

Reimagining The Moral Life

On Lisa Sowle Cahill's Contributions
to Christian Ethics

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Introduction

Transformative Engagement in Dialogue

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We are transformed by any reality around us, and we contribute to the transformation of reality. Such a profoundly relational way to describe, understand, and experience our humanity is attentive to who human beings are, where we are located, and what we do. This threefold dimension of human agency—identity, context, and praxis—shapes and, at the same time, defines the character, location, and actions of a theological ethicist engaged in today’s world. However, identity, context, and praxis require further explication.

Four Traits

In his 2014 book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, African American lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson revisits encounters and experiences that profoundly transformed him; allowed him to unveil the complexity of multiple contemporary cultural, religious, and social contexts; and informed his future commitments and actions.¹ Four traits exemplify how he was transformed and how further transformation occurred.

First, *proximity with the poor*.² The faces, voices, stories, struggles, and hopes of those who are marginalized touch our hearts and minds. They affect us in our bodies and influence our thinking and critical analysis.

¹Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2014). Stevenson is executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, a professor of law at New York University Law School, and a strenuous advocate fighting any bias against the poor and people of color.

²*Ibid.*, 16, 18, 22.

The injustice and ordeals endured by too many persons in need haunt us, and outrage becomes vivid. Authentic proximity avoids clerical, patriarchal, and paternalistic biases that inform any rhetoric separating “us” from “them.” Moreover, true proximity steers away from any discourse in which we, who live in the pockets of the developed Global North, presume to have all the answers and solutions to alleviate the suffering of the poor and relieve them of their pitiable condition. On the contrary, while it burdens us with the weighty suffering of the dispossessed, proximity implies togetherness: whoever we are, and wherever we are located, we might embrace the opportunity, even the privilege, of learning from the other, and we long for a shared engagement. We learn, share, and receive. We are changed, and the other is changed, too. Together we can work to transform any unjust dynamic that entraps those who are less advantaged; perpetuates racial discrimination; deprives persons of needed educational and working opportunities, safe living and working environments, and affordable, accessible, high-quality healthcare; and stifles chances for social and political empowerment and flourishing.

Second, we should work together to *change the narratives* that oppress, marginalize, discriminate, and alienate, and that, too often, are shaped by fear—whether it is fear of the other or of uncertainty.³ We have the required ability and sufficient imagination to change any narrative that fosters racial inequality or caste discrimination. We need to change narratives of white supremacy and any other type of supremacy. The new narratives that we want are shaped by justice, equality, mutuality, collaboration, and participation.

Third, we need to *hope*.⁴ Hope is essential. We should help one another to stay hopeful, to keep nourishing hope. Lack of hopefulness disempowers us. We need to hope. We should be able to find reasons to hope. With their own lives, passion, and commitments, many embody hope and they foster hope in us. With hope, we can engage to promote justice, and we can help others to hope. Moreover, many hope in us. We are part of their hopes for a better and more just future.

Fourth, we should be *willing to do things that are uncomfortable and inconvenient*.⁵ This means neither to foster masochistic attitudes nor to promote a disordered sense of sacrifice. We know that there is a cost in caring for others, in helping them. Many helped us at their own expense, with their time, ingenuity, patience, and dedication. Naturally, we prefer comfort, quiet, relaxation, and rest. Without denying needed self-care and

³Ibid., 96, 184, 213, 259, 274.

⁴Ibid., 10, 22, 37, 57, 70, 92, 114, 191, 212, 255.

⁵Ibid., 103, 272.

the urgency of protecting ourselves and others from anything that might harm us, we see the value of empowering one another and many others across the planet, particularly those who cannot yet protect themselves. We want to support projects and initiatives that foster justice and embody mercy. We long to contribute to making our world a better place for everyone.

