversation with moral philosophical concepts. Under the steam of this movement it may very well be licit to progress from the idea of the covenant's vindication, or vindication of Christ's humanity and so humanity in him, to the idea of the reliable moral normativity of the natural order. But my impression is that it is not just O'Donovan's disciplinary methodology as a moralist that puts language of creation before language of covenant (or relatedly, we might add, election), dislodging christology from some of its canonical footing. His doctrinal convictions tend to that concentration, too – if not outright usurpation. *Thirty-Nine Articles*, where we see those convictions more plainly, speaks of Christ's resurrection as 'the vindication of his humanity', 'on behalf of all men', as well as a 'moment of recovery' in relation to creation.[105] But it still does not say much about covenant. If the terminology of the resurrection's 'restoration' of creation may derive from Calvin, by neglecting to say more about covenant he departs more than he might like from the Reformer's practice, in which language of creation cleaves more closely to it. And where that linkage appears in Calvin, it also seems to reckon more soberly with sin's effects.[106] Of course it also appears, in a radicalised way, in Barth[107] – whose formulations pointed Ramsey towards

[104] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 60. The first sentence's sentiment will not be unfamiliar to readers of Pannenberg or Wright.
[105] Ibid., 29.
[106] See Calvin's comment on Col. 1:18: 'in the resurrection there is a restoration of all things, and in this manner the commencement of the second and new creation, for the former had fallen to pieces in the ruin of the first man' (quoted in T.F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 153). But also his comment on Jn. 13:31, speaking about the *cross*, 'in which there is a wonderful change of things – the condemnation of men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order' (quoted in Randall C. Zachman, 'The Christology of John Calvin', in *The Oxford Handbook to Christology*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 284-96, 295).
[107] See e.g. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/2, trans. Harold Knight et al (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 204.

resolution in his own struggle to form 'an ethic of faithfulness … that would honour the unity and wholeness of God's activity as Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer'.[108]

Holmes' argument *may* have about it something of the pedantic fretfulness of the systematic theologian when faced with an ethicist's pragmatic application of Christian teaching, pressing the questions of *taxis* and proportion on their own terms. But appropriating it we say that the vindication of the covenant is an essential affirmation often overshadowed in *Resurrection* by a claim of vindication oriented primarily to a 'natural ethic'. The moral-theological disquiet, signaled by the dogmatician's, will be about whether that metaethical translation is too optimistically executed. Thus, whether the universal moral implications can so easily be abstracted from the unsubstitutable particularity of God's ways with God's people. Does the ease of transposition permit a notion of vindicated created order not sufficiently formed by those narratives? This might seem a strange thing to worry about given O'Donovan's evidently deep familiarity with Scripture and intention to discipline concepts according to it (seen pre-eminently in *Desire*, though commentators worried about covenant's minor role there, too).[109] But there is a nagging sense that it is sometimes made to yield universal principles too quickly, or that analogous relationships between particular biblical realities and other entities (in *Desire* between Israel and other nations, in *Resurrection* between the biblical concept of creation and a philosophical notion of moral order) are drawn a little too closely, becoming bridges across which assertions can move too freely. So we must keep that question in mind.

*Resurrection*'s first direct foray into the theme of eschatology – its third chapter, 'Eschatology and History' – suggests O'Donovan does consider his case scripturally responsible. An exegetical passage provides the chapter's point of departure, and while it certainly enlarges the overall argument, nothing found there diverges from the earlier assertions. The initial signs are that it might, however. When the author to the Hebrews writes that '[a]s it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him', we read, it seems as though the vision of created order in Psalm 8 is dismissed.[110] 'The order which the psalmist believe that he beheld in the world around him the author to the Hebrews declares to belong to "the world to come". It is not realised – yet. It is not something that we can already count on. "But", the author goes on, "we see Jesus … ".[111] At pains to mitigate against a misreading of this, O'Donovan continues:

> the writer is not guilty of ignoring [Psalm 8's] obvious sense as cosmology. He is not attempting to *replace* the psalmist's doctrine of creation with an eschatology which will better suit his own Christological interests. Rather, he sees in Christ, and in the order of the world to

[108] William Werpehowski, *American Protestant Ethics and the Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 34; 40-4. See Werpehowski's warranted judgment that the conceptuality was critically absent from Ramsey's *political* theology (51-4). Adam Edward Hollowell, *Power and Purpose: Paul Ramsey and Contemporary Christian Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) – originating in an Edinburgh PhD supervised by O'Donovan – exposits it nicely (15-38) but offers an unconvincingly high estimate of Ramsey as political theologian.
[109] E.g. Victor P. Furnish, 'How Firm a Foundation? Some Questions About Scripture in *The Desire of the Nations*', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 11:2 (1998): 18-23, 21; Stanley Hauerwas and Jim Fodor, 'Remaining in Babylon: Oliver O'Donovan's Defense of Christendom', 30-55 of the same edition (38).
[110] *Resurrection*, 53.
[111] Ibid.

> come, the vindication and perfect manifestation of the created order which was always there but never fully expressed. The elusiveness of that order in our experience did not mean that it had no kind of existence …
>
> The triumph of the Son of man prepares the way for the future triumph of his "brethren", mankind as a whole. But this eschatological triumph of mankind is not an innovative order that has nothing to do with the primal ordering of man as creature to his Creator. It fulfils and vindicates the primal order in a way that was always implied, but which could not be realised in the fallen state of man and the universe.[112]

The canonical conclusion, then, reinforces the metaphysic for morals which O'Donovan derives from his interpretation of the resurrection.

Nevertheless, here following more closely Scripture's telling of 'eschatological triumph', he does say more about that eschatological fulfilment 'that was always implied', and not just about the vindication of created order. He clarifies (fifty pages too late, we might think) that it is mistaken to understand redemption as purely repristination:

> we must go beyond thinking of redemption as a *mere* restoration, the return of a *status quo ante.* The redemption of the world, and of mankind, does not serve only to put us back in the Garden of Eden where we began. It leads us on to that further destiny to which, even in the Garden of Eden, we were already directed.[113]

In *Thirty-Nine Articles* a very similar clarification is issued, though he is a little clearer a little earlier. There, too, 'the meaning of Christ's resurrection is that the renewal of all creation has begun', and this renewal has 'two aspects … which have to be kept in proper balance'.[114] The first aspect, as in *Resurrection*, means 'we must not understand the newness of the new creation as though it implied a repudiation of the old', which is 'brought back into a condition of newness … its integrity and splendour'; but 'restoration is not an end in itself' and besides it there is 'advance' – 'Adam's "perfect" humanity was made for a goal beyond the mere task of being human … intimacy of communion with God'.[115] O'Donovan *does* recognise, then, that creaturely life was – as Irenaeus taught – 'already set in an arc leading to something greater'.[116]

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[112] Ibid., 53, 54.
[113] Ibid., 55.
[114] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 28.
[115] Ibid. The idea of restoration of an ordering-to an eschatological end is there in Calvin (See *Institutes* 2.1.3.). Though they are largely beyond my ken, it figures in some neo-Calvinist theologies, too, especially Herman Bavinck's, whose understanding of nature and grace is seen as exemplary by many in that school. Debate seems to persist, though, over whether 'restoration' adequately captures Bavinck's position, as well as about its compatibility with 'glorification' in his thought. See Jon Stanley, 'Restoration and Renewal: The Nature of Grace in the Theology of Herman Bavinck', in *The Kuyper Center Review, Vol. 2: Revelation and Common Grace*, ed. John Bowlin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 81-104; Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012); and Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017). Unfortunately, popular presentations of neo-Calvinism have few qualms about absolutising 'restoration'. E.g. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005 [1985]). They do so in a way that markedly contrasts with the sentiments of prominent others in their tradition – e.g. Geerhardus Vos, who wrote: 'Eschatology aims at consummation rather than restoration' (*The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, P&R, 2001), 73-6). A sign of the instability in interpretation, contemporary appropriation, and ecumenical relations of this tradition is the diverse reading of debates in Catholic theology – Stanley, for instance, finds de Lubac's vision of nature and grace (and thence Radical Orthodoxy's) an 'ally' for the neo-Reformed tradition ('Restoration and Renewal', 100), but Allen (*Sanctification*, 138, 214-15) thinks that this tradition coheres more with recent critical neo-Thomist

Certainly, O'Donovan shares what he describes in *Self-Love* as Augustine's sense of 'the one dominant cosmic movement, the return of the created being to its source and supreme good'.[117] But it is clear that O'Donovan's sense of the economy of salvation, like Augustine's, is ultimately linear rather than cyclical, and that casting redemption as recovery besides advance does not controvert this linearity. As *Resurrection* puts it:

> For the creation was given to us with its own goal and purpose, so that the outcome of the world's story cannot be a cyclical return to the beginnings, but must fulfil that purpose in the freeing of creation from its "futility". This fulfilment is what is implied when we speak of the "transformation" of the created order. Thus there is an important place in Christian thought for the idea of "history" … The Christian understanding of this idea is, of course, only to be reached through a Christian understanding of the end towards which events are directed, that is, through eschatology.[118]

O'Donovan's own *exitus-reditus* scheme does seek to mould itself to the canonical story, even as it sees innate (if imperfect) compatibility with other teleological visions of nature and its destiny, and with other visions of nature's ordered givenness. Yet satisfying ourselves that O'Donovan sees 'the world's story' as definitively directional rather than cyclical does not mean there is not debate to be had. Once we have allowed his acknowledgement of transformation as well as vindication, of teleology beyond 'mere restoration', the debate to stage will be an intra-mural theological quarrel: about his scheme's internal coherence, contesting its topography. There may also be a quarrel to be had about any strongly linear scheme's fittingness as a way of understanding the gospel's relation to history. Some thinkers do advocate for a non-linear understanding of eschatology, seeing in that a basis for ethics. I am unconvinced about it, when adopted to the exclusion of other tellings of 'the world's story', though there are some things to learn for the Christian moral life from some proponents of non-linearity. Elsewhere we will also be able to compare other theologians' linear topographies and their implications for ethics; interest in those comparisons, I hope, has been piqued by close examination of O'Donovan's scheme in this chapter.[119]

Now, though, in order to perceive further the details of his theology and the ethics which informs and is informed by it we may take the quotation's mention of 'the Christian understanding' of history as a prompt to examine *Resurrection*'s treatment of historicism.

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responses *to* the de Lubac/R.O. approach (i.e., with the defence of 'pure nature' issued by Lawrence Feingold, Steven A. Long, Thomas Joseph White, and Reinhard Hütter).

[116] John Behr, *Irenaeus: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 148.

[117] *Self-Love*, 36, 23. Like Augustine, O'Donovan articulates that movement in terms informed by 'the Christian doctrine of creation-from-nothing', not simply 'the Neoplatonic conceptions of Plotinus'. Among other commitments this doctrine determined the reshaping of Aristotelian, Platonic, and neo-Platonic philosophies in Christian theological reception. Recent philosophical theology (e.g. Robert Sokolowski, Janet Martin Soskice, David Burrell, David Bentley Hart, Simon Oliver) has reflected with great insight upon 'the great discovery' (Hart) of the 'Christian distinction' (Sokolowski), i.e. the difference between God and creatures, in light of this doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*. O'Donovan seems to have espoused a traditional understanding throughout, untroubled by earlier departures from traditional understandings now recuperated for mainstream academic theology (at least).

[118] *Resurrection*, 55. Cf. 62.

[119] See Appendix A.

*Resurrection*'s section 'Eschatology and History' returns us in part to the pattern of exposition in 'The Natural Ethic'. We might worry, given the similarity, that again the 'second aspect' revealed in the resurrection is too quickly qualified by connection to historicism's shortcomings. The bones of the account are already there in the earlier piece, and *Resurrection*'s criticism of historicism is similarly assertive, such that Gustafson can write that 'on the basis of his argument for the moral order and its knowability' O'Donovan 'fulminates against "historicism" … in a quite unnuanced way'.[120] Without doubt, O'Donovan's treatment has not yet developed the nuance achieved in *Ethics as Theology*. There are critical questions to be asked about the relation of the moral order to history, too, some of which are pursued in the following. But here we do find a more detailed depiction of historicism than in 'The Natural Ethic', along with a longer catalogue of its ethical effects, and many constructive comments about Christian ethics. Understanding why O'Donovan lands the way he does on contemporary moral questions requires understanding of this depiction and catalogue as much as anything else. This subchapter of my study is intended to aid the reader to that end.

The occasional rhetorical flourish of O'Donovan's 'fulmination' in various passages *adversus* historicism does produce a set of memorable characterisations. Among them is the succinct definition of historicism as an attitude for which 'all teleology is historical teleology'.[121] Occasionally, however, the overdrawn way in which historicism is ventriloquised

[120] Gustafson, review of *Resurrection*, 132. On the shifting attitude to natural universality and historical particularity in Gustafson's own work, see Hauerwas, 'Time and History in Theological Ethics: The Work of James Gustafson', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 13:1 (1985): 3-21. Besides Strauss, George Grant and Hannah Arendt inform O'Donovan's thought – see *Resurrection*, 67. Joan Lockwood O'Donovan doubtless contributed much to the understanding of Grant in particular (cf. *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984)). Grant's critique of technological modernity has, like Jacques Ellul's, certainly influenced O'Donovan deeply. For more on Grant in this respect, see Brian Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), especially 66-101. Cf. Robert Song, *Christianity and Liberal Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), a work originating in an Oxford DPhil. supervised by O'Donovan.

[121] O'Donovan, *Resurrection,* 58. Worth comparing is a programmatic article published slightly earlier by Timothy F. Sedgwick: 'Revising Anglican Moral Theology', in *The Future of Anglican Theology*, ed. M. Darrol Bryant (New York: Edwin Mellon, 1984), 131-41. Sedgwick employs Bernard Lonergan's account of 'The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical Mindedness' to draw a contrast between a prior 'intellectualist framework' which 'assumed that values are objective, that … stand for qualities or relations that are independent of us, and which we as rational beings are then able to grasp universally', and 'the alternative claim that values are human symbols which express the evaluative understanding which persons have made. Values arise historically and so express a particular historical understanding and vision'. Post-Oxford Movement Anglican moral theologians like Kirk, he says, followed Thomist rationalism, but we – following developments post-Vatican II – ought to embrace this alternative claim, viewing the self 'in terms of responsibility': 'Morality is a human creation that expresses our developing identity' (136-9). O'Donovan by no means simply avows that Thomism, but he usually does have more in common with a trajectory of pre- and post-Vatican II Catholic moral theology represented by Dominicans like Pinckaers and Cessario, and indeed Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, than those Sedgwick has in mind, like Fuchs, Häring, Charles Curran, or Richard McCormick. (O'Donovan would have been firmly on Ramsey's side in his debate with the last, and in agreement with *Veritatis Splendor*'s criticism of proportionalism). That first trajectory, it has been argued by another Anglican Sedgwick – Peter – inhibited ecumenical progress on moral matters: a claim with some

again comes close to taking back what was given in O'Donovan's own belated but significant affirmations of eschatology. For historicism:

> What we took to be natural orderings-to-serve and orderings-to-flourish within the regularities of nature are in fact something quite different: they are orderings to transformation, and so break out altogether from nature's order. The natural exists only to be superseded: everything within it serves only a supernatural end, the end of history.[122]

Did we not find O'Donovan saying, though, that the restoration of Eden is precisely restoration *to* its ordering-to-transformation? That the supernatural end is the created order's true *telos*? That this eschatological ordering becomes visible at particular moments ('breaking out,' for example, in the vocation of singleness)? Nonetheless, the basic sketch is clear enough and the aim of passages like those quoted is to distinguish historicist attitudes to *nature* from O'Donovan's own. For *him*, nature's objective value (and thus normativity) is never superseded; for *them* 'natural order and natural meanings are understood only as moments in the historical process, and their value lies not in any integrity of their own but in being raw material for transformation'.[123]

Similar treatments of historicism elsewhere in O'Donovan's work can be adduced. In *Common Objects*, for instance, he identifies an historicist 'conviction that the identity of any thing lies in change', a 'rejection of fixed essences' which marks 'a society that has departed from the philosophical beliefs of its ancestors'.[124] But another place where these themes are tackled at greater length, where we find passages that display as frankly as anywhere the theological rudiments of O'Donovan's critique, is *Church in Crisis.* There, in an excoriation of liberal theology, he writes:

> The dialectic of creation and redemption is not merely one episode in the struggle between orthodoxy and revision. It is its central and decisive battleground. It gives their shape to the creeds that differentiate Christianity from deism. What is the underlying doubt that causes them, with greater or lesser embarrassment, to shuffle uncertainly towards doctrinal revision at this decisive point? The answer is, as I take it, a simple moral mistake, centrally characteristic of liberal Christianity. The mistake is called "historicism", and it consists in confusing the good with the future. It induces a profound loss of nerve over any claim to discern the good hand of God within the order of a good creation.[125]

The mention of deism is curious given one would think deist thought *could* make some sense of creation and providence, but none of salvation in history, or eschatology. But the overall point is powerful, and put to work in censure of Robert Merrihew Adams a few pages later. Its presentation in this quotation does not do as much as we might like, though, to avoid the conflationary typology of 'The Natural Ethic', which threatened to couple *any* constructive

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plausibility as regards the possibility of easy ecumenical concord, but too committed to the assumption that Anglican moral theology will *always* be more compatible with the second trajectory. That is falsified by O'Donovan's work and presence on ARCIC II, apart from anything else. (Peter Sedgwick, 'Anglican Moral Theology and Ecumenical Dialogue', *Religions* 8:9 (2017): 63-70).

[122] *Resurrection*, 58. Whether that is true of all historicisms I am not sure; for Hegel at least the reality is more complex – see Frederick C. Beiser, 'Hegel's Historicism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 270-300, 279.

[123] *Resurrection*, 59.

[124] *Common Objects,* 67.

[125] *Church in Crisis,* 88.

moral-theological mention of the future with historicism, in opposition to the protological good that ethic prefers.[126] In fact, chapter 6 of *Church in Crisis* entitled 'Creation, Redemption, and Nature' can be read as deploying something very much like 'The Natural Ethic's framework. While I have no desire to wade here into the specific issues that book speaks to, I will offer a structural observation relevant to my theme.

In that chapter, O'Donovan likely overreaches towards a 'creation ethic' because of his basically well-founded allergy to the way in which Adams transfers 'the whole normative content of creation … to eschatology' without theological warrant – in other words, promotes unalloyed 'kingdom ethics'.[127] Antipathy to unwarranted relocation of normative content educes from O'Donovan the strongest possible enunciation of the sense in which '[n]ew creation is creation renewed, a restoration and enhancement, not an abolition', and thereafter that '[n]ot everything that can be thought of as future can be thought of as the kingdom of God'.[128] What is at stake is 'moral responsibility to the real', that 'love of what is', which 'is precisely what the dialectic of creation and redemption safeguarded', and without which '"the new creation" is an empty symbol'.[129]

Slightly earlier, he defends 'the step from a philosophy of nature to a theology of creation', which 'is not to abandon one set of interests in favour of another', contrary to the perception.[130] A theologian can make it without trepidation or trespass, because:

> The revealed purposes of God in creation will direct our attention back to *the world*, i.e. the totality of what there God has made, and teach us how to see the good he has given us within it. Any purposes God has in making the world are to be discerned in the world; they are not set apart from it somewhere else. Any discernment of how the world works will, *pari passu*, be a discernment of the purposes of God.[131]

What should we make of this? I readily agree that Adams' argument seems theologically unsteady, as relayed and probably on its own terms. O'Donovan's sharp rejoinder has, for the most part, the tradition's 'dialectic of creation and redemption' on its side. But that dialectic of creation and redemption, should it be rigorously pursued, must surely identify the normative content not just of creation but *of redemption*, beyond refutation of some contemporaries' transfer of normativity from first things to last in an attempt to move the goalposts of ethical value.

Understanding better why O'Donovan is prone to overreach towards a purely 'creation ethics' requires clarifying his concerns about historicist moral philosophy and the faulty metaphysics he argues it conveys. As historicism departs from classical Christian divinity ontologically, he says, it does so in moral matters. In traditional theology, the link was tight: moral thought 'proceeded from a universal order of meaning and value, an order given in

[126] Ibid., 97-9.
[127] Ibid., 98.
[128] Ibid., 99.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid., 96.
[131] Ibid.

creation and fulfilled in the kingdom of God, an order, therefore, which forms a framework for all action and history, to which action is summoned to conform in its making of history'.[132] In historicism, it is also tight, to opposite effect: denying any such order and ascription of value, it teaches that '[a]ction cannot be conformed to transhistorical values, for there are none, but must respond to the immanent dynamisms of that history to which it finds itself contributing'.[133] For O'Donovan, this teaching alters humankind's conduct towards nature. Given that 'the ends of natural life which human action should respect are no longer understood to be given objectively in nature itself, but to be conferred upon nature by the interpretation of a human culture', it inevitably 'promotes a strong tendency to intervene and manipulate'.[134] I will appraise a particular example of O'Donovan's concern later, but first we should consider the examples he gives in this part of *Resurrection.* In them the question of eschatology resurfaces.

## AGAINST HISTORICIST ETHICS

The moral implications in regard to our own nature, he says, can be demonstrated by taking 'as … paradigm a natural institution of which the New Testament has a good deal to say, the institution of marriage'.[135] The account here of what 'Christians have classically believed' about marriage is as one might imagine: it touches on marriage as a teleological structure which is 'a fact of creation and therefore not negotiable', on 'the dimorphic organisation of human sexuality', and so on.[136] Essentially, marriage is a non-contingent feature of creaturely existence, perduring 'whatever happens in history'.[137] An historicist account, narrating marriage as 'an item of cultural history', cannot but place it under a question mark: 'Historicism makes all created goods appear putatively outmoded'.[138] (Commenting elsewhere on another contemporary's revisionist sexual ethics, he worries about lack of suspicion of 'the pretensions of history to change the world').[139]

The treatment becomes especially relevant in its discussion of *singleness*, which counters the historicist conception with 'one that is, in a fuller sense, "eschatological"'.[140] Singleness points forward to the eschatological quality of community, 'in which the fidelity of love which marriage makes possible will be extended beyond the limits of marriage'.[141] The early Church took this vocation seriously, witnessing to the hope it declared by 'fostering the social

[132] Ibid., 67.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 68. Cf. Hans Jonas's seminal account of modernity's understanding of nature as manipulable in e.g. *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
[135] *Resurrection*, 69.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid. See O'Donovan's comment in a contemporaneous dictionary article 'Augustinian Ethics', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (London: SCM/Westminster: John Knox, 1986), 46-9: 'The defence of created goods is the key to Augustine's conception of marriage' (47).
[138] *Resurrection*, 70.
[139] 'Archbishop Rowan Williams', 8.
[140] *Resurrection*, 70.
[141] Ibid.

conditions which could support a vocation to the single life'.[142] Its approval of two vocations maintained a double testimony – and here the presentation is parallel to the explication of the resurrection's 'double aspect':

> The one declared that God had vindicated the order of creation, the other pointed beyond it to its eschatological transformation … Neither would accommodate in itself or evoke in the other an evolutionary mutation [the historicist outcome]. Marriage that was not marriage could not witness to the goodness of the created order, singleness that was not singleness could tell us nothing of the fulfilment for which that order was destined.[143]

O'Donovan suggests that despite later confusion, marriage and singleness were not conceived of hierarchically as objects of moral choice. Rather, they were respective appropriate responses to a vocational gift.[144] What we find here is obviously an advance on 'The Natural Ethic'; singleness points to eschatological transformation not just creation's judgment. But making sense of singleness in the way *Resurrection* does surely mean accepting a good derived from the future. Can it really be a vocation derived exclusively from 'how the world works'? Is not in its deepest witness governed by a criterion which is not intrinsic to the created order – a form of life which requires non-naturalistic reference to an eschatological whither (and thereby whence)? I am not saying that the eschaton is the *only* reference point for singleness, just as we should not say that marriage is *only* a natural good.[145]But to say, rightly, that singleness points to 'eschatological transformation' does mean that the kingdom has normative content *along with* creation.[146]

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 71. I explore *Resurrection*'s discussions of vocation, freedom, and the good some in chapter 3. See also *Resurrection*'s discussions of the distinction between a command and a counsel (170-1), and monastic renunciations (283)
[145] At the sharp end of the point that singleness, 'the harbinger of the coming rule of God', involves 'Apocalyptic Allegiance and Disinvestment', see the article of that title by John Barclay – a reading of 1 Cor. 7:25-35 (in *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 257-74). For the appropriate synthetic, integrative move see again Bennett, *Water is Thicker than Blood*, especially ch. 5. Of course, the term 'singleness' covers multiple states of life, not all of which correspond to what the tradition understands as vocational celibacy or virginity, but each theologically intelligible in different ways, as Augustine shows. For careful consideration of different states see Bennett's more recent *Singleness: A New Theology of the Single Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). In these projects Bennett advances promising work in the area by other Catholic scholars like David Matzko McCarthy, David Cloutier, Julie Hanlon Rubio, and others who also form the group behind the *Journal of Moral Theology*. Related, and worth noting here, is that Bennett's interpretation of Augustine's understanding of marriage and singleness in redemption history parts ways with Ramsey's, as seen in his 'Human Sexuality in the History of Redemption', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16:1 (1988): 56-84, and *One Flesh: A Christian View of Sex within, outside, and before Marriage*, *Grove Booklet E:8*, ed. E. David Cook and Oliver O'Donovan (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1990).
[146] Again, this study is not primarily about 'sexual ethics', but note that doing justice to the way Scripture and tradition have understood this '*along with*' would be a condition revisionist proposals have to meet if they do not want to fall foul of something like O'Donovan's critique of Adams. Some are contentedly historicist, of course. Among others, Robert Song's *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* (London: SCM Press, 2014) intends to meet that condition; we await his fuller proposal. Wells also seeks to make his proposal in terms of what he calls 'the five-act play' of salvation history – specifically, though, 'to advocate [a] view of sexuality … based less on what we believe about Act 1 (creation) than on what we understand about Act 5 (consummation)'. He is right that sometimes 'Christianity is presented as asking, 'What is the rule book that was given in Act 1 and how can we stay close enough to it to qualify for Act 5?' and that 'living in Act 4 is more about asking the question, 'What

We must leave until later O'Donovan's attempt to distinguish between vocation and moral norm – made in order to tie the norms 'back' to the goods of creation while allowing vocations to be eschatologically-oriented. He will reify that distinction as one between moral and pastoral theology. Yet we can see already that if marriage can also point forwards as well as backwards, as it can not as an 'evolutionary mutation' of historicism but an estate given in creation and transfigured by *redemption history*, then whatever its merits the distinction between vocational command and moral law should not allow him to ground the entire conspectus of Christian ethics in creation without remainder – marginalising eschatology.

It is in these discussions of historicism's failures that we also find arguments that come to the fore in later theopolitical work: 'If historicism fails in its treatment of nature for lack of a concept of creation, its social thought fails equally for lack of a strong eschatology'.[147] That is not to say that Western political thought has deemed eschatology irrelevant:

> The opposition in Western theology between the City of God and the earthly city has enabled political thought to avoid theocratic conceptions of government, which, by claiming to express the rule of heaven on earth, must unify the earthly and heavenly into a single totalitarian claim. Western theology starts from the assertion that the kingdoms of this world are *not* the kingdom of … God … not, at any rate, until God intervenes to make them so at the end … earthly politics, because they do not have to reconcile the world, may get on with their provisional task of bearing witness to God's justice.[148]

Historicism fails, by contrast, to concede the 'distance' between divine and human kingdoms – despite the prominence of the concept of the kingdom of God in its political thought.[149] Actually, according to O'Donovan, 'eschatological categories' like this are used by historicist thinkers to '*legitimise* the immanent tendencies of history rather than to *criticise* them'.[150] This is true whether historicism issues in state-totalitarianism or what he dubs 'liberal culture-totalitarianism'.[151] The latter, we are told, relies on protest (rather than administration) to propel 'history forwards on its way'.[152] We should find reliance on protest problematic, despite 'the sincere determination of many theologians to assert a Christological foundation' for it: 'Not in the immanent turbulence of social movements is hope to be found, but in the revelation of divine justice at Calvary'.[153]

*Resurrection*'s negative assessment of Helmut Thielicke's apparently eschatologically-driven reading of Jesus' moral teaching touches on the same theme: 'It is no answer to say that "the Sermon on the Mount does not overlook the reality of the world; it protests against it" for

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kind of life in Act 4 reflects the joyful heritage of Acts 1-3 … and the breathtaking destiny of Act 5?'. But that does not yet tell us enough about how we should understand the heritage of Act 1 to know whether his prioritisation of Act 5 is defensible. *How Then Shall We Live? Christian Engagement with Contemporary Issues* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2016), 104.

[147] *Resurrection*, 71.

[148] Ibid., 72.

[149] Ibid., 73.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid., 74. For incisive phenomenological characterisation of 'culture-totalitarianism' see *Common Objects* (45-72).

[152] *Resurrection*, 74.

[153] Ibid., 73-4.

protest, in itself, is formless'.[154] It is fair to say that throughout his work O'Donovan shares a distaste for protest with MacIntyre. Elsewhere, he admits that protests do bear 'unconscious witness to the principle of universality in ethics', but become 'self-defeating when divorced from a recognition of this principle' – and he seems to count much contemporary activism as exactly that.[155] I wonder if this is another moment where his work evinces a failure of eschatological imagination. It *could* very well be the case that nearly every contemporary protest movement is divorced from that perception of universality (a strange thing to say in the era of human rights, though of course O'Donovan has his reservations about the adequacy of that framework). But the note of presumption and paternalism here is unfortunate, and protest can achieve that recognition even if it does not know to aim for it in the terms of a moral philosopher. Debate about the critique of protest in O'Donovan's work resurfaces in relation to *Desire*.[156] I will make the specific point here that O'Donovan's instinct (as MacIntyre's) seems to necessarily inhibit the critical function of eschatological hope. Why?

As a preliminary observation, could it not be the case that protest on occasion embodies the criticism *of* the immanent tendencies of history – criticism inspired by 'eschatological categories' – that O'Donovan laments as lacking in historicism?[157] *Resurrection*'s reading of Moltmann, generally shrewd, risks overextending in the same way. By grounding hope in 'dissatisfaction' and 'suffering' rather than the resurrection, we are told, Moltmann bleaches hope's Christian specificity, 'subordinating it to the more general phenomenon'.[158] Moreover: 'If we base our hope on the resurrection of Christ, it is impossible to say that it is "founded" in dissatisfaction, for our dissatisfaction with the present is overwhelmed by the glorious vindication of creation which God has effected in Christ'.[159] O'Donovan overstates his case despite a generally well-founded basic concern.[160] I agree entirely that, in John Webster's

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[154] Ibid., 145.

[155] O'Donovan, 'What Can Ethics Know About God?', in *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics*, ed. Alan J. Torrance and Michael Banner (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 46 n. 6. On protest as 'a distinctive moral feature of the modern age', see MacIntyre's (harsh) comments in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edn (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 85.

[156] See especially Tim Gorringe's review and O'Donovan's response, cited in chapter 4.

[157] Cf. Stefan Skrimshire, *Politics of Fear, Practices of Hope: Depoliticisation and Resistance in a Time of Terror* (London/New York: Continuum, 2008), e.g. 141-201, though I have reservations about the book, including its earlier reading of theologians on eschatology and apocalyptic, and the way in which the contemporary philosophical evocations of cultural mood which are considered perhaps determine the normative conclusions more than they should – for a theological account.

[158] *Resurrection*, 66.

[159] Ibid. Interesting to compare here would be the work of Johann Baptist Metz and perhaps Edward Schillebeeckx, as well as a raft of liberation theologians. What is interesting in the case of Metz and Schillebeeckx, at least on one reading, is that each thinker's deepening attentiveness to suffering and injustice ('contrast experiences', 'the underside of history') represented a *break* with the immanentist and progressivist eschatology of historicist thought, as they assimilated the insights of the Frankfurt school and other critical theorists. See Steven Rodenborn, *Hope in Action: Subversive Eschatology in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[160] See the generally sympathetic reading of O'Donovan's critique in Tim Chester, *Mission and the Coming of God: Eschatology, The Trinity and Mission in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 179-195. Note, though, Timothy Harvie's claim that Chester 'relies far too much on Schuurman's work', which overestimates Moltmann's stress on eschatological discontinuity and does not defend its own proposal 'of the eschaton re-instituting

words, 'a Christian moral theology of hope' should not be 'much disposed to take its bearings from prestigious readings of our cultural situation developed without the gospel's tutelage'.[161] Indeed: 'Little is to be gained (and a good deal may be lost) by expounding Christian hope as a counterpart to some philosophical or cultural-theoretical presentation of the human condition'.[162] But it *must* be possible to ground decisively Christian hope in the resurrection *and with that* find grounds for dissatisfaction with all that in the present opposes itself to the goodness, justice, and peace of God's future – a future reality presently determinative in some way of the moral order, if that is a cohesive order. As Richard Hays writes: 'The eschatological framework of life in Christ imparts to Christian existence its strange temporal sensibility, its odd capacity for simultaneous joy amidst suffering and impatience with things as they are'.[163]

O'Donovan is right, of course, to find in Moltmann's thought the seepage of historicist presuppositions into Christian theology.[164] But does the way this assessment is made prevent O'Donovan from taking the time to make sense of the properly theological commitments which might *also* shape Moltmann's more salient concerns? I think it does; in fact, exactly this is what we will find in *Finding and Seeking.*

## AGAINST HISTORICIST THEOLOGY

Moltmann's early partner in the 'theology of hope' Wolfhart Pannenberg also makes a fleeting appearance in *Resurrection*'s discussion of historicism.[165] O'Donovan's focus is Pannenberg's 'articulate attempt', in a section of *Theology and the Kingdom of God* entitled 'Appearance as the Arrival of the Future', 'to discover historical teleology in certain strains of Socratic and Aristotelian thought'.[166] Conceived there is an eschatological ontology in which 'the relation of appearance to reality' is imagined as 'essentially the relation of present to future'.[167] But, O'Donovan argues, it cannot be found in those sources: 'classical categories' such as 'Plato's

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an Edenic state'. *Jürgen Moltmann's Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities For Moral Action* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 24 - a book with Moltmann's imprimatur, written before Moltmann's own *Ethics of Hope* and affirmed in it (xi). Of course, it is possible to think that neither Schuurman nor Moltmann get things quite right.

[161] Webster, 'Hope', 299.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 198.

[164] The critique of Moltmann, and 'Moltmannian' eschatology, in Adam, *Our Only Hope* is salient. See also Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics*, 47-54. In an article sharply critical of the wholesale philosophical borrowings in later twentieth-century eschatology, Nicholas Adams notes the influence of Bloch on Moltmann (as well as Heidegger on the eschatology of Rahner, and Hegel on Pannenberg). Adams, 'Sacred and Profane: The Effects of Philosophy on Theology in Pannenberg, Rahner and Moltmann', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:3 (2000), 283-306.

[165] For a fuller impression of O'Donovan's misgivings about Pannenberg's apparently Troeltschian historicism, see his review of Pannenberg's *Ethics,* in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 35:1 (1983): 358-64.

[166] *Resurrection*, 59.

[167] Ibid.

"Idea of the Good"' do not 'contain any element of futurity', and cannot be incorporated into the ''historicist concept of good-as-project'.[168]

O'Donovan is surely correct here, and it is important to be accurate about classical philosophies and their relation to modern ideas; informed debate about them is preferable to the bald assertion of 'theology's fall into Hellenism' found in many iterations of Protestant theology (from Luther to Harnack to Moltmann).[169] As we shall see in chapter 3, O'Donovan resists any simplistic opposition of biblical worldview to classical metaphysics. He seems to hold to a sense of a patristic and scholastic (perhaps even Anglican) synthesis of biblical wisdom and Greek philosophy, given granular detail by his close reading of the Fathers, and enhanced by sensitivity to those texts' worlds owed to a background in classics. What we can discern already of his understanding of this synthesis is that it is unusually assured for its time, especially for an evangelical Protestant of his generation – present already in 'The Natural Ethic' and *Self-Love.* Equally it is seldom complacent: chastened, maybe, by some reading of Barth, and certainly by O'Donovan's evangelical formation. (It is therefore often expressed in a more biblically-literate, case-by-case, and watchful way than contemporary exponents of the sensibility known as Radical Orthodoxy).[170] Still, this observation cannot yet tell us how O'Donovan sees this synthesis directly informing the subjects this study investigates, though we may already be able to make a decent estimation of how it might.

In *Resurrection*'s conversation with Pannenberg, O'Donovan writes that Christianity's idea of history is not that it is insignificant, but that its significance is secured precisely by its proper limitation, its dependence on a prior reality:

> When history is made the categorical matrix for all meaning and value, it cannot then be taken seriously *as history.* A story has to be a story about something; but when everything is a story there is nothing for the story to be about … The story of what has happened in God's good providence to the good world which God made is "history" in the fullest sense. But when the world itself is itself dissolved into history… we have no history any more … only … process.[171]

This formulation, not least the 'story' language, certainly invites comparison with recent systematicians besides Pannenberg. In a probative paper delivered at a symposium on O'Donovan's reading of Scripture, Craig Bartholomew ventured a quite different formulation by Robert Jenson:

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[168] Ibid.

[169] The description of Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Though* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[170] It may be that they consider O'Donovan, when they do, to 'tend to the ploddingly exegetical' – as they say of Barthians. *Radical Orthodoxy*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 2. In the context it is unclear whether the comment refers to exegesis of Barth's texts, or of Scripture. In O'Donovan's generally impressed review of Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* (*Studies in Christian Ethics* 5:1 (1992): 80-6), he wrote that 'encounters with scriptural studies in this book are rare … There are hints that his own way of reading the Scriptures will tend to Marcionism; and occasionally we may think we glimpse a ghost of the old reactionary Catholic disdain for those who imagined that these texts can be read at all except in the liturgical performance of the Mass … The logical next step for Milbank would be to turn from apologetics to a pure theology of society, developed more fully in responsibility to Scripture and tradition' (85).

[171] *Resurrection*, 60.

> What God creates is not a timeless cosmos, which thereafter acquires a history. What God creates is a history, which is a creation, a whole, because it is brought to a completion. Just so there *is* a completion, and one that does not just start everything up again. That is, there is what theology has called an "eschaton".[172]

O'Donovan responded, affirming that creation 'cannot be thought of existing apart from history; it exists *with* history and *under* history, in a dialectic that allows neither order nor event to disappear into the other', but criticises Jenson's expression severely: 'I do not see how that can be excused from conflating moral and historical teleology, 'the good' and 'the future', precisely as … I complained that … Pannenberg did'.[173] One among a number of finely-wrought ensuing statements provides us with something like O'Donovan's definitive articulation of creation and history's relation: 'In viewing creation we see what underlies the history through which we move; in viewing God as seated in creation's throne we see the implications for creation of what has been shown us of God's rule in history'.[174]

Indeed, in *Resurrection* a similar point is made as rejoinder to Pannenberg, against what O'Donovan sees as the replacement of history with 'process': creation is *complete*, and can be defined as 'the given totality of order which forms the presupposition of historical existence'.[175] The next line offers a description of created *order*, 'that which is not negotiable within the course of history, that which neither the terrors of chance nor the ingenuity of art can overthrow'.[176] This description resonates with the traditional idea, following Aristotle and taken up as axiomatic by classical Christian theology, that 'art imitates nature' – a reversal of understanding about which arguably precipitated both epoch-making technological advance and scientific progress and incalculable damage to creaturely life and humility.[177] In a similar sense McKenny notes that for O'Donovan:

> The sharp distinction between creation as an order that demands respect and as raw material

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[172] Robert W. Jenson, 'The Great Transformation', in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), 33-42, 33. Cited in Craig Bartholomew, 'A Time for War and a Time for Peace: Old Testament Wisdom, Creation, and O'Donovan's Theological Ethics', in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Robert Song, Jonathan Chaplin, and Al Wolters (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), 91-112; O'Donovan's response 113-15. It might be a rare distinction that a moral theologian is taken with such seriousness by Old Testament scholars – admittedly, largely evangelicals, including Christopher J. H. Wright, who also draws on O'Donovan at numerous points in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004). But not exclusively: witness O'Donovan's sometime Oxford colleague John Barton's acknowledgment of indebtedness in 'Virtue in the Bible', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 12:1 (1999), 12-22, 22.

[173] 'Response to Craig Bartholomew', 114. He continues, parenthetically: 'The older Pannenberg of *Grundlagen der Ethik* makes full amends'.

[174] Ibid., 115.

[175] *Resurrection*, 61.

[176] Ibid.

[177] The kind of point made by Robert Spaemann. See e.g. 'What Does It Mean to Say that "Art Imitates Nature"?', in *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essays on Nature, God, and the Human Person*, ed. D.C. Schindler and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Spaemann is an important (acknowledged) influence upon O'Donovan, who translated *Persons: The Difference Between Someone and Something* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and whose students Guido de Graaff and James Mumford translated and edited Spaemann's *Essays in Anthropology: Variations on a Theme* (Eugene: Cascade, 2010).

> available to the human will-to-form corresponds to a broadly Aristotelian distinction between two kinds of human action: acting properly understood, which recognises generic and teleological orders as created by God and respects them as such, and making, which treats created things as unformed matter available for human fashioning.[178]

We can see that this definition underlies the commanding critique of technological modernity in *Begotten or Made?* and elsewhere. Nevertheless, phrased thus might O'Donovan not be a little too optimistic about the natural order's ability, in all its material minutiae, to resist the 'ingenuity of art'? I return to that below.

As alluded to, a conviction about creation's immovability he finds in the Psalms bolsters O'Donovan's sanguinity. He invokes it in *Resurrection* when he goes on to say that created order 'defines the scope of our freedom and the limits of our fears':

> The affirmation of the psalm, sung on the Sabbath which celebrates the completion of creation, affords a ground for human activity and human hope: "the world is established, it shall never be moved". Within such a world, in which "the Lord reigns", we are free to act and can have confidence that God will act. Because created order is given, because it is secure, we dare to be certain that God will vindicate it in history.[179]

For the tradition, divine sovereignty 'in and through the perilous contingencies of history was assured by the order which was God's primary gift in creation'.[180] But contemporary theology and piety is muddled about creation and providence: 'modern faith in "continuous creation" is merely the latest form in which forgetfulness of this dialectic between order and contingency betrays itself'.[181] Remembering the biblical trope of Sabbath rest would have kept historicism at bay: 'The sign which celebrates the completeness of creation looks forward also the fulfilment of history. Does the eschatological meaning replace, or annul, the reference to creation?'[182] Of course the answer is No. 'Historical fulfilment means our entry into a completeness which is already present in the universe'. [183] O'Donovan does, however, allow for a hint of incompleteness. If the divine work of creation can rightly be said to be complete, the divine works of 'providential government and redemption of history' cannot.[184] Nonetheless, as so often in his writing, the argument loops back around from this countersubject to the principal theme – this completion is nothing other than the 'vindication of creation from death, the manifestation of its wholeness'.[185] As before, we are enjoined to renounce historicism's idea of history as *progress*, which 'replaces the categories of good and evil with those of past and future'; a misstep closely related to 'gnostic' dualism's denial of creation's goodness and

[178] McKenny, 'Evolution, Biotechnology, and the Normative Significance of Created Order', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31:1 (2015): 15-26, 18. This article's evaluation of *Resurrection* is similar to part of chapter 2 of McKenny, *Biotechnology, Human Nature, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). I draw on that book below as well as a critical response to the essay.
[179] *Resurrection*, 61.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid. Surely God's *primary* gift in creation is the gift of existence itself.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., 62.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.

'idealism's' denial of evil's reality.[186] 'Progress', he says, is opposed to 'the Christian threefold metaphysic of a good creation, an evil fall and an end of history which negates the evil and transcends the created good'.[187]

Historicism's hubristic claim to know the direction of history is at odds with theological modesty, too, if encouraged by an element of ancient (including Christian) thought that explained history with similes of growth. Whether optimistic, pessimistic, revolutionary or conservative, historicisms 'all have in common … the confidence that history will declare its own meaning'.[188] What this loses sight of is 'the mystery of God's dealings, the inscrutability of historical events which reduced the prophet to tears', and the decisive role of *revelation*, since 'the fulfilment of history is not generated immanently from within history … to speak of "grace alone" … is to speak of a work "from outside"'.[189] Here O'Donovan makes space for consideration of the novelty inherent in God's eschatological work, in a passage worth quoting in full:

> in transforming the world that he has made, God is not merely responding to necessities intrinsic to it, but is doing something new. The transformation is in keeping with creation, but in no way dictated by it. This is what is meant by describing the Christian view of history as "eschatological" and not merely as "teleological". The destined end is not immanently present in the beginning or in the course of movement through time, but is a "higher grace" which, though it comes from the same God as the first and makes a true whole with the first as its fulfilment, nevertheless has its own integrity and distinctness as an act of divine freedom.[190]

In warding off progressivist assumptions of transformation propelled by forces immanent to history, then, O'Donovan makes one of his strongest cases for the novelty of divine action. Having to specify his dispute with historicism, he now produces greater clarity about *nature*, too. If we make the mistake of suggesting the world's destiny is 'immanently present within its natural orderings' he writes, 'it must be present universally'.[191] This cannot but reduce Christ to a mere instance of disclosure of 'tendencies that are already present in world history as a whole'.[192] There were eighteenth and nineteenth-century Christologies that realised exactly such a reduction. In *Thirty-Nine Articles*, O'Donovan commends the Reformers (and Kierkegaard as their heir) for seeing, unlike these, the implications for a theology of history of the once-for-all, eschatological character of Christ's advent and atoning sacrifice.[193] In *Resurrection* O'Donovan goes on to warn, nonetheless, that the appropriate 'distinctness' is not maintained by portraying '"saving history" so zealously that the kingdom of God ceases to be the destiny and purpose of *all* history and appears relevant only to a narrow band of special activity within it'; but neither should that 'universalism' make 'every act of providence by definition an act of salvation' as

[186] Ibid., 63. Cf. *Small Boats*, 48. For more positive invocations of progress, see *Ways*, 134, 179.
[187] *Resurrection*, 63.
[188] Ibid., 64.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., 65.
[192] Ibid.
[193] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 33, 124.

historicism is wont to do.[194] This question of historical novelty is addressed earlier in *Resurrection*, in a discussion of voluntarism that can be engaged profitably at this point. (It features in a slightly different way in the later discussion of the 'moral field', passages which I consider in chapter 3).

## VOLUNTARISM

Voluntarism, defined here as 'the attack upon kinds', can be understood sympathetically as an attempt to recognise divine freedom.[195] When pursued within Protestant theology, this attempt is usually galvanised by the judgment that this recognition was not adequately preserved in pre-Reformational moral systems. Yet, for O'Donovan voluntarism eventuates in 'theological reservations … about the linking of moral obligation to the natural generic-teleological order'.[196] These reservations accompany suspicion that a universal ethics 'ties God's will down to an eternal and necessary structure over which he has no more power to command'.[197] According to the voluntarist:

> We cannot be content to say that God has made his dispositions once and for all, so far as this world is concerned, in the creation of an order of kinds and ends, that he made these dispositions freely, and that he is at liberty to make any other world than this whenever he chooses. We must also insist on his freedom within this world to do more than merely reiterate the changeless summons of the generic order once given. And so the theological objector goes on to argue that morality must respond to the agency of God in history, and not rest solely upon the uniform structures which stand apart from history. But as soon as he says this, he appears to be committed to denying the generic character of morality; for any command or principle that changes in history thereby becomes a particular, a mere item in the history of ideas. The demand that morality must change with God's acts in history therefore puts the axe to the root of the doctrine that morality is generic.[198]

Needless to say, O'Donovan rejects voluntarism. But he does identify 'elements in this position which no theology can ignore without forfeiting its claim to be Christian'.[199] One is the maintenance of 'God's right to command particularly, to address individuals in a way not susceptible of universalisation', for instance in election, grace, and conversion, or in 'a special exercise of such divine freedom in individual vocation'.[200] Another reason to countenance voluntarism's good intentions, if not proffered resolution, is that 'Christianity is committed to the meaningfulness of history as the stage on which mankind's salvation has been wrought':

> "Salvation-history" means change and innovation; it means that God can do a "new thing". Consequently we must not proceed on the assumption of a uniform pattern of divine activity in all ages, for it is central to Christian belief that there is a difference between God's self-manifestation before and after the coming of Christ.[201]

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[194] *Resurrection*, 65-6.
[195] Ibid., 38.
[196] Ibid., 39.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid., 41.
[199] Ibid., 42.
[200] Ibid. We have already touched on it, but vocation is a reoccurring theme in O'Donovan's writing, often in conversation with the figure and works of Kierkegaard. I return to it later. Cf. *Ways*, 75, 82.
[201] *Resurrection*, 42-3.

Having acknowledged all this, however, O'Donovan settles the matter in terms that anticipate *Resurrection*'s definition of the relation of creation and history we have already seen:

> There is … an irreducible duality between the freedom of God to act particularly in history and the generic ordering of the world which is reflected in morality. For history to be meaningful history, and for God's freedom to be gracious freedom, there must also be order which is not subject to historical change. Otherwise history could only be uninterpretable movement, the denial of what has been in favour of what is to be. The fact that temporal movement is comprehensible as "history" points to the prior fact that temporal movement is not the sole manifestation of God's work. He who is unchanging … is the author, not only of change itself, but of the order which makes that change good.[202]

We need to preserve a sense of divine freedom in history, then, to safeguard particular divine commands, vocation, and salvation history itself. But to safeguard *ethics,* we will need to presume an unchanging order: 'Morality is that to which one is summoned, not particularly … but by virtue of being mankind in God's world'.[203] Our discussion of *Ethics as Theology* will return us to that claim, and its serviceableness.

## CREATION, REDEMPTION, AND 'THE INGENUITY OF ART'

I want to return, now, to the question of nature's susceptibility to the ingenuity of art, and its implications for O'Donovan's understanding of creation and redemption. What follows offers another example of the way his basic view of created order and dismissal of historicism play out. It also lays out a useful, if complicated, indication of the way the arrangement of doctrines figures moral stances, and of the challenges to doctrinal coherence which seem to derive from an ethical issue. Ultimately, it underlines the essential power and enduring value of O'Donovan's position, but only after whittling away at the exaggerated claims involved in his account of nature's normativity and factoring in more robust acknowledgements of historical alteration – acknowledgements which in *Resurrection* are fewer and feebler than they ought to be.

Recall that O'Donovan describes created order as 'that which is not negotiable within the course of history, that which neither the terrors of chance nor the ingenuity of art can overthrow'.[204] In the face of the prospect of radical *technique*, capable of altering human and non-human creatures in more than trivial ways, this description will be subject to scrutiny. If non-negotiable features of our world are equated with morally-normative features, then either the sanitary cordon around that which is morally-normative will grow tighter as more and more features of our world turn out to be humanly manipulable, or non-negotiable morally-normative features must be in fact a different kind of 'given' than strictly (biologically, say) non-negotiable features. But this first outcome is surely not what O'Donovan intends, and the second does not, at first glance, seem to be the claim he is making.

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[202] Ibid., 45.
[203] Ibid., 43.
[204] Ibid., 61.

As McKenny says, O'Donovan *does* seem to suggest that 'the immunity of human nature to determination by biotechnology' follows 'in a straightforward way from the goodness and completion of human nature as God's creation':

> If creation is both good and finished, and if its eschatological transformation occurs at the end of history and not in it, then respect for creation appears to require us to leave human nature as it is, intervening only to prevent or restore threats to it in the form of disease and injury. With regard to eschatology, this position astutely recognises that it is far from obvious that the transformation of creation for which Christians hope is continuous (or even compatible) with the transformations of human nature which biotechnology is poised to bring about. But with regard to creation, this position also seems to court the problems that attend conceptions of human nature as separable from our constructions of it and to ignore the changes human nature has undergone at the hands of unintentional human activity.[205]

On my reading of O'Donovan's eschatology this impression would be exacerbated: if the transformation hoped for is more-often-than-not understood as *continuous* with the given, non-negotiable form of created order, any significant alteration to that order (whether or not we oppose it) would seem to place strong material continuity under a question mark. It would mean eschatological restoration either against the grain of altered nature, and therefore discontinuity with creaturely reality in order to 'reset' to prior creaturely reality, *or* restoration with the grain of altered nature, and therefore discontinuity with prior creaturely reality (its Edenic form, say). Whether or not my amendment is accurate, the main point to realise is that O'Donovan's concept of created order, taken at face value, seems to fall foul of powerful criticisms of such concepts. One salient objection is that seeing nature, as *Begotten or Made?* put it, as 'a world which we have not made or imagined', that 'simply confronts us', is naïve, because it is now clear that access to nature is culturally mediated. Another more immediately *moral* objection – also salient – is that ideals of 'pure' biological nature preceding culture, in particular human nature, will always be inscribed societally in 'morally repugnant ways'.[206] We have seen, in 'The Natural Ethic', that O'Donovan is not unapprised of these dangers. But his strong sense of creation's completion, not just in the theological sense associated with a full-orbed doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, but in its moral-theological gloss which suggests imperviousness to human activity, *does* seem untenably innocent of historical change.

