

ETHICAL CHRISTIANITY:  
A REFORMATION OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCH  
Jeffrey C. Moon

“Am I at a Grateful Dead show?” I mused during my most recent church service. The worship band leading the congregation had two guitarists, two drummers, and the first five songs played right into each other, without a pause or break, and then back into the first song. Already, a third of the hour-long service was passed and we had only sung—or, some of us just droned—contemporary hymns. Next came an uninspiring Eucharist, followed by a muttering of rote prayer, and my watch showed that forty minutes had passed. With only twenty minutes left in the theatrical weekly service, the sermon was finally orated. I highly esteem a church service’s sermon because it has the capacity, if articulated with wisdom and eloquence, to define holiness in a way that profoundly inspires me to change my daily thoughts and behavior. The pastor attempted this, and began his sermon with a description of Jesus returning to Earth during the Apocalypse, found in Revelation.

Someone “like the son of man” was dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. (1.13-16)

The pastor vividly described the strength, constitution, and magnetism of the divine rescuer of all Christians. This post-apocalyptic Christ, with seven beautiful stars and a devastating sword coming out from his mouth, has eyes of fire with an x-ray-like power to see the good and evil in a person. The minister climactically finished his speech with a shout, “Be prepared for the Second Coming!” His overall message was that he would be humbled by the presence of such a figure and that we in the congregation would be wise and Christian to do the same. “Was that a good sermon?” I wondered. Apparently, Jesus’ death on the cross is cause for a tremendous celebration, for as soon as the pastor concluded his sermon, the choir erupted into glorious song, filling the congregation, as the offertory was passed around and thus church “was done” for the week. I left the building feeling, as expected, unfulfilled

because I did not learn anything new nor feel particularly motivated to be a holy Christian. A wasted hour at church.

If I want to have a meaningful experience at church, I need a discerning ear to sift through the rhetorical religious miasma that is often spoken during church. Because so much time of a “normal” church service is devoted to rituals, music, and prayer, the brilliance of Christian ethics is often obscured. When a sermon is finally delivered, it habitually disappoints me. This happens because the pastor’s message often encourages me to believe things I find logically unacceptable or morally unimportant. My research indicates a possible reformation of Protestant churches’ beliefs and practices, and this essay poses an academic critique of Christianity. The majority of my Christian experience has been in a Presbyterian middle-class church. It is through this lens that I view Christianity and therefore, the renovation in worship that I espouse applies specifically to mainline Protestant Christianity. The underlying change from current Christianity that I will encourage is upholding and valuing Jesus the Teacher and *not* Jesus the Christ. I believe that ethical living is the essence of Jesus’ teaching, and the future priority of Christianity. Current Christianity needs to shift its emphasis from music, ritual, and prayer to teaching Christian moral reasoning and motivating ethical living. The result of this new reformation will not be a Lutheran schism, but will be similar in some respects. I call this new religious denomination “Ethical Christianity.”

The notion of “salvation through a belief in Jesus the Christ” is a Pauline concept, evident in most of his letters; Galatians, Thessalonians, Corinthians, and Romans all refer to Jesus’ supposed ability to save sinners from God’s wrath. These compositions form the majority of the New Testament, and, moreover, Christian scripture as a whole. Paul’s letter to a heavily-persecuted church in ancient Thessalonica says, “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5.9). This statement is similar to what Paul wrote to the congregation in Galatia, “We have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ” (Galatians 2.16). Stephen Harris, the author of an undergraduate New Testament textbook and Professor of Religion at the University of California, Davis, suggests that “[t]he letter of Romans is a calmly reasoned presentation of Paul’s doctrine on salvation through faith” (Harris 336). “Salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice” is the foundation of Paul’s *Kerygma*, which is a doctrine that has strongly affected the Christian church in belief and in practice throughout its

history, and still does in present-day church worship (Harris 42). To complicate this further, biblical historians have found that Paul *never* met Jesus because Paul wrote his letters thirty years *after* Jesus died. What validity does Paul have in making such claims? Why does Paul give such attention to the significance of Jesus' death and not to his life?

The majority of today's historians of the New Testament era (0-80 CE) believe that the earliest Christian church survived major and devastating persecution from Rome because it was different from other upstart religions of the day (Harris 111). Harris believes the religious conviction would have immediately stopped with the death of its initiator—Jesus—as had other now-dead religions, without Paul the scripture writer.

