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POST-CHRISTENDOM VIRTUE ETHICS

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The shape and emphases of Christian theological ethics, while maintaining identifiable family resemblances across time and place, have proven to be fairly adaptable to new situations and to contingencies. The specifics of such adaptation are constantly contested within Christian thought and practice, and often challenged by non-Christian sources, especially when and where Christians have sought to impose theological ethics on broader society. In this essay, I bring to view a recent emphasis within Western Christian thought that has developed and been adapted within a world that is frequently construed as having moved into a post-Christendom state.

Following a brief orientation to clarify the notion of post-Christendom, I turn my attention to a specific development within post-Christendom theological ethics, namely, a retrieval of virtue ethics. In tracing this development, I focus on the contributions of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jennifer Herdt, with a particular focus on the heightened importance placed on the role of the church within that retrieval. The retrieval of virtue ethics in an ecclesiological mode creates new possibilities for Christian theological ethics in a post-Christendom setting, including the investigation and promotion of specific virtues. John Bowlin's recent work on tolerance as a necessary virtue for our time displays the pursuit of one such new possibility. I briefly investigate his project in the final section of this article, an inquiry that will provide an opportunity to reflect on the ongoing temptation of even post-Christendom Christian ethics to continue to embrace Constantinianism.

The Church in a Post-Christendom Era

Christendom—described as the arrangement whereby church and secular authority work in close relation to govern Western society,[1] now heavily critiqued and subsequently dismantled—has given way to the current post-Christendom era. Most theological voices in Western Christianity that were framed within a widespread acceptance of a basically unified reality of Christendom in its many forms, now seek to work within this post-Christendom reality, without relying implicitly or explicitly on the presumptions of Christendom, especially the long-standing but also contested concern that the Christendom era was primarily one long, unfaithful yielding of the church to the temptations of Constantinianism. Briefly put, this "is the identification of church and world in the mutual approval and support exchanged by Constantine and the bishops."[2] Put another way, "the Roman emperor who began to tolerate, then supported, then administered, then finally joined the church, soon became and has remained until our time the symbol of a sweeping shift in the nature of the empirical church and its relation to the world."[3] Constantinianism, so this story goes, continues in the form of Christendom, and thus,

> for a millennium and a half, European Christians have been identifying faith in Jesus Christ, for themselves and for others whom they meet, with an all-encompassing set of ideas and practices largely of Greek, Roman, and Germanic origins. This is "Christendom" as a

1. The term "Christendom" can describe a specific historical era in which the Christian church was identified with the whole of organized society, or the merging of the religious and political community. See Southern, *Western Society*, 16. As a concept, "Christendom" might be described an attempt to take seriously the political nature of the church and its instrumental role in the salvation of the world. See Cavanaugh, "Church," 397. In Craig Carter's use of the term, Christendom is "a concept of Western civilization as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to Christian faith, which is seen as the so-called soul of Europe or the West." Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 14.
2. Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood*, 154.
3. Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood*, 245.

> total religious-cultural package, in many ways marked more by those other religious cultures than by the Bible.[4]

On this view, if Christendom is by its nature intrinsically Constantinian, then the church has only minimal—and almost exclusively theoretical—constructive possibilities.

Oliver O'Donovan challenges such an understanding of Christendom, using the term instead to refer to a historical idea:

> that is to say, the idea of a professedly Christian secular political order, and the history of that idea in practice. Christendom is an *era,* an era in which the truth of Christianity was taken to be a truth of secular politics . . . it is the idea of a confessionally Christian government, at once 'secular' (in the proper sense of that word, confined to the present age) and obedient to Christ, a promise of the age of his unhindered rule.[5]

The historical parameters of this era lie between AD 313, the date of the promulgation of the Edict of Milan, and 1791, the date of the First Amendment to the American Constitution. O'Donovan subsequently explains more fully that the First Amendment serves as the most suitable symbolic end of Christendom: "since it propounds a doctrine meant to replace the church-state relations which Christendom had maintained, it was formulated largely by Christians who thought they had the interests of the church at heart, and it was argued for, as it still is, on ostensibly theological grounds."[6]

For John Howard Yoder, then, Christendom is an era marked by the unfaithfulness of the Christian church that has succumbed by and large to the temptations inherent within Christendom. For O'Donovan, Christendom is a contingency, an era for which the church was partly responsible because its pursuit of its God-given mission resulted in the embrace of faith by those in power.

4. Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood*, 248. Yoder goes as far as to say that "'Christendom' is the word for Europe. It is a geographic expression." Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 233.

5. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 195.

6. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 244. I take some of this material regarding Christendom and post-Christendom from my book, Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 128–35.

The structuring of this era surely brought about new and varied temptations, but like any other era of history in which the church finds herself, the practice of discernment is critical—but there is nothing inevitable about the Church's unfaithfulness in any era, including Christendom.

Nonetheless, while issues swirl around the beginnings, inherent temptations, intrinsic unfaithfulness, and the identifiability of the end of Christendom, it seems clear that the Western church finds itself in a post-Christendom situation, which has formally been defined as "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence."[7]

That Western Christians find themselves living with the realities of a post-Christendom society signals the possibility of significant changes in the way that the Christian church pursues its call to be the body of Christ in the world. That is, the way of being in the world where the Christian faith does not play a primary shaping role in society means that the church cannot labor under the illusion that Christians are in control of history. For the church to confront its marginalized status is a stripping away of precisely that illusion, rather than the arrival of some completely new reality. Even when the church thought and acted as if it were in charge to some degree, such was not the case. Current

7. The quotation is from Murray, "Series Preface," 15. Murray comes to this definition in Murray, *Post-Christendom,* the first book of a series entitled *After Christendom.* To name just a few of the proliferation of sources relating to post-Christendom in one way or another, see Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*; Guroian, *Ethics after Christendom*; and Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*. James Davison Hunter argues that Christians find themselves not only in a post-Christendom situation (he refers specifically to American Christianity), but in a post-Christian setting, which, in his opinion, is not bad news. "The goal for Christians, then, is not and never has been to 'take back the culture' or to 'take over the culture' or to 'win the culture wars' or to 'save Western civilization.' Ours is now, emphatically, a post-Christian culture, and the community of Christian believers are now, more than ever—spiritually speaking—exiles in a land of exile. Christians, as with the Israelites in Jeremiah's account, must come to terms with this exile." Hunter, *To Change the World*, 280.