Yet McKenny also supplies an alternative interpretation, showing that while O'Donovan unquestionably subscribes to an understanding of creation in which it is exempt 'from temporal becoming and creaturely activity', he should be taken to posit not so much the view that 'created things themselves … are static', but rather that 'their changes and activities are intelligible only in terms of a created *order* that is itself finished and unchanging'.[207] Intelligible, in other words, in terms of that 'given totality of order' we saw postulated in *Resurrection*, 'which forms the presupposition of historical existence'.[208] The distinction McKenny makes may seem elusively fine, but he illustrates its significance for a plausible

[205] McKenny, *Biotechnology, Human Nature, and Christian Ethics*, 66.
[206] Ibid., 30.
[207] Ibid., 35. Italics mine.
[208] *Resurrection*, 61.

formulation of the normativity of nature. If read in this *second* way, we find that 'the assumption that human nature is given once for all in an initial creative act is avoided while anthropogenic changes to human nature can be accommodated', but that a rationale for opposing willful alteration can still be maintained:

> intentional determination of human biological characteristics cannot be opposed on the grounds that it violates creation as a finished work of God. It can, however, be opposed on two other grounds, namely, that it disrespects created order by virtue of the kind of action it is (which treats nature as inherently unordered and susceptible of imposition of order by human action), or that it directly violates created order by disregarding the generic and teleological relations in which things exist. It is significant that on these last two grounds normative status attaches to human nature not in itself but in relation to the created order in which it exists. On the last of the two grounds, the determination of someone's biological characteristics is morally suspect insofar as it violates the generic equality of the person whose nature is determined with the one who determines it. Normative status properly attaches to the created order as such, and within this order it attaches to human persons with respect to their generic equality and to their biological nature as constituents of their personhood. If human nature should be kept off-limits to biotechnology, it is because intentional determination of it violates the generic equality of the one whose nature is determined and not because it possesses normative status in itself.[209]

The definition of nature offered in *Begotten or Made?*, accordingly, can be refined to state that nature (in this case human nature) is 'a world which we have not *intentionally* made, but which simply confronts *our willful activity*'.[210] This captures O'Donovan's essential contention, resolves his objections to determination of children's biological characteristics in particular into a single 'indispensable' concern that the reformulation preserves: 'the principle that the biological nature of others is not at our disposal', because it would involve 'a morally problematic comportment toward them', what O'Donovan calls 'making'.[211]

I have focused attention, with the assistance of McKenny's percipient commentary, upon some ethical ramifications of O'Donovan's theological commitments. Much more could be said, but I limit myself to one further comment, intended as suggestive rather than definitive. Comparing the chapter in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* entitled 'Natural Life' with statements in *Resurrection* which speak of the 'failure to reckon with creation' might help us see further what is at issue between O'Donovan and McKenny (and others).[212] Perhaps the best way to read Bonhoeffer's chapter – whether or not it is found inharmonious with the rest of *Ethics* – is to see it as a particular deployment of part of the theological tradition in response to extreme circumstances of degradation and exploitation.[213] After all, the confusion of morality with what is *perceived* to be natural is usually the very target of Bonhoeffer's Christocentric culture-criticism. Yet here, as I have indicated already, Bonhoeffer articulates a number of convictions

[209] McKenny, *Biotechnology*, 36, 67.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid., 69, 68. Cf. 186.
[212] *Resurrection*, 16.
[213] For a recent reading of the essay, see Hans G. Ulrich, 'Understanding the *Conditio Humana*', in *Bonhoeffer and the Biosciences: An Initial Exploration*, ed. Ralf K. Wüstenberg, Stefan Heuser, and Esther Hornung (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 147-68, 155-8.

O'Donovan shares. What we read early in *Resurrection* could easily be written in 'Natural Life':

> True, man has rejected, despised and flouted this order. Human nature, as Christians believe, is flawed not only in its instances but also in its mould, so that to be human itself means that we find this order of things a problem and are rebelliously disposed towards it. And yet this order still stands over against us and makes its claims upon us. When man is least on guard against God he finds his natural ordering reasserting itself and carrying him in directions against which his self-will revolts.[214]

If Bonhoeffer's theological appeal to the natural is primarily driven by discernment of the times, then so it seems is O'Donovan's. O'Donovan's rhetorical overstatement does suggest contextually-occasioned hyperbole, but who bears the burden of proof that he has been writing moral theology in similarly extreme circumstances of nature's debasement? Technological high-modernity and its precipitation of ecological crises could be thought just that (that is the force of Northcott's employment of *Resurrection*). And it is possible to trace distressingly direct genealogical lines between overt eugenics and subtler post-Second World War bioethical legitimation of the kind O'Donovan has written about.[215] Of course, we can make equally severe contemporary judgments *and not* think we need to appeal remedially to a transhistorical and transcultural natural order in the same way. We could hold to what McKenny shows can be O'Donovan's more understated and defensible position. Or, like McKenny himself, having formulated a defensible version of O'Donovan's concern, we could also look elsewhere for other theological accounts of nature's normative status.[216] Leaving that there, we can return to evaluation of *Resurrection*'s agenda with a wider-angle lens.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing suggests that in *Resurrection* we may take O'Donovan as offering an answer to the concluding question of 'The Natural Ethic': 'If we cannot *balance* creation ethics and kingdom ethics, what *can* we do with them?'. *Resurrection*'s aim is to embrace the 'double-aspect' within the integrated whole of a 'Christian metaphysic' – thus to transcend balance. As he writes in the preface to the second edition:

> I was concerned to overcome the confrontation between advocates of "creation ethics" and of "kingdom ethics", and I claimed that, in the resurrection of Christ, where creation is restored and fulfilment promised, ethics had a foundation which embraced the partial truths of both these points of view.[217]

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[214] *Resurrection*, 16.
[215] Tracing such lines and churches' complicity in that legitimation is an achievement of Amy Laura Hall's arresting *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
[216] For a summary of why McKenny does not settle for the approach represented by O'Donovan, see *Biotechnology* 186-7.
[217] *Resurrection*, xvi.

In this last subsection, I offer my first analysis of *Resurrection*'s answer. Doing so involves investigation of passages not yet treated which show this answer most clearly, among which are two pieces of biblical commentary.

We have already seen enough to realise that *Resurrection'*s argument for the 'double-aspect' is often pursued through exegetical means. While we cannot bring in for discussion all the many passages of moral-theological commentary O'Donovan presents as corroborating his case we can appreciate that the hermeneutic is canonical and integrative.[218] Differences of emphasis among biblical texts are recognised, but his aspiration is a coherent constructive reading of Scripture. I mark this because it bears on the first passage I have in mind, at the beginning of which O'Donovan carefully notes the gospels' distinctive presentations of the resurrection's backwards looking and forwards looking implications. But he continues:

> the important thing is not which of these two aspects of the resurrection we emphasise at any moment, but that it does properly have both aspects; origin and end are inseparably united in it. The humanity of Adam is carried forward to its "supernatural" destiny precisely as it is rescued from its "sub-natural" condition of enslavement to sin and death. The vindication of that humanity in Christ's resurrection includes both its redemption and its transformation.[219]

In the following lines, he mentions the same pair of partial positions identified in 'The Natural Ethic' as 'creation' and 'kingdom' ethics, writing again that some are forced into a decision for 'kingdom' over 'creation' because of its 'radical' rather than 'conservative' appearance. What is newly stipulated here is the need to make the resurrection central to Christian ethics, which *overcomes* this confected dichotomy. 'This way of posing the alternatives is not acceptable, for the very act of God which ushers in his kingdom is the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the reaffirmation of his creation'.[220] Standalone kingdom ethics 'set up in opposition to creation could not possibly be interested in the same eschatological kingdom as … the New Testament …. At its root there would have to be a hidden dualism which interpreted the progress of history to its completion not as a fulfilment, but as a denial of its beginnings'.[221] Yet a standalone ethics of creation, 'set up in opposition to the kingdom, could not possibly be evangelical ethics, since it would fail to take note of the good news that God had acted to bring all that he had made to fulfilment'.[222] (This point, incidentally, is one Porter does not seem to have heeded as much as she might).[223] The restatement of O'Donovan's own position over-against these is familiar: 'In the resurrection of Christ creation is restored and the kingdom of God dawns'.[224] But it is

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[218] Cf. O'Donovan, 'Scripture and Christian Ethics', *Anvil* 24:1 (2007): 21-9, and 'The Moral Authority of Scripture', in *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 165-75.
[219] *Resurrection*, 57.
[220] Ibid., 15.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Hauerwas's judgment on her use of O'Donovan to the end of developing 'an account of God from creation' seems implicitly, I think, to draw this distinction between them – but it is not quite clear. See Hauerwas, 'The End is in the Beginning: Creation and Apocalyptic', in *Approaching the End: Eschatology Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 3-21, 14 n.33.
[224] *Resurrection*, 15.

followed by a revealing comment about the variegated way the two aspects can be drawn upon: 'Ethics which starts from this point may sometimes emphasise the newness, sometimes the primitiveness of the order that is there affirmed. But it will not be tempted to overthrow or deny either in the name of the other'.[225]

Yet O'Donovan seems again to expend more energy on the dangers of kingdom ethics than creation ethics. Note the sentences which immediately follow *Resurrection*'s earliest affirmation of a 'world-transcending aspect, in which we are to seek the things that are above'.[226] First he details, cursorily, moral impulses thought to derive from it: eschatological 'aspects, of abnegation and transcendence in personal ethics, of criticism and revolution in social ethics'.[227] He then regulates them firmly by prioritising the objective first aspect: they 'are prevented from becoming negative and destructive by the fact that they are interpreted from the centre, the confirmation of the world-order which God has made'.[228] Given this habit of introducing eschatological themes and their ethical corollaries with caveats hedged all around, a reader expecting to find balance between the aspects would again be disappointed.

He does indisputably intend that balance, however. A few pages later we are returned to the central theses of 'The Natural Ethic', now with the resurrection well-defined as their lynchpin:

> Creation and redemption each has its ontological and its epistemological aspect. There is the created order and there is natural knowledge; there is the new creation and there is revelation in Christ. This has encouraged a confusion of the ontological and the epistemological in much modern theology, so that we are constantly presented with the unacceptably polarised choice between an ethic that is revealed and has no ontological grounding and an ethic that is basedon creation and so is naturally known. This polarisation deprives redemption and revelation of their proper theological meaning as the divine reaffirmation of created order. If, on the other hand, it is the gospel of the resurrection that assures us of the stability and permanence of the world which God has made, then neither of the polarised options is right.[229]

What is at first sight a neat passage without loose ends becomes slightly puzzling on reflection. The first sentence's parallel and complementary logic places creation's ontological and epistemological aspects alongside redemption's. But it seems to break down. Based on the logic within these few sentences alone, 'an ethic that is revealed' would seem to have as its ontological grounding 'new creation', just as 'an ethic that is based on creation' would seem have its ontological grounding in 'the created order'. Yet when two polarised options are ranged against one another we find 'an ethic that is based on creation and so is naturally known', and

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[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid., 14.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid. These aspects are prominent in Moltmann, Schuurman's critique of whom turns on the same point O'Donovan makes here. Schuurman expands upon his teacher Gustafson's worries about Moltmann in terms of the subordination of creation to eschatology, the lack of distinction between creation and sin, and the lack of practicable ethical direction.
[229] Ibid., 19-20. Bartholomew quotes this passage in order to provide contemporary support for Bavinck's view of grace's restoration of nature, which he notes is more eschatological than Kuyper's. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), 68. Still, given what looks to be Bartholomew's reliance on Wolters' account of nature and grace, I have my doubts these worries about O'Donovan's presentation would be alleviated there.

'an ethic that is revealed *and has no ontological grounding*'. Somehow, redemption's ontological aspect, described in the second sentence as 'new creation', has gone missing. Or at least – and I suggest this is the case – has transmuted into something else by the time O'Donovan comes to give his own presentation in the final sentence.

It might be that O'Donovan cannot in fact conceive of 'new creation' as denoting any ontological weight, so discounts it, despite the place he finds it in the formal parallels of the first sentence. He evidently sees nothing substantial, ontologically, in the moral vision of those who promote 'an ethic that is revealed'. More likely is that new creation, the ontological aspect of redemption which corresponds to revelation as its epistemological aspect, is by the final sentence the self-same reality as the ontological aspect of creation. That is, *created order*. To draw the equation more straightforwardly: the revelation and reality of new creation *is* 'the reaffirmation of created order'; new creation *is* created order. The double-aspect appears a lot like a single principle at this point. To a critical eye that may in the end amount to not being able to imagine the ontological weight of eschatology. O'Donovan's intention to outline a unified ethic is seen here in its conflationary force rather than its promise. Of course he would reply that there *could* be no other reality than this one; a Christian metaphysic does not admit two planes of reality existing together. However significant it is for him, an 'inaugurated' eschatology does not mean so much a sense of the even-now co-existing realities of two aeons, say, so much as the 'the whole order of things created', *already* 'restored', *to be* 'transformed'.

The danger of polarised ethics is real and the outcome irrefutably damaging. Yet the cost O'Donovan incurs in taking precaution against it is too high. It *cannot* be enough to describe revelation and redemption's 'proper theological meaning as the divine reaffirmation of created order'. One would not want to say less than that, perhaps, but Christian eschatology is improperly bounded by the reductionism involved in such a claim. Perhaps, at a stretch – if heavily invested in a 'natural ethic' – one could say more exactly that the core of redemption and revelation's proper *moral* meaning is 'the divine reaffirmation of created order'. But the moral entailments of the gospel's depiction of the resurrection still seem restrained if its role is essentially assurance 'of the stability and permanence of the world which God has made'. That may be a plausible, even attractive, moral-theological inference based on a perceived need to make sense of the structures of the world around us as authoritative for our conduct (quite literally, to make a virtue of necessity). Yet, unless this moral-theological instinct for the 'natural ethic' is *also* most basic to apostolic teaching, the ethicist's desire for stability and permanence *alone* seems unlikely to prove adequate presupposition for veracious reception of scriptural witness to the works of grace.

Both the plausibility and limitation of O'Donovan's interpretation of the double-aspect can be seen in *Resurrection*'s two set-piece interpretations of the First Epistle of Peter.[230] Here is the first:

[230] As we will see, a third instance of exegetical comment on these verses occurs in *Desire.*

> We are driven to concentrate on the resurrection as our starting point because it tells us of God's vindication of his creation, and so of our created life. Just so does 1 Peter, the most consistently theological New Testament treatise on ethics, begin by proclaiming the reality of the new life upon which the very possibility of ethics depends: "By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:3).[231]

If my anxieties about the adequacy of O'Donovan's treatment of eschatology so far have been at all comprehensible I hope it will strike the reader that these sentences' pre-emptive gloss hangs together a little awkwardly with the biblical quotation. At best it implies an over-generous amount of canonical inference about creation's vindication. That inference is not totally illegitimate, and the problem is *not* as such that O'Donovan is engaging in avowedly theological interpretation (*contra* Richard Burridge, who criticises O'Donovan in a crass way on this score).[232] But *Resurrection*'s interest in created order dictates the manner in which it is made, marginalising any interest in 'the reality of the new life' on its own terms. O'Donovan would no doubt say that 'new life' must in a real sense be 'created life' – what else could life be? And that the 'new world of his resurrection' must in a real sense be the vindicated order of creation. I do not doubt that the steps by which he gets from 'born anew … through the resurrection of Jesus Christ' to 'God's vindication of his creation, and so of our created life' have been thought through. Yet here the terminus of that process of anti-'gnostic' reasoning is presented as self-evident interpretation of the text, which does not seem to bear a plain sense meaning of creation's vindication. The sense that we must be '*born anew* to a living hope' appears to recede.

Let us consider *Resurrection*'s second treatment of the Epistle:

> So it is that Christian ethics, too, looks both backwards and forwards, to the origin and to the end of the created order. It respects the natural structures of life in the world, while looking forward to their transformation. This can be seen, for example, in the First Epistle of Peter, which starts with a general characterisation of the Christian life in terms of "hope", which is set "fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ", and then elaborates a special ethics in terms of respectful submission "for the Lord's sake" to every institution of human life, especially the institutions of government, labour and marriage (1 Pet. 1:13; 2:13ff). There is no conflict here between what might be thought of as the "radical" character of the general outlook and the "conservatism" of the specific counsel. A hope which envisages the transformation of existing natural structures cannot consistently attack or repudiate those structures. Yet the "conservatism" (if it is proper to use the word) includes a sense of distance, which springs from a sharp awareness of how much the institutions need redemption and how transitory is their present form.[233]

If one wants to offer some riposte to the line of analysis I have pursued, this is the place to turn. Because less compressed it allows fuller expression of the range of that particular epistle's

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[231] *Resurrection*, 13.

[232] Burridge sweepingly dismisses the 'overall worldview approach' of O'Donovan and Banner. It is, apparently, necessarily 'a long way from the actual text of the Bible and is in danger of imposing a doctrinal or theological framework on the text … the text could just be a convenient peg from which to hang the argument, which is really driven by dogmatics and systematic theology'. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 383-4.

[233] *Resurrection*, 58.

theological vision than the concertinaed earlier instance. It also shows how that fuller expression is still in service of a thoroughly *unified* moral outlook. The unifying sensibility is worthwhile, but exactly what pressed in too soon in the first example. It is hard not to think that it sometimes issues in such pre-emptive strikes upon *schwärmerisch* antinomian ethical invocations of the kingdom that eschatology's import itself takes the hit. Where in O'Donovan's ethics do we find an exposition of that 'sense of distance' from 'present form' that is as thorough as his steady exposition of 'existing natural structures'?

I stress *ethics* because it is intriguing at first blush to read, in *Small Boats*, this homiletic comment referring to the same verse:

> The presence of the risen Lord and the new world of his resurrection catch us out, surprise us, find us unready, looking the other way … Why is the resurrection difficult to see? Because it is more than the world to which our perceptions are fashioned, within which we have learned to live and to observe.[234]

If I understand the gist of O'Donovan's thought, 'the world to which our perceptions are fashioned, within which we have learned to live and to observe' is the socio-cultural overlay of assumptions about the way things are which figures our lived experience – simulacra which prevent our apprehension of 'the world' in its truer, objective sense. In *Resurrection*'s terms, it is the 'present form' from which we need to achieve 'a sense of distance'.[235] I will return to this distinction of worlds a few times. But if the inferences are, in the end, substantially similar, it does seem to me that these sermons afford the opportunity to see O'Donovan meditating upon passages with unavoidably eschatological themes less guardedly than he might in his ethics. Still, that does not affect our question: where do we find exposition of that 'sense of distance' – that stance against the world which is the prerequisite of a life lived truly for it? Indeed, that motivates the analysis in our remaining chapters, and is an appropriate sentiment with which to conclude these first incursions into *Resurrection*.

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[234] *Small Boats*, 35.

[235] The same entity, then, the true self-understanding of which is in a sense contingent on the witness of the church – Hauerwas's well-known point. Bernd Wannenwetsch's development of Hauerwas's claim is worth considering. He writes, for example, of the way worship gives birth to 'the world': 'First, the world becomes the totality of created beings and their activity which do not praise the Creator. But this first becoming of the world, which is really negative, is the pre-condition for a second, salutary, and in the real sense political becoming'. That is, when the world learns to see itself as *saeculum.* Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 249.

# 3.

# Contour:
# *Resurrection and Moral Order*, a second look

## INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2 I examined *Resurrection*'s foundations in detail, describing and analysing the role eschatology does and *does not* play in them. This chapter ranges more freely and a little less forensically, exploring eschatology's part in a number of themes key to the book's unfolding argument. I address elements of what Part Two of the book calls 'The subjective reality' of ethics – freedom, love, and authority, knowledge and sin – and elements of what Part Three calls 'The form of the moral life' – conversion and character, and the form of obedience in light of cross and resurrection. Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to think that these topics take us much away from 'The objective reality' of Part One. In fact, O'Donovan's explanation of each is determined by the particular interplay between objectivity and subjectivity. I argue that the same interplay is further apparent in *Resurrection*'s discussions of the relation between divine command and the order of creation, between natural stability and historical novelty, and between christology and pneumatology.

It will be no surprise that I consider O'Donovan's acknowledgments of sin's impingement upon knowledge attenuated, and, partly for that reason, his account of the authority of worldly order unqualified. Not unrelatedly, I suspect a certain devaluation of the cross's moral import, an inability to reckon fully with eschatological newness, and an undue restraint in pneumatology. The kingdom and the Spirit, though, find ampler witness – without any detriment to creation or christology – in *Resurrection*'s doctrine of the Church. I explore it here, and also relay the essential insights of the book's final two chapters, on the moral life's 'double aspect' and its 'end', which approach eschatology most directly. Yet even there I find the account inhibited by familiar reticence, seen most clearly in O'Donovan's faltering mentions of hope. Before we get to that point, though, there is much material to cover, and having summarised where this chapter will go we can now dive into its first themes.

## FREEDOM, LOVE, AUTHORITY

I have shown how *Resurrection's* basic moves grounded the ethic in an account of created order and its moral normativity. Eschatology was not absent as such, but largely signified that order's decisive vindication. Moreover, any mention of eschatological renewal or transformation beyond this vindication might have seemed largely irrelevant for morality. Indeed, part of the case I am making is that *in the final instance* O'Donovan does provide an approach to moral

reasoning in which these aspects of eschatology appear worrisomely immaterial. But there are segments of his argument which they *do* begin to inform materially. Freedom is one.

O'Donovan is aware that the resurrection, 'viewed in isolation, might appear to be two removes away from ethics'.[1] After all, 'it is the promise, but not the fulfilment, of a world-redemption yet to be completed; the order there renewed and vindicated in principle still awaits its universal manifestation'.[2] That vindication can seem to be of 'a renewed order of things apart from myself'.[3] Not so, however. 'There is a transition from the objective to the subjective mode. In that transition, marked by mention of the believer's "freedom", the eschatologically awaited world-redemption has an anticipated reality already present'.[4] Here, significantly, we learn that an answer to the question of eschatology and ethics must be thoroughly *pneumatological*. As O'Donovan writes, in a sub-section on 'The Spirit and Christian freedom':

> The evangelical character of Christian morality appears in its relation to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. But even so it does not appear fully until we add a word which, had we been following Saint Paul directly, we should have placed first. From the resurrection we look not only back to the created order which is vindicated, but forwards to our eschatological participation in that order. Of that final enjoyment we have a present anticipation through the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit.[5]

As our present anticipation, this gift 'means that the renewal of the universe touches me at the point where I am a moral agent'.[6] Following the Reformers, this means liberation from 'the bondage of the will': 'the removal of psychological barriers which prevent us from responding to the challenge of God's will'.[7]

If we are tempted to think that this transition of modes means that the prior commitments fade into the background, the reminder is swift that they do not. It is never enough to have 'an ethic of the Spirit alone': many 'revival' movements became terribly legalistic because they emphasised 'the inward moral power of the Holy Spirit unchristologically'.[8] A bit drastically – though it is not irrelevant – O'Donovan mentions Montanism here, a favourite historical illustration of doctrinal distortion and moral decay that features repeatedly in his more polemical passages.[9] With Joachimism, Montanism is used to similar effect in *Thirty-Nine Articles* and *Church in Crisis*.[10] I will return to the second example below, reflecting on the contextual discernments animating O'Donovan approach to pneumatology. But his consistent argument is that we need a Christological determination in any discussion of liberty;

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[1] *Resurrection*, 22.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 23. In the terms of Reformed divinity, I suppose, something like an *historia salutis* unconnected from an *ordo salutis.*
[4] Ibid., 23.
[5] Ibid., 22.
[6] Ibid., 23.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 24.
[9] Manichaeism and Gnosticism, as we have seen, are other well-played tunes in his repertory of cautionary tales. Compare the equally drastic suggestion of H. Richard Niebuhr that these are always developing at the edge of the radicalism represented in the 'Christ against culture' mentality, which cuts itself off from nature. *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 79-81.
[10] *Thirty-Nine Articles,* 45, 124.

specifically, that 'we must characterise Christian freedom as participation in Christ's authority within the created order'.[11] That order was not 'ever anything other than what God made it', and, because of that, 'in the redemption of the world I, and every other "I", yield myself to God's order and freely take my place within it'.[12] In freely taking our place within that order there really is 'by the Holy Spirit … the possibility of creative discernment, "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), since the second Adam has restored the first's 'lordship'.[13] We ourselves assume a recovered authority, then, 'yet this characterisation of freedom, too, is inadequate':

> indeed, it is perilously misleading – if it is left to stand on its own. For it may be taken to mean that the Holy Spirit, in conferring such authority upon man, has, as it were, withdrawn authority from the rest of the natural order which confronts man, and has left him to make what he will of it … But creative freedom conceived in this way can only break down into mere improvisation, dominion become domination … How can creativity function with its eyes closed upon the universe?[14]

So how *can* we speak properly of freedom, clear-eyed and thoroughly this-worldly?

It is *love* which delivers the integration of subjective and objective in an account of evangelical freedom; 'the form of the human participation in created order', it is thereby 'the overall shape of Christian ethics'.[15] Love is the Spirit's work, shaping '*the appropriate pattern of free response to objective reality*', a creativity achieved 'by being perceptive' – much like Adam's task of naming – rather than by manipulation.[16] Following 'classical Christian descriptions' love can be further expounded by two terms: wisdom, 'which is the intellectual apprehension of the order of things which discloses how each being stands in relation to each other', and delight, 'which is affective attention to something simply for *what* it is and for the fact *that* it is'.[17] These specific terms of wisdom and delight in relation to the given order resonate strongly with David Kelsey's treatment of fitting creaturely disposition and action in response to God's creative work – a useful comparison I return to. More important to observe here is that the understanding of love *Resurrection* promotes has its roots in O'Donovan's interpretation of Augustine, and the fruits of Augustine's 'search for an "ordered" love in which the subject was neither victim nor master'.[18]

Central to that inquiry is O'Donovan's creation-oriented reading of the notion of an *ordo amoris*, in which love's order 'is given by its comprehending conformity to the order of reality … Love accepts and does not impose its ordering'.[19] As he writes in *Resurrection*: 'The real world authorises man's agency'.[20] On this understanding, we might say, responsibility is not

[11] *Resurrection*, 24.
[12] Ibid., 25, 23.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid,. 25, 26.
[17] Ibid., 26. Cf. 'Evangelicalism and the Foundations of Ethics'.
[18] *Self-Love*, 18.
[19] Ibid., 31. Cf. 64; 'Augustinian Ethics', 47; *Common Objects*, especially chapter 1.
[20] *Resurrection*, 120.

inaugurated in the spontaneity of the first person (Kant), nor in the communal answerability of the third person (Aristotle), rather established in the authoritative alterity of something like the second person – not, though, the interpersonal other of a Levinasian ethic, but the claims of the natural order.[21] Just so, a core claim across much of O'Donovan's work is that 'authority is the objective correlate of freedom'.[22] His aim, then, is not exactly to find 'a middle ground between authority and liberty', as has been thought Anglican moral theology's particular *via media*,[23] nor even quite to specify the 'essential complementarity' of their demands – another description of the Anglican attempt[24] – but rather to assert their inner connection.[25]

Yet his definition of authority's relation to reality as currently configured is not entirely undialectical. It has two facets: one critical, in which unreality is exposed and judged, and one constructive, in which 'a new and truer structure for existence' is called into being.[26] Though it is, crucially, a single work of the Spirit, this double effect can be said (ambitiously) to correspond to a range of contrasting pairs within 'Christian moral thought: reflexive and … directive conscience … deontic and teleological ethics … reason and will … repentance and moral learning … justification and sanctification … conversion and instruction'.[27] It also corresponds to Christ's death and resurrection, showing something of the opposition of the two, which should not be 'collapsed': 'A moral authority which does not both judge and recreate is not the authority of Christ, but a purely natural authority, to follow which is to be conformed to the world'.[28]

To understand O'Donovan correctly it is again important to see that what he means here by 'conformity to the world' is conformity to the 'apparent structure of order which is presented within the world': the kind of naturalism he earlier distinguished from his own natural ethic.[29] For his own ethic does very much recommend conformity to the authority of the world, the

[21] Applying and extending, here, the terms of analysis used in Gerald P. McKenny, 'Responsibility', in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, 237-53.
[22] Ibid., 122. Cf. *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 98, *Ways,* 68, 'What Can Ethics Know About God?', 33, 40. For perceptive reconstruction of these themes see Austin, *Up With Authority: Why We Need Authority to Flourish as Human Beings* (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 74-91. O'Donovan's understanding of authority develops, as is well noted by Errington and Austin.
[23] Paul Elmen, 'Anglican Morality', in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 364-78, 364.
[24] A. J. Joyce, *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6, paraphrasing the view of Henry McAdoo. Cf. David H. Smith, 'Kenneth Kirk's *The Vision of God*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, 449-65, 450.
[25] Among contemporary Christian ethicists, O'Donovan's basic instinct here is perhaps closest to one shared by that strand of Catholic moral theologians I mentioned earlier. Compare Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 354-78; Livio Melina, *Sharing in Christ's Virtues: For a Renewal of Moral Theology in Light of* Veritatis Splendor, trans. William E. May (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 61-5.
[26] *Resurrection*, 104. For detailed consideration of 'Authority and Reality in the Work of Oliver O'Donovan' stretching from *Resurrection* to *Finding and Seeking*, see Errington's article of that title. (*Studies in Christian Ethics* 29:4 (2016): 371-85).
[27] *Resurrection*, 104.
[28] Ibid., 105.
[29] Ibid., 104.

'real' world behind that which is judged. If this real world is 'recreated', then he intends by that nothing more than that it is restored:

> God's authority, located as it is in a man's life and in his victory over death, may oppose the natural authorities in their rebellion and disorderliness, but is not opposed to the created order as such. It does not override our obligation to the truth in a "teleological suspension of the ethical" such as Kierkegaard described, though it may criticise our perceptions of it. It promises to vindicate the authority of creation.[30]

What this means for eschatology's import is that the kingdom is not 'purely transcendent', rather imposes 'true order upon our worldly obligations'.[31] Under it 'we can discover a positive ethic for life in the world', he writes, returning to a familiar refrain:

> We should not … be tempted to set Jesus' "radical" ethic of the kingdom against the practical this-worldliness of the apostolic churches, as we see it, for example, in the so-called Household Codes of the epistles … The moment of divine irruption is more than an irruption: it is the foundation of a renewed order.[32]

Though the book typically leans on the resurrection to make these claims, O'Donovan's conviction about divine authority's this-worldliness is inferred from the incarnation. Of course, the resurrection presupposes the incarnation – we should assume a strong claim about its moral implications is made whenever we read one about the resurrection. But in defending the place of this sense of worldly obligation in the moral life, he will at times write of 'the foundation of Christian ethics in the incarnation':

> Since the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, transcendent divine authority has presented itself as worldly moral authority. It comes to us not as a *mysterium tremendum* which simply destroys all worldly order, but as creation restored and renewed, to which God is immediately present in the person of the Son of man. The teaching and life of Jesus must be *morally* authoritative if we are not to be thrown back upon the gnostic gospel of a visitor from heaven who summons us out of the world. We cannot regard the divine command, in Helmut Thielicke's distressing phrase, as "extraplanetary material". For though the redemption of the world had to be wrought from outside it by God's gracious intervention, it had still to be the redemption of the world. The meaning of Jesus' life and teaching must be a worldly meaning, a reality of human existence which can command our lives in the world and reorder them in the restored creation.[33]

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[30] Ibid., 142. Though beyond this study's remit, closer examination of O'Donovan's reading of Kierkegaard would get to the heart of some contemporary discussions in more theologically-conversant moral philosophy. I suspect O'Donovan is not always quite fair to the Dane. See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), for a compelling reading – though, to be clear, one which *does not* base its case on *Fear and Trembling*, the work O'Donovan alludes to here.

[31] *Resurrection*, 142.

[32] Ibid., 142, 143.

[33] *Resurrection*, 142, 143. The best indication of the centrality of the incarnation to *Resurrection*'s argument is actually seen *outside* O'Donovan's work, in Brent Waters', who over an entire career has deployed *Resurrection*'s theology and ethics largely by foregrounding it. For his direct appeal to the book, see a long list besides *The Family*, where summary of *Resurrection*'s argument is the book's principal 'Theological Theme': 'The Incarnation and the Christian Moral Life', in *Christology and Ethics*, ed. Brent Waters and F. LeRon Shults (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 5-31; *Reproductive Technology*, 34-7; 'What Is Christian About Christian Bioethics', *Christian Bioethics* 11:3 (2005): 281-95, 289-91; *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), part 5 'An Alternative Theological Framework'; *This Mortal Flesh: Incarnation and Bioethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 124-30, 160; 'Christian Ethics and Human Germ Line Genetic Modification', *Christian Bioethics* 18:2 (2012): 171-86, 174-5; and *Christian Moral*

*Resurrection*'s account of Christ's authority, then, centres on his identity as the One in whom 'we meet the moral order itself revealed as incarnate'.[34]

The engagement with Thielicke sheds further light. To O'Donovan's ears, he seems to be propounding an incipiently gnostic gospel which 'sounds troublingly like a gospel of deliverance from the world rather than of it'.[35] Nonetheless, he recognises that Thielicke gives 'eschatological categories … impressive existential immediacy', and alleviates the 'gnostic leaning' by maintaining that 'the new aeon, too, is "the world" in its renewed state'.[36] Ultimately, however, the law-and-gospel schema fails to deliver: 'since the new aeon can assume no form in this aeon except the formless form of protest, we are left, in effect, to be guided by the emergency orders'.[37] In other words, our form of life is not governed by the gospel, but by making-do with law. This cannot satisfy O'Donovan, who wants a genuinely 'evangelical' worldiness, in which the gospel's normative force is felt. It is not 'that life in Christ can break out of its ambiguities and incompleteness before the parousia, but that life in Christ must not be denied its own … (but with safeguards) law'.[38]

Wherever it appears, O'Donovan's dissatisfaction with Lutheran ethics ramifies from disagreement over this question.[39] In a way, I think O'Donovan sees in law-and-gospel the worst of what he sees in 'creation ethics' *and* 'kingdom ethics'. Law-and-gospel approaches cannot make sense of any ordered moral demand as *positive*, he says, because they envisage 'the liberating activity of God' simply as transcendent.[40] Normative Christian ethics is returned to 'something unevangelical', concerned with the 'purely provisional and transitory significance' of order, 'even the order of creation'.[41] His response to these Lutherans is exactly about finding a positive moral role for eschatology in the *current* order:

> Jesus' moral authority is evangelical in the fullest sense, since the moral order which he proclaims is the kingdom of God, the theme of his message of salvation. It is a moral order in which the arbitrariness of sinful man's relation to God's purposes has been overcome and done away with. When Saint Matthew introduces Jesus' teaching with the programmatic summary, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17), he shows quite clearly how the moral challenge belongs with the eschatological message.[42]

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*Theology in the Emerging Technoculture: From Posthuman Back to Human* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). The construct 'vindication' is central to each of these, too.

[34] *Resurrection*, 147.

[35] Ibid., 145. A similar judgment on much twentieth century Lutheranism characterises the work of theologians like David S. Yeago and Reinhard Hütter (the latter of whom, with others like Bruce D. Marshall, is numbered among a number of high-profile ex-Lutherans, now Roman Catholic). See e.g. Yeago, 'Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology', *Pro Ecclesia* 2:1 (1993): 37-49; Hütter, *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), esp. part II.

[36] *Resurrection*, 145.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Reiterated in the interaction with Martin Honecker in *Resurrection*'s preface.

[40] Ibid., 153.

[41] Ibid., 153-4. This extends to the realm of political theology and ethics. See chapter 4.

[42] Ibid., 155.

Though I have already expressed misgivings about the success of the endeavour, *Resurrection* does attempt to weave the starkly eschatological biblical depiction of Jesus' proclamation and identity into the warp and weft of a philosophically-realist ethic based on a – *the* – moral order. Unlike some Catholic and (historically) Anglican natural lawyers, or some law-and-gospel Lutherans, O'Donovan does not mean to consign the kingdom to an interior spiritual realm if by that it is meant any not-yet-ethical sphere.[43]

For him, any reality we are given to know by Christian teaching (be that God's works of creation and redemption, or God's kingdom) must be taken to constitute the order of things that is morally normative. Or, to put it more precisely: it must be understood to *constitute* that order in the case of creation, and to be *articulated in reference to* that order, straightforwardly in the case of redemption, and more complexly with kingdom. If O'Donovan's construal of gospel and law – to which Barthians can assent – is surely correct, then the way it interlocks with creation and eschatology in *Resurrection* makes us wonder what exactly 'the kingdom of God' signifies in terms of reality.[44] Here, it is 'the moral order' which 'Jesus … proclaims'. And we know that *Resurrection* portrays *one* moral order, heretofore and hereafter understood as that which is created and restored in the resurrection. How exactly, then, does the kingdom of God form that order? Does it contribute anything distinctive? Perhaps the 'kingdom of God' and its 'eschatological message' mentioned here are coterminous with creation's vindication and its proclamation, respectively. O'Donovan's stated understanding of the way divine authority both judges and recreates therefore seems less than dialectical in practice.

In sum, *Resurrection*'s attempt to work through both 'the subjective and the objective aspects of salvation' in terms of morality is intentionally disproportionate. Topics O'Donovan understands to belong to the subjective mode are never without reference to an objective baseline which can itself be outlined in more isolation.[45] Evident worries about subjectivism and enthusiasm result in constant reiterations of ethics' objectivity, and these are usually salutary. Yet while he is able to expatiate upon themes like freedom and love with real insight, these anxieties sometimes impede the account's ability to reflect as well as it might on a number of dogmatic *loci* and related moral-theological implications. In the next section, I identify one as

[43] Cf. earlier comments on Joachim Jeremias, whose 'anti-prescriptivist stance' to the commands of Jesus is dictated by convictions about '"Gospel and Law"'. 'Towards an Interpretation of Biblical Ethics', *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976): 54-78, 70. In 'How Can Theology Be Moral?', we find similar criticism of Luther and comments on the Reformed tradition, which 'tried to speak … more positively … about the ethical content of the Christian life', pioneering 'the work of Protestant moral theology', but itself did not relate 'this concern to soteriology' satisfactorily. Calvin's third use of the law 'still justified Christian ethics in terms of Paul's law-Gospel dichotomy, as a burden and a discipline' (90-1). That may sometimes be so, but would *not* be the case with the account of the *usus didacticus* as 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:2) which Calvin and the Reformed tradition also expound. See Paul T. Nimmo, 'The Law of God and Christian Ethics', in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 291-310. And consider Aquinas's antecedent treatment of 'the New Law', 'the Law of the Gospel' (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 106-8). Cf. Pamela M. Hall, 'The Old Law and the New Law', in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 194-206.

[44] *Resurrection*, 154-5.

[45] Ibid.

the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and demonstrate the impact this has on O'Donovan's understanding of the moral significance of eschatology.

## PNEUMATOLOGY AND CHRISTOLOGY

If we have steadily observed the particular Christological determination of O'Donovan's thought, we saw how the Holy Spirit begins to figure, in the discussions of freedom, love, and authority. But my concern about *Resurrection*'s handling of pneumatology arises, among other places, exactly in its account of Christ's authority, which seems sometimes to constrain recognition of the Spirit's role. We read that God the Father, 'not the Holy Spirit', conferred authority upon Christ 'when God raised Jesus from the dead'.[46] I agree that the vindication of Jesus' authority is accomplished in the resurrection – and perhaps in some sense we have carefully to specify, the conferral of authority too (Rom. 1:4). But to state like this that it is achieved without the Spirit's work is mistaken (compare again, perhaps, Rom. 1:4). It is also to skip over or elide significant moments earlier: one thinks of the Father's spoken conferral in Jesus's baptism, in which the Spirit does not simply effect the viewer's faith but the conferral itself, or Jesus's own self-recognition of vocation in the synagogue ('the Spirit of the Lord is upon me … ').[47] There are paradigmatic examples of Spirit-given recognition of Christ's authority before the resurrection, too.[48] And to state that the resurrection confers authority upon Christ *without* the agency of the Spirit is to appropriate the indivisible external works of the undivided Trinity to persons in a way that divides rather than distinguishes. A divine work *ad extra* may be attributed to the Father (or the Son or Spirit) eminently but not exclusively.

This misstep, like some others we will consider below, seems a little strange given that O'Donovan absolutely *does* seek a constructive understanding of the work of the Spirit in the divine economy, and the ethical entailments. And he aims to do so specifically in regard to authority. Before Easter, he admitted earlier, there may have been doubt that the created order was good; now he admits that before *Pentecost* there may still be doubt that the restoration of that order in Christ is good news *for us*. 'Even a realist understanding of the redeemed world-order can be arbitrary if it is not related to the existential situation of the agent'.[49] Apostolic proclamation of Spirit does just this, speaking 'of God at work within us, applying and confirming God's act in Christ for us', showing that 'the redeemed creation does not merely confront us moral agents, but includes us and enables us to participate in it'.[50]

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[46] Ibid., 140.
[47] On Christ's baptism, see Mt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:9-11, Lk. 3:21-23. On Christ's self-recognition, Lk. 4:18. We should not forget the transfiguration, either (Mt. 17:1-9, Mk. 9: 2-8, Lk. 9:28-36 [cf. *Resurrection*, 150], 2 Pet. 1:16-18).
[48] Consider the synoptics' accounts of the people's amazement at one who taught 'with real authority' (Mt. 7:29; Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32), and, in the Johannine account of the wedding at Cana, Mary's bold recognition of Jesus' authority, which if we were so inclined could be just so participation in authority's conferral (Jn. 2).
[49] *Resurrection*, 151.
[50] Ibid., 101.

The distinction between the act of God in Christ for us and the work of God in Spirit within us is the strict theo-logic governing *Resurrection*'s use of 'the words "objective" and "subjective".[51] I am particularly interested in this because the neatness of the appropriative distinction shapes a number of passages in Part Two which portray the Spirit's work in terms of ethics, and in so doing often start to entertain eschatology's import.

> When we say that the Spirit makes the reality of what God has done in Jesus "authoritative to us", we are speaking not of how the authority of Christ comes to *be*, but of how, originating apart from us, it comes to *claim* us, of how we "enter" the kingdom of heaven. The work of the Spirit, who does not speak "from himself", is to bear witness to the kingdom, making its reality present to us as he elicits our faith, and making its authority bear upon us as he elicits our free obedience.[52]

O'Donovan elucidations of the Spirit's work in creaturely life, then, anchor it in christology, countermanding any drift towards understanding that work in abstraction from Christ's. The lines which follow those just quoted are a small-print excursus on the Holy Spirit's ministry which detail this theo-logic very tightly:

> In Jesus all truth, the truth of world-order and the truth of world-history, is summed up. The Spirit is not given to create the new reality, since in the exaltation of the Christ the new reality has been given its decisive form; but he is given to bring that new reality to bear upon the old, to "speak what he hears" (i.e. the Father's decree concerning the Son) and to "declare what is to come" (i.e. the universal manifestation of the kingdom of God at the fulfilment of history). Thus he is to "glorify" Jesus, which is not to usurp the Father's prerogative in exalting him, but to give what the Father has done a universal resonance in the praise offered by a redeemed and obedient creation … To speak of a divine authority after the resurrection of Christ is to speak of the authority of the exalted Christ. There is nothing left to say, no codicil or postscript in which the Spirit might address us with a divine claim that did not refer us to Christ's rule.[53]

More doctrinal passages of *Thirty-Nine Articles* convey much the same understanding: 'What God does for the individual believer … is not a new and different work, a further "making righteous", but an application of the one complete work, a "counting" of this believer into the righteous Kingdom already established …'.[54] Most pithily: 'Pentecost is not *added* to the sequence, Christmas, Easter, Ascension, as a further and additional moment of divine revelation, but rather stands apart from them, casting light back on them and interpreting them'.[55] A Pentecost sermon from around the same time strikes a similar note: 'The Spirit, as Christ's Spirit, initiates us into the whole of Christ's life, and especially into his death and resurrection': 'The gift of the Spirit is, first and foremost, the gift of recapitulating Christ's way … He is the radical novelty, the new thing God has done. All things are made new *in him*. The Spirit is the Recapitulator, who makes the achieved work of Christ present in every age. In recapitulation is our newness'.[56]

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 140.
[53] Ibid.
[54] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 79.
[55] Ibid., 45.
[56] *Small Boats*, 48. (Sermon from 1988).

Many of these sentiments are sound enough, but there is an obvious pattern worth noticing, in which O'Donovan much more frequently reminds us to connect talk of the Spirit in ethics to talk of Christ, than vice versa. Christological aspects, like aspects of creation and objectivity, are dilated upon freely – though each is in theory not to be left unsupplemented, and though together they are incomplete as an account of the moral life, as the book's structure suggests. Yet pneumatological themes, like themes of the kingdom and subjectivity, are allowed no such unhurried treatment before we are returned to the main subjects.[57] Why is that the case – and is there anything objectionable in it?

His pneumatological restraint has a theological commitment behind it, which I think is likely reinforced by judgments of circumstance. The dangers associated with enthusiasm seem to crowd in quickly, determining the account of freedom to a greater extent than any worries about naturalism, for example, determined the account of created order. There seem to be two kinds of enthusiasm in view. On one front, it is reasonable to conjecture that O'Donovan has conversations occasioned by the 'charismatic renewal' movement in mind. When he speaks, for instance, of the need to bring a 'Christological principle of criticism to the manifestation of spirits, present or past, within the church … avoiding excessive admiration of spontaneity … and … excessive reverence for tradition', it might be read that way.[58] On another front are ongoing disputes with liberal Protestantism, most sharply delineated in *Church in Crisis*. Commenting on a 'fall into incoherence' which imperils 'the liberal hermeneutic', he writes that to avoid that fall requires facing 'a simple alternative':

> Either it posits some further climax of salvation history over and beyond Christ, some "age of the Spirit" such as Montanus or Joachim conceived of, or a Hegelian dialectical history with an Absolute Future, something, at any rate, that will allow a "deepened moral sensitivity" to which the revelation of the incarnation looks immature and outgrown. Or else it makes a distinction between the normative position of Jesus himself and the subnormative position of the apostolic authors, refusing to claim on their behalf the kind of finality it claims for him.[59]

O'Donovan's pneumatological restraint, then, might be a point of deliberate differentiation from much contemporary Christianity. We will not find in his work any 'pneumatological expansionism' of the sort characterised fiercely by Ephraim Radner as 'a bane of modern theology',[60] nor any of the Joachimism espoused by Moltmann and decried by Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar.[61]

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[57] By saying this, I am not saying that we *should* think kingdom a more subjective *or* a more pneumatological concept than it is an objective or Christological one: it is just that *Resurrection*'s treatment seems to line them up this way.

[58] *Resurrection*, 141. O'Donovan's treatment of *tradition* involves confident affirmations and Protestant qualifications. See 'Scripture and Christian Ethics', 23.

[59] *Church in Crisis*, 62. There is more of interest in the link to Joachim of Fiore than I am able to do justice to. For brief introduction, see Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 1.126-37. Cf. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, ch. 8, and Bernard McGinn *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: MacMillan, 1985).

[60] Ephraim Radner, 'The Holy Spirit and Unity: Getting out of the Way of Christ', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16:2 (2014): 207-20, 207.

[61] See Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. J.W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967); *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London:

What should we make of that restraint, theologically? There is nothing unfitting about Christological focus in an account of divine economy – such is the focus of biblical and traditional descriptions. And Christ is the measure of an account of moral action, too. This fitting Christocentrism does not at all have to mean derogation of the Spirit's work, and O'Donovan for the most part shows that well. But at times his allergy to enthusiasm produces too severe a hermeneutic of suspicion about ethical invocations of the Spirit. He does not overreach as baldly as does Radner, for whom 'Pneumatological categories are, by their very nature, voracious of temporal concretisation, and seem always to end by subverting the acute focus of christological form, ethically'.[62] That unfortunate phrasing, more so than anything O'Donovan says, is wont to imply that pneumatology (perhaps even the Spirit) is the problem, rather than Christologically-underdetermined expression of the Spirit's work. But *Resurrection* can tend towards something like that implication. Yet O'Donovan did not imagine his own project as cautious in these ways, so much as remedially pneumatological. In *Thirty-Nine Articles* he was as worried about an eclipse of proper reflection on the Spirit's work – an 'Afterthought' – as about the excesses of untethered pneumatology.[63] This is another reason why the occasionally atrophied character of *Resurrection*'s pneumatology suggests an overreaction to contemporary hypertrophy.

For some good reasons, the book situates pneumatology's bearing on the moral life as an irreversibly second thought, consecutive upon Christology. But it does so in an overdrawn way, I suggest, because 'judgments of circumstance (that which ought to receive especial emphasis here and now)' affect too much the 'judgments of material content (that which the Christian faith teaches)'.[64] There is no reason that a careful exposition, attentive to the order of teaching, attentive to the way salvation plays out, should curtail pneumatological reflection upon eschatology's import for ethics as much as it does in this earlier work. Consider a final quotation, in which O'Donovan explains the way in which 'the Spirit makes the reality of

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SCM Press, 1981); *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Neither Flipper's book nor Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Being as Communion* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), touch on this engagement, which is a shame because it seems to me a neglected divergence in twentieth-century theology. But see Kenneth Oakes, 'Henri de Lubac and Protestantism', in *T & T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac,* 373-92, 388-90, and especially Cyril O'Regan, *Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 2009), 48-50, 104-7, 122-3.

[62] Ibid., 219. With more specific relevance for my question of eschatology and ethics, Radner writes elsewhere, in a similarly provocative article but with similar lack of care, of an 'uncertain pneumatic dynamism' in eschatological transformation, which needs 'a concrete form … the human body assumed by Jesus' to 'stabilise' it ('The Mystery of Christian Anthropology', in *Anthropology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jason Maston and Benjamin E. Reynolds (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018), 243-62, 260). Congar, the great pneumatologist of recent times, is unfailing in the Christological anchoring of his doctrine of the Spirit, but within these proper bounds does not misspeak like this *and* finds plenty more to say.

[63] The title of the third chapter.

[64] The phrases are John Webster's. See 'Perfection and Participation', in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed. Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 379-94, 379.

redemption, distant from us in time, both present and authoritative … evokes our free response to this reality'.[65]

> The restoration of created order is an event which lies in the past; its universal manifestation belongs to the future. Yet on these two points, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his Parousia, the whole of our life is made to depend even now, as each moment of it successively forms our present …We speak of the Spirit when we make the transition from "then" to "now", when the remembered past and the unthinkable future become realities which shape our present. The work of the Holy Spirit defines an age – the age in which all times are immediately present to that time, the time of Christ … the Spirit makes the reality of redemption *authoritative* to us; for authority is the mode in which this past and future reality is also present. There are other ways, immanent and non-authoritative, by which past and future events enter into the present and affect it. Events have consequences which endure, sometimes in the form of lasting institutions or pervasive habits of thought. Events can be anticipated, and excite us to action in expectancy and hope. But the redemptive moment, or moments, of Christ's passion and triumph act upon our present in quite another way. They are God's final deed, the *eschaton* in which history is given its meaning; and as such they stand equidistant from all moments of time and determine what the reality of each moment is. "Authority" and "reality" are inseparable aspects of the presence of God.[66]

There is very much to appreciate about this explanation. But we should ask, as we have done before, about this kind of confidence in that past-tense nature of 'the restoration of created order', and its relation to the 'universal manifestation' which 'belongs to the future'. We should also query the troubling implication that *hope* is not an authoritative way in which the parousia may enter into the present and affect it. I suggest that O'Donovan's inability to make any sense of hope at this stage is indicative of his difficulties in making good moral sense of eschatology. For while he is interested, here, in the way the Spirit makes the eschaton authoritatively present to us, what the Spirit makes present must be nothing other than the restoration of creation – which is the sole reality of redemption. Because of that reduction, O'Donovan assimilates over-confident knowledge of an eschatologically restored order to a this-worldly love ordered to what is, displacing faith's hope in a 'salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' (1 Pet. 1:5). We will return to these questions in chapter 5, but now turn to consideration of another of *Resurrection*'s themes in which this same interplay of objective and subjective plays out, and in which a similar reduction arguably occurs.