Choosing the demanding proximity with the poor, changing alienating narratives, hoping, and embodying a generosity that leads us to embrace even things that are uncomfortable and inconvenient: these four traits describe the concrete commitment for just mercy that informs Bryan Stevenson's life and activism. These same four traits might describe a way of being Christian ethicists in today's world and in churches where the ethicists' identity, context, and praxis are shaped by proximity with the poor, a commitment to change oppressive and discriminating narratives, a source of reasons to hope, and the call to do what may appear uncomfortable and inconvenient. *Reimagining the Moral Life* intends to celebrate this approach. These four traits are profoundly human. They are also rooted in the Christian experience informed by the gospel and lived in communal contexts across history and around the globe. Finally, for Catholics these four traits are strengthened by the ecclesial vision inspired by the Second Vatican Council of God's people discerning the signs of the times and sharing "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties" of everyone, "especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, [because] these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."⁶

Among the many colleagues who, around the world, embody and live these four traits, what better way might we revisit the field of theological ethics than by focusing on one of them? Since 1976, in her forty-five years of teaching, lecturing, research, leadership,⁷ and relational engagement in the Theology Department at Boston College as J. Donald Monan, SJ, Professor, in the academy, and in the Catholic Church and society at large, Lisa Sowle Cahill has embodied these traits and promoted the transformations they imply.

Throughout her career, Lisa Cahill has trained many scholars around the world by fostering their own personal and unique way of embodying these four traits and shaping their identity and praxis in their diverse contexts. The contributions of this volume, from a group of former doctoral

⁶Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), no. 1, www.vatican.va.

⁷Within the academy, among many leadership positions, Lisa Cahill served as president of the Catholic Theological Society of America (1992–1993) and of the Society of Christian Ethics (1997–1998).

students whom she directed and are now colleagues spread throughout the United States and around the world, exemplify her mentorship and passion for a type of justice that is informed by equality, mutuality, reciprocity, and solidarity with the poor, and which aims at promoting concretely the common good in our world today. With passion, insight, dedication, and ingenuity, Cahill has influenced the field of theological ethics and empowered women and men, lay and religious, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox to find their own theological voices and join in transforming our world.

Theological Transformation

In his selection of influential voices in modern U.S. moral theology, Charles Curran discusses Lisa Cahill, together with Margaret A. Farley and Ada María Isasi-Díaz. He rightly identifies Cahill as “a prolific and very highly regarded moral theologian”⁸ and he further stresses how “All have to admire the depth and breadth of her work.”⁹ While tracing the trajectory of Cahill’s scholarship throughout her career, Curran highlights how transformation is a theological leitmotif in her work. For example, Cahill recognizes that the vision of sexuality lived by the early Christian communities empowers them to transform relationships within the surrounding, dominant social and cultural ethos of the time, “by reordering relations of dominance and violence toward greater compassion, mercy, and peace and by acting in solidarity with the poor.”¹⁰

Moreover, transformation also affects Cahill’s methodological approach by leading one to consider participation not merely as a strategic device instrumental to achieving consensus, but as a moral category that aims to change unjust social arrangements. In commenting on Cahill’s theological ethics, Curran affirms, “The role of participatory Christian ethics is to promote social arrangements that are consistent with the values of human dignity, the alleviation of suffering, cooperative realities, and a preferential

⁸Charles E. Curran, *Diverse Voices in Modern US Moral Theology*, Moral Traditions, ed. David Cloutier, Kristin Heyer, and Andrea Vicini, SJ (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 151.

⁹*Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 156. See also 157. In the present volume, Sarah M. Moses stresses how the idea of transformation is essential to understanding Cahill’s scriptural hermeneutic.

option for the poor.”¹¹ Practices,¹² experiences, symbols,¹³ and narratives belonging to particular religious traditions—including Christianity—play a significant role in any social transformation that fosters participation and the promotion of the common good.¹⁴ Transformation also informs social life in one of its essential components: family life. Hence, Curran highlights that, “The Christian family’s threefold responsibility is to form children, to serve the Church, and to try to transform the world.”¹⁵

Finally, transformation is needed even in the case of Catholic social teaching, particularly when it faces indeterminate and intractable issues—“wicked” problems, like climate change, and with its consequences for the quality of life on the planet for human beings, as well as for all living creatures and nonliving forms.¹⁶ In particular, because of the lack of global authority, the difficulty of global governance and the absence of enforcement systems are added to the lack of political will, despite the

¹¹Curran, *Diverse Voices*, 158. See also 164.

¹²For example, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The Bible and Christian Moral Practices,” in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and James Childress (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996), 3–17; Lisa Sowle Cahill, “*Laudato Si’*: Reframing Catholic Social Ethics,” *Heythrop Journal* 59, no. 6 (2018): 887–900, at 894 and 897. For Alasdair MacIntyre, practices are “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods natural to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended” (MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. [with prologue], Bloomsbury Revelations [London: Bloomsbury, 2007], 218).

