The Contributions of Scholarly Methodology to Matt. 5:17-48 for the Popular Conception of Sacred Scripture: Matthean Redaction and Literary Style as Dramatically Hyperbolic in Moral Pedagogy

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College and the Biblical Department of the Toronto School of Theology
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Abstract

Modern scholarship has virtually no influence on how scripture is approached and understood by the general populace—for whom biblical verses, understood as divine writ, are generally interpreted and applied with a literalistic simplicity.

A prime example for illustrating this problem is found in Matt. 5:17-48. Here, severe commands, concerning a range of ethical topics, are offered in absolute terms. Scholarly methods suggest the passage was intended as a unit of hyperboles, built upon surpassing the righteousness of prominent Jewish groups. Thus, critical methodology can temper the severity of the commands in Matt. 5:17-48, offering a viable way of interpreting the teachings.

This work is intended to encourage the academy to remain cognizant of what its knowledge can offer to the general populace. Scholarship can broaden the understanding of mainstream Christianity concerning any number of biblical issues—facilitating intellectual growth, thoughtful reflection and more fruitful dialogue.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Author's Orientation

This project reflects perspectives that have been cultivated through a long process of intellectual and personal development. The underlying position—that Christian scripture should not be interpreted literally, and that the divine quality ascribed to it by believers must denote a deeper, subtler, more abstracted reality than merely straightforward imperatives—was discovered through a long arduous journey (as only the most worthwhile discoveries are). Being passionately committed to my faith, and deeply involved in a church community, during the very influential and formative years of late-teenaged life and those of early adulthood, I approached the scriptures with fervent intensity. Likewise, the morality found therein was applied with similar rigor and uncompromising severity.

With this orientation, alongside a naturally inquisitive mind and inclinations toward intellectual pursuits, came incremental gains in theological knowledge and scholarly perspectives. However, given that a devoted Christian and relatively uninformed inquirer tends to find information and guidance in readily available popular theology and broadcast media, the vast majority of the subject-matter explored by me and others like me was of an apologetic or catechetical character. Without the knowledge gained through access to modern biblical and theological scholarship, nor any confident sense of where to begin pursuits of a more intellectual nature, my passion was adamantly applied in affirming truths of my faith while defending it against critique or attack—authentic, perceived, conjured-up or otherwise.

With the passage of time, continued accumulation of knowledge, and the evolution of critical-thinking that accompanied my undergraduate studies, I was forced to re-examine my positions
and certainty concerning a great many things. Among these was my understanding of biblical texts—a fundamental aspect of my faith—and the way in which divine truth is conveyed through them.

Having been born and raised very near to the Canadian/U.S. border and the major American city of Detroit, it is not irrelevant that a constant factor in my development was exposure to American Christian media and Fundamentalism. The culture of devout Christianity in the immediate region, spanning various denominations, is significantly influenced by these forces. At the same time, though local cultural nuances are certainly a constant and immutable factor, I believe the issue is not strictly limited to one area. There exist some prominent common threads of Christian culture that carry beyond specific regions; this being facilitated, in no small part, by mass media and certain staples of the religion’s beliefs—allowing for a general discussion pertaining to the broader civilization. Though exceptions always exist, and it would be both short-sighted and narrow-minded to submit that every individual Christian, or group, completely conforms to stereotypic views and characteristics in all ways, at all times, the broad permeation of culture allows for discussing general traits and common views.

This is exactly what is facilitated by the sweeping influence of mass media, the promulgation of printed Christian texts, radio broadcasting and televangelism. The far-reaching effects of mass communication, with regard to popular Christian beliefs and perceptions, results in the disintegration of clearly defined local or regional boundaries, with regard to general beliefs, perceptions and practices, so that trends can be observed and generalizations accepted—as long as the acknowledgment of anomalies and exceptions persists simultaneously. Therefore, while the locale of my personal development is a significant motivation for referring to and citing material in the next chapter—wherein the cultural influence of the Bible and fundamentalist uses
of it in America play a prominent part—it should also be recognized that a great deal of
Canadian culture is also heavily influenced by American media and culture. This is supported by
the fact that most of the available bibliography on the subject, even in the library system of a
major Canadian university, tends to focus on these issues in America.

While some differences certainly exist between the mainstream cultures of the U.S. and Canada,
there are enough similarities, particularly with regard to the Bible and Christianity, that
American patterns are useful to provide a general context for the discussion of this thesis. It is
simply worth noting that proximity and exposure to this culture may have made me more aware
of its prominent influence, along with related conventions of Christian culture that have a
tendency to transcend regional boundaries when contributing to, or forming characteristics of
Christian ideology, identity and praxis.

In any case, the place of the Bible within Christian culture, history, theology and teaching is so
immense and complex that it would take decades of work and dozens of careers to carry out a
complete analysis of my subject in this thesis. At the same time, given that the subject matter of
this work is examined with a specific focus on popular theology and other common notions that
prevail amidst the general believing Christian public, there exists the potential for making
unnecessary, or inaccurate generalizations, or stereotypes. An attempt has been made to
minimize this, I hope, by narrowing the investigation and focusing on the particular matter of
how to interpret moral imperatives in one well-known passage.

Thus, this thesis attempts to raise awareness concerning only one facet of the general topic:
namely, what established scholarly methods can contribute to the widespread popular
interpretation of biblical teachings as being, basically, straightforward, simple and absolutely
binding—otherwise termed a “literal” approach to the text. In this way, academic scholarship should be encouraged to engage both its immediate and general social context more directly, thereby becoming enabled to make contributions to the lives of so-called “regular people.” Modern historical-critical insight can be the correcting tool from which such a traditional, popular, literal interpretation of Christian scripture would benefit. Take, for example, Matt. 5:17–48.
Chapter 1.2
Nature of the Problem

A chasm, of one kind or another, appears to exist between the modern scholarly community’s investigation of biblical texts, and the way in which the Christian Bible is approached and perceived by Christians elsewhere outside of the academy. The source of this divide is, in part, a fundamental difference in methods and motivations for study between the different arenas. Academic Biblical Scholarship approaches the text analytically to discover, among other things, the historical, theological and socio-cultural atmosphere in which the author was immersed—such environmental factors having great influence over the production of the original text. This contrasts with the general intention elsewhere in popular Christian culture to find immediately applicable moral guidance, an uplifting spiritual/emotional experience, or to affirm beliefs about metaphysical truth. Scholarship tends to ignore these aspects almost entirely in favour of critical thought and intellectual inquiry; however, intellectual pursuits often neglect to address how scrutinizing the documents with critical methodology can produce meaningful insights for the majority of Christian believers.

This thesis will, first, provide evidence of the aforementioned divide and, then, demonstrate how, in my opinion, it might be constructively improved or transcended. This will be done by examining interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount (hereafter: SM) in the Gospel of Matthew and, more specifically, its so-called antitheses in Matt. 5:17-48 as my "Test-Case.” Before undertaking an in-depth examination of how particular aspects of Matt. 5:17-48 tend to be used in popular theology and comparing this to a scholarly approach to the text, however, it will be beneficial to briefly discuss the general context of the larger issue in modern North America.

In the common culture of North America’s majority population—the underlying, unspoken
schema of values and principles that direct a shared perception of reality—the Bible is generally understood as a holy book. While the devotion to traditional spiritual doctrine and adherence to, what would now be considered, conservative moral codes has waned, the Christian Bible bears connotations of spiritual meaning and moral importance. Despite secularization and increasing cultural trends moving away from traditional values and faith perspectives, North America’s Christian heritage still causes the sacred scriptures of this religion to retain a place of prestige and respect; even for those who no longer consider the Bible sacred or of any metaphysical significance, not to mention sub-cultures that actively oppose or repudiate its values or worth, the general knowledge that it was once the staple of religious and moral norms for the overwhelming majority of the Western world, and common understanding regarding how many strongly believing Christians approach its writings, form a deeper foundation of cultural understanding concerning it. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, a literal interpretation of Christian Scripture facilitated by this orientation is, by no means, limited to the modern Western world; instead, it has been a constant throughout Christian history. Though in what immediately follows the role of American Fundamentalism is examined as exemplifying the issue, this use of scripture as described would seem to have permeated every denomination and era of the religion.

For believers, the sacredness of the text, commonly understood as “the Word of God,” typically facilitates an approach to the Bible as though it were the straight-forward and clear utterance of divinity to humanity, intended for direct application in the modern world. This conception of biblical texts, though, frequently results in any verses that might pose a challenge to it being outright ignored or explained away unsatisfactorily. Scripture itself carries connotations of divine authority and unchallengeable immutability, making the common believer intuitively averse to acknowledging error, contradiction, or problematic aspects of the text.
Christian culture and media also have a considerable impact on how the Bible is understood by the rest of society—even by those who have no interest in spiritual or theological matters. For, though many may not respect or cherish the Bible as believers do, their perception of the book and the religion is influenced through the many widespread examples of Christians using it.

1. The Bible in the Common Culture

The Bible maintains a place of prominence and reverence in North America. Through cultural processes—the subtle, primarily unspoken transmission of meaning and understanding via simplistic categorization—biblical texts remain associated with a sense of the sacred, moral authority and metaphysical truth for the majority of persons. This norm has been inherited and sustained from previous generations, wherein the Bible was overtly declared to hold these qualities, though little interest in it may have existed:

Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don’t read it. And because they don’t read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates. Virtually every home in America has at least one Bible. Four Americans in five believe the Bible is the literal or inspired word of God, and many of those who do not, still regard it as the basis for moral values and the rule of law. . . .[A] solid one-third [of Americans] believe that “holding the Bible to be God’s truth is absolutely essential for someone to truly know God.” But despite the large percentage of Americans who believe the Bible is the word of God, only one-third of Americans read it at least once a week. . . . This lack of Bible-reading explains why most Americans know so little about the Bible that is the basis of the faith of most of them.¹

While literal belief in the Bible as inerrant truth has declined, along with the belief that it is inspired by God, “. . . the vast majority of Americans respect [its] religious authority.”

Nevertheless, associating the Bible with literal religious truth remains a notable aspect of North American culture in general.

A significant factor in how the Bible is presented and understood in modern, North American culture lies in the history of Fundamentalism as a Christian ideology. Fundamentalist belief is intrinsically bound to the assertion that the Bible, as inerrant truth, holds no falsehood within its texts; for if one error, or falsehood, exists in it, all is subject to doubt and scrutiny. As a movement, “. . . it originated in North America and continues to flourish there, [being] a reaction against increasingly secularized politics as well as against the modern science and scholarship of the nineteenth century.”

According to Gerd Theissen, the Fundamentalist perspective can be characterized by: (1) “Rejection of historical-critical research into the Bible, that is, rejection of the general rational interpretation of the text.” (2) “A fight against the doctrine of evolution in favour of a creationism that interprets the Bible’s account of creation literally and rejects human descent from apes.” (3) “The defense of traditional morality, especially in opposition to women’s emancipation, abortion, and homosexuality.”

A stern commitment to the absolute truth of Christianity also results in Fundamentalism being avidly opposed to pluralism or relativism. By these points, Theissen distinguishes Fundamentalism from Evangelicalism, which he views as more moderate.

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5. Theissen, The Bible and Contemporary Culture, xvi.
6. Theissen, The Bible and Contemporary Culture, xvii.
7. Theissen, The Bible and Contemporary Culture, xvi.
All of these traits, though, stem from the basic Fundamentalist assertion that “. . . the Bible is . . . the ultimate repository of truth;”\(^8\) an aversion to critically examining the text, from an academic perspective, follows from this: “For fundamentalism, historical-critical research is seen as the great opponent. . . . [It] endures no critics who call it into question. . . . Fundamentalist and evangelical groups claim the Bible emphatically for themselves.”\(^9\) Therefore, Fundamentalism is most widely characterized by a “literal” interpretation of scripture\(^{10}\): “The logic of biblical inerrancy is palpable. If God is omniscient, and if he is the author of the scriptural text, it follows that the text cannot contain mistakes, whether in content or form. If it should be found to contain errors, through some indiscernible will of its author, it remains problematic that an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being should be content to allow errors to have come into existence in his written work.”\(^{11}\) Thus, any discrepancies or “problems” found within the text are placed at the feet of interpreters.\(^{12}\) Literal interpretation is the most common means by which a “proper” interpretation is recognized.\(^{13}\)

The claim to read the Bible literally, plainly and simply, inevitably leads to “writing” the text, whereby the preferred meaning is generated when convenient.\(^{14}\) Additional objections to the Fundamentalist approach can be cultivated through the logical difficulties, strained exegesis and inconsistencies in interpretation it facilitates\(^{15}\): “We would not go far wrong in saying that literalistic reading practices are virtually synonymous with the common reader’s approach to a text . . . . [Y]et, when hundreds of thousands of readers are following their own common sense, it

\(^8\) Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 36.
\(^9\) Theissen, *The Bible and Contemporary Culture*, xvii.
\(^12\) Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 36.
\(^15\) Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 77.
becomes woefully apparent that such sense is not so ‘common’ after all.”16 These variations, though, are overlooked through faith in a specific interpreter, whose function is largely unrecognized as such17: “One cannot adequately appreciate the power of extra-textual authorities, such as pastors or commentators, without recognizing that the interpretative presuppositions upon which their pronouncements are based are largely invisible to the person in the pew.”18 In response to the question of whether Fundamentalism is the authority of the Word or the interpreter, Boone answers that it is both and neither: “The biblical text is prescribed by the preacher’s interpretations and in turn prescriptive of them.”19

This perspective on Fundamentalism highlights how a text, assigned sacred authority, is elevated above critical investigation; this is a problematic process that is resolved by embracing one interpretation as the authentic meaning: “The authority of fundamentalism arises from the intricate interplay and complex interrelation of the Bible and those who interpret it. . . . Its compelling power is a function of its success in portraying itself as the clear and plain exposition of the words of God himself. . . . It makes no sense for God’s book to have mistakes in it, and the fundamentalist says so.”20 The validity of these observations does not end with the label of Fundamentalism. For, the rise of telecommunications in the twentieth century has facilitated the promulgation of a Fundamentalist approach to scripture into the general populace.

The Role of Televangelism:

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a series of events and developments that

contributed to a unique atmosphere wherein a perpetuation of the Fundamentalist interpretation of scripture would thrive. Technological breakthroughs in broadcast communications provided new opportunities for evangelists, while a post-World War II society witnessed revived religious interest and church attendance. Such a climate saw the success of broadcast religion. From the outset, Fundamentalists took full advantage of technological innovations in their impassioned quest to sell religion to the masses. Though the pioneering inventiveness of Fundamentalists and Protestant liberals in creating new forms of evangelism saw a decline after the first-half of the twentieth-century, they prepared a path for the legacy of televangelism to live-on.

Economic prosperity and continuing technological advancement in the 1950’s and 1960’s created a dynamic atmosphere wherein various forms of Christian broadcasting became more commonplace, while interest and attendance at churches continued to rise. “Neo-Evangelicals” took to mass media with considerable success and, though critical of Fundamentalism in some respects, maintained many sympathies with its views. Remnants of traditional Fundamentalism subtly persisted within Evangelical Protestantism, which is especially pertinent considering its enduring success and influence since the 1970’s. Those who strictly adhere to the tenets of Evangelicalism—built upon Fundamentalism—may be a minority in North America; however, “. . . Evangelicalism is firmly representative of the American middle class” at least in terms of

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formal, religious profession or identification. This is of significance given that this middle-class forms the majority, which determines general cultural perspectives—including biblical interpretation: “For this reason Evangelicalism has gained widespread public acceptance.” In such an environment, the bold involvement of Evangelicalism in secular culture has generated a lasting vitality for its own worldview.

Building upon the foundation laid by Fundamentalism in broadcast medium, televangelism moved further to the Right as the decades passed by. Frankl uses the term “electric church” to characterize “. . . commercial religious programs produced for television and radio by evangelical and usually fundamentalist organizations.” More than an alternative form of religious “gathering,” this is seen as a unique phenomenon that “. . . has become a major sociopolitical movement. . . . Televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Robison have become opinion leaders for the New Christian Right . . . play[ing] a key role in [its] social and political agenda.” These organizations point to increasing moral laxity in secular culture and waning devotion as signs of social degradation requiring a revival and rededication to Christian values.

The Agenda of the Right:

In Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics Ralph Reed details the rise and fall of the Christian Coalition in American politics. He is frank, and up-front about

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30. Moore, Selling God, 244-7.
32. Frankl, Televangelism, 3-4.
33. Frankl, Televangelism, 4-5.
the agenda and influence of prominent Christians, such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, on
the Republican party during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Reed is open and clear about
hopes and ambitions of the Christian Right to continue influencing American politics and culture
for the future: “Our political agenda is based on the need to affirm the basic social and religious
values upon which the nation was built. Ours is largely a defensive movement.” Though
Republican and conservative Christians are differentiated by the author, their relationship is
presented as strategic and co-dependent: “[W]e wish to ensure that our movement will be
viewed in the years to come . . . as a long-term participant in American public life.” Reed
gives an insider’s witness that a great influence on society and culture is aspired toward by the
Christian Right, for whom a strong commitment to biblical principles is a priority.

Therefore, the Christian Right is both a religious and political force. Those who are adamantly
involved in the televangelism of the New Christian Right, both as producers of the message and
receivers, share a tremendous commitment and sense of purpose, which makes them a
considerable force in culture and politics. Though it experiences many setbacks and even
failures in striving for political support of its agenda, the movement remains an influential,
multifaceted force in politics that will persist. In the context of this discussion, its success is
relevant as the pervasiveness of a literal approach to scripture within this movement continues to
influence North American Christianity and the broader culture. Writing in the 1980’s, Hadden

34. Ralph Reed, Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics (New York:
35. Reed, Active Faith, 195.
36. Reed, Active Faith, 234-5.
37. Reed, Active Faith, 280.
38. Sara Diamond, Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right (New York:
Guilford Press, 1998), 237.
Fundamentalists Confront the World, edited by Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie, 379-94 (Lanham,
was accurate when concluding that “. . . one important fact has been almost completely missed by the media and intellectuals: The ‘kooky Fundamentalists’ . . . have already defined much of the agenda of this society for the foreseeable future, and therefore shaped the direction of American culture [italics added].”

2. The Bible in Scholarship

The scholarly exploration of the biblical texts through the historical-critical method (hereafter: HCM) stands in great contrast to the literal approach to scriptural interpretation, most readily associated with Fundamentalism in modern times. Scholarship immerses itself deeply in the puzzling or intellectually challenging attributes of biblical texts, submitting them to highly critical analysis to make reasonable and informed conclusions concerning authorship and intent.

Similar to those who study literature, history, philosophy or classical civilizations, scriptural writings are dissected by theologians to cultivate a vast array of knowledge and insights about biblical texts from various perspectives. Biblical verses are explored in terms of the historical and cultural context, the intention of the authors, literary styles and devices as well as immediate context and to the Bible as a whole. Through this approach, theological knowledge is enriched far beyond the often simplistic perceptions of mainstream society.

The HCM has given rise to various methods of critical analysis, which now fall under its umbrella. For example, Form Criticism arose in the 1920’s, Redaction in the 1950’s, and Semantic/Linguistics Criticism in the 1970’s. In general, the HCM gives a central role to the

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place of the author, while also considering culture, society, language and audience.44

Uncovering the intent of the author does not exhaust the potential meanings in the text; however, this is usually given prominence over others.45

In addition to the most common forms of the HCM, other academic developments have broadened scholarly approaches to scripture. Sociology, for example, has generated theories that analyze the author and audience to suggest that what an individual brings to a reading is far more important than what is read out of a document.46 While this has much application for modern, literal interpretation, it is also useful for examining the original social context of the writings. Such a perspective reveals that the agricultural and economic reality of the ancient Mediterranean led to a “present-oriented” culture. The future was determined in terms of immediate experience; for example, pregnancy meant that labour pains were forthcoming, and labour pains mean that childbirth is imminent. Such a cause-and-effect perspective, expecting immediate or short-term results, toward the common act of childbirth, permeated all of the elements of daily-life; in general, the concern was on the “here and now,” and what would immediately follow.47 Also, social characteristics of the time viewed conscience as a social perception, not an individual one; every person was understood on an in-group/out-group basis at all times, and every interaction with another group was a win/lose scenario.48 Such knowledge can offer considerable avenues through which biblical authors or their original audience can be explored.

47. For the preceding points see Malina, “Social-Scientific Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew,” 171.
The HCM looks toward “the world behind the text” but this is not exclusive; other ways of looking at the text are also permissible. No scholarship is complete, nor completely objective. For those concerned with the applicability of the texts to a modern audience, the HCM may seem of limited use; however, for those who maintain that what it means depends on what it meant, it is invaluable.\(^49\) In this way, it can be submitted that modern biblical scholarship and the views of common believers need not be mutually exclusive; the former can, and indeed should, inform the later— influencing spiritual insights gleaned from the text. While the HCM can certainly challenge faith, and may have the potential to ruin it, this is not necessitated by, nor an inevitable result of the methods. In fact, it can strengthen faith by opening-up new perspectives and a deepening appreciation for the ancient world wherein these religious truths were established.\(^50\)

The analytical methodologies of academic biblical-scholarship differ significantly from the “literalism” seen in traditional or popular Christianity, specifically insofar as such scholarship applies critical methodology with disciplined reason. Yet the knowledge and insights drawn from these can contribute to the theology, ethics and morality of the traditional Christian, fundamentalists and other “literal” interpreters of Christian scripture. In this way, a mutual benefaction is possible, here; popular methods can discover a more reasonable, viable and intellectual means of approaching scripture, while scholarship confronts the contributions its methods can make beyond the academy.

3. Moving Forward

From this point onward, the thesis focuses on Matt. 5:17-48 as exemplary for demonstrating the benefits of using scholarly historical-critical methodology to develop insights that would be

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50. For the preceding points see Hagner, “The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew,” 19.
applicable in correcting, or augmenting the popular approach to scripture. In this text, the biblical author uses forceful imperatives to cover a variety of ethical obligations. Several seemingly hyperbolic phrases are employed in this particular section, exemplifying the author’s tendency toward this form of expression when conveying the basic morality attributed to Jesus. Therefore, scholarly methods would suggest seeing the passage as a complete unit with hyperbolic commands, pointing to an underlying moral disposition that is not merely or primarily a matter of the individual statements. Thus, the imperatives are not intended literally, but as moral guidelines.

