In this essay the thought of Enda McDonagh will be explored in support of the growing conversation between Catholic moral theology and spirituality.\(^1\) This conversation is reinvigorating the content of moral theology after years of focus upon questions of norms, method, and authority. McDonagh is a pioneer in the contemporary movement to integrate spirituality and moral theology.\(^2\) Paying attention to his emphasis upon prayer will bear fruit in, and set further direction for, the work of moralists who follow after him.


MORAL METHODOLOGY

McDonagh’s method contributes to the history of theology because he was one of the earliest moral theologians to produce a Christian ethic inspired by the pastoral theology of Vatican II. The integration of moral theology more explicitly with dogma and human experience is McDonagh’s mandate as promulgated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Encouraged by the teaching of Vatican II, McDonagh’s mind ranges over the many creative possibilities of how one who believes in Jesus as Savior can speak to the dilemmas of human morality. The mind liberated to love the world in Christ, not fear it, is the core of McDonagh’s “reinvigorated” natural law method. It is the essence of the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology applied to Christian living. The legal perspective of moral theology which was used to protect Christians from an adversarial “world” gave way after Vatican II to a “world of grace” making it the Christian moralist’s role to articulate a more complex relationship between good and evil than previously encountered. If the world was good and the Kingdom was not contained exclusively within the Roman Catholic Church, then the presence of God was to be welcomed within previously secular or profane arenas. McDonagh’s writings reflect one Catholic theologian’s view of this “new” reality.

Underlying the trust that Vatican II placed in human discovery through experience and discourse is a profound theological foundation. McDonagh’s view of Christ as the center of humanity evokes a trust in a God who works with humans in their efforts at “doing the truth.” The reasoning McDonagh trusts, however, is not complete until it is integrated with the mysteries of the faith.

Catholic moral theology . . . needs to turn more self consciously to knowledge through doing and to be willing to pay the price for

3. Optatum totius, no. 16 specifically, but Gaudium et spes is crucial as well. See McDonagh, Invitation and Response, 19; and Making of Disciples, 2.
4. McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 99.
5. McDonagh, Gift and Call, 14. See also McDonagh, Invitation and Response, 24.
that. In this context the Cross as an epistemological tool may not be so far-fetched as appeared at first sight. Moral theology, for all its reasonableness, has to transcend the mere reasonableness of nous to reach the more comprehensive understanding of faith and the Cross which will continue to appear as foolishness to the non-transcending nous.6

The center of McDonagh’s method is neither legislation nor elitist asceticism but the power of persuasion within a community of free, reasoning, believers. McDonagh argues that this is the authentic method of ethical discernment within the Church after Vatican II. The style, as reflected in the social teachings of the Church and the documents of Vatican II, is pastoral and the method is one of appeal. It is his hope that this authentic ethical method will also be used in personal ethics.7

The great danger about the imposition of moral truth in juridical fashion is not that it will provoke dissent and disobedience. Frequently, in today’s climate it will. More profoundly it impoverishes moral truth and moral living by not offering the truth as having a validity in itself... it makes the actual truth irrelevant and reduces all virtues to the virtue of obedience. Humanae vitae might have been better composed and recommended as an appeal to the truth than as a demand for obedience.8

The moment of moral awakening within McDonagh’s method is in a person’s denial of self so that the needs of another might be met. It is only in this death of selfishness that one can even “see” the other. It is a rising from self enclosed fulfillment to an other-centered emptying. McDonagh’s ethic is as much gift as virtue and the denial of either element constitutes betrayal of revelation.9 This moral awakening can occur at the time of the call

6. McDonagh, Making of Disciples, 34.
7. McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 194.
8. Ibid. 194. For a good analysis of the inconsistent ethical method within Catholic doctrine, see Kenneth R. Overberg, An Inconsistent Ethic: Teaching of the American Catholic Bishops (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980).
9. McDonagh, Invitation and Response, 69. 76. 77.
to discipleship. At the moment of realization that one is in the presence of God one is also opened to the presence of one’s fellow human. Thus discipleship forms a key interpretive tool for McDonagh as it stands near the center of his ethic. The one who receives the gift of divine presence is bid to give one’s self to another. However, a discipleship ethic will not immediately solve the problem of whether one should freeze and retain human embryos for example. But McDonagh insists that his method provides a basic Christian vision and this vision is the context for all authentic solutions.  