For Paul, it is not the message of the human Jesus that counts most in God's plan for human redemption but the post-mortem status of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ. While largely ignoring the traditions about Jesus' earthly career (if indeed he was familiar with them), Paul focuses on the supreme importance of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. (Harris 342)

Through an Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 53, Paul found a way to explain the death of its creator, so that Christianity's validity to ancient Jews was not jeopardized. Paul reasoned that any true Jew believed and respected the prophecies and events in the *Tanakh*—or, as Christians call it, Old Testament—as divine in origin and thus incontestable to debate. Therefore, the Pauline doctrine, which, Harris argues, has greatly shaped current Christianity, is very much an extension from a belief in a specific Jewish prophecy. Consequently, Christian theology has been centered on the Isaiah-based prophecy of a peaceful Jewish messiah killed by sinners for sinners.

The early Christian faith, as Paul described it, was a grafted shoot onto a rooted and pre-existing Jewish religion. But that was then, and Christianity today is firmly established: "there are 2 billion Christians in today's world and 14 million Jews" (Russel 44). Christianity is not threatened with extinction from the powerful Roman government the way it was two thousand years ago, which is the time when its scripture was composed (Harris 14). Therefore, the need to preserve Jesus' legacy is not as strong as it once was. As a result, changes and improvements can be made to ancient Christian theology. This is why Ethical Christianity follows the author of the New Testament letter Hebrews, who believes in "looking to Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (12.2) but does not believe in the notion that Jesus' death on the cross has the ultimate significance for Christian belief or

theology. Christians may now look from Jesus' death to his life and find the heart of Christianity—the life that stressed ethical action as a path to the Kingdom of God (Borg 230 and Spong 127).

Jesus, the central figure in Christianity, changed much of the Old Testament's laws while "fulfilling," them because the Old Testament applied to a certain people thousands of years before his time (Harris 71). The Old Testament was antiquated in Jesus' time and still is today. For example, the first five books claim to be about five thousand years old. Jesus knew that one's understanding of God grows and develops, so he made the Jewish religion he grew up with evocative for those of his time, which is now about two thousand years ago. His parables and maxims were better understood as radical extensions of past Judaic beliefs rather than as completely new ideas (Harris 60). Because Jesus' teachings, and any historical document from 50-90 CE, was composed for an audience different from contemporary readers, interpretation of the gospels was necessary (Harris 78). Consequently, to review the Christian beliefs, texts, and practices of days gone by for the purpose of making them meaningful in today's world would be to act like Jesus, and therefore wholly Christian. Understanding Ethical Christianity involves a historical hallmark of Protestant thinking—a church ideology that guides its function and services based on the Bible together with contemporary knowledge and reasoning (Harris 21). Biblical hermeneutics constitutes the knowledge of current times that would affect the Protestant church. In following the tradition of Protestant Christianity, Ethical Christianity respects the validity and merit of factual historical findings concerning biblical events. With hermeneutical knowledge pervading churches, Protestant church services will be supported by twenty-first century modernity.

Jesus' ethical teachings reverberate through the Christian church and are expressed in a church's social engagement. Christianity's "best function in society is [in] its attempts to correct social wrong and provide meaning and support for life's journey" (Russel 4). These ethical actions are extensions of Jesus' teachings and effects of stressing ethical action. Ethics are moral philosophy, whose product is a set of principles of right conduct that direct a person's behavior. As Old Testament scholar and Oxford University professor of religion John Barton argues, "Ethics, as commonly understood, whose relation to the principal subject-matter of the biblical corpus and major aims of Christianity, is sometimes tangential and often only implicit" (25). This is why the foremost amendment to current Christianity

begins with a change of priorities. Today's church services should shift the emphasis on songs, ritual, and prayer for forgiveness through belief in Jesus' death to teaching Christian wisdom and motivating ethical living.