## THE DIVINE COMMAND AND THE ORDER OF CREATION

Among other questions raised and answered *Resurrection*'s Part Two is one O'Donovan calls 'basic to all theological ethics … the relation of the divine command to the order of creation. How does God's word engage our obedience when it would seem that our obedience is totally committed to the authority of created order as it is present to our reason?'[67] In what follows, I evaluate his answer on its own terms, concentrating both on its significance and its tendency to flatten the angularity of divine command wholesale into the consistencies predicated of created order. I also show how this answer – indeed the book's ethical approach as a whole – places us

[65] *Resurrection*, 102.
[66] Ibid., 102-3. Cf. *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 38, 41-4, 123.
[67] *Resurrection*, 132.

within the ambit of contemporary metaethical debates in Christian ethics, and despite that limitation might contribute to them.

Two traditions, he says, present different answers to that question of the relation of divine command to the order of creation. Theological rationalism gives one that is 'continualist': 'God speaks *through* the order which reason perceives'.[68] It seeks 'to trace an ontological continuity between the secondary authorities of creation and the primary authority of God'[69] That attempt can avoid pantheism if executed with Aquinas's care, but particular formulations – even Thomas's – engender overweening confidence in human rationality, bereft of 'self-critical responsibility to objective truth'.[70] By contrast, theological voluntarism gives a 'discontinualist' answer: 'God's command *cuts across* our rational perceptions and relativises them'.[71] It is 'concerned to make a sharp distinction between the authority of the divine command and any authority that man might discern within the order of creation'.[72]

Both traditions can claim biblical warrant. Yet each taken in isolation 'has shown a tendency to degenerate into humanism', by which I think he means an inappropriately anthropocentric conception of the moral life.[73] We therefore need to 'include true perceptions from both sides, just as the corresponding statements about created order and history … needed to accommodate both the inherent teleology of creation and its historical destining to transformation'.[74] Rationalism, for its part, 'was not wrong to promise an ultimate scrutability in the divine purpose; it was wrong only as it attempted to empty that promise of its eschatological character and hurry forward to a premature fulfilment by the route of a reductive immanentism'.[75] Voluntarism, too, witnessed to a particular theological truth. Late medieval theological voluntarists did not think creation without divine ordering, but sought to maintain 'the immediate contingency of morality upon the declared will of God … not derived from God *through* the created order':

> The voluntarist was also right to stress that God's freedom to innovate was not adequately described in terms of a *lex aeterna*, a blueprint which could not be changed but could only be successively realised. God's action can encompass novelty, that which is itself unpredictable except in terms of God's own declaration of his intent: "Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Is. 43:19).[76]

*Resurrection* takes a more nuanced line than we might have expected, then, given 'The Natural Ethic'. But Of course O'Donovan immediately reminds us that 'God's freedom also implies his self-posited faithfulness':

> When we say that God "bound himself" in the covenant of creation, we use a paradoxical metaphor, certainly, but what we say is not meaningless … God's freedom is exercised in

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 133.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 134.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 132.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid,. 136.
[76] Ibid.

> congruence with itself. It is not randomness, turning idly back upon itself and cancelling out its own creative deed, but redemptive transformation, which respects and exalts that which has gone before. Rationalism was correct to predicate coherence of God's deeds. "He cannot deny himself", says the apostle (2 Tim. 2:13) not thereby setting a limit on God's power, but declaring that God's unlimited power includes also the power to be consistent with itself.[77]

It is safe to say that what he considers indispensible in the voluntarist contention is preserved so as to accommodate it into a broadly rationalist proposal.

*Resurrection* repeatedly emphasises the essential unity and constancy of God's action – and sees that action expressed normatively in forms of creaturely life – even as it acknowledges that moral discernment of it in time is diverse. Love, once more, is the key, 'the unitary orientation that lies behind all the uniquely varied responses to the generic variety of the created order'.[78] As before, O'Donovan connects this point with vocation, again sublating it into an account of the unified ground, form and *telos* of action:

> The particularity of vocation must serve as a window through which the universal character may appear. Just as the variety of voices within the church are unified in a common confession, "Jesus is Lord" so the variety of forms of life are unified within a common form of life according to God's order, the life of love.[79]

*Church in Crisis* puts it more strongly still: 'vocation cannot provide a comprehensible idea of the good on its own. To appreciate its contribution, we have to tie it back into the goods of creation'.[80] The reason for this, as *Resurrection* argues, is that 'a metaphysic of ethics must be unitary. If an act is obligatory, it is so by virtue of its relation, whether direct or indirect, to the good; and by virtue of that same relation the performance of it is free'.[81] Concretely, it means that:

> the disciple who obeys the divine word in defiance of his own limited perceptions of right is genuinely trustful only if he believes that the paradox is not an ultimate contradiction in reality. He must hope to see the moment of critical confrontation finally resolved by the elevation of his reason to grasp God's action as a coherent whole.[82]

This elevation, however, is truly eschatological, given 'in moments of grace'.[83] Metaethically, the relation posited describes the right connection between deontological and teleological considerations – behind which lies the 'antithesis of voluntarist and rationalist understandings of morality'.[84] And inasmuch as O'Donovan's moral anthropology seeks to comprehend and integrate the powers of reason and will, he may have been ahead of his time within Protestant

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 224.
[79] Ibid., 222. Thomist moral theologians are also concerned with this relationship. So Melina: 'The singularity of the person and the universality of human nature are the undeniable poles for exercising Christian prudence, which, perfected by the gifts of the Spirit, guides one to fulfilment of one's own personal vocation in Christ'. *Sharing in Christ's Virtues*, 8.
[80] *Church in Crisis*, 99. Cf. the preface to *Self, World and Time*: 'stern activism is more attractive as a charism than as a universal prescription' (ix).
[81] *Resurrection*, 170. Again, O'Donovan's claims here can be compared with those of C. Stephen Evans, and with a number of thinkers also cited below, like R.M. Adams, who O'Donovan takes as an interlocutor throughout his career. I can only suggest this comparison here, prioritising other questions.
[82] Ibid., 136.
[83] Ibid., 139.
[84] Ibid., 137-9.

moral theology.[85] Moreover, by offering a theological case for that integration, rather than simply on an Aristotelian-Thomist argument about the structure of practical reason, he represents an advance on otherwise similar positions.[86]

Not unrelatedly, I say that *Resurrection*'s approach is on its own terms *broadly* rationalist, not just because it seeks to overcome these antitheses, but because O'Donovan adopts rationalism's concern for moral order in the *world* rather than what he sees as its inappropriately anthropocentric concern for moral order in the human *mind.* His comments elsewhere, on the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, highlight the distinction. Though impressed by John Paul II's criticism of much twentieth-century ethics, he worries that the Pope speaks 'out of a species of Christian idealism', offering 'some startling hostages to the claims of unaided natural reason': 'What is lacking in contemporary trends in moral thought is a sense of moral order in the world. Can he repair this with a stress on moral order in the mind? I am not sure'.[87] I agree that the document makes such hostages. But I can imagine that a defender of *Veritatis splendor* could reply to O'Donovan that his need to show *as a second move* how the restored order of creation is directly relevant for human action could have been avoided by the encyclical's 'personalistic interpretation of the classical doctrine of the natural law'.[88] And surely we Protestants should generally encourage the Catholic trend towards personalistic and increasingly theological interpretation,[89] continuing to urge more developed explication of its underpinnings in doctrines of creation and providence, and less isolation from Christology, soteriology, and eschatology (not to mention the doctrine of sin).

In any event, for O'Donovan it is this attribution of moral order to the world that is imperative if we are to understand divine commands correctly. As he writes in an article on

[85] Renewed study of these powers' distinct characteristics and place in moral reasoning within Catholic moral theology has been fuelled by new studies of Aquinas, e.g. Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). As yet, this seems to mean that they do not range as freely across the Christian tradition as does O'Donovan.

[86] Westberg sets too great store by this structure, without correspondingly serious theological defence. See his first book *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), which originated in a DPhil thesis supervised by O'Donovan and McCabe. In *Renewing Moral Theology*, Westberg writes: 'The harmony and unity of intellect and will are properly restored by our four-stage model' (52), no doubt a sophisticated reproduction of practical reason's operations. Yet putting it like this raises questions for those of us whose worries about sin's noetic effects suggest themselves sooner than they seem to for Aristotelian-Thomists – especially when reading an introduction to Christian ethics the first four chapters of which detail a not-necessarily-theological approach to moral reason. Even if a model of practical reason can purport to restore the harmony of unity and will, we want to know how sin has fractured the moral reason of actual moral actors, and how grace reveals and begins to transform it. Thankfully, later chapters (see 76, 98-9) return to the theme, culling vital Augustinian insights (think of Augustine's developing interpretation of Rom. 7). Westberg's order of presentation is not illogical: human reason is created before fallen. And general human reason is the subject of 'ethics' before Christian moral reason, on his understanding. But should Christian ethics have to piece together *ex post facto* from 'natural' accounts the actuality of the way reason and will present themselves in the moral life of those who are not just creaturely but sinful?

[87] 'A Summons to Reality', 44.

[88] Melina, *Sharing Christ's Virtues*, 72.

[89] In the latter respect, see e.g. Russell Hittinger, 'Natural Law and Catholic Moral Theology', in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1-30.

'Scripture and Christian Ethics': 'commands are events that occur within a relationship. A bare order barked out parade-ground fashion means nothing unless there is some parade-ground that will constitute a relation between the barker and the barked at'.[90] That constitutive relation, I presume, is the created order. The emphasis, again, is partially 'rationalist' but not, perhaps, rationalistic. Nigel Biggar conjures a similar image in more pronounced fashion when writing, *contra* Barth, that 'command should be legislative before it is military', because 'conceiving God's commands in military rather than legislative terms … implies that receiving or hearing a command of God takes the place of reflecting and reasoning – that it is a substitute for ethics'.[91] Clearly their views are substantially similar. Prudential deliberation is prominent for both, and there is a shared and deep-seated resistance to any perceived moral irrationalism. But O'Donovan typically seems to strive a bit harder to acknowledge divine freedom, and his worry about 'bare' commands is more immediately determined by their apparent contentlessness and separation from an always-already provided order, than their threat to moral reasoning as such.

I still think, though, that O'Donovan subsumes divine commands too quickly under 'the authority of created order as it is present to our reason'. Why does he do so? For one thing, it is no doubt the case that any apparent absence of 'horizontal' mediations of the divine will would undermine the moral universalism inherent in some of his foundational claims. There is, as we have seen, a Christocentric particularism inherent in O'Donovan's notion of the *revelation* of this order's origin, coherence and *telos*. Nevertheless, his claims about that order's intelligibility and normativity as such are certainly based on the integrity of natural order. Yet if God's ethically-determinative address ever bypasses moral reason's generic valuations of earthly goods – or even simply disrupts those valuations in disjunctive transformation – then it would not be possible to maintain as confidently that 'the *exclusive* object of ethical reflection is the same created order shared by all persons across time and culture'.[92]

Second, and relatedly, this kind of rationalist construal seems more readily available to him than it should because of the tendency to marginalise considerations theology would press upon ethics besides the doctrine of creation; namely, sin and redemption. More precisely as regards *redemption*, we might say that O'Donovan often fails to imagine it as a reality to which divine commands might correspond, beyond creation's restoration. This disinclination is seen most clearly in comments in 'the Foundations of Ethics', frankly restating *Resurrection's* view:

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[90] 'Scripture and Christian Ethics', 25.

[91] Nigel Biggar, 'Karl Barth's Ethics Revisited', in *Commanding Grace: Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics*, ed. Daniel L. Migliore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 26-48, 29-30. It is important to say that contemporary readings of Barth on these topics diverge. Compare, for instance, Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2007), and Matthew Rose, *Ethics with Barth: God, Metaphysics and Morals* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2010). The direction in which Rose would take Barth's ethics seems much closer to O'Donovan than that presented by Nimmo.

[92] Borrowing here a description of the universal aspect of Balthasar's moral vision which fits O'Donovan's ethics just as well. See Steck, *Ethical Thought*, 94, who tends to call this aspect 'Catholic'. Italics added.

> the point of the commands is that they give a moral exposition of the response elicited by God's acts of salvation. They draw their authority *from* the acts; they do not supply an authority which the acts have somehow failed to supply. Reality is authoritative and action-evoking, and nothing else is. In his acts God has determined the reality that now conditions us; in his commands he has explained what this reality requires of us.[93]

It is right to say God's acts of salvation *are* the morally-determinative reality. But, as that article goes on to demonstrate in an even more unmistakeable manner than the book, O'Donovan seems to consider those acts to be exhausted in 'the recovery of creation'.[94] Because of this it is not clear to me that he avoids the error he alleges rationalism of making, in which it 'attempted to empty the divine purpose of its eschatological character, hurrying forwarded to a premature fulfilment by the route of a reductive immanentism'.

At worst, the less qualified rationalist claims O'Donovan makes court a mislocation of moral authority. That would be no trivial thing; 'to speak of a course of ethical action on the basis of a flawed perception of the cosmos … is to court disaster'.[95] More commonly, though, his claims fail to effect the integration of 'divine command' and 'the order of creation' in a way which shows as much attention to the second and third articles of the creed as the first. That is, they fail to conceive the natural order in its *actual* history within the drama of salvation. What this means for a model of moral discernment is that O'Donovan does not emphasise as much as he might the way in which the sovereign address of God directs our evaluation of the manifold moral claims of creaturely life. Much more could surely be said about how the radically personal and historical events of God's call upon each of us refashion moral reason's weighing of intramundane goods.[96] That address need not be imagined as arbitrary, punctiliar, or occasionalistic – to imagine that the summons to free obedience issues from some kind of naked divine will sundered from divine wisdom is to project an abstraction forgetful of all we have been given to know of God's self-revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ.[97] Nor does the

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[93] 'the Foundations of Ethics', 100-101. Cf. 'How Can Theology Be Moral?', 88.
[94] 'the Foundations of Ethics', 97.
[95] So J. Louis Martyn, 'De-apocalyptising Paul: An Essay Focused on *Paul and the Stoics* by Troels Engberg-Pedersen', 102, quoted in Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 138. I am afraid that I have come to think that Martyn courts other kinds of error, which any pursuit of 'apocalyptic' theology should not gloss over. My sensibility here is coherent with the one well expressed in Grant Macaskill, 'History, Providence, and the Apocalyptic Paul', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 70:4 (2017): 409-26.
[96] Steck's book is good beginning in this direction, especially chapters 3 and 4, because he works hard to articulate how the more particularist aspect of Balthasar's moral vision (the aspect owed partly to Barth) can be combined with the other. The comparison is especially apt, because O'Donovan's own particularism also seems to be tutored by Barth.
[97] As D. Stephen Long points out, to base morality on an abstracted 'pure' nature seems to be a parallel modern mistake: neither natural law nor divine command approaches as purely philosophical stances can factor in the shape of the divine economy (*Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 189). I cannot adjudge, nonetheless, whether Long does justice to the Catholic scholasticism and Reformed orthodoxy he has in mind. It does not map especially well onto the paired contemporary theological sensibilities at which his broader argument aims – neo-Thomists and 'McCormackian' Barthians. Neither neo-Thomist moral theologians nor 'actualistic' Barthians are straightforwardly susceptible to these charges. Consider e.g. Romanus Cessario, Reinhard Hütter, and Livio Melina on the one hand, David Clough and Paul Nimmo on the other: both schools are

refashioning this address effects need to be seen as opposed to our fulfilment in the earthly enjoyment of those goods. Yet we *should* try to conceive of it so as to recognise the sense in which God's adventitious address initially and continually overturns our habits of navigating the concrete situations of 'this present age'. And that would mean admitting that the ongoing conversion of moral reasoning entails a more revolutionary unsettling of our perceptions of the world and its normative texture than O'Donovan often allows.

## METAETHICAL INTEGRATION

These shortcomings aside, appreciation of what O'Donovan tries to do in these discussions – and in *Resurrection*'s integrative effort more widely – is of course enhanced when seen against ethical approaches which champion one or other variety of what is rather inelegantly christened 'metaethical monism'.[98] But its accomplishment is also obvious when viewed alongside nascent attempts (especially Protestant) at metaethical integration.[99] If these attempts are a way forward – I have some doubts about their level of abstraction, as will become clear – they could

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Christocentric in a particular way, though certainly neither integrates nature and grace in exactly the manner Long prefers.

[98] For recent comments on the need to avoid these monisms, see *Entering into Rest*, viii.

[99] See Jesse Couenhoven, 'Against Metaethical Imperialism: Several Arguments for Equal Partnerships between the Deontic and the Aretaic', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38:3 (2010): 521-44. On integration of natural law and divine command, see Neil Arner, 'Precedents and Prospects for Incorporating Natural Law in Protestant Ethics', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 69:4 (2016): 375-88. For a sense of the gains seen as possible by such incorporation, see Arner, 'Ecumenical Ethics: Challenges to and Sources for a Common Moral Witness', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36:2 (2016): 101-19. In the first article, Arner catalogues elements of the rehabilitation of natural law in Protestant thought, counting O'Donovan among a set of thinkers contributing to this recovery. I summarise his survey as follows. First, historical research uncovered the unquestioned place of natural law in earlier Protestant thought. Second – here's where O'Donovan comes in – Protestant ethics has often been thought to focus on divine command. However, in recent philosophical theology and ethics divine command approaches have come in for severe criticism. Common accusations focus upon a few features: the arbitrariness it seems to locate at the centre of morality; the picture of God as a capricious tyrant; the prioritising of the *right* over the *good*; the voluntaristic prioritising of God's will over God's reason and human will over human reason; the seeming lack of concern for the flourishing of humankind, which other ethical systems (broadly *eudaimonistic*) foreground. In fact, human flourishing (a further element of this rehabilitation) has increasingly become a topic of Protestant theologising, rather than the object of its suspicion. Among philosophical theologians Evans, Adams, Richard J. Mouw, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and John Hare have all sought in some way to register these concerns, offering modifed accounts which relate notions of moral obligation derived from divine command to those which ground morality in human nature and the fulfilment of its goods. But if they want to say that morality is *fitting* in terms of human nature, they do not say that moral duties can be *deduced* simply from knowledge of it. Arner lists O'Donovan alongside them, noting that those who share this recognition nevertheless tend to avoid nomenclature of natural law. To a greater or lesser extent, these thinkers are mindful of the Barthian disavowal of natural law (a disavowal Arner, following the wider literature, contrasts with Calvin's qualified affirmation), but attempt to move beyond it. I would add that, at best, the theologians especially among them are alert to the potential a-theological abstraction of the term 'natural law' and have sought to make much of the doctrine of creation when talking about natural moral goods. O'Donovan is clearly a case in point here, and also – like Hauerwas – more alert than others of potential a-theological abstraction in 'divine command theory'. Arner goes on to say that Protestant retrieval of natural law relies also on recently magnified claims that Protestantism has taught an *extensive* rather than *intensive* notion of sin, despite caricatures. I.e. that its damage extends to every natural and human capacity (so has both epistemological and ontological effects) but does not *destroy* them.

probably do worse than to take O'Donovan as a guide. I offer the following minor suggestions as to how we might locate his thought within these conversations.

First, O'Donovan's *historical* work often tries to recognise in modern modes of moral-philosophical argumentation patterns of thought native to classical philosophical and theological morality. His excavations help reveal contemporary metaethical approaches as forgetful heirs – their theories the misrememberings of theological traditions in sometimes more wilful and sometimes more accidental ways. I would suggest that O'Donovan's genealogical efforts are often less compelling when they attempt to trace contemporary disarray to moments when philosophical errors like nominalism arose, than they are when they show in particular how the fragmentation of the Christian moral tradition came about and was confirmed through partitive exegesis. In the latter respect, his modernity-critique surpasses much contemporary theology of otherwise similar instincts, which only offers over-hasty generalisation in terms of the former, and which shows – among specific ills – general lack of patient sensitivity to Reformational thought.

Second, O'Donovan's *constructive* approach to ethics exhibits commitments familiar to Kantian ethicists of obligation, features Aristotelian philosophers of the natural law could heartily endorse, and still other qualities shared by aretaic ethics. It is no surprise that a number of Catholic theologians have found his work congenial.[100] And if contemporary Protestant theologians schooled in an ethics of obligation – perhaps Kierkegaardian or Barthian 'divine command' ethics rather than strictly Kantian deontology – find fellow-feeling strained at some points of O'Donovan's work, any contestation is intramural. A host of metaethical approaches find themselves engaged, then, and at his work's best the conceptual apparatus of these stances is appropriated only as it is made intelligible by the commitments of Christian orthodoxy, and shown in its relevance for the practice of the Christian life. Proposing that contemporary attempts to re-integrate moral approaches might take guidance from O'Donovan – or Hauerwas for that matter – is not unrelatedly to urge that Christian ethicists continue these two figures' *theological* and *pastoral* intent.[101] The treatment of vocation is a good example of O'Donovan's

[100] Besides those already named, see e.g. the reviews by David Cloutier and Nicholas M. Healy cited in chapter 5.

[101] The details of Hauerwas' theological commitments have been up for debate, but I hope it is indisputable that he has both embodied and made possible a search for Christian moral wisdom of both philosophical clarity and pastoral coherence. Whether or not he has been right to jettison natural law in his retrieval of major Thomist moral-theological themes (I think he makes a serious case: see below), and whether or not he has always given more theological divine-command based conceptions a fair hearing (I am not sure he has), his retrieval of virtue and character, in addition to promotion of the postliberal themes of narrative and community, has allowed for a generation of Christian ethicists who display more facility with the texts of the moral tradition, and more theological confidence. Incidentally, Arner notes that Hauerwas was recently happy to accept a 'Protestant Thomist' account of natural law such as the one proposed by John Bowlin ('Precedents and Prospects', 377, n. 9). My speaking of 'metaethical monism' owes not just to recent scholarship but also to Hauerwas's student Charles Pinches, who speaks of 'principle monism' ('Principle Monism and Action Descriptions: Situationism and Its Critics Revisited', *Modern Theology* 7:3 (1991): 249-68). Theologians like Pinches, and his fellow Hauerwas-students, are themselves examples of ecumenically-minded, confessionally-committed, and practically-oriented

ambition (if not because always convincing in its details), because its theoretical account of moral reasoning's philosophical components is exegetically constructed, and it both derives concerns from pastoral practice and directs conclusions towards it.[102]

All that said, however, seeing that O'Donovan's work comprises an unusually brilliant attempt to overcome modern ethics' fragmentation should not preclude attempts to trouble it. Here, this means that appreciating *Resurrection's* effort to supply an integrated approach to divine command and created order does *not* entail saying it does so flawlessly. We can learn from O'Donovan's struggle to register various pressures in a coherent moral theology, but maintain that his handling of eschatology in particular is unsatisfying. That is especially palpable in the book's discussions of novelty, which we turn to now.

## THE NEW

Though he clearly suggests that there is a unified moral order, O'Donovan recognises that the moral *field* does not appear to us as a stable, consistent, reality. Moral questions arise that seem to be new, and their novelty induces anxiety in the moral subject. In fact some genuinely are new, and this really does pose a problem that the language of 'quandaries' apprehends, notwithstanding now-customary dismissal of 'quandary' ethics.[103] Indeed, a major contribution of *Resurrection* is its attempt to maintain the particularity of moral situations in what is technically a deontological framework that posits an ethical universalism. For O'Donovan, wisdom in moral reasoning means alertness to apparently exceptional cases as opportunities to learn more about the underlying consistent features of generic morality: the moral law. Knowledge of particular situations and of the generic moral order are reciprocally informing. And by grounding moral law in 'objective world-order' O'Donovan self-consciously takes a step beyond Paul Ramsey in the development of Protestant theological ethics.[104] He writes: 'The moral agent approaches every new situation … equipped with the "moral law" … that wisdom which contains insight into the created order when it is formulated explicitly to direct decisions, i.e. deontically'.[105] But what demands our attention within this is the more focused question of novelty.

Two modern approaches, we learn, orient themselves differently to it. First, *conservatism* (understood philosophically rather than politically) seeks to 'establish sufficient continuity to tame the apocalyptic strength of novelty to the point where it can be managed by a comfortable

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Christian ethics. It is to be regretted if Niebuhrian 'neo-Augustinians' of the next generation who regard O'Donovan highly spurn the lessons Hauerwas can teach them. (And *vice versa*, of course).

[102] See 'Towards an Interpretation of Biblical Ethics' for mention of O'Donovan's education in the 'disciplined attention' and 'distinctions' of moral philosophy, his sense of its neglect by biblical scholars, and a conception of his own reparative undertaking.

[103] Cf. O'Donovan's comments on ethics' 'problematical' quality in 'How Can Theology Be Moral?', 82-3. Errington's 'Every Good Path' is especially excellent on this.

[104] *Resurrection*, 188.

[105] Ibid., 190.

process of adaptation'.[106] It does so by calling upon past experience, but this is in fact just historicism in conservative manifestation and its cords are not up to the task of binding the new. Second, *consequentialism* 'proposes to overcome the perils of novelty by *anticipation*'.[107] This, again, can be understood as a kind of historicism, 'a programme for robbing human history of its terrors by conceiving of history as a kind of human artefact'.[108] It is consequentialism's historicist bent which represents its significant dissimilarity with classical teleological ethics, despite their being frequently grouped together in opposition to deontic ethics.[109] Teleology's 'value-ordering "for the sake of" has been replaced by a quite different "for the sake of", which means productive of'.[110] The consequentialist imagines that present acts totally determine the future, managerially choosing the prospective state of things. This is futile, because 'nothing will bind the future unless the future, for all its unpredictability, is already bound, by being the future of God's world, the history of his created order'.[111]

We can learn much here of O'Donovan's concern to secure moral *agency* in history over against any disempowering historical determinism. A purely consequentialist analysis ultimately undercuts action:

> All classical ethics, Christian and pagan, teleological and deontic, is challenged at its heart by the proposal to evaluate acts solely in terms of the consequences they tend to produce. Such a proposal can be understood only as a refusal to refuse to evaluate *acts* altogether. Indeed, we may go further and say that it is a proposal to abandon the *category* of acting altogether, for in reconstruing history as an artefact we abolish the only context in which acting can have any meaning. Acting implies risk … To speak of acting implies a history *into which* we act.[112]

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[106] Ibid., 185.
[107] Ibid., 187.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid. The reader may have noticed that when speaking of O'Donovan's integrative approach I focused on the interplay of divine command and natural law. Later in this chapter I address the place of character, virtue, and community in his project. Absent, then, are non-classical teleological ethics of a utilitarian kind, which receive pretty short shrift from O'Donovan and those he has influenced (often for very good reason). See *Resurrection*, 138, 181-2, 187, 238. 46 Cf. 'Augustinian Ethics', 46: 'Augustinian eudaemonism' – and we may take him to indicate his own ethic by extension – 'is not a teleological ethic in the modern sense, but a teleological metaphysical framework that serves to give intelligibility to ethics that are in substance command-based'. Theologians looking to integrate utilitarian perspectives would probably have to choose another exemplar than O'Donovan. In a previous generation, Catholic proportionalists would have been read to this end. For Protestants, perhaps, exemplars would perhaps likely come from among those more formed by the tradition of Reinhold Niebuhr than by Ramsey, as O'Donovan is. And that is not to say Ramsey cannot be seen, in his own way, as a Niebuhrian realist – just that Ramsey's characteristic argumentation in his medical ethics in particular has a distinctly deontological flavour and includes numerous vigorous tussles with colleagues' consequentialist proposals. See *The Essential Paul Ramsey*, ed. William Werpehowski and Stephen D. Crocco (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), xx-xxii, D. Stephen Long, *Tragedy, Tradition, Transformism: The Ethics of Paul Ramsey* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 1-2, and Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 180-8. Any outright attempt at integrating consequentialism into Christian ethics seems mistaken to me, but for illuminating *comparative* analysis see *God, the Good, and Utilitarianism: Perspectives on Peter Singer*, ed. John Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Charles Camosy, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics: Beyond Polarization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[110] *Resurrection*, 187.
[111] Ibid., 188.
[112] Ibid., 187-8.

Wisdom is found in a proper understanding of novelty's relation to given, enduring order. That is not to say moral discernment is not partly about recognising what is genuinely new, so that 'new moral decisions can be made'.[113] As he writes in *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 'a biblical epistemology does not mean that thought must stand still. We have to grasp, appropriate, interpret and understand, and then we have to apply what we have learned to new problems'.[114] But beneath that is 'the perception that every novelty, in its own way, manifests the permanence and stability of the created order, so that, however astonishing and undreamt of it may be, it is not utterly incommensurable with what has gone before'.[115]

That givenness and endurance, too, is a biblical concern. Dissatisfied with theologians' custom, more fashionable then than now, perhaps, of opposing 'the' Hebrew and/or early Christian cast of mind to 'the' Hellenistic metaphysical one, he writes: 'It has often been said, quite falsely, that Israel did not have the same sense of stability and eternity, set in opposition to change and history, that marked Greek thinking'.[116] It is mistaken to imagine that adopting Scripture's approach to morality would entail 'replacing the eternal stability of things with the arbitrary and historically determinate command of God'.[117] Creation and history are not opposed there:

> The joy of life-in-the-world was a gift given together with the joy of life-before-God. At the same time the arbitrary command of the transcendent Lord of history had assumed responsibility for ordered life. The God of Exodus and Conquest had shown himself as God of creation too. In *torah* the moral authority of created order and the transcendent authority of the electing God were made one.[118]

Again, in some ways a stronger contrast can hardly be drawn than between O'Donovan's interpretation and that of Robert Jenson – for whom O'Donovan's thought might be a divinity of *persistence*, yearning for the fleshpots of Egypt, theologising about gods 'Continuity' and 'Return'![119] But we do not need to lurch so far in the opposite direction as Jenson to feel that O'Donovan says too much in claiming that 'the moral authority of created order and the transcendent authority of the electing God were made one'.[120] Surely there is a necessary

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[113] Ibid., 188.
[114] *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 115.
[115] *Resurrection*, 189.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 190.
[118] Ibid.
[119] See e.g. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1 *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66-8, which touches on the same Old Testament themes in a completely different way, contrasting theologies of *persistence* with those of *anticipation*. Behind their disagreement might lie differing mid-late twentieth-century positions in Old Testament theological interpretation concerning creation and redemption – could we roughly align Jenson's position with instincts of Gerhard von Rad and O'Donovan's with those of Claus Westermann or Bernhard Anderson?
[120] My own sense of a different approach to either Jenson or O'Donovan is represented fairly well by Francis Watson's comments on this part of Jenson's *Systematics* ('"America's theologian": an appreciation of Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology, with some remarks about the bible', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55:2 (2002): 201-23, 222-3). Though he recognises Jenson's corrective instincts over-against much modern theology, Watson troubles Jenson's exclusively eschatologising hermeneutic by paying attention to the character of the gospels as historical narratives not apocalypses, and to the creed's fulcrum in the second article. Watson conveys a more unerring instinct for comprehension of the

asymmetry between these terms, such that if we grant that 'the transcendent authority of the electing God' does indeed imbue the created authority with life-giving moral authority we cannot thereby say that 'they were made one'.

What is important to see at this point is that O'Donovan's account of moral reason intends to allow space for the historically novel, and for divine freedom, in concert with an abiding affirmation of creation's consistency. He means to dissuade readers from concluding that his claims about the stability of unchanging morally normative goods owed more to philosophical commitments than scriptural revelation. But, in keeping with chapter 2, we might press whether there is space for the kind of *eschatological* novelty – which is not simply *historical* novelty – about which the canonical witness seems eager to instruct us. Again, we would not have to accept Jenson's posing of the problem (nor Pannenberg, Moltmann, or Jüngel's, for that matter) to think that O'Donovan may construe these things in a way that *does* veer towards imagination of an 'eternal stability of things'. That worry arises whether we think it is the product of undue influence from a 'Hellenistic' cast of mind, preoccupation with presuppositions of non-theological moral philosophy, the pressure of contextual discernments, all three, or none. Before we move on to consideration of *Resurrection's* treatment of sin and knowledge, I want to draw attention to one further feature of O'Donovan's treatment of novelty.

In *Resurrection* and elsewhere, the 'new' is a theme consistently negotiated with reference to christology and pneumatology, and their ordered relation. Usually this underscores exactly the features we have already examined. But in one or two tantalising instances it seems to press beyond the other passages, dovetailing notes of discontinuity and continuity in a way that suggests interest in genuinely *eschatological* novelty. Consider this sermon:

> … the new cuts right across our existing framework of human experience. The new defies expectation, extrapolation, prediction, all those laws of change promising a certain stability within the flux of things. And yet it makes sense, not nonsense, of what we have experienced. It is discontinuity, yet it is fulfilment. Not any and every disruption in the course of things counts as something new, only that disruption which takes up the old, broken continuity into itself, and saves it as it destroys it. In the Acts of the Apostles the presence of the Holy Spirit is signalled by miracle. Miracle does not merely defy human expectations; it also satisfies the thread of hope within them … Miracle gives fulfilment to hopes lurking within the fabric of experience which have no claims on predictable experience. It is new … Yet the new is not easy to recognise. Precisely because it *is* new, we have no native capacity to see it, since recognition has to do with the familiar and the old. The new must force itself on us, evoking an act of faith, that is, an experienced discontinuity in our understanding. There is, Christians have dared to claim, one new thing lying at the heart of all new things: that Jesus is Lord. And *nobody can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit*.[121]

Here we seem to find a version of O'Donovan's major claims made in a form less susceptible to accusations of the collapse of creation and redemption, yet just as capable of describing their real relation, and of making good sense of the intimately related but

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Christ-event's genuinely pivotal character in its continuity and discontinuity than O'Donovan (who subordinates it to creation) and Jenson (who subordinates it to the eschaton). Of course, Watson will not tell us what that might mean for ethics, nor much about the bearing upon the moral life of the kingdom of God that the gospel records as central to Christ's (moral) teaching.

[121] *Small Boats,* 46-7.

nonexchangeable works of the Christ and Holy Spirit of God in saving history. But this only presses the question again, why the sense of unpredictable fulfilment evoked here is so elusive in *Resurrection*, even vanishingly so. The reason, I think, is that there O'Donovan's agenda is driven by what he sees as the pressing tasks of *ethics*, and ethics cannot but be unsettled by this disjunction, by discontinuity. It is his conception of those pressing tasks, furthermore, which contributes to the book's checked recognition of sin – our next theme.

## SIN AND KNOWLEDGE

Like 'The Natural Ethic', *Resurrection* postpones treatment of epistemological limitation and hindrance. O'Donovan does announce relatively soon that he is aware of the challenge: 'The *epistemological* programme for an ethic that is "natural", in the sense that its contents are simply known to all, has to face dauntingly high barriers'.[122] But his answer allows the account to move quite serenely on:

> we are not to conclude from this that there is no ontological ground for an "ethic of nature", no objective order to which the moral life can respond … only … that any certainty we may have about the order which God has made depends upon God's own disclosure of himself and his works.[123]

And *Resurrection*, of course, upholds the possibility of an elevated degree of certainty about that order, based on a particular understanding of the disclosure of divine character and works. Yet Protestants routinely reject what O'Donovan calls the natural ethic, it seems to me, for two reasons. They reject it because of their impression of the obstacle which is *sin*, and – a more recent trend, perhaps – they reject it because of their impression of the impediment of *creaturely finitude*. In this subsection, I consider *Resurrection*'s response to each 'high barrier' in turn, before observing the difficulties inherent in O'Donovan's approach to a third barrier: eschatology.

First, sin. The book usually explains human moral failure in terms of something like our *disavowal* of the created order, dissatisfaction with the value-bearing fixities which ought to shape our lives and govern our moral reasoning. We find less than we might expect about misperception of that order, or of the effects of sin upon it. Still, when epistemological hindrances *are* referred to overtly, they do complicate O'Donovan's natural ethic and its assertive moral realism, at least for a moment. 'In speaking of man's fallenness', he writes, 'we point not only to his persistent rejection of the created order, but also an inescapable confusion in his perceptions of it … we must reckon also upon the opacity and obscurity of that order to the human mind which has rejected the knowledge of its Creator'.[124] Yet this kind of admission is almost always followed by the instant recollection that our rebellion and ignorance has been utterly ineffective in degrading or damaging the natural order, outwith the moral state of the

[122] *Resurrection,* 19.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

human creature. As Errington correctly observes, there is 'little talk of sin as involving a corruption of the conditions in which obedience takes place. The order itself is undamaged'.[125] All told, neither sin's effects on the human knower nor on the known object and its self-disclosing value seem as serious as they might.[126]

There is also sense in which O'Donovan's prioritisation of creation seeks to outbid the worry about sin, in mapping a substrate of *moral reality* absent any presupposition of the fall. If, as Bonhoeffer lamented, there are two kinds of Protestant failure to properly regard the penultimacy of 'the natural' – for some it was 'completely lost in the darkness of general sinfulness … for others it took on the brightness of primal creation' – *Resurrection* is more liable to be counted among the latter.[127] O'Donovan's cartography of *moral action* seems to follow suit, in outbidding the worry about sin. Agency is grounded in that foundation of created moral reality, and while he recognises that ethics takes place after the fall, he proceeds as though the ethicist's task is to take agents' sin-stricken limitation for granted: to describe the shape of free (that is, restored) action in a good, vindicated world.

O'Donovan's epistemological caution is less about the difficulties of rightly perceiving the moral order because of sin than it is – second – about the difficulties of finite creatures' knowledge of an order of creation of which they are themselves part. The objection to *Veritatis Splendor*'s rationalistic employment of Thomistic natural law that we considered earlier might therefore owe more to the point about finitude than to any Protestant disquiet about sin and revelation – nor any postliberal point about cultural traditions' particularity, and revelation's primarily ecclesial reception.[128] To see *Resurrection*'s understanding of this barrier, we need to familiarise ourselves with the main features of its account of knowledge. What knowledge, O'Donovan asks, is it that has the created order as its object? He finds answer in the term *participation*. No abstracted gaze, since it cannot be the kind of knowledge that rises above creation, participation is knowledge from our position in the universe, 'from within … '"existential" knowledge'.[129] As knowledge of the natural order 'it must … be knowledge of

[125] Errington, 'Every Good Path', 166.
[126] Wannenwetsch's understanding is very similar to O'Donovan's. Nonetheless, he is sometimes a little clearer than O'Donovan about the effects of sin and therein the need for the disclosive work of the divine Word. See e.g. 'Creation and Ethics: On the Legitimacy and Limitation of Appeals to "Nature" in Christian Moral Reasoning', in *Within the Love of God*, ed. Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 198-216, 216.
[127] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 171.
[128] For a most pointed articulation of the former (in combination with a bold estimation of the predominantly disjunctive character of the new), see Ziegler, 'The Fate of Natural Law at the Turning of the Ages', now republished in *Militant Grace*, 129-38. For the latter see Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 59-61, where it is combined with suggestion of natural law reasoning's innate violence, a point originally Yoder's – as Wells points out (*Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998)). The suggestion is contested from within Anabaptist theological ethics by Paul Martens: 'With the Natural Grain of the Universe: Reexamining the Alleged Pacifist Rejection of Natural Law', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32:2 (2012): 113-31.
[129] *Resurrection*, 79. I do not focus on the question of epistemology and natural law in chapter 5's exposition of *Ethics as Theology*, so note here rather than there a passage from *Entering into Rest* (63-4)

things *in their relations to the totality of things* … the "shape" of the whole'.[130] This consideration of participatory knowledge is not entirely removed from the consideration of sin, though, because such knowledge is not neutral, but always-already 'moral knowledge … co-ordinated with obedience'.[131] Stated with critical edge: 'the exercise of knowledge is tied up with the faithful performance of man's task in the world, and that his knowing will stand or fall with his worship of God and his obedience to the moral law'.[132]

A further feature of this account of knowledge is especially relevant for our question: it 'must be *ignorant of the end of history*':

> Whatever apprehension of created order may belong to man by virtue of his place within that order, the shape of history belongs to the secret counsel of the Lord of history. The creature must walk blindfold along the road of time, and may see only when he turns to survey that portion of the road which has already been traversed.[133]

Here we find O'Donovan revisiting the themes of the discussions of historicism with an epistemological focus, and foreshadowing the later discussions of novelty we have already examined. It is no wonder, he suggests, that there is an unceasing 'search for a philosophy of history', since 'the question about the end of history is a matter of anxiety'.[134] To many philosophies the future appears as threat: 'To face novelty with confidence, they must be sure that what they have truly known as good in the past cannot be invalidated by what they may yet have to know', but of this they know no guarantee.[135] Sympathy is evident here, as the 'they' slips into a 'we':

> in the fallen condition of the universe the created order is constantly put in question by the events of history, so that we have no assurance that the good which we have been given to know, and may still presume to know even though our knowledge is misknowledge, can and will sustain itself.[136]

Nevertheless, in truth the knowledge afforded to us is 'knowledge that is vindicated by God's revelatory word that the created good and man's knowledge of it is not to be overthrown in history'.[137]

A more manifestly particularist point follows:

> Such knowledge, according to the Christian gospel, is given to us as we participate in the life of Jesus Christ … he is the one whose faithfulness to the created moral order was answered

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where in terms coherent with *Resurrection* O'Donovan writes that natural law is 'not badly described by Pope Benedict XVI as a "blunt instrument"'.

[130] *Resurrection*, 77.
[131] Ibid., 87.
[132] Ibid., 81.
[133] Ibid., 82.
[134] Ibid., 83.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid. The exegetical excursus on 84-5 rewards attention, culminating in interpretation of Revelation 4-5, the 'diptych', which both here and elsewhere O'Donovan considers a *locus classicus* of the threatening nature of history – 'the sealed scroll'. See beyond these few lines 'History and Politics in the Book of Revelation' in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 25-47, a revised version of 'The Political Thought of the Book of Revelation', *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986): 61-94.
[137] *Resurrection*, 85.

> by God's deed of acceptance and vindication, so that the life of man within this order is not lost but assured for all time.[138]

I return below to the relationship between this knowledge, 'given' in Christ, and that knowledge 'vindicated by God's revelatory word'. Before that we should query the formulation's theological description. It may not be unfitting to speak of Christ's faithfulness as being 'to the created order', but it may be imprudent, and it is not exactly a scriptural idiom (surely Christ's earthly career is most fittingly said to show faithfulness to his Father).[139] Perhaps O'Donovan has Jesus's 'works of healing and exorcism' in mind, which he mentions later, adding that his 'new teaching vindicated itself by vindicating and restoring the old creation'.[140] Christ, he writes in another passage, 'has been a faithful witness to the order in which we live, "faithful to him who appointed him"'.[141] That illustrates concisely his understanding of faithfulness to the given order as coextensive with faithfulness to the Father. As before, we might specify where O'Donovan does not, and interpret him as meaning to tell us that Christ's faithfulness to the created order is the most *morally* noteworthy element of a broader obedience to the Father. He does not specify it, though, and that claim itself would stand somewhat at odds with the different way christology figures in New Testament ethical exhortation and much of the Christian moral tradition.[142]

At any rate, the general claim is there: true knowledge is not possible without Christ, and true participation in the created order requires participation in him. In a sense, it is therefore *exclusive* knowledge, and this exclusivity is 'an epistemological implication of the fallenness of man'.[143] However, following the same pattern of relating particular and universal we observed above, 'the object of this exclusive knowledge is inclusive: it is the whole order of things created, restored and transformed'.[144] Errington puts this well when he writes that for O'Donovan '"God's revelatory word" … given to humanity in Jesus Christ … is the particular, exclusive point of access to the inclusive field of vision of creation that moral knowledge seeks'.[145] Most basically, what O'Donovan wants to say, in keeping with his understanding of created order's utter objectivity, is this: 'It requires no revelation to observe the various forms of generic and teleological order', but 'such knowledge is incomplete unless the created order is grasped as a whole, and that includes its relations to the uncreated'.[146] If we object that the

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Cf. Meilaender, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 39.
[140] *Resurrection*, 137.
[141] Ibid., 150.
[142] There are plenty of 'therefore' exhortations consequent on Christological (especially soteriological) statements in the Epistles, none of which seem to me directly related to Christ's faithfulness to the created order. E.g. Rom. 6:4; 6:12; 12:1; 15:7; 1 Cor. 6:20; 15:58; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:12, 4:1; Col. 2:6, 2:16, 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:18, 5:11; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:1. That is not at all to say that other Christological statements are not ethically significant, nor that the apostles thought creation unimportant, or morally irrelevant. But the way Christology figures directly in these paraenetic sections is worth considering.
[143] *Resurrection*, 87.
[144] Ibid., 85.
[145] Errington, 'Every Good Path', 162, initially quoting *Resurrection*, 85.
[146] *Resurrection*, 88.

world itself seems less than perfectly orderly, he will reply that any disorder, 'like misknowledge, is attributable only to things which are in their true being ordered', and its brokenness 'not merely unordered chaos' but 'the brokenness of order'.[147] Sin has not corrupted the created order such that human creatures cannot know its configuration to some extent without revelation. Disorder is to be attributed to historical appearances, not creation's 'true being'.[148]

The relation O'Donovan envisions between revealed and common or 'natural' knowledge, if indeed he is consistent, is certainly sometimes a little difficult to work out. He expresses it from different angles at different points, and it is no surprise that he has been taken to intend different things. One articulation in *Resurrection* seems to attempt another *via media*, if from the Protestant side:

> revelation in Christ does not *deny* our fragmentary knowledge of the ways things are, as though that knowledge were not there, or were of no significance; yet it does not *build on* it, as though it provided a perfectly acceptable foundation to which a further level of understanding can be added. It can only expose it for not being what it was originally given to be.[149]

Inasmuch as O'Donovan propounds a 'natural ethic' based on the doctrine of creation, taking Brunner's line regarding the orders of creation in the dispute with Barth, we might expect him to follow some Catholic theology in indexing the sense in which revelation in Christ 'exposes' our impoverished grasp of reality to the sense in which it sharpens and clarifies our 'fragmentary knowledge', elevating and perfecting it.[150] Yet here he does not do so, instead leading with the note of judgment. What, then, *does* 'revelation in Christ' bestow?[151]

'We are not', he writes a few pages later, 'to think of revelation as conferring upon man a knowledge of created order which he never possessed before'.[152] But 'it is true … that it confers a knowledge of the shape of *history* which he never possessed before'.[153] If we recall the earlier line that knowledge must be of a kind '*ignorant of the end of history*' this seems puzzling, not least because the crux of the history revealed to us is 'God's deed of acceptance and vindication,

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[147] Ibid.
[148] The phrase is from 'Response to Craig Bartholomew' (see 113-14).
[149] *Resurrection*, 89.
[150] Ibid., 86-7. See the wide-ranging Bruce D. Baker, *The Transformation of Persons and The Concept of Moral Order: A Study Of The Evangelical Ethics Of Oliver O'Donovan With Special Reference To The Barth-Brunner Debate* (PhD Diss. University of St. Andrews, 2010). That O'Donovan's account of natural knowledge and epistemology is hard to grasp is evident in the disagreement between Baker and Hans Burger, who criticises Baker's interpretation in 'Receiving the Mind of Christ: Epistemological and Hermeneutical Implications of Participation in Christ according to Oliver O'Donovan', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 10:1 (2016): 52-71, 55 n.11. Cf. Hans Schaeffer, *Createdness and Ethics: The Doctrine of Creation and Theological Ethics in the Theology of Colin E. Gunton and Oswald Bayer* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), e.g. 209. My sense is that it would be just as illuminating to read O'Donovan against the backdrop of the Barth-Balthasar conversations as the Barth-Brunner debate.
[151] I push on to discuss themes related to eschatology here but on those left aside see also Brian Brock, 'The Form of the Matter: Heidegger, Ontology and Christian Ethics', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3:3 (2001): 257-79, which tries to use Barth to 'sharpen O'Donovan's account of natural knowledge, clarifying the relation between redeemed and natural understandings of the normativity of the form of the matter' (257).
[152] *Resurrection*, 89.
[153] Ibid.

so that the life of man within this order is not lost but assured for all time'. As before, the key to understanding this confusing collection of statements is to see that O'Donovan's doctrine of revelation preserves a degree of eschatological reserve about history's direction, along with an eschatological confidence about the promise of nature's restoration. But *Resurrection*'s understanding of these things does not seem resolved.

How O'Donovan imagines that combination of eschatological reserve and confidence to work out in epistemology is marginally clearer in *Self-Love*. Here as elsewhere, the interpretations of Augustine tell as much about O'Donovan's theological principles as they do about the Bishop of Hippo. For Augustine, he says, eschatology represents 'a new, decisively Christian discontinuity':

> "We walk by faith, not by sight", we do not yet see God, as the same apostle says, "face to face". Christian eschatology poses a serious threat to the prospect of a reason-based epistemology. It is characteristic of the mature Augustine that he will not, as once he might have done, evade the implications of eschatology.[154]

Augustine does not abandon reason-based epistemology entirely, though, rather attempts 'to develop a theory of knowledge-by-faith which has room' for eschatology – which shows 'a continuity between what may be known and loved now and what may only be known and loved then'.[155] '"Sure faith is the beginning of knowledge"', he goes on: 'Only the beginning … Yet it is no less than the beginning. For without some kind of sight, the deliveries of *auctoritas* could have no content.[156] Put otherwise: 'Augustine is not pleading for a total discontinuity between the self that is and the self that will be. The negative stress in this distinction is balanced by the positive assertions of created goodness in the other'.[157] If '"faith" is the dominant discontinualist, *auctoritas*-oriented motif of the ascent', then this does not discount 'the chief force' for continuity, which is 'the desire for happiness' fundamental to any eudaimonistic scheme.[158]

I have said a little about *Resurrection*'s acknowledgements of 'the dauntingly high barriers' to a natural ethic – namely sin, finitude, and eschatological hiddenness – and tried to get across something of the tensions involved in the way O'Donovan's epistemology deals with each. When we turn to the book's understanding of the moral life, as we are about to do, we will find some passages of greater resolution, but the same tension in the acknowledgement of sin, and the same combination of eschatological reserve and confidence: a tension and combination which are sometimes productive, and sometimes less so.

## CONVERSION AND CHARACTER

[154] *Self-Love*, 79.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid., 62.
[158] Ibid., 90.

In this short subsection I review *Resurrection*'s proposals regarding a focal theme of contemporary Christian ethics – *character* – and one which contemporary Christian ethics neglects – *conversion.* I do so favourably, because these proposals seem to me some of the book's most attractive, and because they show well the import in an understanding of the moral life of a range of doctrines, including eschatology.

We can begin exploring O'Donovan's approach to conversion and character by seeing how it unfolds from the book's earlier commitments. Following the commitment to moral realism, 'moral understanding is a grasp of the whole shape of things'.[159] Moral learning, therefore, must be more than 'a simple *accrual* of moral wisdom … To learn radically new moral truth is to change the shape of the whole outlook. One cannot *add* moral truth to moral truth; one can only *repent* false perceptions of the moral order and turn to truer ones'.[160] Repentance – indeed, conversion – is a basic feature of the moral life. As Westberg among others has observed, conversion is a neglected theme in moral theology, failing to appear in Protestant, even evangelical, ethics where one might expect it; O'Donovan, as Westberg says, is unusual in writing about it substantively.[161] In doing so in *Resurrection*, he follows once more a route *Self-Love* plotted. Here is his description of Augustine's depiction of the moral life:

> The mature Augustine was not interested in spiritual and moral progress as a matter for speculative theorising. True, he began where the ascetic theologians began, with the Platonic mystical ascent of the soul; like them, he worked this out in Christian terms as a pilgrimage toward the purification of the soul and the vision of God; like them, he believed that the Christian life was a protracted moral struggle. But for him there was no ladder of progress by which the soul's movement from one level of moral achievement to a higher one could be charted. The struggle rather consisted in a series of recapitulations of Adam's choice between good and evil.[162]

I contemplate conversion's place in *Ethics as Theology* in chapter 5, offering a reading of those books' approach to it which is to a degree critical. But that criticism presumes gratitude for the effort to recognise conversion's ethical significance, consistent through O'Donovan's work.