Because morality is a human phenomenon, no direct normative connection can be made between discipleship and correct ethical behavior. The theologian is to see how faith connects to ethics not how specific judgments arise out of faith. Except in formal terms, faith will not yield ethical answers to specific situational dilemmas. One must discern, criticize and converse with others to attain an answer. McDonagh would not deny, however, that this discernment includes prayer since his ethic is based on a gift (divine relationship/power) – achievement (reason, virtues) model.  

The call from Christ is to become human not remove oneself from the historical struggle toward truth and goodness. Discipleship as used in ethical discernment does not add additional burdens to doing the good but it is utilized to highlight the gift or grace aspect of becoming good. One task which corresponds to this gift of discipleship is service to the poor in order to liberate these community members from subjectionhood.

McDonagh couples one’s advancement in spirituality to one’s respect for neighbor.

[Prayer’s] relevance is related to sensitivity to other human beings as well as to attention to prayer forms. There is no question of opposing one to the other or pursuing one at the expense of the other. Yet in [humans] there may be a danger that their prayer-

10. McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 33.
11. Ibid. 16, 23. See also McDonagh, Making of Disciples, 27, 28.
12. McDonagh, Making of Disciples, 37.
blocks derive from the inhumanity of their relationships rather than from their inattention to prayer.\textsuperscript{13}

This is an ancient insight which seems to need perennial articulation. It is also a reminder of the depths of Catholic theology as it tries to understand the mysteries of grace-nature, divine-human, and faith-works.

As a representative theologian of the Second Vatican Council, McDonagh's major contribution to theology consists in the fact that he offers a progressive yet balanced approach to theology. By that I mean he is one who does not long for the continuance of Trent as dead word to be handed down literally nor does he want to uproot theological reflection from solid dogmatic foundations. He truly is a moderate thinker without being static. More specifically his greatest contribution is the work he has done in the area of fundamental moral theology. He is definitely a foundation builder who has constructed a firm theological platform upon which a social, medical and sexual ethic can be built. Unfortunately, he has done very little of the building itself. This is a curious situation. Obviously the lack of any systemic analysis on specific moral issues undermines one's attempt to truly understand McDonagh's theology.

Nevertheless, what has convinced me to pay attention to McDonagh is his sustained effort to integrate some of the great Christian mysteries with foundational ethical thinking. Moreover, the prophetic tone of his writings is intriguing. He makes one think more deeply about being a theologian not simply an ethicist. He holds a legitimate distinction between theology and ethics, and does not thereby reduce one to the other. There is simply an awareness in his writings that one's commitment to Christ must be taken into account when making ethical decisions. "The scope of my argument is to provide Christian believers with a way of accepting the autonomy of the moral experience, but then seeking to understand its deeper connection with their faith in Jesus Christ."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} McDonagh, \textit{Small Hours of Belief}, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{14} McDonagh, \textit{Doing the Truth}, 50.
To consider how faith and ethics relate is a consistent duty of moral theology. What makes McDonagh’s emphasis unique is that his writings on spirituality, faith and morality reclaim moral theology’s position within an explicitly theological tradition. Studying McDonagh will work against some of what Matthew Lamb warned about in an article in America:

In American culture there are tendencies toward acknowledging reason as public only to the extent that it is ‘calculating reason’ of the Enlightenment empiricists. . . . Reason is thereby secularized to the extent that spiritual realities are excluded, including many pre-Enlightenment appropriations of reason as spiritual.

For McDonagh, human reason has a spiritual dimension and is not a vehicle of autonomous empiricism. His dissertation was on the subject of “Dignitatis Humanae” and was influenced by the thought of John Courtney Murray who held a deep spiritual foundation for reason in the eternal logos, Christ. The desire to form a closer union between moral theology and spirituality is the result of recognizing that in the past, the two disciplines were unnaturally separated.