conditions helpfully make that reality more obvious to the church and to the world, thus freeing the church from being subservient to the self-imposed task of ruling the world.[8]

The Retrieval of Virtue Ethics in Post-Christendom

Within the broader work of the church, Christian theological ethics has had to confront this post-Christendom reality, and has done so in various ways. I will attend to one, virtue ethics, which is most often associated with (broadly speaking) Aristotelian and Thomistic thought. An emphasis on virtue, or virtue ethics, is often taken to be an alternative to duty- or rule- or principle-oriented ethics, or consequentialism. Whereas a focus on duty emphasizes the action or decision of a person in a given situation, and rule- or principle-based ethics are a turn to fundamental principles that guide actions or decisions, virtue ethics look more closely at the person, and seek to promote a way of being or an emphasis on character. While duty ethics might want one to display actions that are courageous, virtue ethics is more concerned about producing courageous people. Boldly stated, "An ethic of virtue centers on the claim that an agent's being is prior to doing."[9]

The arrival of modernity contributed to the ignoring or rejection of virtue in place of an emphasis of individualism and rationalism. However, the latter part of the twentieth century and first part of the twenty-first century have witnessed a retrieval of virtue ethics, both in philosophical and Christian theological thought. The most common account of this development describes the work of Alasdair MacIntyre as central to the revival of virtue ethics in philosophical thought, while the work of Stanley Hauerwas is credited with providing the impetus for the retrieval within Christian theological ethics. Concomitant with

8. For an extended conversation along these lines, see Yoder, "To Serve Our God and to Rule the World," 3–14.

9. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 113.

the revival and embrace of virtue are emphases on moral tradition, character, and community.[10]

Alasdair MacIntyre and the Retrieval of Philosophical Virtue Ethics

MacIntyre's entry into the current emphasis on virtue as central to morality is found in his ground-breaking, extremely influential book, *After Virtue*, well-known for its particularly pessimistic treatment of the contemporary state of moral understanding.[11] MacIntyre argues that moral discourse in the West is essentially incoherent, because nearly everyone is committed to emotivism, which, simplistically put, is a commitment to one's own feelings. This has become the case because of the dismal failure of the Enlightenment project. Left with a choice between Nietzsche and Aristotle, between nihilism or virtue ethics, MacIntyre advances the central thesis that "the Aristotelian moral tradition is the best example we possess of a tradition whose adherents are rationally entitled to a high measure of confidence in its epistemological and moral resources."[12] Liberalism, the child of the Enlightenment, is a failure because of its attempt to reject all tradition. MacIntyre ends the book on a rather wistful note, suggesting that we are not waiting for a Godot to rescue us from our current moral predicament, but for "another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict."[13]

Central to MacIntyre's discussions of virtue, rationalities, and tradition is the notion of community. The good must be embodied in practices, which can only be discovered and able to

10. Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 96–109. Porter describes her essay as "an overview of the development of a Christian tradition of the virtues and of the theoretical reflections on virtue which have emerged out of that tradition" (96–97). Her essay traces the development of the tradition in considerably more detail than I am including here. Her brief description also provides some context for the retrieval of the tradition, with the primary focus being MacIntyre and Hauerwas.

11. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

12. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 277.

13. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 263.

confront other conceptions of the good when "presented within the embodied life of particular communities that exemplify each specific conception."[14] This notion of the embodying of virtue and practice within specific communities lies behind MacIntyre's wistful longing for a new St. Benedict at the end of *After Virtue*.

Stanley Hauerwas and the Retrieval of Theological Virtue Ethics

Stanley Hauerwas provides significant impetus for a retrieval of virtue ethics within Christian theological ethics in ways that do not depend on an embrace of Christendom, especially in its Constantinian forms. Hauerwas' emphasis on virtue is closely tied to his early focus on vision. Often the two concepts are dealt with in tandem, as seen in the title of Hauerwas' first book *Vision and Virtue*. While vision has been given much less explicit emphasis in Hauerwas' later work, the concept of virtue as an important ethical category continues to appear frequently.[15] However, Hauerwas rejects the distinction between virtue ethics and rule-based ethics, and seeks to subvert such classification itself, based as it is in modes of investigation that are separate from the practices of communities that carry forward fully developed notions of how life should be lived. Hauerwas seeks to render the distinction between theology and ethics problematic, and a focus on virtue is a way out of the confusion currently encountered in discussions concerning ethics.[16]

14. MacIntyre, "The Privatization of the Good," 12.

15. Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*. By far the most prominent contemporary source on which Hauerwas draws for his material on virtue is Alasdair MacIntyre. Hauerwas acknowledges his indebtedness to MacIntyre on many occasions in his writing. In a 1997 publication in which Hauerwas writes fourteen essays in response to the thought of numerous significant theologians and philosophers, he somewhat surprisingly does not include chapters on MacIntyre or John Howard Yoder. He explains this exclusion by mentioning his previous work on these men, but then goes on to state that "every chapter in this book is so dependent on what MacIntyre and Yoder have taught me that the book is, from beginning to end, about them." Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 14.