The common believer may receive them as literal orders directly from the divinity to humanity, to be rigorously followed without exception. However, the extreme quality of these commands is such that adhering to them literally would require serious modification to modern Western living; otherwise, the problems which they pose must simply be ignored—as evidenced by the lack of Christians walking the earth with severed hands and gouged-out eyes, believing that moderate anger warrants eternal punishment, or willingly embracing complete poverty in response to material disputes (Matt. 5:22,29-30,40). If the challenge of literal application is acknowledged, the problem becomes how these teachings can be approached as spiritually enlightening when subjected to human judgement and “common sense.” A function of scholarship here can be offering depth to the passage, revealing the theological motivations for the author of the Gospel of Matthew, and illustrating that Matt. 5:17-48 is aimed at moral foundations more than individually binding imperatives.

The thesis will proceed by examining popular works of theology dealing with selected elements of Matt. 5:17-48. In the chapters that follow, treatments of Matt. 5:27-30,38-48 will serve as the basis for discussion, before investigating the larger unit, through scholarly methods, as an
integral and neglected aspect of interpretation. Briefly surveying selected ancient instances of interpreting verses from Matt. 5:17-48, before investigating modern uses of the teachings, in Part Two, will help to illustrate the depth of the literal approach to scripture and the breadth of its influence in Christian history.

First, it will be shown that a modern literal interpretation is, in fact, not a novel means for approaching scripture; selected ancient writings on aspects of Matt. 5:17-48 suggest that isolating verses and literal interpretation has been the normal Christian approach to the Bible for much of the last two millennia before the intellectual innovation of modern scholarly methodology. This, then, will be confirmed by demonstrating that contemporary theological works intended to edify the general believing population have inherited this norm of scriptural interpretation. It may seem ideal to utilize the most popular and influential figures in Christian media and televangelism to exemplify the practice as previously discussed; unfortunately, however, the nature of such sources, and the brief appeal to a plethora of scattered verses that is characteristic of their scriptural citation, makes them unfit for an in-depth academic investigation of this kind. Instead, works that feature a more lengthy treatment of specific biblical verses and teachings derived therefrom will be used, as these offer the length of treatment required for academic investigation while remaining good examples of popular biblical interpretation intended for the believing populace.

In this way, it will be seen that interpreting specific biblical verses literally, while altogether ignoring or interpreting figuratively—that is, producing an abstracted meaning based on general principles—verses for which a literal interpretation is inconvenient due to moral severity or doctrinal conflict, among other things, is not a modern development. This practice, then, which also falls under the label of a “literal” reading of scripture, comes at the expense of considering
the broader context and is a long-standing practice; the identifying traits of which have endured despite all the other evident cultural differences that might exist among the different examples of it. Therefore, the traditional “ancient Christian” and modern “fundamentalist” interpretations of the Bible, however else they might be different from one another, share a common “literalism”—which is to say, not yet being thoroughly acquainted with the methods and insights of modern scholarship.

The third portion of the thesis will contrast the popular/pre-modern approach to scriptural texts with modern/scholarly practices. In so doing, the specific teachings examined through the lens of popular theology will be investigated by means of surveying scholarly insight on the same verses. Following this, the methods of Literary Criticism, Redaction Criticism and Textual Criticism will be used to investigate Matt. 5:17-48 as a whole; these particular methods of inquiry, being fundamentally different than popular theology, are ideal for illuminating the issue at hand.

Taken together, the methods and insights of biblical scholarship will build a weighty argument that the passage in question was intentionally structured as a complete unit utilizing hyperbolic imperatives. Therefore, its teachings should be read together with consideration of this pedagogical style, not be entirely isolated from others in the unit, and thus not necessarily be interpreted literally. Instead, acknowledging the author’s conscious effort to construct a passage of extremes and absolutes encourages cultivating a subtler morality from the text—discovering a schema for moral guidelines, rather than strict orders. In these ways, it will be demonstrated that intellectual methods both contrast with popular theology and also harbour the potential to offer much toward shared concerns and ultimate goals.
Chapter 2.1
Select Examples of Interpreting Matt. 5:17-48 in Christian History

A brief look at pre-modern approaches to the passage in question will demonstrate the ancient foundations of modern, popular perceptions of Christian scripture. Ancient interpretations of select verses from Matt. 5:17-48 suggest that a common approach to scripture in the past was one that reverently sought a straightforward ethical code from the text. Biblical verses were used as a means of affirming moral norms carrying divine authority, and were not diligently subjected to, what is now called, critical thought. Imperatives in Matt. 5:17-48 were taken with literal severity, establishing the perception of scripture inherited by modern believers. When exceptions to a literal understanding are recognized, this is not applied to a broader comprehension of the whole text.

The writings of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and an incomplete commentary on Matthew by an unknown author, address aspects of Matt. 5:17-48. Writing in an era when the canon for sacred texts was not, as of yet, officially dogmatized, and shared practices and traditions were heavily relied upon as measures for Christian conduct and belief, these writers drew from popular notions and their own insight to understand its “proper meaning.” These will help to demonstrate that early interpretations of scripture were typically void of the scholarly methods employed today, favouring a spiritual approach that provides the basis for the popular use of Christian scripture in modern times.


Clement of Alexandria lived in the second-half of the second century C.E.\(^{51}\) He was a convert to

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Christianity, likely from Stoicism.\textsuperscript{52} The diverse atmosphere in the commercial centre of Alexandria confronted him with a wide-range of beliefs and ideologies, which certainly affected his outlook.\textsuperscript{53} Relying on Christian scripture as an authority, The SM was among Clement’s favourite and most frequently cited areas of scripture (Matt. 5:1-7,29).\textsuperscript{54}

His treatment of Matt. 5:27-28, prohibiting lust, displays an understanding of the imperative as straight-forward and binding. Like other thinkers of the time, he sought balance between Gnosticism’s devaluing of creation, and maintaining a prudent outlook that did not legitimize fornication.\textsuperscript{55} Clement’s middle-ground was thought to be a viable alternative.\textsuperscript{56}

In the \textit{Stromateis}, Clement presents a literal interpretation of the prohibition against lust (Matt. 5:27-8).\textsuperscript{57} His rationale for treating this matter with such severity follows from the grammatical delivery of the imperative. Clement finds significance in Christ’s words “But I say to you . . .” contrasting with “. . . you have heard.” (Matt. 5:27-8); this is taken to emphasize the authority of Jesus and convey that “. . . the application of the commandment is more rigidly binding.”\textsuperscript{58}

Therefore, he is confident in using the verse to assert that everyone who looks with lust is under judgement (Exod. 20:17; Matt. 5:28).\textsuperscript{59} However, Clement fails to acknowledge the overall context of the passage as a series of hyperbolic antitheses, or even to recognize the verses within the immediate context of the teaching as a whole. For example, despite the literal interpretation

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ferguson, \textit{Clement of Alexandria}, 13-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Ferguson, \textit{Clement of Alexandria}, 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Obach, \textit{The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse}, 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Clement \textit{Stromateis} 3.11.71.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Clement \textit{Stromateis} 3.2.9.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Clement \textit{Stromateis} 2.14.61.
\end{itemize}
of forbidding lust, the following exhortation to prefer self-mutilation to this sin is ignored entirely (Matt. 5:29-30). One severe imperative is interpreted literally while another, albeit more difficult one, is not given any attention. Moreover, it is overlooked that the grammatical justification for his interpretation would apply to all of the antitheses, as it is the bedrock of their format.

A consideration of Clement’s treatment of Matt. 5:27-28 should not ignore the philosophy of Stoicism that influenced his own Christianity, as well as several theological giants of his era. Stoic principles asserted that human inclinations and aversions only operated in an orderly fashion when guided by right reason. For Stoic Christians, intercourse was a regrettable necessity to be engaged in reluctantly for its hindrance to piety and devotion.

Clement differed from other Stoics in that he contended intercourse done for procreation was permitted as the ideal. Stoic principles are evident as motivations for his literal application of Matt. 5:27-28 through the prioritization of reason and disciplined mastery of passion. For Clement, the Christian should be a person of will and self-control, not desire; so marriage and copulation should be done out of a will to procreate, and union from desire should not take place—even for the married couple. He saw Satan as the source of seeking sexual pleasure. Thus, the Christian should be free of all desire, even sexual desire for a spouse.

Clement concludes with a notion, not uncommon for ancient Christian writers, which would

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60. Clement Stromateis 3.7.57-8; 3.11.71.
62. Ferguson, Clement of Alexandria, 37.
64. Obach, The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse, 23.
become normalized in Catholic sexual ethics: intercourse is only for procreation.\textsuperscript{68} The lust of the eye, whether it occurs in the married or unmarried, is sinful because it does not wait for the proper moment of rational will.\textsuperscript{69} The unmarried should not be procreating and raising children outside of the marriage household; so, they cannot \textit{rightly} seek copulation out of the reason and will to procreate. The wedded couple, too, must master their passions through rational will, only coming together to achieve pregnancy.\textsuperscript{70} In this way, Clement’s philosophical disposition facilitates a literal interpretation of Matt. 5:27-8, forbidding all lust with moral severity.

Clement’s Stoic Christianity left a legacy of disdain for sexuality and marital intercourse in later Catholicism. Many of his other writings were all but ignored so that this became his lasting influence\textsuperscript{71}: “Marriage became a second-class lifestyle for those Christians who were not able to ‘contain’ their sexual desires.”\textsuperscript{72} This view rested upon his background in Stoic philosophy and a literal interpretation of Matt. 5:27-28.

Though this approach to sacred texts is not unique to Clement, and so cannot be seen as his own, he contributed nonetheless to normalizing his style of interpretation, what is now being called “literal.” His lasting influence as an early Christian writer became a staple in the heritage of Christianity, so that his use of scripture would continue to persuade later theologians who appealed to his perspective for guidance and wisdom. Consequently, verses from works that would eventually form the Christian Bible were selectively applied with literal fervour, and more challenging aspects, along with problems raised by them, were ignored.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Clement \textit{Stromateis} 3.11.71; Obach, \textit{The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse}, 25-6.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Clement \textit{Stromateis} 3.14.94.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Clement \textit{Stromateis} 3.7.57-8.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Obach, \textit{The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse}, 25-6.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Obach, \textit{The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse}, 26.
\end{itemize}
2. Tertullian on Submission (Matt. 5:38-42):

Tertullian lived in the later part of the second century C.E. and the first quarter of the third century C.E. 73 His writing was done while living in Carthage, a city about which he possessed considerable knowledge. 74 A convert to Christianity from paganism, both the simple fact that he was literate, along with the quality of his works and knowledge of literature, denotes that his education was considerable. 75 The skill of Rhetoric was an essential aspect of the educated life in the Roman Mediterranean of Tertullian’s time. 76 Its importance for Tertullian, and the rhetorical character of his works, means that his “treatises” should not be understood as comprehensive explorations of the topic at hand; rather, he penned documents to refute specific counter-claims to Christian belief and practice. Appreciating this is necessary for understanding his works. 77

Though he covers a wide-range of topics, Tertullian is primarily an apologist, producing polemics to refute heresy. 78 The important function of scripture to his faith is evident in the heavy reliance on it in his writings. Although he did not write exegetical commentaries, Tertullian uses scripture in nearly every chapter of his works. 79 Unlike philosophy, which Tertullian saw as human opinion, Christian morals were based on revelation which surpassed the former in its demands. 80 He was not opposed to philosophy altogether, but based his own version of it upon holy texts. 81 For Tertullian, scripture was not only authoritative evidence, but

75. Dunn, *Tertullian*, 5.
80. Tertullian *Apology* 45.3; Dunn, *Tertullian*, 32.
a source of intellect and truth; it was the epitome of all philosophical rationale, and contained the essence of truth that all reasoning aspired to obtain.\textsuperscript{82} The “proper interpretation” of a verse forms the basis for virtually every argument he presents, and scripture is often his primary evidence for argumentation.\textsuperscript{83}

Tertullian’s position on the use of scripture was elaborate. He believed that redactional additions were made by authoritative apostles, so longer books such as the gospels of Matthew and John took precedence over Mark and Luke.\textsuperscript{84} Heretics had no claim on scripture, as they twisted its meaning to suit their own agendas\textsuperscript{85}; instead, the living Tradition of faith, or the Regula Fidei, was the measure of proper interpretation.\textsuperscript{86} Though he recommended that believers not even engage in debate over scripture with heretics for this reason, he fails to adhere to this principle, as his treatises centre on such controversy.\textsuperscript{87} His method of interpretation relied on three basic principles that he often did not follow\textsuperscript{88}: first, scripture has a simple means of interpreting itself, so as to explain away all apparent inconsistencies\textsuperscript{89}; secondly, one text must always be interpreted in light of a greater number of texts\textsuperscript{90}; finally, later texts must agree with earlier ones.\textsuperscript{91} Tertullian would also employ typological or allegorical means of interpretation\textsuperscript{92}, or approach verses literally\textsuperscript{93}—depending on the nature of the verse or his purpose in using it.\textsuperscript{94} His

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 32-3.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 19, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Tertullian \textit{Against Marcion} 4.2.4; Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Tertullian \textit{On Prescriptions of Heretics} 15.3; 38.6; Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Tertullian \textit{On Prescriptions of Heretics} 19-21; 37; Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 21-2.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Calhoun, \textit{Scripture, Creed, Theology}, 158; Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Tertullian \textit{Against Praxeas} 18.2.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Tertullian \textit{Against Praxeas} 20.2.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Tertullian \textit{Against Praxeas} 20.3.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Tertullian \textit{Against Marcion} 3.5.3; 3.14.5,7; 3.24.2; 4.17.12; 5.4.8; 5.7.11; \textit{Against the Jews} 9.20; \textit{On Modesty} 8.11; \textit{On the Resurrection of the Flesh} 37.4; \textit{On the Soul} 35.2.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Tertullian \textit{Antidote for the Scorpion’s Sting} 13.4; \textit{Against Praxeas} 13.4; \textit{Against the Valentinians} 1.3; \textit{On the Resurrection of the Dead} 19-20; 26.1.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Dunn, \textit{Tertullian}, 22-3.
\end{itemize}
education in Oratory and Rhetoric made him skilled in making the most of his source material:
“A good debater will find a way to contradict and undermine what the person from the other side
has said. Tertullian would support whatever method of using the Scriptures would win his
argument for him.”

A paradox of interpretation is exemplified by Tertullian when commenting on Matt. 5:39-40,42.
He takes the imperatives to give to anyone who asks and to relinquish one’s cloak very
seriously. He finds additional virtue in being ready to give up one’s clothes as it proves disdain
for worldly goods, which cannot be served alongside God (Luke 16:13). Likewise, a physical
aggressor is not to be resisted (Matt. 5:39). The objective, here, is a form of passive-aggression, as victory over the oppressor is sought through submission. Tertullian proposes that
an abuser will be worn out by the patient submission of a believer. In this way, one can both
adhere to the imperatives of Matt. 5:39-40,42 with devout literalism and still overcome the
adversary.

Yet Tertullian also demonstrates a selective application of the very verses he takes so seriously.
While boasting that he is ready and willing to offer up his clothes in compliance with Matt. 5:40,
he simultaneously affirms that he would not submit to one whose motives are malicious, or who
opposes the faith. In the same way, his generosity—motivated by adhering to

Matt. 5:42—will not be exploited through threat, or intimidation.

95. Dunn, Tertullian, 23.
96. Tertullian Fuga: 13.1; Treatise VII-VIII.
97. Tertullian Treatise VII-VIII.
98. Tertullian Treatise VII-VIII.
99. Tertullian Treatise VII-VIII.
100. Tertullian Fuga 13.1.
Tertullian’s interpretation of Matt. 5:39-40,42 should not be considered as strictly literal. He readily notes conditions and exceptions for following these verses. Moreover, his comments on this text are unique among other interpreters considered in that his concessions do not involve conveniently ignoring other verses in the general context. Unlike Clement, for example, who affirms the prohibition against lust without acknowledging subsequent verses on mutilation, Tertullian’s conditions pertain to the very imperatives he is referencing. This peculiarity in his application of scripture can be clarified by considering his efficiency as a rhetorician.102

Conditional and elaborate thinking befits one skilled in rhetoric, which Tertullian is thought to have been.103 In Rhetoric, ethos served as an appeal to the character of the speaker, while logos appeals to rational argument, and pathos utilizes the emotions of the listener to gain support.104 Tertullian’s interpretation of Matt. 5:39,40,42 may reflect the ethos of persuasion that Aristotle outlines as an essential aspect of Rhetoric.105 In defending his own character, Tertullian presents himself as willing to follow the prescriptions of Matt. 5:39,40,42 to severe lengths; at the same time, however, he preemptively refutes any assault on his character, or defamation of his faith, by asserting he would not assist one who is antagonistic to Christianity, or allow coercive abuse to exploit him. This demonstration of rhetorical ethos reveals that his own faith was not limited to following select verses of scripture literally without critical analysis and modification; rather, Tertullian plainly intended, as a good Rhetor, to interpret Christian scripture to his own advantage.

103. Sider, Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian, 11-4.
105. Aristotle Rhetoric 1.2.1355b-1356a; Sider, Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian, 13.
3. Opus Imperfectum on Retaliation and Lust (Matt. 5:27-30,39):

The Opus Imperfectum is an incomplete commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by an unknown author. It is believed to have been penned in the later part of the fourth century C.E. in the region of Northern Greece. The author likely lived near Constantinople, within the boundaries of the Roman Empire but nearing its periphery, under great influence from Hellenistic culture.

The evident education of the author implies a high standing in the Church, though the particulars of this are uncertain. For centuries, the author was thought to be John Chrysostom; however, the piece does not match his style, and makes use of apocryphal books that Chrysostom would likely have been reluctant to use. More importantly, the comments on the meaning of original Greek vocabulary indicates that the Incomplete Commentary was originally penned in Latin. Thus, the author was probably not Chrysostom, and is left unidentified.

A surprising aspect of the author’s theology, given the commentary’s popularity in the Middle Ages, is the presence of subtle elements of mild Arianism found in select sections. Though some Arian and Pelagian perspectives have found their way into the text, however, they do not dominate the work. Thus, the author cannot rightly be called an Arian or Pelagian with confidence.

The Opus Imperfectum is not a polemical work. The author’s goal is to offer a thorough

108. Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xviii; Banning, Opus Imperfectum in Matthaueum, v.
109. For the preceding points see Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xvii-xviii.
111. Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xxii.
exegetical commentary on Matthew.\textsuperscript{113} It is titled “incomplete,” not only due to its unknown author, but because the commentary is missing any treatments of Matt. 8:14-10:15, Matthew 14-18, and deals with nothing after Matthew 25.\textsuperscript{114} The author relies on Origin’s allegorical method of interpretation at certain points, and even his exegesis of specific passages.\textsuperscript{115} Origin’s influence can also be seen in the strict morality, that might be considered “proto-Pelagian.”\textsuperscript{116} Despite its shortcomings, this work has had significant influence over some of history’s most notable theologians, including Aquinas, Abelard, Bonaventure, Geert Groote, John Wycliffe and Jan Huss.\textsuperscript{117} It is, therefore, of great importance to the history of biblical scholarship that should not be ignored.\textsuperscript{118}

The author of Opus Imperfectum demonstrates a literal interpretation of scripture when discussing the command to turn the other cheek to an assailant (Matt. 5:39). Not seeking retaliation for a wrong and, especially, not striking back is taken as a moral imperative beyond question.\textsuperscript{119} The author accepts these words with such fervour so as to make retaliation equal to apostasy: “If you strike back, then first you deny that you are a disciple of Christ, not by your words but by your deeds.”\textsuperscript{120} While this exemplifies a literal interpretation, it also epitomizes elevating one verse as a spiritual priority—making violation of it a denial of faith despite the lack of this punishment in the source material.

Such an interpretation was likely common in the Church of the second and third centuries C.E.,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Banning, Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeeum, vii.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xvii.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xxii.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xxii-xxiii.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xxiv.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, xxiv.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, 106-8.
\item Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, 107.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
as Luz points out that many pre-Constantine Christians prohibited joining the army.\textsuperscript{121} However, it is important to note that, while the author expects the believer to avoid physical acts of retaliation without question, a spirit of retaliation persists in the form of hoping for divine retribution. The author presents a hope that God will avenge the wronged Christian, and this is used as incentive for the individual to resort to pacifism. For, in hitting-back one avenges the wrong and, thereby, nullifies the divine wrath that would otherwise await the wrongdoer.\textsuperscript{122} Thus, for the author for the \textit{Opus Imperfectum}, non-retaliation is both absolutely necessary to maintain one’s Christian status, and the very means for assuring a far worse punishment for the attacker than physical retaliation could ever inflict.

While the admonition to non-retaliation is taken very literally, the author also demonstrates the selective and convenient application of this method of interpretation characteristic of those reverently seeking moral maxims from the text. When discussing the prohibition against lust, self-dismemberment is not taken literally (Matt. 5:29-30); rather it is interpreted by emphasizing the “right” hand and foot. These are taken to mean the inclinations of the soul and not the flesh. Thus, the righteous are expected to cut-off sinful inclinations from the soul, and in this way hinder the desires of the flesh.\textsuperscript{123} Yet, the absolute forbidding of lust along with the extreme of associating it with adultery is taken quite literally, and emphatically defended against counter-claims.\textsuperscript{124} This shows considerable selectiveness in applying a literal interpretation—viewing more difficult verses liberally.

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\textsuperscript{122} Kellerman, \textit{Incomplete Commentary on Matthew}, 107-8.
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\textsuperscript{123} Kellerman, \textit{Incomplete Commentary on Matthew}, 101-3.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{124} Kellerman, \textit{Incomplete Commentary on Matthew}, 100-1.
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4. Conclusion:

This simple survey of how some ancient Christians interpreted select verses of Matt. 5:17-48 illustrates a few significant aspects of the broader use of scripture in the history of theology. Clement’s literal understanding of the prohibition on lust is accompanied by a convenient neglect of the verses immediately following the antithesis, which, if applied with the same literalism, would be severely problematic. Tertullian demonstrated a rigorous attitude in applying the exhortations to extreme submission and generosity. His approach is unique in that he overtly makes exceptions and concessions for following Matt. 5:38-42 literally via theological reasoning; however, his insistence upon following the teaching literally, under the right circumstances, overlooks the context of the entire passage as one of hyperbolic extremes. Finally, the author of *Opus Imperfectum* exemplifies selective methods of interpretation, where the admonition to turn the other cheek is implemented with extreme zeal and associating lust with adultery is taken literally, while the more challenging command to mutilate oneself is understood metaphorically.