The pessimistic anthropology from which [moral theology] started, and which served inevitably to confirm and reinforce itself, particularly when the subject was pursued in growing isolation from the rest of theology and developed as a spiritual arm of the Church’s legal system, drove moral theology increasingly to concern itself almost exclusively with the darker and insubordinate side of human existence. The miasma of sin which emanates from the penitential literature and from the vast majority of manuals of moral theology is not only distasteful, but profoundly disquieting. . . . As a consequence of this commitment to spiritual pathology, the discipline of moral theology was to relinquish almost all consideration of the good in man.

to other branches of theology, notably to what became known as
spiritual theology.\textsuperscript{18}

Since Vatican II, moral theology no longer relinquishes the study
of virtue to the field of spirituality. It has not, however, come very
far in its articulation of the relationship between spirituality and
doing the good, or "doing the truth," as McDonagh would say.

McDonagh's natural law methodology stands as his greatest
theological strength. Mahoney aptly makes clear the problem that
McDonagh has addressed:

There is a mysterious or 'supernatural' element to nature itself as
it historically exists. . . . The concept of nature, and the conclusions
derived from it, have been theologically defective in not taking suf-
ficiently into account the continuity and the actual . . . indivisibility
of God's onward purpose for man in Christ.\textsuperscript{19}

The richest implication for development within McDonagh's
thought is his use of theological themes in social ethics and his
suggestive advancements toward an integration of spirituality and
ethics. It is to this latter vein of thought that I now turn.

**ENDA MCDONAGH ON PRAYER**

In one of his earliest writings, McDonagh investigated the role
of prayer in moral theology in the context of the liturgy.\textsuperscript{20} In the
first chapter of *Invitation and Response* McDonagh places the
whole work of moral theology in a more experiential, personalist
framework. This indicates, as has already been mentioned, a shift
from the way moral theology had been approached prior to the
Second Vatican Council. Tracing the history of moral theology and

\textsuperscript{18} John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 112. Further on he states: "A 'natural' view of man as a
source for moral reasoning is inadequate and does not correspond to
the reality that 'man is made a new creature who can respond in love
and genuine freedom to the plan of his Creator and Saviour'" (pp.
112-13).

\textsuperscript{20} McDonagh, *Invitation and Response*, 96.
its alignment with Church law from 1600 to the Second Vatican Council, McDonagh sees the possibility of reunifying moral theology with dogmatic and spiritual theology by centering upon the person of Christ. For McDonagh theology is a personal exploration into the Divine self-giving. It carries with it a call to holiness for each theologian as well as an intellectual and deliberative task.\textsuperscript{21}

In philosophy and psychology as well as theology the insights of the day stress the value of the individual person, his need to mature through responsible, free activity and his commitment to the community. So the movement to renew moral theology for all its limited beginning seems destined to grow in the coming decades, and may perhaps later be synthesized within the totality and unity of theology in a way comparable to that of St Thomas in his day.\textsuperscript{22}

McDonagh’s whole Christian ethic is built upon the function of faith-informed reason reflecting upon God’s suffering in Christ. His ethical foundation is located in the center of theology where the great truths of our faith lie: Incarnation, redemption, resurrection, from which we are invited to participate in a divine-human exchange. After reflecting on how much God, in his love, has done for us, moral behavior becomes an act of thanks; it possesses a “Eucharistic character.”\textsuperscript{23} This thanksgiving is experienced within the Christian as the event of personal salvation, as knowing one is united to God in Christ. McDonagh claims that Christ “constitutes the center of the moral order, incorporating in himself the moral possibilities enshrined in humanity, which taken in abstraction may be described as natural law.”\textsuperscript{24} The incarnation founds the natural law.

The Christian ethic which is established upon this revelation of Jesus Christ is first and foremost an ethic addressed to a community and only from within that body are dignified and unique persons addressed. Community-building becomes normative for Christian ethics. Whatever behavior promotes and edifies the “community of

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 6.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 20.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 25.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 35, 36.
mankind" is ethical, whatever undermines the community is to be rejected.  The church is the explicit witness to this "basic structure of reality" and must therefore publicly manifest this unity of all peoples in fidelity to the will of God manifest in Jesus' universal embrace of all as recipients of the Father's love. For McDonagh, it is this structure of reality which founds communal worship and prayer. Knowing we are one with others yet personally unique is the creative tension which drives the legitimacy of public and private prayer.

All Christian prayer, as a share in the response of Jesus to his Father, is community prayer. It is the prayer of a son who must also be a brother . . . Unseen, private prayer is as Christian prayer also community prayer. The necessity and value of public expression of this community prayer in the liturgy should not obscure this community aspect of private prayer and its necessity and value. The attention and reflection which private prayer can develop will in turn deepen public expression of this same community reality.  