16. It is important to recognize that Hauerwas never claims that a retrieval of virtue ethics is the only or even primary way out of such confusion. Even

Despite Hauerwas' emphasis on virtue, he is reluctant to offer a clear definition of virtue prior to narrating the practices of the virtuous life. For example, he does a quick sweep of various understandings of the term "virtue," citing the Greek understanding (that which caused a thing to perform its function well), Plato's notion that virtue is knowledge, Aristotle's use of the term as a mean which is defined as a rational principle, Aquinas' dependence on Aristotle with the addendum of the "mean between the passions," and so on. Finally, Hauerwas reveals that his less-than-comprehensive list is merely an illustration of the impossibility of gaining an adequate understanding of one definition of virtue.[17] To Hauerwas, an understanding of virtue must be context-dependent, based on an understanding of human nature and history, or that virtue itself must be seen as having a historical nature, not some abstract form or content. The strongest argument he can make for the historical nature of virtue is the diversity of virtue described by various societies.[18] What Hauerwas wants to avoid, it seems, is any sort of acquiescence to the notion of a common human nature. Even some identification of commonality culled from various lists of virtues dissipates in the move from naming a common virtue to agreeing on the substance of that virtue. This is no call to vicious relativism or the relegation of attempts to depict virtue as arbitrary. Rather, this way of looking at things simply "reveals the historical nature of our human existence, which requires virtues for the moral life of the individual and society."[19]

Hauerwas does not wander far from this early position; however, he does reveal a certain ambiguity regarding common human experience in his extended discussion of virtue in *Christians*

when he is directly addressing the virtues, he is careful to relativize them in various ways, not least by emphasizing the formative role of liturgy for ethics. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, ix, x. The liturgical emphasis is most prominently on display in the introductory essays (co-written with Samuel Wells), in Hauerwas and Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*.

17. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 111–13.
18. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 121.
19. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 123.

Among the Virtues. While he continues to maintain that "[n]o appeal to human nature is sufficient to insure the commonality of all human virtue,"[20] Hauerwas (along with his co-author, Charles Pinches) moves to acknowledge the possibility both of some commonality between historic virtue traditions and shared human experience. Drawing on the work of Robert Roberts, Hauerwas concedes that virtues have a sort of "grammar, a set of rules embodying a system of relation," therefore "some formal parallel might reasonably be drawn between the various historic virtue traditions."[21] Despite this move, Hauerwas still speaks of being agnostic toward the material implications of this formal point, suggesting that eternal questions arise out of a very qualified understanding of the human condition. Basically, he is willing to grant that humans share a condition of neediness, but is quick to qualify his concession with a renewed commitment to a Christian understanding even of this neediness, so that the theological concept of sinfulness is not ignored.

Hauerwas' commitment to the primacy of Christian theology within the discussion of virtue is also evident in his treatment of Aristotle's work on the subject.[22] His most sustained work in this regard is found in the first three chapters of *Christians Among the Virtues*, in which Hauerwas and Pinches attempt first to understand Aristotle's themes such as happiness and friendship, which fall within the larger rubric of virtue. At the end of each chapter, these authors set forth intentionally theological positions on the issues raised by Aristotle, whose teaching is taken as far

20. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 117.

21. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 119.

22. Hauerwas warns his readers that while a revival of virtue language in current ethical debate is positive, Christians must not lose sight of the fact that virtue language has its origins in Greek thought. Therefore, Christians may borrow such concepts, but stop short of defending virtue as a thing in itself. So, "for Christians, it could be used with great reward, but it must be purified as used or else bear bad fruit." Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 56, 57. Prior to that assertion, Hauerwas had already admitted that "I am quite sure that the way Christians should live can be displayed without Aristotle, and perhaps even without, as Yoder never ceases to remind me, the virtues." Hauerwas, "A Testament of Friends," 215.

as is appropriate for Christians. This coincidence of thought then gives way to a description of the often-deep differences between Aristotle and Christianity. Two examples will illustrate the point. From Aristotle's discussion of happiness, Hauerwas and Pinches glean the positive notion that Christians can more fully embrace what happiness means by understanding that the life we are called to live is better understood as being a journey rather than a destination. But a deep difference is to be found in the differing accounts of the kind of person one must be to be happy. Whereas Aristotle promotes self-sufficiency that guards against outrageous fortune as the key to happiness, Christianity claims that happiness is found to the extent that our lives are formed in reference to Jesus.[23]

The topic of friendship likewise reveals both considerable affinity and deep fissures between Aristotle and Christianity. The very notion of friends as crucial to one's own happiness is important to both, but some very important differences are also clear. For example,

> Christians cannot accept a vision of friendship that excludes (or overcomes) otherness in the friend, or that shelters her from sharing our sufferings or defeats. The divergence between Aristotle and Christians on these points is not over against an agreement about virtue and happiness but rather informs and requires disagreement on these subjects as well.[24]

In addition to his careful drawing upon and making distinctions from Aristotle, Hauerwas also emphasizes the importance of community, and especially the church. In *A Community of Character*, Hauerwas begins to work out in an explicit manner what the relationship between community and other factors such as character, virtue, and Scripture ought to be: "our capacity to be virtuous depends on the existence of communities which have been formed by narratives faithful to the character of reality."[25] Hauerwas asserts, "I began my work wanting to do no more than recapture the significance of the virtues for understanding the

23. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 15, 16.
24. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 44.
25. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 116.

Christian life and in the process perhaps even live more faithfully . . . I had no idea I would believe the church to be as important as I now think it is for understanding the nature and truth of Christian convictions."[26]

The necessary connection between church and virtue has been increasingly important to Hauerwas, arguing as he does that the church can be a public display of virtue. He claims that "if the church, which after all is a public institution, can be the kind of community which manifests the political significance of virtue, then the church may well have a political function not often realized."[27] Hauerwas takes this turn to the church in part from MacIntyre, and even more substantively, from Yoder's ecclesiology, although the particular relationship of virtues and ecclesiology seen in Hauerwas is not seen either in MacIntyre or Yoder. That is, contra these two interlocutors, the church and virtue ethics are intrinsically interrelated in the thought of Hauerwas, who claims that "I am a theologian with a theological position that makes no sense unless a church actually exists that is capable of embodying the practices of perfection."[28] This makes the church an important consideration in discussions of Christian theological ethics, especially as part of virtue ethics, in a post-Christendom setting.