This effort is never clearer than in *Resurrection*'s reflections on 'the function of an ethic of character', though we should note that scholars seem to read O'Donovan's relation to the 'turn to character' or 'turn to character virtue' quite differently.[163] His ethics, as we have seen, is focused upon moral *acts* and the moral *order* in which, and in response to which, acts take

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[159] *Resurrection*, 92.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Westberg, *Renewing*, 106-10.
[162] *Self-Love*, 150.
[163] *Resurrection*, 224-5. In locating Ramsey's thought among more recent developments including virtue ethics, Hollowell writes that while the turn to virtue is 'largely attributed' to MacIntyre, 'significant early writings by Jean Porter and Oliver O'Donovan situate this turn within an explicitly Christian frame' (*Power and Purpose*, 5). Porter, certainly; O'Donovan, *perhaps*, complexly; but what about Josef Pieper, or Hauerwas? Jenny Moberly, in *The Virtue of Bonhoeffer's Ethics: A Study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics in Relation to Virtue Ethics* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), takes on *Resurrection*'s austere account of virtue as a main case study, and in the conclusion seeks to 'counter O'Donovan's statement that notions of character can only inform the evaluation of an act … not the decision of how to act' with a reading of Bonhoeffer's 'virtue-ethical motifs' that can still satisfy Protestant concerns (229-32).

place, before it is focused upon the moral character of the agent.[164] But at this stage O'Donovan directly advocates three functions of a character-based approach, the first of which is expressly soteriological:

> An ethic of character … raises the question of salvation in relation to morality; that is why the Catholic tradition has been right to retain it. But it does not answer that question sufficiently; that is why the Protestant tradition has been right to suspect its possible pretensions. We shall not learn how to save our souls by talking about the formation of virtuous characters. Nevertheless, such talk may teach us better than anything else what it is for a soul to be lost or saved, and so teach us to care about it for ourselves and others.[165]

The second function accentuates the first: 'thought about moral character plays a central role in repentance', not least because it enables us to 'form judgments … on what kind of character our history has disclosed, and these, rather than judgments on particular acts, are what will make us feel most acutely the need of salvation'.[166] O'Donovan continues: 'Of an ethic of character, then, we can say with particular point what Lutheran theology used to say about the moral law in all its forms, that by condemning us it drives us to seek the grace of God'.[167]

He by no means thinks conversion is all, though. In the earlier section he criticises some Protestants so fixated upon it that they are tempted to restrict talk of morality to it, undercutting notions of moral growth. Now, this claim is often made and certainly reflects *some* strands of Protestant theology, in which 'justification virtually leaves sanctification, ecclesiology and ethics in suspension',[168] and ethics 'suffered from benign neglect'.[169] But I am yet to read or meet many contemporary Protestants who *in fact* conceive of morality so starkly, having the courage of any reductionistic soteriological convictions in their ethics (or lack of ethics), aside from perhaps some 'Radical Lutherans' like Gerhard Forde, and in his tradition Steven Paulson and Mark Mattes, plus the radically Lutheran Episcopal Paul Zahl.[170] Many Protestant

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[164] Westberg claims to see a way in which *Resurrection* can be squared wholly with Aquinas's approach to virtue: 'Because virtues are developed by a pattern and then a habituation of consistent right choices and actions, there is what … O'Donovan calls 'the epistemological priority of act', and this is clearly taught by Thomas Aquinas in his general principles of act and virtue'. See also Westberg, 'The Influence of Aquinas on Protestant Ethics', in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed. Manfred Svenson and David VanDrunen (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 267-85.

[165] *Resurrection*, 224.

[166] Ibid., 225.

[167] Ibid.

[168] John Webster, 'Christology, Imitability and Ethics', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39:3 (1986): 309-26, 320.

[169] James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 10.

[170] See e.g. Gerhard Forde, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology: Authority, Atonement and Ecumenism*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Forde, 'The Christian Life', in *Christian Dogmatics,* vol. 2, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 391-470; Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). There is much to learn from these theologians, but ultimately my assessment of this approach is similar to that expressed by Allen in *Sanctification* (30-3, 183). For the briefest but cask-strength indication of where disagreements lie, see Forde's review of Webster's *Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to His Theology*, in *Lutheran Quarterly* 2:4 (1988): 531-3, in which Forde reminds the reader, in view of Webster's concerns for ontology and human action, that Pelagius was also British. I say 'reductionistic soteriological convictions', *not* 'reductionistically soteriological convictions', because the problem is not that they cannot think otherwise than salvation – they are right to think theological investigation ought never to leave grace behind – but that they cannot think the grace upon grace of the

theologians develop or adopt conceptualities bespeaking moral growth, whether 'sanctification', some understanding of progressive 'discipleship', or more extensive language of character and virtue. At a popular level, preachers who do not – though virtually nobody seems to eschew them in one guise or another – hardly forgo talk of e.g. holiness, and can be just as moralistic as those who do, albeit haphazardly.

Either way, O'Donovan maintains that he, too, holds that true moral knowledge begins with conversion and that in order 'to proceed with seriousness it must be constantly renewed in repentance as well'.[171] But he does create room for a loftier understanding, espying another way, 'a mode of learning, which is not accumulation on the one hand, not merely a sequence of repentings on the other'.[172] Yet Christian restriction upon speech about growth in the moral life is not just the product of anti-Pelagian resolve – a concern which O'Donovan shares but does not allow to disqualify reception of biblical and traditional witness to that genuine 'mode of learning'. It also issues from an eschatological consideration, which *Resurrection* recognises in a third comment on character ethics.

The 'self-assessment' of character ethics does show how we 'stand under the law of God, which accuses', and leads to an assessment of others, too, 'because the moral law speaks generically'.[173] But these judgments are firmly provisional, because of the eschatological hiddenness of disclosure:

> Just as our favourable judgments on ourselves must be provisional, knowing that whatever has been given us by God's grace may be lost through complacency and carelessness, so our favourable judgments on others are tempered by the knowledge that they, too, are open to temptation. More importantly, just as our critical judgments on ourselves must be provisional, lest we despair of repentance and transformation, so our critical judgments on others must be expectantly open to God's grace. And when we look at others we have to think not only of repentance and transformation that may yet take place, but of that which may possibly have already taken place, though without being disclosed to our view. Thus Solon's warning, to call no man happy until he is dead, is less cautious than Jesus' warning [not to judge, Mt. 7:1]. Even of the dead we do not know what hidden work of God may yet be shown us on the last day.[174]

The way the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of its eschatological perfection are sometimes interpreted in *Resurrection,* without formative reference to the moments of sacred history in between, yields what can appear a premature *ethics of glory*.[175] But in instances like this

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Spirit's effective work in conforming human beings to Christ, beyond the most cursory of indications that it will involve liberation for love. It is possible to think from the precedence of divine being and action through to the sanctification of the pardoned sinner without losing any grasp of the gratuity of salvation *extra nos*.

[171] *Resurrection*, 93. Cf. *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 80-1.

[172] *Resurrection*, 92. Meilaender's recurring account is similar. See e.g. *The Limits of Love: Some Theological Explorations* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 35, endorsed by Hauerwas and Pinches: 'On Developing Hopeful Virtues', in their *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 113-28, 116.

[173] *Resurrection*, 92.

[174] Ibid.

[175] And not just to those Radical Lutherans, though among contemporary theological sensibilities it is theirs which would likely anathematise O'Donovan's most severely – consider e.g. Forde's angular

O'Donovan does acknowledge constraints upon knowledge of the success or otherwise of the moral life, owed to finitude, sin, and eschatological hiddenness. He sometimes concedes that the moral life itself will be difficult, in this order. Yet he does so infrequently. In the next subsection, I identify and assess the theological convictions which seem to decide that concession's infrequency.

## OBEDIENCE, FLOURISHING, AND THE CROSS

O'Donovan's acknowledgement of constraint and difficulty is theologically entwined with meditation upon 'the meaning of the cross *in itself*'.[176] Christ's death, we learn:

> shows us the outcome of the encounter between the true human life and the misshapen human life, between the order of creation as God gave it to be lived and known and the distorted and fantastic image of it in which mankind has lived … joyful and obedient participation cannot continue freely in the world but must conflict with disobedience and so be driven out.[177]

*That*, he continues, is the cross's meaning, 'presupposed by all further meanings which it assumes in the light of the resurrection'.[178] Despite the earlier accent upon the *Christus victor* of Easter Sunday vindication, and the suspicion that Hauerwas espouses 'crucimonism' – 'a tendency to privilege the crucifixion over the other moments of the Christ-event, in keeping with an emphasis on martyrdom and death as the normative expression of Christian witness'[179] – *Resurrection*'s paschal ethics is at last able to register something of Good Friday's moral-theological magnitude.[180] While we 'confess that God reversed the crucifixion of the Son of man and vindicated the true against the false', O'Donovan can write in the preceding sentences, 'that does not alter the fact that the corrupted order had in itself the tendency and the capacity to destroy the uncorrupted'.[181]

Given the apparent reluctance elsewhere to admit the efficacy of creaturely rebellion, these sentences are noteworthy. It is clearer here, too, that the corrupted order still has in itself that tendency, because O'Donovan *does* derive present moral implication from the encounter epitomised in the cross. The record of the way things went for Christ, of goodness's rejection by a fallen world, is also indication of the way things will go for the people called by his name, because it discloses the way things must *always* go in the corrupted order. 'We are not invited

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commentary on the Heidelberg Disputation, *On Being a Theologian of The Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

[176] *Resurrection*, 92.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 95.

[179] Ibid., xvi. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote similar things about Barth.

[180] In that prologue, O'Donovan writes that that he 'did not say enough about how resurrection ought to relate to other Christological moments (advent, cross, resurrection)' (ibid.). Nonetheless, according to Wells, O'Donovan's criticism of Hauerwas is not unmerited: 'by over-emphasising the cross and underplaying creation, Hauerwas falls short of his own criteria … failing to do full justice to the *narrative* form of Christian convictions' (*Transforming Fate*, 156). Later, by turning to Milbank's account of nonviolent creation, 'Hauerwas can finally bridge the divide between creation ethics and kingdom ethics' (158).

[181] *Resurrection*, 95.

now to live in the created order as though there had been no cross'.[182] It might seem that here O'Donovan seems to imply that the created order was not fully restored by the resurrection in as univocal a sense as he usually maintains. He is able to make these claims as he does without implying that, though, by placing great weight on the distinction between the *created* order and 'the distorted and fantastic *image* of it in which mankind has lived', identifying 'the corrupted order' totally with this image. For O'Donovan, this ontologically insubstantial fabrication is always what the New Testament concept of 'the world' defines.

I have quoted *Resurrection*'s most thoroughgoing sentiments regarding the cross's disclosure of the conditions of the moral life. But, in spite of these, it has been suggested that O'Donovan understates the cross's place in moral theology. Gustafson was incorrect in saying that 'crucifixion is absent from this book', but would he have been mistaken to say that it is often missing from the book's basic ethical approach? Stephen N. Williams saw that the cross was not absent, but pressed the query about the relation of resurrection and crucifixion, linking it to the marginalised place of suffering.[183] And in some ways, we should expect more evangelicals like Williams to query that relation in O'Donovan's thought.[184] When O'Donovan takes the resurrection as keynote of an evangelical ethics which 'proclaims the good news as one of its aspects', this means that while there is 'an ascetic and disciplinary side to moral theology … it is not primarily an ascetic discipline, just as Christian discipleship itself involves participation in the cross of Christ but is not primarily crucifixion but resurrection'.[185] That perspective was and is, no doubt, therapeutically reparative for some evangelical audiences. Yet it also means that while amplifying an evangelical accent on theology's proclamatory nature and task he tends to downplay the proclamation of the word of the cross. To venture an analogy: the force of O'Donovan's moral theology is more like Stanley Spencer's series *The Resurrection at Cookham* – which paint risen life in continuity with what went before, provoking us to contemplate our this-worldly responsibilities – than it is the finger of the Baptist pointing to the crucified One, in Barth's beloved Isenheim altarpiece.

The way different moral theologies relate cross and resurrection and their respective moral import can sometimes determine, or be determined by, their adherence to one meta-ethical approach over another. Self-consciously or not, eudaimonism in ethics, we might say, must presume the resurrection's reaffirmation of the goods of creaturely life and its teleology. An ethics of divine command and obligation may tend to see the cross's revelation of the character of obedience in this age of death, sin, and the devil as more paradigmatic.[186] These

[182] Ibid., 94-5.
[183] Williams, 'Outline for Ethics', 89. He also raised well-placed worries about O'Donovan's reading of 1 Peter, in this vein, and drew a pointed contrast with liberation theology.
[184] These same concerns are there in Chester's *Mission and the Coming of God*, which originates in a thesis supervised by Williams.
[185] 'the Foundations of Ethics', 103.
[186] The place of eudaimonism within Protestant theological ethics is contested. Its compatibility with various Protestant commitments is long debated, including divine command, pride's sinful self-love, and the self-forgetfulness of Christian obedience. Many contemporary moral theologians, including

characterisations cannot hold true for all moral theologies (Hauerwas would be hard to classify by this, for one), but it does help understand some of the kinds of links between dogmatic proportion and moral theological atmosphere that can be detected. It is a reading strengthened rather than weakened by realisation that O'Donovan's most extended meditations on the difficulties of obedience are his most extended meditations on the cross, and that they are different in tone from the large swathes of the rest of a book which bases its ethic upon the resurrection.

While these meditations on the cross's moral import do seem far less central to the book's moral vision than its meditations on the resurrection, some have valued the way O'Donovan brings the two together. Daniel Westberg places O'Donovan (and himself) in a trajectory of moral thought that communicates a vision of human flourishing – a vision both Catholic and Protestant[187] – and seeks to assimilate to it notions of obligation and duty. Brief consideration of Westberg's argument helps us distinguish the profile of O'Donovan's moral theology better. Like *Resurrection*, his *Renewing Moral Theology* aims to incorporate evangelical concentration upon the cross of Christ and recognition of the power of *obedience* as a controlling concept for the moral life within an essentially eudaimonistic whole:

> The Christian life presented in the Scriptures, in the life of Christ and described in sermons and saints' lives is obviously a combination of duty and joy, of obligation and fulfilment. But which is more fundamental? Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane prayed that the cup of suffering might be avoided, but he accepted that God's will and not his own was to be done. On the other hand, the Epistle to the Hebrews says that our Lord, "who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame" (Heb. 12:2), speaking of an ultimate joyful purpose.[188]

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Protestants, are adopting broadly eudaimonistic perspectives. That this adoption is thought desirable and possible, even necessary, relies in part on thoroughgoing – merited – critique of anti-eudaimonist arguments of Protestants like Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr as well as renewed attention to the eudaimonistic character of classical Christian ethics (Augustine and Thomas Aquinas largely, but others besides), and, at best, detailed reflection on the ways in which Christian theological concerns modify philosophical eudaimonism. It also frequently involves dismissal of Reformational moral thought, especially Luther's. Or, more accurately, what is usually perceived as Luther's *lack* of moral thought. This part of the case seems more hastily prosecuted, not least because Luther wrote plenty and there is more than one interpretation of 'Lutheran ethics'. A precise consideration of eudaimonism and Christian ethics can be found in Frederick Simmons 'Eudaimonism and Christian Love', in *Love and Christian Ethics: Tradition, Theory, and Society*, ed. Frederick V. Simmons, with Brian C. Sorrells (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 190-209. He observes that the 'relationship between eudaimonism and Christian love is a vast and vexing topic, in part because both notions have been taken to mean so many things' (190), and goes on to trace a number of possible understandings of term which show considerable diversity in usage. He associates O'Donovan's understanding in *Self-Love* with the kind that takes eudaimonism to be 'the doctrine that moral obligation is justified by its contribution to the eudaimonia of those who comply with it' (190, 204 n. 5). This collected volume, containing an essay by O'Donovan himself, is a kind of extended tribute to Outka, whose 1970 Princeton class O'Donovan took, and which gave him the stimulus to return to Oxford intending to write about self-love in Augustine (under Henry Chadwick's supervision). That sojourn also provided the opportunity to learn from Paul Ramsey.

[187] Westberg, *Renewing*, 32. After all, he notes, is not enjoyment key for the Westminster Catechism?

[188] Ibid. There are resonances in both with Arner's account of increasing Protestant interest in 'flourishing' (citing the diverse work of Volf, Ellen Charry, and Neil Messer), and of recent 'forthright defences' of eudaimonism (citing Gregory and Jennifer Herdt). 'Precedents and prospects', 378.

On this basis Westberg goes on to situate ethical recognition of duty inside, as it were, an ethics based on teleological purpose:

> The assumption that an ethics based on duty is more "ethical" or more Christian is understandable when we think of morality in the restricted sense of special decisions where we sense difficulty, confusion and especially conflict. It is especially in times of temptation when inclination and desire lead to a course of action more attractive to us, but if we are honest, we know that the right thing to do is what we ought to do – that is our "duty". But if we expand morality from these special situations of doubt, conflict and temptation, and we accept that all of our conscious actions reflect our morality, then it is easier to see that the more fundamental picture of being attracted to good things (such as marriage, friends and career) and through them to the good itself is sounder philosophically, psychologically and biblically. The sense of duty is secondary to overall purpose. Laws and lists of duties, job descriptions, and responsibilities are important and essential, but they do not furnish fundamental motivation, except at certain stages of immaturity or training.[189]

We can appreciate much about this rejection of a 'hard cases' model for moral reasoning. I welcome its view of Christian ethics as reflection upon Christian life in its full span, and the manner it draws the widest possible circle around moral action. Furthermore, there is surely something therapeutic or reparative for some Protestant piety in relating flourishing and duty like this.[190] O'Donovan makes a very similar argument in his article 'The Foundations of Ethics': 'The struggle of the cross is one which takes its calling solely from the joy that is set before it, the pattern of the resurrection life in its completeness'.[191] And Eric Gregory's summary of O'Donovan's thought certainly coheres with Westberg's: 'Obedience is not an end in itself, but a means to human flourishing in delight with God's will for the good of human beings as revealed and made possible through the saving work of Jesus Christ'.[192]

This view that in the 'first person' perspective 'the commandments are a pedagogical stage relative to the formation of the moral virtues' is widely espoused by Catholic moral theologians.[193] But it also increasingly common in Protestant theology, among those theologians who embrace some form of virtue ethics. D. Stephen Long builds on MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, for instance, when he writes that 'the moral life begins with "our nature as it is in itself" … and transforms it to "our nature as it should be". This movement is what helps us make sense of laws and commands. They are not ends in themselves; they are intelligible because of the ends to which they direct and form our nature'.[194] Westberg's own espousal is indebted to Servais Pinckaers' account, and predicated on Pinckaers' declension narrative, which tells of 'a major shift … to a fundamental orientation of the moral life to law and obedience … prudence and the

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[189] Westberg, *Renewing*, 33. We might ask: what about obedience to Christ himself (Heb. 5:9), or to the teaching of the gospel about him (Rom. 6:17; 2 Cor. 9:13)? That is hardly a form of obedience to be left behind! For its place in the Christian life as described by Paul, see e.g. John Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) – cf. 1 Pet. 1:22.

[190] If some does indeed court hyper-kenoticism, a valorisation of sacrificial suffering for its own sake – a judgment hard to make in any general way.

[191] 'The Foundations of Ethics', 106.

[192] Gregory, '"The Spirit and the Letter": Protestant Thomism and Nigel Biggar's "Karl Barth's Ethics Revisited"', in *Commanding Grace*, 50-9.

[193] Melina, *Sharing in Christ's Virtues*, 136.

[194] D. Stephen Long, *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

other virtues recede, or become aspects of an obedient will … conscience becomes the source for moral reasoning, with the decision to act taken by the will, a decision which then takes on the character of obedience or disobedience'.[195] There is disagreement about the extent to which Pinckaers himself did manage to integrate law and obedience within his retrieval of eudaimonism.[196] But his reaction to this shift – to much 'manualist' Catholic moral theology – has a great deal to commend it, not least his turn to 'Sacred Scripture', his concern to give a theological 'redimensioning' to moral anthropology and an account of moral reason, and to reconnect morality with the spiritual life.[197] Moreover, Westberg claims that the post-tridentine tradition's sometimes reductionistic and austerely rigoristic interests in conscience, law, and obedience also influenced Anglican moral theology for ill, too; if so, Westberg's critique also finds something of a target in his and O'Donovan's tradition.[198] And it may also hit home in the drily moralistic evangelical ethics Westberg also has in mind. Yet – here is the point of my digression – is there not in this adoption of a 'morality of beatitude' sometimes a risk that it constructs a vision of the journey of the moral life inadequately marked by consideration of disciples' need to be conformed to the cruciform way of Christ in the world?[199]

If we are, in the final analysis, to take up something like the understanding just entertained, we must be alert to the occasional trace of triumphalist overstatement in Westberg's case that can also be found in O'Donovan's *Resurrection*. It threatens to weaken the sense in which creaturely life in this order is stricken by sin and suffering, and the related sense in which the life of creaturely flourishing which is the destiny of the children of God might as often as not be 'hidden with Christ' (Col. 3:3), awaiting disclosure. Granted, some Thomist moral theologians take the time to clarify that beatitude's 'subjective' side is more than simply a state of enjoyment, rooted as it is in its ultimate object – God.[200] But I would still emphasise that the subsumption of obedience under a eudaimonistic account of the virtues – or O'Donovan's more act-oriented but effectively eudaimonistic account of the moral life – should not be enacted

[195] Westberg, 'Influence of Aquinas', 277. For contemporary ownership of something like the view criticised see Hare, *God's Command* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), e.g. 312.
[196] See Craig Steven Titus, 'Servais Pinckaers and the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology', *Journal of Moral Theology* 1:1 (2012): 43-68, 59-67, for references to the literature and a positive assessment.
[197] 'Theological "redimensioning"' is Melina's phrase – see e.g. *Sharing in Christ's Virtues*, 140.
[198] To be sure, Westberg knows figures like Jeremy Taylor, Richard Hooker, and Kenneth Kirk have plenty to offer within and besides these topics. There is certainly debate about the extent to which the Caroline divines reformed scholastic casuistry when they absorbed it. Actually, Kenneth Kirk and Henry McAdoo's readings of them make them sound rather like Pinckaers himself, in terms of restoring the connection between moral and ascetic theology, and between Scripture and reason. See Kirk, *Some Principles of Moral Theology and their Application* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1920; McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1949). That said, like Peter Sedgwick after him, McAdoo thinks that the Caroline divines align with, and indeed are 'a striking anticipation' of, the work of Catholic moral theologians like Häring and Fuchs (see Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, 7), whose sensibilities overlap with Pinckaers but can be clearly distinguished from his post-Vatican II.
[199] Cf. Mt. 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23.
[200] For instance Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics,* e.g. 16, there building on Pinckaers, and William C. Mattison, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

blithely, because here the danger of an ethics of glory lies close at hand.[201] Christ's incontrovertibly cruciform way is, as a *way*, ordered to a *telos* beyond the opposition and difficulty encountered in this world as it is currently configured. But it knows no path around them – and we should avoid the inference that Christ's obedience (for our sake) was necessary because he was at a certain stage of moral immaturity.[202] Recognition of his *way* should encourage us to retain a strong sense of the moral life as a struggle for reasons more adequate and realistic than an overactive fascination with the sheer difficulty of isolated moral decisions as such, or an unduly arbitrary conception of divine command.[203] I am not making a judgment here on whether the commitments of an august 'morality of happiness', broadly construed, should once again be taken as *the* marrow of the Christian ethical approach in this postliberal age as it was in patristic, early, and high medieval moral thought.[204] Rather, I am expressing a concern (predictably Protestant) that the way in which this classical tradition[205] is appropriated needs to be maximally rather than superficially informed by our understanding of the real situation of human creatures as disclosed by the gospel.

In terms of the relation of eschatology to ethics, these are especially apt matters for contemplation. After all, both flourishing and obedience are notions which derive their theological intelligibility from eschatology, as well as Christology and soteriology; or, more precisely, very often from the perceived relation of these tracts of Christian teaching. And both notions often achieve their power exactly by extension from a particular understanding of eschatology's relation to present conduct. Eschatology can sponsor strongly teleological narrations of the moral life based on imagination of Christian life as a present participation in the joy of beatitude. It can also sponsor narrations in a sense equally teleological but typically gloomier, based on imagination of the Christian life *in via* as dutiful endurance.

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[201] Language of obedience is hardly absent from Scripture, and that is no doubt why it is more present in O'Donovan's work than Westberg or Gregory's. The link between obedience and blessing finds biblical support, too, throughout Old and New Testaments, though answers to the question of eschatological reward can be related in different ways to answers to the question of present flourishing.

[202] That would surely be a mistaken (subordinationist, adoptionist) way to read Heb. 5:8 ('Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered …').

[203] Cf. Hauerwas and Pinches, 'Is Obedience a Virtue?', in *Christians Among the Virtues*, 129-48.

[204] Pinckaers aims to demonstrate just how central it was – see *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 134-68. Despite the extensive making of distinctions in Thomistic moral theology, 'obedience', 'duty', 'obligation', 'law', and 'commandment' are not always as well defined in the turn to virtue as they might be, in the rush to make a case for virtue's supremacy. Likewise, 'obedience' and 'virtue' are sometimes effectively mapped onto an 'Old'/'New Law' scheme less carefully than might be desired. Melina *does* count 'humility, obedience, service' as 'new virtues', 'in reference to Christ' (135), but in general 'obedience' is usually understood in terms of 'negative precepts' (often those in the Decalogue), and the realisation that it seems to be also a feature of the 'New Law', exemplified Christologically, does not lead to much further reflection on the shape of 'virtue'. The riches of *ressourcement* have evidently put Catholic moral theology back in touch with Scripture in a serious way, but the moral visions that *ressourcement* has produced are still not as closely canonically-regulated as Protestants might hope. Exceptions here would be the work of William C. Spohn, e.g. *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York/London: Continuum International, 2007), in which the place of obedience in discipleship is well-observed, and Raniero Cantalamessa, e.g. *Obedience: The Authority of the Word*, trans. Frances Lonergan Villa (Slough: St. Paul, 2018), who shows the place of obedience 'in the Spirit'.

[205] See e.g. Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

To make a very minimal claim, we would want to say that any account of eschatology's import for ethics should not dispense with the essential truth of either. It should affirm the presence even now, by the Spirit, of the blessedness of eternal life.[206] It should also grant the fleeting quality of the present experience of that blessedness in the face of the world's corruption, and in view of the temptations to betray its promise – against which biblical exhortations to perseverance and endurance are issued.[207] Coherently and persuasively relating these different dispositions of Christian ethics is a task for a theological narration of the Christian life which seeks to describe well the bearing upon that life of hope in the kingdom of God. What these first five chapters argue cumulatively can be stated more plainly: this task requires attentiveness to the full range of theological *loci* which describe the realities in which that life subsists, including the full range of eschatological aspects. Again, this is a modest criterion for theological ethics but, I submit, a useful one.

I find *Resurrection*'s dialectical understanding of conversion and character persuasive in the way it seemed to be responsive to a full range of doctrinal *loci*. But overall I have found its evocation of the general mood of the moral life a little less so. The evocation of joyful flourishing is not illegitimate; it is based on an understanding on the created goodness of human life in the world, goodness secured through the work of Christ and realised in the life of discipleship by the Spirit. Yet it is less dialectical than it might be, because it downplays the way Christ's cross discloses the way obedience must go in this order before the perfect fulfilment of eschatological consummation, and the way the Spirit testifies in our weakness and affliction as well as obvious triumphs. Keeping these assessments in mind, we turn now to *Resurrection*'s ecclesiological passages, searching them for further persuasive proposals, but alert to this tendency.

## COMMUNITY AND KINGDOM

If we follow *Resurrection's* continued explorations of the theme of *freedom*, we find a continuing pneumatological determination and an increasingly eschatological one. O'Donovan speaks of 'freedom to act in such a way that our freedom itself is affirmed and sustained, the freedom to achieve our supernatural end, which is the perfect liberty of the kingdom of God'.[208] This is dogmatically parsed in a now familiar pattern of ascription: 'It is Christ, the pioneer of renewed creation, who evokes this freedom in us, as the Holy Spirit makes the authority of his eschatological triumph subjectively present and immediate to us'.[209] And the account of human freedom opens out here, since it is not just *individual* liberty which is made possible:

[206] Mattison stresses an 'intrinsic', 'continuous' relationship between eternal happiness and activity in this life in *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral* Theology, e.g. 39-40, 204-23.
[207] See e.g. Rom. 5:4; Col. 1:11; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 10:23 (remembering 10:39) and 12:1; Jas. 1:12; 1:25. Also Mt. 10:22; 13:21 (Mk. 4:17); 24:13 (Mk. 13:13).
[208] *Resurrection,* 163.
[209] Ibid.

> Our communal action, too, is made free by the work of Christ, who is the first of a community of brothers. Human freedom consists not only in the power to act alone, but in the power to act together, as a co-operating fellowship. Our humanity is destined, as the seer of the Apocalypse presents it, for the shared life of a city, a fulfilment, redeemed and transformed, of the collective existence of ancient Israel, the "new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven" (Rev. 21:2).[210]

Freedom's communal dimension is available because of promised – and present – eschatological reality.

Just as O'Donovan's ethics typically attends to moral action (and his political ethics to the political 'act') but finds room for consideration of character, having attended to the individual moral agent it now begins to address the community as the subject of moral reflection. He is able to pitch individual and communal moral subjects as non-competitive by following Augustine in speaking of 'the City of God, which eschatologically transcends the tensions between infinite individual aspiration and the limitations of collective structures'.[211] And he is able to show how the freedoms of individual and community are necessarily different but finally convergent:

> The freedom of the community to render corporate obedience to the gospel is the ground of its authority over the individual member. At the same time, his individual freedom to render obedience to the gospel in immediate responsibility to God defines the limits of the community's authority over him. It is obvious enough that these freedoms are liable to conflict. The church is not free from the risk which all communities must face in the conditions of a fallen world … However … The conflict between them, when it arises, is only provisional, springing from sin or from misunderstanding. For both these freedoms are authorised by the same eschatological reality, the kingdom of God, in which every individual vocation is fulfilled and brought to perfection in harmony with the whole. This means that within the church's life the eschatological reconciliation of individual and collective can begin to be realised. There can be a partial experience, at least, of living together in love. Both the church's freedom and the individual's freedom consist in their finding fulfilment in each other, and so displaying in outline the lineaments of the kingdom of God. But since the kingdom is founded on the victory of truth over falsehood in that decisive act of divine truth-telling which we call the Last Judgment, the freedom of church and individual consists also in their being given to speak the truth, to display the character of ultimate reality by which all deception will be condemned.[212]

Later passages toe a similar line: we see a glimpse of the kingdom in 'the communitarian character of redemption', but this does not disaffirm individual vocation, an eschatologically-derived requirement of solitude, which values 'secret alms, private prayer, and concealed fasting'.[213] That requirement reminds us of the dangerous possibility that 'public deeds of righteousness … lose their eschatological reference', that 'their horizon is entirely occupied by the demands and satisfactions of the religious community in the present'.[214] The value of those private deeds 'is not spent upon the community of the present', but 'can expect acknowledgment in the eschatological community of God's kingdom'.[215]

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[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid., 164.
[212] Ibid., 169.
[213] Ibid., 230.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., 231.

There is much to learn from O'Donovan about the way theology can speak convincingly about both individual and community, and for ethics more particularly much to learn about questions of freedom and agency, personal and ecclesial.[216] More to the point, we find here that his ethics encompasses an eschatological factor inasmuch as it has an ecclesial definition. Equally, he is quick to discourage any 'angel ecclesiology': unequivocal, over-realised identification of Church with kingdom.[217] The Church not only proclaims the kingdom and 'is, therefore, in its secondary movement, the kingdom's messenger', first and characteristically it 'hears God's word addressed to it, enters the kingdom of God by faith, and … begins to be conformed to its life'.[218] (Whether conformity to the life of the kingdom is a different, perhaps more expansive, concept than conformity to created order is unclear). If we speak of the Church's authority we first have to speak of it standing under *another* authority, and as such 'the church's authority is genuinely ecclesial only when it manifests the church's identity as a witness to the kingdom of God'.[219] With this appropriately deflationary caution, however, he is willing to call the Christian community 'a true anticipation of the kingdom of God' as the portion of humankind that hears that word.[220]

O'Donovan suggests that the Luke the Evangelist can teach us much about 'the true character of eschatological expectation', over and against 'enthusiastic attempts to invoke final judgment prematurely'.[221] The Church's sign 'points, entirely symbolically, to the last judgment', and in this symbolic witness is differentiated from political authorities.[222] Ecclesial authority is dialectically related to the eschatological disclosure of reality. On the one hand, its 'judgments are vulnerable to the hiddenness of the future', for 'nobody knows what an individual will become, nobody can speak a final word of judgment upon him' (recall the comments on character ethics).[223] On the other, 'a provisional disclosure of reality is given to us. The importance of this sign is that it takes the church's public life seriously as a sphere of action in which eschatological reality can be seen'.[224] On this basis, the Church's authority can

> penetrate behind deception and render a judgment by the prophetic word which makes hidden things plain. This judgment derives its terrifying decisiveness from its relation to the final judgment of God, which seems to cast its shadow back across the penultimate judgments of men and make itself known in the midst of history.[225]

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[216] Not to say political theology – see *Desire*'s account of Christian and civil freedom. It is probably accurate, as Malcolm Brown does, to classify O'Donovan for pedagogical purposes, along with Hauerwas, Milbank, and Banner, as 'communitarian' rather than 'liberal' Christian ethicists, but O'Donovan's reflections on the individual-in-relation-to-community, throughout his work, clearly evince a depth that tag would not always necessitate. Brown, *Tensions in Christian Ethics: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2010).
[217] *Resurrection*, 164.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 173.
[220] Ibid., 165.
[221] Ibid., 177.
[222] Ibid., 173.
[223] Ibid., 176.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid., 178.

After all checks and balances, then, O'Donovan's ecclesiology is unafraid to align the Church with the city of God: it 'is only a witness to that reality, operating under the constraints and ambiguities of public life, nevertheless it is a witness which the Holy Spirit has authorised, and through which God's word has been made known, constraints and ambiguities notwithstanding'.[226] In a line which contains the kernel of an idea repeated in his political theology and ethics – an idea which finally flowers in *Entering into Rest* – he writes: 'A community of loving agreement in the truth can have existence, though fleeting and imperfect, in our midst, and can show us something of the life of heaven'.[227]

I suspect that some readers may find in O'Donovan's ecclesiology traces of the triumphalism which troubled me in *Resurrection*'s earlier narration of the moral life, and there is no doubt that seen in the context of book triumphalism might be inferred from the arresting alignments of Church as witness to the kingdom. Its general mood is perhaps one of certainty, 'constraints and ambiguities notwithstanding'. But while I recognise that danger, I find *Resurrection*'s ecclesiology more persuasive, partly because its use of the concept of 'witness' seems to keeps us firmly in era of the Church militant, even as in our midst there may be by grace be a foretaste of the Church triumphant.[228] We are still in search of a comparably persuasive instance in which *Resurrection* shows eschatology's import for the moral life, however – a search which takes us to its final two chapters.

## LOVE, FAITH, HOPE

In an article responding to McKenny, John Berkman and Michael Buttrey present their own reading:

> To understand O'Donovan's theology of created order, of the "beginning", we start with the end, both the end of creation in general, and with our individual ends as human persons specifically. O'Donovan refers to our end as the restored order of creation (or "new creation"), which we as Christians participate in through a life of ordered love of God and neighbour. Indeed, this proper ordering of love is the chief task of Christian ethics.[229]

If we afford the priority to the claims of *Resurrection*'s earlier chapters' which they seem to demand for themselves then this interpretation, including the decision to 'start with the end', amounts to Augustinian-Thomist streamlining of the book. I make this argument more fully in this chapter's conclusion. But here it serves to introduce the way *Resurrection*'s chapter 11 and

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[226] Ibid., 176.
[227] Ibid.
[228] As Webster writes, 'the notion of witness tries to express the permanently derivative character of the work of the church', 'the active visibility' of which 'consists in attestations of the Word and work of the God who is its Creator, reconciler and consummator'. The church's active life is 'one long act of testimony'. Webster 'On Evangelical Ecclesiology', in Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 153-93, 183, 175. Webster's clarity about the church's identity as witness is matchless, but we may find salutary affirmations in O'Donovan's ecclesiology which Webster's near-incessant deflationary instincts tended to suppress in fear of contemporary 'ecclesiocentrism'.
[229] John Berkman and Michael Buttrey, 'Theologies of Enhancement? Another Look at Oliver O'Donovan's Created Order', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31:1 (2015): 27-37, 30.

12 contribute to the whole as well as McKenny's summary expressed the contribution of the earlier chapters.

Chapter 11, 'The double aspect of the moral life', tells us more about the significance of *love*: 'the principle which confers unifying order both upon the moral field and upon the moral subject's character … the moral law's fulfilment on the one hand, and the virtues' form on the other'; the rule of worship and of social life, admitting no conflict between active and contemplative, or between evangelism and works of mercy.[230] Once more, love is 'free conformity of our agency to the order of things which is given in reality … Love of the material world is good if it is built upon a recognition of what material goods are and what they are for'.[231] Love is this-worldly. Still, 'love of Christ must be viewed eschatologically, as the form which our moral obligations have taken in these last days, at the climax of God's redemptive work'.[232] Indeed love, 'like faith and hope, has an eschatological reference which belongs to it essentially'.[233] It therefore has a measure of *discontinuity*:

> What … did Jesus mean when he taught it as a *new* command "that you love one another" (Jn. 13:34)? The point is that whenever we take love seriously, even within the perfectly "natural" perspective of the twofold command of love to God and neighbour, we stand under the shadow of the last things. The order of love, the created moral order, does not have eternity in itself, but looks forward to a new creation to fulfil it and make it wholly intelligible.[234]

With this O'Donovan augments the result of an exposition of 1 John in the previous chapter, and goes a little beyond it in a salutary direction. There he suggested that the commandment's 'newness … is the eschatological newness of Christ's appearing; its oldness, correspondingly, the aboriginal oldness of created order which is vindicated as the dawning light floods the world'.[235] But here the 'newness' is the eschatological newness of 'new creation', of the last things, a fulfilment which seems to mean new wineskins as well as wine.

Chapter 12, 'The end of the moral life', goes on to show how understanding love's eschatological reference aright means considering the 'relations to the eschatological future' of *faith* and *hope*, too, 'dispositions which are quite without point if they are viewed in isolation from the end':

> If we have understood why love, the form of the moral life, is grouped, not with the spiritual gifts, which have their own intelligibility, but with faith and hope which depend for intelligibility upon the end of history, then we have grasped how morality is related to salvation, how it is that Christian ethics is evangelical. The moral life of mankind is a moment in God's dealing with the created order which he has restored in Christ. Only as that restored order is fully disclosed can the meaning of human morality be comprehended.[236]

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[230] *Resurrection*, 226.
[231] Ibid., 236.
[232] Ibid., 242.
[233] Ibid., 245.
[234] Ibid., 247.
[235] Ibid., 243.
[236] Ibid., 243, 245-6.

Hope and faith 'qualify' love in different ways, O'Donovan suggests, and I will dwell on these further reflections on the Pauline triad because his explanation of the three virtues' complementary functions puzzles as well as illuminates.

Hope 'encourages us and sustains us by promising to our present experience, with all its ambiguity, a completion which will render it intelligible'; in it 'future transformation' is made 'present to our minds by anticipation'.[237] It raises questions of love's reward and therein love's incompleteness in the current order, for the 'divine life of love', truly the supernatural end of humankind, 'quite surpasses the life of human love'. But, O'Donovan says, we can confess that heavenly end without denigrating its earthy analogue, of which it is 'a renewal and perfection'.[238] For 'the life of love to God and neighbour is a true participation in the restored order of creation, a responsive love to the divine love in which the divine mode of life becomes our own'.[239] Still, the two must be distinguished, and the reasons *Resurrection* gives for this distinction are ones we would have been glad to find more readily repeated throughout the book. Our 'participation in the restored creation' must be conformed to a cruciform pattern if it is to 'point forward to the resurrection', and 'the present hiddenness of God's new creation demands its fulfilment in public manifestation, the *parousia* or "presence" of the Son of man to the cosmos in which God is to be all in all'.[240]

Faith conceives 'that future as something apart from our present, wholly independent of it and standing in judgment upon it'.[241] In view of it, the moral life is utterly dependent on 'God's final judgment of grace'.[242] It qualifies love by relating it to justification, revealing how love is ultimately consequent upon 'the one eschatological reality' of the moment of conversion: 'the one decisive transformation', which is successively reclaimed, and signified publicly in baptism.[243] All human lives, myriad in outward appearance, stand under the 'final question … what do they constitute for eternity?'[244] The criteria of that judgment, further, 'are not immanent to the created order itself but … come from beyond it, from its supernatural end', asking whether 'this life, this act, this character' belongs 'to the renewed and transformed world which God is bringing into being'?[245] This question reduces to 'a stark and awesome simplicity' the complex issues of morality 'as diverse as the created order which gives rise to them'; it can 'be answered only in terms of the relation to Christ in whom the transformed world is already present to us'.[246]

Eschatology does frame the narration of the moral life O'Donovan gives in these last

[237] Ibid., 247.
[238] Ibid., 249.
[239] Ibid., 248.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid., 253.
[243] Ibid., 256-8.
[244] Ibid., 259.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid., 260.

chapters, then. And he is aware of multiple other ways in which ethics' eschatological orientation has been voiced. We might 'speak of Christian morality in relation to the kingdom of God', of 'the Christian life as life *in Christ* … "hidden" (Col. 3:3) and "waiting" (Heb. 10:13)', or of 'the Christian moral life as lived *in the Spirit*' who is 'a signpost to the future … (Eph. 1:14)'.[247] It is a shame that a more prominent place is not found for them, though as we shall see O'Donovan himself attempts just that in later writing. More troubling than the relative absence of these idiomatic expressions, though, is relation between hope and faith which he posits in the final chapter.

In hope, he says, our contemplation begins 'from the problematic character of the present', turning 'gratefully to the future judgment of God which perfects the imperfections of the present and promises completion'.[248] In faith 'we move in the opposite direction', beginning with God's Yes to humankind's 'created life and love', and turning to the present, 'our appointed scene of action, to claim and enjoy that affirmation … as an immediate reality'.[249] So far this makes some sense to me. But he goes on: faith 'takes two decisive steps beyond hope' since it 'corrects' hope's orientation to the ambiguous present, paying attention 'first to the objective completeness of the divine judgment', and, decisively, by moving '*to* the present rather than *away from* it', it gives 'practical "substance" to what is hoped for (Heb. 11:1)'.[250] Faith 'is thus at once more contemplative and more active'.[251] These conclusions must be unsatisfactory. If hope truly described is, as the tradition has variously taught, not just a naturally arising attitude or disposition but one which is brought to fruition in the creature as a gift of God the Holy Spirit, then it should be incorrigible and inalienable Christian disposition. In a purportedly complementary account, how can faith so improve upon hope – 'correct' it, go 'beyond' it decisively – on every count? It could be possible to argue that *the moral life* is more obviously served by faith, understood this way, and prayerful longing by hope. That itself would be mistaken; 'of its very nature hope is an aid to action'.[252] Yet even that is not O'Donovan's move: for him faith also trumps hope for contemplation.

This inadequate argument alerts us to the way in which the space afforded to eschatology is contracted by the *prima facie* concern that ethics be assured about the given, and by the habit of evaluating aspects of Christian confession according to their apparent practicability. That assurance about the given O'Donovan finds subjectively in the justification *faith* knows, and objectively in the justified created order to which *love* conforms. There is nothing as such mistaken about that, though the second part can be understood more or less subtly. But why, we may wonder, did Paul risk including *hope* as one of three, if it is so likely to detract from the present, and if the Christian life could be better served by explication of faith? The inadequacy

[247] Ibid., 247.
[248] Ibid., 253.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 40, a. 8.

of O'Donovan's argument is especially mystifying since he has just argued convincingly that love's eschatological character does not diminish its this-worldly significance. Yet it seems to me that he does not quite trust his own argument on that point, which proves to be a neuralgic one throughout his work.

That this is indeed a belief about which O'Donovan wavers might be further indicated by drawing attention to an influential and much-contested criticism he made of Augustine's earlier theology in an article published between *Self-Love* and *Resurrection*, and reaffirmed in the latter.[253] To simplify greatly, O'Donovan's worry there is that in *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine holds to an unfortunately instrumentalising model of Christian neighbour-love precisely because he places the order of love within an eschatological framework, rather than adequately within an ontological framework (that is, one based on creation). Within that eschatological framework, he says, with its central motif of the moral life as 'pilgrimage' (*peregrinatio*), the neighbour is merely the earthly means to a heavenly end, whereas within the ontological framework, the intrinsic value of the neighbour is secured. Yet, as Sarah Stewart-Kroeker ably demonstrates, O'Donovan's critique establishes 'a false opposition between ontology and eschatology, neighbour and self, neighbour and God'.[254] Rather: 'The ontological and the eschatological aspects of Augustine's understanding of ordered love are integral threads bound together in a Christological understanding of love, richly developed in the *peregrinatio* image as a process of moral formation in loving God, self, and neighbour truly'.

Given O'Donovan's characteristic confidence in the ability of the Christian tradition's resources to reframe ethics theologically, the loss of nerve over hope in *Resurrection* is conspicuous. And, if Stewart-Kroeker's reading of this earlier piece is correct, and/or my reading of 'The Natural Ethic' plausible, then *Resurrection*'s difficulty with hope is illustrative of an ongoing struggle concerning the place of eschatology in ethics. That struggle is the subject of my concluding analysis.

## ANALYSIS

*Resurrection* is not easy to engage. It is densely argued, intrepid in its proposals, and light on references. In chapters 2 and 3 we have considered some central features, especially its concern for an objectively grounded moral realism and for subjective freedom correlated to the authority of the objective created order. Perhaps most significantly we have lingered over the claims epitomised by the book's title and subtitle, plumbing O'Donovan's claims about the resurrection's role as cardinal ('hinge') moment in securing that order, and the ways in which this represents good news for us as ethical agents. In all of these and further related themes

[253] O'Donovan, '*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* I', *Journal of Theological Studies* 33:2 (1981): 361-97. See *Resurrection*, 235.
[254] Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 243.

besides I have traced the treatment of eschatology in its moral implications. In closing I draw out from the foregoing analysis a set of direct comments on that topic, volunteering additional support, and interacting critically with a handful of other readers of *Resurrection*.

Eschatology is not by any means totally occluded in the book's moral vision. It is present in at least two ways, which with imperfect accuracy might be called 'Thomist' and 'salvation-historical' respectively.[255] An understanding which entertains teleological thoughts of eschatological transformation is unquestionably there, though I have argued that its appearance is fleeting. Besides this, a more continuous understanding is very much in evidence, coherent with un-interruptive salvation motifs of 'restoration' and 'vindication'. It is this continualist element which I have sought particularly to interrogate, because it seems to me to determine O'Donovan's ethics more than the other. Envisioning a fundamentally realised 'already', it sees that realised 'already' as inaugurating a new creation which is not just proleptically present in the moral order that confronts believers, but – inasmuch as it is substantially continuous with created order – already *is* that moral order. Newness, then, appears absorbed to a high degree into a primarily continuous account of the created order. The tendency is to subordinate the commitment to a transcendent eschatological teleology to the prior commitment to a classically-contoured 'natural ethic'.

Interestingly, the key issues surface already in *Self-Love*'s conclusion, though there O'Donovan seems to answer them rhetorically rather than directly. At the heart of it lies his concern for comprehension of the proper relationship obtaining between creation and redemption. We see this in his criticism of Nygren:

> It has sometimes been suggested that Nygren has no place for the doctrine of Creation, the ground on which Augustine would assert the continuity and stability of the created subject who is the object of God's grace. It could perhaps be argued that the reverse is the case: He has no room for anything other than the doctrine of Creation, since every movement from the divine centre has to be presuppositionless, *ex nihilo*, creative, bringing into existence something quite unprecedented. His rejection of "philosophic *eros*" is not so much the rejection of Creation as the refusal to presuppose it. Creation is existential, never to be taken as read, never to be regarded as the foundation for subsequent movements, both of initiative

[255] In some inexact but significant sense, this continualist element is redolent of N.T. Wright's work, to whose biblical-theological sensibility *Resurrection* might be thought the moral-theological counterpart. I wonder if Wright is actually more influenced by a particular reading of O'Donovan than *vice versa*, and expect New Testament scholars grappling with Wright would find many basic instincts underlying his project in O'Donovan's book. Still, Wright's own moral-theological and theopolitical writing takes some different tacks than O'Donovan's – I mention those in chapter 5. If the connection between O'Donovan and Wright seems tenuous, see the acknowledgments in *Desire* (xii) – Wright as 'former colleague and lifelong friend', *Entering into Rest*'s preface (ix) – sections of that work have 'enjoyed the benefit of comment and advice' from Wright. Wright's *Virtue Reborn* (London: SPCK, 2010) contains a similar line of acknowledgement, and see also the comments in the Preface of Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), acknowledging Wright's 'double debt of friendship and scholarship' to O'Donovan and Rowan Williams, and further mention of the work's indebtedness to *Resurrection* (e.g. 737). The element of O'Donovan's thought concerning eschatology and ethics which coheres well with Wright's may issue from a similar experience in and shared judgment about a particular ecclesial context. The themes of O'Donovan's thought which would *not* cohere as well with Wright's probably owe to O'Donovan's reading of historical and dogmatic theology.

> and response, which will be differently characterised. When man's conversion is described as a "new creation" the phrase is taken literally.[256]

And we also see it in a more synoptic statement, which serves as a useful précis of a host of questions important for our investigation:

> The heart of the quarrel between Augustine and his critics, then, is whether the creative work of God allows for teleology, and so for a movement within creation, which can presuppose the fact of creation as a given starting point, to a destiny which "fulfils" creation by redeeming it and by lifting it to a new level. It is the meaning of salvation that is at stake: is it "fulfilment", "recapitulation"? If this is indeed the authentic Christian understanding of what God has done in Christ, then Augustine's critics will have to face this implication: Between that which is and that which will be there must be a line of connection, the redemptive purpose of God. We cannot simply say that agape has no presuppositions, for God presupposes that which he himself as already given in *agape*. However dramatic a transformation redemption may involve, however opaque to man's mind the continuity may be, we know, and whenever we repeat the Trinitarian creed with Saint Augustine we confess that our being-as-we-are and our being-as-we-shall-be are held together as works of the One God who is both our Creator and Redeemer.[257]

I accept most of these contentions. But as they play out in *Resurrection* the weak transformation and strong continuity redemption may involve seems too transparent to the moral theologian's mind (if not every believer's). And they seem too transparent for reasons as much generated by the discourse's assumed need for confidence in natural order as by the encompassing reach of a unified doctrine of God.

Lorish and Mathewes see in *Self-Love* an 'insistence on a connection, some continuity, between this life and the life to come', 'a sturdy and durable (perhaps less Augustinian than he thinks) insistence that things are *clear enough* – that, in fear and trembling, we can know at least something of what to do'.[258] The impetus for *Resurrection*, they suspect, was partly the attempt to get 'at the theological basis for that conviction'.[259] Though their observation is purely descriptive and comes in a passage of fulsome commendation, it corroborates something like my reading. I have already raised questions about the distinctly undialectical confidence in the created order's eschatological perdurance, and the significance of this confidence in licensing the natural ethic. And I have intimated that this confidence about the moral-theological

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[256] *Self-Love*, 158. For Meilaender, these passages' description and criticism of neo-Lutheranism captures well the kind of Lutheranism he was trained in, and what was wrong with it – see 'Hearts Set to Obey', in *I am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Christopher Seitz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 253-75, 263. That may be so, and I have no intention to defend the neo-Lutherans, but O'Donovan's rhetoric here is a little incautious. The way in which the scriptural witness links creation and redemption *is absolutely* to draw analogy between the two acts (e.g. 2 Cor. 4:6), and this can be expressed in terms which do seem designed to bring the *ex nihilo* quality of creation to mind when we contemplate election and salvation (Rom. 4:17). See e.g. John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 132, 140, 461, 479-92. Now, this does not mean to say that the divine works of free grace are 'presuppositionless' in the sense of being opposed to God's loving covenant faithfulness. Rather, it means that our trust in God's ability to redeem sinners – as utterly unable to make ourselves new as to create ourselves in the first place – is based on confession that in the beginning God (alone) created from nothing and so can, does, and will (alone) make new. See e.g. Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64-5, including the claim that 'this movement is something like our literal recreation'.