The liturgy is that explicit and formal prayer which gives expression to the underlying implicit structure of daily living as response to the Father in Christ through the power of the Spirit. McDonagh contextualizes his reflections upon worship and Christian living within the themes of Trinity, covenant, Passover, and exodus.

McDonagh sees community being made explicit and celebrated in worship while not primarily being formed and known there. Community is known and developed in freely chosen acts of daily living. Through these free acts the individual develops a moral character which in turn assists in the creation of the character of the community. The prayer of the gathered community reflects this sequence of community formation.  

According to McDonagh's understanding of worship, prayer acts as a clarifier and purifier of one's vision of reality. The foundation of reality is relatedness: relatedness to God, the community

25. Ibid. 43, 49, 52, 53.
26. Ibid. 101.
27. Ibid. 102-3.
and self. He characterizes sin as a failure to worship. In this way, both natural law and worship play complementary roles in McDonagh’s thinking: both invite the participant into reality.

He further examines petition and thanksgiving as two specific forms of prayer. In petitioning God, McDonagh sees a prayer which focuses a person’s attention upon the needs of one’s neighbor. It is a prayer which sensitizes one to “discern and listen to God’s voice especially in the cries of need of his neighbor.” Authentic petition is never a turning in on oneself, but an openness within oneself to be thrust deeper into consciousness of another’s dependency.

The prayer of thanksgiving is seen as a corrective to any vision of the moral life which fosters a legalistic form of “self-salvation.” Based on a vision of life which acknowledges radical dependency upon God’s love for one’s existence, McDonagh envisions the proper human stance as one of gratitude. It is the primordial virtue and it is expressed as worship and trust in the divine presence which molds and calls one to salvation. The moral life is only authentically engaged from within this context of thanksgiving.

In a later and very personal work McDonagh elaborates his own vision of prayer and the need to connect it with critical theological reflection.

What spirituality is fundamentally about is the personal communal living of faith-hope-love. To write them in such linked fashion is to emphasize their unity in bible, liturgy and living. . . . Faith-hope-love in dynamic unity form the heart of Christian living or spirituality and the basis for Christian reflection or theology.

In a sermon delivered at the erection of a new church, McDonagh emphasizes the unity of devotion and theology. It is significant that in dedicating a sacred place he saw the building itself as a reminder to the devout and prayerful, as well as the

28. Ibid. 104.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. 106.
31. McDonagh, Small Hours of Belief, 106.
theologian, that despite their distinct duties and responsibilities, all are called to prayer.

A prayerless theology then is not theology at all. It is not possible for a member of the Church to contribute to its interpretation, articulation and presentation of its own deeper life, its prayer life to the Father and the Son by the gift of the Spirit, without entering more and more into that prayer-life. . . . Cut off from prayer there can be no genuine theology. 32

Whether or not McDonagh means a non-praying theologian cannot contribute objective content to the field is unclear and perhaps has to be refuted. However, one could not call that scholar a “theologian.” The title theologian implies a deliberative thinker who criticizes with a keen mind and devout heart. Personal faith and therefore prayer is implied in McDonagh’s notion of theologian. 33

Prayer and morality are linked, according to McDonagh, to protect “the unity of Christian community and activity.” This protection is afforded through attention to the experience of prayer and community as “springboards of moral analysis.” McDonagh rejects any “prepackaged answers” served up by moralists who are really called to offer methods whereby Christians can make their own moral decisions. In directly attending to human experience and relationships, McDonagh finds the distinctive Christian response to moral living: it opens one to prayer. This attending to prayer calls for a moral theology which, McDonagh maintains, must apply to a “person in act” not to an act isolated from the person. This implies a narrative focus to