So what constitutes Christian ethics? Since "ethics cannot be 'Christian' if they are not in some sense 'biblical'" (Barton 25), they will mostly come from the New Testament. Paul's letters are wonderful wells to tap concerning Christian morals, but the New Testament revolves around Jesus, so it is with him that the foundation of Ethical Christianity must be laid. However, composing a system of Jesus-based ethics is a difficult task. As Michael Ruse, a biblical scholar of the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, suggests,

In the preaching of Jesus we do not find an articulated moral system for ongoing societies—not even for those of yesterday, let alone for the technology-fueled mega-groups within which we live today. It fell to Jesus' followers to develop and build an ethical system for societies that are going to persist and that are facing ongoing points of moral conflict, within and without. (290)

Paul was the first to undertake the process of creating Christian ethics (Harris 152). He stressed the love commandment and offered counsel to the new and growing Christian communities of biblical times. Paul's words have inspired Christians for two thousand years because his claims are insightful, articulate, and undoubtedly Christian, but if he were a contemporary author, he would be viewed as conservative for more than just his salvation concepts. Ruse observes that "[a]ccording to a strict Pauline Christianity, slavery as a social custom is accepted; the subordinate status of women is stressed; the immorality of homosexual activity is reaffirmed" (290). John Shelby Spong, a recently-retired Bishop of the Episcopal Church, believes the Protestant Church will inevitably experience a drastic change from its present conservative faith. Bishop Spong suggests that Paul's conservatism has no place when he champions actions that in some way limit others (77). Jesus preached the infinite value of *every* individual in his parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and Lost Sheep (Luke 15). Ethical Christianity fully agrees with Bishop Spong because Jesus taught that ethical behavior, ecumenical judgment, and open-heartedness is paramount to living a holy life. With Jesus, "the defining marks of the past—tribe, language, race, gender, or even sexual orientation—faded" (Spong 224). Therefore, some of Paul's conventional boundaries

are not in accordance with what Jesus taught, so I return to Jesus as the paradigm Christian ethicist.

Jesus attempted to transcend the myopic Jewish laws of the Old Testament through his maxims, parables, and actions as detailed in the Gospels. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to destroy them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5.17). The New Testament book of Matthew is the preeminent literary mine of ethical gems because it contains the lengthiest and most detailed account of Jesus' teachings. It is the earliest report of his repudiating the "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" ethic attributed to Jewish law. Jesus said, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the [Judaic] Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7.12). First and foremost, Jesus preached the ethic of love. A Pharisee said to Jesus,

"Teacher, which commandment of the [Judaic] law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22.36-40)

This is not the love of a man and woman in a romantic relationship (*Eros* in Greek) but the love and care a parent has for a child (*Agape* in Greek), which is translated as "charity" in some Bible versions. *Agape* is manifested in the Christian's character, and its effects on the benevolent Christian are "the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5.22-23). Christians should practice *agape*, "not just of his wife and children. Do not even the tax collectors do the same? But love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 5.47). Believers of the Ethical Christianity denomination should not weather evil and retaliate, but return the evil with *agape*, for "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5.44). Jesus suggests that his followers should not exclusively give money to widows and orphans but give their bodies, minds, and hearts to others with patience and wisdom. Ethical Christians should not only help friends and family, but they should extend helping hands to everyone, for this is the ethic of the Good Samaritan. Committing adultery is not only prohibited under Jesus' ethics, but having lust after another in one's heart is also immoral and thus unholy (Ruse 294). Some New Testament scholars argue that Jesus broadened the ethical message of the Torah so much that an antithesis is present: forgive and love each other

because moral perfection is impossible (Harris 45). The gospels, specifically Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's parables, contain the heart of Jesus' teachings.

Jesus' New Testament actions validate him as a practitioner of his teachings (Harris 90). Jesus welcomed and conversed with lepers while his religious tradition condemned them as untouchable (Matthew and Mark). According to Jewish ritual law, Levi Matthew was unclean because of his tax collector profession and work for the Romans, yet Jesus called him to be one of his closest disciples (Luke). Although the Torah ordered him to condemn the woman taken to adultery, Jesus showed her love and encouraged her to live honestly. A multitude of other examples exist, and they all show the same message of Ethical Christianity. By having no boundaries to others and acting with true benevolence, Jesus lived a revered and godly life—one that Christians might imitate. King Solomon says in Proverbs, "He who walks with the wise grows wise" (13.20). Jesus says in Matthew, "whoever does [my teachings] will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (5.19). This is to be interpreted as being blessed. By acting as a good and holy Christian, the believer comes closer to God, experiencing the holy spiritualism which motivated his original action. Therefore, emulating the character of Jesus, which is to live ethically, is a Christian spiritual vehicle to God. According to the well-known German theologian Paul Tillich, who defined sin as "estrangement from God," acting unethically is "sinning" because it separates the Christian sinner from God (78).