[257] *Self-Love*, 159.

[258] Lorish and Mathewes, 'Theology as Counsel', 723.

[259] Ibid.

'therefore' consequent upon a strongly affirmative account of the resurrection does not seem theologically self-evident.[260] It remains to be seen, however, whether the moral convictions O'Donovan imagines are secured by a 'therefore' consequent upon that perdurance are in fact *already* secured for Christian ethics by other tracts of theological teaching, or – if not – are therefore to be thought less certain.

Returning to the thought that eschatology is everywhere in O'Donovan but not everywhere the same – true of *Resurrection* as well as his *oeuvre* as a whole – it is no surprise that interpreters may find in it quite differently constructed schemes and utilise them to quite different ends. At the most basic level, it is obviously a text susceptible of readings which pay more attention to the account of creation order and of those which take it to be thoroughly eschatological, a susceptibility I will illustrate by taking up a few examples.

Joshua Hordern is a good example of a Christian ethicist whose theological sensibilities and not simply topical ethical judgements or account of moral reasoning are inherited almost wholesale from O'Donovan – and *Resurrection* in particular. 'Vindication' is the controlling cipher at any moment when substantive Christian teaching is mentioned, representing the whole economy of the gospel by synecdoche. We read of 'God's good creation vindicated by the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ'; of the 'coming of a new humanity vindicating the moral order and bringing coherence to the human experience of it'; of an objective moral order, 'created by God and vindicated by the incarnation and resurrection, as God's saving actions say "yes" to the goodness of that which was created from the beginning and destined for fulfilment in the new heavens and the new earth'; and very, very often of 'vindicated created order' or similar.[261] 'The moral order created by God is "very good" and the resurrection of Christ from the dead reaffirms that "very good" and promises its eschatological fulfilment'.[262] And, finally:

> Since … dogmatic knowing is the beginning of ethics, the crucified and vindicated Christ is where Christian ethics must begin. Since the resurrection vindicates creation, it is also through such knowledge that the true moral order is discovered and the shape of the new heaven and the new earth is disclosed.[263]

He does acknowledge what he sees as Augustine's sense of the 'current corrupted state of the world', but supplements it hastily with O'Donovan's talk of 'redeemed creation', depicting epistemology once more as the only difficulty.[264] His book's 'theological description' of reality 'speaks … of a created, fallen, vindicated universe of generically and teleologically related features, whose stability is guaranteed by a transcendent God who became incarnate'.[265] Most other instances, unfortunately, do not include the modifier 'fallen', and when they do the implications are constrained. When he speaks, for instance, of 'the settled, attractive quality of

[260] Nor in Wright's *Surprised by Hope.*
[261] Hordern, *Political Affections*, 5; 7; 83-4; 84, 87, 90, 93, 98, 101, 110, 112, 113, 118, 119, 121, 125, 161, 200, 201, 241, 272, 280, 282. The book originates in an Edinburgh PhD supervised by O'Donovan.
[262] Ibid., 86.
[263] Ibid., 277.
[264] Ibid., 92, 97.
[265] Ibid., 98.

the created though fallen order', the implication to be spelled out is this: 'Rather than rooting the instability in the world – which, though blighted by sin, is yet firmly established – our account calls people to examine themselves, their own unstable fragility, and their failure to be fitted to the cosmos as it is'.[266] Ultimately, what *Resurrection*'s doctrinal scheme produces in Hordern's *Political Affections* is the conviction that 'Christ's incarnation and resurrection along with Pentecost vindicated the localised life of natural affections within the moral order, thereby reaffirming its mode of stability'.[267] I will return to it in chapter 4.

Hordern seems unaware of extant or possible challenges to O'Donovan's account of creation and redemption. However, there are readers of *Resurrection* who acknowledge potential challenges yet see in its account of the two aspects of the resurrection ample theological qualification of a purely natural ethic. An excellent example of this reading is found in Berkman and Buttrey's article, which I quoted above. They take McKenny to task for his apparent inability to see such qualification because of his focus on *Resurrection*'s 'first aspect':

> we fear that McKenny has neglected the architectonic significance of the resurrection and eschatology for O'Donovan's account of created order, where the resurrection vindicates the created order and eschatology fulfills the created order. While McKenny understands O'Donovan to derive his account of created order from the Genesis creation narratives … we believe 1 Corinthians 15 and Colossians 3 are the decisive texts for O'Donovan's understanding of created order.[268]

Their own reading makes much of the 'second aspect' as the first's supplement:

> Jesus' resurrection vindicates creation in a "double aspect": on the one hand it redeems and restores the original created order from its "sub-natural" enslavement to sin and death (13, 55-57); on the other hand it points to creation's renewal and transformation (both actual and eschatological) towards its supernatural destiny. On O'Donovan's Trinitarian account of the created order, to act with an ordered love precludes an exclusive focus either on preserving the original creation or on bringing about the new creation; the ordered love to which we are called "respects the natural structures of life in the world, while looking forward to their transformation".[269]

Two possible responses suggest themselves. We could allow that McKenny overlooks the second aspect. But to miss it would be an easy mistake, because the first aspect dominates its programmatic early chapters. The possibility of overlooking the recessive second aspect in itself connotes a challenge to *Resurrection.* For if they are right about 'O'Donovan's Trinitarian account' and the account is clear why can such misreadings so easily arise? Perhaps, then, McKenny is in fact privy to the subtleties of the book – his reading of O'Donovan's position on nature's normativity suggests as much – and still does not think that the second aspect makes much of a difference to the its basic moral vision.[270] More specifically, I argue that if the aspect of renewal and transformation did make more of a difference the aspect of vindication and

[266] Ibid., 98-9.
[267] Ibid., 235.
[268] Berkman and Buttrey, 'Theologies of Enhancement', 31.
[269] Ibid., 34.
[270] Unfortunately, those subtleties are routinely overlooked in Matthew Simpkins, 'The Church of England's Exclusion of Same-sex Couples From Marriage: Some Problems with Oliver O'Donovan's Influence and Arguments', *Theology* 119:3 (2016): 172-84.

restoration would itself not be articulable in such confident priority (even effective isolation) so as to be intelligible as a 'natural ethic'. If that is correct, McKenny would be quite justified in working on the assumption that *Resurrection*'s commitment to created order represents O'Donovan's essential position. Even if this assumption may not do justice to the synthesis presented by Berkman and Buttrey, to observe that O'Donovan *can* give a more nuanced account of the resurrection's two aspects takes nothing away from the observation that he often *fails* to do so.

That eschatological themes are introduced with unfailing, controlling reference to ones essentially originating in the doctrine of creation is part of *Resurrection*'s cumulative argument itself, in its response to his reading of the context and severe judgment about Protestant ethics' historical trajectory. The paucity of passages exploring the implications of the resurrection's *transformative* aspect for ethics is not simply attributable to neglect; eschatology's ambivalence here is the product of deeply held convictions. In constructing such a coherent summary, I suspect that Berkman and Buttrey have done some doctrinal tidying-up, though they likely mean it only as précis. Their description relieves the tension exhibited between restoration and transformation; O'Donovan is hardly as clear on 'creation's renewal and transformation' so as to distinguish between 'actual and eschatological' as they do. And his presentation of the eschatological renewal of creation seems to fall short of the transcendence constituted in the supernatural end that they focus upon when they reconstruct his account in what might be a more exclusively Augustinian-Thomist idiom.[271]

I have quoted lines in *Resurrection* which support their interpretation, of course – and as a theological position it is preferable to what we find in the book's more limited articulations. So too is Gilbert Meilaender's reading, which effects a similar amelioration when it notes the importance for O'Donovan's exegesis of 'the overarching account the Bible gives of humankind as claimed and graced by God in creation, reconciliation and redemption', going on to say that 'there is movement in this account. The end is not simply the restoration of the beginning'.[272] Meilaender's Barthian parsing in terms of creation, reconciliation and redemption[273] is not quite how O'Donovan organises his thoughts about the canonical history's long course. In fact, O'Donovan's preface to *Resurrection*'s second edition, noting the publication of Barth's *Ethics*, admits that Barth's adoption of the principle 'that Christian ethics must conform to the shape of salvation-history, and so has a threefold pattern corresponding to creation, reconciliation and

[271] There may, that said, be tensions between Augustinian and Thomistic sensibilities here, particularly in relation to Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi* – perceived as austerely Augustinian – and its unfavourable reception by some Thomists. But the general trend of (conservative) contemporary Catholic theology seems to be to affirm the broad continuity of Aquinas's with Augustine's thought. See e.g. Matthew L. Lamb, 'Wisdom Eschatology in Augustine and Aquinas', in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 258-75.

[272] Meilaender, 'Ethics and Exegesis: A Great Gulf?', in *Royal Priesthood?*, 259-264, 262.

[273] It is put to very good use in Gilbert Meilaender, 'The Church: A Family of the Adopted', in *Church, Society, and the Christian Common Good: Essays in Conversation with Philip Turner*, ed. Ephraim Radner (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 131-45.

redemption (*i.e.,* eschatology) … promises a fuller account of theological ethics than any monothematic programme based on creation, kingdom or even resurrection'.[274] (The admission is still followed by a couple of pages which eventuate in a defence of 'the *particular* significance of the resurrection').[275] Furthermore, Meilaender's characteristic other imaginary – Augustinian-Thomist, in a mode of expression indebted to Josef Pieper – lends a strongly teleological-eschatological colouration to his interpretation of O'Donovan's thought which is not always as pronounced there as it can be in Meilaender's own.

To be clear, Augustine and Aquinas *do not* discount eschatological continuity. As Matthew Lamb describes Thomas's position: 'Eschatology is the teleology of redeemed creation in the fullness of the kingdom of God', indeed, 'as grace perfects nature, so the revelation of the last things perfects the finality of all creation'.[276] Contemporary Thomists are almost as keen as O'Donovan to gainsay any doom-mongering prediction of desolation, no doubt worried about similar excesses in contemporary Christians' eschatological expectation. Any *discontinuity* 'from the viewpoint of this world', Lamb writes, is simply purification: 'The sapiential eschatology of Aquinas, building upon patristic eschatologies, understands the eschatological and apocalyptic passages in Scripture as revealing the transformation of the whole of creation so that it fully manifests the divine wisdom, beauty and goodness', not, therefore, 'as involving or portending widespread devastation or ultimate doom'.[277] That sapiential eschatology, at least as Lamb presents it, integrates creation and eschatology in a way not unlike O'Donovan's clearer statements.

Nevertheless, I do not think Augustinian-Thomists need to share to the same extent the worry O'Donovan seems too often to have, that Christian hope which fastens itself to a promise of a world to come that is innovatively related to this world (as well as meaningfully continuous with it) will have morally distorting effects. They should be able to defend more strongly than he does a creaturely longing for that supernatural end to which creation is drawn in Christ – an end truly 'more than we can ask or imagine' (Eph. 3:20) – and not pitch it against faithfulness in the present order. Alarm at 'gnosticism' which falsely opposes the order of grace to the order of nature should not short-circuit an account of the genuine 'beyondness' of the order of glory.[278] I suspect Meilaender, Berkman and Buttrey know all this, and O'Donovan himself does too, as he shows in the subtle discussion of eschatological and earthly loves – it is surely passages like that

[274] *Resurrection,* xvi.
[275] Ibid. xvi, xvii.
[276] Matthew L. Lamb, 'The Eschatology of St Thomas Aquinas', in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 225-40, 225, 227. Cf. Carlo Leget, 'Eschatology', in *The Westminster Handbook to Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Joseph Wawrykow (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 44-9.
[277] Lamb, 'Eschatology of St. Thomas Aquinas', 236.
[278] There are many appropriate ways of putting this, but for variety's sake consider John Owen's authentically Thomist compression: 'Grace renews nature; glory perfects grace'. 'Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ', in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 1:383.

which allow them to find their own teleology in *Resurrection*.[279] But throughout *Resurrection* those worries just keep pressing in.

As unaware of possible challenges to *Resurrection*'s approach as Hordern, but palliating in a similar way to Meilaender's, I think, are Brent Waters' and Luke Bretherton's readings. On Waters' reading, which only quotes passages which support this thrust: 'The created and redeemed order is irreducibly eschatological, proleptic, and teleological … creation's pristine state is not recovered but transfigured into the new creation'.[280] Without a trace of recognition that it might also inculpate O'Donovan, he criticises Herman Dooyeweerd for using '"creation" and "nature" as interchangeable terms' and for therefore implying 'that redemption is more a recovery of creation's pristine origin than its transformation in Christ; more an attempt to restore the old than to be drawn into the new'.[281]

Bretherton conscripts *Resurrection*, as does Hordern, to show the 'Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics' on precisely eschatological grounds.[282] O'Donovan is brought in to lend Christian specificity to a basic structure furnished by MacIntyre, and to reject Grisez's project as inadequately shaped by theological concerns. 'In effect', Bretherton writes, 'Grisez is saying that Christ simply republishes the moral law', and just so he 'fails to take seriously enough the implications of the resurrection and eschatology for ethics'.[283] What are these implications?

> Revelation does not merely enable enhanced intelligibility of an already existent morality. While it does do this, it does more than this as well. Revelation furnishes the Christian with a

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[279] By contrast, I am not sure Jean Porter is particularly interested in eschatology – though she did supervise Elliot's excellent doctoral research on hope.

[280] Waters, *The Family*, 161-3.

[281] Ibid., 160. A glance at Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), suggests that Dooyeweerd did understand redemption as 'radical and comprehensive restoration of creation', which it neither 'abrogates nor supersedes' (47-51). More generally I wonder if the neo-Calvinist intention to avoid what it perceives as dualistic understandings of nature-grace, either in grace-annihilating-nature (Pietism) or grace-elevating-nature (Catholicism) leads to inadequate acknowledgement of either sin or transformation. The Dutch neo-Calvinist Hans Schaeffer realises that the theology of marriage might be a litmus test for testing construals of the creation-eschatology axis, and sees that certain New Testament texts (Mt. 22:30; 1 Cor. 7), and thereby the vocation of singleness, could pose challenges to his creation 'orders' or 'mandates' based moral vision (*Createdness and Ethics*, 275) – though, following Bayer, these mandates are by no means static entities. But when he comes to discuss 'Creation, Eschatology, and Marriage' (331-42), and to mitigate (rightly or wrongly) the biblical texts' discontinuous tenor, singleness appears to vanish as a consideration. Bennett follows similar interpretations, but does a better job with singleness.

[282] Bretherton, *Hospitality*, 61.

[283] Ibid., 54. It may be – this is not meant critically – that Waters, Song, Bretherton, Hordern and others saw in O'Donovan the moral-theological route for their ecclesial sensibilities (which I think would not be incorrectly identified as evangelical) to enter academic theological discourse. Certainly in Bretherton and Hordern's cases directly devotional language beyond O'Donovan's keeps company with the technical vocabulary of doctoral thesis. In a review of *Political Affections*, Mathewes is descriptively correct if a little unfair when he writes: 'One might be forgiven for wondering why Hordern does not notice that the two idioms do not smoothly flow together, nor are they neatly sutured together'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84:1 (2016): 272-6, 275. In addition, I wonder if this route, along with the academic trajectory of many scholars in Christian ethics whose first degrees were rarely in theology, means that O'Donovan likely appeared a singularly powerful *doctrinal* as well as ethical and ecclesiastical voice. Again, I do not mean to be critical: the diversity of backgrounds lends the discipline its welcome diversity of experience, and O'Donovan is a serious dogmatic theologian though he does not typically identify as one by trade (note, though, that his position at Wycliffe, Toronto, was in Systematic Theology). But as in other cases it can lead to uncritical appropriation of a leading figure's thought.

> materially new content that entails distinct moral demands … in Christ our fulfilment is already realised and this fulfilment can now, through the Holy Spirit, break into the present age. By implication, our participation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, brings new insight, and calls (and enables) new kinds of responses to old problems'.[284]

This means going beyond MacIntyre, too, since Bretherton discovers that O'Donovan has 'a very different conception of time and history': he 'understands there to be a single reality which itself is under transformation by the eschatological kingdom of God'.[285] In order to develop this line of critical comparison, then, he seems to play up the second aspect of the two evident in *Resurrection*. If MacIntyre lacks 'a distinctively Christian cosmology', O'Donovan's 'eschatological framework … is able to account for the continuity and radical discontinuity between this age and the age to come. O'Donovan is thus able to account for the continuity and discontinuity between Christian and non-Christian approaches to morality'.[286] Bretherton's thoroughly doctrinal summary of 'ethics for O'Donovan' as 'Trinitarian in nature' places its accent at the same point:

> To be moral is to be judged and re-created by Christ and so free to direct oneself, through knowledge and actions, to one's eschatological transformation; which is being accomplished now through the priestly actions of Christ with the Father, in which we can participate through the actions of the Spirit.[287]

Or, again,

> Christ's resurrection has the double aspect of being resurrection from sin and death (thus healing and restoring creation) and glorification at God's right hand (thus looking forward to the eschatological transformation and perfection of creation as a new creation, as distinct from a revolutionary or teleological transformation of existing creation). By contrast, MacIntyre's ethics appears closed to the possibility of this kind of newness or transformation.[288]

Bretherton follows Hauerwas here in asking 'whether MacIntyre's teleology is compatible with Christian eschatology', and raising 'an important and largely unexplored question as to what the relation may be between Paul's eschatology and the teleology insisted upon by MacIntyre'.[289] To extend the point a little further, in closing, we may ask what the relation is between Paul's eschatology and the teleology sometimes insisted upon by O'Donovan.

## CONCLUSION

As it happens, Hauerwas raised a connected query about *Resurrection*. O'Donovan himself quotes it in the preface:

> The connexion that I made between resurrection and created order allowed some commentators, and by no means unfriendly ones, to conclude that I was using resurrection simply as a way back to creation ethics. "What I think O'Donovan seeks is an account of

[284] Bretherton, *Hospitality*, 54, 55.
[285] Ibid., 81.
[286] Ibid., 88, 87.
[287] Ibid., 74.
[288] Ibid., 83. Cf. 81.
[289] Ibid., 81. Cf. Wells, *Transforming Fate*, 153.

> natural law which is not governed by the eschatological witness of Christ's resurrection", Stanley Hauerwas wrote. "We cannot write about *Resurrection and Moral Order* because any order that we know as Christians is resurrection".[290]

In due course, we will have opportunity to investigate what the positive implication might be of Hauerwas's claim as it is relayed in that final sentence. We may also want to ponder the accuracy of O'Donovan's claim, in response, that he and Hauerwas 'walk together in agreement about the non-self-evidence of creation order'.[291] And, to be fair, to note conversely that on O'Donovan's own terms in *Resurrection* and elsewhere his intention absolutely *is* to discipline an account of the natural order's moral relevance with an eschatologically-inflected account of Christ's resurrection. Nonetheless, Hauerwas can put the line about O'Donovan's book in a more piquant and slightly different way: 'Too much moral order, not enough resurrection'.[292] What my exposition has illustrated, I hope, is that he was on to something.

[290] *Resurrection*, xvi. For Hauerwas's comments in full, see *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (London/Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 175.
[291] *Resurrection*, xv.
[292] Quoted in Cavanaugh, 'Stan the Man', in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 25.

# 4.

# Territory: *Desire of the Nations* and *Ways of Judgment*

## INTRODUCTION

O'Donovan's political theology and ethics merits far more space than I can afford it here. It would have been possible to centre a study of the import of eschatology for ethics on the role it plays in *Desire* alone, not least in the first part's narration of the scriptural and traditional development of political conceptualities. It would be hard to miss the prominence of themes like the rule of God or the Lordship of Christ in O'Donovan's theopolitical vision. Yet having chosen *Resurrection* as this investigation's nub, here I need to home in on just a few features, following leads through this material that were set in earlier chapters. Accordingly, I do not make very much of the strictly 'political' in treating O'Donovan's theopolitical vision in this chapter. First, in critical exposition of *Desire*'s trope of 'Restoration', I show the continuities with *Resurrection* in respect of the predominance of the resurrection's backwards-looking aspect. Second, I reflect on the discernment of the times inherent in the theopolitical as well as moral-theological projects. Observing its contextual oversights, I suggest these oversights both condition and are conditioned by theological presuppositions. Third, I demonstrate how eschatological themes once again figure in O'Donovan's ecclesiology, and how they now figure in his account of political life. Finally, engaging debate among commentators, I offer some comments on the way different doctrinal *loci* – creation, sin, providence, salvation, eschatology – are drawn upon to various effect in O'Donovan's political as compared with moral theology.[1]

Inevitably, I must pass over many of these works' historical details, funded by a thoroughgoing theopolitical *ressourcement* achieved in partnership with Joan Lockwood O'Donovan.[2] I also leave unmentioned many of their striking constructive claims, and my

[1] In general this part of his work seems to have attracted more commentary than others, though contemporary conversations in political theology do not engage his thought as much as one might expect. I interact with a few pieces here. Among those I do not are most of the essays responding to *Ways* in *Political Theology* 9:3 (2008), and, recently, James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). The ongoing conversation regarding 'rights' between Wolterstorff, Lockwood O'Donovan, and O'Donovan rewards attention, but again is not referred to here. I also cannot treat O'Donovan's *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) or *Peace and Certainty: A Theological Essay on Deterrence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[2] The historical texts ingredient in this return *ad fontes* are gathered in a sizeable volume edited by O'Donovan and Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). *Bonds of Imperfection* accompanies the volume. That retrieval of the 'Great Tradition' has attracted inescapable but not unfounded concerns about its partiality: see e.g., Arne Rasmusson, 'Not All Justifications of Christendom Are Created Equal: A Response to Oliver O'Donovan', and Christopher Rowland, 'Response to *the Desire of the Nations*', *Studies in Christian*

engagement with O'Donovan's theopolitical reading of Scripture – just as fundamental to his project as the retrieval of a 'Great Tradition', though intriguingly dovetailed with it – can only be piecemeal.[3]

I treat *Desire* and *Ways* together, books O'Donovan describes as 'two phases in an extended train of thought'.[4] In the preface to the second, he reflects on the whole project's positioning:

> The enterprise is superficially similar to, but very different in spirit from, a line of enquiry promoted under the title "political theology" in the second half of the twentieth century, which also argued for the correlation of theological and political concepts, but made the former depend on the latter. After showing how theologians of the past had been the stooges of the political forces that made use of them, political theology set out to reorder our theological concepts to the service of a suitably liberal world-view. The proper political orientations were taken to be well understood, the shape of our theological beliefs indefinitely negotiable. I start from diametrically the opposite assumption. The Gospel proclamation I take to be, in its essential features, luminous, the political concepts needed to interpret the social and institutional realities around us obscure and elusive. The work of political theology is to shed light from the Christian faith upon the intricate challenge of thinking about living in late-modern Western society.[5]

The approach, then, is decidedly confessional in this domain, just as it was in the broader moral-theological one *Resurrection* represents. *Desire*'s purpose is to show 'how the political concepts wrapped up in Jewish and Christian speech about God's redemption of the world still had political force, generating expectations for political life that found one type of expression … in the political ideals of "Christendom" …'.[6] *Ways*, for its part, is 'a Christian political ethics', though one 'the agenda of which' was 'set by political rather than by theological questions'.[7] Accordingly, though it is a fascinating book, much of it is less immediately relevant to the kind of enquiry – moral-theological *qua* moral-*theological* – begun here. I cite it to that enquiry's

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*Ethics* 112:2 (1998): 69-76, and 77-85 respectively, and O'Donovan's reply: 'Response to Respondents: Behold the Lamb!' (91-110 of the same edition).

[3] The reader may remedy this lack, however, by consulting *Royal Priesthood*, a volume of essays (including responses from O'Donovan) addressing precisely his scriptural interpretation, especially in *Desire*. As already noted, prominent in O'Donovan's theopolitical reading of Scripture is his suggestive reading of Revelation. With that in mind, I suggest that those who imagine essential methodological agreement between O'Donovan and Biggar would do well to heed the differences:

> Biggar is a theologian who … can usually remind us of a detail we had forgotten or a document we had missed. He is interested in history … His opinions are often forceful, and glory in their unfashionability … We may sometimes be puzzled, however, as to what distinguishes his contribution to these themes as a theological one. The use of theological sources is only occasional, and rather at arm's length … is it not curious for a theologian to discuss empire without once touching on the reflections on that topic which the author of the Apocalypse drew from the book of Daniel?

(O'Donovan, review of *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation*, *Theology* 119:1 (2016), 42-3, 43)).

[4] *Ways*, ix.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

end only. Going through, I draw also from *Common Objects*, which like *Desire* and *Ways* was quoted earlier when relevant, but which belongs to this period of thought.[8]

I also treat this period as in general marking no great departure from *Resurrection*. Indeed its sequence of works is carried through in self-conscious continuity with it.[9] As O'Donovan writes elsewhere:

> knowledge of the moral order can be a common knowledge, the possession of a community shared through the activity of tradition. It can be the subject of discussion, or persuasion, of agreement; and so it can form the basis of free common action. Within the objective moral order is given the possibility of rational community. This is the necessary path that leads from ethics to politics, a path that I took subsequently to [*Resurrection*] though following lines I had already indicated there.[10]

To be sure, certain features of his argument in the theopolitical works represent modifications of those initially propounded in *Resurrection* (for example, his account of authority).[11] And these works have a tangibly different tonality, as the final part of this chapter explores. But, besides that, the elements which demand this study's concentration are not especially novel.

## RESTORATION

We read in *Desire* that there is 'some truth in the suspicion that political theology has gained a following among those who have grown tired of talking about God'.[12] O'Donovan is quite self-consciously *not* among those 'suffering from metaphysical exhaustion'.[13] He is adamant that all substantive 'topics that responsible theology attends to' must be ingredient in political theology, and in turn themselves illumined by it. Listed as 'repentance and forgiveness, the Incarnation, the sharing of the life of the Godhead in the Spirit, justification and adoption, creation and the renewal of the world, the life of the Church and its ministry of word and sacrament', these are an admirably ambitious set of theological themes to expect political theologians to entertain.[14] For my purposes, O'Donovan's own construction and construal of these terms is of interest, and given our exposition of *Resurrection* particularly the paired terms 'creation and the renewal of the world'. The latter one is, I take it, eschatological shorthand. The scope of that unobjectionable phrase, when employed as placeholder for a range of aspects proper to eschatology, is not straightforwardly identifiable. The use of 'renewal' rather than 'vindication'

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[8] I draw on a particular passage of *Ways* in chapter 5, where it is especially pertinent to a discussion lying outside this chapter's purview. *Common Objects* is brimming with insight, but not especially connected to my topic. The book occasionally touches on the question, though, ubiquitous as it is in O'Donovan's thought: 'how is creation vindicated in the coming of God's Kingdom? And how is the Kingdom seen to make creation new?' (46).

[9] Cf. *Resurrection*, xx.

[10] 'What Can Ethics Know About God?', 40. Cf. *Desire,* 19-20. Note there especially the line which follows rehearsal of *Resurrection*'s core theses: 'as true ethics is grounded in *that* history because it is a history of the vindication of creation order, so it is also grounded in *that* politics. Which is the politics of the divine rule'.

[11] *Ways*, 142-3.

[12] *Desire*, 3.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

might lead us to think the earlier shortcomings will be avoided here. Yet *Desire* does not always avoid them. This is apparent in the theological grammar which surfaces most plainly in its ecclesiological fifth chapter.

In order to proceed in making the case that vindication in fact predominates, I should note that much in *Desire* is arranged by way of a scheme based on scriptural portrayal of the Christ-event. 'The moments of the representative act' are four: 'Advent, Passion, Restoration and Exaltation'.[15] In a move also recognisable from as in *Resurrection* and *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the Church is rendered transparent to these moments in pneumatological recapitulation. Our earlier apprehension about O'Donovan's neatness in appropriating features of creaturely life to Son or Spirit is not entirely assuaged.[16] At any rate, the basic fourfold pattern yields an account of four marks of the Church and (boldly!) four sacraments. It also corresponds to themes in the Old Testament and Jesus' ministry, and to both four praiseworthy features of liberal society, which has 'the narrative of the Christ-event stamped on it', and four parodic features of the same society's Antichristic pretense.[17]

O'Donovan's stated intention in identifying these moments of the *Heilsgeschehen* is not to sever them from one another, atomising the act of salvation, which is properly 'one drama of redemption, not a series'.[18] *Desire*'s provocative list of ideal-type ecclesiologies which foreground one moment above the others illustrates the problems which isolation of each produces. O'Donovan stresses that the Church's pneumatological participation in these

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[15] *Desire*, 133. Constraints of space mean I can only indicate here a potential comparison with the three 'focal images' – cross, community, new creation – of Hays' *Moral Vision* (see 193-206). While *Desire*'s scheme is admittedly heuristic and at times has something of the *ad hoc* about it compared to the earlier account of the three facets of Yhwh's rule, it controls the rest of the book. O'Donovan responds to reviewers' confusion about the status of 'the four-moment analysis of the history of Christ', explaining its exegetical validity as 'a simplified summary, not as a detailed analysis', and its intention to 'facilitate' the reading of text, as well as the subsequent use theory can make of it, in 'Behold the Lamb!', 98.

[16] Towards the end of *Ways*, in an ecclesiological chapter, O'Donovan offers explanation of the theological difference between the church's sacraments and its pastoral, didactic, and missionary ministries – a difference obscured by the neo-Aristotelian moral-theological interest in 'practices' as such. To do so he offers a distinction of them in terms of the missions of Son and Spirit formally familiar from *Resurrection*, but now applied. He writes of those ministries:

> Their authority is secondary in the same sense that the work of the Holy Spirit is secondary to the work of Christ, not implying ontological difference, merely a proper sequence in the order of salvation, where the once-for-all event that saved the world leads on to its manifestation in the church. The sacraments are Christologically determined, the church's communications and ministries are Pneumatologically determined. (266-7)

It is not quite clear how this distinction, however tenable, relates to the sense in which *all* moments of the church's existence entail pneumatic recapitulations of the christic, as suggested earlier. Nor, indeed, in terms of the sacraments, how what seems to be the centrality of (pneumatological) *epiclesis* for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, or the teaching that Christ's baptism is one 'with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Mt. 3:11), can be shown to be derivative of central Christological focus *in abstracto.*

[17] *Desire*, 283. See the Appendix in Paul G. Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion: Post-Christian Protestant Political Theology in John Howard Yoder and Oliver O'Donovan* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 217, which charts the whole set. Doerksen's study originates in a thesis supervised by Kroeker, building on Kroeker's excellent 'Why O'Donovan's Christendom Is Not Constantinian and John Howard Yoder's Voluntareity Is Not Hobbesian: A Debate in Theological Politics Redefined', now reprinted as ch. 7 of *Messianic Political Theology.*

[18] *Desire*, 191.

moments must be ultimately unified (and the sacraments, too, have a certain unity, whether two, four, or seven). Yet he worries that when ecclesial thinkers *have* sought to bind them together, they have employed 'external narratives' in order to render them intelligible – for instance 'dissolving the signs of church identity into rites of passage'.[19] His own reading seeks 'the *inner* logic of the sequence', a thoroughly eschatological cogence: 'the logic of the dawning Kingdom of God which the sequence itself makes plain'.[20] In particular, *Desire*'s third and fourth moments of recapitulation – Restoration and Exaltation – are the passages where we would expect to find eschatology's ecclesio-political import. I return to Exaltation later, but here we are considering Restoration.

If earlier analysis of *Resurrection* was at all percipient, then it will be worth pausing again over O'Donovan's choice of Restoration as shorthand term for the element signifying Christ's resurrection. Seen against the interpretation the earlier book presented of that event's double-aspect, it makes primary the backwards looking element, perhaps suggesting that the forwards looking element can be integrated under that heading well enough. And no doubt it does so partly because with the term Exaltation, signifying Christ's ascension, O'Donovan names part of the reality captured as forwards looking.[21] Still, might it threaten to give up on the attempt *Resurrection* made, however strained, to combine the two. Does it return us to the lop-sidedness of 'The Natural Ethic'? A closer look at *Desire*'s explanation of Restoration is necessary if we are to discover a fair answer to that.

The Church's correspondence to Christ's resurrection is found in its character as a 'glad community'.[22] A small-print exposition of the opening verses of 1 Peter which caught his attention – twice – in *Resurrection*, subsequently delineates the way in which 'Easter gladness' is connected to the moral life.[23] That connection is seen not least in 'joy, even in the face of suffering … the decisive characteristic of the resurrection life': life lived in an 'eschatological frame, with the resurrection behind us and the full appearance of salvation ahead of us'.[24] This line of interpretation seems a less pre-emptive approach to the text's eschatological themes than the more limited of the two earlier exegeses, allowing, like *Resurrection*'s other exposition, more space for the breadth of the epistle's subject matter. The challenge issued by its author, says O'Donovan, is to 'set your hope to the full upon the grace which is coming to you (1:13)',

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Cf. *Resurrection*, 57, where O'Donovan also critises Barth for failing to emphasis this and so neglecting the resurrection's 'backwards-looking' aspect. Paul Molnar defends Barth stoutly against O'Donovan's criticism on this point. See Molnar, *Incarnation and Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 337 n.31.
[22] *Desire*, 181. Typographical error here has 'Exaltation' instead of 'Restoration' as the *third* point as well as fourth. Unfortunately Bretherton was misled by this, and – relaying the scheme – calls the third moment 'Exaltation', worrying that 'O'Donovan seems to conflate two distinct moments within his third mark', which should instead correspond 'only to Christ's resurrection'. *Hospitality*, 104 (also 142). It *does* correspond to resurrection: the problem is that Restoration as the third moment itself conflates what were, in *Resurrection*, the resurrection's two distinct (though certainly inseparable) aspects.
[23] Ibid.. 182.
[24] Ibid.

though it 'remains an open question for these members of the church whether their lives will be shaped by that exalted delight which is participation in the new creation of God, or whether they will be shaped by the old and habitual dispositions of the affections'.[25]

Yet the passages on gladness adjacent to this promising excursus explain it almost entirely in terms of the backwards look. He suggests, in short, that by the Spirit the ecclesial analogue to Christ's resurrection is its 'glad recovery of creation order'.[26] Note: not *new* creation, or 'the new creation of God', but creation *order*: a deliberate elision. So if we perceive in *Desire*'s account of resurrection joy something akin to the account of delight in creation found in *Resurrection*'s treatment of love, it is not misheard:

> When we say that the church is glad in the resurrection of Christ, we point to the meaning of that event as the *recovery of creation order*. Gladness belongs essentially to the creature, as glory belongs to the creator. There is something to say about the glory of the church, too, and mankind's exaltation to participate in God's rule; but we need know nothing of that as yet. It is enough that Adam has recovered the original joy with which he greeted the creator's glory. If the church's gladness is the gladness of creation, that means it is the gladness of Jesus himself; for this renewed order of creation is present in him. He was the "first-born of all creation … in whom all things hold together", and consequently, in his resurrection "the first-born from the dead that in everything he might be pre-eminent" (Col. 1:15, 18).[27]

Further elaboration of the response of a joyful heart continues in much the same style. 'Gladness' is described as 'a moral attitude, a disposition of the affections appropriate to the recognition of God's creative goodness', which seems to belie the epistle's emphasis on joyful apprehension of God's redemptive goodness.[28] For O'Donovan joy – as love, in *Resurrection* – sets in motion our true participation in the created order, placing us within it, and 'by our gladness' making it complete.[29] Despite the mention of the Christian life's eschatological frame, it turns out that its love, gladness and joy, even if part of the eschatological renewal of human subjectivity, seem to have their only objective referent in the order of creation. What happened, then, to setting our hope on the full appearance of salvation which is to come? Has the new creation of God already been completely fulfilled?

In chapter 3, I indicated similarities between O'Donovan's understanding of wisdom, delight, and joy and that offered by Kelsey, in the section of his *Eccentric Existence* concerning creation – rather than reconciliation or consummation, which generate their own reflections on other dispositions. So it makes sense to find a challenge raised to O'Donovan's understanding of joy that it is unduly tied to creation. That challenge he undertook to answer:

> My account of joy, according to Carroll, is exclusively related to creation and history, not the future. The reasons for this lie with the subjective conditions for the experience of joy. Gladness is a subjective condition, objectively caused. The subjective condition must lie in a correspondence between the object and the subject, and where the object is future, in a correspondence between future and present. Without that, the future could not be a joyful one *for us*, however joyful it might be for God and the angels. Gladness lies in the vindication and

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 174.
[27] Ibid., 181.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 182.

> confirmation of what is already given and loved. "Pure" future is always terror. That we may find joy in what is still unrealised is true, but it is a truth not about joy as such, but about faith and hope, which become the basis of joy.[30]

This response seems to me a little unclear, and perhaps another instance of O'Donovan's somewhat acrobatic attempts to relate the eschatological future to the moral present while being unsure about accrediting any genuine objectivity to that future, apart from its already manifest vindication of creation in past history. In any event, there is no problem with relating joy to the 'already' and 'now' of salvation in Christ as experienced in the Church – that seems biblically responsible. Nevertheless, I am not sure creation or even its vindication is always so immediately the object of joy there, so much as salvation, and we must not forget the Pauline teaching that 'the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace *and joy* in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17),[31] nor the Pauline exhortation to 'rejoice in hope' (Rom. 12:12).[32]

The critical point I am entertaining here is that discussion of Restoration, a moment which ostensibly takes its lead from Petrine emphasis upon 'the eschatological frame' of the Christian life, becomes one which gilds that frame's 'behind us' but fails to embellish its 'ahead of us'. This cannot just be because *Desire*'s fourfold scheme parcels up the eschatological and pushes it along the line to the fourth moment, Exaltation, though that was surely the force of his comment that 'we need know nothing of that yet'. *Resurrection* suggested that the raising of Christ from the grave entailed both aspects intrinsically. *Desire*'s explanation of the resurrection's moral implications by speaking of Restoration, then, is another sign of the tendency to imply that when dealing with the central matters of ethics 'we need know nothing … yet' of the eschatological horizon. And there is no doubt that the moment of Restoration, in *Desire* as elsewhere, outweighs Advent, Passion, or Exaltation (it is the longest section), and brings into play more themes already central to his ethical vision than the others.

We can see this in a sense indirectly, if we observe that the relation of joy in restored creation to the Church's experience of suffering, a consideration of the Passion moment, is expressed in terms reminiscent of *Resurrection'*s comments on cross and resurrection. In *Desire* also resurrection is far more prominent. The ecclesial response to Christ's resurrection, in its identity and activity as glad community, is among other things 'an essential qualification to the martyr-consciousness of the church':

> For communities that find their identity in the fact that they have been unjustly treated come to depend upon the injustice of others … what stands between the church and this pathology is the conscious joy it takes in the resurrection life. "The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead" dwells within it. From this position of strength it has no need of the oppressor's

[30] O'Donovan, 'Response to Daniel Carroll R.', in *Royal Priesthood*, 143-6, 145. Cf. M. Daniel Carroll R., 'The Power of the Future in the Present: Eschatology and Ethics in O'Donovan and Beyond' (116-43).
[31] On the link between the Holy Spirit and joy cf. Ps. 51:10-12; Acts 13:52; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess. 1:6.
[32] A theme taken up to good effect in chapter 3, 'Rejoicing in Hope', of Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics*.

> impotent oppression, and so can offer reconciliation. Forgiveness is the sign that all rebellion against God has been defeated, so that the enemy, too, is liberated from its power.[33]

Again, he contrasts his position with Hauerwas's, from whose understanding of martyrdom and its place in Christian witness he diverges, contending that 'readiness for martyrdom is not the only form the church's mission must take. Since true martyrdom is a powerful force and its resistance to Antichrist effective, the church must be prepared to welcome the homage of the kings when it is offered to the Lord of the martyrs'.[34] These are significant passages, providing the detailed subtexts to the headline contestation of Constantianism in the theopolitical debate bubbling away been O'Donovan and Hauerwas and their readers.[35] They illustrate the far-reaching implications for political as well as moral theology of differing construals of cross and resurrection: though I cannot take up that debate here, I hope that my reconstruction and evaluation of O'Donovan's thought could inform it.[36]

Passion receives the shortest of the four treatments. Nevertheless, there is recognition of the Church 'as a *suffering community* engaged in conflict with the principalities and powers that Christ has overcome', and of its true martyr-consciousness.[37] If meditations on the cross's significance in O'Donovan's writing typically entail reflection on the cruciform shape of *individual* lives rather than the Christian community, the fourfold scheme's Passion moment is to a certain extent the exception. If aspects of the moral life O'Donovan typically correlates with the cross are usually connected to particular discernments of personal vocation rather than the generic obligations of morality, here the account of the suffering community, in its 'authority to confront and overcome resistance to God's saving will by enduring suffering in whatever form', definitively ascribes them to the ecclesial assembly.[38]

Of course, Passion leads to Restoration: 'No re-enacting of Christ's death by the suffering church could be without its affirmation of divine victory', as the passage concludes.[39] O'Donovan is suspicious of what *Ways* calls 'characteristically Western concentration on the cross at the expense of the resurrection'.[40] His explanation there further discloses why Restoration assumes so much more ethical and political weight:

> while the cross discriminates between God's righteous servant and the world that rejects him, and brings every question down to the point of which side we stand on, it is the resurrection that vindicates the pattern of humanity that Christ lived for us and commanded us to follow. The resurrection does not leave God's judgment as a mathematical point without dimensions, but unfolds it and expounds it in the life of the Second Adam. That life, though not wholly

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[33] *Desire*, 181.
[34] Ibid., 215.
[35] Cf. 'The Foundations of Ethics', 106-7, where, asking how the church can 'sustain Easter joy in conflict' – the 'struggle of the cross', a 'struggle … against the principalities and powers' – 'as an eschatological sign of the resurrection of the human race', O'Donovan says it 'can do so by forgiving its enemies'.
[36] Cf. Doerksen's sound comparative work in *Beyond Suspicion* (71-85), incorporating the concerns about O'Donovan of e.g. Furnish.
[37] *Desire*, 178. Cf. *Ways*, 294, 'The Foundations of Ethics', 104-5.
[38] *Desire*, 179.
[39] Ibid., 181.
[40] *Ways*, 85, speaking of Luther.

> disclosed, is not undisclosed either: "Thy judgments have been revealed" (Rev. 15:4). Here there is a prescription we may embrace as a promise, a prescription that wholly presupposes that God has given us back our human powers of active life renewed.[41]

The handful of treatments of the cross in O'Donovan's' work, like these, go some way to alleviating a reader's concern – though they themselves seem preoccupied with overcoming the West's perceived crucicentrism. But given the pattern of exposition within them, and the more common silence about the cross, the reader might be led to think that the events of Good Friday are to be understood by theology and ethics as merely epiphenomenal to the central matter of the Christian mysteries. I do not think that O'Donovan actually regards the cross as simply *praeparatio evangelica*, a necessary negative presupposition or narratival preamble to proclamation, rather than as disclosive in itself of the truth about the way faithfulness will go in this order. But, again, his tendency to recalibrate what he takes to be lopsided traditions of dogmatic and moral teaching might lead to an insufficiently dialectical account. I would argue also that the tendency to over-realise eschatology as regards created order, in description of Restoration triumph, does seem to suppress the moral-theological and theopolitical significance of the way of the cross in a world of *ongoing* sin and suffering.[42]

Leaving the moment of Passion behind, we can further see that among the four moments Restoration returns us most thoroughly to focal themes of O'Donovan's ethics when realising that of them all this one covers 'the *moral life of the church*'.[43] Introducing an earlier axiom – 'Church morality is an evangelical morality' – he summarises it:

> This is a morality of new creation in Christ, the life of a new community constituted by God's acceptance of Christ, promising a world made new in Christ and fit for human beings to live and act in. On the other hand, the Gospel is not simply "apart from" God's law. The Mosaic Law, the possession of Israel, contained the promise of an active life, awaiting fulfilment in an Israel with the law written on its heart. That fulfilment is now offered. In Christ we may live and act acceptably to God.[44]

Unfortunately, this fine statement does not resolve *Resurrection*'s ambiguity, though the mention of *new creation* is again welcome, albeit once more likely indicating potential conflation of creation and eschaton. Likewise, obscurity surrounds the implications for theological understandings of creation's fallenness; it seems here as though it was the *world* which needed making new in order for it to be the place of true human life and action, where elsewhere it had seemed that what needed renewal was primarily *humankind*, not least our perception of that still good world.

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[41] Ibid., 85-6.

[42] We can find more of a place for the normativity of the life and cross of Jesus than does O'Donovan without being reductionistically 'Jesuological' – his worry. (On this see again Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*). And we can do so without the needlessly anti-metaphysical stance of Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), which despite its many fine proposals is held back by this diffidence, both in its reading of Barth (and to a certain extent Hauerwas) and its constructive claims.

[43] *Desire*, 183. It is also the one which corresponds to 'natural right' (sometimes 'natural order'), comprising natural equality, structures of affinity, universal humanity, and creaturely cohabitation.

[44] Ibid.

The context, which we have already seen, does little to clarify matters. These passages *are* helpfully clear, nonetheless, in demonstrating as plainly as ever the scriptural reasoning accompanying the move backwards to creation, nervous about over-hasty invocations of the move forwards:[45]

> As the church participates in Christ's resurrection it is authorised to live joyfully in the order God has made, and to recover it from oppressive and exploitative corruptions. The church of the New Testament self-consciously claimed the created structures of life and work in community, as we may see especially (but not only) in the so-called "household codes", a common model of ethical catechesis underlying passages in Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Peter. These have sometimes been thought a disappointingly conservative sequel to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The reasons for discomfort are various: it arises from direct quarrels between contemporary liberal assumptions and the convictions expressed in the text … but it arises also from a failure to appreciate what these texts undertake to do. They do not treat household structures merely as part of an unnegotiable social context with which the church has to get along somehow. They repudiate aspects of them, and claim back other aspects.[46]

The comment here evidently overlaps significantly with those on 1 Peter in *Resurrection*. His readings of it, in the end, triangulate. O'Donovan's praiseworthy attempt to do justice to 'created structures of life and work in community' seems to foreshorten any exploration of the moral import of the exhortation to 'set your hope to the full upon the grace which is coming to you', beyond the 'claiming back' of those structures. Distrust of any falsely bifurcating reading is one thing, judicious when declared as warning to any tempted to take the kingdom's putative transcendence as excuse for posterity's condescension. But so immersed is he in fighting the fires of historicism that his attempt also issues in unnecessary disinclination, in passages that represent key movements of his own thought, to offer many readings of the genuine transcendence of the kingdom of God – of those eschatological themes not directly translatable to the retrieval of created order.

As before, this disinclination is undoubtedly produced by discernment of the times as well as a theological conviction. It seems to limit the exegetical possibilities O'Donovan sees as responsibly open to him, and by extension to limit also (whether correlatively or causally) eschatological hope's ethical import. Later in this chapter, we will further consider the relationship between this prudential judgment and the theological architectonic presupposed and deployed by it, returning to the question of circumstantial judgments' effects on those doctrinal fundaments, and vice versa. Already the mark of O'Donovan's discernment is legible in *Desire*'s treatment of Restoration. Consider the following few lines which press upon us the givenness of things:

> The church's active life is based on delight at what God has done. Delight is not a matter of contemplation and reflection only, but of active celebration; yet the activity is founded on something *there*, the handiwork of God, and is not simply self-generated. When we care for

[45] Ibid., 184.
[46] Ibid., 183. Cf. Francis Watson's comments on Hays' *Moral Vision*, in which despite its other intuitions, Watson worried, 'the pastoral epistles are seen as marking a decline from the exhilarating radicalism of authentic Pauline ethics into a dull traditionalism that has learned to accommodate itself to the social status quo'. Review, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 10:2 (1997): 94-7, 96.

> our neighbour's welfare, it is because we are delighted by our neighbour: by the sheer facticity of this other human that God has made; by the fact that God has given, and vindicated, a determination of our neighbour to health, rationality and relationship. When we make artefacts and machines to exploit the forces of nature, it is because we delight in nature, both in its raw givenness and in its possibilities for co-operation, and we are glad that God has restored it to fulfil his purposes for it. At the heart of making and doing there lies discernment of what the world is and is meant for. Activity is responsive; otherwise it becomes tyrannous and destructive.[47]

Similarly indicative of this contextual judgment are a number of passages in *Ways*. At the end of that book's genealogical narrative of the passage to modernity, for instance, O'Donovan sketches with synthetic acuity the pernicious effects of the modern subject's 'affective independence':

> Sovereignly abstracted from cosmic dependence upon God and fellowship with neighbours, the conscientious individual has also been cut off from the worldliness of moral order; and since the order of creation is the only point of reference to judge what is good for created beings to do, he is left with no recourse to practical reason.[48]

The following sentence relates this analysis to the failures, in turn, of 'the naïve, categorical phase of modernity' – heightening 'the separation of faith and reason: the commands of God were absolute, unrelated to the world in which they were given' – and of 'the later, historical phase' – in which 'the divine commands were dissolved into human constructs'.[49]

Yet what we cannot fail to notice in the context of this inquiry is *Ways*' decidedly overstated claim that 'the order of creation is the only point of reference to judge what is good for created beings to do'. As emblematic of my broader concern it is sufficient again to say that what might be described as the salvation-historical monism implied in this line is such that little moral-theological sense could be made of vocations to singleness. This problem is especially acute because O'Donovan is everywhere at pains to emphasise that divine commands do not circumvent nor subvert practical reason, but are consonant with a measured, deliberative approach which weighs relative claims made upon us within creation, seen in the light of the dawning kingdom of God. In the next discussion, I seek to show what might be lost in O'Donovan's overstatement.

## DISCERNMENT OF THE TIMES, REVISITED

What I seek to do here is to test out a concern that emerges in reading both *Desire* and *Ways* by drawing attention to it here in a very specific way: as regards one feature of *Desire*, and as that concern returns in reading Hordern's *Political Affections.* In short, the concern is this. First: that the discernment of the times made in these books, like the one found in 'the Natural Ethic', tilts the scales towards a creation ethics less affected by eschatology than it should be. Second: that

[47] *Desire*, 183. Note that health, rationality, and relationship are commonly attributed to human beings in natural law theories.
[48] *Ways*, 311.
[49] Ibid., 311-12.

despite the contextual discernment's partial accuracy, this tilting of the scales produces serious lapses in attentiveness to pressing moral challenges.

Articulating my concern requires brief consideration of O'Donovan's treatment of what he terms the 'Southern school' of political theology, or in other words, political theologies of liberation. Early on, *Desire* declares that despite its merits, that school lacks a concept of authority – deploying philosophically-idealist suspicion against the notion itself – and, by such an omission, builds itself 'on an acephalous idea of society, dissolving government in deconstructive scepticism'.[50] Ultimately, it lacks 'a point of a view which can transcend given matrices of engagement'.[51] These particular statements are often a lightning rod for broader apprehension about O'Donovan's 'patrician', perhaps 'legitimating', tone, and the lack of radicality exhibited by his political thought; responses he continually professes to be surprised by.[52] What I want to observe is one of O'Donovan's claims in particular: 'This rejection [of authority] has tended to restrict the immediate usefulness of political theology influenced by the Southern school to questions faced in the North'.[53] 'The Northern democracies', he suggests, present different questions than the Southern, questions which require 'detailed attention to the structures of authority which undergird their unruly democratic culture'.[54] He lists them as follows:

> Can democracy avoid corruption by mass communications? Can individual liberty be protected from technological manipulation? Can civil rights be safeguarded without surrendering democratic control to arbitrarily appointed courts? Or stable market-conditions without surrendering control to arbitrarily appointed bankers? Can punishment be humane and still satisfy the social conscience? Can international justice be protected by threats of nuclear devastation? Can ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities assert their identities without oppressing individual freedoms? Can a democracy contain the urge to excessive consumption of natural resources? Can the handicapped, the elderly and the unborn be protected against the exercise of liberty demanded by the strong, the articulate and the middle-aged? Should the nation-state yield place to large, market-defined governmental conglomerates?