32. Ibid. 107-8.
33. See Ralph McInerny, “St. Thomas: Contemplative in the University,” Communio 14 (Winter 1987) 373-84. McInerny remarks: “Thomas recalls that judgment is the mark of the wise and then distinguishes two sorts of judgment which give rise to two senses of wisdom. One might judge through inclination . . . as when one possessing a virtue judges what that virtue requires insofar as he is inclined to such things. And he cites Aristotle to the effect that the virtuous man is the measure in human affairs. Another mode of judgment is by way of knowledge . . . as one learned in moral science can judge the acts of a virtue even if he does not possess that virtue” (p. 376).
ethics rather than an "atomistic discontinuous sequence of discrete human acts as analyzed in the manuals." In moral deliberation it is not the rule which is absolute but rather the value which it expresses. This value is always historically conditioned, and thus the moralist must proceed with humility in definitively naming evil in some universal and trans-historical fashion. The moral life is not based on abstract laws and values imposed upon the person, but rather, on the guiding force of conscience. This integrity is not exerted in some extreme autonomy but rather in the context of defining the human "in relation to and in independence of (freedom, intellect) God."

This understanding of the human condition highlights the ultimate mystery of humanity’s existence and undermines a morality based on fear of punishment and/or external rewards. The good life as beloved of God becomes its own reward. God is not a threat to human integrity. This free yet dependent stance of the human becomes an essential factor in determining the role of prayer in moral discernment.

McDonagh calls for a moral pneumatology in the areas that relate to questions of discernment and one’s conscience. He also calls for, but does not elaborate upon, an explicit form of "community conscience," which is similarly Spirit-dependent. Broadly speaking, a call for explicit theological articulation of the role of the Spirit protects moral theology from collapsing into a purely juridical structure.

McDonagh assesses the traditional relationship between prayer and moral theology to be extrinsic in nature. To pray was seen as a moral duty, but there was little exploration regarding prayer’s role in moral decision-making except in the area of vocational discernment.

The predominant links were extrinsic in moral obligations to pray or in the use of prayer to obtain light and strength to fulfill one’s moral obligations, although in the prayer to obtain forgiveness the

34. McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 30.
35. Ibid. 37.
connection was understood in a more intrinsic way, but the potential for intrinsic connection in the 'morning offering' was scarcely adverted to.\textsuperscript{37}

The morning offering was seen as the prayer which reflects the intention of the Catholic to "consecrate" his or her daily events to God.\textsuperscript{38} This duty to pray, and dedicate one's day to God, is obligatory due to the Christian's identity as a person who is one with Christ. A follower of Christ ought to explicitly communicate with God in order that the moral life can be maintained and grow. "The care for one's own morality will also have to be expressed in prayer: evaluating with the Lord what is meant to be life in him. The duty of prayer is, therefore, connected at root with the duty to care for one's own ethical responsibility."\textsuperscript{39}

This personal relationship with God as expressed in prayer finds agreement in McDonagh's thought as well. For him the whole of the moral life is summed up in love of Christ. This love is not expressed simply as ritual but as a developed virtue in a process of conversion.\textsuperscript{40} The movement in moral theology away from external authority to one of interior authority opens up a space for prayer in ethical discernment. For McDonagh "this space" is conditioned upon respecting the preciousness of others. In seeing the other as gift one can be prepared to receive the ultimate Other as well. In this web of relatedness between God, self, and other, "the intrinsic relationship between morality and prayer is to be found." The dignity of the other person in our midst, who carries (from our perspective) a moral summons, resides in and is derived from God. "So the moral response to the human other can and should by its own inherent dynamism expand into a response to the ultimate other; it can and should expand into prayer."\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37} McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 44.
\textsuperscript{39} Sergio Bastianel, Prayer in the Christian Moral Life (Middleground, England: St. Paul, 1988) 34.
\textsuperscript{40} Enda McDonagh, "Moral Theology: The Need for Renewal," Irish Theological Quarterly 31 (1964) 277.
\textsuperscript{41} McDonagh. Doing the Truth, 51.
McDonagh notes two perennial temptations within this context of a prayer-imbued moral theology. The first temptation is to distort humanity’s union with God by being blind to the fact that, at least explicitly, not every person who is open and sensitive to his or her fellow human as displayed in ethical behavior is also open to God in prayer.

One can become quite ethical indeed without a theological focus. Even Christians can reduce their moral lives to “good neighborliness.” In this way the penultimate, our fellow humans, have become ultimate. “Such temptation can only be avoided by insisting on the true meaning of the penultimate as derived from, dependent on, and directed towards the ultimate. And for this, of course, direct and explicit attention to . . . prayer . . . is essential.”