It is essential to distinguish Hauerwas' understanding of ecclesiology from a generic sense of communitarianism. For example, in an essay in which he addresses medical ethics, Hauerwas explicitly denies association with communitarianism, which is often seen as an, or *the* alternative to liberal presuppositions in medical ethics. He argues that liberalism and communitarianism are both produced by problematic liberal notions such as individualism. The longing for community may itself be the working out of liberalism, so that communitarianism becomes the grouping of alienated selves produced by liberal notions in which case the community becomes an end in itself. Hauerwas is quick to challenge this end, claiming that he is not interested in

26. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 1.
27. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 195.
28. Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 67.

community for its own sake, but interested in the kind of church that can shape people who can sustain significant practices.[29]

A further reason for the rejection of the communitarian label stems from Hauerwas' suspicion, following MacIntyre, that too often communities within liberal societies exist to contribute to the politics of the nation-state. For Hauerwas, the church is not simply a community, it is *the* primary category for Christians.[30]

> In a world like ours, people will become attracted to communities that promise them easy ways out of loneliness, togetherness based on common tastes, racial or ethnic traits, or mutual self-interest . . . Community becomes totalitarian when its only purpose is to foster a sense of belonging in order to overcome the fragility of the lone individual . . . life in the colony, is not primarily about togetherness. It is about the way of Jesus Christ with those he calls to himself.[31]

For Hauerwas then, the church is not simply a community indistinct from other kinds of communities except for idiosyncratic religious beliefs; it is a Christian community that is accountable, not to society around it, or to the nation-state, but to Jesus Christ. In this way, Hauerwas' ecclesiology and ethics are post-Christendom (or perhaps more accurately, non-Christendom, or non-Constantinian). The church is an interpretive community, a disciplined and disciplining community, and is distinct from the world around it. The church, because it is not contiguous with liberalism, and as a result is not accountable to any secular power such as the nation-state, must find a way to recover or maintain an integrity of its own instead of functioning as an institution designed to serve other institutions.[32] This is done partially through a recognition of the "world." Hauerwas works hard at placing himself in a position that is not anti-world as such, arguing that the world is God's good creation and not inherently sinful. "World" is not an ontological designation; rather, the world consists of people who have not chosen to make the story of God their story. Therefore, the church's task is to show the world that

29. Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 157, 158.
30. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 58.
31. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 78.
32. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xxiii.

it is the world. "Our task as church is the demanding one of trying to understand rightly the world as world, to face realistically what the world is with its madness and irrationality."[33] Or,

> the church must stand in sharp contrast to the world which would have us build our relations on distortions and denials. The world is where the truth is not spoken for fear such truth might destroy what fragile order and justice we have been able to achieve . . . Such a community cannot help but stand in sharp contrast to the world.[34]

While Hauerwas claims to not be anti-world, his description shows church and world to be in an adversarial relationship, a move that echoes his treatment of liberalism. His construal of the church as clearly distinct from the world makes it especially necessary for him to explicate his understanding of the responsibility of the church to the world, since such a 'position' brings the criticism that it advocates a withdrawal ethic. The church as a political community does not withdraw, but rather it must "give up the presumptions of Constantinian power, particularly when those take the form of liberal universalism."[35] This implies for Hauerwas that "the church would have to give up the security of having its ethos enforced or at least reinforced by the wider social structures, trusting rather the power of the Holy Spirit to be its sustainer and guide."[36] Hauerwas' version of the church's responsibility does not include attempts to enter the extant political system in a given state in an attempt to gain power, nor does he want to attempt to gain as much influence as possible at the cost of some 'realistic' compromise. Rather, the church's maintenance of its integrity is political in itself.

Hauerwas asserts some aspect of this view of the church and its responsibility throughout his work. It might be summed up in a statement that is repeated many times—"namely, that the church does not *have* a social ethic but rather *is* a social ethic."[37] Hauerwas expands further:

33. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 102.
34. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 103.
35. Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, 18.
36. Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 76.
37. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 101. Emphasis in original.

> The claim that the church is a social ethic is an attempt to remind us that the church is the place where the story of God is enacted, told, and heard. Christian ethics is not first of all principles or policies for social action but rather the story of God's calling of Israel and of the life of Jesus. That story requires the formation of a corresponding community which has learned to live in a way that makes it possible for them to hear that story. The church does not have a social ethic but is a social ethic, then, insofar as it is a community that can clearly be distinguished from the world. The world is not a community and has no such story, since it is based on the assumption that human beings, not God, rule history.[38]

The church, therefore, does not seek to discern or distil a number of principles from Scripture or tradition and then find ways to apply these rules and principles within the church, or to assert these principles as best they can in wider society. Instead, the church is a political entity that is transnational, transcultural, and global, as opposed to national states, which, according to Hauerwas, are the real tribalists.[39] The church that Hauerwas has described is called to faithfulness, not effectiveness or success as those terms are often understood.[40]

It is not difficult to see how Hauerwas' work can be seen as advocating an ethic of withdrawal. Emphases such as his insistence on a specifically Christian ethic, a close connection of the church to social ethics, along with highly-charged anti-liberal, anti-American rhetoric give the appearance of someone who is calling for withdrawal. Many Christians are attracted to Hauerwas' work, since it provides a resource for strong identity and a renewed emphasis on faithfulness to God, especially

38. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 101.

39. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 42. Put another way, "the church will serve the world best as it serves its Lord through the depth of its doctrinal affirmations, its liturgical experience, and the kind of moral concern the members of the church share among one another. If it does this well the church cannot be content with its institutional affairs as an end in themselves, for the content of its doctrine, liturgy, and communal form will not let it forget that it exists only as mission to the world." Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 216.

40. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 103.

within the church. It is therefore possible to understand and to use his work to support a withdrawal ethic.