For O'Donovan, 'philosophically motivated "modernity-critics" who have concentrated on the philosophical character of technology … and of modern moral and political thought' are more enlightening on these questions than political theologians.[55] There is nothing inherently disagreeable in this, and we have benefited from his expansions upon their analyses. It surely also true to say, as Christopher Insole does, that attractive in O'Donovan's thought 'is a prudential determination to judge in a way that is sensitive to the particularities and

[50] *Desire*, 16.
[51] Ibid. Cf. O'Donovan, 'Political Theology, Tradition and Modernity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 235-47.
[52] E.g. Timothy Gorringe, 'Authority, Plebs, Patricians', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 11:2 (1998): 24-9; Andrew Shanks, review of *Royal Priesthood*, *Theology*, 107:836 (2004): 145-6.
[53] *Desire,* 18.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

contingencies of a time and a place'.[56] Recall, however, an earlier explanation of the reasons polarised 'naturalist and historicist camps' formed:

> We have to proclaim the gospel in different cultural and philosophical contexts. Many of us have deep sympathy with the problems of the Third World, tyrannical regimes, oppressive family and tribal structures, maldistribution of resources, and so on, and, speaking authentically to the static naturalisms which have produced and aggravated such problems, will talk eschatologically of transformation, even with a daring but possible expropriation of language, of "revolution". Others of us are concerned chiefly with the problems of the Western world, the abuses of technology, the threat to the family, the dominance of financial power, and so on, and find themselves needing constantly to point to the *data* of created nature. No doubt there is a temptation here: it is easy for the one group to think of the other as "conservative" or "radical". But whenever we do this we exclude one side of the nature-history balance, and condemn our own stance to being less Christian for lack of that balance.[57]

There is unsurprisingly strong overlap between the kinds of concerns he assigned to 'the Western world' then and 'the Northern democracies' now, and a more implicit consistent sense of 'the Third World' issues for 'the Southern school'. But reflecting on these two texts together aids our perception of the relationship between circumstantial judgments and theological architectonic.

If O'Donovan sees concern for *both* contexts as authentically Christian, given the construal of both impulses in 'The Natural Ethic', then we have to regard as purely pragmatic his diagnosis of the issues facing us and his deployment of pertinent theological resources. The rationale would go something like this: we have a duty to understand and utilise the theological resources applicable to our situation, which enable proclamation in our contemporary situation. As I observed in chapter 1, O'Donovan's predilection for the natural ethic can be seen as a discernment in this light, a reading fortified by what we read in *Desire.* But from both texts it is still unclear just how misguided he considered the respective attempts to draw, therapeutically, on different theological emphases for different cultural maladies. It seems as though he was content to give some credence to the instincts of those who correlated creation with 'North' and kingdom with 'South'.

In *Desire*, O'Donovan does record a 'word of honour … due to Gustavo Gutierrez', who has devoted his career 'to clarifying the authentic shape that theology must take in his own cultural situation'.[58] In *Ways*, too, rehearsing three 'over-simplified' construals of sin, he credits liberation theology by name (as 'least misleading'!) for its insights into the way 'the envy of the primal sin may be worked out in *excluding structures*'.[59] And he does so at the point in that book when he himself begins to 'make contact with the long tradition of Christian concern for the poor'.[60] (Though announcing a rewarding set of reflections, it is hard not to think that needing to 'make contact' with that tradition suggests O'Donovan's own reflections begin

[56] Christopher Insole, 'Seek the Wrong', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5427 (2007), 9.
[57] 'The Natural Ethic', 31.
[58] *Desire*, 12.
[59] *Ways*, 82.
[60] Ibid., 45.

elsewhere, returning to other apparently more exigent matters beyond this interlude). In *Desire*, he discounts a particular charge of political theology's 'influential critics' because 'it fails to recognise the inspiration of the movement, which has been to take up the cause of the poor *as a theologically given mandate*'.[61] He goes on: 'If the question of the poor is, quite specifically, the question of Latin Americans because it arises in their context, it is, at the same time, a question for everyone because it arises from scriptural warrants to which we must all attend'.[62] Liberation theology's 'true weakness lies not in taking up the cause of the poor in a preferential manner, but in partially concealing the theological warrants for doing so in order to conform the historical dialectic of idealism'.[63]

O'Donovan is not as such inattentive to 'Southern' or 'Third World' issues, then, or entirely unenamoured with political theologies of liberation. But we should mark his two lists' confidence in adjudicating which questions are matters for Christian deliberation in 'Northern democracies', because I wonder whether the demarcations tidy away myriad manifestations of sin plaguing 'Northern democracies' into a list of items proper for deliberation by 'Southern' Christians – and even then, O'Donovan apparently thinks 'Southern' political theologians respond wrongheadedly to 'their' questions. Looking back to 'The Natural Ethic', we remember that the audience was *not* made up of two groups disparate in context. The fact that *British* Christians were exercised about the kinds of issues O'Donovan allocates solely to 'the Third World' might have been a hint that different discernments about their immediate context were being made too. Yet he assumes their interest was in those problems *there,* never here.

At the very least, even if O'Donovan's impressions of the main features of cultural situations are superficially accurate, it has been the experience of some Western Christians that their concern for the problems of 'the Third World' alerted them to *universal* features of sin: features found in their own societies. In a not dissimilar vein O'Donovan writes of *Veritatis Splendor* that, while there is no detectible 'conscious intent to respond to the challenges of liberation theology … clearly the Pope is ready, in squaring up to the more dehumanising determinants of Northern civilization, to learn from that source and to imitate the spirit of Christians who have confronted oppressive structures in the South'.[64] (It is not clear whether we should learn *just* to imitate their spirit, or whether we can also learn to confront oppressive structures). Admittedly, European political theologians' accounts of particular instantiations of the universal features of the moral field sometimes lack subtlety. Neither do they attain the exegetical or conceptual sophistication of O'Donovan's political theology and ethics. But as he himself has given us reason to expect, they can be based on scriptural warrants as well as social analysis.

[61] *Desire*, 10-11.
[62] Ibid., 11.
[63] Ibid.
[64] 'A Summons to Reality', 43.

I have argued that features of the moral field in 'Northern democracies' fit into O'Donovan's category of those constitutive of 'the Third World'. Do these features demand that we draw on eschatological vocabulary to address them? In a way, he would be right to reject this inference, if he wants to maintain the claim that Christian ethics' centre of gravity should be established prior to the pressures of context that produce disequilibrium. But he would seem to have to accept it, given that the contextually-derived concerns he *does* take up seem to him to require attention to *the order of nature*, and are addressed on the basis of a strongly creation-oriented account of salvation as restoration. Accepting that, though, would seem to mean admitting the 'kingdom ethicists' could have rightly intuited the doctrinal resources to draw upon, since they saw the moral challenges differently. As we will find again in *Ethics as Theology*'s incomprehension of Moltmann, he is still very far from that admission.

In other words, O'Donovan makes a more particular argument than he lets on, exactly in the way he structures his putatively universal claims, but criticises others for not assuming those same claims. There is an admirable reach in his thought: both an effort to outline a credibly universal account of moral and political life, *and* a stated sensitivity to the circumstance-derived heterogeneity of Christian moral reason's practical exercise. But I do think the relation between the two is vexed. His ambitions are belied by the contextual oversight that is found here, an oversight that keeps company with the inability of O'Donovan's natural ethic to genuinely transcend binary theological possibilities. I will return to this point briefly below, but before that look to Hordern's *Political Affections* for a very simple illustration of this tendency and the oversights which attend it.

A passage there offers comment on Deuteronomy, recruiting its depiction of Israel's festivals to enrich the thesis as a whole. Hordern speaks of the 'festive joy … arranged so as to awaken the people to the neediness of the poor in light of the goodness of the land and the goodness of the One who gave it', poor who – following the particularity of the biblical text – are named as 'the shamed fatherless, the fearful sojourner, and the sorrowful widow'.[65] He notes that 'recognition of the goodness of the land in general presses people to enquire as to whether the land is proving good *for* the poor and needy in particular'.[66] Yet the footnote attached to this insightful paragraph quickly instructs us as follows: 'The materially poor are not the only ones to be recognised in affection', and: 'For a contemporary set of needy neighbours at risk of being forgotten amidst actual material abundance, cf. O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?*'.[67]

Now, I make a risky point here, because I have no quibble *whatsoever* with the identification of the unborn as needy neighbours the value of whom ought to place us under obligation of the utmost moral seriousness, nor with the suggestion that scriptural concern might prompt us to draw such a conclusion. But why should that be so hastily invoked to qualify the text's stated emphases? Certainly, the expansive notion of needy made room for by the

[65] Hordern, *Political Affections*, 151.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

hermeneutical slippage (materially poor, to poor and needy, to needy defined as per the terms of a particular political reading of the times) is not illegitimate. A sound theological reading of these times should quickly identify the unborn as vulnerable in this way. Moreover, the concerns expressed in O'Donovan's *Begotten or Made?* are substantial, expressed also in the lists of pressures upon 'Northern democracies' in *Desire*. So why draw attention to this aside, making out that it is an instance of a problematic drift of thought?

I do so because when seen against the general tenor of the book, this instance is illustrative of a troubling tendency to *prejudge* the kinds of concrete cases which demand moral reflection in the light of a prior political reading of the times: a reading which conditions and is conditioned by a prior theological assumption. I hope that what the passage choreographs is not sleight of hand evading the force of perspicuous scriptural concern for the materially poor, or the insinuation that the challenge of material poverty is a matter of purely historical consequence, or local preoccupation elsewhere.[68] I hope it really *is* about alerting us to *another* 'contemporary set of needy neighbours'. Granted, it is partly true to say, as O'Donovan himself does, that 'where we live' – meaning the Northern democracies as such – 'the location of true poverty is hidden behind a veil of widespread wealth'.[69] 'The church's identification with the poor', he goes on, 'has to be the goal, not the presupposition, of social reflection in the North'.[70] But true poverty is *not* veiled in all places 'we' live in Northern democracies, nor are the Northern assemblies of the Christian community all completely bourgeois (thank God). We should say to Hordern and others that it is not prudential in the least to moderate our mobilisation in what O'Donovan called 'the cause of the poor ... *a theologically given mandate*' that 'arises from scriptural warrants to which we must all attend'.[71]

The troubling tendency we have just seen keeps company with the marked inclination to afford material priority in Christian ethics to the doctrine of creation interpreted with natural law rubrics, and for soteriology and eschatology to take up their attenuated roles on a stage already well-set.[72] What should we make of that link? We should not baldly assert that the

[68] I trust I am not making a mountain out of a molehill: *Political Affections'* reading of the times and approach to poverty in the UK can, among other judgments, with straight face hold up Iain Duncan Smith's 'Antiochene experience … in Easterhouse, Glasgow' as heralding a revolution in 'the tone and leadership of the United Kingdom Conservative Party since 2005 with regard to poverty', which is to be understood credulously as exemplary instance of 'Christian affections'' ability to 'disturb, renew, or correct patterns of social trust, renewing and challenging political loyalty and representation' (271). If there is an element of truth to this, formally, it seems to me a completely wrongheaded example to choose, given the effects of that Party's policies when in government (already tragically evident by the time *Political Affections* was published).

[69] O'Donovan, 'Response to Peter Scott', in *Royal Priesthood,* 374-6*,* 375.

[70] Ibid., 376.

[71] *Desire*, 11.

[72] For Hordern 'natural law' seems more straightforwardly considered in purely positive terms than for O'Donovan, where Christological concentration exerts more conceptual control. I mean this critically, but should note that Peter Scott intends to extend *Desire*'s motif of Restoration and corollary account of 'natural right' further, indeed basing that 'further' on claims about nature's eschatological fluidity, in order to remedy the features of O'Donovan's political theology I too worry about. He writes: 'those who live "closest" to nature, or who are the principal mediators of nature to society, or who are denied access

oversight is straightforwardly caused by that inclination, but in order to establish the conceivability of their keeping company I do not have to toil: O'Donovan's own typology in 'The Natural Ethic' describes it well enough, if supposedly neutrally. But we should notice it, and I think something critical can and should be made of it, which I will try to outline in what follows.

I do not mean by all this to raise suspicion only or reductively in terms of the sociology of knowledge; it is valuable but not sufficient to point out theological views' unavoidably habituating socio-economic locations. Gorringe's review of *Political Affections*, which I quote some milder comments of below, is a fierce example of that.[73] Rather – and this might be to say both less and more – the observation to be made is that actual losses of perspectival range occasioned by this academic and ecclesial locatedness are not unrelated to the diminishment of *theological* resources necessary for the discovery of the lost insights. What that might mean in this connection is that specifying what cannot be seen by Hordern, or by O'Donovan, is to specify precisely those challenges the discernment of which was earlier taken to have been better served by 'kingdom ethics' than 'creation ethics'. From this angle, it is not inconsequential that the dogmatic vocabulary for salvation to hand for Hordern, though seemingly replete with eschatological expressions, is determined by language of 'vindication'. Used as master concept, that language prevents due recognition of the moral import of coming kingdom of God. O'Donovan himself knows, as we will see more fully in chapter 5, that doctrinal knowledge of the kingdom can unsettle the 'moralist's love of the appearances of order which appear in the world'; though, as we will see there, he has ways of mitigating that destabilising force, and doubling down on the way a notion of restoration 'authorises the moralist's love of order'.[74]

Rowan Williams is right to say that O'Donovan's work 'has been marked by the patient, coherent assemblage of a viewpoint thoroughly permeated by primary theological convictions', and that this 'is why he is so hard to characterise as a thinker of "left" or "right" – and why he is so hard to dismiss and so necessary a presence'.[75] In seeking repair it is therefore imperative that we interrogate failures of perception doctrinally as much as socio-politically, searching in and under the presenting issues for the precipitating oversight. Too few critics have done so.[76] In a way, O'Donovan's description of Christian ethics' polarisation and the different moments

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to natural goods, may be those who are best able to speak of this dynamic order'. 'Return to the Vomit of "Legitimation"?', in *Royal Priesthood*, 344-73, 361.

[73] Gorringe, review of *Political Affections*, *Journal of Theological Studies* 64:2 (2013): 868-70.

[74] 'How Can Theology Be Moral?', 93.

[75] Williams, 'Foreword', viii. Malcolm Brown observes that 'Williams's social theology and O'Donovan's evangelical political theology may not be so far apart after all'. 'The Case for Anglican Social Theology Today', in *Anglican Social Theology,* 1-27, 23.

[76] Whatever one makes of the critics' complaints, it is lamentable both that many of them seem to misread O'Donovan, *and* that he continually seems to invite reproaches and misreadings by his compressed style and occasionally aloof tone, as well as by incautious examples and turns of phrase, some of which are justly picked up on by commentators. This goes beyond the theopolitical works. See e.g. the fair comments of Doug Gay – review of *Finding and Seeking*, *Theology* 118:5 (2015): 364-5.

of doctrinal teaching each side draws upon gives us the beginnings of a response. What we have come to see, however, is that his own project, like Hordern's, does not seem to have overcome that polarisation sustainably itself. If anything, O'Donovan's very claim to have overcome such corrosive dualisms (echoed *verbatim* by Hordern) might have lead to complacency about the scope of political and social reality in 'Northern democracies' demanding theological attention.[77] Yet the fundamental resources are there in O'Donovan to chasten that complacency. As he writes with great insight in *Church in Crisis*:

> The logic of human historicity is that living in a given age means having a distinct set of practical questions to answer, neither wholly unlike those that faced other generations nor mere repetitions of them. It is to be neither superior to nor independent of the past; but it is to be answerable for our own space and time and for its peculiar possibilities of vice and virtue.[78]

Our task is 'to understand together the particularity of the age in which we are given to attest God's works'.[79] That prompt can be taken on board without qualification. First, as a spur to extend understanding of our times and places: 'a Gospel requirement, laid upon us as upon Jesus' first hearers'.[80] But also as an encouragement to go further in attestation of God's works, striving as best we can to testify to all that we are given to know of the Lord's mighty acts of salvation, and their implications for creaturely life.

All that said, fuller testimony to those acts is in fact found in O'Donovan's theopolitical work, despite the ways in which the narrower focus on nature seems to cramp that testimony's moral import. It is to this fuller testimony I turn in the next section, which takes a less critical turn.

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[77] The late John Hughes positioned O'Donovan and Milbank's work as parallel developments (Anglican evangelical and Anglo-Catholic) of MacIntyre and Hauerwas's critiques of enlightenment liberalism. He notes, however: 'O'Donovan does not have so much to say about social and economic questions, but his evangelical account of natural moral order and his constitutionalist defence of the legitimacy of the use of political power and law have been very influential on the current generation of Anglican social thinkers, particularly among evangelicals'. (Hughes, 'After Temple? The Recent Renewal of Anglican Social Thought', in *Anglican Social Theology*, 74-101, 86). It is been suggested to me that O'Donovan recognised his own lack of expertise in these areas compared to others, and even from this remove it does seem that socio-economically concerned theologians were prominent in Christian 'social ethics' during his career. Think in the UK alone of Ronald Preston, John Atherton, and Duncan Forrester. That may be so, but oversights of discernment cannot take that as sufficient excuse, even if explanatory in part of the treatment's scope. It is interesting to see that with Waters' *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethics of Economic Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2016), we now have an economic ethics from one of O'Donovan's students, though (at first glance) *not* one that would satisfy the critics of O'Donovan's theopolitics who have themselves worked on socio-economic themes. That said, as have seen, Sean Doherty's *Theology and Economic Ethics* also shows O'Donovan's influence in parts, though to make a related case entitled 'The Kingdom of God and the Economic System: An Economics of Hope' he relies on other sources. That volume (*Theology and Economics: A Christian Vision of the Common Good*, ed. Jeremy Kidwell and Sean Doherty (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), carries a brief response by O'Donovan to four essays (not Doherty's), of characteristic analytical precision but not many constructive clues. *Desire*'s comments on poverty (98, 165, 207) and *Entering into Rest*'s comments on markets (50-1) suggest that O'Donovan *does* have something to say about socio-economic questions, but nowhere addresses them programmatically.

[78] *Church in Crisis,* 45.

[79] Ibid., 116.

[80] *Desire*, 272-3.

As I have indicated, the eschatological language employed in *Desire* and *Ways* is far from exhausted by the exposition of Restoration. For one thing, O'Donovan goes on describe the significance of the fourth moment, Exaltation, which bespeaks truly eschatological realities. It is to that description and some related passages that I turn now, showing how eschatology figures in the ecclesiology of these books, and how it sets the terms for politics.

Recalling that each recapitulation of the representative act yields corresponding ecclesial dimensions, we find that the Church's participation in Christ's Exaltation is that it 'is a community *that speaks the words of God*'.[81] It does so in prayer and in prophecy, and corresponding to this fourth moment is the speculatively proposed fourth sacrament: the laying on of hands. By this O'Donovan means to capture the common significance lying behind a range of Church practices, including ordination and prayer for bestowal of the Spirit at confirmation. These all in some way secure a place for the recognition in community of the individual and their vocation. We need not dwell on this curious suggestion here apart from noting that part of his case for it rests upon the observation that '[i]n the New Testament … it signifies the church's privilege of invoking 'the powers of the age to come', and especially the bestowal of the Holy Spirit':

> The prayers of the church seek one thing only, the final manifestation of God's rule on earth. Nevertheless, because it is called into existence in order to witness to that coming manifestation through its own life and word, it prays also for God's power at work within itself. Prayer is invocation of the Spirit, calling upon God's power now to witness to God's power then.[82]

In witness, then, the Church is a political community as 'the community of God's rule, manifesting his Kingdom for the world'.[83]

In this way, as in *Resurrection*, O'Donovan makes some quite fulsome statements about the *ecclesia* as instantiating witness to the Kingdom:

> In Jesus' proclamation the duality of Babylon and Israel has become a frontier in time. He stands at the moment of transition between the ages where the passing and coming authorities confront one another … The same frontier in time occupies the apostolic proclamation, with this expansion: the future age now has a social and political presence. A community lives under the authority of him to whom the Ancient of Days has entrusted the Kingdom.[84]

So too in *Ways* he can write that 'the church differs from all societies that we know otherwise in representing the kingdom of heaven'.[85] The socially communicative quality of life beyond judgment – truly a taste of the eschaton – infuses ecclesial life:

> As the model for the communication of the Spirit in the world, the church is defined as the community that "judges not", but bears witness to a final judgment … it is the bearer of a discourse that defers judgment, seeking further reflection and a discourse "between the times" in the moment of God's patience. This discourse is its life, both as an announcement and as a

[81] Ibid. 189.
[82] Ibid., 190, 189.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 158.
[85] *Ways*, 254.

> lived display. For the church is the community within which the Spirit is "given", representing the eschatological identity of humankind, and embodying it provisionally for all to see and enter.[86]

This community is itself possessed of backwards and forwards looking aspects by virtue of its *social* character: 'In the church we look forward to the sociality of the human race gathered around the throne of God and of the Lamb, and we look back upon the given sociality of the race in its creation, apart from sin and the necessity of human rule'.[87] In the present it 'both is and is not a "political society"': it judges not, and is as such 'counter-political', yet it is judged.[88]

If, as we shall see, O'Donovan intends to put politics in its proper place in view of the City of God, it is not that he wants the Church to preen itself on account of its individuating witness. Recognising the true character of the Church militant, we find, is really about understanding its *time*:

> But the counter-political witness of the church, too, is constrained by that "not yet". It points to the future appearing of the one representative, and to the decisive judgment he will give. It models the eschatological community. But it is not simply identical with the eschatological community that will live without structure or form other than the immediate presence of God and the Lamb in its midst.[89]

In fact I think the question of the Church's eschatological continuity and the current legitimacy of governmental judgment is one in terms of which interesting conversation between the emerging traditions of O'Donovan and Hauerwas could be staged.[90]

O'Donovan is attentive to the ways in which the Church's eschatological orientation relates to the political as such. Central among these is that it calls into question the hubristic, self-aggrandising tendencies of earthly rule. Rulers and ruled must never forget: 'The kingdom of God can have no concrete representation upon earth except the indirect one afforded by the

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 241.
[88] Ibid., 318.
[89] Ibid., 261.
[90] Especially if we entertain Wells' proposal to modulate Hauerwas's earlier largely spatial claims into ones more about time. See Wells, *Transforming Fate*, ch. 7, 'From Space to Time'. In a way, Cavanaugh's somewhat Hauerwasian reading of Augustine gets us a certain distance towards this end, and provides a robust critique of 'already'/'not yet' legitimation of slackly spatialised dualities – see 'From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space', *Political Theology* 7:3 (2006): 299-321. Insole's reply to Cavanaugh's piece identifies its challenge but also its problematic irresolution; his push for clarity about the present status of government and his further development of the temporal dimension are both largely coherent with O'Donovan's work (Insole, 'Discerning the Theopolitical A Response to Cavanaugh's Reimagining of Political Space', 323-35, of the same issue). However, Insole seems to push the anti-ecclesiocentrism line a little harder than O'Donovan would, a difference seen in his worries about *Ways* in 'Seek the Wrong'. Actually, the way Insole understands the eschatological 'disruption of our false "already" by God's already' ('Discerning', 332) to trouble the postliberal turn to communal practices and virtuous habit is not dissimilar to the ways in which some current exponents of apocalyptic theology (Nathan Kerr, David Congdon) seek to puncture what they see as the hypertrophy of ecclesiality in otherwise kindred spirits. I have *some* sympathy with *some* of this de-emphasis – and recognise the point about the pervasiveness of sin – but for reasons related to the theology of grace, and less to do with any revalorisation of liberal individualism, a night in which all secular and ecclesial cows appear black, and which seems too determinative in Insole's piece.

church'.[91] This is not to say that eschatology has no relation to earthly affairs. As *Desire* has it, 'Justice is to have a new, evangelical content'.[92] Indeed *Ways*, as O'Donovan's volume of *political ethics*, possesses its own eschatological orientation, which might be best summarised in the following quotation: 'Our membership in the kingdom of God may be transcendent, but it can be gestured towards in the way we do our earthly justice'.[93]

How seriously O'Donovan takes that gesturing is perhaps easiest to comprehend when placed in the relief he wishes us to see. *Ways*' critical comments on Luther's political theology re-present in this connection the critical comments I introduced above on law-and-gospel ethics. In a chapter considering 'Punishment', O'Donovan understands his own commitment to the moral reach of Christ's victory ('the triumph of the kingdom') to necessitate following Augustine's lead instead, when it comes to the present relevance of the gospel for practices of judgment. Unlike Luther, Augustine could see 'no other context for exploring this than the church's mission of reconciliation and redemption'.[94]

But O'Donovan also stresses that recourse to eschatology in political thought can turn pernicious. For instance: 'Actually to project an ideal of eschatological equality onto the political order of secular society produces a tyrannous idealism, for social reality as we encounter it is always shaped by representation and judgment one way or the other. Eschatological equality belongs to the "not yet" of the kingdom'.[95] As Eric Gregory writes, for O'Donovan, 'though politics can be in the service of the church, we do not build the kingdom of God through revolutionary action, even as we long for that promise to be fulfilled and pray for it come'.[96] Or again:

> No reader of O'Donovan – or Augustine for that matter – could underestimate this cautious, non-apocalyptic realism flowing from recognition of the fallen human condition, the contingency of history, and the mystery of providence. Civic virtues have their proper ends, ones chastened by the future rather than present dimensions of salvation. In fact, judiciousness is the virtue of an eschatological patience that knows the "not yet" of any human achievement. Here we find something like an apophatic political theology, veiled in the ambiguity of exilic pilgrimage and sin-stained temporality … Our compromised politics are not the kingdom of God …[97]

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[91] *Ways*, 214-15.
[92] *Desire*, 201. Cf. Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, 251-60, which interacts with drafts of *Desire*.
[93] *Ways*, 215.
[94] Ibid., 89. Compare the earlier comment that Augustine's 'distinctly Christian approaches to the administration of justice should not be described (H.R. Niebuhr) as "transforming" earthly institutions, for they do not anticipate the eschatological kingdom but assert the created order of loving equality as the context in which juridical coercion should be interpreted. In the final peace of God itself there will be no human dominion'. 'Augustinian Ethics', 48.
[95] *Ways*, 261.
[96] Gregory, 'The Boldness of Analogy: Civic Virtues and Augustinian Eudaimonism', in *The Authority of the Gospel*, 72-85, 73.
[97] Ibid. O'Donovan wrote earlier: 'It was at this point that Aquinas sharply diverged from the Augustinian tradition to re-establish the connection, carefully severed by Augustine, between earthly politics and humanity's final good'. 'Augustinian Ethics' 48. Later, at least, he sees their divergence as not insurmountable (see *Ways*, 60), but would not go quite so far, I think, as recent attempts to find a 'naturalness' to political authority in Augustine, and by so doing to draw him closer to Aquinas, found in Gregory and Joseph Clair, 'Augustinianisms and Thomisms' in *The Cambridge Companion to Political Theology*, 176-96.

Yet, as Gregory himself describes it, for O'Donovan, 'relieved of the pressure to be salvific, politics is set free to pursue its provisional and relative tasks. Such politics, like our experience of grace, operates more in the modality of healing than elevation. It tempers imperfection rather than tutors perfection'.[98] As 'Buckle Street', O'Donovan's poem which prefaces *Ways,* has it, 'Grace' is 'the invader', and though its work is 'scornful of gravity', righting what has gone wrong, to do so it 'Follows the traces left by our interdicts / Scoops out from hard-core legal strictures / Runnels of kindly communication'.

That poem's topic of *judgment* is fundamental to O'Donovan's project, and through it runs an eschatological thread, though it cannot be examined in any detail here.[99] Neither can more than a word be said about another aspect of his metaphysically-ambitious account of political reality and history which that thread runs through: *secularity*.[100] Deeply suggestive, though, is the line in *Common Objects*: 'Western society has forgotten how to be secular. Secularity is a stance of patience in the face of plurality, made sense of by eschatological hope; forgetfulness of it is part and parcel with the forgetfulness of Christian suppositions about history'.[101] And, in a wonderful earlier passage of that book:

> Secular social reality, we may say, is constantly subverted by a conspiracy of nature and grace. The community-building love that the Creator has set in all human hearts, and that makes even Hell a city, will always need redemptive love if it is to realise its own capacities. Secular community has no ground of its own on which it may simply exist apart. It is either opened up to its fulfilment in God's love, or it is shut down, as its purchase on reality drains away.[102]

Politics for O'Donovan, then, is firmly this-worldly. This-worldly, in the *created* sense of the natural, dignified limitations and contingencies of social life; in the *fallen* sense of the pretensions of powers and principalities openly rebelling against divine rule; and in the providential sense of the necessity of the acts of judgment which restrain evil. But it is never entirely without analogy to the ways of divine judgment, untouched by the ways of divine grace.[103]

## CONCLUSION

Jonathan Chaplin's has remarked well what he calls *Desire*'s 'panoramic, Augustinian eschatological vision of political history', and that remark lends the theme on which I

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[98] Gregory, 'The Boldness of Analogy', 73.
[99] See Guido de Graaff, 'To Judge or Not to Judge: Engaging with Oliver O'Donovan's Political Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 25:3 (2012): 295-311.
[100] Brock finds the form of eschatology – final judgment – which shapes O'Donovan's understanding of secularity too limited. Brock goes on to make a case, following Wannenwetsch, for the political 'fertility' of eschatological hope in a 'secularity generated by … present experience of reconciliation' rather than '"unfulfilled promise"'. ('"What is the Public?" Theological Variations on Babel and Pentecost', in *The Authority of the Gospel,* 160-78, 168). De Graaff's article represents a modification of O'Donovan's theopolitics influenced by Wannenwetsch's ecclesial vision, too.
[101] *Common Objects*, 69. On the difference between O'Donovan and Milbank's evaluations of secularity, see Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 146.
[102] Ibid., 24.
[103] *Ways*, 100.

conclude.[104] Lorish and Mathewes were not misled when they wrote that 'his has been a distinctively *Augustinian* judiciousness':

> one attuned to the complexities and paradoxes of a sin-riddled creature, immured in this world but longing for a divine happiness that never has more than a fugitive presence here, and all the ironies and necessary compromise attendant on such a creature's existence in our world.[105]

Nor Gregory, when he wrote that their statement 'nicely captures the anthropology and eschatology of an influential strand of political Augustinianism':

> It is governed by what O'Donovan names as a "threefold metaphysic of a good creation, an evil fall and an end of history which negates evil and transcends the created good". So understood, politics is theologically located in the flux of history in the time between the times (*in hoc saeculo*), not in created nature.[106]

Insole, too, makes a similar assessment, writing that *Ways* shows no exception to the 'Augustinian sense of our imperfectibility' that 'provides the pedal note under all of O'Donovan's work'.[107]

This sense so identified may indeed be sustained throughout his work, but given my reading of 'The Natural Ethic' and *Resurrection*, I want to offer some specification. An assessment of the sobriety of O'Donovan's eschatological reserve in political theology, history, and ethics has to be accompanied by an assessment of the confidence of his eschatological realisation in moral theology. This reading is itself supported by Lorish and Mathewes' comments cited earlier, the drift of which was that *Resurrection's* conviction about moral clarity is less 'Augustinian' than O'Donovan might think. Developing this assessment is not straightforward, though, because as we have seen that book seemed to meld different visions of eschatology, sometimes more, and sometimes less convincingly. On one hand, it envisages sturdy continuity between creation and new creation, which makes possible strong, somewhat

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[104] Jonathan Chaplin, 'Political Eschatology and Responsible Government: Oliver O'Donovan's 'Christian Liberalism', in *Royal Priesthood?* 265-308, 275.

[105] Lorish and Mathewes, 'Theology as Counsel', 722. They write that *Desire* 'simply recast the field of "political theology":

> … Up until that work, discussion of "church and state" issues had largely been occupied by a running debate between ecclesially-minded "narrative theologians": of Hauerwasian and Yoderian varieties, on the one hand, and those "public theologians" for whom the Christian's presence in a liberal society was a given fact that needed to be acknowledged: the former saw the latter as perniciously collaborationist, while the latter saw the former as hopelessly sectarian … O'Donovan's book rearranged the categories for everyone, both taking Scripture and church if anything *more* seriously than the narrativists, and also engaging in the public order more constructively and collaboratively than the public theologians (725).

Gregory writes: 'Deliberativeness is another way of identifying this judiciousness' they appreciate in O'Donovan, 'one that marks O'Donovan's distance from the oscillation between prophetic jeremiad and secularist punditry which can be found in Anglo-American theological ethics' ('The Boldness of Analogy', 73). There's something essentially right here, though it seems to me too crude to characterise Hauerwas's mode as *simply* prophetic jeremiad, not least since he has done as much as anyone to *propose* a particular social ethic, and to commend specific practices, sometimes in conversation with non-theological interlocutors. More to the point, arraying the options in this way, thereby portraying one's exemplars and oneself as, for example, neither left nor right, can be a comfortable way of avoiding the sharp end of Hauerwas's jeremiads (granted, he issues a few!): of settling into a complacent *mediocritas.*

[106] Gregory, 'The Boldness of Analogy', 73.

[107] Insole, 'Seek the Wrong', 9.

eschatological knowledge in the present of the form of created goods (which may, in his 'flatter' account of restoration, be coterminous with new creation). In this kind of epistemic confidence, as they point out, there might be something not quite 'Augustinian'.[108] But, on the other hand, O'Donovan holds even there an austere view about the possibilities of knowledge of the moral import of the eschatological future, of the kingdom of God, rather than creation's already-eschatologically-achieved vindication.

In his political theology, in distinction, O'Donovan strikes me as a more singularly 'Augustinian' thinker. Apophatic reserve takes hold more strongly: the relation of earthly to eschatological reality is by analogy; current reality seems more marked by sin; current perception seems more provisional; current possibilities of perfection seem more fragile, even absent. The peace and justice obtained in the necessary compromises of Christian engagement with the *saeculum* are for O'Donovan, as for Augustine, 'merely shadows of what will obtain after this life'.[109] And whatever appellation we might use, O'Donovan's sobriety concerning earthly politics is why other moral and political theologians who otherwise share many instincts can find him unduly pessimistic. Finding the relation too equivocal, the echo too distant, they wish for a more univocal relation between heaven and the earth in particular moments or movements of worldly activity.[110] Yet when that judgment is considered, it must be borne in mind that O'Donovan's political theology has *also* been criticised for an 'overrealised' eschatology, which is understood to sponsor its Constantinianism. That claim has force, if not necessarily precision.[111]

In O'Donovan's thought, the givens of (redeemed) creaturely life and its goal are always-already given. They seem to dictate the mood of his moral theology. Though that mood permeates *Desire*'s treatment of Restoration and its ecclesial parameters, for the most part the atmosphere of the theopolitical work is subtly different. In it, the *unknowns* of life in this order, owed both to sin and to the 'not yet' of the kingdom, are an ever-present bulwark upon which human reasoning breaks, and must be respected. Gregory's remark, that when seen in terms of the threefold metaphysic O'Donovan espoused in *Resurrection*, 'politics is theologically located in the flux of history in the time between the times … not in created nature', holds the clue to understanding what this chapter is arguing in concert with my earlier chapters. Gregory means

[108] I realise to say 'Augustinian' is to raise almost as many questions as it settles, inviting engagement with critical debates not mentioned directly. Literature related to competing readings of *City of God* continues to proliferate.

[109] Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 213. Cf. O'Donovan, 'Augustine of Hippo', in *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 104-13.

[110] E.g. Gregory, 'The Boldness of Analogy', and *Politics and the Order of Love*, Brock 'What is "the Public"?.

[111] Kroeker ('Why O'Donovan's Christendom …') critically assesses the adequacy of that claim as made by Yoder. It is one repeated by Hauerwas and Fodor, and by Cavanaugh ('Church' in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 392-406, 404). Cf. J. Alexander Sider, *To See History Doxologically: History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), ch. 1, Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 104-8, and D. Stephen Long, *The Goodness of God: Theology, Church, and the Social Order* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 89-104.

that description of O'Donovan's theopolitical vision, and to do so, I think, as continuous with the salvation-history of his moral vision. But for *Resurrection morality,* by contrast with politics, seemed to be theologically located more resolutely in created nature, at times too far removed from historical flux. As I wrote in the Introduction, when vindication or Restoration become the shorthand for the aspects of eschatological reality that appertain to creaturely life, O'Donovan consistently announces eschatology and expounds creation. That trend is present here, too, inasmuch as the foregrounded notion of Restoration underpins the account of the Church and its moral life. Yet in a dimension distinct from this, in his theopolitical work it is *the kingdom of God* and the *last judgment* that come to the fore (besides the 'already' and 'not yet' of Christ's triumph over earthly powers), representing the transcendent and delimiting horizon of human affairs.[112]

An intriguing further realisation might follow. In broad terms, if Hordern's theopolitics takes up what I earlier called *Resurrection's* continualist strand of eschatology, O'Donovan *himself* takes up *Resurrection's* second strand – transcendent, apophatic – in his. When Gorringe writes (let us leave aside the mentions of Hitler and Mussolini) that Hordern's book is 'very much in the school of [O'Donovan] … drawing on his work as a principal source', he means principally that 'Hordern accepts O'Donovan's contention that there is an objective moral order'.[113] But that is, of course, a contention not especially central to O'Donovan's own account of politics. In his theopolitical work, the account of created order's restoration – the first strand of his eschatology – lends a baseline of reality to political life, most easily described as social life, most fully explicated in terms of the moral life of the Church. I do not deny that Hordern also holds to 'the eschatological, Augustinian distinction between an Eden without human politics, the present where political authority serves society, and the coming Kingdom', which 'enables the insight that that the givenness of social life is not made by political authority but discovered by it'.[114] But he allows an analogy to be drawn more closely between the affective participation in worldly order generated by the experience of salvation in Israel and the Church, and affective participation in the status quo of political life as such.

It is true that O'Donovan's political theology also fundamentally relates particular and universal, inasmuch as its universal account of political authority is hewn from the canonical history of God's works.[115] All political authority, in some way, is located in divine providence, and rightly for him an understanding of that must be won through attending to the story of God's ways with God's people. Yet in *Desire* and *Ways* there is an ecclesial particularity to the

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[112] Like Brock, Carroll considers O'Donovan's eschatological interest too much spent on final judgment.
[113] Gorringe, review of *Political Affections*, 868, 9. He continues:

> we can readily agree with this. The problem, of course, is how we know it, and what aspects of it we identify. Ulysses, in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, articulates just such an order, which one suspects would not be unsympathetic to Hordern, but which for much of the past century and a half has been subject to an ideology critique of which Hordern is innocent.

[114] Hordern, *Political Affections*, 245.
[115] In a different way, *post*-apostolic history too, itself subject to divine activity.

*fuller* appropriation of restored creation. That, I think, produces some tension with O'Donovan's earlier moral theology, and seemingly with Hordern's less restrained theopolitics.

Scholars have often attributed O'Donovan's restraint to his 'dispensationalist' grounding of politics in providence to the exclusion of its moorings in creation.[116] That is exactly right, since for O'Donovan politics 'belongs within the category of history, not of nature': 'political order is a *providential* ordering'.[117] Judgment, after all, the core of his proposal, presupposes an actual wrong, and therefore the fall.[118] Some, among them Jonathan Cole, have located this contrastively against *Resurrection*'s own embryonic political theology, for instance *Resurrection*'s brief mention of 'institutions of government' among a list of 'natural structures of life in the world', taken to mean that 'politics might in fact have prelapsarian origins'.[119] (From our reading of 'The Natural Ethic', we can see that this too enthusiastically understands 'natural' to mean 'created'; natural, for O'Donovan, has always included *post-lapsum* historical provisions). In saying this, Cole recognises Chaplin's interpretation of O'Donovan's mature position, in which 'salvation *restores and vindicates* the created orders of *society*, but *restrains and disciplines* the providential order of *government*'.[120] But he wants us to 'locate the *esse* of political authority in the created order', as he thinks *Resurrection* did, and 'to locate its *bene esse* in Christ's redemption of the whole created order, which is to say in the providential realm of history'.[121] By placing politics more squarely in the scheme of *esse* and *bene esse,* Cole intends also to recognise a middle term, the *male esse* of creatures' perversion of creation's form, in order to help O'Donovan avoid the impression that by grounding politics in providence alone the evil of tyranny is ascribed to God.[122]

His concern with Chaplin's 'distinction between the redemption of society and the taming of political authority' is that it is not clear how it 'can resolve the question of how O'Donovan's providentialist account of the ontology of political authority can explain its ability to evoke a free and intelligible human response if it is not grounded in the regularity of the created order like other authorities'.[123] With that grounding, Cole means to create space in political theology

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[116] See Chaplin's theoretically precise challenge ('Political Eschatology', 296-304).
[117] O'Donovan, 'Deliberation, History and Reading: A Response to Schweiker and Wolterstorff', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51:1 (2010): 127-44, 137.
[118] That is not to say O'Donovan means 'judgment' purely in the sense of retrospective condemnation. As de Graaff says, it 'consists in forward looking policy', too ('to Judge or not to Judge', 299). Cf. *Ways*, 8-10, 61-63.
[119] Jonathan Cole, 'Towards a Christian Ontology of Political Authority: The Relationship Between Created Order and Providence in Oliver O'Donovan's Theology of Political Authority', *Studies in Christian Ethics* (forthcoming): 10, quoting *Resurrection*, 58.
[120] Ibid., 16, quoting Chaplin, 'Political Eschatology', 296. Chaplin thinks that for O'Donovan liberal society's structures of 'natural right' (which correspond to Restoration), are 'evidently parallel to the varying manifestations of "natural authority"' in *Resurrection*, but that these are distinct from government in the purest sense of the execution of right, 'needed in our present age, but … not grounded in created order in the same way that natural social structures are' (296-7).
[121] Cole, 'Towards', 16.
[122] Ibid.. 18.
[123] Ibid., 17.

for an extended notion of the common good, besides remedial judgment.[124] Much as, I think, do those 'Augustinian' political theologians who read Augustine as more proximate to Aquinas and therefore government as 'consisting in organising and facilitating social life as much as protecting it against wrong'.[125] I am not unsympathetic. Yet it is worth seeing that the same grounding, without the kind of careful specifications Chaplin's analysis, for instance, would demand, can open up possibilities like those Gorringe sees as actualised in Hordern. And if Gorringe reads Hordern's book indiscriminately, that does not mean that a worry that problematic use may be made of the ascription of naturalness to political authority is unfounded (nor, for that matter, a worry that such use may be made of natural law in ethics).

Perhaps that is only as much as to say that the doctrine of creation, as hamartiology and eschatology, to name but two others, can be appealed to in political theology for diverse ends. That is a rather lame conclusion, but its implication is that we should be careful to specify what exactly we wish for, if we want O'Donovan to relate creation or eschatology more directly (that is, positively rather than by negation)[126] to political life. Furthermore, if we would aim – like a Mathewes or a Gregory – for a closer analogy between the life of heaven (the life, that is, of love) and the life of the secular, earthly polis, we would do well not to lose our grasp of the other Augustinian commitments O'Donovan holds besides those shared by 'political Augustinianism'. Namely: Christ-centredness, and confidence in Christ's distinctive presence in his body, the Church.[127]

I do not engage theopolitical debates further; this study's case is more limited. In a sense, its case is the inverse of what Cole proposes: not so much that O'Donovan ground politics simply in creation, instead of providence and the particularity of Israel and the Church[128] – nor for that matter simplistically in eschatology;[129] but that he give us an ecclesially-determined *ethics* as duly attentive to sin, providence, and the kingdom as it is to creation. That, I think, *would* yield a modified political theology, but that is not my focus here. In the next chapter, I explore how *Ethics as Theology* both frustrates and fulfills the development of that moral vision.

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[124] Cf. Biggar, 'On Defining Political Authority as an Act of Judgment: A Discussion of Oliver O'Donovan's *The Ways of Judgment* (Part I)', *Political Theology* 9:3 (2008): 273-93.
[125] De Graaff's description (300), though he also does not enter the debate.
[126] Gregory shows how doctrines of eschatology – in its 'reserve' – and sin are important for the Augustinian realism of Niebuhr and Markus (*Politics and the Order of Love*, 93).
[127] Stewart-Kroeker takes a lead from Gregory here, but advances upon it. See *Pilgrimage*, chapter 5, 'The Body of Christ: Church as the Site of Formation'. The Christological and ecclesiological determination can be emphasised without the conflations of Milbank, to which Gregory rightly reacts in *Politics and the Order of Love* – perhaps overreacts.
[128] Cole's article is a little unguarded regarding that implication and should have made clearer that we do not have to play the two off against each other (if, as I hope, that is what he too thinks).
[129] As refreshing as is Doherty's 'The Kingdom of God and the Economic System', that is a worry.

# 5.

# Remapping:
# *Ethics as Theology*

## INTRODUCTION

In an illuminating autobiographical note in the preface to *Self, World, and Time,* the first of three volumes which make up *Ethics as Theology*, O'Donovan recounts an experience of waiting in Canterbury Cathedral for a ceremony to begin, meditating upon the book he brought with him in order to while away the time – Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. Contemplating it, he writes, 'created a healthy disturbance in my mind … I was prompted to ask further about the gift of the Spirit and its implications for the forceful moral objectivism of my *Resurrection and Moral Order.* A "Pentecost and Moral Agency", perhaps?'[1] This asking further began 'yet another turn around the floor with that "bad idea" … Christian Ethics'.[2]

What we have before us, then, is a return to moral theological first things. (In that return – indeed in the whole sweep of O'Donovan's literary production – we find something like the arc O'Donovan himself saw in the *oeuvre* of Paul Ramsey).[3] *Ethics as Theology* revisits the themes of *Resurrection*, but it modulates them into a new key. The task of *this* chapter is to stimulate discussion about the ways in which it does so, especially as regards the place of eschatology.

As with the previous chapter, our focus – plus the constraints of space – requires much be left aside. What is forfeited is at least as great as before, and probably greater. There are passages of constructive comment upon just about every major question of fundamental moral theology, and passages of deepened engagement with particular conversation partners (Cicero or Kant; Milbank or Lacoste). Many of these I cannot touch on. And what is also forfeited is further reflection of the new *mode* of moral theological work which O'Donovan is crafting here. His late style has a meandering quality, though in its own way, though, this project is systematic as well as digressive. Might it be an 'irregular Christian ethics', akin to Barth's description of 'irregular dogmatics'? It is unfortunately true that 'the reader … may sometimes sometimes feel forgotten, even lost, within a labyrinthine internal monologue'.[4] It is also true that in these

[1] *Self, World, and Time*, xii.
[2] Ibid., vii.
[3] Bookended first by *Basic Christian Ethics* and last by research on Jonathan Edwards, an 'opportunity to return to the theological roots of ethics'. 'Paul Ramsey: 1913-88', 90.
[4] Clare Carlisle, 'Cry for Wisdom', *Times Literary Supplement* (2015) <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/cry-for-wisdom/> [accessed 20 September 2018].

books, more so than ever before, O'Donovan seems to consider his work above mere scholarship: an approach which is balm to some and irritation to others. For one of the latter, *Self, World, and Time* seems to 'hold itself in significant ways in isolation from the debates of the Church at large and from the etiquette of the contemporary academy'.[5]

Whatever that judgment's veracity, much in *Ethics as Theology* does take it beyond theoretical brilliance, and into the realm of spiritual classics (if of a rarefied kind!). *Finding and Seeking*, one reader observes, 'combines scholarly precision in ethics with a richness of … spiritual wisdom unfolding a vision of life in the Spirit'.[6] To read it, says another, 'is to sit with a wise, compassionate and toughminded spiritual director through a meditation on the business of gaining a self. This is a profound, pastoral, almost parental preparation for Christian action in the world'.[7] *Entering into Rest*, we read in a recommendation, 'is a profound encouragement on our pilgrimage to the God of love'.[8] 'Were I a bishop', a final theologian tells us, *Ethics as Theology* 'would be a primary examination text in pastoral care for all seminarians in my charge …'.[9]

The proportions of this chapter of my critical investigation, it follows, by no means reflect the ratio of material which I find deeply illuminating in relation to about which I am less convinced. Of necessity, I select a handful of topics pertinent to the theme, and select texts which best display their dimensions. I begin by asking further after O'Donovan's understanding of the developments *Ethics as Theology* represents upon *Resurrection*; developments not incidental to the question of eschatology's import. Chief among developments, on my reading, are twin advances in conceiving the moral life's subjective, lived character. Fresh insights into *self* and *time* now take their place alongside a finessed construal of *world.* The fruitful correlation of these terms with the three theological virtues – self (the agent) with *faith*, world (the order of values) with *love*, and time (the horizon before which we deliberation on action) with *hope* – yields a more considered treatment of that last virtue than the etiolated role found for it in *Resurrection*.[10]

Yet some of the old habits persist, and in some ways the marginalisation of eschatology in O'Donovan's model of moral reason is more patent in *Self, World, and Time* and *Finding and Seeking* than earlier. That occlusion, I argue, is also seen in the purely formal bearing of the kingdom of God on present action, an abstraction which explains O'Donovan's continued incomprehension of Moltmann's ethical priorities, as well as the lapses of attention in his interpretation of the book of James. In search of further reasons why this occlusion might inhere in O'Donovan's thought I turn next to the definitional demarcation of doctrine and ethics

[5] Samuel Wells, review of *Self, World, and Time*, Theology 117:5 (2014): 392-394, 393-4.
[6] David Cloutier, review of *Finding and Seeking*, *Pro Ecclesia* 26: 3 (2017): 333-6, 336.
[7] Doug Gay, review of *Finding and Seeking,* 365. Similar sentiments are expressed in Cloutier's review – *Pro Ecclesia* 26: 3 (2017): 333-6.
[8] From Hans Boersma's dustjacket recommendation of *Entering into Rest.*
[9] Nicholas M. Healy, review of *Finding and Seeking*, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29:3 (2016): 359-62, 62.
[10] The intensified attention to temporality and its phenomenological texture are partly owed to the engagement with Lacoste.

apparent in *Ethics as Theology* but expressed and evolving throughout his career. Ruminations on this theme lead into a final section in which I find, in *Entering into Rest*, a fuller reckoning with eschatology's moral import, once again interlaced with ecclesiological ruminations.

## 'A NECESSARY COMPLEMENT'

I have already intimated that O'Donovan considers *Ethics as Theology* something of a return to first principles, an opportunity to reimagine – to remap, as I have put it – the foundations of moral theology which *Resurrection* laid out earlier. But now that he has made this return, how does he think that the two fit together? In *Self*, *World*, *and Time*'s fifth chapter, 'The Task of Moral Theology', O'Donovan addresses the question directly. It is worth hearing the context in which he does, because it locates the relationship of the two in a movement of thought central to the theological argument of *Ethics as Theology*. He is discussing one of the newly expanded foci, the agent-self:

> If … we inquire how the agent is centred in him- or herself, competent and empowered, exercising freedom in self-identity, the answer can only be that the agent is centred also upon this absolute centre, the moment of history at which the name "Jesus Christ" was made known for the redemption of the world. That moment was Jesus' resurrection from the dead … With the self made sure upon that historical centre, the agent is free to move in either of the two directions practical reason requires, towards world and towards time. The way is open in one direction from the empty tomb of Easter to the beauty and order of the life that was the creator's gift to his creation and is restored there. The way is open in the other direction from the empty tomb to a new moment of participation in God's work and being … The risen life of the last Adam gives hope to the first Adam in the midst of God's created work. The risen life of the last Adam inaugurates the Creator's purpose to consummate all life, past, present, and future, in the reign of life. In the empty tomb we are shown heaven and earth, we are promised that they shall be restored, not destroyed and brought to nothing, and we are taught to look for new activity, new deeds, new possibilities that prepare the way for a new heaven and a new earth. These two directions are not alternatives, to one or the other of which Christian thought might equally well turn, adopting a "conservative" or a "radical" posture to taste. Neither are they sequential directions, that we should satisfy the demands of created order first and newness second afterwards … The two directions are mutually reinforcing angles of vision that depend for their intelligibility upon each other. Moral thinking is always descriptive of the world. Moral thinking is always opening towards the future. The bipolarity of value and obligation is irreducible.[11]

At this point the relation between this and the earlier work is treated explicitly:

> An earlier volume of mine called *Resurrection and Moral Order* adopted an angle of vision that looked principally towards the objective order of created goods and the restoration of human agency by the resurrection of Christ. The importance of this view impressed me, and continues to impress me, in the light of the civilisation's forgetfulness of created order, which persists, "green" issues notwithstanding, to the present day.[12]

It was not just wider societal amnesia which demanded that approach, though, but theological forgetfulness:

> The neo-orthodoxy that put Christ at the centre without putting him *at the centre of the created world* gave birth to an Ethics that danced like an angel on the head of a needle, wholly lacking worldly dimensions and focused solely on a conversion encounter with the

[11] *Self, World, and Time*, 92-3.
[12] Ibid., 93.