The other temptation McDonagh mentions is to overlook the penultimate in favor of the ultimate. In this case the human in his or her historical presence is bypassed in favor of some encompassing fixation upon the Divine, the Eternal. The other person in this situation is simply reduced to a means to an end as the moral person aims toward God alone. This God, however, McDonagh notes, is not the God of Jesus Christ, creation and salvation. To suppress the other is to suppress a main factor in Christianity’s vision of reality. The human stands in relationships to self, other, and God and love is not known if any one of these is suppressed, objectified as a means, or denied.

For the Christian, this concentration upon love of the other, upon seeing the gift potential within all others, even the enemy, is an attitude which inculcates authentic prayer. The search for the gift potential within every human is an act of reaching out for the divine mystery in the image of God, the human person. “Explicit prayer which one then voices for peace and reconciliation is the translation into words of what the search for God involves, as one seeks the true gift of humanity in one’s enemy.” Taking seriously the embedded, historical, real presence of the person before us and

42. Ibid. 53.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid. 56.
the mysterious, loving presence of the transcendent God is the 
balance which opens the Christian to genuine prayer. Response 
to presence, both divine and human, is fundamental to 
McDonagh’s vision of ethics and prayer. At this level, he sees 
prayer and moral behavior as potentially mutually interpenetrating 
from within a stance of openness to and respect for the other.45

Even more explicitly, McDonagh claims that the distinctive 
element in Catholic moral theology is the “inner connection” 
between prayer and moral living.46 However, McDonagh is quick 
to retain morality’s “relative autonomy” from faith and endeavors 
to respect moral questions on “their own human terms as they 
occur in experience.”47 This relative autonomy is an expression of 
the Irish moralist’s natural law method. By retaining respect for 
natural law, McDonagh bids one to attend to human experience 
as the only context within which prayer can function. He wants to 
give “real human roots” to Christian spirituality.

These roots take their nourishment from paying attention to 
others (asceticism) and their needs. Further, they can be watered 
through tolerance (openness to others’ differences), humility 
(interdependence, dependence upon God as our authority) and 
the traditional evangelical counsels, understood as a new freedom 
to love (celibacy), sharing a community of goods (poverty), and 
availability to others (obedience).48

In the context of social ethics, McDonagh again affirms the 
essential nature of prayer in Christian moral living. He wants to 
redefine the traditional dichotomy between prayer and action 
while maintaining its tension. In this way he avoids encouraging 
the status quo of oppression by the rich and the victimization and 
impotency of the poor in their unanswered prayers of liberation. 
He explains his vision of prayer:

45. Ibid. 64.
46. McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 60. See also Edward Schillebeeckx, 
“Silence and Speaking about God in a Secularized World,” in The 
Spirit and Power of Christian Secularity, ed. Albert Schlitzer (Notre 
Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969) 179.
47. McDonagh, Doing the Truth, 61.
48. Ibid. 64-75.
The most remarkable feature of prayer is not what it does for man but what it does ‘for’ God. It allows him to enter his own world most intimately and properly by entering the minds and hearts of human beings. The first liberating effect of human prayer is its liberation of God, permitting him to be himself in the intimacy of human hearts. Letting God be himself in his own world is the critical achievement of genuine prayer.  

However, this liberation of God to be God is fulfilled only if prayer is accompanied by activity which promotes justice. Faith as prayer and faith as activity promoting and embodying moral virtues is the context “in which God can express himself.” The relationship between prayer and social ethics resides in the unity of values inherent in both spheres. These commonly shared values are identified and rooted in the dignity and mystery of the human person.

Regarding a person with worth and respect can open one to prayer. “The qualities which characterize this recognition of the other as irreducible gift and value are the qualities of thanksgiving and humility and respect and awe. They are the qualities of prayer.” Prayer is seen as a way to transcend the exigencies of time, history and space yielding a more sensitive and objective view of any circumstance and condition. Of course, McDonagh does not reduce prayer to a merely technical tool even though he sees it yielding fruits of objectivity and clarity. This is true because the nature of prayer is to be in communion with God.

McDonagh also maintains that it is impossible to pray authentically while one is perpetrating unjust conditions in society. In this state, one not only engages in unethical behavior but “blasphemes” God by one’s hypocrisy. Overcoming oppression and forgiving the oppressor is the two-edged work of developing a spirituality of prayer in social ethics.