But why should ethics replace the hallmark traditions of the Christian church service? Because church music and ritual, which occupies much of a church service's one to two hours per week, is fundamentally centered on Jesus' salvationist quality (Borg 34). Baptism represents a "death to a life of transgression and a resurrection into a new life with Jesus." Confirmation is the declaration of "Jesus as the divine rescuer of sinners from hell." Repentance is the admission of sins to God so that the sinner may be forgiven from them with Jesus' sacrifice. With the Eucharist, bread and wine are consumed in remembrance of Jesus' death. Easter celebrates Jesus' rising after his death on the cross. These aged church rituals are primarily faith-based and unconcerned with the believer's resolve to live by a Christian moral code. This emphasis on passive faith challenges the most sacred of Christian scripture—the New Testament.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by good action, is dead. (James 2.14-17).

The Christian morality of James indicates that true Christians—who listen to the scripture that they regard as holy—are motivated on a spiritual level to do good. Otherwise, the fraudulence of the Christian is evident, and he is separated from God: "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead" (James 1.26). Unfortunately, the rituals and music common to Protestant worship do not effectively convey this paramount message of charitable action, according Bishop Spong (78). An ecclesiastical emphasis on ethical action and *not* passive faith needs to be more clearly expressed in today's church services, which "guide the religious beliefs and practices of billions of current-day Christians" (Russel 6).

How might Ethical Christianity regard the death of Jesus? The capital punishment of Jesus was similar to Mahatma Gandhi's and Martin Luther King's—death was the consequence of what they were doing but not their purpose (Borg 160). Jesus knew, as they did, that his radicalism would endanger his life, but he valiantly and righteously persisted teaching the Christian way of ethical living. A religious conviction that strictly follows Jesus' direction is very different from the Judaism that spawned it; so different that Christianity would eventually become a new religious conviction. "The priestly leadership [of Jesus' day] may have regarded him as a blasphemer and potential threat to the delicate balance between Roman rule and Jewish welfare" (Harris 267). The Pharisees demanded his execution preserve their conservative faith, and their dark request was granted. Marcus Borg, a Lutheran theologian and author of *The Heart of Christianity*, is one of the leading historical Jesus scholars of this generation and has valuable hermeneutical insight on the death of Jesus,

In its first-century setting, the statement "Jesus is the sacrifice for sin" had a quite different meaning. The "home" of this language, the framework within which it makes sense, is the sacrificial system centered in the temple in Jerusalem. According to the temple theology, certain kinds of sins and impurities could be dealt with only through sacrifice in the temple. Temple



theology thus claimed an institutional monopoly on the forgiveness of sins; and because the forgiveness of sins was a prerequisite for entry in to the presence of God, temple theology also claimed an institutional monopoly on access to God. In this setting, to affirm "Jesus is the sacrifice for sin" was to deny the temple's claim to have a monopoly on forgiveness and access to God. It was an anti-temple statement. (94-95)

By looking at the Bible in with an objective, historical view, Borg asserts that the significance attributed by John's gospel to Jesus' death on the cross is slightly flawed. John's gospel, which has shaped Christian ritual and worship more than any other source, states that "Whoever believes in [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3.18). In the above quote, Borg affirms that Jesus' life was not intended to save mankind but to change the theology of Judaism. Perhaps the "scripture" is flawed because it was written fifty years after Jesus lived? However, not all of John is without value in Ethical Christianity because the teachings of Jesus in John pass the test for historical validity. As a result, they are important to Ethical Christianity, which is selective with its scripture choices. Therefore, if historical hermeneutics are respected, Christian rituals cannot have the same meaning they would if Jesus' importance to the church concerned his suffering on the cross. For this reason, baptism, confirmation, confession of sins, and the Eucharist could be removed from regular church services as rituals that distract from the more important concept of ethical living. However, for some Christians, ritual reinforces Christian teachings. For example, the recitation of the Eucharist finishes, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me " (Luke 22.19), and many Christians treasure time-honored church traditions (Spong 231). If these rituals must be preserved, I propose that special services should be provided for them, but not during the regular Sunday church service.