> cross. The sublation of Ethics into faith … was founded on the simply assurance that the worldly content of Ethics was blandly self-explanatory and needed no interrogation, but only to be situated in relation to theology. A generation which saw the normalization of nuclear weapons and biotechnology could hardly sustain that assurance, unless with its eyes tightly shut. *Resurrection and Moral Order,* therefore, undertook to validate the interest of Theological Ethics in elucidating worldly order.[13]

O'Donovan's own reading of that earlier work's goal coheres well enough with my depiction of it, and his account of the discernment of the times which sponsored its emphasis supports what has been argued. The identity of this unreferenced 'neo-orthodoxy' is a little elusive, though, and it seems to me that this lack of specification hinders his case somewhat. Whose writings and influence is meant? Barth? Bonhoeffer? Bultmann? (Certainly it is often the *existentialist* aspects that are at issue). Brunner? Reinhold Niebuhr? In some ways, the grounds for criticism recalled in *Self, World, and Time* do seem near-identical to those which motivate O'Donovan's criticism of Lutheran law-and-gospel theology in earlier works. The clearest sense of what O'Donovan sees at issue is, however, found not in relation to any of these figures – though there are rewarding cameos for Bonhoeffer and Barth in the book[14] – but in relation to the less influential figure of P.T. Forsyth. Named in the full passage, he Forsyth mentioned earlier in the context of a discussion of 'Authority', where O'Donovan writes that he fails 'to give sufficient weight to the purpose and moral order of the world *as creation* ... Forsyth's concept of the ethical never really broadens out beyond a pinpoint moment of motivation, never takes in the breadth and scope of wisdom as it is spoken of in the Old Testament'.[15] That may be so,[16] but without further specification, we have to take on trust O'Donovan's implicit suggestion that 'neo-orthodoxy' was sufficiently productive of moral-theological confusion to occasion that strong objectivism.

At any rate, O'Donovan's defence of *Resurrection's* theological coherence and timeliness leads to an explanation of the present work's aims:

> What follows may now be regarded as a necessary complement to it, its angle of vision turned principally towards the subjective renewal of agency and its opening to the forward calling of God. The restored agent is also the renewed agent, filled with the life of God poured out within the world. In comparing the two books in this way, I speak only of their general directions. Much must be said here about the objective order of created goods; rather more was said there about the renewal of human agency than was apparent.[17]

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Yet not, unfortunately, much engagement with recent scholarship concerning Barth's ethics (there is one reference to Nigel Biggar's earlier *The Hastening that Waits* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) in *Finding and Seeking* – a solid enough book in most respects but now surpassed in many).
[15] *Self, World, and Time*, 58.
[16] Other scholarship supports O'Donovan's designation. In fact, one assessment draws on *Resurrection* to criticise Forsyth on similar grounds. See Jason Goroncy, *Hallowed Be Thy Name: The Sanctification of All in the Soteriology of P.T. Forsyth* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 76-7. Note, though, that while Goroncy follows the gist of *Resurrection*'s case for the resurrection's 'vindication of the providential unfolding of created order within history', the passage concludes thus: 'we may anticipate the redemption of creation as its renewal and completion, but not its restoration; for Christian hope is placed not in a renovated Eden but in a hallowed new heaven and earth'. (Goroncy does not seem to realise that in this he departs from *Resurrection*).
[17] *Self, World, and Time*, 93.

It is a neat, attractive explanation, though the claim that *Resurrection* adopted a particular angle of vision does seem to smooth over its self-presentation as *An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*: a complete primer. Similarly, while coherent with the notion that this 'Pentecost and Moral Agency' is a sequel, what we read here seems to mitigate the force of the question O'Donovan says he was prompted to ask. Surely something more like a revision than a supplementary perspective is being entertained when speaking of the 'implications for the forceful moral objectivism' of the earlier book. Certainly, some of the differences between the two simply reveal different emphases within a consistent undertaking. And there are certainly plenty of points of continuity. But there *are* also points at which decisive departures are made from the earlier work.

One example would be the topic of freedom and authority. Self-consciously, O'Donovan espouses a more nuanced view than *Resurrection*'s, now defining authority as 'an *event in which a reality is communicated to practical reason by a social communication*', as 'mediated' to a greater extent than was acknowledge before.[18] He still believes, to my mind correctly, that freedom and obedience must correspond, and maintains that authority is the objective correlate of freedom:

> All this must be said, and yet freedom is a *wider category* than authority, so that my phrase was too loose to make a satisfactory definition. Not every exercise of freedom is, directly at least, a response to authority. Authority is not simply vested in the world, self, and time as soon as we awake to them. That would collapse the dialectic of freedom and authority onto a flat plane, reducing all authority to self-evidence, all obedience to commonsense … And that is why my account of "moral authority" in *Resurrection and Moral Order* was flat and this-worldly. In studying *political* authority subsequently … I laid more emphasis on authority's lack of perspicuity, and this emphasis must now be accommodated within the general theory … Authority, we must say, is a *focused disclosure* of reality, one that demands we turn our attention away from everything else and concentrate it in this one place'.[19]

We should welcome what we find here and throughout *Ethics as Theology*: the threefold attentiveness to self, world, and time allows O'Donovan to shade with greater subtlety the depicted realities of the moral life. Even more interesting for my purposes than the question of freedom and authority, though, is whether and how the consideration of *hope* is another aspect of development, or rather one of departure.

## HOPE

O'Donovan has by no means become a utopian, or an apocalypticist. He is ever ascetical in his attitude to philosophising or theologising about the future, and to its moral value. There are, he says, many kinds of future, each with its own ontic status, and they are not equally pertinent for ethics. There is 'the future we imagine, prompted by fears or hopes or lazy presumptions of

[18] Ibid., 53.
[19] Ibid., 53-4.

regularity. Such projected futures are easy enough to construct in imagination, but ontologically they are shallow; they make little claim on our belief …'.[20] There is a theologically-genuine 'absolute future', too, 'that winds up future, present and past in the appearing of Christ and the judgment of God on history'.[21] *That* future, we might say, marked much of the horizon in *Desire* and *Ways*. Since it 'has the ontic status of a promise', however, it *is* 'partially accessible to knowledge as the promise is heard and believed'.[22]

But: 'Our responsibility is not to any of these futures, real or imaginary, any more than it is for the past'.[23] Why not – and what future *is* our responsibility?

> We do not attend to any of these futures, any more than we attend to the past, *deliberatively*. I reflect, but cannot deliberate, on what I ought to have done in the past week. I imagine, but cannot deliberate about what my life will be like many years hence. I may hope for, but cannot plan to bring about, the coming of the Kingdom of God. Reflection on things remembered, anticipation of things projected, feed and shape my actual deliberations, for prudence, the virtue proper to deliberation, weighs up existing states and projected outcomes. But the focus of deliberation is not on these futures but on the immediate future, the forward-looking present, the future as it beckons to the present, the present as it opens to the future. To define this moment more precisely: it is the *available* future, the possibility that lies open to our action.[24]

The insights formed by this understanding of the 'available' future are abundant. But we are bound to ask about the way in which the ultimate future is kept at bay in the sphere of ethics. O'Donovan is alert to the question: 'Does the Kingdom of God, then, not overshadow the available future and make it possible? Is the remote future merely "absolute"? Or does it, as in the first proclamation of Jesus, "draw near"?'[25] His answer sets the terms for eschatology's presence in *Ethics as Theology*:

> Certainly it draws near, and in that there lies the importance of *hope* to deliberation. But we must not think we can reach out and grab it. Our first thought must be to allow the horizon to be the horizon, to resist the temptation of taking over the ultimate and managing it. Practical reason is not a way of organizing the future.[26]

The ethicist's vocation – or, better, the vocation of *any* responsible agent - demands disavowal of *prediction* as much as projection:

> "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son!" (Amos 7:14) is a motto for every moralist, professional and amateur. If we knew the story of the future hidden in God's foreknowledge, we should be beyond deliberation, beyond action, even beyond caring. "The kingdom of God is not coming with observation" (Luke 17:20). Even of the Son of God through whom God acts in history it is said that the day and the hour are not revealed to him. The price of agency is to know the future only indirectly, that we may venture on it as an open possibility. The future of prediction, dreary with anxiety or buoyant with hope, has to be held at bay, so

[20] *Self, World, and Time*, 16.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 16-17.
[25] Ibid., 17,
[26] Ibid.

> that we may use this moment of time to do something, however modest, that is worthwhile and responsible, something to endure before the throne of judgment.[27]

If eschatology is certainly here in the sober horizon of judgment, once more, and newly drawing near in *hope*, then O'Donovan hyper-sensitivity to hope's potential to *mislead* is still evident. Its buoyancy is to be avoided if it issues in prediction, and it is placed parallel to a vice (anxiety) in a way he would be unlikely so directly to do with faith or love.

Pairing hope with a single vice might be thought curious, too. After all, at least on a Thomist telling, there are vices either side, as it were, the theological virtue, and the one paired with anxiety (or despair) is presumption. Granted, presumption, 'false and bloated hope … subverts moral agency', and it is 'often confused with theological hope itself'.[28] But O'Donovan should know better than to allow their conflation. And lest we be mislead by that mention of 'bloated' into thinking that one can have too much hope, we must emphasise that presumption is not true but '*false*' hope. Again, if real hope is a gift of God (a 'theological virtue'), then there is no problematic 'excess' beyond any 'prudent' mean; it knows no excess to be avoided because its revealed object is the giver of the gift, God, who is perfect plenitude.[29]

I have focused on an indicatively distrustful mention of hope, there. But in *Ethics as Theology* O'Donovan does generally seem to know better. The importance of hope to deliberation – to framing action at 'the opportune time'[30] – in fact becomes a central thread of the work, there in the final chapter of *Self, World, and Time*, and coming to fruition in *Finding and Seeking*. A good part of *Finding and Seeking*'s treatment re-presents the first volume's,[31] but the account is extended, and it informs the superb reflections on deliberation and discernment which are the book's two final chapters.[32] So prominent is hope within *Ethics as Theology*'s account of moral reason, and so convincing the articulation of how the future horizon becomes 'an opening for reasonable action',[33] that it may seem churlish to maintain reservations about O'Donovan's handling of eschatology. Yet I do still have reservations, which are best explained via analytical readings of a few particular passages of *Finding and Seeking*.

## MORAL REASON AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A lengthy excursus on the twelfth chapter of Luke allows O'Donovan to further distinguish hope from anticipation, observing 'how largely such a critique' – of anticipation – 'figures in

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics*, 111. On presumption, see also Josef Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 65-72. In terms of popular-philosophical attempts to grasp hope's promise in this regard, a fascinating pair to compare here are Terry Eagleton, *Hope Without Optimism* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2015), and Roger Scruton, *The Uses of Pessimism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010).
[29] On this boundlessness of the theological virtues, see Long, *Christian Ethics*, 21.
[30] *Finding and Seeking*, 146-7.
[31] See e.g. *Finding and Seeking*, 150-2.
[32] For a fine reading of these, see Errington, 'Every Good Path'.
[33] Ibid., 215. Cf. 233.

Jesus' own teaching about the ultimate future'.[34] Having sifted out anticipation, O'Donovan says, the gospel's teaching *is* precisely about 'the great eschatological redirection of practical reason'.[35] We are eager to ask what this might mean, and so too, it appears, is O'Donovan: 'how does hope transform the immediate horizon?'.[36] But the answer he find in the text is 'astonishingly spare' – it is simply the demand for 'watchfulness'.[37]

The parable he has in mind, 'of the servants who stay up for their master's return', 'is one that echoes through the teaching of Jesus'.[38] Yet whereas 'Mark's version mentions a variety of duties' and 'Matthew's the duty of the household steward', here in Luke's version 'the servants do nothing at all but stand around in their household clothes ready for their chores whenever the knock on the door shall come'.[39] O'Donovan takes from this 'striking adaptation' that it 'highlights the *formal contentlessness* of the practical task given to us':

> No definite thing, or things, must be done in the light of the promised future. The single category that embraces all the many things we may have to do is waiting, attending wholly and with concentration focused on what is *not yet* happening, so that whatever *is* happening is handled with a mind supremely bent on something else. That gaze into the distance, causing all intervening action, as it were, to disappear, is Luke's key to life lived hopefully.[40]

This Lukan 'formal contentlessness', then, serves to reify O'Donovan's characteristic way of exhibiting eschatology's import: God's future sheds light on the moment of action, on the path before our feet – but it does not determine it. In *Ethics as Theology* this aspect is brilliantly expounded with reference to the Holy Spirit, the one whom we ask in prayer 'for the reconstruction and re-attunement of our moral imaginary, bringing the world before our eyes as created, redeemed, and destined for fulfilment'.[41] Yet is there not something a little unsatisfactory about this, not unrelated to nagging worries which I and others have had about O'Donovan's work more broadly? (What, for one thing, of the normative force of Mark and Matthew's content-full wakefulness?) Reflecting upon the treatment of Moltmann in the following pages of *Finding and Seeking* can help us flesh this worry out further.

At this point, O'Donovan turns aside to note with bafflement a pair of contradictory pieces of Moltmann's thought. Moltmann acknowledges, O'Donovan says, that eschatology *cannot* be based on extrapolation, given hope's basis in God's promise. But Moltmann also insists on anticipatory 'intrinsic possibilities', and it is from these that he has developed his 'ethico-political program for the life of hope in the world'.[42] And this mistakes hope's moral function:

> Hope cannot be the answer to any question of the form, "what shall we do next?" It is the *condition* on which that question can be raised and answered – answered on its own terms according to criteria of practical reasonableness. Hope … cannot ground the program

[34] Ibid., 152.
[35] Ibid., 154.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 154-5.
[41] Ibid., 127.
[42] *Finding and Seeking*, 164.

> Moltmann elicits from it: the struggle for economic justice, the struggle against political oppression, the struggle for solidarity against alienation …[43]

Now, I agree that there is some reason to be baffled at a contradiction between the recognition that eschatology cannot be based on extrapolation and the assertion that there are eschatological 'intrinsic possibilities' (depending on what that latter statement means). But, as I will seek to show very simply in what follows, I also think there is good reason to be unsettled by O'Donovan's incomprehension of the more basically defensible elements of Moltmann's project. There is also good reason to be baffled at a contradiction in a piece of O'Donovan's own reasoning, which is connected to this incomprehension, and to which we will turn subsequently.

O'Donovan finds nothing objectionable in 'the political clothes in which Moltmann has dressed his doctrine of hope', finding them 'respectable, neatly cut, and fashionable', if bearing the appearance of having 'been slept in'![44] But, he cautions immediately: 'No agenda for practical Christian witness can have universal and timeless validity',[45] and we have therefore 'to ask how the elements of this program, with its distinctive priorities, were come by. The suggestion that they were found on the straight road from the resurrection of Christ and the promise of the Kingdom is frankly unbelievable'.[46]

I do not doubt that plenty of suggestions in Moltmann's *Ethics of Hope* are less than carefully asserted, or – as O'Donovan has been known to remark – that it is suspicious how similar Moltmann's vision of the kingdom of God looks to an achieved political programme of the *Socialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or the like. (A similar congruence might be remarked between Hordern's vision of vindicated creation and the British Conservative Party, of course, just as one was remarked between Niebuhr's 'Heavenly City' and the United States of America).[47] Yet, as before, I find something unsatisfactory about O'Donovan's assessment of Moltmann, and want to trouble it in an exploratory but focused way.[48] To this end, I suggest we consider these passages alongside O'Donovan's moral-theological commentary on the Letter of James in *Finding and Seeking*'s immediately preceding chapter. Analysing O'Donovan's interpretation helps us see better why his worries about Moltmann arise. Beside this, it advances our understanding of why O'Donovan *fails* to see how Moltmann can hold that a biblical-

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[43] Ibid., 165.
[44] Ibid.
[45] A similar point is, in fact, made by Moltmann – see *Ethics of Hope*, xii.
[46] *Finding and Seeking*, 165.
[47] Wilson Carey McWilliam, quoted in Gregory, *Politics of Love*, 18.
[48] Compare O'Donovan's expression of incredulity about Moltmann's way of grounding ethics eschatologically to Ronald Preston's professed cynicism about the strand of the World Council of Churches' theology named 'eschatological realism' (Ronald H. Preston, *Confusions in Christian Social Ethics: Problems for Geneva and Rome* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 140-2). This ecumenical programme is one Moltmann self-consciously takes his bearings from (*Ethics of Hope*, xii), and though it was certainly rather incautiously broad in some of its theological brushwork, the far-reaching cynicism Preston expresses tells as much about his peculiar commitments – overriding concern for a certain understanding of the public rationality of Christian ethics, admitted agnosticism about biblical eschatology — as about any W.C.C document.

theological framework might lend certain priorities, principles, or patterns to contextual moral deliberation: aids which *do* in fact have some kind of 'universal and timeless validity', and which authentically nudge Christians (like Moltmann) in particular directions of historically-specific discernment, even as they do not stipulate particular moral policies.[49] Let us turn to O'Donovan's exegesis.

James, he says, is 'a moral treatise' which 'begins where a doctrinal treatise would end', with joy.[50] (I will return to that contrast below). In this tract of ethical instruction, then, 'themes of Christology and redemption are notably absent'.[51] It is, in fact, a exemplary moral treatise: 'Moral teaching at its best addresses generic truths specifically, focusing on typical points of urgent need', and James' letter is 'addressed throughout to all Christians everywhere, in their most universal moral needs': 'It is focused on the paradigmatic human oppositions that generate moral need: rich and poor, sick and well, hesitant and confident'.[52] The epistle's examples 'take us to situations that typify the moral life'.[53] *Finding and Seeking*'s largely persuasive reading ranges very widely among these (the index notes twenty-four references to the book, ranging from the first chapter to the last). O'Donovan takes poverty and wealth as a prime illustration, 'the two presented in a surprisingly parallel manner', though he goes on to note (very briefly) James's other comments (in 4:1-6 and 5:1-6) 'on the slippery slope of wealth'.[54]

This assessment seems a little odd to me. And in a very straightforward way, it is accordingly striking that O'Donovan fails entirely to mention the first part of the epistle's second chapter. Consider a few lines from it:

> My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please", while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand here", or "Sit at my feet", have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? … (Jas. 2:4-7)

I am no New Testament specialist, but these verses' subject matter seems to includes a few features which we were told we would not much find in the book: moral chastisement appearing in and with ecclesiological determination; theological and specifically Christological reference;

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[49] The way Moltmann sometimes undiscerningly constructs a counter-tradition which promotes marginal religious figures as the true bearers of Christian eschatological hope should not put us off the straightforward exegetical basis of some his claims (e.g. *Ethics of Hope*, 39-41). The present moral bearing of the kingdom of God is well borne out by readers of his who do not carry all of his baggage – see, e.g., Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 159-68.
[50] *Finding and Seeking*, 142.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 143
[54] Ibid.

markedly asymmetrical treatment of poverty and wealth; and the relating of all this to the eschatological horizon of the kingdom of God. It is difficult to see them, on my reading, as descriptive of 'the formal contentlessness of the practical task given to us … in the light of the promised future'.[55] If the epistle *is* universal in ethical intent, then this passage too must have (determinate) normative force of some kind. O'Donovan's only way to deny that, given his characterisation of the letter, would be to paint it as an incongruous interpolation of less-than-generic hortatory material addressed to particular churches at a particular time. It would be decidedly unlike him to deny normative value to such passages, though, and he has already told us that it 'is addressed throughout to all Christians everywhere'.[56]

My point is this: even if apparently minor, this difficulty crystallises a few features I have paused over in earlier chapters as well as this. It is hard not to think that it is occasioned by the predilection for a generalising account of 'ethics' as concerning universal features of moral reason, an account originating in deliberate remotion from the realities Christian faith is given to believe, other than the reality of creation. (Not least, those realities of Christ, his kingdom and its concerns, his church, and the structural sur-realities of sin which oppose his reign: each present in these verses of James). What this means is that O'Donovan's depiction of the ethical moment of obedience is achieved in abstraction from the *content* of obedience those theological particularities would give it. Relatedly, I would argue that concern for the poor is a prominent – perhaps the prominent – aspect of the formation of Christian obedience-in-action in light of the kingdom. Here in James it appears by negation, oppression of the poor highlighted as a particular kind of sin against God's ordering of the kingdom. If O'Donovan overstated the matter a little when he wrote that 'themes of Christology and redemption are notably absent' in James, he followed it with a line that could have given him a clue to the way they *are* present there: 'Yet of all the New Testament texts none follows so closely the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and especially the Sermon on the Mount'.[57] Might not the passages of James he overlooks represent one of the points at which its teaching most resonates with those teachings – which are not exactly 'astonishingly spare' taken together – and with that Sermon, the 'charter of the Christian life'?[58]

It is true that it would require extensive further argumentation to work from these scriptural passages, or the countless others which are congruent in conviction, to something like

[55] Ibid., 154.
[56] Ibid., 142.
[57] A similar kind of oversight afflicts Biggar's treatment of Barth's *The Christian Life* in *The Hastening that Waits* and 'Karl Barth's Ethics Revisited'. He cannot see the *inner link* between Barth's ethically suggestive notion of the hastening that waits – language Biggar likes – and Barth's governing rubric of 'revolt' – language Biggar does not. Biggar recruits the purported realism of eschatological restraint and opportunity for action in the 'messy reality' of the world, but not the directions to which Barth would have that action go. Yet I venture that those directions are more than tangentially related to Holy Scripture, despite Biggar's doubts. For a reading alert to the inner link, see Ziegler, '"To Pray, To Testify, and to Revolt"' – introduction to the recent edition of Barth, *The Christian Life* (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2017), 1-16.
[58] So Augustine, in his commentary. Quoted in Mattison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1.

Moltmann's contemporary agenda (should we want to). That further argumentation cannot be pursued here – though an engagement with O'Donovan might be a good place to push it to a high level of clarity. But I think it *is* possible. And, to put it the other way around, it seems probable that O'Donovan's bafflement about Moltmann's claims for his agenda is not unconnected to his uncharacteristic inability to reckon properly with scriptural passages (and a long tradition beyond them) that would allow Moltmann to think he has grounds for it.

Here O'Donovan might be a little closer than he would like to effecting the kind of demarcation attempted by David Horrell in his *Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*.[59] Horrell writes that 'Paul's ethics are thoroughly grounded in the myth which constitutes Paul's "theology", the story which establish the world-view and the ethos he promotes. His reflective moral arguments also depend upon this theology for their content and motivations', particularly Christology.[60] But, Horrell continues:

> I have not, however, unlike many studies in Pauline ethics, given space to outlining specifically how eschatology, the Spirit, and so on function as motivating bases for ethical exhortation. This is in part because these represent aspects of the mythology rather than the ethics themselves; thus they convey motivations for acting ethically rather than indications as to what *constitutes* ethical action … It is also in part because in attempting to engage Pauline ethics in a conversation with other approaches to ethics I have sought to express the exhortations of these ethics in terms that our meaningful outside the bounds of theological discourse.[61]

I am not making any comment here on Horrell's endeavour (the book is full of insight), rather suggesting that O'Donovan's conception of his own work's task would not usually be expressed in these terms and that, therefore, we should ask how and why a similar demarcation seems to obtain. Even if it were a genuinely available distinction to make vis-à-vis Paul (I have doubts!) it would be nigh on impossible to make with regards to the prophets, the evangelists, and John of Patmos – the testimonies of each of whom are, rightly enough, authoritative for O'Donovan's constructive moral theology.

It is unavailable, I would claim, because for Christian theology and thus ethics, the present bearing of the kingdom is not just an initial impetus for Christian morality, a formal source of intentions or basis of motivation. It does not just open up the ground before our feet for action determined by other criteria which can be filled out in a way entirely intelligible beyond the Christian church. If Scripture and much tradition are right, it makes perceptible demands upon that morality, too: 'formed references', in the Barthian phrase. And that means that in concrete history, faithful moral deliberation and discernment can be demystified not only as to its moral-psychological operations, but as to the particular direction of its attentions, and the peculiar shaping of its affections. The kingdom of God, to put it technically, is action-motivating *and* action-guiding. All of that is not to say that very often indeed those criteria which determine

[59] David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* 2nd edn (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016).
[60] Ibid., 306.
[61] Ibid., 307.

faithful Christian action will be shared with others, or at least rationally accessible to them – to a high degree, even. But Christians have reasons to think that their moral deliberation can and should be open to concrete policies made uniquely intelligible by the revelation of eschatological reality.

I believe that the exaggerated demarcation between 'moral treatise' and 'doctrinal treatise' (here, James and Romans)[62] is partly to blame. More specifically, it seems that defining the demarcation in a more exclusive way than is appropriate is necessary for O'Donovan given the commitments he holds about ethics as a discipline, in contrast to doctrine. Though at certain other moments of his writing he shows himself exemplary in his awareness of the potential moral significance of the whole array of scriptural genres[63] – to earlier examples I would add here a wonderful recent piece on Galatians[64] – this disciplinary distinction derives from a more bifurcating reading (or, as I have said, requires it). His description of James vis-à-vis Paul here does fit neatly his characteristic dispersal of tasks to theology and ethics, and it is to his construction of that disciplinary distinction that we turn now, with an eye to its effects on the place he is able to give eschatology.

## DOCTRINE AND ETHICS

Analysis of the place of eschatology in O'Donovan's moral theology has proved knottily entangled with general questions about the relation of doctrine and ethics. Here, I approach the theme from the other end, addressing the general questions directly *and then* eschatology's part in it. While all of O'Donovan's work presupposes an operative account of that relationship, *Ethics as Theology*, as the title suggests, represents his mature position. *Self, World, and Time* in particular distinguishes the two schematically, and I begin here with the relevant passages, introducing some comparable recent treatments: an essay on 'The Trinity and the Moral Life' and a review essay responding to a systematician's critical reading of Hauerwas: 'What Shall We Do?'.[65] Appraising ourselves of the key features of the disciplinary demarcation and interrelationship O'Donovan conceives in these pieces will help us contextualise our broader study. Yet I find nothing particularly objectionable within them, and much to appreciate. Moreover, it seems to me that the account we find in these texts does not really explain the ongoing difficulties with the handling of *eschatological* doctrine. Nor, alone, does an earlier piece 'How Can Theology Be Moral?', though examining it helps us discover the rudimental

[62] *Finding and Seeking*, 142.
[63] See 'Scripture and Christian Ethics', and 'The Moral Authority of Scripture'.
[64] O'Donovan, 'Flesh and Spirit', in *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letter*, ed. Mark W. Elliot, Scott J. Hafemann, N. T. Wright, and John Frederick (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 271-84.
[65] O'Donovan, 'The Trinity and the Moral Life: *In Memoriam John Webster*', in *A Transforming Vision: Knowing and Loving the Triune God*, ed. George Westhaver (London: SCM, 2018), 218-27; O'Donovan, 'What Shall We Do?' *Times Literary Supplement* (2014) <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/what-shall-we-do/> [accessed 20 September 2018].

form of the distinction, essentially contiguous with the later treatments. My hunch is that the fault line is most easily seen in another earlier essay: 'What Can Ethics Know about God?'. (Perhaps the titles of these latter pieces already gives something away). There, O'Donovan shows himself aware of the charge that he neglects eschatology, and sets out to address it directly. But to a striking degree this essay shows him unable or unwilling to overcome it, for reasons which will be familiar from our earlier chapters and intelligible given the other articulations of ethics' disciplinary tasks in distinction from doctrine's – but which are most baldly stated here. Some sense of O'Donovan's struggle towards a more adequate account of the relationship between doctrine and ethics is seen in passages from the final essay which I consider here: 'Sanctification and Ethics' (which overlaps with slightly revised material in *Finding and Seeking*).[66] We will need to jump around a bit chronologically, but I believe taking the texts in this order will help us gain further purchase on the question at hand. Let us turn to our first text.

*Self, World, and Time*'s section 'Moral Theology and the Narrative of Salvation' begins with a laudable concern for what we might call the doxological excess of dogmatics:[67]

> What can and must be sung and said in praise … must be sung and said on its own terms. A Christology that could be cashed out wholly in terms of moral reason … could hardly be adequate to the miracle of God's presence in human nature. There is an excess of divine action over human which can only be acknowledged.[68]

But, O'Donovan says, for a moral theologian the treatment cannot terminate with that recognition:

> there is also something like an excess of human action, something not – or not yet – included in the announcement of God's being and works. When those who heard Saint Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost asked themselves, "Men and brethren, what are we to do?" (Acts 2:37), it was a *next thing* that they asked about, not something they had already been told of in Peter's proclamation. There can be ways of framing doctrine which have had the effect of shutting the door in the face of that next thing, swallowing up the "what are we to do?" in the irrevocable gift and calling of God.[69]

This way of putting things is slightly curious. Presumably what is meant is that the 'next thing' is a sphere of human freedom, and ethics as the discipline which reflects upon that reasoning-to-action is an intellectual realm with its own dignity. It is not to be (as he writes earlier in the book) absorbed wholesale 'into the theological construction of reality'.[70] But it is a little incautious to speak of an 'excess of human action'. If it is truly consequent upon proclamation, then that action must be conceived as founded, encompassed, directed, and brought to completion by the sovereign work of God – far from swallowing up the moment of deliberation, the doctrine of election is *right the way along* determinative for ethics, because it is what establishes free action.

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[66] O'Donovan, 'Sanctification and Ethics', in Kelly Kapic, ed., *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 150-166.
[67] For a meditation on this theme, see Appendix B.
[68] *Self, World, and Time*, 82.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., viii.

Still, O'Donovan knows that dogmatics and ethics, understood aright, are non-competitive. As he writes in 'The Trinity and the Moral Life', an essay written in dialogue with the work of John Webster, there is a 'mutual service of dogmatics and ethics in theology'.[71] The two have a 'complementary and non-exchangeable relation', as *Self, World, and Time* puts it.[72] On one hand, this means we must avoid conflating the two – a danger he illustrates by describing how he understands each discipline to treat *sin* (a topic I cannot focus upon here, but which I believe is significant).[73] On the other hand, it also means that we must avoid completely separating the two. The illustration provided here focuses on two examples: post-Tridentine Catholic moral thought, the 'pastoral ambitions' of which were laudable, but which devised moral theology as 'regulative system for ordering the conduct of the faithful'; and 'twentieth-century adventures which aligned Moral Theology with political agenda, whether of radical social change or of conservative resistance'.[74]

The temptations to conflation and total separation arise, we are told, because moral theology does by nature 'reach out in both directions, towards the doctrinal and towards the practical. It accompanies the course of Christian practical reasoning all the way from its apprehension of the truths of the creed to its practical discernment of the opportunities and duties opening up before its feet'.[75] The active, dynamic nature of the description is important: it must not 'forget how to make the journeys of thought entrusted to it between heaven and the circumstances'.[76] It is informed by description, since it 'is bound to be realist', making 'what

[71] 'The Trinity and the Moral Life', 225. For the suggestion that 'Webster's approach to moral theology greatly parallels that sketched by Oliver O'Donovan, "Sanctification and Ethics"', see Michael Allen, 'Toward Theological Anthropology: Tracing the Anthropological Principles of John Webster', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 19:1 (2017), 6-29, 25, n. 99. That may be almost entirely true, but there are some subtly important differences, which I hope to examine more closely elsewhere.
[72] *Self, World, and Time,* 82.
[73] Cf. *Finding and Seeking*, 17-18; Entering *into Rest*, 65-71. A focus upon sin would be an interesting further case study of this demarcation's effects. The way O'Donovan articulates the kind of knowledge ethics should have of *sin* could be brought into conversation with other understandings. For him, while Christian doctrine may know of ultimate (that is, original) sin, ethics, for its part, as an essentially practical discipline concerned with freedom, is given to know only the possibility of the sins which lurk at the door (akin to what the tradition calls 'actual' sin): in order to avoid them in the next moment of action. This instinct coincides with an emphasis upon the way in which sin represents a possibility for the individual actor. Theologians impressed by the 'apocalyptic' reading of St. Paul, on the other hand, urge full cognisance of the radical scope of the power of Sin; indeed, they are so struck by its constriction of free action that 'ethics' itself is placed under a question mark. By the same token, some such thinkers display a lively sense for the structural realities of sin. Both positions clearly share, up to a point, a theological analysis of the relation of sin's ultimacy to human action, but seem to express essentially dissimilar convictions about its deployment in Christian ethics. David Kelsey's theological anthropology *Eccentric Existence* could be harnessed in an initial attempt to negotiate the two, since it sustains (in triplicate!) an attempt to characterise both *Sin* and *sins* in terms of mis-response to God's gracious relating to create, consummate, and reconcile respectively. (In fact, Kelsey's account of Sin in relation to consummation draws explicitly on the apocalyptic reading of St Paul). Yet Kelsey does not supply a thoroughgoing account of their integration or their mutual implication, nor a discernment of their significance for Christian ethics. This is not, of course, necessarily to mark for blame, since he is not himself offering a theological ethics; what does need to be said about Christian ethics' knowledge of sin, then, must be found or offered elsewhere.
[74] *Self, World, and Time*, 88.
[75] Ibid., 89.
[76] Ibid.

God has said and done the ground of normative judgments'.[77] But it cannot terminate in moral reflection: 'ethical realism cannot mean that the directive and regulative role of moral thinking is irrelevant or unnecessary … Discipleship is not merely to be admired, but taken up as a task'.[78] As he writes in 'The Trinity and the Moral Life', ethics is dependent upon the description 'that is the dogmatician's responsibility in theology', but should not pretend to take it over.[79]

Further defence of this dynamic sensibility beyond description is found in O'Donovan's review of Nicholas M. Healy's *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*. Though he finds much of value in Healy's commentary, O'Donovan intimates that it is, in essence, 'a sketch of what Hauerwas might have been if he had been a dogmatic theologian' – perhaps even the 'revenge' of 'school theology' against an occasional essayist and practically-oriented thinker.[80] That is, Healy fails to see that Hauerwas is a *moral* theologian, interested in belief's 'inextricable relation to authentic action'; accordingly he overlooks the fact that 'the Church, in Hauerwas's understanding, is a category of moral reason … even … his version of Kant's categorical imperative. It underlines the plural pronoun in the formal question of deliberative thought, "What shall we do?"'.[81]

Very much presuming and defending the emphasis upon ethics' deliberative character was the much earlier article 'How Can Theology Be Moral?' (1989), an early pass over the topic of the two disciplines' identities and relation couched in terms redolent of *Resurrection*. The title raises a challenge to be worked through, for 'tension exists between the disciplines of theology, which seeks to discern the rational order of what is believed and to impose intellectual discipline on its presentation, and moral thought which is practical in nature, thought-towards-action'.[82] They seem 'incompatible partners', an incompatibility which can be can be formulated in 'three antinomies'.[83] I relay the first and especially third here. (The second posits that if theology is 'evangelical', moral thought is 'problematic', having to do 'with confronting difficulties rather than with announcing solutions'.[84] His response to this antinomy is entirely coherent with *Resurrection,* and we have dwelt upon it).

The first antinomy is between theology's 'declarative' and moral thought's 'deliberative' characters. Theology 'must consider the merits of action proposed rather than the facticity of action accomplished … The traditional formula distinguishing the *de*scriptive from the *pre*scriptive utterance, crisp and simple-minded though it may be, has its own validity'.[85] The

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] 'The Trinity and the Moral Life', 227.
[80] 'What Shall We Do'. Compare Webster's review: 'Ecclesiocentrism', *First Things* 246 (2014), 54-5, which shows no sign of O'Donovan's qualifications.
[81] 'What Shall We Do'.
[82] 'How Can Theology Be Moral', 81.
[83] Ibid., 83.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 82.

'opposition of knowledge and will' underlies the tension.[86] If deliberation is 'oriented towards an act of will, a decision to do something … which brings new reality into the world', how can that 'be conditioned by knowledge of reality that existed prior to it?'[87] Yet the New Testament shows a 'progress of thought from proclamation to prescription, rotating on the word "therefore"'.[88] That progress *is* possible, then, and if not by deductive inference then still rationally; we speak inductively 'of the "appropriateness" or "inappropriateness" of given acts to the realities which the mind contemplates'.[89] An act of will is a new but never '*dissociated*' reality: 'our behaviour takes on the meaning of a response to what is there before it, an acceptance or rejection of the world into which we act'.[90] Because of this, a 'command cannot evoke rational obedience unless it discloses some aspect of reality': 'Reality is authoritative and action-evoking, and nothing else is. The possibility of moral theology is founded on the dependence of rational action upon reality, of will upon knowledge'.[91]

The third antinomy is perhaps most pertinent. If 'theology is Christocentric, moral thought must be generic. To speak about what ought to be done is … to speak about what ought to be done by anybody at any time in the relevant circumstances. The "ought" of moral discourse does not allow for sheer particularity'.[92] How does moral theology get to grips with this difficulty? O'Donovan's first move, familiar from *Resurrection*, is to 'begin to explore this opposition from another opposition', one 'essential to the Gospel, between the particularity of the Incarnation and the universality of the reign of Christ'.[93] Yet he notes that 'faith in the universal itself demands concrete witness':

> The church in each limited time and place is committed to discerning the implications of Christ's future and universal rule for its own worldly experience … it attempts to grasp its experience both generically and particularly: generically, in terms of the structures of worldly order such as family, political community, economic relations and so on, because the world which is claimed for Christ's rule is an ordered universe; particularly, in terms of the vocation of this or that community or individual in this place or that time, because the world is a universe of particulars.[94]

Here he makes an unexpected and additional disciplinary distinction: 'In the first of these two tasks of concrete interpretation we locate the work of moral theology, in the second the work of pastoral theology'.[95] (There was no sign that pastoral theology was in question before this point, but recall that O'Donovan was Professor of Moral *and Pastoral* Theology). Still, 'these two cannot meaningfully be separated in practice. For moral theology, as a deliberative discipline, always has as its end the venturing of the actions or the forming of the attitudes which are the

[86] Ibid., 84.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 85.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 88.
[92] Ibid., 83.
[93] Ibid., 91.
[94] Ibid., 91-2.
[95] Ibid., 92.

vocation of a given believer or community of believers'.[96] And, as we have already seen: 'To discern a vocation … is already to fulfil a generic duty which rests on all who act, and it presupposes an understanding of the moral order by which the acts and attitudes to which we believe ourselves called will be judged positively or negatively'.[97] Moral theology's 'generic orientation … is not a refusal of the particular, but is in dialectical correspondence with it'.[98]

O'Donovan realises that with his disciplinary demarcations he wanders 'perilously close to some kind of ontic absolutising of the purely conventional distinctions which we observe between different branches of theology'.[99] But the intention is 'not to freeze the lines of demarcation', and the notion of 'dialectical correspondence' used here I take to be definitive of O'Donovan's thoughts about the nature of Christian ethics as it exists between theology and moral thought:

> theology by its very nature must move in certain directions and meet up with the concerns of moral thought, while moral thought, if … undertaken in relation to Christian belief, must move back again and find its centre in the primary proclamation of theology … this both authorises Christian moral thought and disciplines it.[100]

The details of this *authorisation* and *disciplining* of Christian moral thought by theology's 'primary proclamation' are worth noticing: they mark his thought indelibly.

Theology *disciplines* Christian moral thought 'by requiring an acknowledgment of the ambiguity that surrounds any form of worldly order, historical or natural'.[101] It asks questions about these, but not 'sceptically, as though it knew there was no purpose in history, no normativity in nature, and that every pretence at objective order was a sham':

> Theology asks them precisely because it knows that there *is* order, in nature and in history; that the shape of the final order is not yet visible save in outline; and that therefore every apparent element of order must be tested by that outline for its authenticity. The rule of Christ is the measure of order, and "we do not yet see everything in subjection to him; but we see Jesus … crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:8f.). The moralist's love of the appearances of order which present themselves in the world must be challenged and tested by faith and hope.[102]

If we recall *Resurrection*'s interpretation of these verses from Hebrews, we will anticipate the 'but' shortly to arrive. But, O'Donovan says, theology also 'authorises the moralist's love of order':

> the light shed by the sacred particulars will illumine the forms of order which condition the life of our civilisation. Because of this the moral theologian can interest himself in the detailed description of those forms and learn from whatever source he may to understand them more clearly …[103]

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 93.
[103] Ibid.

Nevertheless, there is no value-neutral mode of describing the order which is found within reality:

> scientists and technologists, too, are interpreters … It is here that theology appropriately exercises its normative function, by testing the adequacy and the right of these conceptions against what is given, and by opening them to encounter the horizon of faith, hope, and love, the rule of Jesus Christ.[104]

This last line surely suggests that both creation – 'what is given' – and eschatology – 'the horizon of faith, hope, and love, the rule of Jesus Christ' – ought to be normative, criterial, in that testing.

In this light, we might say that *Resurrection* went further in testing the adequacy and right of scientistic and technological conceptions against what is given than it did in opening them to encounter with that horizon. In a certain way the theopolitical works did indeed confront certain non-theological conceptions with eschatology. We were still waiting, however, for a more concerted *moral*-theological attempt at encounter with the horizon of faith, hope, and love – 'the rule of Jesus of Christ'. From what we have seen so far, *Ethics as Theology* has gone some way towards that, but has sometimes seemed to balk at a fuller encounter. As it turns out, in *Entering into Rest* O'Donovan is able to perform a subtly different variation on his consistent theme, and in so doing to begin precisely that. The earlier articulation in 'How Can Theology Be Moral' already provided an understanding within which it could be achieved. Yet frequently in the intervening years, O'Donovan seems to have been reluctant to follow through with it. We find a prime example, I believe, in the article 'What Can Ethics Know about God?'.

The basic argument is entirely unobjectionable. In fact, it is very similar to that made in *Self, World, and Time.* O'Donovan 'sets out to 'explore … the cooperation within theology' of doctrine and ethics:

> All Christian thought must prove itself as theology, and Christian thought about ethics must prove itself as "moral theology" … Yet at the same time theology is a complex of intellectual undertakings. Ethical questions are not the same as doctrinal questions; the old [Barthian] slogan that "ethics is dogmatics" was intolerably high-handed. But since doctrine has a central place in theology, moral theology is bound to acknowledge and define its relation to the questions of dogmatics, and especially to the central doctrines of God and Christ.[105]

Ethics ought not 'bid for independence', for although 'discussions of the being and work of God … are someone else's special task … without them the moral task would lose its coherence and integrity'.[106] Neither ought it 'imagine that ethics can lay down its terms to doctrine as an equal or even senior partner'.[107] The first temptation – ethics' bid for autonomy – afflicted Protestants 'in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' and 'some Catholic Christians in the twentieth'; the second – moralising doctrine – is 'characteristic of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

[104] Ibid.
[105] 'What Can Ethics Know About God?', 33. Cf. *Self, World, and Time*, 81, for criticism of the Barthian slogan.
[106] 'What Can Ethics Know', 33.
[107] Ibid.

idealism', especially 'the Ritschlian school'.[108]Though 'conscious of recapitulating some classic idealist moves' in his own argument, O'Donovan is keen to avoid this temptation. He distances himself from it as follows:

> In theology talk about God and Christ has priority. Dogma is *doxa*, an act of praise, in which the being and work of God is the first and last thing on our lips … Ethics belongs in between this first and that last word of praise; its significance is derived from its mediating position. Its task is to inform, out of praise and for the sake of praise, the deliberative reasoning which determines practical human undertakings. Yet although ethics has no equal partnership with dogmatics, the communication between the two is reciprocal. Doctrinal implications can be drawn from ethical premises, ethical implications from doctrinal premises.[109]

On this construal, two procedures are available. 'Dogmatics … can appeal to ethics to clarify a point, and ethics can appeal to dogmatics'.[110] The article engages in three exercises as examples of the first kind, 'in which appeal to ethical premises supports doctrinal conclusions'.[111] O'Donovan asks, respectively, 'what moral theology may contribute' to analogical predication of moral attributes to God, to 'statements about the saving work of God', and to statements 'about the trinitarian being of God'.[112] The second concerns us here. Here he turns deliberately 'from the first article of the creed to the second and third', wondering whether 'anything comparable [can] be said'.[113] Behind this interest lies 'a personal reason':

> When … I wrote a book called *Resurrection and Moral Order*, some critics doubted the seriousness of the work done by the resurrection in its programme. I could invoke the resurrection to secure ethics, but could not, they thought, allow that resurrection made any difference to ethics.[114]

Again, he mentions Hauerwas's memorable one-liner, and observes that 'others have kindly undertaken to defend' *Resurrection* 'against Hauerwas's criticism'.[115] Who he has in mind is unclear.[116] But he does 'want to respond constructively to his doubt – which of all possible doubts about the programme of that book seems to me the one most worth taking seriously'.[117]

That doubt invites a question: 'What might an "ethics of redemption" – that is to say, an ethics both responding to the doctrine of redemption and so also contributing to it – look like?[118] Exactly, we might think. (At last). What we read next, though, is nothing new:

> When Christian doctrine speaks of redemption, it speaks of the redemption *of the created world*. To ask what ethics "knows" of this redemption is not to ask that it should know anything *besides* the created moral order, but that it should know that moral order also in and through its historical and eschatological destiny. Here I am at one with Hauerwas; though his incautiously phrased remark, "any order we know as Christians is resurrection", could be mistaken to intend a polarity between a Christian resurrection-ethic and a non-Christian

[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 34.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 35.
[113] Ibid., 39.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] An example I am aware of is Werpehowski, *American Protestant Ethics*, ch. 4 'Politics, Creation, and Conversion', 104.
[117] 'What Can Ethics Know', 39.
[118] Ibid.

> creation-ethic. My suspicions in *Resurrection and Moral Order* were directed against those who sought to champion eschatology in opposition to created order.[119]

This statement corroborates my earlier instincts. But it takes us no further towards the *actual* 'ethics of redemption' he had promised to attempt but in fact swerves away from. Unfortunately, the rest of the subsection makes little progress towards it, either. Crucially, I think, this is owed to the way O'Donovan's exposition is governed by an instinct we are now acquainted with: about 'what ethics does not know but must be told'.[120] Determinative here is the conviction that ethics 'knows nothing by itself of human sin, and nothing of the fact that God has redeemed us … what ethics may and should know is that the moral order is present to the world *objectively*'.[121]

What should we make of these claims? On one level, it is plausible that ethics *qua* ethics may and should know that 'the moral order is present to the world objectively' – though the evidence of twentieth-century moral philosophy suggests otherwise! And indeed it does seem to be 'ethics' simply as 'ethics' which the essay is concerned with, just as the previous essay was concerned with 'moral thought' simply as 'moral thought' – and only then moved to negotiate a role for moral theology. What is on closer inspection critically unclear in both texts, I think, is the extent to which O'Donovan thinks *Christian* ethics can go on *etsi doctrina non daretur*. Certainly even here he says all the right things about the need for Christian moral thought to prove itself as theology; later he is clearer still. But the starting point is consistently this putatively neutral ethics (who does this neutral 'ethics' – do Christians? – and why does this 'ethics' natively have no 'theology' of any kind, secular or otherwise?). It seems to me that O'Donovan's difficulties with eschatology are partly caused by that first principle.

By my lights, for Christian ethics *qua* Christian, the distinction between what doctrine knows and what ethics knows – and does *not* know, but must be told – is untenable, and in fact redundant. To underline the point: the book in which this second essay is published is called *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics*. That is, not *The Doctrine of God and Philosophical Ethics*, or *The Doctrine of God and Commonsense Ethics.* What those who confess the creeds are given to know is the whole sequence of Christian teaching on God's gracious ways with God's good creation. It may be, of course, that some Christian ethicists *choose* – tactically, not strategically – to speak in public without direct reference to these teachings.[122] Granted, there is certainly precedent for appealing to the implicit affirmations

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid. The final passage (45) might suggest that ethics cannot know much of the cross, either.
[122] The distinction between tactics and strategy is de Certeau's – see Wells, *Transforming*, 114-15, and thereafter Mangina, *Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 187. Nigel Biggar seems to operate with what he imagines is an expressly counter-Hauerwasian distinction between deliberately 'distinctive' Christian moral arguments, and 'responsible', 'useful' moral arguments still having 'Christian integrity' and 'authenticity'. See especially *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). In practice, does he remember the difference between tactics and strategy? Has he remembered to continue 'labouring in the quarry' for

downstream of *one* doctrine in the case for speaking in public, or more saliently here for moral reasoning in general. I assume the assumptions O'Donovan imagines 'Ethics' to have about *moral objectivity* are in some sense licensed by natural law implications derived from a doctrine of creation. But to make these moves in any more than a circumstantially tactical way (and even that seems to me risky) is to pretend not to have heard the whole prophetic and apostolic declaration of the *magnalia Dei*: 'God's deeds of power'.[123] Here O'Donovan seems to turn a form of apologetic tactic into a foundational principle.

If, as Bonhoeffer might tell us, the church (and its moral theology) knows the beginning *from the end*, making this first move itself would mean pretending not to know *how* we know the form given in the beginning.[124] I think O'Donovan's own affirmation of the doctrine of creation by tying it to the 'vindication' entailed in salvation and renewal entailed in redemption itself presses this question. The only order we know must be subject to sin and salvific divine action, not neutrally 'natural order' as such. It would be no moral realist who having been told pretended not to know the Christological and eschatological determination of the real; that would be knowledge of 'the world', an abstraction, in O'Donovan's own terms.[125] What we see in this article, I think, is the desire to give a hearing to the full scope of Christian doctrine in Christian ethics, but irresolution about how exactly that might be achieved without destabilising the baseline of 'Moral Thought' which is presumed to carry over into Christian ethics. For further clues as to why that irresolution, as it were, was able to have been established with apparent theological warrant, we need to turn to our final passage: the recent piece 'Sanctification and Ethics'.

In this article, O'Donovan sets out to ascertain 'whether and how ethics as a theological discipline may be located within a scheme of doctrines'.[126] Ethics 'cannot renounce its interest in any of the three theological virtues', and this means 'if we follow Barth's alignment … that ethics [lays] claim to a view of all three doctrines of salvation, namely, justification, sanctification, and vocation'.[127] I believe this understanding augurs well, but how does it fit with what went before? O'Donovan tells us directly. *Resurrection* 'proposed that the proper location of ethics lay with the doctrine of the *resurrection of Christ*, in which the created order, to which our active life was bound, was vindicated and delivered from threat of dissolution':

> The question I was trying to answer was how moral teaching could be evangelical, not an appendage to faith in the gospel but integral to it. If the work of Christ were understood solely from the point of view of the cross, as negation of the world, or from the point of view of the ascension, as transcendence of the world, or even from the point of view of the incarnation, as

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'theological fragments'? (Duncan Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 155-6).

[123] Acts 2:11.

[124] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works vol. 3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas S. Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 21-2. An essentially identical point is made by Hauerwas. See 'The End is in the Beginning: Creation and Apocalyptic', 3.

[125] O'Donovan himself articulates this kind of 'world' well at *Ways*, 231.

[126] 'Sanctification and Ethics', 152.

[127] Ibid.

> assumption of the world into the being of God, moral norms, which have *human* action in view within the created world, could not be conceived evangelically. They could be a law that condemned us, an old order we left behind, or a precondition for realising the birth of God; but only when salvation was conceived as gracious restoration of the world from threat of dissolution could moral norms be a gift that made the path before our human feet a celebration of the coming of God. In locating ethics at that moment in Christology … I argued … the centrality of this moment. That said, and said truly so far as it goes, there remains to be explored the relation of the Holy Spirit to ethics, of the church, of the doctrine of the last things. For redeemed action is not solely a matter of *world*-redemption, but also of the redemption of subjectivity and of time … I have to correct, then, any inference that might be drawn from my proposal that theological ethics … relates to dogmatics at this sole point in the dogmatic scheme. To put it another way: moral theology does not locate itself by reference to a distinct dogmatic theme. Ethics is a reflective mode of *practical reason* … thought undertaking not to conclude in *knowledge* but in *action.* Ethics is doctrine existentially situated, extended into the living of life.[128]

These paragraphs show the same self-understanding as 'What Should Ethics Know of God?', but promise a better attempt at overcoming the earlier constriction. And they announce the agenda of *Ethics as Theology* at its best. He goes on:

> we should avoid the suggestion that doctrine, whether in whole or in part, may be *ethicised* … Ethics cannot replace, or improve on, dogma. Dogmatic statements must simply be grasped and believed – by a moral theologian as by any other Christian. (And it is well to remember that "moral theologian" is not the designation of a distinct class of person, merely of an academic specialism). What ethics can do is reflect on how those statements, once believed, shape and transform practical reason. It thinks … *around* dogmatic statements and *out from* dogmatic statements, but not *about* dogmatic statements … since the revelation that dogma attests is essentially a single truth of God's action, not a series of truths, ethics is in no position to choose among dogmas and declare itself more at home with one (let us say, creation or the incarnation) than another (let us say, Christ's heavenly session at God's right hand). There may, however, be a *route through* the one truth of God's action that is especially conducive to pursuing the questions that arise in reflection on practical reason. Even dogmatics … does not always follow the trinitarian order of the Apostles' Creed. And that is how my proposition in *Resurrection and Moral Order* is best understood, I now think: as identifying *a dogmatic starting point* that will allow moral theology to unfold in a comprehensible and ordered way.[129]

This is highly illuminating. Yet the point I would like to make, predictably by now, is that if 'ethics is in no position to choose among dogmas and declare itself more at home with one … than another', but may plot 'a *route through* the one truth of God's action', it must still show that each of the dogmatic points which it passes through on its journey genuinely determines its 'reflection on practical reason'.