49. McDonagh, Church and Politics, 80. See also Making of Disciples, 101.
50. McDonagh, Church and Politics, 82.
51. Ibid. 82.
52. Ibid. 84.
53. Ibid. 86-87. Regis A. Duffy has made similar connections between prayer and ethical behavior in the context of liturgy; see Real
The exchange and reverence between person and person, and persons and their God is further rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. McDonagh sees Jesus as God’s point of breakthrough toward his people and from his people toward God. The appropriation of discipleship occurs when one acknowledges Jesus as the being where divine-human intercourse occurs. This discipleship is personal and one enters a dialogue with Jesus in the context of the New Testament vision and values. Since the Second Vatican Council, McDonagh believes that it is possible to see Jesus Christ as being both the starting point for moral theological reflection and the summation of any of its conclusions. However, he laments that moral theology still does not know how, or has discovered it to be impossible, to involve Christ and symbols such as the cross in explicit moral discernment.

What is at issue here, however, is not the adequacy of the (non-theological) moral analysis or the soft-headedness of the theological, but the recognition that most moral analyses and moral theologians operate with categories and modes of argument that seem to owe nothing to Christian faith or theology.  

McDonagh sees his focus upon prayer and devotion to Jesus as a way of ending any isolation between the great Christian mysteries of creation, incarnation, Trinity, redemption and resurrection and Christianity as a way of life. “At least the primacy of a theoretical dogmatic theology uninfluenced by the practical needs of the time and from which a practical or moral theology derives, is no longer unquestionable or unquestioned.” In utilizing the hermeneutical theme of discipleship McDonagh hopes to emphasize the dynamic element of moral discernment, thus overriding any sense that one

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can neatly move from principles to application. He does not wish to subordinate praxis unduly under theory or principle, but to have the moral agent remain free and open to discern the moral adventure.  

As a theology of the praxis of discipleship, moral theology will be once again properly theological. In seeking to understand discipleship in and through praxis and reflection on it, the moral theologian is engaged in discerning and promoting the inbreaking kingdom . . . the discernment and presentation of some grasp of God himself. 

The practice of worship and prayer is the most explicit activity of responding to God’s presence and of “grasping” it. The worship of the disciple in liturgy forms the archetype for all prayer. Remembering one’s identity is a significant factor in Christian worship as one is drawn into a representation of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, thus enabling the disciple to worship the Father. In the act of being loved by God, the person’s human identity is confirmed.

McDonagh identifies four essential elements of worship which he claims occur in the moral life as well: celebration, remembering, identity and mystical experience. In celebrating the presence of others in our lives we deepen and become more fully aware of our identity. It is this awareness of God’s presence in liturgy, and by remembering it in daily life in the encounter of others, that one is potentially ushered into awe, wonder and ecstasy. Worship, like all prayer, opens one up to the Divine. Moral behavior likewise opens one up to the other and carries the potential for divine encounter as well. Acute sensitivity to another’s presence is the connection between prayer and moral living. McDonagh understands this presence as being the mystical element in morality.

Further he understands the mystical element to involve the experience of grace, of receiving the gift of God himself. This

56. Ibid. 28-30.
57. Ibid. 37.
58. Ibid. 39.
59. Ibid. 40-41, 45.
receiving is held in tension with the normal way of understanding the moral life as achievement or task. Gift and task become the basic tension of life as McDonagh sees it. The tension can never be resolved, but with an attitude of prayer a person can be grateful for "and cooperate with this basic structure of human existence as it derives from and tends towards God." The human person in our midst is a good sign of this basic structure of human existence as the other is both given to us (gift) and gives to us (task).

Any sharing in the experience of grace is specified in the liturgy as a sharing in the life of Christ. This participation in Christ’s life is not simply a role play but a formative intimacy with the very life-source of Christianity itself. Worship forms character and shapes identity and even further, McDonagh asserts, holds resources for moral understanding in “the more precise demands of different situations.”

The sense then of the other, of the holy which liturgy and prayer define and refine, sheds a glow of light on all our relationships and their demands. This prayer-sense provides a sensitivity to people and their needs which can and should forcefully influence our moral judgments and responses.

