Introduction

In 1990, I travelled to the Philippines with a group led by an Episcopalian priest who managed a sponsor-a-child project for Filipino children. When I met these Filipino teenagers, many of them around my age, I encountered a level of poverty that surpassed my worst imagination. Lying between those beautiful, hopeful, hungry kids and myself, I saw a vast crevasse of social and economic inequity that I felt ill-equipped to traverse.

This inequity forced the question, "What resources do I have to bridge this divide so that these kids can have opportunities like I have?" A child sponsorship program like the one that I had visited the Philippines to promote was a noble effort, yet it seemed woefully inadequate after encountering my Filipino peers. It could help a handful of people but it would never address the systemic and structural inequities that limited their opportunities so severely. In addition, few people in my congregation back home were even paying attention. Issues of social inequity and social justice were given the airtime of a brochure on a table for congregants to pick up on their way out the door.

Over the past twenty years the evangelical context has been changing, thanks in part to global technology, increased mission trips, and prophetic voices. More people, especially the young, are asking the same question, "What resources does the Christian tradition have to bridge this divide?" This book is an exploration into that question from a theological perspective, broken down into three guiding questions that explore theological resources for social justice. We will pose these questions to leading representatives of the Protestant and Catholic traditions in order to assess how well leading theologians of these traditions have equipped the next generation with resources to address the questions that so many of us are asking.

The Guiding Questions

First, we turn to the guiding questions. Our goal is to answer this question: What does theology teach us about how is justice cultivated in society?

When all I could see was the vast difference between myself and my Filipino counterparts, how could theology cultivate social justice that might bridge these social and economic divides?

Yet before that question may be answered, we must ask a prior question: What *is* this justice we seek to cultivate? What does justice look like? What are our criteria for judging existing political or economic structures to decide if they are just?

And if someone gives us those criteria or definitions of justice, how do we know if those definitions or criteria for justice are correct? There are wildly different definitions of justice. Hitler sought to create a good society by promoting notions of racial hygiene. Mother Theresa embraced poverty and spent her life serving the poor. How do we know what justice is and what it looks like? What are the sources for justice and what's our method for developing criteria of justice?

In sum, there are three primary of questions we will be asking to explore theological resources for justice. (1) How is justice known? (2) What is justice? (3) How is justice cultivated in society?

The Guides

When I began looking for theological scholarship on social justice within the modern evangelical, Protestant tradition, the list of theologians with substantial writing on justice was short. Karl Barth stood out as a deeply influential evangelical systematic theologian who had forged a thorough theological account of justice while faced with serious forms of inequity and injustice in Nazi Germany.[1] When I expanded my search into the Catholic tradition, a tradition is known for scholarship on social justice and advocacy on behalf of the marginalized, I encountered the writings of Karol Wojyla, who later became John Paul II. Like Barth, Wojtyla forged a thorough account of justice in the context of twentieth century Europe and while reacting to the devastation wrought by two world wars. Like Barth, Wojytla/John Paul II[2] is widely recognized as a representative of

1. While Barth was recognized as a leader of evangelical theology in Germany, the varied expressions of evangelicalism may make his influence on evangelicalism outside of Germany more ambigious. McCormack and Anderson's *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* traces some lines of Barth's influence upon evangelicalism in the U.S., as does John Lewis' *Karl Barth in North America.*

2. Rather than continuing referring to Wojtyla/John Paul II in this awkward manner, this book will often use the name John Paul to refer to the corpus of his work as Wojtyla and John Paul, especially in the Introduction and in Section Three of this

his tradition. In addition, both men made substantive contributions to ecumenical dialogue as representatives of their respected traditions. The lines of dialogue that they themselves drew makes it possible to compare their work.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to choose these two men as guides is that they both approached the question of justice from a decidedly theological perspective and through the lens of theological anthropology. Their theories of justice were grounded in rich descriptions of the moral landscapes in which persons exist and act. They both located ultimate reality in the personal God of Jesus Christ and they held human persons of the highest value over economic systems, technology, political systems, or other depersonalizing forces of modern society. For this reason, this book is able to explore these questions of justice by investigating their theories of human personhood.

Making human personhood the locus of our discussion marks a decided shift away from recent Catholic and Protestant discussions on social justice, which sought commonality in conceptions of natural law and common grace.[3] Conceptualizing an alternative starting point in the investigation of human personhood advances ecumenical relations and understanding in several ways. First, Barth's devastating critique of natural law and natural theology continues to haunt ecumenical dialogue and this critique necessitates new avenues for comparative dialogue between theologians influenced by Barth and Catholic theologians.[4]

Second, on the Catholic side, John Paul's appeal to Christological anthropology as basis for social ethics has appealed to Protestants who formerly criticized the Catholic detachment of ethics and theology and it has opened up new alternatives for dialogue. For instance, this turn in Catholic moral theology prompted the Protestant theologian, Carl Braaten, to raise the question about John Paul's encyclicals: "What would Karl

book. The context will make it obvious if use of the name, John Paul, refers only to his specific period as Pope or to his wider corpus. For example, when chapter 3 explores his theological works as Pope, the use of the name John Paul obviously refers only to his writings as John Paul II.