¹³As examples, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, “‘Playing God’: Religious Symbols in Public Places,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (1995): 341–46; Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Theology’s Role in Public Bioethics,” in *Handbook of Bioethics and Religion*, ed. David E. Guinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37–57; Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Catholic Feminists and Traditions: Renewal, Reinvention, Replacement,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2014): 27–51, at 39 and 45; and Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Bioethics, the Gospel, and Political Engagement,” *Christian Bioethics* 21, no. 3 (2015): 247–61.

¹⁴“A participatory, theological ethics joins its narrative prophetic, ethical, and policy discourses to participatory intervention in social structures” (Curran, *Diverse Voices*, 162). See Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Global Health Justice: Love as Transformative Political Action,” in *Love and Christian Ethics: Tradition, Theory, and Society*, ed. Frederick V. Simmons with Brian C. Sorrells, Moral Traditions, ed. David Cloutier, Kristin Heyer, and Andrea Vicini, SJ (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 274–89. In this book, see Maureen H. O’Connell’s chapter.

¹⁵Curran, *Diverse Voices*, 170. He refers to Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 4, 18–50.

¹⁶Cahill, “*Laudato Si’*: Reframing Catholic Social Ethics.” On “wicked” problems, see Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 20 and 149–89. On the origin of the term, see Gwin Prins, Isabel Galiana, Christopher Green, et al., *The Hartwell Paper: A New Direction for Climate Policy after the Crash of 2009* (University of Oxford and the London School of Economics, 2010), https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/27939/1/HartwellPaper_English_version.pdf.

urgent need to transform the patterns of economic development by making them globally sustainable and equitable. International agreements are necessary, but insufficient. Networking, and even alliances, involving multiple social entities—from communities to organizations—operating at the grassroots level are very promising.¹⁷

Hence, this transforming reality changes our ethical approach, and Cahill joins advocates of pragmatic solutions. She writes, “Willis Jenkins recommends ‘a pragmatic sustainability ethic’ as having some potential to overcome the ‘dysfunctional and unjust moral culture’ that inhibits the honest search for environmental solutions and the will to act for the common good.”¹⁸ For Cahill, “This strategy would not wait for a comprehensive analysis and action plan, but would attack limited and local cases of environmental injustice, where a potential remedy is both technically feasible and potentially able to command public support.”¹⁹ Pragmatic strategies and solutions aimed at concrete problem-solving promote cultural and social transformation; moreover, they might anticipate, follow, or implement needed political arrangements to address the urgency of the environmental issues that humanity is already facing.

About This Volume

Lisa Cahill is not retiring. As colleagues contributing to this volume, we are grateful for how she continues to stimulate and expand our reflection and scholarship with her creativity, expertise, and dedication. Hence, this volume is not a retirement gift that seals an impressive and long career. Instead, this book aims to show how a group of her former students and now colleagues—mentored, inspired, and trained by her—revisits the achievements and challenges of the recent forty-five years of theological ethics by focusing on the areas, and some of the topics, she has addressed. In the post-Vatican II era, while being profoundly rooted in the Christian tradition, Cahill contributed to transform the theoretical and practical approach of theological ethics. At the same time, she mentored and accompanied many scholars, and inspired them to renew their own ethical agenda and reflection. While we attempt to map her contributions, we will be further empowered and invited to continue joining her in addressing the pressing current and future ethical challenges in our world.

This volume joins other volumes that had a similar ambition, where

¹⁷Cahill, “*Laudato Si*”: Reframing Catholic Social Ethics,” 894–95 and 897.

¹⁸Ibid., 893. She refers to Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 150.

¹⁹Cahill, “*Laudato Si*”: Reframing Catholic Social Ethics,” 893.

groups of scholars revisited theological ethics by focusing on how their mentor contributed to renew the field. We mention two of these books. Lisa Cahill coedited one of them, *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, dedicated to her mentor James Gustafson,²⁰ while the second—*Public Theology and the Global Common Good: The Contribution of David Hollenbach*—celebrated the influence of the scholarship of David Hollenbach, SJ, her colleague at Boston College for many years.²¹

A Theological Agenda

Within Christian ethics, the last four decades have seen many transformations and witnessed the overall strengthening of the field. Of note are the solid critical study of the Christian tradition; innovative methodological approaches to address complex problems; a constant commitment to engage the public arena; and the global contributions of scholars, particularly from the Global South and historically marginalized communities.