Prayer and worship can function as a source of moral understanding but this is influenced by the degree of fidelity one has to the moral life. Public worship is only as good, as effective, as the moral lives of the worshippers. What then is the influence of prayer and worship upon moral understanding? According to McDonagh, in the context of liturgy, public prayer offers “goals, values, standards and critique, insight, motivation, prophetic witness and empowerment to repentance.” McDonagh claims

60. McDonagh, “Moral Theology: The Need for Renewal,” 269-82. This is one of McDonagh’s earliest essays which explicates his focus on life as invitation and response over against Christian living as obedience to law.
61. McDonagh, Making of Disciples, 43.
62. Ibid. 46.
63. Ibid. (emphasis added).
64. Ibid. 50.
that the prophetic witness of public worship prevents one’s moral life from becoming shallow. However, the content of this witness is not to harden into law exclusively. Moral truth holds primacy over moral law and the imposition of this law.

The primary foundation of the moral life resides in what McDonagh calls “doing the truth.” Through public worship we are provided with access to “the primordial and normative doing of Jesus.”

This ‘doing’ of Jesus, only properly grasped in our own ‘doing’ of discipleship, provides the fundamental and normative moral truth for Christians but it cannot be reduced to simply legal formulation or even fully grasped conceptually . . . as a charter of truth to be done.66

The role of moral imagination as described by McDonagh is given a limited yet radical role in moral response. Jesus’ life accessed through liturgy becomes the touchstone for creative moral responses in society. Imagination is seen as a function of remembering and participating in the values and vision of Jesus. It is the community of the church which molds and fashions, and ultimately recognizes as true, any imaginative moral understanding of an individual choice or activity.66 This choice or activity in the concrete is very definitely affected by worship, according to McDonagh. Despite any misgivings to the contrary by other moralists McDonagh believes that prayer and worship so affect a person that this encounter with the divine “illuminates” moral decision-making in “endless ways.”67 Attending to prayer regains the authentic state of moral decision-making in all its provisionality as opposed to an exclusively rationalist or legalist ethic.

There are no strict material norms which public worship gives rise to. From liturgy’s sacramental nature broad principles of respect for the dignity of creation and the body are produced. Further, McDonagh detects within public worship a ritual which

65. Ibid. 51.
66. Ibid. 52.
67. Ibid. 53.
undermines "exaggerated individualism." "The praxis and consciousness, developed in liturgy, of the community as a community of persons and of the person as person in community offers a basis and source . . . for moral living and analysis which transcend any individualism or collectivism."\textsuperscript{68}

The theme of public worship also highlights the coming kingdom of God as being a seed in the present which will flower eschatologically. This eschatological kingdom once again reminds the worshipper of the provisional nature of moral decision-making and achievement. For McDonagh, the kingdom is also the theological entrance into the field of social ethics. "To pray is to seek the coming of the kingdom, the achievement of its values in the society in which we live."\textsuperscript{69} These values of the kingdom are a complete fulfillment of our human condition. For McDonagh these values seem analogous to the political notion of common good, while having an explicit theological referent. McDonagh is interested in defining an intrinsic connection between prayer and social ethics. Primarily, he sees this connection in the shared vision of faith and politics. This vision is to admit more and more of the different, of the other, into one's reality. In efforts made against exclusion and discrimination one finds both the best of faith and the best of politics. Prayer may prevent politics from being reduced to an ideology, and conversely, politics is the only way prayer can "fulfill its tasks of liberating God into his own world."\textsuperscript{70}

CONCLUSION

The reflections of Enda McDonagh on the role of prayer in moral theology represent an explicit faith appropriation of his understanding of the structure of the moral "call" itself. This call

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. 56.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. 103.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid. 111. In allowing the another into one's sphere of reference without prejudice McDonagh is not advocating some relativistic or subjectivist perspective on moral living. He makes it clear that one is to call the other away from evil and toward love (p.116).
is perceived in the presence of another and carries with it the obligation to respond to this person with respect and prudence. In doing so, one acknowledges that the other is not to be reduced to an object nor to be seen as an extension of oneself, but rather, in fact is "another world." The other person is the opening to the ultimate other, and reverencing the presence of the other as gift is preparation for receiving the ultimate Other in a similar manner. Similarly, God's personal indwelling presence softens the hardness of heart which prevents the ethical treatment of others among us. For McDonagh, prayer involves a receptivity to "presence" which bears fruit in ethical behavior.