However, to understand Hauerwas as advocating a withdrawal ethic is to misread him—his theological ethics are neither sectarian nor Constantinian, and thus include the potential for fresh possibilities in an era of post-Christendom. Hauerwas advocates for the active engagement of Christians in societal and ethical issues of all kinds; Christians should engage society as faithful Christians who are being shaped by the church. To disagree with that kind of engagement does not legitimize a conclusion that the disagreement is one of engagement versus withdrawal. However, his ecclesiology does raise questions regarding the understanding of God's work outside of the church, leading to the suspicion that Hauerwas' work does not display an adequate theology of creation. Travis Kroeker has described this as an acceptance of a dualism between nature and history, a concession to liberalism on Hauerwas' part.[41] Hauerwas concedes that his early work indeed failed to pay proper attention to the cosmic significance of God's salvation. He suggests that he is attempting to correct this, but continues to maintain that an adequate account of creation should not be separated from the doctrine of redemption. Thus "creation is not a preliminary movement prior to Christology, but rather integral to an understanding of God's gracious activity."[42] Hauerwas' concern is that creation theology is often used for the domestication of the gospel. "Appeals to creation often are meant to suggest that all people, Christians or not, share fundamental moral commitments that can provide a basis for common action," and "often amount to legitimating strategies for the principalities and powers that determine our lives."[43] Hauerwas expands this same notion in his response to James Gustafson:

> I doubt whether the issue is really a question of the doctrine of creation at all. I certainly have never denied the Christian affirmation of God as creator, but rather I have refused to use that affirmation to

41. Kroeker, "The Peaceable Creation: Hauerwas and the Mennonites," 137, 138.
42. Hauerwas, "Storytelling," 168.
43. Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 111.

> underwrite an autonomous realm of morality apart from Christ's lordship. The issue is not creation, but the kind of creation Jews and Christians continue to affirm integral to God's being. What allows us to look expectantly for agreement among those who do not worship God is not that we have a common morality based on an autonomous knowledge of autonomous nature, but that God's kingdom is wider than the church.[44]

Hauerwas' explanation does not show adequately how God's kingdom is wider than the church, but his explanation does not go much further, except to say that he "would not deny the natural order as a manifestation of God's kingdom."[45]

Hauerwas' theological ethics, while crucial to the rehabilitation of Christian virtue ethics cannot be circumscribed within such a categorization. That is, his work is not reducible to a position. Similarly, MacIntyre's philosophical focus on virtue is not reducible to that category. To reduce these thinkers' work in such a way is to truncate the richness, depth, and scope of their work. However, this retrieval that I have been describing has been and continues to be important in a post-Christendom world, as it has given the Christian church a way of being in the world that does not depend on being in control of the world in which she finds herself. Christian community, Christian practices, Christian tradition, Christian narrative and scripture—these and other dimensions of the Christian faith are taken seriously even while the church finds herself more marginalized that was the case during the Christendom era.

Jennifer Herdt: Putting on Virtue

It is precisely at this point that Jennifer Herdt's recent work makes a significant contribution to post-Christendom theological ethics. Her constructive work, especially as articulated in *Putting on Virtue*,[46] might be described as taking up and extending the emphasis on virtue ethics in important ways. In setting the

44. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 17.
45. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 17.
46. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*.

context for her contribution, Herdt argues that "contemporary Christian virtue ethics, particularly as it has taken its cues from Alasdair MacIntyre and developed these within the context of narrative theology, has emphasized the particular narratives and communities within which virtuous character is formed."[47] In Herdt's view, the embrace of virtue ethics (with all the appropriate disclaimers) by Christian ethicists such as Hauerwas

> made it possible for aspects of Christian moral reflection that had seemed to be handicaps in the context of the dominant modern moral theories to be heralded instead as advantages. Both the intelligibility and the distinctiveness of Christian ethics have seemed easier to articulate in the context of the revival of virtue ethics. Stanley Hauerwas has led the way here in focusing increasingly on Christian particularity—not just narrative but scripture, not just practices but liturgical practices, not just tradition and community but the church.[48]

Herdt credits Hauerwas' work with marking the "special way in which the language of virtue was seized upon in order to legitimize both Christian ethics and the new discipline of religious ethics. It gave Christian ethics a way of remaining robustly theological as opposed to focusing on the translation of theological claims into universal moral principles."[49] Herdt's own recent work extends that retrieval of virtue in a theological key, a project taken up in a series of essays, culminating in her monograph, *Putting on Virtue.*

A central concern for Herdt is that moral philosophers tend to see Christian ethics as fundamentally law-based rather than virtue-based, while Christian thinkers have sought leverage in virtue ethics for critique of secular culture, "which they regard both as hostile to virtue ethics and as incapable of sustaining the virtues themselves."[50] Herdt seeks to move beyond such mutual suspicion, and to resist anxiety over acquired virtue. Herdt claims that she seeks to make sense of the suspicion that was prevalent from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries,

47. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 345.
48. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 345.
49. Herdt, "Hauerwas among the Virtues," 206.
50. Herdt, "Virtue's Semblance," 137.

namely, that "[s]ocial formation and habituation in virtue result in a mere semblance of virtue, a semblance which in fact conceals and entrenches human pride."[51] Positively put, Herdt seeks to identify and retrieve resources from the Christian tradition that embrace

> virtue as simultaneously acquired through mimetic action and infused through divine grace. This account avoids setting human and divine moral agency over against one another, is optimistic about ordinary moral formation, and is generous also towards pagan virtue. It thus resembles in significant respects recent accounts of Christian virtue as performative, but without the ecclesiocentrism or even fideism which often characterizes these accounts.[52]

Herdt's statement here is important in understanding how she is both embracing and extending Hauerwas' treatment of Christian virtue ethics. Briefly put, she embraces much of Hauerwas' positive retrieval of virtue ethics, along with his connection of the church to the development and formation of virtuous people and Christian communities. Nevertheless, Herdt also signals here a significant warning; accounts of Christian virtue as performative may slip over into ecclesiocentrism or even fideism, temptations she wants to avoid even while continuing to emphasize the role of the church, but doing so without the stark distinction between church and world she sees in Hauerwas's work.