These writers make it evident that some prominent Christians in ages past approached Matt. 5:17-48 to discover and affirm ethical norms. Their purpose in appealing to these texts was to rouse reverence and obedience with the thrust of divine authority, rather than scrupulous implementation of scholarly methods to cultivate sound historical-cultural conclusions.

Acknowledging this highlights the cultural inheritance of Christian devotion to the Bible as a sacred text that facilitates reading it as a simplistic, perpetually-binding set of rules, spoken by God directly to humanity. The veneration with which the text is engaged, combined with the

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125. Clement *Stromateis* 3.7.57-8; 3.11.71; 3.14.94.
126. Tertullian *Fuga* 13.1; *Treatise* VII-VIII.
divine authority culturally ascribed to it, facilitates reading commands in a straight-forward and directly applicable manner, being eternally valid given their source in a God outside of time and space. Confronting this history underscores the innovation of the historical-critical method, and the truly ground-breaking insights that can be gleaned from biblical texts as a result of modern scholarship.
Chapter 2.2
Theology of the Body on Mt 5:27-8

Despite over 1,500 years of theological development and socio-cultural separation, the same motives, method of interpretation, and application of scriptural verses observed in ancient authors can be seen in modern works of theology—presenting spiritual ethics intended for the general believing populace. In this way the interpretations of millennia past can be understood, not as irrelevantly archaic, but as a theological heritage of biblical literalism that has been inherited and preserved.

Though contemporary works of popular theology make frequent reference to various scriptural verses, they tend to overlook scholarly methods and insights almost entirely; biblical texts are taken literally, and cited as support for a pre-existing moral maxim or spiritual perspective. This characteristic of popular pieces of Christian theology transcends denominations, length and depth of works, and the particular beliefs of the authors. It is the most widely implemented approach to the Bible and is, therefore, immensely influential over how biblical texts are understood and used by the general populace. One example of such work, intended for the spiritual edification of throngs of believers, is a Catholic piece concerning sexual morality.

In the *Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II compiles lengthy reflections on Catholic sexual ethics. The piece uses certain scriptural texts as the backbone for affirming specific moral teachings. Though several references to scripture are accompanied by brief statements recommending that the original context and intention of the author be remembered, this is not demonstrated in the treatment; instead, much attention is paid to matters of practical spirituality and building a perspective wherein contemporary human relationships might benefit from this
interpretation of select passages. A large portion of the piece’s main body uses the antithesis prohibiting lust as the anchor for discussing the proper orientation of believers regarding sexual attraction (Matt. 5:27-8). The introduction to the relevant section of the Theology of the Body expresses an intention to explore the immediate context of Matt. 5:27-8 as well its “global” context in both scripture and the history of human existence; however, the implications for the latter take prominence, and a thorough investigation of the immediate context of the verse, and its setting within the entire antitheses passage, is absent from the overall treatment.

The author sees the antitheses of Matt. 5:21-48 as “. . . fundamentally revis[ing] the way of understanding and carrying out the moral law of the old covenant.” He notes the reference to the Decalogue in the first two of Matthew’s antitheses (Matt. 5:21,27), and finds Matt. 5:17,19 to be the most important verses when interpreting Jesus’ “opposition” to commands of the Law. It is concluded that to fulfill the Law is to realize God’s kingdom—spoken of in an eschatological dimension. Exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 5:20 is understood as never letting human interpretation and legalism detract from the will and Spirit of the Lawgiver and his kingdom. Other than these brief introductory comments, the context of Matthew’s antitheses and scholarly insights into the text are not explored; the author immediately launches into content of a spiritual and catechetical nature, which persists throughout the treatment.

A “proper understanding” of Matt. 5:27-8; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12 is presented as the indispensable

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core of the *Theology of the Body*.\textsuperscript{134} The text is taken at face-value; not only is adultery condemned, but the author clearly affirms the Matthean antithesis by considering lustful gazes as the moral equivalent of adulterous sin in an individual heart.\textsuperscript{135} The treatment of Matt. 5:27-8 exemplifies a reading of the text with the goal of extracting moral maxims carrying the weight of divine, eternally binding severity.\textsuperscript{136}

In a style not dissimilar to Tertullian’s rhetorical methods\textsuperscript{137}, the author utilizes a variety of biblical verses to support his theology throughout the seventy-eight page segment, wherein Matt. 5:27-8 is relied on as the bedrock of the discussion. In addition to the second antithesis, citations from the book of Genesis regarding humanity’s created goodness and God’s intention for sexuality, references to surpassing/internalizing the Law and the redemption of the body in the Letter to the Romans, and a warning against carnal desires in 1 John 2:15-6 are the most frequent.\textsuperscript{138} In the practice of “proof-texting” common to many theological works intended for popular consumption, scattered biblical verses are cited with ease, when their immediate, literal reading combined with a sense of divine authority supports the point at hand. Methods of biblical scholarship, and the intellectual conclusions yielded from them, are not employed, as cultivating immediate assertions of metaphysical reality is favoured.\textsuperscript{139} A good example of how secondary biblical texts are used is featured here, as David’s lustful gaze, leading to sin with Bathsheba, is quickly cited to emphasize the connection of lust to sight (2 Sam. 11:2)\textsuperscript{140}; no discussion is offered on the context or authorial intent of this account, nor the ways it differs

\textsuperscript{134} John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 104.
from Matt. 5:27-8. That they both show lust to be spiritually detrimental is enough.

1. Wife or Woman:
A clear example of deliberately overruling scholarly knowledge in favour of a preferred reading is exemplified when discussing the meaning of γυναικα in Matt. 5:28. The ambiguity as to whether the woman in question is another’s wife or any women of any status is noted; however, this is dismissed as irrelevant given that the concern is with the interior act of the man. Unfortunately, this overlooks the type of insight that thorough scholarship might divulge. For, given the context of adultery, and especially the Old Testament’s normative use of this verb to always refer to illicit sex with another’s wife, it might be more appropriate to interpret γυναικα as “wife,” here. However, the ultimate aim of the piece being affirmation of stringent moral conduct results in the more conservative interpretation being applied without hesitation.

Initially, the *Theology of the Body* submits that a man who looks at his own wife lustfully does not commit adultery in his heart. The author, first, leaves the interpretation of γυναικα ambiguous: “These words do not say clearly whether the woman—the object of lust—is the wife of another or whether simply she is not the wife of the man who looks at her in this

143. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 292, 294. Luz is keen to note that “wife/gunh” was translated as woman during the transition to the Vulgate, so the lustful gaze became prohibited, not just for another’s wife, but for virgins, single women and even one’s own wife. Thus, “adultery/moixeia” became all sexual immorality. This leads Luz to conclude that, originally, the prohibition against lust implied looking with the intent of breaking up the marriage.
way. She may be the wife of another, or even not bound by marriage.” He then submits that a man cannot commit adultery in the heart through lust for his own wife: “It must be correctly deduced that this lustful look, if addressed to his own wife, is not adultery ‘in his heart.’ This is precisely because the man’s interior act refers to the woman who is his wife, with regard to whom adultery cannot take place.” The teaching continues that the importance of the statement lies in equating lust with adultery in the heart at the level of intuition.

However, in a talk given six months later, it is asserted that a husband can indeed look upon his wife adulterously in the heart: “Even if he looked in this way at the woman who is his wife, he could likewise commit adultery ‘in his heart.’” In this address the author contradicts his earlier reflection. Now he is emphatic that γυναικα must be interpreted broadly as referring to any woman, including one’s own wife:

We have already seen that the above-mentioned words are usually understood as desire for another’s wife (that is, according to the spirit of the ninth commandment of the Decalogue). However, it seems that this interpretation—a more restrictive one—can and must be widened in the light of the total context. The moral evaluation of lust (of looking lustfully), which Christ called adultery committed in the heart, seems to depend above all on the personal dignity itself of man and of woman. This holds true both for those who are not united in marriage, and—perhaps even more—for those who are husband and wife.

Thus, the author says a man can commit adultery in the heart with his own wife, if he treats her merely as an object of lust. Though the discussion concerning the meaning of γυναικα does acknowledge the context of the Decalogue to which the source antithesis refers (Exod. 20:17;
Deut. 5:21), it overtly chooses to go beyond the context of both Matthew and the Decalogue’s imperatives. Any thorough investigation of the Greek is absent, and its meaning in association with the context, being most appropriately translated as “wife,” is overruled. This is done to make the interpretation more compatible with the author’s theological reflections and moral teachings. The absolutism with which these are proclaimed would be sobered by considering scholarly insight here.

2. Lip-service to Scholarship:
The general pattern of mentioning scholarly concerns while immediately overlooking them to pursue predetermined conclusions continues throughout the segment. For example, after some discussion on Matt. 5:27-8, the general topic on lust is elaborated on by referencing 1 John 2:16-17: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.” It is initially stated that the context of 1 John 2:16-7 in its own epistle and Johannine theology must be taken into account; however, this recognition is immediately disregarded as applying the verses to the entire narrative of scripture is favoured. Jumping, quite literally, to near opposite ends of the Bible, 1 John 2:16-7 is presented within the context of the original sin of Gen. 2:17; 3:1-6 with constant reference to Matt. 5:27-8. The goal, here, is to show that humanity’s entire existence has been burdened by lust for the material which originates in the heart. Again, the method of approaching scripture is clear: interpretation is based on a predetermined moral command, seeking to confirm it and strengthen a spiritual resolve aligned with the author’s point of view; the original intention of the scriptural authors, the immediate context, historical circumstances, and related theologies are

secondary to this purpose.

The author clearly states an intention to find similar meaning in the original sin of Genesis 3 and Matt. 5:27-8: “It seems that a theologically and anthropologically adequate answer—important as regards the meaning of Christ’s words in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt:27-28)—can already be obtained from the context of Genesis 3.”\textsuperscript{155} It is very briefly recognized that the subjugation of woman to man in Gen. 3:16 is a result of social practices at the time of authorship; however, further knowledge that might be cultivated through this admission is quickly cast aside as metaphysical truths that apply directly to the modern man and woman are taken from the text.\textsuperscript{156} The permission of polygamy in the Old Testament is explained as an external law, while Christ seeks to address the interior law of the human heart through Matt. 5:27-8.\textsuperscript{157} Once again the author reiterates that, despite the original prohibition against desiring another’s wife in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:14,17; Deut. 5:18,21), Christ’s command against lust is interpreted as applying to all—married and unmarried.\textsuperscript{158} This is done out of respect for the personal dignity of every individual, which is a constant theme in the treatment.

3. Convenient Selection:

Of great significance is that in over 75 pages of text, Matt. 5:27-8 is referenced a plethora of times, and the topic of lust is discussed at length as sinful behaviour not befitting a Christian orientation; yet, despite the length and depth of this treatment, Matthew’s admonition to prefer self-mutilation to the sin of lust is not discussed to any significance.\textsuperscript{159} The imperative to severe members that facilitate sin, Matt. 5:29-30, is only referenced with extraordinary brevity. At the

\textsuperscript{155} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 125.
\textsuperscript{156} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 129.
\textsuperscript{157} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 133.
\textsuperscript{158} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 156.
\textsuperscript{159} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 130-80.
same time, it is not elaborated on other than to affirm that “… the severity and strength of the prohibition” are demonstrated through this command, interpreted as rigorous discipline to root out everything that threatens the purity of the heart.\textsuperscript{160} In this way, the work’s approach to Matt. 5:29-30 bears similarities with both Clement’s complete silence on the same verses in the \textit{Stromateis}, and the unexplained shift between a literal interpretation of vv.27-28 and the metaphorical interpretation of vv.29-30 in the \textit{Opus Imperfectum}.\textsuperscript{161}

No mention is made of the extreme nature of the entire passage wherein the teaching is found, nor is there any explanation as to why the prohibition against lust is taken literally, while the command to mutilation is not.\textsuperscript{162} The severity of the commands is recognized, though not with specific reference to vv.29-30. The author implies that any fear or anxiety caused by the extreme nature of the teaching against lust can be overcome through “… confidence in [its] salvific content.”\textsuperscript{163} In other words, the believer is to bury any stress the command raises, which might facilitate critical investigation and a hyperbolic reading, with uplifting emotions affirming salvation.

It is acknowledged by the author that the teaching against lust, and particularly vv.29-30 on mutilation, have been used in the past to support a Manichean dualism that denounces the body; however, the provided solution to this is that the true and proper interpretation of the antithesis affirms the goodness and right order of the human body and corporeal experience, rather than rejecting it. Unfortunately, this explanation is quickly given and any thorough explanation of specifically how Matt. 5:29-30 is not a dualistic rejection of the material, is missing. It is

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{160} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 158.
\bibitem{162} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 158.
\bibitem{163} John Paul II, \textit{The Theology of the Body}, 159.
\end{thebibliography}
acknowledged that these verses can potentially facilitate the rejected Manichean view, but a “right” explanation of these specific verses does not accompany the “right” view. Instead, in a statement mirroring the heightened severity of retaliation in the *Opus Imperfectum*, lust in the human heart is declared to be the root of all moral, social and economic disorder.

A following section continues to overtly affirm the goodness of the body, and reject the Manichean denunciation of it; however, vv.29-30 are not discussed in this segment, but verses from various areas of scripture that support the premise are referenced. The author’s answer is that this antithesis is not condemning the body, but emotions, experiences and tendencies of the heart. This is a convenient evasion of the problem at hand. While an emphasis on the heart is legitimately seen in the antithesis, a devaluing of the body and physical intuition is easily read from the verses on mutilation (Matt. 5:29-30). The author’s reluctance to explore this in-depth, or offer a viable interpretation to counter the Manichean ideology he rejects, is weighty evidence for the difficulty of the situation and avoidance of the problem.

This is, perhaps, where scholarly methods and insights would be most beneficial to the *Theology of the Body*, as an academically responsible investigation of the texts in question requires careful consideration of their immediate and general context. When this is done, equating lust with adultery would necessarily be viewed in relation to the exhortation to mutilation, as well as a threat to enter hell for experiencing slanderous anger, and admonitions to denounce all oaths and achieve complete moral perfection (Matt. 5:22,33-7,48). Moreover, the setting of this teaching amidst an entire passage of antithetical imperatives carrying a hyperbolic tone would be

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recognized. Using this knowledge to influence theological and spiritual conclusions drawn from
the text would, at least, discourage isolating preferred verses for literal interpretation; instead, the
passage of extremes could be seen as pointing toward underlying ethical guidelines for an
internal disposition of morality. This might suggest, for example, a discouraging of lust, with
particular focus on willfully cultivated lust for married persons, as detrimental to personal
morality and healthy social conduct. Such a reading could serve as an informed meaning of the
scriptural text to guide further discussion.

4. Conclusion:

In general, John Paul II’s treatment of Matt. 5:27-8 in the *Theology of the Body* is an exemplary
instance of citing very specific verses of scripture in order to strengthen a particular
interpretation and strict moral exhortations. This occurs without seriously recognizing any
aspects of the text that might qualify it or encourage a reading that softens, or challenges the pre-
existing theological conclusions already held before approaching the relevant verses. The work
has been warmly embraced by Catholic evangelists and, in the last decade, has been used as the
foundation for numerous works on Catholic sexual morality. Many such works are aimed at the
general believing community, intended to make the lengthy and elaborate theology of John Paul
II more intellectually accessible and practically applicable for the average devotee. These works
display the same traits, in terms of overlooking scholarly methodology when examining
scripture, as already seen in the work that serves as their primary source material.169

169. Carl Anderson, Jose Granados, *Called to Love: Approaching John Paul II’s Theology of the Body*
(Toronto, ON: Doubleday, 2009); Jason Evert, *Theology of Her Body: Discovering the Beauty and Mystery of
Femininity* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009); Jason Evert, *Theology of His Body: Discovering the Beauty
and Mystery of Masculinity* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009); Richard M. Hogan, *The Theology of the
Body in John Paul II: What It Means, Why It Matters* (Ijamsville, Maryland: The Word Among Us, 2006);
Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II’s “Gospel of the Body”*
(Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2003).
Incorporating the insights of scripture scholarship into the sexual ethics of the *Theology of the Body* would not necessitate a complete abandoning of the norms and values at the heart of its message; however, it would discourage a literal application of selected texts as well as proof-texting. Though the certainty, rigidity and severity with which Matt. 5:27-8 is approached might be tempered, a fundamental discouraging of such behaviour and relatively conservative sexual ethics could be maintained. It should be recalled that the scholarly methods by which such a perspective is reached are championed by official Catholic teachings:

> To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words. . . . In order to discover the sacred author’s intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. “For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetical and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.”170

Not only might this make the morals taught somewhat more reasonable to the intended mass-audience, but it would better befit a reliance on scripture as the basis for sacred ethics.

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Chapter 2.3
Wallis and Wink: Complete Pacifism through Matt. 5:38-47

Examples of other theological works intended for the broader Christian population, which also demonstrate a literal application of the antitheses, are those of Jim Wallis and Walter Wink. Like the Catholic work already considered, these two authors reflect a higher intellectual caliber of writing than the most popular Christian “celebrities”—the best known, “household names” of televangelism whose spiritual message inspires and influences throngs of believers—yet their work is still intended to serve as spiritually enriching for the general Christian population.

These authors support a position of pacifism in their writing that seems to be built upon Matt. 5:38-47. A similar approach to scripture as that already seen in popular theology—prioritizing a literal application of select verses while overlooking scholarly insights about the larger context—is similarly the foundation of their work. This is primarily evidenced in their pacifism, grounded in Matt. 5:38-47, while no need to critically investigate the biblical basis for their positions accompanies their arguments.

The teachings on turning the other cheek, gentle submission, and loving enemies are, arguably, the clearest pacifistic exhortations in the New Testament. Therefore, though neither Wallis nor Wink rely overwhelmingly on Matt. 5:38-47, it is justifiably considered the foundation of their ideology, since it is difficult to find a clearer statement in the Christian Bible that might underwrite the claim that pacifism is based in scripture.

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171. Other verses might be taken to support a pacifist position: “[F]or all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 56:52), not returning evil for evil (Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:3:9), “[C]onquer evil with good” (Rom. 12:21), and not seeking revenge but relying on the wrath and vengeance of God (Rom. 12:19); however, none of these explicitly command passivity in the face of attack or oppression as does Matt. 5:38-47.
1. Wallis, Nonviolence and Nuclear War:

For Jim Wallis, pacifism is a biblically rooted principle. He interprets Matt. 5:38-45 as a literal command capable of solving geo-political violence: “The principle of equal retribution would be replaced with the practice of suffering love. . . . With these words, Jesus placed an eternal obstacle in the way of war.” For Wallis, all violence is a result of the fallen world, and a response of more violence can never break the cycle. The radicalism of the antithetical teachings is acknowledged and embraced in order to reject all retaliation, so that true radicalism is seen, not in violent revolution, but total pacifism. Wallis looks down upon the history of Christianity’s marriage to imperial power, claiming that if Christians attempt to physically remove oppressors they are only repeating the mistakes of the Constantinian synthesis—becoming a part of the system of violence. As an alternative, then, nonviolence must be paired with a life lived outside of the system, which does not benefit from empire and oppression, otherwise the violence done against the poor condemns the “nonviolent” who indulge in the system. Hope is displayed in the converting power of peace, and a faith that total pacifism can cure the world’s ills: “Nonviolence turns adversaries into friends, not by winning over them, but by winning them over.”

Wallis’ concerns about violence and peace strongly reflect Cold War tension and anxiety over global, nuclear annihilation. His position is that, in a nuclear age, just and unjust wars can no

174. Wallis, Agenda for Biblical People, 85.
175. Wallis, Agenda for Biblical People, 86.
176. Wallis, Agenda for Biblical People, 87.
177. Wallis, The Call to Conversion, 146.
longer be differentiated; loving enemies now becomes exceptionally relevant.\textsuperscript{179} The practical benefits of applying Matt. 5:43-7 literally are promoted as, in his judgement, loving enemies tears down the stereotypes and hatred that fuels war.\textsuperscript{180}

The arguments of Jim Wallis otherwise feature very little reference to Matt. 5:38-47, and no scholarly investigation of the text; however, their literal interpretation appears to be the bedrock of his perspective, and the absence of any critical examination of these verses is typical of Christian works with an aim to rouse assent and inspire action.

2. A Historical-Cultural Argument:

Another author, Ronald Sider, whose essay is featured in a book compiled and edited by Wallis, features some historical investigation when affirming pacifism—though the scope of employing scholarly methods remains limited. In Sider’s article “Reconciling Our Enemies: A Biblical Study on Nonviolence,” teachings against violence and revenge are taken literally, while some historical background is referenced in making the case.\textsuperscript{181} Sider claims that, through complete pacifism, Jesus goes beyond the Old Testament and the Zealots—who believed the godless should be slain.\textsuperscript{182} The immediate applicability of the surrounding verses in the historical setting of oppression is taken to mean that turning the other cheek was intended literally.\textsuperscript{183} For Sider, the admonition to nonviolence is not idealistic, or fantasy, but a real response to the Zealots’ call to revolution\textsuperscript{184}; therefore, Jesus’ instructions are not utopian, but a means for the oppressed to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{179. Wallis, \textit{The Call to Conversion}, 93.}
\footnote{180. Wallis, \textit{The Call to Conversion}, 98-9.}
\footnote{182. Sider, “Reconciling Our Enemies,” 139.}
\footnote{183. Sider, “Reconciling Our Enemies,” 140.}
\footnote{184. Sider, “Reconciling Our Enemies,” 140-1.}
\end{footnotes}
take control of their situation through suffering. Finally, the crucifixion is referred to as the best testament that Jesus intended nonviolence literally.

3. Wink and Paradigm-Transcendence:
Walter Wink serves as a fitting complement to Wallis and Sider. For Wink also, Jesus’ teachings show a new way of living outside of, or beyond the system of violence. His application of pacifism also perceives nonviolence as leading to forgiving enemies and, ultimately, a new social and political system. The antitheses against retaliation and ordering love of enemies are affirmed with literal rigour. Disciples, both ancient and modern, are to love their enemies and respond to animosity with blessing (Matt. 5:43-8). Turning the other cheek, offering one’s cloak, and going the extra-mile are interpreted as non-violent resistance (Matt. 5:39-41); Christians are expected to resist evil, and even offer some verbal forms of self-defense, but these must always be carried out non-violently.