As a Catholic feminist theological ethicist, Cahill's remarkable contributions encompass many areas: first, the foundations of theological ethics, from Scripture and Christology to engaging natural law together with the study of major theological figures in the Christian ethical tradition (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin); and second, the major subfields of Christian ethics, including social ethics; the ethics of war, peace, and peacebuilding; theological bioethics; healthcare ethics; sexual ethics; and family ethics. Over four decades her work innovated and shaped the terms of debate in multiple areas of fundamental, social and sexual ethics, and bioethics. Working with both undergraduate and graduate students at Boston College and as visiting professor at Yale University and at Dharmaram College in Bangalore (India), she taught and mentored two generations of theological ethicists by empowering them to articulate the attentive and critical study of the Christian ethical tradition and to engage concrete areas of ethical concern.

Overview

Lisa Cahill's specific contributions to Christian ethics have shaped and enriched multiple areas of fundamental ethics and social ethics, while

²⁰Lisa Sowle Cahill and James Childress, eds., *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996).

²¹Kevin Ahern, Meghan Clark, Kristin Heyer, and Laurie Johnston, eds., *Public Theology and the Global Common Good: The Contribution of David Hollenbach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016).

expressing her commitment to dialogue with authors and their ideas, and engaging diverse contexts within the public sphere and the ecclesial milieu. In its three parts, this volume provides an interpretive overview of theological ethics by highlighting how her work has advanced innovative approaches to address deeply contested methodological questions and ethical topics.

Part I focuses on the foundations of Christian theological ethics and highlights how Cahill's original contributions enrich the discipline. Ki Joo Choi examines natural law, moral reasoning, and common morality by stressing how Cahill's Thomist, feminist, and pragmatic approaches to natural law are framed by liberation theology and aim at radical transformation of any unjust structure, dynamic, or relationship.

Both Maureen O'Connell and Mary M. Doyle Roche revisit the fourfold typology that helped Cahill map the field of Christian ethics and, particularly, feminist scholarship: the Thomist, Augustinian, Neo-Franciscan, and the biblically inspired Junian.²² O'Connell relies on those typologies to frame the import of embodiment and the role of communities and practices in moral reasoning. In emblematic ways, she also articulates the tension between the local and the particular, as well as the global and the universal in a racialized world where whiteness still dominates and oppresses.

Doyle Roche highlights how these four approaches of feminist ethical theory and praxis inform Cahill's own theological contributions on sex and gender in Christian ethics. Moreover, for Doyle Roche, Cahill's ability to appreciate theological contributions differing from her own is combined with an attentive and respectful hermeneutic of suspicion, and it engages the concrete practices of the marginalized who are left voiceless and powerless. The result is a sexual ethics that encompasses nature and culture, norms and discernment, and that is capable of suggesting future directions for human flourishing centered on empowerment and inclusiveness.

Christian ethics is profoundly and radically centered on Jesus's Incarnation, on his table fellowship with the downtrodden and outcast, and on the good news of the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace. Marianne Tierney FitzGerald explores the relevance of a liberationist Christology in Christian ethics that fosters solidarity with the marginalized and makes a preferential option for the poor. The crucified Jesus is on the cross in loving solidarity with today's crucified people and calls us to speak against any violence, injustice, and discrimination, and to act with the poor for justice and liberation, longing for the gift of the Resurrection here and now.

²²Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Catholic Feminists and Traditions: Renewal, Reinvention, Replacement," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2014): 27–51.

Scripture is the heart and soul of Christian ethics. Since the Second Vatican Council, theological ethicists more explicitly articulated their ethical reasoning, and their attention to practices, informed by the richness of the biblical witness. In examining the role of Scripture in theological ethics, Sarah M. Moses discusses Cahill's methodological hermeneutic of transformation. Without dismissing the diverse biblical texts, Cahill aims to identify patterns of moral practice that transform society, culture, and ecclesial communities by challenging existing entrenched dynamics and by welcoming the gift of conversion. Concretely, Moses shows how Cahill's family ethics is framed by her critical reading of New Testament sources, in a collaborative, ecumenical dialogue with socio-historical-critical biblical scholarship. Finally, for Cahill, the existing diverse communities in the global context demand careful attention to how each community, within global Christianity, discerns and lives their discipleship.