3. See for example, Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*; Dieter and Hútter, ed., *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals*; and Cromartie, ed., *A Preserving Grace*.

4. See for instance Schreiner, "Calvin's Use of Natural Law," 53–55; Westberg, "The Reformed Tradition and Natural Law," 114–18. Both attest to the dilemma that Barth's critique raised.

Barth have to say about the latest papal encyclicals?"[5] Braaten's inability to answer the question he posed demonstrates the need for such a comparative study.

Third, the critique of natural law raised by the modern philosophical deconstruction of universal categories of justice necessitates new avenues for social dialogue.[6] Given the contemporary distrust of such universal appeals, natural law and common grace seem inadequate starting points for dialogues that seek to engage with persons outside of the Christian faith. To cultivate a just society we must be able to articulate a theory of justice that makes sense beyond the walls of the church. A theory of justice centered on personhood or human dignity is still translate-able in the contemporary philosophical context.[7]

Method of Dialogue

Having established the feasibility of comparing these two theologians, we now turn to the question of method. How should we proceed? In his two books, *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Alasdair MacIntyre made key arguments that continue to shape the methods of moral philosophy. Specific to our topic, MacIntyre's argued that theories of justice are constructed within historical contexts and traditions of rationality.[8] Because Barth and Wojtyla/John Paul II represent different Christian traditions of faith, a simple comparison of definitions of justice

5. Braaten answered his own question, "I don't know." Braaten, *A Preserving Grace*, 34.

6. For instance, Nietzsche argued that there was nothing to natural law but expressions of the will, a projection of one's selfishness. His passage in *The Gay Science* raised questions which deconstructed notions of universal law, "What? You admire the categorical imperative within you? . . . Rather, admire your *selfishness* at this point. And the blindness, pettiness, and frugality of your selfishness. For it is selfish to experience one's own judgment as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty, and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own . . ." [trans. Walter Kaufmann, Section 335, page 265.] Cf. "Nietzsche's Theory of Law as a Critique of Natural Law Theory" in Douglas Litowitz's *Postmodern Philosophy and Law*. Alasdair MacIntyre traces the contemporary loss of notions of universal law and moral judgments in *After Virtue*. He likewise appeals to an ontology of personhood but focuses his discussion primarily upon Aristotelian teleology. [*After Virtue,* 49–75, 103–13, 241].

7. See for example, Chris Brown's critique of natural law as a basis for human rights in "Universal Human Rights: A Critique," 106–10.

8. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?,* 1–11.

or an exploration into the language surrounding issues of justice proves an inadequate basis for understanding the real content of their concepts that are "tradition-constituted." Rather, a thorough understanding of each man's theological theory of justice demands a broader inquiry into the contexts and traditions that formed the content of their theologies. For this reason, this book will examine their theories not as disembodied or abstracted themes, as is a common method in systematic theology. Rather, this book approaches each man as an individual whose theories of justice issue from particular historical contexts and traditions of rationality. Such an approach seeks to minimize superficial misunderstandings by seeking an in depth understanding of the context of their concepts.

For instance, for Barth, as a son of the reformed tradition, true justice is revealed by God's mercy toward humans. For John Paul II, justice is a requirement of the moral order that is, at times, surpassed by God's mercy. At first reading, such conceptions of justice seem untranslatable. For example, the two men appear to be in absolute conflict on the relation of justice to mercy. Thus, an examination of the tradition-constituted rationales behind these conceptions is necessary for discerning if common ground might be found and where mutual critique might be deemed appropriate.

In order to provide an adequate introduction for readers who may be unfamiliar with one tradition, this work first examines the work of each man separately, with some reference to common themes, areas of contrast, or academic debates that relate to our topic. Part One will examine Wojtyla/John Paul II and Part Two will examine Barth. Part Three is a critical assessment of their theories.

Working from the insights of MacIntyre, the work of each theologian is explored from two perspectives: historical and theoretical. The first chapter on each person examines the early contexts in which his theological ideas of justice were developed (chapter 1 on Wojtyla and chapter 4 on Barth). In the second and third chapters on each theologian, their theoretical frameworks for justice are critically examined within their traditions of rationality. Our three questions will guide the exposition of their frameworks: (1) How is justice known? (2) What is justice? (3) How is justice cultivated in society?

Those familiar with one author or the other may find that chapters in earlier sections are more introductory in nature. They have been written in that manner in order to translate these theories across traditions. Because Wojtyla/John Paul II appealed to philosophical and theological foundations for justice, chapter 2 examines his earlier theories of justice as a

philosopher and chapter 3 expounds his theological theories as Pope John Paul II. These three questions will be examined in each chapter or phase of his career. Because Barth remained a theologian throughout his career, his work is examined according to the theological framework provided in the *Church Dogmatics*, which reflects the historical development of his thought. Chapter Five examines *Church Dogmatics* I–III and Chapter Six expounds his theory of justice as developed further in CD IV and extant relevant works.

Part Three critically engages their theories from the perspective of the author, a female interlocutor. It argues that the theories of these men make substantial contributions to our understanding of human personhood and our quest for theories of justice yet their thought is also undermined by serious biases and shortcomings, which must be addressed when creating theological theories of justice that will yield justice for all persons.