The basis for this pacifism is found in a literal application of the command to love enemies in emulation of God who benefits the good and bad alike (Matt. 5:45). In similar style to the author of Opus Imperfectum making an act of retaliation apostasy, Wink goes even further than reading these verses as literal commands by making nonviolence the complete essence of God’s kingdom; this quality is said to be the heart of the Gospel, which believers are obligated

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188. Wink, The Powers that Be, 11.
189. Wink, The Powers that Be, 68.
190. Wink, The Powers that Be, 142-4.
191. Wink, The Powers that Be, 142,146.
192. Wink, The Powers that Be, 128.
194. Wink, The Powers that Be, 129.
Like Sider’s concluding point, Wink uses the crucifixion as support for pacifism. For him, Jesus’ peaceful example in not taking up the cause of war for the expected Messiah, but suffering crucifixion instead, demonstrates the alternative way: “. . . Jesus discovered a way of opposing evil without becoming evil in the process.” In this way, Wink sees him as breaking the spiral of violence by absorbing that done to him. Therefore, Wink concludes that injustice and oppression by “the powers that be” are to be endured with patience and faith—a course requiring spiritual maturity.

4. Conclusion:
The pacifism of Wallis, Wink, Sider, and similar thinkers who would interpret Matt. 5:38-47 literally, does so at the expense of critically analyzing the biblical source for this ideology with the benefits of modern scholarship. The literary style and hyperbolic tone used by Matthew’s author to compile the unified passage are not considered, nor are historical-critical insights that might temper a literal interpretation applied. Furthermore, the overall context of scripture is not considered with the same literalism; for, neither Jesus nor Paul literally follow Matt. 5:39 when they are struck (see, for example, John 18:22; Acts 23:3), as Lapide and Lambrecht point out, nor is a spirit of pacifism displayed in the Revelation to John as martyrs beseech God for violent vengeance and the King of Kings calls forth raptors to feast on the rotting corpses of his slain enemies (Rev. 6:9-10; 19:11-21). Of course, scholarship would separate all of these different

195. Wink, The Powers that Be, 134-5.
196. Wink, The Powers that Be, 69.
197. Wink, The Powers that Be, 11, 92.
198. Wink, The Powers that Be, 192-3.
verses based on the varying historical circumstances surrounding their creation and the intent of the authors; however, if the pacifists’ appeal to Matt. 5:38-47 is based on the divine authority of scripture and a literal interpretation, the texts that are “contradictory,” or “problematic” for pacifism when read literally would hold equal weight under this system of interpretation.

Even so, such considerations would not nullify the teachings of Matt. 5:38-47, nor would it require denouncing complete pacifism for those of such an inclination; however, considering the insights divulged through scholarly methodology, namely that Matt. 5:38-47 contributes to a passage consciously constructed by the author to be unified through hyperbole, might encourage cultivating the deeper morality of the text: seeking peace and quelling revenge—though not necessarily ruling out the use of force as sinful deviation in all circumstances. If nothing else, confronting a literal interpretation of Matt. 5:38-47 with scholarly insight suggests that discussions remain to be had concerning how strictly Christian scriptures demand total pacifism with divine authority.
Chapter 2.4
Part 2 Conclusions:
Literal Approaches to Scripture in Popular Theology

The treatments investigated thus far, though differing from one another in several areas, all share, and appear to be founded upon, a common “literalism” when approaching, interpreting and applying biblical texts for ethical norms and the affirmation of metaphysical truth. For this very reason they can be understood as representative of the utilization of biblical texts within the sphere of popular theology—despite other examples within Christian media, which are not as conducive to intellectual inquiry, that may hold greater influence in the culture.

Contrasting with this approach is the HCM of modern biblical scholarship, which, through disciplined methodology, critical analysis, and diligently applied reason, can be seen as seriously challenging the literalism of both traditional “ancient Christian” and modern “fundamentalist” readings. Despite this apparent clash, or any perceived “opposition” between the two arenas, the insights, knowledge and conclusions drawn via the HCM are not irrelevant to the concerns and goals that ultimately motivate the interpretations of the literal camp. Rather, the information made available through scholarly methods can serve to inform and enlighten the literal conclusions, allowing for a broader application of reason—facilitating moral conclusions more firmly grounded in rationality.
Chapter 3.1
Exegetical Insights through Modern Scholarship:
Lust, Retaliation, Love and Perfection

Having explored several works of theology, both ancient and modern, that exemplify reading elements of Matthew’s antitheses literally, the investigation now turns to the insights and exegetical information offered by modern scholarship on those same biblical verses. What will be demonstrated, here, is the wide-range of opinion and disagreement that exists among scholars who investigate the text—from those who maintain interpretations of a literal inclination, to others for whom the evidence suggests a metaphorical, or hyperbolic reading. However, in general, there is a notable leaning away from interpreting these teachings literally.

1. Lust (Matt 5:27-30):

The second of Matthew’s antitheses—forbidding lust and equating it with adultery, before recommending mutilation to avoid temptation—builds upon one of the Ten Commandments200; however, when considered together with the following command regarding adultery (Matt 5:31-2), it is found that this ordering is reversed from the Decalogue wherein adultery precedes lust by three commandments (Exod. 20:14-17; Deut. 5:18-21). The structure of this antithesis is the same as that preceding it (Matt 5:22-6). It begins with a contrast between acts and thoughts, and an emphasis on prohibiting an internal disposition toward sin; this is followed by elaborating on the severity of the internal sin, ending with a comparison of what should be preferred to

The structure and wording found in vv.29-30 are very close to Matt. 18:8-9 and Mk 9:43-8. Yet, these other two instances do not relate to sexual sin, but to rooting out the greatest stumbling block and cause of sin within oneself. Therefore, Hagner deduces that the author of Mathew adapted this text to suit a teaching against adultery and lust. According to Albright, the emphasis on the “right” extremities (vv. 29-30), interpolated by the author, serve only to highlight that these are the more active and valuable members than their counterparts on the left.

This teaching is often seen as going beyond the convention for the time of Jesus—blaming women for incurring lust—by placing blame in the heart of the luster. As opposed to previous views, now many aspects of male sexuality are elevated to the realm of adulterous sin. However, it should be recognized that condemning the lustful gaze was nothing novel in Judaism (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). Proverbs cautions the prudent to guard the heart against being enamoured by another’s beauty: “Let your heart not long for the beauty of your neighbour’s wife, nor let her captivate you with her glance” (Prov. 6:24). Sirach, likewise, advises against setting one’s eyes on an attractive woman: “Veil your eyes before a charming woman; look at no beauty that does not belong to you” (Ecclus. 9:8). Neither can it be argued that equating lust with adultery, or visual fornication, is the new aspect of this teaching in Matt. 5:27-30; for lust

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201. For the preceding points see Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 120.
was likened to adultery in several texts. The same extreme attitude toward sexual sin present in Matt. 5:27-30 existed among Jewish teachers, as some rabbinic literature maintains that looking lustfully at a woman’s finger was the same as seeing her genitals. Just as significant is that condemning sexual sin with reference to the eye, hand, foot and heart also occurred in Jewish writings. Midrash Hagadol on Exod. 20:14 explains that the Hebrew word for adultery consists of four letters because the sin may be committed with the hand, foot, eye, or heart. The severity conveyed through reassigning a recommendation to mutilation from Mark 9:43-8 also finds similarity with rabbinic teachings ordering mutilation for sinful conduct. Beyond the Jewish sphere, when discussing lust Seneca advises ripping out one’s own heart if vice cannot be ridden from it; this does not suggest Seneca is the source of the hyperbole in Matt. 5:27-30, but it might denote a “. . . common rhetorical convention of the time.”

Despite the severity in Jewish teachings concerning lust and sexual sin, as well as several other admonitions to mutilation, Hagner does not interpret the imperative to sever one’s members literally. He sees it as revealing a principle that it is better to willingly inflict minor loss upon oneself than to suffer ultimate punishment unwillingly. Again, the antithesis shifts emphasis to the internal as the proper realm of righteousness for the true disciple. Despite the admonitions to prefer self-injury in Jewish and Hellenized culture already mentioned,

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207. Test. Iss. 7:2; Reub. 4:8; b. Nid. 13b, bar.; Shab. 64ab; Lev. Rab. 23:12; Pesiq. R. 24:2, cited in Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 186.
“... mutilation does not appear to have been part of Jewish legal practice.”216 This point is essential for recognizing that, though the sentiment was known elsewhere, it was not taken literally in any of these. From this, Nolland surmises that the point of Matt. 5:27-30 is going to any means necessary to avoid sin.217

The Question of Scandal:

When discussing this teaching, several scholars are drawn to the importance of σκανδαλίζει in vv.29-30. Deming suggests that Jewish thought may have identified the eye, foot and hand as the locations of sinful impulses.218 This leads to proposing that the admonition to prefer self-injury to sin, even when not overtly related to sexuality in Mark 9:43-8, implies sexual deviation.219 Keener’s observation, that the reference to the hand may imply self-stimulation, would align with this; however, the overall point is seen as avoiding sin at all costs.220 More important for Deming, however, is that σκανδαλίζει in Matt. 5:29-30 has been appropriated from Mark 9:42-3,45. Deming proposes that Mark 9:42-8 likely also deals with sexual sin, which leads him to read “little ones” as meaning lowly disciples rather than children (Mark 9:42)221; this is supported, for Deming, by the close proximity of warning against scandal in Mark to the prohibition against divorce (Mark 9:42-8; 10:1-12).222 Both Matthew and Mark offer these teachings on σκανδαλίζει near a discussion on divorce—following immediately in Matthew, and within three short verses in Mark.223 Therefore, in Deming’s judgement, Matt. 216. John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 239.
220. Keener, A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, 188.
5:27-30; Mk 9:42-8 and b. Nid. 13b rabbinical teachings on σκανδαλίζω are all derived from a common source in the middle-first century which originally had a sexual connotation. Following rabbinic ideas then, “adultery with the hand” is masturbation, and “adultery with the foot” is authentic adultery, since the foot is a euphemism for the male sexual organ. For Deming, Matthew’s elaboration including the sin of the eye (Matt. 5:29), serves to clarify what Mark omits.

Hence, Deming sees Mark and Matthew as appropriating the notions of severing members from Jewish teachings on how to avoid sexual transgression; however, it is then puzzlingly submitted that the authors of these two gospels understand the hand and foot in their general sense—removing them from their proposed cultural context of sexual implication to a degree. At any rate, it is conceded that these teachings reflect an attempt by first-century Jews and Christians to restrict all aspects of sexuality entirely to marriage.

There are several points of contention found with Deming’s assessment. Most importantly, exception is taken to the claim that the proximity of Mark 9:42-8, on avoiding temptation, to Mark 10:1-12, prohibiting divorce, indicates that the discussion of scandal in Mark 9:42-8 implies sexual sin. When this is considered in the context of Mark’s narrative, it is observed that Jesus and his party come into Capernaum in Mark 9:33 and enter a house, wherein discussions take place concerning status in God’s kingdom, “rival” exorcists, temptations to sin, and the salt of cooperation between disciples (Mark 9:33-49). Following this, the setting changes as Jesus moves to Judea, where he is confronted with the challenge about divorce before the subjects of

children and devaluing material wealth are discussed (Mark 10:1-31). The general context of Mark 9:42-8 is a series of discussions addressing the abstract issue of interpersonal relations between followers of Jesus. Therefore, the subjects of scandal/mutilation and divorce, though in close proximity in the text, are separated in Mark’s narrative by place, time and thematic units; thus, the source for Matthew’s use of mutilation does not necessarily deal with sexuality.

More telling in this regard, however, is that Matthew appropriates Mark 9:42-8 into his work twice. The concept of dismembering oneself in order to avoid sin occurs in both Matt. 5:29-30 and Matt. 18:8-9. The material in Matt. 18:6-9 is a much more direct utilization of the material in Mark 9:42-8 than the antitheses on lust. The format and structure of Matt. 18:6-9, as well as the general sense of avoiding temptation to all sin and those who facilitate it, is preserved, while some unique material is interpolated; Matt. 5:29-30, on the other hand, merely takes-up the concept of mutilation for a subject, apparently, deemed particularly grievous by the author.

Regarding the proximity of Matt. 18:6-9 to the prohibition on divorce found in Matt. 19:1-12, it seems that Matthew’s author was merely following and adding to the structure of Mark’s gospel, here, which has already been shown to be inconsequential.

Having ruled-out a sexual connotation for the source material of Matt. 5:29-30, other uses of σκανδαλίζω become weak as evidence for necessarily implying sexual sin. Even if b. Nid. 13b also applies it in this way\textsuperscript{229}, this is hardly enough to conclude the use of the term in Mark 9:42-8 is certainly sexual in nature. It seems more likely that constant risk of sexual deviation within human nature led to implementation of the term σκανδαλίζω in various texts, and Mark’s author used it simply because it was more than befitting a passage regarding

temptations. Finally, Deming’s point that the authors of Mark and Matthew use the imagery of “hand” and “foot” in a general sense—without the sexual connotations Deming’s submits were generally attached to them at the time—is as problematic as it is confusing. While it is agreed that the dismembering recommended in Mark 9:42-8 and Matt. 18:6-9 do not hold a sexual connotation, the mention of specific members in Matt. 5:29-30 most likely carry some sense of sexual sin with them—evidenced by the author’s intentional interpolation of these terms from other areas, in a teaching where he deemed them especially pertinent. However, even this does not clearly indicate specific sins committed with the members mentioned. For example, it cannot be determined with confidence that scandal through “the hand,” with reference to lust, is speaking of masturbation as Keener proposes.\textsuperscript{230}

A discussion of the significance of σκανδαλίζω that contrasts to Deming, is found in J.F. Cornell’s article “Anatomy of Scandal.” Cornell sees Matthew’s ironic and imaginative use of language as highlighting the problem of scandal.\textsuperscript{231} It is recognized that the teaching about lust is usually explained in terms of hyperbole; however, the real issue for Cornell is scandal—its controlling and insidious nature in the heart being the true adultery.\textsuperscript{232} Cornell makes a similar misstep as Deming, by overlooking the context of σκανδαλίζη in its source (Mark 9:42-8). For him, lust and sexual sin are seen as the primary context of scandal due to the word’s first occurrence in Matthew’s gospel being Matt. 5:29-30\textsuperscript{233}, rather than avoiding general temptation in Matt. 18:6-9—taken from Mark 9:42-8. Despite this problem held in common, Cornell’s investigation of scandal is more viable for deriving meaning from the antithesis against lust.

\textsuperscript{230} Keener, A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, 188.
\textsuperscript{232} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 270.
\textsuperscript{233} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 281-3.
While the original σκανδαλίζει translates as “to offend,” the idea of delivering insult, causing resentment or provoking hostility is insufficient. Instead, the additional meaning of an obstacle or stumbling block that causes a person to fall is better—leading to modern translations “causes you to sin” (Matt. 5:29-30). Therefore, scandal usually implies interpersonal antagonism; σκανδαλίζει is the obstacle that an adversary places in front of someone in order to make him/her fall.\textsuperscript{234} Aside from breaking the Law, persons who cause scandal are the main evil that must be rooted out of the kingdom (Matt. 13:41,43)\textsuperscript{235}; scandalous indignation is the root of hostility and conflict, which is what prompts Jesus to recommend settling disputes before they reach legal action or violence (Matt. 5:21-6).\textsuperscript{236} This insight leads Cornell to understand the subject of one’s members scandalizing the self as a self-division caused by turning the victim/sinner against him/herself.\textsuperscript{237}

For Cornell, both anger and lust seek to dominate the other, but eventually only turn in on the aggressor; thereby scandalizing the self.\textsuperscript{238} Therefore, in the case of lust, “the other” becomes the second-self influenced by this scandal: “The scandalizing body is a silent language expressing the latent antagonisms behind our crimes, our vices, and even our temptations.”\textsuperscript{239} This line of reasoning prompts an interpretation of dismembering oneself as severing the scandalizing impulses that have built up in the heart: “If one stops taking the body and lust so literally, one can see in Matthew’s figure the idea of mentally apprehending these disguised impulses toward scandal and distancing oneself from them. One can see the recommendation of

\textsuperscript{234} For the preceding points see Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 272. The use of “scandal” can also be seen in Matt. 13:5,35,41,43; 16:21-3; 21; John 6:61; 1 John 2:9-11,16.
\textsuperscript{235} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 273.
\textsuperscript{236} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 274.
\textsuperscript{237} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 274-5.
\textsuperscript{238} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 274.
\textsuperscript{239} Cornell, “Anatomy of Scandal,” 275.
self-dismemberment is directed at the scandals that lie beneath adultery, unwitting motives buried in the heart infecting the whole person, conditioned behaviours that are by no means intrinsic to one’s identity.”

Ultimately, Cornell interprets the antithesis against lust as “. . . suggest[ing] a removal of all duplicity and inward conflicts, which makes integrity possible.” Therefore, the conclusion is that the theme of scandal in Matthew’s gospel is “. . . a psychology of interpersonal antagonism.” The radicalism of Jesus’ recommendation to dismemberment is intended to liberate the reader concerning an area of morality where “. . . our self-mastery is most precarious, it is where we are most deeply and unconsciously scandalized.” Only in this way can the individual transcend the burden of scandal to experience an enlightened and liberated existence.

Synopsis:

Despite varying opinions on several aspects of the teaching against lust, the scholarly consensus is that, while the sin is treated very seriously, the exhortation to mutilation is not taken literally. Instead, the point is going to great lengths to avoid sin. The scholarly inclination against applying this teaching literally does not always end with the subject of mutilation; for some, the general severity of the antithesis is also softened to interpret the teaching as, not against passing attraction, but discouraging willfully cultivating desire for an illicit relationship. Taking-up some known Jewish morality at the time, and in keeping with the entire passage’s internal focus,

Matthew’s author appropriates into Christianity the notion that desiring to break the commandment against adultery, even if one does not do it, creates guilt.\textsuperscript{247}

2. Retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42):

Perhaps no antithesis receives as much attention as the teaching on nonviolence. The debate over how to properly apply it, along with difference in opinion concerning the original implications, makes it a source for considerable scholarly investigation. What is relatively agreed upon is that the original command to demand “eye for eye, tooth for tooth and life for life” was eventually used to temper violence in Jewish society (Gen. 4:23-4; Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20).\textsuperscript{248} In Jesus’ time and for centuries after, it was a check against ongoing blood feuds. Rather than promoting brutality, it limited retaliation and ongoing hatred.\textsuperscript{249}

Scholarly investigations into the text tend to reflect a polarization of intentions. Some prefer to read the teaching as built upon an original pacifism and totality of love in the teaching of Jesus, while others see the teaching as pointing toward a general principle to govern conduct. Among those who seem to support a reading in favour of nonviolence, the extreme examples are used to affirm total pacifism. Lapide recognizes that Jesus responded with righteous anger when struck in John 18:22 and that Paul cursed his attacker in Acts 23:3; therefore, it is posited that offering the other cheek is not meant literally, so that what is being advocated here is passive resistance—but pacifism nonetheless.\textsuperscript{250}

Steinhauser observes that in the context of both Matthew and Luke, taking both cloak and tunic

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{247} Test. Iss. 7:2; Reub. 4:8; b. Nid. 13b, bar.; Shab. 64ab; Lev. Rab. 23:12; Pesiq. R. 24:2, cited in Keener, A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, 187.
  \item\textsuperscript{248} Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, 129.
  \item\textsuperscript{249} Albright, Matthew, 68.
  \item\textsuperscript{250} Lapide, The Sermon on the Mount, 123.
\end{itemize}
would leave the person naked (Matt. 5:40; Luke 6:29).\textsuperscript{251} In Jewish Law, a person could not take an outer cloak as a pledge for a loan because it was needed as a sleeping garment (Exod. 22:26-7; Deut. 24:12-3).\textsuperscript{252} He then notes that the teaching instructs action that both exceeds the Law and is extraordinary.\textsuperscript{253} Schweizer agrees, noting that that demanding only a tunic was originally intended to protect the poor (Exod. 22:25-6); however, the teaching in v.40 is not analyzed for a deeper principle, but the spiritual benefits of following it literally are articulated. It is interpreted as promoting absolute faith in God: that it is better to go naked than utilize one’s legal rights.\textsuperscript{254} Likewise, the imperative to carry an oppressor’s pack two miles in v.41 is taken as a literal instruction, through which edification is obtained. Going the extra mile is seen as taking back one’s own power from the oppressor.\textsuperscript{255} Lapide concurs, viewing the voluntary service of the second-mile as a disarming love: \textsuperscript{256} “Here the initiative is taken away from the superior, evil is repaid with good, and, in all probability, in the course of the second mile a friendly conversation will begin to develop.”\textsuperscript{257} Thus, for these scholars the commands of the fifth antithesis are a means of nonviolent resistance intended to overcome evil with gentle goodness and possibly win converts: “Jesus’ third way relied neither on passive powerlessness nor on militant counterforce, but on a completely new course of human interaction that would invert all dominant relationships and deprive them of power.”\textsuperscript{258}

Reiser claims that the instructions are not meant as clever ways to placate, or convince the enemy he/she is wrong without force; rather, their purpose is to transcend the intuitive view of

\begin{itemize}
  \item Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 29.
  \item Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 29.
  \item Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 130.
  \item Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 130.
  \item Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 111.
  \item Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 112.
  \item Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 104.
\end{itemize}
friends and enemies. Despite this cultivation of a subtle principle within the text, Reiser’s general position is that Jesus demanded complete submission and pacifism; the transcendent perspective is the means to achieving this internal disposition. This is compatible with Lapide, for whom such an interpretation seems to be fuelled by an idyllic spiritual sentiment with emotive influences: “Because Jesus was neither a visionary nor a utopian, but a worldly-wise observer of human nature, he did not demand superhuman selflessness or sentiment that would be over-demanding for almost any human heart, but practical demonstrations of love . . . and all the thousand and one effective good deeds that create trust, demolish enmity, and promote love.”

For others, the historical-cultural implications of the teaching are just as pertinent; however, the meanings gleaned from them are directed toward general principles for action rather than rigorous application of pacifist spirituality. For these it is, again, recognized that the teaching concerning taking an eye for an eye was implemented to curb excessive revenge, rather than promote vengeance through blood-lust. However, Luz and Lambrecht both note that a slap on the cheek was a conveyance of hate and insult more than physical injury. Given that one’s cloak had to be returned by sunset, as it was used for sleeping, the imperative to freely offer it means one should give up even the minimum rights of the poor. If followed literally, this is nothing short of extreme—commanding disciples to become voluntary “doormats” for oppressors and abusers. It is also conceded that being forced to carry the pack of a Roman

occupier was a historical reality that might present itself. Yet, the plausibility of these situations does not necessitate that the instructions are intended for literal application, nor insist upon a general principle of submissive pacifism that should be legalistically applied.