Part II, on Christian social ethics, shows how the tenets of Catholic social teaching and thought shape Cahill's approach to each specific area of theological ethics. Raymond E. Ward revisits the essential elements of Catholic social ethics and how Cahill relies on them constantly, by stressing the social relevance and feasibility of the Catholic social agenda focused on relentlessly promoting the common good and social justice, participation, solidarity, and subsidiarity, within civil society and in ecclesial contexts. In light of Cahill's contributions, he highlights three strategies that inform Catholic social teaching: dialogue (seeking common ground), advocacy (fighting for structural change), and shared action (building communities aimed at promoting justice).

In our world plagued by what seem like unstoppable, unsolvable violence and prolonged conflicts, Kate Ann Jackson-Meyer turns to the irreducible ethical dilemmas that shake our moral lives, are sadly too common in war, and challenge pacifism and peacemaking. Moral dilemmas, and the strategies proposed to address them (e.g., the principle of double effect), stretch the limits, or fracture the possibilities of virtuous behavior both in warfare and in the demanding process of peacebuilding and peacemaking. Jackson-Meyer highlights how recent developments in official Catholic teaching, among scholars, and in Cahill's theological reasoning point toward an increasingly dominant, pragmatic tendency to avoid considering war as the ethical way of addressing and solving international and local conflicts. While just war, with its well-articulated and traditional limiting criteria, is not entirely dismissed as a tragic possibility, peacebuilding and peacemaking seem to be better able to embody the radical faithfulness to the gospel and to the demands of the love command.

As Matthew Sherman highlights, social ethics also informs Cahill's family ethics. To flourish and to promote the common good in familial contexts,

in light of the biblical witness critically examined, and in dialogue with Roman Catholic Magisterial teaching (from the U.S. Catholic Bishops to John Paul II and Pope Francis) and with theological scholarship, Cahill engages diverse and composite experiences of families in multicultural contexts, arguing for inclusion, promotion, accompaniment, and liberation. For Sherman, Cahill's methodology and practical reasoning provide guidance in continuing to address ongoing challenges by examining familial practices and by focusing on specific areas of concern: from children's agency to parenthood, from pervasive consumerism to families as domestic churches.

Virginia M. Ryan highlights Cahill's innovative approach to theological bioethics that stresses the value of participation, justice, and change. Cahill has been critical of any narrow approach to moral reasoning that would aim at too rapid a simplification of the complexity of the issues, that would not rely on the rich ethical tradition by privileging short lists of narrowly interpreted principles, and that would favor individualistic emphases. Assuming that any bioethical issue is a social issue, since the beginning of her career Cahill has relied on the ethical resources offered by the Catholic social tradition to address a large spectrum of bioethical concerns, from the more traditional issues (e.g., at the beginning and the end of human life) to universal healthcare, genetics, biotechnology, and global issues like the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Her articulated approach has become mainstream, as confirmed by recent scholarship.²³

Hoa Trung Dinh, SJ, and Stephanie C. Edwards focus on healthcare by stressing how, in the current increasingly divisive political, cultural, and religious global context, Cahill has chosen a middle way that engages in dialogue and aims at finding any possible common ground. Providing access to healthcare services universally should address people's health needs, privileging the most vulnerable. Moreover, solving controversial and divisive ethical cases, which periodically dominate public imagination and debates, is urgent and requires dedicated efforts and generous commitments. Participation facilitates the pursuit of the social good that is represented by available and affordable healthcare services. Dinh and Edwards show how Cahill's methodology—informed by her dialogic attitude, participative methodology, and collaborative pursuit—is congruent with the overall goal of promoting healthcare services and access as belonging to the common good agenda in the public arena, both on the world scale and on the North American scene.

²³M. Therese Lysaught and Michael McCarthy, eds., *Catholic Bioethics and Social Justice: The Praxis of US Health Care in a Globalized World* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018). In her foreword (xiii–xvi), Cahill stresses how the bioethical approach offered by the volume “is not only grounded and practical, it is hopeful and transformative” (xvi).

At the moment of this writing, while Lisa Cahill has not yet fully articulated her interest in environmental ethics,²⁴ Jill Brennan O'Brien anticipates this forthcoming development. She explores Cahill's methodology and scholarship to propose, first, that the scholarship and practical engagement for promoting sustainability needs a fruitful, reciprocal interaction between theoretical reasoning and practical initiatives. Second, participatory reflection and action are remarkably inclusive, in a context where divisions and particular interests hinder successful commitments and efficacious actions to address both the global climate crisis and many other multifaceted challenges to sustainability and resilience. Faithful to Cahill's attention to Scripture, and inspired by the critical biblical scholarship on the creation stories in the book of Genesis, O'Brien stresses the moral obligation to protect creation and to care for it with creativity and hope.