Herdt's positive retrieval/recovery of virtue ethics carries with it significant implications having to do with the ways in which we pay attention to the shape of our lives, as well as to how specific communities might be ordered in ways that promote flourishing and faithfulness. Such a retrieval clearly resists that stream of Christian tradition that is deeply suspicious of an emphasis on virtue, a so-called exodus from virtue. According to Herdt's account, such intense suspicion within the Christian tradition can be traced back to Augustinian influence, the central concern of which was that "ordinary habituation in virtue simply

51. Herdt, "Back to Virtue," 222–23.
52. Herdt, "Back to Virtue," 222.

entrenches the vices of pride and self-love."[53] Augustine worried that efforts to put on virtue would always be incomplete, even sinful, absent a proper vision of our true final end in God. Herdt argues that this Augustinian worry contributed to a loss of any sense that God's grace can work through mundane processes of practice and imitation (habituation). Martin Luther took Augustine's concerns much further (into hyper-Augustinianism). For Luther,

> there is no route from "external" practices to fundamental inner transformation . . . The image of God in us has been utterly destroyed by Adam's fall. This means that we cannot hope through imitating Christ to become participants in the divine activity of assimilating copy to exemplar. Imitation becomes "mere" imitation . . . Rather, the starting point must be a moment of utter passivity, in which we relinquish any reliance on human agency. We must begin not by "acting the part" of virtue but instead by seeming to be what we are in fact—sinful.[54]

According to Herdt, Luther does not trust that it is possible for the person seeking to become virtuous to progress gradually from external motivations to acting for the sake of internal goods, since that person is fundamentally selfish, and thus, at least for Luther, the pursuit of virtue is fundamentally the pursuit of works. The only legitimate agent of human virtue is not the human, but Christ. To think of faith as a virtue, developed through habituation, even if infused by grace, signals a false sense of independence from God, according to Luther.[55] Herdt

53. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 2. I am relying heavily on Herdt's convincing account of the exodus from virtue. I am aware that her account is subject to critique. See, for example, Perry, "The Essential Theatricality of Virtue," 212–21.

54. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 174.

55. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 183–84, 187. To be clear, the "exodus from virtue to grace," labelled as hyper-Augustinianism by Herdt, is not universally resisted in contemporary Christian ethics. To provide just one recent example of renewed support of exactly this exodus, Gerhard Forde argues, that "the exodus from virtue to the grace of Christ means for Luther that justification can be understood only as a complete break with all attempts to view it as a movement according to a given standard or 'law,' either natural or revealed." Further, in

represents an approach that remains committed to a robustly theological conception of virtue, able to retrieve a mimetic conception of virtue while moving beyond the legacy of the splendid vices. Such a view, with Luther, affirms "absolute divine sovereignty and the utter dependency of human on divine agency, but without insisting that any exercise of human agency not grounded in and preceded by clear recognition of this dependency constitutes by that token a repudiation of God."[56] On this account, sin is understood as resistance to dependency and refusal of gift. The perfecting of human persons via the virtues and participation in the fellowship of the divine life allows the Christian to perfect virtue as constituted by a love of God that

> completes rather than competes with love of human persons, including ourselves, and of other finite goods. It accepts virtue as a gift the goodness of which is rightly honored even as it is also always rightly directed to God as its ultimate source. It understands this gift as mediated through scripture, church, and sacraments and also through ordinary inclinations and social relationships, such as a parent's affirming love of a child and a child's desire to emulate a beloved parent, or through attraction to the beauty of social harmony.[57]

Furthermore, the church is very important for Herdt's retrieval of virtue ethics, although her vision of the role of the church is

Forde's reading of Luther, "the most vital enemy of the righteousness of God is not the 'godless sinner' but the 'righteous' who think in terms of progress or movement." Forde goes so far as to assert that we should embrace justification by faith, instead of the justification by grace through faith, since "justification as sheer unconditional address calls for the new subject who hears in faith. As such it *is* 'grace.'" To the potential protest that this constitutes some version of cheap grace, that the virtuous life is ignored, Forde concludes his argument with rhetorical flourish: "What we have to realize today at last is that the questions are *themselves* the protest, indeed the death rattle, of the old being who knows his kingdom to be under the most radical attack. Egypt with its vices—and its virtues—is much more amenable. What we have to realize is that the experience of being so absolutely depotentiated, non-plussed, offended, by the justification address *is* exactly the death-knell of the old and the harbinger of the new. It *is* the exodus, Christian theology never quite seems to have grasped that." Forde, "The Exodus from Virtue to Grace," 32–44.

56. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 343.
57. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 344.

different than that put forward by Hauerwas. Her conception of virtue that embraces grace-enabled participation assumes that the church provides a glimpse of the perfection of the inner life of the divine, constituted as it is by those who understand, however incompletely, the grounding of human agency in the divine, without necessitation a consciousness of God's grace as a condition of that grace.[58]

Herdt, along with other contemporary revivers of the virtue traditions, has shifted attention from the individual to the community, thus revealing

> how an ethic of virtue can foster rather than frustrate the acknowledgment of dependency. A vision of Christian virtue as formed by the church and its practices has also made possible a naturalized account of the Christian moral life that renders Christian moral agency intelligible as agency rather than a miraculous surd. And it does so without reducing Christian ethics to a stronger motivation to perform universal duties, or a principle or set of principles that simply restates in somewhat different vocabulary a universal moral law.[59]

In many ways, Herdt's embrace of the church as central to post-Christendom virtue ethics resembles Hauerwas' work, including explorations of Christian practices that reunite liturgy, spirituality, theology, and ethics, allowing for human "agency while still preserving the claim that formation of Christian virtue is wholly dependent on grace."[60]

Thus far, Herdt and Hauerwas seemingly embrace very similar version of ecclesiocentric Christian virtue ethics; however, Herdt's account of the church does not depend on a strong emphasis regarding the distinctiveness of the church in relation to the world, as does Hauerwas. Put another way, Herdt's understanding of the church-world relation includes an embrace of more porousness. Her view is worth quoting at some length here:

> But once we concede that distinctively Christian virtues, like the virtues of non-Christians, develop through habituation, we should also

58. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 344.
59. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 350.
60. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 351.