Schweizer points out that the context of non-resistance involves legal claims and rights; this observation could lead to a conclusion that the entire section is aimed at a spirit of generosity and social peace-making, rather than nonviolence in response to physical force. For Luz, however, the introductory verses of this teaching, vv.38-39b, make it clear that the following commandments are meant as general rules governing behaviour in circumstances beyond the examples given. Nolland agrees, submitting that the examples chosen are to highlight the difference between generosity and seeking good over self-interested aggression. Therefore, “[i]t goes way beyond the evidence, however, to suggest that what he proposes would require the end of legal compensation or proportionate penalty or that it would rule the use of violence entirely out of court.”

In Lambrecht’s mind, several reasons support that the command to nonviolence was not intended literally. First, it would quickly result in chaos in a society; second, in tension with Luz’s observation that many prominent Christians rejected military service, he submits that the Church has never officially ordered that this be followed literally; also, other extreme teachings are typically softened through interpretation, such as the command that one must “hate” father and mother being interpreted as “less love” (Matt. 10:37); finally, Lambrecht also observes that Jesus

271. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 331. Luz, however, claims that Christianity did require complete pacifism until the Constantinian Revolution. While he offers good evidence that influential Christian thinkers demanded total pacifism, whether the early “institution” required this universally is debatable.
did not simply turn the other cheek in pacifistic silence when struck in John 18:22-3, but questioned the conduct of his attacker; similarly, Paul did not simply accept his imprisonment passively, but appealed to Caesar, and even reviled an attacker for the very type of assault mentioned in Matt. 5:39b (Acts 23:3; 25:10-2). All of this facilitates a conclusion that the sayings on nonviolence are examples to convey radical love.

Lambrecht proposes that whenever radical love of enemy is present, it might be possible to see all behaviour as good. This leads to an assertion that v.39a of the passage, “Do not resist one who is evil,” was not taught by Jesus as such. Likewise, Lapide eventually moderates total pacifism to cite an obligation to just violence in certain circumstances as a reason that Jesus would not and could not have ordered this. He may have taught resisting evil in kindness; yet, as a good Jewish rabbi, he would have known that one is obligated to defend a helpless victim out of the love of neighbour.

Sources outside of scripture, from the same period, lend credence to the notion that submission to force is not the primary concern of this antithesis, by demonstrating that the main concern of Christians at the time was social antagonism and domestic unrest. Milavec refers to the Didache as revealing that Christians were expected to undergo harassment and persecution from family members and close kin more than anyone else. Thus, the context of Matthew’s teachings against violence is not, as Theissen proposes, a response to Roman violence; rather, these are

272. For the preceding points see Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 297-8.
275. For the preceding points see Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 299.
276. For the preceding points see Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 135.
meant to guide actions amidst hostile domestic circumstances wherein Christians underwent hardships, insults, slander and persecutions by those closest to them—typically not violence.\textsuperscript{279}

Therefore, Milavec concludes that any link to the historical Jesus’ teaching of “turning the other cheek” cannot be thought of as recommending “… a strategy for public nonviolent resistance.”\textsuperscript{280} The evidence of the \textit{Didache} reveals domestic aggression was most likely the biggest problem.\textsuperscript{281} Therefore, v.39 is understood in terms of enduring insult and persecution in the form of social antagonism for one’s Christianity.

Lambrecht acknowledges perpetual concern that interpreting the exhortation this way weakens the message; however, it is submitted that this need not be the case if the provocative character of the teachings is remembered.\textsuperscript{282} Radical love, that even includes the enemy, is the intention.\textsuperscript{283} Taking it seriously may not always mean nonviolence “… because not every use of violence is unjust.”\textsuperscript{284} The responsibility to protect and care for one’s neighbour must also be remembered. Individuals have an obligation to protect fellow human beings at risk of injustice, with violence if necessary—always being cautious of the ease with which force could be manipulated, turned into injustice, and tyranny justified.\textsuperscript{285} Christian pacifism is commendable, but the majority choose to employ violence in union with conscience to maintain order; these

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{279} Milavec, “The Social Setting of ‘Turning the Other Cheek’ and ‘Loving One’s Enemies’ in Light of the Didache,” 142.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Milavec, “The Social Setting of ‘Turning the Other Cheek’ and ‘Loving One’s Enemies’ in Light of the Didache,” 142.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Milavec, “The Social Setting of ‘Turning the Other Cheek’ and ‘Loving One’s Enemies’ in Light of the Didache,” 142.
\item \textsuperscript{282} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 299.
\item \textsuperscript{283} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 304.
\item \textsuperscript{284} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 300.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 302.
\end{itemize}
must follow the spirit of the teaching to limit violence to the unavoidable sort.\textsuperscript{286} In these ways, the hyperbolic language of the fifth antithesis is not meant to be followed literally, but for inspiration.\textsuperscript{287} The point is overcoming a position of showing love only to the good and friendly.\textsuperscript{288}

3. Love/Perfection (Matt. 5:43-8):

The command to “love your neighbour,” in v.43 comes from Lev. 19:18.\textsuperscript{289} This is in keeping with various areas of the Old Testament wherein love toward enemies is depicted as righteous behaviour (Exod. 23:4-5; 1 Sam. 24:19; Prov. 25:21-2).\textsuperscript{290} The rest of the verse references oral traditions in later periods that make clear distinctions between Jew and Gentile.\textsuperscript{291} Lapide interprets the “hate your enemy” saying as a polemical interpolation by the author of Matthew to further slander the Jews.\textsuperscript{292} That it might come from the Qumran tradition is denied due to time-frames\textsuperscript{293}; the Essenes would not have had enough influence to be the source of this thinking in the time of Matthew’s authorship.\textsuperscript{294} Convention in Jesus’ time was to hate your enemies, and especially those labeled “unrighteous enemies of God.”\textsuperscript{295} This mentality is precisely what is objected to by commanding that love and goodness be shown to enemies, just as God is good to all (Matt. 5:44-7; Luke 6:27-36).\textsuperscript{296} It is noteworthy that, when examining these teachings in Matthew, Reiser and other commentators on the text join loving enemies with the pacifist

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{286} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 302.
\item \textsuperscript{287} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 299.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 129.
\item \textsuperscript{289} Albright, \textit{Matthew}, 71.
\item \textsuperscript{290} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 132.
\item \textsuperscript{291} Albright, \textit{Matthew}, 71.
\item \textsuperscript{292} Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{293} DSM 1:3, cited in Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{295} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 132.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 133-4.
\end{itemize}
This illustrates a tendency to neglect the unity of the entire passage of Matt. 5:17-48, as it stands in Matthew, as one of extreme commands, even among some scholars; instead, teachings are isolated for scrutiny.

The three extreme examples from the previous antithesis are taken by Reiser to show that Jesus took the idea of loving enemies seriously. It is submitted that Jesus would have been the first to interpret Lev. 19:18 as including enemies—claiming that the only other thinker in antiquity who rejects harming enemies is Socrates. Reiser identifies three levels of friend-enemy ethics. The first is a principle of reciprocity and appropriate revenge—loving a friend and hating an enemy—presented as a pre-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Jewish value system; second is trying not to payback evil with evil, but treating an enemy with respect and justice in the hope of befriending him/her; this ethic seeks to do without appropriate revenge as much as possible, yet it is not officially repudiated; finally: loving one’s enemy regardless of consequences and never seeking revenge; only Socrates, a few Roman Stoics, and Lev. 19:18 under Jesus’ interpretation are seen as reaching this level. For Reiser, the justification for loving enemies—to be like God who does good for the bad and good (vv.44-5)—is unique and innovative in antiquity. Some Greeks thought hatred might be beneath human dignity, and some Jews that vengeance should be left to God, but none came up with the justification put into the mouth of Jesus by Matthew’s author.

The idea that loving only those who show love to you deserves no reward in v.46, pre-existing in

Q based on its parallel in Luke 6:32-3, is also present in the Didache.\textsuperscript{304} Referring to a “brother” in v.47 most likely implies a member of the same fraternal religious community\textsuperscript{305}; thus, the passage is, once again, extolling the Christian to show benevolence to those outside of the “in-group.” Loving enemies was a trademark characteristic of early Christians which astonished non-believers. This command highlights love as the foundation of the higher righteousness which is summarized with perfection.\textsuperscript{306} Though it cannot be certain that Jesus uttered these sayings, in this way, it is likely that they contain the essence of his teaching: that he commanded love of enemies and discouraged retaliation.\textsuperscript{307}

Still, New Testament texts pose a problem for demonstrating this quality amidst early believers. Paul’s attitude toward adversaries was less than charitable (Acts 23:3; 1 Cor. 11:12-5; 13:2; Gal. 2:11-4; 3:1,3). Those with a rival Christian message are treated harshly in 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 12-22; likewise, Stephen’s famous speech in Acts ends with insult and accusation of guilt to those opposing him (Acts 8:51-3). Perhaps carrying the most weight are instances wherein Jesus’s own behaviour toward those he clashes with does not befit the final antithesis put into his mouth (Matt. 11:20-4; 12:25-36, 41-2; 21:12-3; 23).\textsuperscript{308} These challenges to a literal interpretation and application of the final antithesis can be quelled through acknowledgment of the broader passage, and its purpose.

The pedagogical goal of the teachings in question is illuminated by the final, short and simple, yet practically impossible exhortation to perfection (Matt. 5:48). Rather than flawlessness,\textsuperscript{304} Did. 1:3, cited in Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 120.\textsuperscript{305} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 134.\textsuperscript{306} Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 340; Nolland, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 270-1.\textsuperscript{307} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 297.\textsuperscript{308} For the preceding points see Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 349.
Matthew’s perfection is devotion to God.\textsuperscript{309} The higher righteousness is accomplished by wholeness, being intact and complete. In the Old Testament, living perfectly involves total indivisibility in devotion to God; this is what Matthew’s author has in mind.\textsuperscript{310} Other interpretations vary, but not in critical ways. For Albright, $\tau\epsilon\lambda\varepsilon\sigma$ in v.48 does not refer to moral perfection, but truth and sincerity (Deut. 28:13)\textsuperscript{311}; this perspective complements the entire passage’s emphasis on an internal integrity of the heart, rather than external action. For Lapide, perfection is the result of repaying evil with good and showing mercy to all; this is the key element to acting out the commandment of love and being whole as God is.\textsuperscript{312} Luz proposes that love of enemies is the primary path to perfection, upon which the other teachings are built; this trait is required of every believer, voiding any sense of a two-tier ethic.\textsuperscript{313} Luz’s ultimate interpretation of love of enemies is not that it is practically possible, or intended to improve the social-political struggles of the world; rather, that a willingness to show love toward enemies, generally or in individual acts, is an expression of God’s love toward human beings, through other human beings, for their own sake.\textsuperscript{314} This corresponds to “… the Hassidic interpretation, [wherein] the deeper meaning is that wherever two persons love one another selflessly on earth, God is the third party in their covenant.”\textsuperscript{315} In this way, the SM is not a utopian fantasy but a guideline for practical ethics that can make the world a better place.\textsuperscript{316}

4. Conclusion:

This brief survey of scholarly writings reveals that the teachings, much like the entire passage of

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{309} Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, 135.
\item\textsuperscript{310} For the preceding points see Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, 135.
\item\textsuperscript{311} Albright, Matthew, 71-2.
\item\textsuperscript{312} Lapide, The Sermon on the Mount, 119.
\item\textsuperscript{313} Luz, Matthew 1-7, 346-7.
\item\textsuperscript{314} Luz, Matthew 1-7, 351.
\item\textsuperscript{315} Lapide, The Sermon on the Mount, 83.
\item\textsuperscript{316} Lapide, The Sermon on the Mount, 137, 142.
\end{itemize}
which they are a part, are of considerable depth—offering avenues for scholarly pursuits in various directions. Consequently, scholarship tends to feature a wide-range of opinions on any number of relevant subjects, where evidence is used differently and interpretations vary. Some modern scholars prefer to read certain antitheses with a literal method of interpretation similar to that observed in the ancient pieces and popular theological writings—supporting this with exegetical information concerning the socio-historical circumstances surrounding authorship; others utilize the same type of information to submit hyperbolic intentions for the teachings.

The difference between teachings which modern scholars may approach literally, compared to those they have a tendency to show more liberty in interpreting figuratively, reflect the following:

i. a fragmented analysis of the antitheses; rather than viewing them as one unit of hyperboles that point to foundational principles.

ii. antitheses that even scholarship shows a greater tendency to treat literally are those that may have a stronger influence in modern Christian culture (i.e. pacifism, forgiveness and love).

With respect to those who maintain literal interpretations of specific antitheses, it is particularly relevant that such readings are commonly offered when an antithesis is investigated in isolation.

Despite the diversity of opinion, there is enough common acknowledgement that literal interpretation is not the way to approach the teachings to make a compelling case. As Hagner notes, taking the commands literally simply perpetuates a cycle of legalism; thus, they are to be taken seriously, but as a vehicle to discover an inner disposition of moral integrity.317 This assertion will be strengthened as the entire passage is explored; for, the strongest evidence

317. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 125.
against reading any part of Matt. 5:17-48 literally comes through viewing all of the antithetical teachings as part of a single passage, understood and constructed by the author as a unit of hyperbolic moral commands. Therefore, what follows are investigations of Matt. 5:17-48 as a unified passage, through scholarly methods which are best suited for contrasting the text with literal interpretations of the teachings.
Chapter 3.2
Literary Criticism of Matt. 5:17-48 as a Unified Passage

Considering Matt. 5:17-48, in its entirety, under the lens of Literary Criticism highlights the theme of upholding the Law, the rhetorical device of antithesis, and an implementation of hyperbolic extremes. These were employed by the author to make Matt. 5:17-48 a complete unit with a unique quality and pedagogical tone.

Several of the most noteworthy characteristics about Matt. 5:17-48 as a literary unit lie in vv.17-20. These verses emphasize the centrality of the Jewish Law to the morality of the kingdom being proclaimed, a theme that will continue throughout the antitheses that follow. Additionally, it is in vv.17-20 that the extreme nature of Jesus’ exhortations begins—a trait that resounds throughout the proceeding teachings. The antitheses themselves exemplify a consciously chosen pattern by which the author structures his pedagogy. Acknowledging this facilitates comprehending the passage as a carefully crafted teaching unit with a specific purpose. Finally, the use of hyperbole in this section is indispensible as a subject for analyzing Matthew’s literary style. This trait characterizes the entire section, and should be considered as a rhetorical device used to stress an underlying morality.

Literary Criticism involves paying particular attention to the author’s style and means of conveying a message. This is done by identifying key themes, rhetorical devices and structure, so as to discover the mind of the gospel writers through the manner of writing. Despite utilizing source material, and pre-existing narrative formats, they remain authors nonetheless, who exercise creative freedom in how the material is organized and elaborated upon to convey unique
theological perspectives: “We are becoming more and more sensitive to the fact that the evangelists are authors working freely and creatively with their material.” Thus, the authors must be understood and respected as legitimate “authors,” and not merely compilers: “They write for a definite purpose, they give their work a distinct and individual structure, they have thematic concerns which they pursue, the characters in the story they each tell function as protagonists in a plot, and so on.” For Perrin, appreciating the evangelists as authors requires that scholars engage in thorough consideration of various characteristics, some common to mainstream biblical scholarship and some less frequently given attention. In so doing, investigation of biblical texts should share commonalities with literary investigation of other classical texts. By utilizing the staples of historical-critical biblical scholarship, with an added awareness of the concerns of literary investigation and authorship, a deeper appreciation for the reality that “Matthew,” “Mark,” and “Luke” were authors—in the full sense of the word—can be cultivated and promulgated: “[T]here can . . . be no valid hermeneutics which does not consider seriously the intent of the author and the original purpose of the text which he created.”

For Kingsbury, literary criticism gives special attention to narratives, their content and rhetorical techniques, making understanding Matthew as a unified narrative essential to appreciating it; this is contrasted with historical-biographical redaction and Form Criticism, which look for historical and theological realities behind the story instead of concentrating on the story itself.

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321. Perrin, “The Evangelist as Author,” 10-8. These include text and language, sources, redaction, historical context of authorship, literary form, recognition of form and structure, protagonist and plot, and prominent themes of the author.
322. For the preceding points see Perrin, “The Evangelist as Author,” 18.
This view leads to seeing Matthew as comprised of two parts: story (i.e. what is told from birth to resurrection), and discourse (how it is told).\(^3_{25}\) Acknowledging discourse, Kingsbury points out that Matthew attaches special importance to teaching by placing it before preaching and healing units in the narrative. Moreover, Jesus’ teachings take place in the context of the kingdom, laying out how he expects followers to act in it.\(^3_{26}\)

Mohrlang approaches narrative differently, placing heightened responsibility on the reader to acknowledge literary concerns when attempting to understand the author’s priorities. The literary genre of Mathew imposes restrictions on the author to overtly state his precise position succinctly; he is bound to the Jesus Tradition and an inherited narrative.\(^3_{27}\) Thus, his views must be extrapolated, as far as they can be, from within this content. More important in terms of analyzing Matt. 5:17-48, however, is an insight that the complexity of mixing Tradition, source material, and redaction “. . . supports the conviction that it is preferable to treat such passages as wholes, as interpreted tradition reflecting in its entirety the writer’s own understanding and viewpoint [italics added].”\(^3_{28}\) Scholars have tended to isolate verses and concentrate on the individual origins and sources of each; this, however, does great disservice to the author of Matthew, who obviously saw the antitheses as united in this one unit.\(^3_{29}\) Avoiding this encourages putting heightened emphasis on one theme, in particular, that permeates the entire passage.

325. For the preceding points see Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2.
326. For the preceding points see Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 64-5.
1. Law:

Literary Criticism draws attention to the prominent Jewish themes that lace the Gospel of Matthew. It is common knowledge, in the scholarly community, that Matthew’s theology is that of a Christianity still understanding itself as thoroughly Jewish; likewise, his audience consisted, at least in large part, of Jewish-Christians. These are considered to most probably have been Jews of the diaspora who became Christians. Supporting this are the observations that Matthew’s author structured his piece in five separate sections to correspond to the five books of Moses, and the piece gives more attention to the tension between Israel and Christians than any other gospel; also, Jesus’ work is at first only intended for Israel, though Gentiles do take a place of significance. This quality of the gospel’s audience permeates the entirety of the work, but has particular relevance for Matt. 5:17-48.

In Matthew’s world, “the Law and the Prophets” refers to the entire Old Testament. These writings function as a norm for behaviour and prophesying the end-time. In the narrative of Jesus’ life, controversy over the Law is what motivates the Jewish leaders to have Jesus killed. He is critical, condescending and sarcastic toward the legalistic, ritual observance of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-36). Yet, throughout the entire gospel, Matthew’s redaction from Markan passages regarding the Law consistently soften the sharpness of statements so as to

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avoid an implication of invalidating it.\textsuperscript{340}

Stressed at the outset of the passage in question (Matt. 5:17-20), the Law serves as the moral bedrock that Christians are expected to supersede in the antitheses that follow. This theme coincides with the readily apparent Jewish character of the entire gospel, offering valuable insight into Matthew’s orientation. While teaching takes prominence in Matthew’s narrative by preceding preaching and healing, it is just as significant that the Law is a central issue of the teachings.\textsuperscript{341} This pillar of Judaism receives its final revelation through Jesus’ teaching, and his interpretation of it bears authority; it is this understanding of the Law, superior in strictness and facilitated by love, that will not pass away until the earth does (Matt. 5:18).\textsuperscript{342}

Each of the antitheses begins with a characteristic statement referencing previous teachings with, at least, a theme in the Pentateuch. Even when the “saying” is not a direct quotation from the Torah, it is a conventional tradition built upon the Law\textsuperscript{343}: “[T]he dialogue partner is not the OT law as such but the OT law as currently (and sometimes misleadingly) understood and applied.”\textsuperscript{344} Additionally, every teaching contains an antithetical statement. These statements carry the same meaning regardless of varying form.\textsuperscript{345} More importantly, though, the phrase was recognizable as signifying an authoritative claim.\textsuperscript{346} While the phrase was a device for rabbis offering a different interpretation on the Law, exercising such authority was rare—especially when the interpretation stood in tension with pre-existing ideas.\textsuperscript{347} This may partially explain the

\textsuperscript{341} Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 65.
\textsuperscript{342} For the preceding points see Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 67.
\textsuperscript{344} France, The Gospel of Matthew, 196.
\textsuperscript{345} France, The Gospel of Matthew, 195.
\textsuperscript{346} Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 111.
\textsuperscript{347} Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 111.
author’s need to introduce the teachings with a reassurance that the Law is being upheld (vv.17-20).

The scribes and Pharisees are mentioned together here for the first time; scribes were professional interpreters of the Law for practical application, while Pharisees were a reform movement aimed at following every aspect of it meticulously. Surpassing the scribes and Pharisees, in v.20, is Matthew’s own addition; it summarizes the preceding points, and explains the motivation for the antitheses. The scribes and Pharisees were diligent in keeping the Law and showed great devotion to it. These two groups should not be seen as lacking moral fervor; rather, it was their intensity that led to emphasizing minute details at the expense of the comprehensive moral picture. Though Matt. 5:17-48 should not be wholly understood as correcting the problem of exacting scrutiny in Jewish observance of the Torah, with an emphasis on over-arching moral principles, these elements are latent in the teachings; for, tedious legality facilitated several of the moral circumstances addressed by these “new interpretations” of the Law and Traditional interpretations of it. Being more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees would have been ridiculous, unless a different interpretation of “righteousness” is accepted. The author does not require beating them at their own game. Instead, Jesus’ followers must go even further through love, carrying their righteousness to the world.

The introduction to Matt. 5:17-48 confronts Jesus’ messianic authority with the Torah, a source

of conflict with Jewish leaders later on. The teachings are presented, not as opposing the Law, but as holier interpretations of it. This leads Lapide to conclude that the so called antitheses are actually “supertheses;” they do not undo what has been taught, but demand avoiding even evil desires before they become wrongdoing. While some of the teachings do, in fact, overtly nullify the statement that is referenced despite the assertions of vv.17-20, Lapide’s claim does have some validity as it would appear to be the way the author wished the teachings to be received.

Therefore, the introductory affirmation of the Law in Matt. 5:17-20 identifies the hermeneutical principles that governed Jesus’ interpretation of the Law in the eyes of Matthew’s author. The writer maintains a Jewish tradition wherein every aspect of the Law will be upheld, redactionally placing it in the SM so as to give it added weight. This makes the SM in Matthew unique among virtually all other NT texts. Verse 17 establishes the teachings formally; having kept the essence of each teaching as a collected saying of Jesus, these are presented in a formula to be obeyed. More importantly, this first principle establishes that Jesus is not opposed to the Law, but fulfills it.