Cahill's wide-ranging scholarly corpus not only reflects the kinds of questions that Christian ethics has debated over the past four decades, but also, more importantly, indicates the future directions and growing edges of Christian ethics. How should we reimagine the task of Christian ethics in an increasingly globalizing yet also particularizing economic, political, and cultural landscape?

In response, Part III reflects on the future of Christian ethics. In light of Cahill's work, Nichole M. Flores highlights that such a future is marked by the empowerment of those who are marginalized, while being aware of one's own social-cultural-religious location and, because of that, of one's possible marginalization. The transformative character of articulating an ethics from marginalized perspectives informed Cahill's scholarship in family ethics, Christology, and theological bioethics, as well as the type of leadership, accompaniment, and mentorship that Cahill has provided throughout her career. As Flores argues, a Christian ethics from the margins transforms society, culture, and the Church, and promotes a pedagogy of solidarity nourished by the virtues of faith, love, hope, and humility.

Joseph Loic Mben, SJ, recognizes in Cahill's scholarship ethical reflection situated in today's global and pluralist context that does not shy away from seeing and naming the pervasive evil in the social fabric. Such a theology of personal, social, and structural sin, however, demands the constructive and hopeful contributions that Mben finds in Cahill's realist commitment to promote the common good for the whole of humanity, while trusting in the possibility of ethical transformation that the Thomistic natural law tradition suggests.

For Autumn Alcott Ridenour, constructive and collaborative Catholic-Protestant dialogue and the training of Protestant colleagues further

²⁴However, see Cahill, "*Laudato Si'*: Reframing Catholic Social Ethics."

define Cahill's Christian ethics. Cahill's familiarity with major figures of the Christian tradition—Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Reinhold Niebuhr—centers her scholarship in dialogue with the concerns, strengths, and limits of their historically dependent contributions. Integrating the insights of these major figures with feminist scholarship, with theological voices from the Global South, and with modern and contemporary Protestant scholars, a few relevant themes emerge. Among them, Ridenour highlights the believers' union with Christ, the gifts of the Spirit within the community, the virtue of presence, and the importance of the community and its practices. The resulting portrayal further confirms the importance of identity, context, and praxis in Christian ethics and in Cahill's scholarship.

Angela Senander enriches the ecclesial dimension of Cahill's theological location and engagement by highlighting how Cahill's contributions exemplify, embrace, and develop the ethical commitment that informs the vision of the Church articulated by the Second Vatican Council, echoing the summons formulated in *Gaudium et spes*. Being part of God's people, and caring for those in greater need within humankind, promotes ecclesial ethical dynamics with even more urgency while the Catholic Church struggles to deal with the tragic sexual abuse scandal.

In the book's conclusion, Grégoire Catta, SJ, describes Cahill's commitment to a Christian ethics situated within, and in dialogue with, the public social context in a globalized world that many characterize as a liquid and secular society challenged by the ecological crisis. Inspired by Cahill's scholarship and commitment, Catta stresses the need to listen to the poor, while being grounded in the living ecclesial tradition that incorporates the experiences of those at the periphery. The chapter also stresses being engaged in inclusive dialogue and announcing the coming of God's kingdom as a radical, transformative liberation for anyone oppressed, and even for the oppressors.

Conclusion

Transformative engagement that promotes dialogue has a moral authority not dependent on power over against others, but rather an authority that continues to learn, promotes reciprocity, and empowers the powerless and the excluded, including women, children, persons who are poor, and those who are suffering from what limits their abilities. Lisa Cahill rightly avoids any limiting label that boxes scholars into rigid, predetermined caricatures that oversimplify one's nuanced theological methodology, faith

commitment, social persona, and praxis.²⁵ The biblical literature and the Christian tradition, however, do not hesitate to define this transformative dynamism as prophetic, because it embodies a vision of the good to be pursued and creates opportunities to welcome and embrace transformation.²⁶ This volume attempts to nourish this prophetic transformative engagement in dialogue with the academy, the Church, and society.

²⁵William Bole, "No Labels, Please: Lisa Sowle Cahill's Middle Way," *Commonweal* 138, no. 1 (January 14, 2011): 9–15.

²⁶James F. Keenan, SJ, "Prophetic Pragmatism and Descending to Matters of Detail," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (March 2018): 128–45.