> recognize that this means that Christian identity is porous. What attending to habituation allows us to articulate is a chastened account of Christian distinctiveness, which can serve finally to free us from anxiety over the splendid vices and the threat of contamination…
> We must trust wholly in God, even as we embrace the practices of the church and strive to develop our own moral agency. Acknowledging that all virtue shares in the clay feet of a sinful and redeemed Adam involves a deepened relinquishing of control, a further acknowledgment of dependency.[61]

Herdt's work, while clearly within the same stream of thought inhabited by MacIntyre and Hauerwas, makes an important contribution by moving beyond suspicion of virtue ethics in two ways, namely, that virtue is necessarily corrupted by self-love and pride when separated from God as the final end, and the suspicion that even pursuit of God may at base be a sinful expression of self-love. No longer willing to demonise pagan ethics, an early modern move that had the ironic effect of giving ethics a heightened level of independence based on a prioritizing of pure act of will and independence of agency, Herdt opens up a whole world of possible Christian reflection that is free from the false alternative of pursuing ethics independently or abandoning the entire effort because God's favour can't be won in any case.[62] Thus for Herdt, the discourse of virtue ethics does not serve to distance the church from the world; rather, in her construal of things, Christians can affirm true, if imperfect, secular virtues in an intelligible way. Says Herdt, "[o]ne of the most important tasks facing us is powerfully to affirm—and actively to embody—the fact that Christian formation, formation for fellowship with God in Christ, is at the same time formation for service to the common good, a common good which today must be understood globally . . . we are fitted for common fellowship with God only insofar as we are transformed into the kinds of persons who can respond to the neighbor for her own sake, and neither for the

61. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 351, 352.
62. Perry, "The Essential Theatricality of Virtue," 212, 213, 220, 221.

sake of preserving our own virtue nor for the sake of shoring up tribal identities."[63]

New Possibilities for Virtue Ethics in Post-Christendom

My primary purpose in this article has not been to trace the history of virtue ethics; rather, I am interested in the possibilities that present themselves as part of the retrieval/recovery of virtue ethics in a post-Christendom context, especially in the field of theological ethics**,** in addition to the possibility of moving beyond suspicion and avoiding sectarianism even while taking the church seriously.[64] The retrieval of virtue ethics also opens up the possibility of renewed focus or emphasis on individual virtues, which themselves are pursued as a response to the situation in which we find ourselves in a given era. Put another way, *virtue* quickly changes to *virtues*, and the language we use to name our virtues changes constantly. Succinctly put, "[e]ach age creates a vocabulary of virtues (and vices) corresponding to the distinctiveness of its experience," and these terms "reflect ways in which the constituents of successful living have been reconceived in new contexts."[65] Oliver O'Donovan counsels modesty regarding such retrieval of virtue ethics: we have to be careful not to champion virtue ethics as a comprehensive approach, since virtue simply cannot do enough—its attention falls on what the world has already known.

> It shows us nothing that lies, projected and undetermined, ahead of us. Virtue is not a law, not an "ideal," not any form of deliberative norm; it has no reference to a particular time and context we are assigned to live and act in, for what *we* are given to do or be is not revealed in what *others* have done and been. Talk about virtue is

63. Herdt, "Back to Virtue," 226.

64. For a recent example of this kind of work, see Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*.

65. O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*, 92.

> always third-person talk, observers' talk about deeds that have already taken determinate form.[66]

John Bowlin's Rehabilitation of Tolerance as a Virtue

It is precisely this contingent vocabulary of virtues and vices corresponding to the distinctiveness of an age that offers considerable explanatory power in understanding a renewed emphasis on virtue in general and on particular virtues specifically. That is, our own era, which I am considering here in its post-Christendom form, calls for the (contingent) heightened emphasis on certain kinds of virtues. I briefly turn here to a recent project where such a heightened emphasis is on display, namely John Bowlin's work on tolerance as a virtue.[67]

Bowlin argues that we currently live in an age that is a "heyday" for discussions of tolerance, given the current urgent need for this virtue as a constructive response to the problems of association and peaceful coexistence which exist as part of globalization. Bowlin's assertion that tolerance as a virtue will become prominent in times and places where it makes the most sense is not a concession to any argument that would have us understand tolerance as only a modern development; rather, tolerance as a

66. Emphasis in original. This material is taken from O'Donovan's relatively brief treatment of virtue in his *Ethics as Theology* trilogy, where he defines virtue as the service neighbors render to us as guides and examples, "making sense for us of the moral idea of an achieved character, which in turn makes sense of the theological idea of the imparting of Christ's righteousness." O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking,* 89, 90. Stanley Hauerwas's work on virtue is also marked by a fundamental caution, namely that to defend virtue itself is a dangerous thing, to understand virtue as our own achievement denies the validity of virtues, that Christians must be prepared to see pagan virtues transformed, and also be willing to see others deleted and others added, and that it is not the case that Christians can be content to fill the gaps in Aristotle's account with Christian content or defend virtues first and Christianity later. All in all, for Hauerwas, Christian confession demands neither a summary acceptance nor rejection of virtue talk, but its transformation. Regarding virtue, "For Christians, it can be used with great reward but it must first be purified as used or else bear bad fruit." Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 57, see also 27–29, 55–68.

67. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*.

virtue is an unavoidable and recurrent, but not ubiquitous, feature of the human form of life we happen to lead.[68]

Bowlin is no doubt correct in describing our current age as a heyday for tolerance, but along with this heightened emphasis has come significant contestation. That is, the intensified promotion and embrace of tolerance is understood by some to be a stance or practice that is *not* an appropriate or constructive response to the issues faced in our day. Rather, tolerance is understood as marked by indifference and even resentment, certainly not something virtuous.[69] Bowlin is keen to rehabilitate such flabby, inadequate understandings of tolerance in favour of one that sees it as a natural virtue—one that is an integral part of justice; one that presumably has its own history that is separate from those noxious liberal versions of tolerance wherein tolerance is manifested as a vice. According to Bowlin, tolerance is not a "blithe indifference that quickly melts into vile acceptance," an understanding that is really only "traitorous moral flabbiness," a vice in disguise.[70] Bowlin is all too aware of the clouds of suspicion under which tolerance labors, suspicions that he claims are bound by a common (and fallacious) logic, namely that

> [t]olerance is too difficult to muster, too condescending. Tolerance is complicit in the worst devices of liberal societies. Tolerance encourages a passive aggressive politics, a gentle and self-deceived paternalism that in fact betrays our commitment to the equal dignity of all. Tolerance must be overcome; the conditions that demand its exercise must be escaped.[71]

68. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 19, 181–83. Susan Mendus points out that while it is true that the modern era may be witness to increased solidarity between strangers, such tolerance is also (ironically) accompanied by increased fragmentation and civil war, an observation developed in more detail by Garrett Fitzgerald. See Mendus, "My Brother's Keeper," 1, 2. See also Fitzgerald, "Toleration or Solidarity?" 13–19.