How might Ethical Christianity interpret "sacred" Christian texts? Ian McDonald raises a similar point in his article "Does Morality Change" in response to Bishop Spong's claim,

The world into which Christianity was born was limited and provincial, particularly when viewed from the perspective of the progress in knowledge and technology made over the past two millennia. This makes many ideas and

beliefs formulated in 1st-century Judea totally inadequate to our progressive minds and lives today. (54)

McDonald, a Professor of Religion at University of Edinburgh, says, "Nature itself is not static. The Church therefore, cannot be static even if it wished to do so. The appeal to moral absolutes and the labeling of actions as 'intrinsically evil' are thus less than helpful for moral discernment" (216). This does not deny a place for principles, standards, and rules. Bishop Spong identifies these timeless norms: "Christian ethics in the future must be directly linked to the right to explore selfhood, to the courage to live, to love, and to be simply for the sake of living, loving, and being" (165).

Other biblical texts—besides the New Testament—have great value in Ethical Christianity. Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Psalms are wonderful demonstrations of religious wisdom. Ecclesiastes provides meaning for those who are disillusioned with the ups and downs of life, and then seek a more correct and comforting view. Proverbs is my Old Testament favorite because it contains the plainest and most applicable wisdom—the maxims of King David and Solomon are meaningful today, although they were authored three thousand years ago. The beginning of Proverbs accurately explains why Ethical Christianity would include it in its holy book library,

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young, let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. (Proverbs 1.1-6)

The "proverbs of Solomon" do not violate the system of morality in Ethical Christianity, so they are another well of wisdom for Protestant churches to draw from. Because Proverbs is found in the Old Testament, Ethical Christianity does not look to remove the Old Testament from church; it will value it for its ethical guidance and wisdom. Besides these traditional Christian texts, where else can Christians turn to receive ethical counsel? That is, what other historical texts, biblical in nature but not necessarily Jewish in authorship, could educate Christians about ethically living close to God?

In its understanding of Siddhartha Gotama—the historical Buddha—as the paragon teacher, Buddhism can a model for Ethical Christianity. The Buddha was not God and he not

claim to be, but he experienced the aims of Buddhism in the ultimate way. Contemporary Buddhists therefore follow his teachings as a correct path to God, or as they might say “enlightenment.” We Christians would be wise to do the same for Jesus. But why do Christians hesitate to study the Buddha’s teachings? Siddhartha’s words are reminiscent of Jesus’ teachings,

Not for one’s own or another’s gain, should one commit an evil deed.  
Regardless of the desire for children, wealth, or kingdom, or any other kind of  
success, one should remain virtuous, wise, and righteous (*Dhammapada* 22).

Siddhartha Gotama and Jesus have such similar messages that there is ample material for a book that biblical scholar Marcus Borg composed with Tibetan lama Ray Riegert called *Jesus and Buddha: the Parallel Sayings* (2002).

As a student of biological science, I am required to study chemistry, physics, and calculus. By studying other sciences, my biological knowledge is broadened, connected, and thus made more meaningful. Biology does not exist in a vacuum, and neither do the ethics of Christianity. “While Christ may be held—at least in some aspects—to express human perfection, many non-Christians evince Christ-like behavior” (McDonald 217). Furthermore, Christians have no monopoly on morality, truth, or goodness. Since some Buddhist texts are Jesus-like in meaning and message, they can be additional and valuable sources of ethics for a new form of Protestant Christianity.

Another example of how Christians can benefit from Buddhist study is with the practice of meditation. Christian ministers will universally agree that sinning and wickedness are unholy and should be avoided. But is telling a church’s congregation that the evil actions of a Christian are wrong enough to put an end to them? How can a weekly sermon deal with the infinite challenge of living in a world of temptation? The problem is that Christians are told to resist sinning, yet they are not advised on *how* to resist temptation. Self-control and willpower are the personal traits that help an individual resist this undesirable impiety. Interestingly, they are major effects of meditation, the art of controlling a wandering mind. Zen master Rueben Habito succinctly describes the practice of meditation in his book relating Christianity and Buddhism, *Living Zen, Loving God*,

Posture, breathing, and silencing the mind are the three key elements of *Zazen* or Zen sitting practice. First, one assumes a bodily position conducive to prolonged stillness, preferably taking a lotus position, but most important,

keeping one's back as straight as possible while maintaining the natural curve in the lower back. Second, one regulates the breathing, paying attention with each in-breath and out-breath. Third, one silences the mind by not dwelling on any particular thought or sensation, but by being fully present as one sits, paying attention to every breath. (Habito 111)

Like any skill, meditation becomes more effective with repeated practice. Masters of this Eastern art have great willpower, which increases their control of harmful mental habits (Habito 70). As Paul told the first church founded in Rome, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God, what is holy and perfect" (Romans 12.2). Not only is meditation acceptable in an Ethical Christianity but recommended as well. If church services included fifteen minutes of meditation—as a contemporary church ritual—the profound effects of meditation could benefit Christians. These benefits include a tranquil yet invigorating experience of unity with God, who is "the source of being"—in the words of theologian and biblical scholar Paul Tillich (88).