It seems to me that one of the reasons for the particular shape of practical reason's journey through the one truth of God's action – and one which again inhibits eschatology – is an apologetic concern. The trilogy is constructed, with fine craft, so as to lead the reader to the realisation that 'wider wisdom is required if we are to hold … the wisdom of morality, in its place: Christ the centre of the world, the bridegroom of the self, the turning-point of past and future'.[130] It is designed to show how 'Ethics opens up towards theology'.[131] As we shall see as

[128] Ibid., 153.
[129] Ibid., 153-4.
[130] *Self, World, and Time*, 9.
[131] Ibid.

we turn to *Entering into Rest*, eschatology is very much part of the theology which ethics eventually opens up to, once we 'have reached the limit of a theory of moral reason'.[132]

*Ethics as Theology*'s phenomenological texture, I think, is in part an aesthetic and, relatedly, apologetic method. It provides, at the first level, a general phenomenology of ethical experience which serves as a propadeutic to the explicit claims of moral theology. This approach towards moral conversion 'from below' quite obviously seems also to distance it from dogmatic approaches 'from above' (though it certainly proceeds hand-in-hand with an account of 'Spirit')[133]. It is worth raising, if not here answering, questions which arise from this approach. Does tracing in the journey in which moral perception is honed marginalise the starkness of (at least some) biblical impressions of moral ontology? Put otherwise, does it prioritise Wisdom traditions at the expense of a closer tracking with the dramatic heights and depths of the drama of salvation portrayed in the New Testament? (We might recall O'Donovan's comments on Nygren quoted above, whose mistakes apparently included his having 'taken literally' Scriptural instances when 'conversion is described as a "new creation"').

I also wonder whether it is in fact, in part, O'Donovan's precisely *evangelical* interest in conversion (in the broad *and* narrow senses of the word evangelical) which gives the account the apologetic cast and angle of vision 'from below' it possesses. My impression is that if O'Donovan's *political* theology is about articulating the character of political judgment so as to invite recognition that the central categories of Western political thought can be seen as in truth lucent with theological realities, then his *moral* theology, especially in the later work, is about articulating moral reason in such a way that it can be seen as latent with religious commitments. On that view, moral theology, as he wrote about the conception of it in *Veritatis Splendor*: 'is a pastoral and evangelistic response to the existential question constantly thrown up by the human agent who needs to find a ground and end of action'.[134] I will not dwell upon this avenue of investigation here (though it is another which I think should be pursued).[135] Now we can turn directly to *Entering into Rest*, which represents among other things precisely a response to the existential question about action's end. As he wrote in *Finding and* Seeking, looking forward to that volume: 'The end of action … directs our love of the created world towards the Kingdom of Heaven. Here Ethics is shaped by an eschatology that it cannot take direct responsibility for'.[136]

## *DE FINIBUS*

[132] *Finding and Seeking*, 239.
[133] See e.g. *Finding and Seeking*, 95-6.
[134] 'A Summons to Reality', 41.
[135] Luke Bretherton, review of *Self, World, and Time,* in *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 27:3 (2014): 365-9, 367. Cf. James King, 'Moral Theory: Response to Chapter Four', in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 33:1 (2015): 86-91, and O'Donovan's response (104-8 of the same edition).
[136] *Finding and Seeking*, 239.

If the first instalment of *Ethics as Theology* was about the study of moral thinking, and the second about the progress of moral thinking, then *Entering into Rest* turns its attention to moral thinking's 'object': 'the forward horizon with which moral thinking engages'.[137] O'Donovan invokes a classical division of moral philosophical tasks to describe 'the two aspects' under which these three parts can be considered, the first corresponding to 'classical discussions *de officis*, "on duties"', and now the second corresponding to treatises '*de finibus*, "on ends of action"'.[138] Though the distinction is improperly worked out in modern ethics in the split between deontological and teleological approaches, there is some benefit, he says, to concentrating attention upon agents' responsibility and the goals and ends of their action, respectively. According to this scheme, *Entering into Rest* represents O'Donovan's own *de finibus.*

This last movement imparts to the earlier works' outlook a new perspective: it 'a view of the climax of the Pauline triad in the sovereignty of love'.[139] As with the resurrection motif in earlier work, O'Donovan recognises that 'there could be other possible starting points' than the Pauline sovereignty of love for this work, too: 'the Sermon on the Mount suggests itself, framed as it is by declarations of the moral significance of the ultimate future, for the teleology of classical ethics is drawn, in a Christian context, inexorably into the magnetic field of eschatology'.[140] That starting point is arguably one taken by Hauerwas – and certainly by writers like Glen Stassen and David Gushee;[141] we can only wonder what material difference it might have made to O'Donovan's enterprise.

Still, the 'moral significance of the ultimate future' directly occupies O'Donovan's *de finibus,* too. Its basic lineaments in that respect are as follows. Fundamentally, the Pauline recognition of the sovereignty of love demands a reassembly of the triad. Earlier formulated in the sequence faith, love, and hope, it is now configured as faith, hope, and *love* (1 Cor. 13). In doing so, the horizon of 'accomplishment' is opened: 'the satisfaction of moral agency in its end … a point of rest on the far side of deliberation to which practical reason may look as its goal, not alien to practice or superseding practice, but pushing its horizon back to the accomplishment that life itself is offered.[142]

Now, I have said that an ecclesiological element has been somewhat attenuated in *Ethics as Theology* up to this point. That is, in itself, worth observing, because as we have seen,

[137] *Entering into Rest*, vii.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), though for startling loss of confidence in this project, see now David P. Gushee and Codi D. Norred, 'The Kingdom of God, Hope, and Christian Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 31:1 (2017): 3-16. It is bracingly clear that, while becoming laudably engaged in social concern, the 'evangelical left' reproduced the immanentism of the social gospel, turning the eschatological confessions of the creed into functions of ethical action – and in the face of contraindications to earthly (read: American) progress, their hope burned out.

[142] *Entering into Rest*, 2

O'Donovan has sometimes been counted among those post-liberal theologians who have helped us regain confidence in doctrinal and ethical speech about the church – a classification which is surely not wholly incorrect. Against this background, the ecclesially-underdetermined character of *Self, World, and Time* has not gone unremarked. Though Samuel Wells counts a little stingily when writing that reading the first book he 'only picked up one reference to 'church' (there are a handful more), his remark is substantively to the point.[143] I have also argued, throughout, that in O'Donovan's work it is relation to the church that eschatology's import for the moral life is most often exhibited. Does that mean, therefore, that eschatology's place has been attenuated up until this point, too? Not straightforwardly, as we have seen. While the link is prominent in *Resurrection*, and especially in *Desire*, it is almost absent from the first two books of *Ethics as Theology*. When eschatological themes are present, in both books' discussion of hope, they are largely uncoupled from ecclesiology, rather focused on the possibility of agents' free action. In *Entering into Rest's* schematic reorientation, however – a deliberate one internal to *Ethics as Theology* – both areas, earlier curtailed, are once more inextricable from one another. And they are front and centre, in this last idiosyncratic meditation upon love.

For O'Donovan, love in First Corinthians describes 'a moment when the urgent need to act is postponed in the interest of others' actions'.[144] He intends something quite precise by this: not contemplation leaving behind 'the sphere of action', rather, an 'active-passive disposition', which as rest is specifically '"resting in" others' labours'.[145] When placed at the "summit" of the three, therefore, love 'is a statement about the finality of the community'.[146] This ecclesiological point is pregnant with eschatological resonance. Placed there, love is also 'a statement about the end of time … now placed on the far side of hope, the virtue that "anchors" the endurance of time in a future of promise'.[147] Hope needs this further love, then, and just so *ethics* needs it:

> An Ethics that had never heard tell of such a future could only end tentatively, in an uncertain hope of endurance for any further goal there may or may not be. Hope acquires its assurance with the word, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has drawn near" (Mark 1:15). Yet though anchored in the promise, hope cannot draw the Kingdom near enough to be talked of and experienced, for hope lives only in the dark. An Ethics that concluded in hope would be apophatic, gesturing towards a goal of which it could not speak.[148]

These sentences, left as they are, continue a train of thought evident in the earlier two volumes. Indeed, in those volumes it seemed to terminate there. But here O'Donovan goes on: 'The same evangelical logic that brings assurance to hope, then, also implies that hope cannot pronounce

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[143] Wells, review of *Self, World, and Time*, 393. O'Donovan's response, I imagine, might be essentially to reiterate the sentiment he expresses on pages 86-7, in commentary on Schleiermacher's 'Ethics conceived as *religious* description', which is silent 'about the ordered and structured beauty of the created world … There can be no objection, of course, to the idea that Moral Theology is a practice located within the church … its form as well as its context … But the church is not the object *about which* it raises questions, nor the presupposition on which it does so'.
[144] *Entering into Rest*, 2.
[145] Ibid. 3.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

the last word in Ethics. The Gospel confirms, but also reorders, practical reason. The Kingdom's drawing-near offers agency a provisional view of the final point of rest'.[149]

As in *Resurrection*, then, there is a sense in which hope is superseded. However, here it is so in a more theologically satisfactory way. O'Donovan is still hyper-sensitive to the difficulty moral reason has in reckoning with the Kingdom, and the particular way in which it comes to know of it:

> The drawing-near of the Kingdom is a reality that has first to be announced. It is not merely *teleological*, projected forward by the logic of moral experience, but *eschatological.* Ethics must be told of it, and then learn to refer to it in terms of moral reason. But the moral reference is possible only if the Kingdom, which lies beyond the goods of world and time, can somehow be represented within the goods of world and time'.[150]

Just that representation, we might think, is what O'Donovan has previously effectively denied! Yet here he announces that there *is* a reliable way of so representing the Kingdom 'within the goods of world and time': Paul's way, which is to speak again of love, 'what Ethics has already known'.[151] The elaboration of this way is dense and difficult to parse in relation to earlier articulations:

> Love's *métier* is a world of meaning and goodness. Love is focused on an object, finding its rest in an objective world … God could have responded to the moral loss of mankind by making new worlds of which mankind was not part; instead, he has restored the world of which we are part, making it responsive to our purposive action. The logic of Paul's inverted triad, then, is the logic of salvation and eschatology; no eschaton could be a Kingdom of God *for us*, if it were not also a redemption and recovery of the created work of God we are. As we are offered love as the climactic moment in our moral thinking, concluding, ordering, and making sense of what has gone before, we know it as familiar, and yet we have never encountered it before *like this.* To discover the sovereignty of love is to discover created good given as a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, as the future appearing in a present familiarity, the past reappearing with a new message of what God will do.[152]

The explication of eschatological novelty in terms of renewed apprehension of this 'restored … world of which we are part', in order to secure 'our purposive action', is a familiar one. O'Donovan himself writes that 'at the end of a hope that sprang out of love we have not taken one step beyond love'.[153]

O'Donovan's description of the *form* of that love, though, entails as confidently material a description of eschatology's import for ethics as we are likely to find in his work. In other words, the 'never … before *like this*' begins to make a difference. 'If hope', he writes, 'narrows deliberation to the moment of opportunity and adventure', then 'love now leads out into a world, not the final world of the Kingdom of God but a genuine anticipation of it …'.[154] It is nothing other than 'many agents living and acting with one common agency'.[155] We cannot call it 'the eschaton *tout court*', but it *is* 'more broadly "eschatological", announcing God's future' –

[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid. 4.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

'the experience of redemption includes the representation of ourselves to ourselves as living wholly with, for, and in dependence upon, one another'.[156] Put otherwise, boldly: 'Community alone can tell us of the universal order yet to arrive … To act that another may act well: that is to seek an end which carries the assurance of God's Kingdom within it'.[157]

Though eschatological 'content' was earlier denied to hope in response to the way in which Moltmann filled out that virtue, O'Donovan does offer something substantive here – in the character of *caritas*. Hope, then, cannot pronounce ethics' last word. But charity does not 'make an end of hope', since 'so long as we are situated in time', charity 'does not exhaust the content of promise'.[158] As a 'token of the promised final rest', charity's 'rest in community' is provisional. And that means hope still has a place. In it 'we return to deliberation, confident of finding in community the authoritative form of our own further acts'.[159]

Recalling the Pentecostal character (in the original sense of the word) of his constructive ecclesiology in earlier works, we may expect a pneumatological explication of this social 'foretaste'.[160] And indeed, though we did not focus upon it, the narration of the 'forward-looking' aspect of the resurrection in *Self, World, and Time* majors even more on the 'step forward into the life of Spirit' than earlier works: if we are 'to speak of an eschatological elevation without being left gesturing, contentless, pointing towards indefinable and indescribable empty space' we will have to 'speak of Pentecost'.[161] Here in *Entering into Rest*, O'Donovan draws an equation between 'acting together and thinking as one' (Phil. 2:2) and a 'communion of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13:13).[162]

The pneumatological provenance of this *genuine* anticipation is brought out most clearly in passages which take the fifth chapter of Romans as their basis (a chapter in which he finds further confirmation of his reading of the 'rearranged triad of virtues').[163] There we learn that '"Hope will not disappoint, since God's love is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given us"' (Rom. 5:5).[164] O'Donovan comments: 'Love offers the final validation of moral reason … love not as a demand, but as a present reality, as sure sign of the presence of the divine, reflectively completing and evoking hope, an eschatological anticipation made real by the presence of the Holy Spirit'.[165] He continues in this vein, paying attention the tenses used by Paul:

> if faith has its object in the *past* acts of God, the death and resurrection of Christ, and hope has its in the *future* judgment and salvation to be wrought through Christ, the tense of love is the present tense, representing what we possess and know already, in this time of love's "pouring out"'. Love's "now" is a viewpoint which can take cognisance of all time …

[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid. 5.
[158] Ibid., 9.
[159] Ibid., 9-23.
[160] *Self, World, and Time*, 95.
[161] Ibid.
[162] *Entering into Rest*, 5.
[163] Ibid. 6.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid. 7.

> spanning the gap that divides the accomplished from the still-to-be-accomplished, and situating the present situation, with its experience of the Holy Spirit and its practical tasks of service and endurance, in between these two temporal poles. For this is a *second* reflection of love, not merely upon the world God has redeemed, but upon the temporal movement of our salvation, emerging from and proceeding towards the purposes of God in time'.[166]

The inversion of the triad, then, seems to promise the development of an account of the present bearing of eschatology beyond that 'merely' – owed to love's first reflection – and beyond the apophasis of hope.

What does this mean for practical reason? First, we are presented with 'an *eschatological extension* of practical reason, an extension implied by the drawing near of the Kingdom of God'.[167] While practical reason can conceive of action's ends, it needs 'a disclosure to bring to light what it is groping after': 'In that disclosure is given back what natural practical reason "had" in its abstract ideality, and conferred what it "could not have" apart from promise'.[168] And here a familiar pattern is applied: 'The destiny of practical existence is governed by the logic of the resurrection: restoring the world, and opening up a world made new'.[169] Second, this eschatological extension implies 'an *ecclesiological orientation* of practical reason'.[170] This eschatological extension and ecclesiological orientation seem, therefore, to fulfil the latent yearnings of moral reason. A worked-through example of how moral reason opens up to revelation – precisely in terms of eschatology and ecclesiology – is provided in O'Donovan's insightful reflections on the ends of action, which I will not rehearse here.[171]

All told, we find what we have consistently found: O'Donovan *is absolutely* capable of bringing these themes to the fore, but some kind of conviction about the need to demonstrate the workings of moral reason before it becomes 'ethics as theology' segregates them from some of the core claims of his moral-philosophical work. *Entering into Rest's* formulations make one wonder again, then, about the ambiguous theological specificity of the account of moral thinking in the first two volumes. This might very well be viewed positively: Eric Gregory writes in his endorsement of the book that 'by stretching categories of religious and secular thought with eschatological horizons, it has something constructive to say to our spiritual and intellectual lives and the communities that sustain them'. But the strength of its ultimate ecclesiological and eschatological convictions may just as well raise questions about just how coherently possible the earlier abstracted account(s) in fact were: questions this study has been inclined to answer negatively. A final reason for O'Donovan's difficulties with eschatology will be entertained in the Conclusion to this study.

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[166] Ibid. 7-8.
[167] Ibid. 8.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] See 24-44.

# Conclusion

Which parts of O'Donovan's approach should we adopt – and which should we not? How should we adapt those elements which seem broadly generative, but not exactly right? In what ways might O'Donovan's work be related to other more-or-less contemporary projects in doctrinal, moral, and political theology? What overall, should we say about eschatology's place in ethics – and what is the case to be made for that place? Throughout the foregoing five chapters, I have indicated the beginnings of an answer to each of these questions, which I will not repeat here.[1] The additional thought with which I do wish to conclude the study is one that concerns the final two queries: what is the case to be made for the place of eschatology in moral reasoning, and what should its place be?

My argument here is fairly simple. I can begin with O'Donovan's own proposal that we 'grasp the Christian metaphysic in its wholeness and realise its significance for ethics'.[2] This is an entirely salutary suggestion, for our understandings of the moral life must be contextualised within the economy of the gospel, proclamation of which details moral action's 'environment' or 'arena'.[3] By marginalising any core Christian theologoumenon, ethics cannot but close itself off from the light which 'divine teaching' might shed upon considerations of creaturely conduct.

Affirming this point is not simply about suggesting the reliance of ethics on doctrine, nor encouraging moralists to say something about each dogmatic affirmation for the sake of a kind of creedal courtesy. The need to demonstrate deliberate attention to each moment of the Church's confession does not (or should not merely) arise from the systematician's demand that ethicists follow suit in terms of comprehensiveness, proportion and *taxis*, valuable as those considerations can be. It arises, instead, from the requirement – or, better, happy possibility – that Christian ethics might be true to the worship of the Church. If this means, as has become popular to suggest, that Christian ethics 'must incorporate sustained reflection on the liturgical prayer of the church',[4] then it will certainly mean incorporating sustained reflection on eschatological themes. There is, undeniably, an overwhelming preponderance of eschatological expression in Christian hymns and songs, prayers, poetry, and iconography. [5]

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[1] For an exercise which works towards an answer on this final question, see Appendix A.
[2] 'The Natural Ethic', 31.
[3] The terms are, respectively, Paul L. Lehmann's and Balthasar's. See Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (London: SCM Press, 1963) and Steck, *Ethical Thought*.
[4] Vigen Guroian, *Ethics after Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Christian Ethic* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 7. Cf. Vigen Guroian, 'Liturgy and the Lost Eschatological Vision of Christian Ethics', *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000): 227-38, the entire *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, and O'Donovan, *Liturgy and Ethics: Grove Booklets E: 89* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1993).
[5] See paragraph 11 'The Law of Prayer is the Law of Belief', of the document of the International Theological Commission called *Some Current Questions in Eschatology* (1992). Cf. Peter C. Phan,

Whatever the fortunes of eschatological reflection among the professional theologians and ethicists of any given period, it seems to have been ever-present in all major traditions of Christian piety, one of the wellsprings of everyday Christian worship, and, because of that, one of the animating forces of the Christian life.[6] While not a few theologians have been tempted to think of traditional eschatological expectations as the workings of 'the simple mind' (Paul Althaus),[7] Christians in fact engage in complex and deeply compelling processes of reasoning when they seek to act in light of these commitments. It seems to me that all kinds of believers *display* much better than trained theologians nearly ever *explain*, how 'hope for the future is an inseparable, integral dimension of Christian faith' and just so – without necessary competition – 'the implied condition of possibility for responsible Christian action in the world.'[8] When it comes to hope, it seems to have been especially hard for professionals to 'recapture *in modo cognitionis*, what the faithful heart of any old woman already knows' (one of Aquinas's definitions of theology).[9] One of the reasons why this is so, I think, is because professional ethicists and morally-minded theologians in particular have been for some significant reasons highly attuned to the potential *dangers* of eschatological longing.

Sometimes resistance to eschatology's formative role in the Christian moral imagination is owed to the apparently false consolation it presumes to offer.[10] Sometimes it resolves into a concern that the wild diversity of eschatological beliefs among Christians might undermine any unified basis for social ethics.[11] In both instances referred to here, interestingly enough, what emerges is a compensatory and almost monistic stress on the surpassing value of *charity* as action-motivating and action-guiding, without much support from its companions in the Pauline triad. For others, the worry is that eschatological hope, when it feeds (or becomes) a social gospel, burns bright and burns out. 'We've been through this business of the Kingdom before', said Reinhold Niebuhr.[12] Yet we must surely counter, with David Elliot, that 'theological hope is … not a parasite or deadweight, but something which makes a real contribution to Christian

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'Roman Catholic Theology' in Jerry L. Walls ed., *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 215-232.

[6] See Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: a Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991),

[7] In Markus Mühling, *T & T Clark Handbook of Christian Eschatology*. Trans. Jennifer Adams-Massmann and David Andrew Gilland. (London: Bloombsury T & T Clark, 2015), 262.

[8] Daley's conclusion to his survey of Patristic eschatology: *The Hope of the Early Church*, 217.

[9] Bruce D. Marshall, '*Quod Scit Una Uetula*': Aquinas on the Nature of Theology', in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 1-26, 26.

[10] So Timothy P. Jackson, *Love Disconsoled: Meditations on Christian Charity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) – an account influenced by Richard Rorty, and convincing to Jeffrey Stout (*Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 256, 336 n. 43). For theological responses to Jackson, see Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics*, 75-85, Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity: The Sins That Sabotage Divine Love* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 42-60, and Gregory, *Politics of Love*, 111-12.

[11] So Stephen N. Williams, with an essay response by Miroslav Volf, *The Limits of Hope and the Logic of Love: Essays on Eschatology and Social Action* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006).

[12] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935), 59.

love',[13] and does so sustainably; that hope is, in fact, to be closely associated with the perseverance which forms characters who do not grow tired of doing the good.[14] O'Donovan indisputably agrees – but does he occasionally waver? Are his concerns about the over-heated 'calculations or prognostications'[15] of anticipation a little too determinative of what he is able to say, positively?

Reservations about eschatology's ethical import have by no means put theologians off trying to make moral sense of it, however. And so convinced have some been that eschatology is indeed irrevocably central to Christian practice that they have declared that 'theological ethics is eschatological or it is nothing'.[16] (That is not quite true: theological ethics absent eschatology is not nothing: it is very often something like natural law). Yet there are few contemporary theologians who eschew it entirely. Perhaps more pressing – strange to say in a study advocating eschatology's abiding relevance to morality – is what Rowan Greer calls 'the risk that the last things have often become no more than a way of talking about the meaning of the here and now'.[17] That is, the risk of moralism.

So it is not the case that eschatology is usually absent. Today, *all* of the main elements of Christian teaching *are* generally in play, to some extent or other, in any given theologian's work. The task of analysis is therefore to see how these elements relate, how certain *loci* are thought to be of more use than others in the development of an account of human action, and how particular areas of 'applied' ethics are understood to fall most fittingly under which dogmatic headings. (There are certainly now no generally accepted criteria for establishing which doctrines practitioners should reach for when approaching any given 'issue', if there ever were). I have tried to pursue something of this task here, in relation to O'Donovan. The task has been difficult insofar as his work is complex, and rewarding insofar as he too thinks directly about these questions, and offers a set of powerful answers. Some theologians make this even easier: Markus Mühling, for instance, intersperses moral and pastoral topics among particular aspects of eschatology in particular – a kind of Barthian move at the micro-level.[18] For others, we would have to look a little more closely, and analyse at risk of artificially unraveling

[13] Elliot, *Hope and Christian Ethics*, 85.
[14] Rom 5:4; Gal. 6:9.
[15] The phrase is Ben Witherington III's: 'The Conquest of Faith and the Climax of History', in Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald, eds, *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 432-7, 436. Witherington is defending actual eschatological hope, but it is not hard to find scholars who conflate all future eschatological hope with these over-heated predictions. They are, for example, entirely determinative of the astonishingly creative 'counter-apocalyptic' of Catherine Keller. See e.g. *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004).
[16] Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 47.
[17] Rowan A. Greer, *Christian Hope and Christian Life: Raids on the Inarticulate* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), e.g. 3.
[18] Mühling, *T & T Clark Handbook.*

something deliberately woven, in order to see which doctrines are doing what work (to put it crudely).[19]

Leaving aside that task for now, we may ask, finally, what 'work' eschatology *should* do in ethics. To put it in a necessarily abstracted, formal way, we can do worse than to base an answer upon Pannenberg's notions of eschatology's 'critical' and 'constructive' functions.[20] I have reservations about speaking of 'function',[21] and would maintain that this tract of Christian teaching, like any other, is essentially irreducible to any practical effect. But the proposal captures much that is important to capture. First, as O'Donovan and many others can teach us, the horizon of eschatology stands over current states of affairs, as a 'critical comparative',[22] serving a 'negative, interrogative'[23] purpose. And, second, hope in the fulfilment of that heavenly state of affairs here on earth has a 'positive and transformative' role to play, too.[24]

I have argued that O'Donovan has not made quite enough of this second aspect. But we must make much of in a particular way. It will always need repeating that Christian ethics is not in any cause and effect manner the means of producing the kingdom of God. Eschatological hope does not pass by the world, even as it goes beyond it,[25] but *we* do not, in any self-standing sense, 'build the kingdom'; 'real transformation of our estate is vested in God rather than human being'.[26] Yet 'relieved of final responsibility', we are 'called instead to steadfastness, alertness and expectancy', and, to 'hopeful Christian action'.[27]

The action which moral theology seeks to commend *may*, then, be understood as really and meaningfully linked to that kingdom, but we will have to describe carefully the general character which that 'link' by grace possesses. There are no doubt many different kinds of words and phrases we might employ to do so; the basic rule for their validity will be whether they can be seen as coherent with the prayer 'Our Father … your kingdom come, your will be done'. To list just a few, we can legitimately say, I think, that human moral action can be an *annunciation* of God's kingdom, a *witness*, *token*, and *ensign* of redemption; that moments and patterns of creaturely behaviour can be seen, by the Spirit, as *analogies* to it or *parables* of it; that the kingdom drawing near elicits our *corresponding* action even as it is the reality under

[19] One way in which we might do that is by employing an analytical tool, and one analytical tool which might be leveraged towards this end, it seems to me, is the hyper-systematic structure of David Kelsey's book *Eccentric Existence*. (Much like Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is often used, and especially its threefold logic of creation, reconciliation, and redemption). For my attempt to do this, see Appendix A.
[20] Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Constructive and Critical Functions of Eschatology', *Harvard Theological Review* 77:2 (1984): 119-39. Cf Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 335.
[21] See, again, Appendix B.
[22] Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, trans. John Webster (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 183.
[23] John C. McDowell, *Hope in Barth's Eschatology: Interrogations and Transformations Beyond Tragedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 180-213, 202.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological-Dramatic Theory* vol. V*: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 176. On the inverse of this point, see Appendix B.
[26] O'Regan, *Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic*, 56, paraphrasing Bulgakov.
[27] Webster, 'Hope', 214.

which we stand *and* the destiny to which we are drawn. This study has suggested that Scripture and tradition can give fuller indications of what kinds of action might constitute such witness than O'Donovan often appears to think. I have been necessarily selective in following through on those suggestions here. For one thing, I have particularly wanted to press the point that concern for the poor is principal among those kinds of actions, although that example is not quite as clear a test case as singleness, to which I have also sought to draw attention. (It is not such a clear test case because concern for the poor can and should also be derived from a creation demand, whereas singleness presumes a different moral ontology altogether).

Qualifications of O'Donovan's approach like this are important, but they only serve to specify further a conviction I am sure that he shares and on which I will end. It is, as his old friend Hauerwas puts it, that for the sake of the world, the Church 'assembles reminders of the kingdom of God in subtle, seemingly trivial and insignificant ways'.[28]

[28] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: life in the Christian colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 96-7.

# APPENDIX A
# COMPARATIVE:
# O'DONOVAN AND SOME CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

I said, in the introduction, that writing about O'Donovan analytically is not straightforward: much easier is reproducing his thought, or dismissing it. One of the aims of this study has been to map, patiently, the topography of O'Donovan's moral vision so that it might be more conveniently brought into wider discourse. To some extent, I hope, the passing references made to other theologians throughout have already begun to do just that. What I seek to do here in this appended reflection is to provide a skein of brief suggestions which might serve to invite further conversation, and lay the foundations for further constructive work.

As I indicated in the Conclusion, one way in which we might do that is by employing an analytical tool, and the analytical tool which I attempt to leverage towards this end here is the hyper-systematic structure of David Kelsey's book *Eccentric Existence*. There are all kinds of *material* points of striking resonance and dissonance between Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* and O'Donovan's work, some of which I have touched upon – another would be the categorisation and phenomenological sketches of 'sins against' which both engage in: Kelsey considering sins against God's relating to create, consummate, and reconcile, and O'Donovan sins against faith, love, and hope. But the point of using as scaffolding Kelsey's scheme of creation, consummation, and reconciliation (the order is supralapsarian, but that does not need to detain us now) is that it might give us a formal grid, with which to record O'Donovan's contribution to Christian ethics' *theological* presuppositions. And, second, a grid with which to relate it to other construals of moral theology's doctrinal coordinates more generally, and eschatology's import more specifically. In keeping with the analogy employed throughout the study, we might call this Appendix an exercise in 'comparative cartography'.

To be clear, I am *not* suggesting that Kelsey necessarily gets things right – it does not matter whether he does or does not, for the purposes of this exercise. Nor am I suggesting that his style of hyper-systematicity is a goal worth striving for in *ethics* or, for that matter, in doctrine (I hope this comparative exercise is not another kind of school-theology revenge upon practical reasoners). But what Kelsey represents, in the clearest possible way – three hefty volumes on each theme respectively – is commitment to thinking through the implications of each moment of the divine economy. What I am aiming at by employing it, then, is enriched thinking about the dogmatic presuppositions of different approaches in contemporary theological ethics. What follows is a rapid and selective tour of the horizon of contemporary moral theology, in which I use the terms 'creation, consummation, and reconciliation' to capture some differences of emphasis. It will be, by necessity, observational and assertoric, and restricted in its main figures to Protestant theology. And, once again, this way of going about

reception of O'Donovan's thought cannot directly assess his particular treatments of moral and political issues, or that of any other thinker engaged.

First and very straightforwardly, we can see that O'Donovan, like Kelsey, *affirms* the doctrine of creation, and its place in moral theology. The significance of this cannot be underestimated, in view of cultural practices (in which Christians are complicit) that are at best inhospitable to the moral claims of the Christian theology of creation, and at worst participate in the 'abiding mutilation of a Christian vision of creation and our own creatureliness'.[1] (We might think here of structural sins like racism, sexism, and the degradation of the environment). As I have indicated, this places O'Donovan in the company of various Christian thinkers who have recently sought to retrieve the doctrine of creation for various ends.

In theory at least, O'Donovan is able to show – just as do Kelsey, who provides doctrines of consummation and reconciliation *besides* creation – that salvation and eschatology can be thought alongside protology 'without elimination'. Yet in a sense, Kelsey's painstaking articulation of the three elements places in stark relief a tendency to salvation-historical monism in O'Donovan: in which all that really matters morally is creation's form, 'the old, made explicit' (certainly given, restored, and enduring, but essentially the same).

Interestingly, as I noted, the kind of ethos promoted by Kelsey's doctrine of creation actually exhibits many of the same details as the one O'Donovan intends to foster with his understanding of the resurrection. This observation underscores a lack of properly eschatological definition in O'Donovan's view of the resurrection, to be sure; if the focal qualities he places under that rubric are almost without remainder found under Kelsey's rubric of creation then what ethical weight does the resurrection's forward-looking aspect in fact carry? But it also provides a way of receiving and elaborating upon some of O'Donovan's material insights while uncoupling them from his particularly this-worldly flattening of eschatology. Given that I have sought, on doctrinal grounds, to unsettle the strongly continuationist account of eschatological continuity O'Donovan displays, and have suggested that it is an account driven by ethical concerns, I propose that its ethical gains (including concern for the body, and for ecological issues) can just as well be obtained by the kind of perspectives offered by Kelsey, which are not dependent on such an account.[2] As subsequent points will clarify, I do not mean by this modification to imply that creation should be viewed uneschatologically – O'Donovan's attempts to relate it strongly to Christology and eschatology are to be preferred to many current Protestant retrievals of natural law – rather that a strongly continuationist vision is not the only way to relate the two, and furthermore that we do not need

[1] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 293.

[2] This shared concern for the moral implications of creaturely life in this space and time might be extended further by engagement with Ephraim Radner (*A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality and the Shape of a Human Life* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) and John Swinton (*Becoming Friends With Time: Disability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016)).

to believe creation's form will perdure in a strongly continuationist way for it to be morally significant *now*.

If we glance at the *content* of Kelsey's account of *consummation*, we find divergence here, too. In this area, Kelsey draws on the apocalyptic reading of Paul (as does Hauerwas in his criticism of O'Donovan's focus on creation). That reading yields a more discontinuous, disjunctive vision, and – though he claims not to be doing ethics – Kelsey embraces the broadly liberationist moral and political vision attendant on such a reading.[3] This apocalyptic sensibility clashes with O'Donovan's in a pronounced way, and I shall enlist it as a conversation partner for the rest of the chapter. Furthermore, that this sensibility does so sharply diverge from O'Donovan's is not surprising – apocalyptic theology's most vocal contemporary critic is N.T. Wright, and on occasion apocalyptic critics of Wright have taken O'Donovan to task, too.[4]

To say that 'apocalyptic' theology has little invested, ethically, in a doctrine of creation, is to underline the sharpest of distinctions between O'Donovan and that sensibility. Moreover, that Kelsey himself, like O'Donovan, also treats creation, does represent an advance on many of those apocalyptic theologians who would approve of his account of consummation. However, though he presents both aspects, Kelsey gives little help in seeing how his apocalyptic eschatology and doctrine of creation relate. In fact, his account of creation is decidedly non-teleological – deliberately based on Wisdom literature rather than Genesis in order to *avoid* teleology – and therefore static in a slightly different way than O'Donovan's. Thus Kelsey (perhaps like Kathryn Tanner), however insightful his individual accounts of each *locus*, tends to sever the links between creation, providence, salvation, and eschatology.[5] More the point for this study, that leaves serious questions about how the multiple elements (in shorthand creation, consummation, and reconciliation) should inform *ethics*.

Granted, there is the danger of reductionism in a single story reduced to one essential point ('vindication', perhaps), but how should *three* distinct stories inform moral deliberation? Perhaps they are different resources to be drawn upon as reflection demands (akin to a suggestion Francis Watson makes about ecclesial discernment regarding deployment of James' sense of created order and Pauline apocalyptic).[6] O'Donovan's sense of the relation of creation, providence, salvation, and eschatology is obviously more integrated because more teleological, and though in some way *over*-integrated, it is preferable to Kelsey's (and the more disjointed

[3] Whether or not we accept Kelsey's denial does not effect my use of the scheme here, but I do think his theological anthropology (like any) is ethically primed. I hope to write more fully elsewhere about the ways in which *Eccentric Existence* might both inform and be challenged by a moral theological reading. For a beginning, see Paul Dafydd Jones, review essay in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80:3 (2012): 787-800, 797-8.

[4] See the reference to the work of Samuel Adams, above.

[5] This leads to widely observed tensions in his scheme. For an overstatement of them, see Catherine Pickstock's assessment: 'The One Story: A Critique of David Kelsey's Theological Robotics', *Modern Theology* 27:1 (2011): 26-40.

[6] Francis Watson, '"Every Perfect Gift': James, Paul and the Created Order', in *Muted Voices of the New Testament: Readings in the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, ed. Katherine M. Hockey, Madison N. Pierce, and Francis Watson, 121-37.

moments of Barth's) inasmuch as it answers the question of the significance of these elements' interrelation as a 'unified metaphysic' for morals. Yet that is only a major gain if O'Donovan is able to demonstrate sensitivity to the ways each of the dogmatic moments shapes the Christian ethos distinctively, which Kelsey tries to do discretely – to a fault.

Returning to the 'apocalyptic' theologians, I find that though often failing to account satisfactorily for creation, unlike Kelsey and O'Donovan, they do typically represent an advance on O'Donovan in one respect. Accounts based on logics of 'coming to pass/passing away' (Christopher Morse)[7] or 'perpetual advent' (David Congdon, interpreting Bultmann),[8] I argue, offer a heightened sense of eschatology's *present* import which is not as pronounced in O'Donovan. In fact, Christopher Holmes' apocalyptic interpretation of *Christus praesens* is given doctrinal definition in direct criticism of O'Donovan's *Resurrection*.[9] Holmes's approach has many merits, not least its concerted effort to see dogmatic christology shape an understanding of ethics, and in such a way as to nourish commitment to reflection on Jesus's ministry and teaching, besides his death, resurrection, ascension, and coming in glory. If ethics which treat exemplarity do typically reflect on these, Protestants who ground ethics in christology – including apocalyptic Christology – are seldom so committed to the practice of attention to the content of Scripture's depiction of Christ as is Holmes. His approach, in terms of Christ's reality-making contemporaneity, nicely sharpens one element of *Resurrection*'s vision with the critical eye of a Barthian systematic theologian. But, as I will go on to say, it does not do much with the rest. If we are advanced beyond *Resurrection* in terms of *one* of morality's theological bases, we are not much informed about how we should think of the others, if at all.[10]

O'Donovan's focus upon *judgment* does in resonate with some of this apocalyptic stress, and the awareness of moral action and identity being enacted and constituted in the presence of the Lord is there in his work, too. The sense of moral answerability – responsibility – in the present is important. O'Donovan does not, however, seem to bring our so much the way in which the presence of the kingdom in our midst even now – 'a concrete messianic *irruption* of

[7] Christopher Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes: Rehearing the Gospel as Good News* (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2010).
[8] David W. Congdon, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Companion to His Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005).
[9] Holmes, *Ethics*, 95-7.
[10] That might also be considered a distinct limitation of 's *Christ, History, and* Apocalyptic, despite its promise. My worries about Kerr's book – concerns amplified in terms of Congdon's work – are comparable to those expressed in D. Stephen Long, *Hebrews* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 198-213. Holmes now appears to develop implications more in terms of creation, while maintaining covenantal particularity: 'Just as Jesus Christ is the one who completes torah and temple he, as the agent of creation, is the very fulfillment of the created order'. (*The Lord is Good: Seeking the God of the Psalter* (London: Apollos, 2018), 155). He is not primarily an ethicist, but interesting, perhaps, that his sensibility has shifted as he has moved away from apocalyptic theology, and in his own description 'through' Bonhoeffer and Barth: to an approach more informed by Augustine and Thomas, and among recent theologians Webster and Sonderegger. Interesting, too, that interpretation of the Psalms in Augustinian and Thomist idiom yields throughout formulations more in keeping with O'Donovan's than before.

history itself', in Nathan Kerr's representative terms – creates particular forms of liberative action.[11]

Some interpretations of apocalyptic theology are especially alert to moral dimensions,[12] deploying their eschatological emphases in a different kind of 'Augustinian' political theology than O'Donovan's (P. Travis Kroeker) and leveraging it against ethical turns to natural law (Philip G. Ziegler) and virtue (Morse). But those few with apocalyptic sensibility for disjunction who *do* recognise creation's moral import as well as that of 'the new' (Eberhard Jüngel) are elusive about what that might mean morally.[13] And while apocalyptic theology announces itself as thoroughgoing eschatology, it sometimes fails to account satisfactorily for *future* hope. Completely de-temporalising eschatology in order to articulate it in purely spatial terms, as some do, is in the end, I contend, doctrinally, morally, and pastorally irresponsible, and cannot but betray authentic Christian hope.[14] It also fails to fully overcome the immanentist, progressivist eschatology of the Social Gospel, which apocalyptic theology in its origins (J. Louis Martyn) in some way formulated itself in stark opposition to (though maintaining the Social Gospel's moral and political commitments). Though I would wish to preserve something of the angularity of apocalyptic theology's construal of eschatology and its radical import for ethics, I think for it to contribute to a full-orbed moral theology, it must be modified by reparative arguments (Grant Macaskill, Cyril O'Regan)[15] which begin to show how it can be integrated in a wider frame more like O'Donovan's, attentive to creation and the coming kingdom as well as the present day of salvation. It is certainly possible to maintain this heightened sense of the 'today' of Christian faith – on the drawing near of the kingdom, on the presence of judgment – alongside longing for the heavenly city. Kelsey at his best rightly sees no reason to oppose consummation or reconciliation to creation, nor within considerations of eschatology any reason to oppose future hope and the existential immediacy of the 'even now'.[16] The best reason not to oppose any of these elements to one another is, ultimately, Christological: 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever' (Heb. 13:8).[17]

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[11] Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic*, 188.

[12] E.g. Nancy Duff, 'The Significance of Pauline Apocalyptic for Theological Ethics', in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 279-96; Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003); and *1 and 2 Peter* (London: SCM, 2009).

[13] See the deeply enigmatic Eberhard Jüngel, 'The Emergence of the New' in *Theological Essays II*, trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and J.B. Webster (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 35-58 and more recent, 'New – Old – New: Theological Aphorisms', trans. R. David Nelson, in Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis eds. *Theological Theology* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 131-35.

[14] This is also a real issue with Kathryn Tanner, 'Eschatology and Ethics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, 41-56. Cf. the final chapter of Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

[15] See Macaskill, 'History, providence, and the apocalyptic Paul'; O'Regan, *Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic*, and 'Two Forms of Catholic Apocalyptic Theology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20:1 (2018): 31-64.

[16] A further (unexpected) source of guidance here might be Jean Danielou, who, quoting Bultmann, emphasises the former, and argues that it fits alongside the latter. See Jean Danielou, *The Lord of History:*

Having found apocalyptic theology especially well suited to chasten O'Donovan's position, then, I have found it inherently limited, and recurrently turned to Kelsey's schematic to chart the different elements and to show their essential compatibility. But, as already mentioned, I find Kelsey's schematic itself insufficiently integrated to serve moral theology as well as might be wished, and deficient in that respect compared to O'Donovan. What we are looking for, then, are *appropriately* integrated visions of ethics' theological bases that take on board creation, consummation, and reconciliation – and more particularly, in terms of this study's specific topic, the different aspects of eschatology's import.

One promising candidate here is the sensibility associated with the 'Erlangen Luther' interpretation: Hans G. Ulrich, Bernd Wannenwetsch, Brian Brock, and now Michael Laffin.[18] Indeed, moral theological *integration* of the apocalyptic sensibility about eschatology's present import with a concern for creation is effected explicitly in the thought of Hans Ulrich,[19] drawing on a particular line of Luther interpretation (held in common with Oswald Bayer).[20] Ulrich, moreover, shares with O'Donovan a sense of the link between eschatology and pneumatology (again one Kelsey also recognises, explicating pneumatology in the section on 'consummation', if again hermetically demarcating the *topoi*). Ulrich grounds an eschatologically-inflected but firmly this-worldly account of the Christian life in pneumatology, sometimes constructing this account in direct conversation with O'Donovan. Because of his integrated theological vision, Ulrich's account of divine and human agency is also more promising than the apocalyptic account, and complements O'Donovan's. Besides this, Ulrich and those in his tradition have a different way of registering the significance of the doctrine of creation than O'Donovan – as O'Donovan himself notes[21] – and therefore a different understanding of nature's normativity than O'Donovan – one typically more subtly sensitive to the effects of sin and to the historical and social shaping of human action. Here they show some unexplored affinities with John Bowlin's Protestant Thomism, though as with his project there are still questions to be asked

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*Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, trans. Nigel Abercrombie (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1958), 32-3.

[17] On this see Katherine Sonderegger, '"Response", to Christopher Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes*', *Theology Today* 68:1 (2011): 64-8, 66.

[18] See e.g. Hans G. Ulrich, *Wie Geschöpfe leben: Konturen evangelischer Ethik* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007; Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*, Michael Laffin, *The Promise of Martin Luther's Political Theology: Freeing Luther From the Modern Political Narrative* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2016). We might also include the earlier Hütter (whose supervisor was Ulrich).

[19] See especially Hans G Ulrich, 'The Messianic Contours of Evangelical Ethics', in *The Freedom of a Christian Ethicist: The Future of a Reformation Legacy*, ed. Brian Brock and Michael Mawson (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2016), 39-64. Cf. Ulrich, *Eschatologie und Ethik: die theologische Theorie der Ethik in ihrer Beziehung auf die Rede von Gott seit Friedrich Schleiermacher.* München: Kaiser-Verlag, 1988.

[20] See e.g. Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response. Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[21] O'Donovan, 'The Object of Theological Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 20:2 (2007): 203-14.

about how exactly the material form of creation is to be evaluated, if it is to be indeed understood as place where God's call may be directly heard and responded to.[22]

Unfortunately, however, it seems as though to this point, there is a certain allergy to futural eschatology because of its potential for distraction from ethical concern, and therefore a tendency to neglect the transcendent eschatological element the spiritual correlate of which is longing and hope. Perhaps allied to an overreliance on certain presentist aspects of messianic eschatology (like some apocalyptic theology), the proper concern for integration leads to a risk that eschatology and protology are conflated in an undifferentiating Lutheran theology of encounter with the Word. To parse out the three aspects of eschatology's import, the Erlangen Lutherans do justice (i) to eschatology's reaffirmation of creation, and (ii) eschatology's present coming-to-pass, but not so much (iii) to its production of hope in what is to come. Actually, as in O'Donovan, it seems that this potential oversight is driven by moral-theological concerns rather than dogmatically sound reasons; it is in fact the one area where these theologians seem to court more doctrinal revisionism than they would be happy doing elsewhere.

Finally, I suggest that among prominent contemporary theological ethicists it is Gilbert Meilaender whose work, when mapped onto Kelsey's grid, would most closely resemble O'Donovan. Meilaender, though Lutheran, does not necessarily share the apocalyptic sensibility of more 'radical' Lutheran thinkers. But while approximating O'Donovan's thought in the respects of concern for salvation's this-worldly significance *and* ultimately eschatological horizon, Meilaender seems sometimes to more successfully blend a concern for creatureliness (owed in his case to Lutheran and Barthian influences) with a transcendent eschatological vision of consummation (owed to Augustinian-Thomist). He is also typically more sensitive to the effects of sin, in his account of reconciliation and redemption. Moreover, while his Lutheran instincts secure the significance of faith, and his Augustinian instincts a role for love – both crucial for O'Donovan, too – his Thomist vision engenders a more developed impression of the creaturely life *in via* than O'Donovan's, and therefore finds a more consistently significant role for hope.

I could go on, registering the particular theological shape of other contemporaries on something like Kelsey's grid, but I will leave it there. Cumulatively, these comments show the many rewarding avenues which might be pursued by further analysis – and I have not added in the additional factor of moral and political 'issues', which would develop the comparative exercise further. What these comments do suggest, taken together, is that further work is always needing to be done to develop non-reductive moral theology attentive to the whole range of Christian doctrinal affirmations – the full scope of Christian worship. And, concurrently and

[22] See McKenny's review of Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age* (*Studies in Christian Ethics* 25:3 (2012): 372-5).

thereafter, further work is always needing to be done working out the significance of all this for the living of Christian lives.

# APPENDIX B
# DOXOLOGICAL:
# THE END OF ETHICS

This study has been about the import of eschatology for morality. But when we are thinking about eschatology, the last word cannot go to ethics, for a simple but spiritually crucial reason of which O'Donovan is aware. It is this: as regards the practice of the moral life, there is a profound superfluity to eschatological hope, an inassimilable '*more'*.

Before I invoke that surplus any further let me be quite clear, again, that I think that hope is not just not inimical to action, but a 'a busy and active thing' – as Luther called faith. It gives boldness (2 Cor. 3:12) and renews strength (Is. 40:31). 'To abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13)', as Webster says, 'is not only to look to a prospective benefit but also to receive appointment as a certain kind of agent'.[1] To confess the Creeds' eschatological claims is to enlist for service, for all 'Christian statements of hope are unavoidably self-involving'.[2] And it bears repeating that to say these things is not to render eschatology a function of human projects or projection. Visions of God's kingdom have been and will continue to be supremely generative of ethical practice, and the scriptural portrayal of that kingdom may encode many human aspirations in such a way as to suggest that they are (also) policies of action. But the ways in which biblical narratives regarding, or biblical propositions about, the Kingdom do indeed serve to enable and form moral action are utterly theologically dependent upon those narratives' 'realist' function as references to – descriptions of – the mighty acts of God.

The hope which that realist faith produces, then, is truly fit 'for the densest of earthly settings' – situations of injustice, oppression, and suffering.[3] Yet while it is present and powerful in these earthly situations, eschatological hope – as a non-reductively realist hope – reaches beyond them, too.[4] It does so because its object is the Coming One who entered into the very depths of the earth, triumphed over evil, and is now raised in the heavenly places. Fixed as it is upon him, 'our blessed hope' (Titus 2:13), the Christian doctrine of eschatology has an ultimately doxological excess.[5] And, correspondingly, Christian hope – 'sure and steadfast anchor of the soul' (Heb. 6:19) – is finally irreducible to its ethical import, and cannot be

[1] Webster, 'Hope', 290.
[2] Nicholas Adams, 'Hope', in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 309-11, 310. For Aquinas, of the three theological virtues Thomas hope loves God as our *personal* good, so has a particularly self-involving or existential character.
[3] Lifting this phrase from Ivor J. Davidson, 'Salvation's Destiny: Heirs of God', in *God of Salvation:,* 155-75, 169, where he uses it, profoundly, of the 'Abba' cry of the Lord Jesus.
[4] See Sonderegger, 'Towards a Doctrine of Resurrection', in *Eternal God, Eternal Life: Theological Investigations into the Concept of Immortality*, ed. Philip G. Ziegler (London/New York, NY: Bloomsbury T & T Clark), 115-29. Cf. Medi-Ann Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 238: 'doctrine points the way forward … so that through the tribulations we can discern … the kingdom of God toward which we hasten in hope'.
[5] On this see Adam, *Our Only Hope*, and Greer, *Christian Hope and Christian Life.*

exhausted in praxis. The 'God of hope' (Rom. 15:13), on this view, cannot be reduced to a postulate of practical reason necessary for morality, nor God's kingdom *just* a principle of action, a regulative ideal rather than a promise the fulfilment of which Christians long for.[6] Eschatology does not need to be resituated wholesale in the realm of morality as though we thought that modern strictures upon speech about the 'beyond' evacuated it of any content in dogmatic or spiritual theology.[7] It does and should have critical and constructive ethical 'styles' and implications, but its primary 'style' will be contemplative and 'celebratory'.[8]

O'Donovan is right: theological ethics ought not 'attach itself sluggishly to one of its poles … *always* singing the praises of God in heaven or *always* picking over the practical possibilities of action in difficult circumstances': rather it should 'make the journeys of thought entrusted to it between heaven and the circumstances'.[9] Yet, as he also knows well, ethics is only a 'middle' movement of Christian theological reason. It is true that this middle movement is an unavoidable responsibility in this age, and so too reflection upon it: 'Theological moral criticism is nothing but an endless trade in critique and revision until Christ comes'.[10] But even in this life, not all is ethics. And, as O'Donovan knows well, with 'all our busy activities over and done with' – even the busy activities of moralists – 'the only thing that will remain will be *alleluia'*.[11]

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[6] The language here is, of course, meant to invoke something of a Kantian understanding. See e.g. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 137, but whether or not Kant's moral postulates should be read in this immanent way is contested. See Frederick C. Beiser, 'Moral Faith and the Highest Good' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 588-629, 620.

[7] On this, see John E. Thiel, *Icons of Hope: The "Last Things" in Catholic Imagination* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

[8] Adapting, here, some terms employed by Rowan Williams. See *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), xiii. Benedict XVI's *Spe Salvi* makes a similar argument, though seems to consider more political and liberation theology to fall foul of it than I do.

[9] *Self, World, and Time*. 89.

[10] Bowlin, 'Protestant Thomism', 251.

[11] Augustine, Sermon 255, in *Sermons: The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, III.7 (230-272B), ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1993), 156. Italics added.

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