69. For example, A. James Reimer considers tolerance at some length in his political theology, and finds it badly wanting. For a brief summary, see Doerksen, "The Politics of Moral Patience," 454–67.

70. Bowlin, "Tolerance among the Fathers," 9.

71. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 22.

However, Bowlin remains unconvinced by such comprehensive suspicion of tolerance. Instead, his work might be described as a rehabilitation of tolerance as an important virtue, one that includes much-needed constructive possibilities in areas of common good, including education, citizenship, and friendship.[72] Bowlin, writing in a way that is intended to be intelligible and acceptable by either secular or religious moral discourses, sets out to complicate the distinctions between the two, and thus identify mutual resources.[73] His project argues that tolerance is one of the natural moral virtues, "natural to us as concept, act, and inchoate virtue."[74]

Bowlin connects closely the natural virtue of tolerance to that of forbearance, categorizing them as sibling virtues. He takes pains to show that while forbearance is based on charity, which includes dimensions such as God's love and the gracious transformation of the Holy Spirit that are not part of the so-called 'natural siblings' such as tolerance, nonetheless, they are not completely different things. That is, while tolerance may be natural and forbearance a gracious gift, nonetheless they belong to a family; thus forbearance and tolerance can be 'mixed,' as it were, since they both, either by habit or by grace, come to share a common material object, that of the common good of the society in which we find ourselves.[75] Thus,

> God's love can be added to love's virtue, charity to natural forbearance, infused habit to acquired, and when it is, the person transformed by that love will forbear the objectionable differences of their friend, not simply in accord with the graces and requirements of the natural fellowship, but now, in addition, for the sake of fellowship she has with God and hopes to share with her friend. As before, God's love does not erase the virtues he transforms, rather he heals their deficits and elevates their acts to union with God and neighbor.[76]

72. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 10.
73. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 9.
74. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 105.
75. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 13, 213.
76. Bowlin, *Tolerance among the Virtues*, 238.

Has Post-Christendom Remained Constantinian?

While it is no doubt true that each era brings forth its own heydays and its temptations, it is neither self-evident nor inevitable that the temptations that accompany any given era are left behind with the passing of the era. The demarcation between the passing of the old era and the ushering in of the new is not easily discerned. If we have (nearly) slipped from Christendom into post-Christendom, the question to ask is whether the church has also left behind that lingering temptation of Constantinianism, whether Christians are still seeking mutual approval and support of church and world, even though the terms of such an arrangement may well have changed. Perhaps it is with caution that we should embrace the rehabilitation of virtue ethics, and the concomitant focus on specific virtues, which can be developed and promoted on both a 'natural' and 'religious' basis. However, it seems to me that even this new development can be marshalled in a way that undergirds the church's ongoing attempt to retain such power as may still be available in our current era.

Put another way, the move from Christendom to post-Christendom that saw a rehabilitation of virtue ethics in a way that continues to take the church seriously may yet carry the vestiges of that old Christendom temptation, Constantinianism. Vincent Lloyd raises this concern in a recent review essay of three sources dealing with toleration, including Bowlin's *Tolerance Among the Virtues*, whose work on toleration emphasizes continuities with Christian practices of toleration, made possible by the newfound self-reflectiveness in the West.[77] And yet, according to Lloyd, Bowlin's account of toleration makes Christian convictions optional. Not only that, while Bowlin's post-Christendom rehabilitation of virtue ethics by way of toleration and forbearance is timely, the question that remains is whether he doing that work from a position of power, creating the effect in which "everything that is said to elaborate a theory of toleration necessarily functions (in its effect rather than its content) to entrench the powers that be and so to marginalize further those

77. Lloyd, "Constantinian Toleration," 1–11.

already at the margins."[78] Lloyd's poignant question is: What would it mean to draw on Christian resources while refusing the identification of Christianity with state power or with worldly authority more generally (including patriarchy)? That is, what might it mean for Christians to approach toleration from below?[79]

While the first part of Lloyd's question has received considerable attention from Christian theologians and ethicists, including but not limited to Hauerwas, the latter part of the question has not garnered as much discussion. Perhaps one might say that the realities of a post-Christendom setting have pushed the church to consider and confront more explicitly the versions of Constantinianism that were as obvious while the church was busy embracing the identification of Christianity and state power (which in any case is far from extinct).

The identification with forms of worldly power other than state power is difficult to discern and resist, hard to give up, and tough to replace. But the church's clash with temptation ought not to come as any surprise. Indeed, the temptation within the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom is for the church to believe that this dawning era will be a golden age of sorts in which it will be easier to be faithful, since the church will be freer to be the church because she can no longer assume worldly power. However, to embrace one era or another as somehow in and of itself 'better' for the church is to make a mistake—a mistake that is structurally similar to the (unfaithful) embrace of worldly power in Christendom. To align too quickly and closely to the spirit of any age is fraught with the temptations of unfaithfulness, temptations that are embedded within the pursuit of faithfulness, and therefore difficult to identify.

The retrieval of virtue ethics in a post-Christendom world opens up possibilities for an emphasis on the practices of the church as central to theological ethics. In Herdt's case (and even more so in Bowlin's) embracing porousness between the church

78. Lloyd, "Constantinian Toleration," 8.

79. Lloyd, "Constantinian Toleration," 9. See also Kroeker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics*.

and the world is important, without leaving the church behind in, say, the individual realm. In sum, post-Christendom virtue ethics has opened the way for Christians to consider and promote specific virtues that are in their heyday in this post-Christendom world, to do so in ways that can be taken seriously by those within and without the church, even while resisting unfaithful accommodation to the powers of this world.

I conclude on a cautionary note. The way to confront the dangers and unfaithfulness of the church in Christendom is not to embrace post-Christendom, but to pursue and embrace the confession that Jesus is Lord, and carrying on the necessary practices of seeking, discerning, praying, performing the virtues, and our calling to be the church, the body of Christ in the world.

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