Another principle is located in v.18, that the Jewish scriptures maintain their validity for Christian believers; so, “. . . the SM remains within the bounds of Judaism” until the end of

356. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 112.
time. In v.19, Jesus’ interpretation of the Law is established as authoritative. This verse may be directed against Pauline Christians who had disregarded the Law’s relevance for believers. It is a warning and encouragement to those teachers who hold, what the author considers to be, “proper” beliefs. Finally, v.20 identifies the goal of the entire SM in Matthew as surpassing the scribes and Pharisees in righteousness. This is crucial as it highlights the praxis of the scribes and Pharisees as incapable of reaching the Kingdom of Heaven; in contrast, the followers of Jesus’ teachings must renounce pure externalism, and disclose their internal dispositions toward God. This, then, is the fundamental principle for interpreting the passage: the teachings are not intended as legally binding rules, but as instructions intended to familiarize the disciple with God’s will and facilitate application through thought and action. This is the higher righteousness.

Scholars have tended to isolate verses of the passage and concentrate on the individual origins and sources of each. This, however, does great disservice to the author of Matthew, who obviously saw them as united by a similar theme in this one unit: “The Instruction on the Mount is thus nothing but the Torah exegesis of Jesus of Nazareth proceeding from this twofold love [of God and neighbour] and aiming to make it concrete so that God’s reign on earth may break through.” Moses offered his own commentary on the Law in Deut. 1:5; likewise, Matt. 5:17-20 portrays Jesus not as a usurper of the Mosaic Law, “. . . but as the legitimate

369. For the preceding points see Betz, Essays on the Sermon on the Mount, 53.
interpreter of God’s will as contained in the Torah.” Together with the antitheses, vv.17-9 indicate a true interpretation of the Law rather than an overthrowing of it.

That the antitheses passage begins this way indicates both that Jesus displays unquestionable fidelity to the Law, and that the author did not see the instructions to come as doing away with it. Furthermore, by inserting “But I say to you,” into the antitheses, the text is reiterating that the Old Testament Law has its validity, authority and proper understanding through Jesus’ interpretation. Therefore, the format and structure of the new commands also do not resemble a new Law, so that Jesus is not a new Moses, or in opposition to either; instead, what is being offered is an authoritative interpretation exposing the core, and true will of God in the Torah—a guide to conduct based on the love principle.

Despite the claim that the Law persists, the new behaviour is clearly presented as different than the old way of living. The Law retains immense prominence for the author; yet, the true focus is on the person of Jesus as Lord and Son of God—elevating his authority beyond that of the Torah. Therefore, the retained status of the Law should not be overestimated.

The first two antitheses surpass commands of the Decalogue, while the third, fifth and sixth hold tension with Old Testament commands. The fourth antithesis in particular, completely

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377. For the preceding points see Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 119; Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 100-1; Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul*, 23-5. Though Hagner rejects that the passage is an exegesis of the Decalogue, due to the reverse ordering of imperatives against lust and adultery when compared with their source in Exod. 20:14-17; Deut. 5:18-21 (Matt. 5:27-32), his perspective is compatible with others in seeing an attempt to unearth the heart of the Law.
379. For the preceding points see Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul*, 23-5.
abolishes the practice described. Though some of the antitheses could be taken as abrogating the Law, their purpose is to “. . . call for heightened obedience to its deepest intent. . . . Here the evangelist declares that the kind of righteousness the law requires is of a much deeper level than that of mere legal conformity.”

The ethics of Matthew’s SM, then, are not foreign to Jewish piety; they are presented as obedience to the proper interpretation of the Torah: learning and imitating God’s loving mercy for creation. Early Christianity held that Jesus had fulfilled the Torah through the love commandment; therefore, it is fitting that the passage introduced with devotion to the Law is summarized with a final command to love (Matt. 5:44-8). The context of the whole passage, as well as the Matthean prioritization of love (Matt. 5:48; 7:12; 9:13; 12:7; 22:40), suggests that the “fulfillment” of the Law is to live-out its deeper objective. In this way, keeping the Law and doing God’s will is always an act of love.

Legal Fulfillment:

Scholarly discussions of vv.17-20 are overwhelmingly drawn to the meaning of “fulfill” when speaking of the Law in v.17. The entire section of 5:17-48 operates on the central theme of fulfilling the Law. As a thematic phrase, “the Law” is not restricted to vv.17-20; it is coupled with “the Prophets” as a constant throughout the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 11:13; 22:40), and

386. Mohrlang, Matthew and Paul, 8.
these are especially bound to fulfillment in this gospel. The key issue is how “fulfilling the Law and the Prophets” is interpreted.

A problem exists in assuming that Matthew’s author intended that Christians keep the Law completely, given what is known about the transition away from dietary Laws and other customs in the early Church (Rom7:1-6; 10:4; Gal 3:24-5; 5:1-6); moreover, the tension that several of the imperatives hold with traditional obedience throws doubt on assuming this to be the author’s intention. Nevertheless, one is obligated to investigate what motivated the author to make these claims and compose the unit this way.

By the time Matthew was written, Christians had accepted that dietary Laws and other customs were unnecessary (Matt. 12:1-8; 23:23-6), so the author’s “doing” the Law must mean something else. While some submit that, for Matthew, “fulfill” carries a connotation of understanding and true meaning, Lambrecht proposes that fulfilling is making the true will and teaching of God known. Albright’s interpretation is very similar, reading πληροφορεῖν as “to clarify the true meaning of.” On the other hand, Schweizer and France offer an insightful and viable meaning of “to fulfill” as carrying the connotation of “to bring into being” as it does elsewhere in Matthew (Matt. 1:22; 3:15; 11:14; 13:14,48; 26:54,56). This interpretation is more convincing as the ethics of the antitheses can be seen as bringing into being obedience to the Legal commands referenced—those with no anger will not murder, those who do not lust will not

390. Albright, Matthew, cvii.
392. For the preceding points see France, The Gospel of Matthew, 180.
394. Lambrecht, The Sermon on the Mount, 84.
395. Albright, Matthew, 58.
commit adultery—whereas clarifying a true meaning does not befit the antitheses where elaborations or additions are given.397 So then, this deeper interpretation of the Law, when followed, brings its purpose into being more fully.

The teaching on fulfilling the Law, and the antitheses that follow, should also be considered within the general context of the gospels as a whole. According to Luz, commandments about fasting, divorce, and provisions reveal that Jesus’ teachings were nuanced and adapted in the early Church.398 The Law was primary for the Jews, while early Christians emphasized the prophetic nature of the Old Testament. The controversy between Paul and the Jerusalem Church over the place of the Law should be understood as the background here.399 Therefore, Matthew’s author compiled moral teachings deemed to be among the most important within a framework that presented them as fulfillment of the Law, so as to bridge the Jewishness of his community with their Christian beliefs. The author understands the commands of the Law as coming fully into being through this “new righteousness”—internalizing and prioritizing a consciousness of pleasing God through selflessness toward a neighbour, even at the expense of following the Law literally.400 This disposition toward interpreting the Law should also be applied to the hyperbolic commands that follow in the antitheses.

2. Antithetical Structure:

An antithesis—in which a decree of the Law, or Traditional interpretation of it, is either made more strict, or done away with altogether—is featured as the introduction to every major

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397. Mohrlang, Matthew and Paul, 8, 19. If fulfill as “bringing into being” takes its strength particularly from other uses, such as the fulfillment of prophecy, challenges to the interpretation can persist with regard to fulfilling the Law through the antitheses, wherein some of the former commands seem to be done away with.
399. For the preceding points see Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew, 139- 41.
teaching of Matt 5:21-48, so that the theme of excelling in righteousness drives the passage. This antithetical framework, by which previous decrees are contrasted with the new, carries a noted tone of authority and serves to emphasize a superseding of the scribes and Pharisees in a righteousness of internal virtue (Matt. 5:20).

The antithetical format, which Matthew’s author employed consciously to structure the teachings, suits the authority ascribed to Jesus throughout the rest of the work.\textsuperscript{401} It is also befitting of these ethical commands intended to comprise the moral fabric of believers living under God’s reign. However, this tone of authority is perhaps best understood in relation to bringing into being a deeper interpretation of the Law.\textsuperscript{402} Appreciating antithetical authority is particularly viable given that superseding the Law is at the root of each antithetical statement. The author is confident in utilizing radical principles for guiding human conduct because these are put into the mouth of one who is presented as the divine Son of God under a developed Christology.\textsuperscript{403} As such, Matthew’s Jesus possesses the authority to go beyond the Law when implementing a higher morality for his followers to adhere to.\textsuperscript{404}

The statement “But I say to you,” or variations of it, by which the author’s Jesus begins every adapted teaching is a specific formulation of a rabbinic interpretation on the Law.\textsuperscript{405} While, the antithetical format is often cited as an authoritative, Christian superseding of the Jewish Law\textsuperscript{406}—posing the “new” faith at odds with its roots—these words reflect typical phraseology

\begin{footnotes}
\item [404] Mohrlang, \textit{Matthew and Paul}, 23-5, 126.
\item [405] Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?} 44-5.
\item [406] Lapide, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 42-3.
\end{footnotes}
of interpreting the Torah by devotees. Giving context and examples for the antitheses was a common pedagogical practice at the time; learners needed concrete circumstances to properly understand traditions, teachings and divine Law.\(^{407}\) Therefore, the assertions put into the mouth of Matthew’s Jesus reflect other confident teachers of the time, such as those seen in the debates between Hillel and Shammai.\(^{408}\) These insights support a popular view in Matthean scholarship, that the author was a former legalist—a Jewish rabbi who converted to Christianity—who was concerned with a growing lawlessness in the Church.\(^{409}\) Thus, while Kingsbury’s position that the divine authority of Matthew’s Jesus enables him to supersede the Law remains valid\(^{410}\), this does not require distancing the new commands from their foundation in Judaism, nor void the relevance of their historical-cultural setting within Jewish-Christianity.

Moreover, the new teachings following “But I say to you . . .” demonstrate that God’s revelation cannot be limited to legal tenets, but must penetrate the interior person.\(^{411}\) The emphasis on the internal disposition, making it just as crucial for righteousness as outward actions, is often seen as the truly revolutionary element of kingdom ethics.\(^{412}\) Such a perspective, it could be argued, was befitting the diversity of occupied Palestine in the first century C.E.; for Greek, Roman and Israelite Law all judged an offense by its intention, and the teachings of Matt. 5:17-48 convey that Christians should understand God as doing no less.\(^{413}\)

In light of this focus on internal dispositions and motives, care should be taken to avoid treating


\(^{408}\) *Aboth*, V.20, cited in Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 44-5.


\(^{410}\) Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 41, 45-6, 78, 82; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 100-1.


\(^{412}\) Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 118.

the teachings of the antitheses as orders to be adhered to blindly. Taking the commands literally falls into a new form of legalism; they are to be taken seriously, but used to discover the internal disposition of the kingdom.\footnote{Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 118.} Therefore, the new morality put into Jesus’ mouth by the words “But I say to you . . .” can be summarized in five points: (1) the Law serving humanity, not abstraction; (2) the Law not being inflexible, but interpreted based on circumstance; (3) the principle of love being the general umbrella guiding decisions in specific situations; (4) that there is to be no discrimination between the outsider and insider, the evil and the righteous; (5) finally, Law itself must be critical of making any one stipulation absolute.\footnote{For the preceding points see Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 136-7.} Therefore, though the divine authority of Matthew’s Jesus must be considered as a latent factor in the antitheses, this does not necessitate a literal application of the teachings. There remains a third literary component of these teachings carrying equal weight alongside their antithetical structure: a hyperbolic tone.

3. Hyperbole:

The passage of Matt. 5:17-48 is laced with absolute statements of excessive or extreme nature from the outset. It could be submitted that claiming not even the smallest mark of the Law will pass away until heaven and earth does is hyperbolic (Matt. 5:18); likewise, that any teaching in conflict with the Law merits the lowest status in the kingdom, as well as admonitions to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees seem excessive (Matt. 5:19-20). Clearly hyperbolic commands continue being delivered throughout the antitheses. Every reference to the Law is followed by an imperative of hyperbolic character. The first teaching asserts that anger warrants judgment and that verbal slander merits prosecution and hell-fire (Matt. 5:22). The second antithesis claims a lustful look is the moral equivalent of adulterous intercourse before
ordering dismemberment to avoid this (Matt. 5:28-30). The teaching against divorce equates the legal act with adultery (Matt. 5:32). The ban on oaths not only makes a sweeping statement against all swearing, but adds that any elaboration on an honest statement beyond “yes” or “no” is motivated by “the evil one” (Matt. 5:33-7). The teaching against retaliation demands that no resistance be given to an evil aggressor, that a struck victim offer the other cheek for more striking, that every garment owned should be freely offered if a lawsuit is filed for one article of clothing, that the victim of forced military service freely offer double the required service, and that any request should always be met with complete generosity (Matt. 5:39-42). The concluding teaching demands loving enemies and praying for persecutors, before a final admonition to exist in perfection as God does (Matt. 5:44-7,48).

The pattern of antithesis and hyperbole in this section reveals that the author is doing more than simply laying down rules to be blindly followed. Few to none would think to follow the maxim of self-mutilation literally (Matt. 5:29-30); yet, it is questioned whether turning the other cheek or never taking an oath are intended literally (Matt. 5:34-7,39), despite that these imperatives form a section featuring literary and stylistic unity. That every matter discussed precedes an order that is absolute and severe suggests that the entirety of the section should be viewed through the lens of this rhetorical schema.

The hyperbolic qualities of Matt. 5:17-48 must be considered alongside popular teaching styles of the time. Crossan maintains that understanding the use of aphorisms is integral to the unit. For him, aphorisms are concise maxims given in sharp language416; they are, by nature,

authoritative—regardless of content.\footnote{417} Even more important for this discussion, however, is the observation that hyperbole and exaggeration are characteristic of typical aphorisms.\footnote{418} It is also worth noting that, in oral transmission, only the basic structure of an aphorism is important; it is only once it is committed to writing that the exact wording becomes crucial.\footnote{419} This prompts Crossan to conclude that the original teachings of Jesus were not drilled into the minds of his followers as dogmatic statements; he observes that had Jesus instructed his disciples to memorize the exact phrasing of his aphorisms, their accuracy in transmission would be among the worst in the history of this process.\footnote{420} Such implied fluidity in the transmission leads Carlston to identify what were likely the fundamentals of Jesus’ original aphorisms; although many of the aphorisms determined to have been in the original Jesus Tradition existed before his time, or were contemporary with him\footnote{421}, teaching attributed to him “. . . differs in its use of hyperbole, its paradoxical formulations, its extremism, its demand for bold action, and perhaps above all in its eschatological conditioning.”\footnote{422} These elements of inherited teachings were acknowledged by Matthew’s author, as he generated a single unit that relied upon and accentuated them.

Considering the author’s intent in creating this passage, it is significant that hyperbole is specifically paired with teachings presented as upholding the Law. Given Matthew’s Jewish-Christian orientation, it is likely that teachings relating to the Law were of particular importance; this may explain the use of hyperbole, here, as a direct result of the weight that the author connects to this subject. Such a tactic can be seen as in keeping with other New Testament texts, wherein hyperbole is used as a means to stress teachings that are of particular concern for the

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{417} Crossan, \textit{In Fragments}, 26.
\item \footnote{418} Crossan, \textit{In Fragments}, 27.
\item \footnote{419} Crossan, \textit{In Fragments}, 39.
\item \footnote{420} Crossan, \textit{In Fragments}, 40.
\item \footnote{422} Carlston, “Proverbs, Maxims, and the Historical Jesus,” 102.
\end{itemize}
author. The Gospel of Luke, for example, emphasizes social justice and morality concerning material possessions⁴²³, and the author implements hyperbole toward this end (Luke 12:22,29,33; 14:33; 18:22,24-5). Thus, the extreme teachings found in Matt. 5:17-48 reflect the author’s own theological priorities—introduced as fulfillment of the Law.

A sincerity and purity in interpersonal relationships underlies all of the hyperbolic antitheses.⁴²⁴ The teachings go beyond traditions and the commands of the Law to get at the root of actions which should not occur in the first place⁴²⁵: “True righteousness requires a whole and undivided heart, which belongs first to one’s neighbour and thus also to God.”⁴²⁶ Such an internalizing of morality and “high ethical idealism” is then epitomized in the love commandment⁴²⁷: “The greater righteousness meant by Jesus engages the entire person; it has its centre of gravity in love; God’s perfection is its model.”⁴²⁸ Therefore, the entire passage of Matt. 5:17-48 can be understood as promoting a focus on inward motives and concerns instead of outward actions. It encourages superseding specific rules with general principles to govern conduct, while not being concerned with avoiding sin as much as doing the will of God. Finally, the passage replaces a system by which perfect righteousness through meticulous legal observance is theoretically possible with a far-reaching ideal (being perfect as God is: v.48), that is beyond the achievement of any disciple.⁴²⁹ This last characteristic necessitates a perpetual striving for holiness, while discouraging any sense of self-righteous satisfaction.

⁴²⁷ Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 112.
⁴²⁸ Lambrecht, The Sermon on the Mount, 113.
⁴²⁹ For the preceding points see France, The Gospel of Matthew, 197.
“Unchastity” as a Challenge to Hyperbole:

The greatest challenge to the argument that Matthew’s author purposefully incorporated severe and hyperbolic statements, not necessarily intended for literal interpretation, into a unified passage is the exception clause in the prohibition on divorce (Matt. 5:31-2). The teaching against divorce, and equating it with adultery, has been appropriated by the author from the Markan source (Mk 10:11-2). However, unlike the original, and Luke’s use of the same teaching (Luke 16:18), Matthew’s author adds the phrase “except for unchastity,” when prohibiting divorce (Matt. 5:32). This brief accommodation can cast doubt on the assertion that all of the teachings in the passage are intentionally extreme, and not intended for literal adherence. It could be argued that the exception clause of Matt. 5:32 suggests the original author expected the teachings to be followed literally. Though redaction criticism will continue to support that the author recognized the passage as unified by teachings of extreme quality, the need to include an exception clause for divorce remains puzzling if the author understood the teachings as hyperbolic.

The meaning of πορνεία, here, is uncertain and debated given that the common Greek word for adultery is not used as it is in Matt. 5:27-8; John 8:3. Schweizer takes it to mean continual behaviour rather than one instance of infidelity, allowing him to apply the antithesis with a serious thrust. Despite this, he understands the antithesis prohibiting divorce as, essentially, attacking the self-righteous satisfaction of one who has observed divorce rules of the Law and thinks this is satisfactory for righteousness.

430. Similarly, the interpolation of an exception clause into the antithesis against anger in Matt. 5:22, discussed in section 3.4, indicates that later scribes accepted the antitheses literally—thereby requiring an exception for one felt to be too difficult.

431. For the preceding points see Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, 124.

Fitzmyer, on the other hand, uses contemporary Jewish teachings and Old Testament references to submit that πορνεταί indicates Gentile marriages between close kin (incest) that were necessarily dissolved as illicit for converts to Judaism, or Christianity, and especially for the Jewish-Christians in Matthew’s community (Lev 18:6-18; Acts 15:29). Further significance lies in that Matthew’s exception is not found in parallels of the teaching. This is thought to reflect pressures and views of his community, while still imploring Christians to seek the ideal. This information could be used to assert that, for all practical purposes, marriages were permanent bonds for Matthew’s community; thus, the teaching was followed literally, requiring the exception clause. Moreover, the witness of the First Letter to the Corinthians supports that divorce was not an option for Christians, even at this early stage, as only non-Christians have the option of dissolving their bond (1 Cor 7:12).

At the same time, however, it could be hypothesized that the absolute prohibition against divorce, and equating it with adultery, was understood hyperbolically—in-line with the rest of the passage. Marriage may have been treated as a sacred, life-long bond for Matthew’s believers, which was not subject to being dissolved; though, exceptional cases of repeated and unabashed adultery, for example, may have nulled the union. In this scenario the exception clause, under Fitzmyer’s interpretation of pre-existing incestuous unions, would have been a necessary addition, and perhaps simple common-sense, to address a practical problem that faced the community regularly. Such a context and understanding could allow for a hyperbolic intention for Matt. 5:31-2, which is not threatened by the exception clause.

434. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 126.
This teaching against divorce challenges the idea that the antitheses are not intended literally more than any other. Its literal application in the early Church and the author’s inclusion of it amidst the other teachings is problematic for a hyperbolic reading of the passage as a whole. The solution to this challenge is recognizing that the teachings were certainly important, and meant to be taken seriously; however, many aspects of their severity were not intended for literal application or interpretation. For example, drawing attention to wrath as a serious issue that facilitates murderous intent could be seen as the goal of the first antithesis (Matt. 5:21-22); however stating that anger and insult merits hell could be intended to convey the importance of the teaching—not a spiritual fact. Likewise, lust is considered a serious matter, a step toward fornication that should be avoided; however, that it is on equal moral ground with physical adultery, and that dismemberment should be employed to stave it off could simply be meant to affirm the severity of the issue (Matt. 5:27-30). In the same way, equating divorce with adultery is simply to emphasize how wrong it is.\footnote{436}{Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 125.}

\textbf{Hyperbole as Guide:}

Reading Matt. 5:17-48 as characteristically hyperbolic complements what Betz sees as the literary genre of the entire SM: “. . . an epitome presenting the theology of Jesus in a systematic fashion. The epitome is a composition carefully designed out of sayings of Jesus grouped according to thematic points of doctrine considered to be of primary importance.”\footnote{437}{Betz, Essays on the Sermon on the Mount, 15.} It is intended to offer followers the necessary tools of theologizing under the parameters of the master’s teaching and act accordingly.\footnote{438}{Betz, Essays on the Sermon on the Mount, 15.} The message is conveyed through phrases that
“. . . must be classified as wisdom sayings.” For Borg, paradoxical language and reversals serve to overturn convention. Seeing Jesus as a wisdom teacher—offering insights about how to live—Borg proposes he primarily taught in aphorisms and parables: “Aphorisms are short, memorable sayings, great ‘one-liners.’ Together, aphorisms and parables are the bedrock of the Jesus tradition, and they put us most directly in touch with the voice of the pre-Easter Jesus.” This voice is one that, in Borg’s view, speaks about the kingdom of God in impossible terms, or utilizing unexpected combinations. This perspective on Jesus’ teaching-style leads to the conclusion that recorded sayings attributed to him were not literal maxims: “Rather, the sayings individually require being thought about. As provocative sayings meant to lead the hearer to a new perception, they require time for digestion [italics added].” In this way, the nature of the commands as wisdom material encourages ongoing learning: “Thus the aphorisms of Jesus are best understood as memorable crystallizations of insight that invite further insight [italics added].”