So what does all this mean for the Protestant churches of today? In a 2001 survey reported by the journal *Christianity Today*, "Churches that uphold high standards of personal morality were the most alive and had the most support and growth" (Carnes 19). This massive survey involved approximately 80% of the 300,000 American Christian congregations. An example that expresses this is in the "changing emphasis of African-American church leaders from the civil-rights movement to civic engagement in rebuilding communities and personal lives" (Carnes 19). Churches need to concentrate on teaching ethics and biblical wisdom because this is what many Christians want. "Civic engagement in rebuilding communities and personal lives" is exemplary ethical action and fulfills the biblical ethic in Proverbs, "He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy" (14.21). So, to church leaders seeking to make their congregations grow, I say teach Jesus' ethics, Solomon's Proverbs, and Zen meditation, and cause a surge in your church's vitality.

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#### COMMENTARY

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In "Ethical Christianity: A Reformation of the Protestant Church," Jeffery C. Moon calls not only for a reevaluation of Christianity, but a possible schism, which would further partition the already heavily-fractured sects of Christianity. However, Moon asserts that the result of this new reformation would not be "a Lutheran schism," but rather, only "similar in some respects." Perhaps any change in the existing dogma of Christianity might threaten the stability of the long-standing institution that is the Protestant Church. The idealized hope for the accretion of a new system of ethical teaching in Christianity may inevitably result in the further fragmentation of Christian belief and practice. A possible division, and the concerns of such a division, can most likely be attributed to more fundamental and conservative ideological values held by Christians, which essentially remain fixed in order to maintain the "status quo" of their faith. This inflexibility does not allow for progress and

therefore does not jeopardize a foreseeable path to salvation with a possible deviation from established tradition, or conventional “paths” to salvation through accepted ways of practicing one’s faith.

Yet Moon’s Ethical Christianity is not asking for a new way to believe. Instead he asks for a new way to live through the pre-existing dogma of Christianity. Such a movement, as Moon suggests would not be un-Christian: “To review the Christian beliefs, texts, and practices of days gone by for the purpose of making them meaningful in today’s world would be to act like Jesus, and therefore wholly Christian.” For Moon, to update and therefore re-envision the ethical concerns of the Bible in a “meaningful” way, which respond to contemporary values, would be to do as Jesus did and therefore be “wholly Christian” in nature. But will contemporary practitioners of this type of hermeneutical reconstruction be faced with similar opposition to that of Jesus? During Jesus’ life-time, the primary text from which he taught was about three-thousand years old, and as Moon asserts, “Jesus knew that one’s understanding of God grows and develops, so he [Jesus] made the Jewish religion he grew up with evocative of his time, which now is about two thousand years ago.” Now, removed about five thousand years from the original context, what Moon requires from his audience is to uphold the teacher-like tradition of Jesus, which is perhaps lost in a more Pauline approach to Christianity which focuses on Jesus the savior, the sacrifice—not Jesus the teacher.

Paul’s *Kerygma*, the doctrine that emphasizes “salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice,” greatly marginalizes the more humanitarian approach to religious practice, which was the root of Jesus’ teachings, and as Moon suggests should be the core of Ethical Christianity. In this sense, Moon’s argument for a possible reformation in Christianity is sound, as he calls for Ethical Christians to act as Jesus did in interpreting the Bible. However, the ostensible myopic effect of such a reformation remains exclusive to a particular group of people. In a broader sense, perhaps in an increasingly globalized world, a system of ethics needs to be established which applies to all humans, regardless of race, creed, gender. To deal with ethics and their connection to a higher moral order in this matter, is in a sense thinking globally and acting locally, for Moon recognizes a need for an ubiquitous system of ethics, but localizes its effect within Christianity.