Koester’s position, that the Q sayings are wisdom teachings, is primarily supported by early Christian writers and evidence that early communities did not follow some of the sayings literally. For him, extracanonical sources for Jesus’ sayings must be considered as weighty
evidence, both in revealing how the early Church understood and interacted with traditional sayings and by pointing to the possibility of variant collections.\footnote{Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 98-9.} “It is also quite likely that other early materials of Jesus’ sayings have survived outside of the trajectory of Q and have been incorporated into canonical and extra-canonical gospels independently of Q.”\footnote{Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 262.} Koester calls Jesus’ command to love enemies “hyperbolic radicalization,” claiming that followers in the first centuries of Christianity preferred wording the command differently.\footnote{Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 87-8.} The Didache, Justin Martyr, and Polycarp all chose to emphasize praying for enemies rather than using the word love.\footnote{Did. 1.3; Justin Martyr 1 Apol. 13.3; 15.9; Dial. 35.8; 96.3; 133.6; Polycarp Letter to the Philippians 12.3; Justin Martyr only uses the common wording of Matt. 5:44 once, in Dial. 85.7, cited in Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 87-8.}

Moreover, 1 Clem. 13:1-2 offers sayings of Jesus that, in general, are very similar to the virtues of the SM; however, notable differences exist in their phrasing, order, and the choice of some words. This version of the command recommends an attitude of mercy, forgiveness, and a lack of judgement in order to receive all of these gifts for oneself.\footnote{For the preceding points see Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 86-9.} These examples are taken by Koester to signify a non-literal interpretation and application of the early teaching to love enemies: “This clearly shows how Jesus’ radicalization of the commandment of love into the commandment of loving one’s enemies was rendered innocuous by being transformed into an admonition for prayer.”\footnote{Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 88.}

Koester explains the transition in the early Christian approach to recorded teachings from “liberal” to “literal” as resulting from the development and reverence of written gospels. He contends that the written gospels were intended as biographies, and not conceived of as “Gospels,” in the modern sense, by the authors; this understanding developed over time. The
original understanding of \( \epsilon\nu\alpha\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\nu\) was “. . . the proclamation of the saving message about Christ or the coming of the kingdom.” Koester argues that the preliminary Q document(s) developed from a message about the coming of God’s kingdom to the return and judgement of the Son of Man; this is generally compatible with Kloppenborg’s perspective on the source’s gradual progression from teaching “speeches” toward a preliminary biographical form, where a historical, or biographical tone was added to earlier sayings associating the speaker with a divine agent. The passing of time witnessed a shift in Christian focus from the dawning kingdom to orienting oneself toward the spiritual.

Koester stresses that even Q must be regarded as a later recollection of Jesus’ teachings, and not verbatim documentation: “[T]he earliest stage of the sayings tradition of the first written version of Q cannot be considered as a direct witness to the preaching of Jesus.” In his judgement, the tradition of Jesus’ passion and death was the primary aspect of early Christian belief, so that, eventually, only “gospels” including a telling of it were considered valid for the canon. Appreciating this assists in understanding the development from interpreting teachings liberally to literal adherence, as once the gospels, which would become canonical, were becoming more authoritative, adhering to the phrasing of loving enemies became more common.

Therefore, “[t]he SM is not law to be obeyed, but theology to be intellectually appropriated and internalized, in order then to be creatively developed and implemented in concrete situations of

452. For the preceding points see Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 56, 70-1. Luke identifies the genre of his work as a narrative (\( \delta\iota\gamma\eta\gamma\sigma\iota\sigma \)) in Luke 1:1-4.
453. Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 80.
456. Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 80.
457. Koester, From Jesus to the Gospels, 224.
life.” This coincides with Kingsbury’s insights regarding the antitheses when viewing Matthew as narrative: Matthew’s Jesus stresses a superior righteousness centred in singleness of heart and radical love of neighbour—all under the umbrella of loving God.

4. Conclusion:
Applying Literary Criticism to Matt. 5:17-48 supports viewing it as a single passage, united by theme, structure and discourse. The author’s Jewishness puts a heightened emphasis on the Law throughout the entire gospel, which is particularly pertinent in this passage. The rhetorical style of antithesis unifies the section, while also befitting a developed Christology by which the Law may be authoritatively reinterpreted. Likewise, the unit is characterized by extreme commands, which point to a deeper moral framework to guide general conduct and interaction. This perspective on the teachings will continue to be supported as they are examined under the lens of other useful scholarly methods.

460. Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 65, 68.
Chapter 3.3
Redaction Criticism of Matt. 5:17-48

Applying Redaction Criticism to the passage reveals that a majority of it is uniquely Matthean material. Out of all thirty-two verses in Matt. 5:17-48, only ten have parallels in the other synoptic gospels (vv. 25-6, 32, 39-40, 42, 44, 46-8). The emphasis on the Jewish Law, as well as the subsequent antithetical format is redactional. While several of the extreme commands have parallel passages, indicating they do not originate with the Gospel of Matthew, it is noteworthy that some of the most severe aspects are uniquely Matthean. In addition to revealing the author’s contribution to the text, Redaction Criticism allows scholarship to identify the source of material with parallels in Mark and Luke. Familiarity with the author’s sources in this passage will allow further insight into the earlier traditions of Jesus’ teaching, to suggest the ways in which Matt. 5:17-48 incorporates preliminary teachings and builds upon them. This information will show that Matthew’s author cannot be labeled as the sole innovator of putting extreme ideas into the mouth of Jesus. Yet, this same method of comparison reveals that his own hyperbolic statements are characteristically more severe than those that are shared.

Source Criticism is concerned with analyzing New Testament texts, primarily the Gospels, in order to uncover the nature of their source material. This thesis operates under the assumption, most common to New Testament scholarship, that the two-source hypothesis is correct. That is, that Matthew’s author utilized Mark and the Source Q, independently of Luke,

to form his gospel account.\textsuperscript{464} Redaction Criticism follows somewhat naturally from Source Criticism, by concerning itself with how the author of a gospel altered or deviated from source material when forming a unique text\textsuperscript{465}: “Redaction criticism is concerned with the final stage of the formation of the Gospels, and focuses on the evangelists’ editorial work in using their sources.”\textsuperscript{466} This methodology reveals the authors as theologians—tailoring their sources toward a specific message and perspective.\textsuperscript{467} Redaction is particularly interested in getting at the world behind the text, as it highlights the specific circumstances and priorities of the evangelist and his community through additions and alterations to the original material.\textsuperscript{468} Conversely, interaction with the world behind the text can also generate insights about the beliefs and norms in the broader society by considering the influence these may have had on the author. Such historical-cultural background studies illuminate many peripheral factors of the time and place in which the texts were authored; drawing from a plethora of disciplines, a focus on the historical-cultural environment is perhaps the most open to being enriched by other methods such as Redaction Criticism.\textsuperscript{469}

Q as Primary Source and SM Origins:

Applying Source and Redaction Criticism to Matt. 5:17-48 reveals a complex interplay of source material, redacted material, and the incorporation of common Christian themes penned by the author in unique phrases. Contrasting Matt. 5:17-48 with the other synoptic gospels reveals that

\textsuperscript{464} Ehrman, \textit{The New Testament}, 93-4. This hypothesis is not completely incompatible with what Ehrman calls the “Four-Source Hypothesis,” which holds that Matthew and Luke both independently used Mark and Q, in addition to their own unique source material referred to as “M” and “L” (these likely being oral in nature and, or localized to their community)—making the four sources “M,” “L,” Mark and Q. The Two-Source Hypothesis would simply see “M” and “L” material as having been generated by the authors themselves, rather than taken from an additional source.

\textsuperscript{466} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 27.
\textsuperscript{467} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 27.
\textsuperscript{468} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 28.
\textsuperscript{469} For the preceding points see Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 30.
a majority of the material in this passage, taken from elsewhere, was drawn from Q. While the nature of the source Q is a topic of wide-ranging discussion far beyond the scope of this project, commonly held conclusions will be useful in examining its use for Matt. 5:17-48.

Modern scholarship has come to a general consensus that Q was not just a collection of sayings, but a redacted collection forming a coherent progression of sayings. For this reason, Crossan submits that Q may have had some pre-existing sequence concerning adherence to the Law, scandal and forgiveness; these sayings, and their format in Q, would have had a direct influence over the compilation of Matthew’s antitheses. Lambrecht is of the opinion that a rudimentary SM was present in the Q text; it was associated with a mountain and the beginning of Jesus’ public life. Therefore, for him, there is some historical weight to the postulation that Jesus did deliver such a teaching in this context, and its focus was a response to God’s grace through love of neighbour. For Lambrecht, Matthew’s author is responsible for the composition of Matt. 5:17-48 as a whole, uniting pre-existing antitheses with other teachings that are put into this format. Kloppenborg offers a complementary position, seeing Matthew’s author as responsible for rearranging a great deal of Q material in the teachings of the SM. Hagner’s position is not incompatible with these, believing it improbable that Matthew created

472. This conclusion is made primarily on the placing of the SM in the life of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke, and that both circumstances involve a mountain: Jesus going up a mountain to teach in Matt. 5:1, while coming down from one in Luke 6:17. This presumes, in-line with the “Two-Source Hypothesis,” that Matthew used Q independently of Luke, instead of reversing the Lukan mountain theme for his own Mosaic image.
473. For the preceding points see Jan Lambrecht, The Sermon on the Mount (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985), 40.
the antitheses form and that this format, in some way, comes from Jesus.\textsuperscript{476} For Hagner, the Q material was reshaped in an antitheses form, which is traced back to the historical Jesus.\textsuperscript{477} Yet, he admits it is possible that the author formed all six antitheses in keeping with an emphasis on Jesus’ authority.\textsuperscript{478} Betz concedes that the SM tradition preceded Matthew, but differs with others on necessarily tracing the setting and teaching form to Jesus. Instead, Betz maintains that the SM is taken, in its entirety, from a pre-Matthean text; it did not originate with Jesus of Nazareth directly, but the Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem in the mid-first century C.E. Thus, in Betz’s view, the author(s) of the original SM tradition compiled sayings of Jesus into one unit that can be classified as epitome in genre.\textsuperscript{479} The variance between these respected scholars is merely a glimpse at the wide-range of opinions concerning the sources for Matt. 5:17-48.

Interpolation of Jewish Culture as Redaction:

The concept of Matthean redaction must be broadened beyond merely alterations made to source texts, or original inventions of the writer. The author of Matthew likely borrowed common ideas and beliefs from his place and time to form his own “redacted” material. This can be seen in that the ethics of the SM are not foreign to Jewish piety. They are presented as obedience to the proper interpretation of the Torah: learning and imitating God’s loving mercy for creation.\textsuperscript{480} Every one of the antitheses are accompanied by additional material that is probably the work of the author. When the concepts are found elsewhere, it is usually with a different sense.\textsuperscript{481} Matthew’s author inserts Jewish material into Matt. 5:17-48, such as when dealing with adultery (Matt. 5:31-2); this addition of content to a text that is clearly from Mark 10:11-2 suggests that

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\textsuperscript{476} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 113.
\textsuperscript{477} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 112.
\textsuperscript{478} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 113.
\textsuperscript{479} For the preceding points see Hans Dieter Betz, \textit{Essays on the Sermon on the Mount} (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 90.
\textsuperscript{480} Betz, \textit{Essays on the Sermon on the Mount}, 123.
any Jewishness of the other commands was also inserted by him.\footnote{482} Furthermore, by inserting “But I say to you . . .” throughout the antitheses, Matthew’s Jesus is saying that the Old Testament Law has its validity and proper understanding through his interpretation.\footnote{483} This repeated statement, which is unique to Matthew’s version, conveys authority in the teachings that follow it—demonstrating that God’s revelation cannot be limited to following legal tenets, but must penetrate the interior person.\footnote{484} In these ways, the incorporation of Jewish ideas confirm that Matthean redaction utilized known concepts of the place and time.

\textbf{Antithetical Redaction and Varied Opinions:}

The antithetical formula featured in Matt. 5:17-48 is not seen in any other gospel, although Matthew may have taken it from his source(s). Here, again, opinions vary. Matthew’s six antitheses may have been taken from an earlier series of three, to which he added three more teachings with an antithetical form he felt appropriate for them.\footnote{485} The teachings in antitheses one, two and four comes from Matthew’s own source (Matt. 5:21-30,33-7), and are considered by Betz to be from the Jesus tradition.\footnote{486} Schweizer’s view is that the teachings in antitheses one and two likely came first, possibly from Jesus himself; while Jesus’ original antitheses, if he indeed taught this way, may have ended with the prohibition on anger (v.21-2).\footnote{487} The third antitheses about divorce is taken from Mark 10:11-2, which for Schweizer was probably also a saying of Jesus.\footnote{488}

Scholars show less certainty concerning the authenticity of the rest of the teachings. Of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[486] Betz, \textit{Essays on the Sermon on the Mount}, 123.
\item[488] For the preceding points see Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 111.
\end{footnotes}
entire antitheses passage, vv.23-4 are considered least likely to have come from Jesus. These may have been added as examples of conduct—suggested by the imperatives changing tense to second person singular, instead of maintaining the plural. Likewise, Matt. 5:29-30, on mutilation, changes to the second person singular tense from the Markan original (Mark 9:43-8). Here, “life” is dropped as the opposite of “hell,” suggesting for Schweizer that Mark’s account is closer to the original.

Thus, the passage is permeated with considerable alterations and additions to its sources. This information confirms that Matt. 5:17-48 is composed of a variety of material from different sources, intentionally organized, and given common traits and phrasing by the author. A deeper look into each teaching within the passage will continue to support this, while offering clearer demonstrations of how it was done.

1. Law (Matt. 5:17-20):

The introduction to the passage, affirmation of the Law’s legitimacy (Matt. 5:17-20), was not taken from a previous source as it stands. Schweizer holds that v.17 is likely Matthew’s own creation to argue against a position that Jesus supplanted the Law. While vv.17-9 echo sentiment strewn throughout various Christian texts (v.17, cf. Matt. 10:34; v.18, cf. Luke 16:17; v.19 cf. Rev. 22:18-9), they were not copied verbatim from any of these. Therefore, it is a safe assumption that v.18 is evidence of the author implementing a popular sentiment in Christian circles, while the verse itself is his own construction (v.18, cf. Luke 16:17). Verses 19-20, likewise, have no parallels in the synoptics; they reinforce an upholding of the Law and carry

489. For the preceding points see Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, 115.
this theme into the antitheses—through which it remains a constant. Therefore, they too can rightly be considered Matthean redaction, intended to serve the author’s purposes for the passage as a unit.

2. Anger (Matt. 5:21-6):

The first antithesis, the prohibition against anger (Matt. 5:21-6), demonstrates the mixing of source material that will persist throughout the passage. The first two verses of this teaching (Matt. 5:21-2), which lay the antithetical framework and the essence of the new command, are written by Matthew or taken from his unique source—considered to likely have been oral in nature. For Lapide, this teaching fits well into the overall tone of the entire passage, which is introduced with an imperative to greater righteousness and finished with emulating divine perfection through loving enemies (vv.20,43-8). This observation comes after acknowledging the origin of this antithesis in Leviticus, a prohibition against carrying admonition for one’s brother/sister in the heart, but still being allowed to admonish so that one does not sin because of him/her (Lev. 19:17); this being followed by “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

Verses 21-4 do not feature parallels, and are considered to have been authored by the gospel writer. However, Hagner holds that vv.21-2 are from the author’s unique source as opposed to having been generated by him. In either case, the severe punishments for seemingly moderate anger, here, are not witnessed in the other synoptics. The material in vv.23-6, changes to second person singular from the earlier plural, and is thought to have been added to clarify the original

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496. Crossan, *In Fragments*, 159.
antitheses.\textsuperscript{498} It is also worth noting that vv.23-4 correspond to the Didache 14:2.\textsuperscript{499} Though not an exact match, the commonality here may reveal, as it does in Matt. 5:18, an instance of the author putting a popular concept under his own authorial jurisdiction. Interestingly, Schweizer highlights these verses as being the least likely to have come from the historical Jesus.\textsuperscript{500} On the other hand, vv.25-6 are paralleled in Luke 12:58-9, suggesting a common origin in Q.

These instructions to quell hostility and reconcile, then, pre-date the Gospel of Matthew, and may have links to the historical Jesus. Matthew’s author presented this teaching in an antithetical format, with elaborations from common Christian instruction for practical living. Thus, the first antithesis was made to fit the pattern desired for the rest of the passage.

3. Lust (Mt 5:27-30):

The teaching against lust, Matt. 5:27-30, also features an interesting blend of material. The antithetical format, the prohibition against lust, and an equating of this with adultery is unique to Matthew among gospel texts (vv.27-8). The following two verses, wherein self-mutilation is proscribed as preferable to this sin, exhibit an interesting mix of text taken from Mark 9:42-8 and a redacted context with several changes (vv.29-30). The eye is listed first in Matthew, whereas it is last in Mark; this is likely due to the prominence of the wandering eye with regards to lust. Conversely, the foot as a sin-facilitating member is dropped in Matthew. As already noted, the change in Greek tense from Mark’s second person plural to second person singular is a hallmark of Matthean redaction in the antitheses. Moreover, the loss of mentioning entrance into “life” to contrast with a warning of hell suggests, for Schweizer, that Mark’s version is the original, or

\textsuperscript{498} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 115.
\textsuperscript{499} Crossan, \textit{In Fragments}, 159.
\textsuperscript{500} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 115.
closer to it.\textsuperscript{501}

Though Crossan sees these verses as clearly redactional\textsuperscript{502}, their commonality with Mark 9:42-8 is too strong to conclude they were independently created. Rather, Matthew’s author has taken these severe admonitions from a Markan warning against leading others astray, and made them fit into a teaching that he considers worthy of such anxiety. As discussed in chapter 3.1, Matthew adapts Mark 9:42-8 more than once; its occurrence in Matt. 18:6-9 follows the Markan form more closely and features less alteration. This is the best evidence that Matthew consciously decided the severe admonition to mutilation from Mark 9:42-8 was appropriate for the second antithesis. Thus, vv.29-30 are neither entirely redaction, nor entirely paralleled; they represent the intricate mix that permeates the passage as a whole.

4. Divorce (Mt 5:31-2):

The antitheses prohibiting divorce, though only two short verses in length, offers much for discussion. It is one of the teachings that scholars tend to agree can be traced to the historical Jesus in some form.\textsuperscript{503} This antithesis is simpler than those preceding it, as it deals with action instead of internal thought.\textsuperscript{504} The introductory statement, citing legal customs and continuing the antithetical framework, is Matthean (Matt. 5:31). Verse 32, prohibiting divorce for Christians and, implicitly, establishing marriage as a permanent bond, features parallels in Mark 10:11-2; Luke 16:18, from which it is copied nearly verbatim.\textsuperscript{505} The teaching’s parallels cause Crossan to conclude that Matt. 5:32 already existed in Q, and that the author altered an earlier

\textsuperscript{501} For the preceding points see Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 116.
\textsuperscript{502} Crossan, \textit{In Fragments}, 163.
\textsuperscript{503} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 99.
\textsuperscript{504} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 123.
\textsuperscript{505} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 123.
aphorism to fit in the antitheses. However, this does not explain the commonality with Mark 10:11-2. Hagner, on the other hand, holds that the similarities between Matt. 5:32 and Luke 16:18 are not enough to conclude they came from Q; rather, these are likely independently adapted from Mark 10:2-12.

This shared teaching, though, also features redaction in Matthew through the addition of the conditional statement “except for unchastity;” this exception to the rule is also featured in Matt. 19:9, where the same prohibition of divorce is offered in response to a Pharisaic challenge (Matt. 19:1-12). Matthew’s exception clause is seen as a result of the pressures and views of his community, while the Christian should continue to seek the ideal. Hagner finds it most likely that the exception clause is not from a separate source but the author’s own addition for several reasons: (1) divorce is prohibited absolutely in Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:16; 1 Cor. 7:11; (2) the ethics of the kingdom are typically given in absolute terms, and the exception accommodates Deut. 24:1, which the author’s community followed seriously; (3) finally, the exception clause weakens the antithesis and the logic of Matt. 19:1-12, making Jesus similar to the Shammaite Pharisees. Originally, equating divorce with adultery was simply to emphasize how wrong divorce is. There is usually no debating or hair-splitting on the subject; the ethics of the kingdom are given in idealistic and absolute terms.

5. Oaths (Matt. 5:33-7):

The prohibition against oaths is completely Matthean material. However, Steinhauser finds it a noteworthy example of inserting Jewishness into the antitheses. The forms of the oaths offered

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506. Crossan, In Fragments, 212-3.
507. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 123.
508. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 126.
509. For the preceding points see Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 123.
510. For the preceding points see Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 125.
here as examples of undesirable behaviour are clearly from a Jewish context and society, offered to an audience who would understand them as such. While this may simply reflect the general Jewish-Christian prominence of Matthew’s gospel, it also complements the specific Jewish tone of the passage—introduced by upholding the Law, and referencing legal imperatives throughout. Therefore, the prohibition against oaths serves as an example, not only of Matthean interpolation, but as evidence of the author’s conscious intent to form a unified passage of overarching themes.

6. Retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42):

The antithesis ordering non-retaliation follows suit with the passage by beginning with a redacted citation of the Law (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Matt. 5:38). The author makes this teaching stand alone as an independent teaching, separate from loving enemies (Matt. 5:43-7), which it was not in the source text of Q as evidenced by Luke 6:27-36. Verses 39-40 have parallels in Luke 6:29, though Matthew’s author adds not resisting someone who is evil as well as specifying that it is the right cheek being struck. Steinhauser acknowledges “right” is redactional, and proposes that the original Q was “. . . to the one who strikes you on the cheek, turn the other also.”

The legal circumstance of the cloak and tunic exhortation is also clearly a Matthean redaction (v.40), and the following verses show further evidence of this; therefore, there is good reason to accept the Lukan version as the original (Luke 6:29-30). In Matthew and Luke, taking both cloak and tunic would leave the victim naked. Luke describes a robbery but Matthew

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511. For the preceding points see Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 30.
describes a court scene.\textsuperscript{516} In Jewish Law, a person could not take an outer cloak as a pledge for a loan because it was needed as a sleeping garment (Exod. 22:26-7; Deut. 24:12-3).\textsuperscript{517} However, the insertion of Jewish material by Matthew’s author throughout the passage implies that any relation of a cloak/tunic scenario to Jewish Law is redacted\textsuperscript{518}; in other words, the original was simply an imperative to extreme, submissive generosity. By Steinhauser’s assessment, the original Q term was “. . . to the one who takes away your cloak [tunic?] let him have your tunic [cloak?] as well.”\textsuperscript{519} Therefore, Matthew’s Jesus is instructing action that both exceeds the Law and is extraordinary.\textsuperscript{520}

The question arises as to whether Matt. 5:41-2, going the extra mile, is also redactional, or existed in Q; though they are not paralleled, confusion is seen in that Matthew and Steinhauser’s proposed original Q share the same characteristics of form and grammar here.\textsuperscript{521} He concludes that Matt. 5:41 also stood in Q and was reformulated by Matthew\textsuperscript{522}; this is based on the vocabulary of military commandeering not being used redactionally by Matthew’s author.\textsuperscript{523} This connection seems weak, and is made more questionable in that Steinhauser seems to be motivated by a predetermined conclusion that Q taught non-violence.\textsuperscript{524} Steinhauser proposes that Luke omitted this part of Q because he may have lived in a region without Roman troops, or those from a senatorial province, so this example would have been unfamiliar and useless.\textsuperscript{525} By

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{516} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 28-9.
  \item \textsuperscript{517} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 29. Luke’s account also suggests a specific situation, as Matthew’s court scene, in that there is some evidence of violent, military-backed seizing of tunics in Roman occupied regions such as Palestine. Therefore, Luke’s scene is something that would also be familiar as a relatable, real-world scenario.
  \item \textsuperscript{518} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 29, 30.
  \item \textsuperscript{519} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{520} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 29.
  \item \textsuperscript{521} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{522} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{523} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{524} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{525} Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 33.
\end{itemize}
Steinhauser’s assessment, then, the original Q for v.41 was “. . . with him who requisitions you to go one mile, go two.”\(^{526}\) This judgement is suspect, and it seems more likely that Q did not feature going the extra mile, as no parallel suggests that it did. Finally, the original Q of Matt. 5:42; Luke 6:29 is presented as “. . . to the one who asks of you, give, and from the one who wishes to borrow, do not turn away.”\(^{527}\)

A common theme, then, in the “original Q” of all these verses is seen as a response to violence.\(^{528}\) Schweizer sees non-resistance and lending as likely associated in Q, as both Luke and Matthew put them in close proximity (Matt. 5:38-42; Luke 6:29-30).\(^{529}\) Thus scholars see the “original Q” of all three verses as dealing with submission and generosity in the face of actual violence and violent acts.\(^{530}\) The first three verses indicate the situations of the oppressed under Roman military occupation, and the reaction of a Cynic to this social situation.\(^{531}\) Though it cannot be certain that Jesus uttered these sayings, in this way, it is likely that they contain some essence of his teaching: that he instructed love of enemies and discouraged retaliation or vengeance.\(^{532}\)

7. Love/Perfection (Matt. 5:43-8):

The last command, on loving one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43-8), also features a significant mix of redaction and source material. As with the rest of the passage, the introductory citation of popular teaching is redacted to continue the antithetical format (v.43). Matthew’s author, or his

\(^{526}\) Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 33.
\(^{527}\) Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 34.
\(^{528}\) Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 33.
\(^{530}\) Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 33.
\(^{531}\) John Dominic Crossan, The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 81-2; Steinhauser, “The Violence of Occupation,” 34-5; Leif E. Vaage, Galilean Upstarts: Jesus’ First Followers According to Q (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 10-5, 41-2, 46-9, 50-4, 103-6. Cynic, here, is used to mean a way of life critiquing Greco-Roman values and acting as a liberating symbol against the accepted system.
\(^{532}\) Lambrecht, The Sermon on the Mount, 297.
source traditions, linked the sayings about nonviolence and love of enemies with an antithesis form.\textsuperscript{533} Likewise, v.45, wherein the example of divine benevolence is used, is redacted; however, it should be noted that this verse merely elaborates on others in the teaching, which feature parallels (vv.46-8, cf. Luke 6:32-3,38).

The notions of loving enemies and praying for adversaries in v.44 finds a parallel in Luke 6:27-8; although Matthew’s author has omitted blessing those who curse (Luke 6:28). The reasoned appeal to see no honour in benefitting only one’s friends and allies in vv.46-7 is slightly re-worked from Luke 6:32-3, and the admonition to be like God in v.48 is taken from Luke 6:36—where the trait of divine mercy is replaced with perfection. The closing words of the teaching and passage as a whole, feature uniquely Matthean redaction specifically through elevating perfection (Matt. 5:48), which becomes the condition for entering the kingdom (Matt. 19:21).\textsuperscript{534} This use of “perfect” in contrast to the Lukan parallel of “merciful” gives Matthew’s verse a more climactic and comprehensive function.\textsuperscript{535}

Though Matthean redaction plays a great role in the passage, Lambrecht sees the teachings on loving enemies and prohibiting divorce as going back to the earthly Jesus.\textsuperscript{536} In fact, non-retaliation, always giving generously, loving an enemy, and being like God in mercy and goodness—the key-notes of the passage’s final verses—are proposed by Lambrecht to have been featured in Q’s version of the SM.\textsuperscript{537} These parallels strongly suggest that the fundamental morality of this antithesis existed in Q, and has some connection to the historical Jesus.

\textsuperscript{533} Schweizer, \textit{The Good News According to Matthew}, 111.
\textsuperscript{534} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 106.
\textsuperscript{536} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 99.
\textsuperscript{537} Lambrecht, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 105.
Schweizer agrees that, at least, the love and mercy concepts can be traced to Jesus.\(^{538}\)

8. Conclusion:

Applying Redaction Criticism to Matt. 5:17-48 has highlighted the hyperbolic quality of the passage through demonstrating the author’s unique contributions, along with how he chose to organize the unit.

The emphatic statements concerning the continual validity of the Law, along with a firm demand to exceed even the most extreme devotees, that introduce the passage, are the author’s own work (vv.17-20). The teaching on anger, though featuring a paralleled instruction to make peace rather than face punishment (vv.25-6), begins with the teaching, unique to Matthew among the gospels, that any anger or insult toward a peer merits judgement and hell (vv.21-4). The prohibition against lust, and equating it with adultery, is not appropriated from a written text (vv.27-8). Though the exhortation to mutilation has been adapted from Mark 9:43-8, placing it within the context of sexual sin is the author’s own doing (vv.29-30); this shows the severity with which he approached the subject, while also illustrating his own conception of the passage as a collection of absolutes and serious matters. Clearly, Matthew’s author judged the preference for mutilation to general sin in Mark 9:43-8 as befitting the hyperbolic tone of the antitheses. Interestingly, the prohibition against divorce is the only antithesis where the author’s redaction softens the imperative through the exception clause of v.32. Still, the inclusion of the abolition of divorce within this passage—despite its reiteration in Matt. 19:1-12—also illustrates that the author recognized the quality of the passage and deemed this an appropriate place for the teaching. The prohibition against oaths and commanding complete honesty in all speech is unique material (vv.33-7), again showing the author recognized this as the place for absolute

teachings. Though turning the other cheek and extreme, submissive generosity are taken from other sources (Luke 6:29-30), the author adds not resisting an evil one and voluntarily enduring forced service for an extra mile to the teaching against retaliation (vv.38-42). Likewise, praying for oppressors and an appeal to surpass reciprocal benefaction is paralleled (Luke 6:27-8,32-3); yet, the author inserts an elaboration on divine goodness and replaces an imperative to be merciful with perfection (vv.45,48; Luke 6:36).

Thus, this method of scholarly examination supports that Matthew’s author understood Matt. 5:17-48 as a unit of extremes through both incorporating teachings of absolute quality from other sources, and by adding his own characteristically hyperbolic material to the passage.
Of particular interest when examining the prohibition against anger are manuscript inconsistencies for v.22. Text Criticism, which compares a text with existing manuscript evidence to identify meaningful variants, reveals that some early sources do not include the words “without cause,” when Matthew’s Jesus prescribes judgement for those who are angry with “a brother” (Matt. 5:22). This verse is the only one in the passage at hand that features a significant textual variant. The early manuscript P\(^67\) omits the words “without cause” when forbidding anger, as do Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, the Vulgate, Justin Martyr, and Origen.\(^539\) The absence of these important words in such early sources suggests, with some weight, that they did not appear in the original Gospel of Matthew. On the other hand, the words “without cause” are present in many later sources such as Codex Bezae, Washington Codex, Koridethi Codex, the Lake Group, the Ferrar Group, the Koine manuscripts, Old Latin manuscripts, all major Syriac versions, as well as both Coptic versions. These texts are all later than those omitting “without cause,” some considerably so.\(^540\) Therefore, the earliest versions of Matthew prohibited all anger against a brother, and later interpolation limited this to unjust or unprovoked anger. The earliest possible textual evidence for such changes dating to the fourth century.\(^541\)

This observation suggests that, at some point in the history of scribal transmission of Matthew, it was felt necessary to qualify the prohibition against anger to permit just anger. Later manuscript


\(^540\) For the preceding points see Throckmorton, Gospel Parallels, xiv-xxiv, 27.

\(^541\) For points in the preceding paragraph see Throckmorton, Gospel Parallels, xv-xxii, 27.
evidence would be obvious attempts to soften the demands of the teaching; despite these later documents with an exception, the original, radical nature of the command permits no conditions. Thus, the shorter version of Matt. 5:22 followed the tone of the rest of Matt. 5:17-48—a moral command of extreme character without conditions. The teaching originally exhibited the same extreme quality as the other commands in its immediate context, and the conditional aspect was penned by a later scribe.

Luz supports the position that “without cause” in Matt. 5:22 was interpolated by a later scribe. He also recognizes that literal and absolute application of the rule is problematized by Jesus calling his opponents “fools and blind,” while Paul calls the Galatians “foolish” (Matt. 23:17; Gal. 3:1). Supporting anger in certain circumstances, John Chrysostom also cites Paul’s repudiations of the Corinthians and Galatians: “Being angry then is not a transgression, but being so unreasonably.” However, he conveniently ignores Paul’s use of the word “fool” in Gal. 3:1, when expressly denying that Matt. 5:22 is hyperbolic and such slander does warrant hell through the vices which take root through verbal expression.

For Luz, the text’s history of being softened in interpretation and conditioned to unjustified wrath was strengthened by the implementation of Aristotelian philosophy in Christian thought. In the ethical treatise to his son Nicomachus, Aristotle says wrath is a praiseworthy virtue when properly ordered toward appropriate people and objects at the proper times. Luz cites the

547. Luz, Matthew 1-7, 286.
548. Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 2.6.10; 4.5.3,14.
Opus Imperfectum, wherein wrath is said to be necessary for enforcing the rule of the state and punishing deviation.\textsuperscript{549} The author of the Opus Imperfectum takes his interpretation even further to claim that sin occurs when just anger is not felt: “[A]n unreasonable patience sows vices, nourishes negligence and invites not only evil people, but even good people, to evil. . . . The anger that is with cause is not anger but judgement.”\textsuperscript{550} Furthermore, Aquinas maintains that anger is praiseworthy if it is for the right reason: “But if one is angry in accordance with right reason, one’s anger is deserving of praise.”\textsuperscript{551} He goes further when claiming that even revenge can be motivated by good or evil intentions.\textsuperscript{552} In these ways, the logic of later theologians demonstrates why it could have been felt necessary to include the condition of “without cause” in Matt. 5:22.

1. An Alternative View:

The view that “without cause” is a later interpolation to Matt. 5:22 is not without challenge. David Black maintains that the words “without cause” were present in the original verse. He asserts that these words were removed by later scribes to heighten the intensity of the teachings.\textsuperscript{553} In support of this claim, Black contends that there are other instances wherein the ethics of Jesus are presented with conditional statements (Matt. 5:11,32; 19:9)—though he acknowledges that these are rare.\textsuperscript{554} Nonetheless, the conditional clause for divorce in Matt. 5:32, for Black, is evidence that the author of Matthew could have penned the exception for the first antithesis as well.

Black recognizes that Jerome saw these words as interpolation, stating that the “authentic texts”

\textsuperscript{549} Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, 96; Luz, Matthew I-7, 286.  
\textsuperscript{550} Kellerman, Incomplete Commentary on Matthew, 96.  
\textsuperscript{551} Aquinas, Summa Theologica 2/II Q.158, art.1.  
\textsuperscript{552} Aquinas, Summa Theologica 2/II Q.158, art.1.  
\textsuperscript{554} Black, “Jesus on Anger,” 3.
of his time did not include them\textsuperscript{555}; yet, he does not agree with this conclusion. It is submitted by Black that other areas of scripture denouncing anger may have been the motivation for shortening Matt. 5:22.\textsuperscript{556} According to Black, the type of anger spoken of in Matt. 5:22 can be justified or unjustified (i.e. sinful). It was a misunderstanding of this word as always indicating hatred and sinful anger that led to the removal of “without cause.”\textsuperscript{557}

Though others point out anger displayed by Jesus and Paul to soften a literal application of the unmodified teaching\textsuperscript{558}, Black points to Jesus being angry at the hypocrites in Mark 3:5, and referring to others as foolish, in order to authenticate the exception clause (Matt. 23:17; Mark 7:26; 25:2,3,8); he also highlights Paul using this word to chastise the Galatians as does Luz (Gal. 3:1).\textsuperscript{559} Perhaps the strongest evidence for Black’s case lies in noting that the manuscripts supporting the shorter version are almost all Alexandrian—geographically limited to Egypt. This could suggest that they are all the product of one deviant edition, while those including “without cause” are far more diverse geographically.\textsuperscript{560}

This overlooks, however, the late date of these manuscripts, while ignoring the literary qualities of Matt. 5:17-48 as a unit. When compared to the extreme quality of the other exhortations in Matt. 5:17-48, and the absence of “without cause” in v.22 recorded in early manuscripts, Black’s evidence is not compelling. Instead, it seems far more likely that the original penning of Matt. 5:22 followed suit with the rest of the passage by being a radical imperative without conditions,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{555} Jerome \textit{Commentary on Matthew} 5:22, cited by Black, “Jesus on Anger,” 2.
\item \textsuperscript{556} Prov. 6:34; 14:17,29; 15:1,14,18; 16:32; 19:19; 27:4; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26,31; James 1:19-20, cited in Black, “Jesus on Anger,” 5.
\item \textsuperscript{557} Black, “Jesus on Anger,” 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{559} Black, “Jesus on Anger,” 7-8; Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7}, 286.
\item \textsuperscript{560} For the preceding points see Black, “Jesus on Anger,” 6.
\end{itemize}
and the words “without cause” were added by a later scribe who found this particular teaching too difficult or problematic to remain unaltered. Thus, a qualifying phrase was added to make the exhortation appear to be more feasible.

2. Implications for Historical Interpretation:
In addition to confirming that the original Matthean text was uniform in its radicalism, this application of Textual Criticism also has something to say about the history of interpretation of these verses. The interpolation of “without cause” into Matt. 5:22 might also suggest that at the time of the scribal interpolation (C.E. fourth century at the earliest), the commands of the passage were often understood with rigid literalism, thereby requiring the exception for one that was too difficult. Though a scribe’s literalism does not necessitate that the first author intended the teachings as such.

Interestingly, though Black’s use of the interpolated exception clause for Matt. 5:32 does not secure his argument, highlighting the author’s liberty here could be used to suggest a justification for the interpolation in Matt. 5:22 by a later scribe. Adding a conditional clause for a difficult teaching might have been justified, in the mind of the scribe, by considering another antithesis wherein the evangelist clearly added to his own source. This, of course, is dependent upon an assumption, counter-intuitive to modern notions, that the scribe was familiar and analytical enough with the synoptics to surmise that Matthew’s author borrowed this teaching from Mark 10:11-2. Otherwise, the exception clause of Matt. 5:32 itself, considered by the scribe to be the authentic teaching of Jesus, might have opened the door for another condition.

3. Conclusion:
Application of Textual Criticism, thus, reveals that the original version of Matt. 5:22 was
absolute and consistently extreme together with the rest of the sayings in Matt. 5:17-48. This strengthens the case that the entire passage forms a single unit of hyperbolic teachings to convey a fundamental moral framework. Moreover, the interpolation of a conditional statement into this verse illustrates that what was written in the passage was taken very seriously and followed with literal intensity, so that alteration was thought prudent for an imperative seen to otherwise be too severe.

In these ways, the knowledge available through modern scholarly methods can offer much “meaning” to be gleaned from the text for ethical or spiritual purposes. Clearly, applying v.22 literally was deemed to be too difficult by some scribes in Christian history, who were not above altering the text; such modification, however, can be considered unnecessary, on the one hand, as the entire passage carries this tone, while, on the other hand, if one teaching is thus open to moderation, they could all be similarly softened for practical implementation.
Chapter 3.5
Part 3 Conclusions:
Scholarly Methodology on Matt. 5:17-48

Examining Matt. 5:17-48 through the lens of modern scholarship makes a strong argument for reading the passage’s antithetical teachings as hyperbolic statements, directing the reader/hearer toward an underlying moral disposition. Despite the tendencies of some modern scholars to view certain antithesis in isolation, and interpret literally those teachings with a particular influence in modern Christian culture, their exegetical insights generally emphasize reading the teachings figuratively. Some methodologies, which have been foundational for modern scholarship, strengthened the argument much further.

Literary Criticism of Matt. 5:17-48 confirmed that the author unified the passage through the permeating theme of the Law, a consistent antithetical structure, and a thoroughly hyperbolic tone running throughout the unit. Analyzing the passage by means of Redaction Criticism continued to support that the author consciously recognized the passage as unified by the characteristics discovered with Literary Criticism; as it makes clear that the author combined scattered information from his sources, while making his own unique contributions, to accentuate these qualities of the piece. Finally, Textual Criticism of the only meaningful textual variant from manuscript evidence of the passage reveals that a scribal condition was interpolated into v.22, in the prohibition against anger, demonstrating that the original teaching was uniform in its absolutism.

In general, then, the insights derived through these methods of modern scholarship strongly support reading the antithetical teachings of Matt. 5:17-48 as hyperbolic in nature, guiding recipients toward a subtler moral code that underlies the extreme imperatives. While this is
significantly different than the literal approach and the conclusions drawn from the same text by both ancient and modern authors of popular theology, the two spheres need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, the scholarly insights unearthed, here, can have considerable viability for the popular sphere—wherein the motivation and ultimate goal is the definition of “proper morality” for the purposes of Christian spirituality and ethics.
Conclusions

I have argued that diligent application of certain scholarly methods strongly suggests
Matt. 5:17-48 was intended as a single unit employing an antithetical framework and hyperbolic extremes to structure a message of an underlying righteousness to surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees—thereby “fulfilling” the Law (vv. 17-20).

I have tried to show that works of theology intended for consumption by the broader believing community have a strong tendency toward literal interpretations of isolated verses to support a presupposition. The ancient writings of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and the *Opus Imperfectum* illustrated that this practice is deeply rooted in Christian uses of scripture from millennia past. Modern works by John Paul II on sexuality, or Wallis and Wink on complete pacifism affirm that this approach to scripture persists, and is the most influential means by which these texts are utilized for spiritual and ethical concerns. Consequently, these modern works make little attempt to consult scholarly methods or insights when utilizing biblical verses.

At the same time, scholarly practices are seldom accompanied by much concern for relevance to common perceptions of scripture, nor do they regularly display an attempt to make such knowledge accessible. In my opinion, scholarship should become more cognisant of the application that its insights could have within the larger believing community and the benefits that this could bring to a culture wherein the Bible remains a prominent source of values. This does not require that scholarship compromise its methods to accommodate the preconceptions of the wider populace, but only cultivate a fuller awareness of how intellectual knowledge could benefit popular perceptions.

In the particular case of Matt. 5:17-48, scholarly methodology would suggest, with some weight,
that a modern audience is not obligated to interpret each verse, or antithetical teaching, literally when attempting to recover ethics from this text. Instead, a viable alternative would be to search for an underlying moral principle of each antithesis—meant to be taken very seriously, but not literally—as these were unified under the theme of a rigorous morality seeking to surpass the status quo.

Thus, the contribution of scholarship to discussions relating to Matt. 5:17-48 in the general populace would be revealing that these imperatives are intended to convey a heightened righteousness, in the context of the Jewish Law of first century Palestine, and point toward a fundamental ethos. In this way, Matthew’s hyperboles need not be interpreted literally, nor ignored; instead, they can be seen as highlighting an underlying message of governing norms for moral conduct. This realization, facilitated by scholarly methods, can also greatly benefit the broader, popular conceptions of scripture as a whole. Historical inaccuracies, conflicting teachings and extreme instructions need not be ignored, or explained-away, when given depth in meaning through intellectual inquiry. A greater understanding of, and appreciation for scholarship is one means by which this can be accomplished.

No definitive moral conclusions need to be offered, here, concerning the ethical particulars drawn from the moral guidelines of Matthew’s hyperbolic antitheses. It is enough to recognize them as such, and to use this insight as the basis for interpretation, and deriving ethical norms therefrom. Exactly what course this will take, and the conclusions derived by this means will be determined by future discourse. Yet, it is likely that moderated moral principles derived from the antithetical extremes would be perceived as a more plausible and practical path to virtue by the mass audience of popular theology. While this may not offer the calming, and sometimes intoxicating, certainty of radical, uncompromising imperatives, it will facilitate a spirituality and
 ethic that is more compatible with diligently applied reason and the merits of modern scholarship.

All of this has been offered with an eye on the broader context of North American culture, wherein silence, ignorance and perhaps overt opposition keep the scholarly sphere and popular conceptions of the Bible at an arm’s-length apart. These observations, naturally, lead to a much broader discussion, of a much more elusive, abstract and multifaceted nature, concerning the cognitive and social-cultural conception of scripture as “God’s Word.” More specifically, it remains to be examined how the divine quality assigned to the Bible in Christianity facilitates and, through cultural processes, strongly dictates a literal reception of the words on the page. This discussion, being beyond the scope of this thesis, remains to be had.
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### 3.1 Exegetical Insights through Modern Scholarship

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3.4 Textual Criticism of Mt 5:22

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