

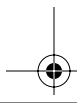
Preface

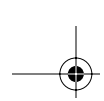


Becoming Good is a study of what is called virtue or character ethics. This subject has been getting renewed attention in recent years. Alasdair MacIntyre (in moral philosophy) and Stanley Hauerwas (in moral theology) have done great and influential work in this direction, persuading many to take character and virtue seriously. In politics, questions have been raised about the personal character of Bill Clinton, Oliver North, Newt Gingrich and others among our leaders. In business, Max De Pree, James Collins and Robert Solomon are leading a new emphasis on the character of corporations and of executive management. In their writings about education, Christina Hoff Sommers, Peter Kreeft and William Bennett have argued for character education, not just values clarification. All of this is pressing us to ask not just what the moral rules are, but what kind of people we are.



What kind of people are these violent predators on the weak we read about every day? Or these terrorists who would kill the innocent and run off to their cowardly hideouts? Or these garbage-dumping destroyers of our environment? Where did all this selfish greed that corrupts our public officials come from? What kind of people are we who can close our eyes to the poor, the unemployed





and the homeless around us? We could go on.

It's the character issue—and not just the personal character of individuals but the character of our communities and institutions. What kind of a business, school, church, neighborhood, city or nation do we have and want? Are we welcoming to the stranger, comforting to the hurting and empowering to the weak? Are we an inexhaustible source of good news and redemption to the lost? Are our institutions and practices just and fair?

Becoming Good is “a Christian ethic.” It does not pretend to be “the Christian ethic.” As “Christian” ethics for the whole church, not just some segment, it intends to stay close to the biblical text that we share as our common guide. We want to understand the Bible’s great classic texts, grand themes and general contours concerning character. The term “building” in the title emphasizes that we are looking at a lifelong process, not a fixed-state accomplishment. At the beginning of this new century the pace of change and the scope of the challenge to human life will make a Christian ethic founded on good character more important than ever before.

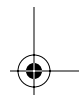
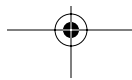
Becoming Good is the foundation for and companion to *Doing Right*. In *Doing Right* we will look more precisely at our doing, at the principles and practices God might term “right” and how we can apply these to the hard cases of our time. But to “do the right thing”

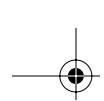
we need not only principles and rules to guide us, we need the capacity and inclination to understand and carry out such directives. Of course, there are no guarantees: good people sometimes do the wrong thing—and bad people sometimes do the right thing. But those are the exceptions; the rule is that we need to shape good people if we want to see the right thing done more often. Without making progress on

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what and who we *are*, it will be impossible to know and *do* what is right.

Becoming Good has two major parts. In “Prepare” (part one), the stage is set for building good character by looking more closely at





ethics today, character formation, God's goodness and our community realities. In "Build" (part two), we look in some detail at the content of a good character. My account of this content is drawn mainly from St. Paul's virtues of faith, hope and love, and from Jesus' Beatitudes. The biblical material on character is massive; I have attempted to draw it together in a five-part synthesis that will ring true in relation to the whole and the parts. This study closes with "Test" (part three), a brief consideration of how our character gets tested and tried, and then either crushed or strengthened.

This is not a heavy, pedantic, scholarly study written for professional philosophers. I would like, of course, to think that my work on ethics might be of interest to some of my colleagues. Nevertheless, my primary interest is among the people outside the scholarly guild. What I hope, above all, is that the Christian laity will be helped by my work. My primary audience is thoughtful Christians who live and work as engineers, managers, bus drivers, youth soccer coaches, restaurant workers, PTA members, attorneys, gardeners, physicians, nurses, teachers, journalists, parents, neighborhood volunteers . . . These are the sort of people (with their pastors and teachers) for whom I write.

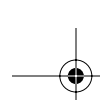
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For those wishing to probe my argument and Christian virtue ethics in greater depth, the footnotes provide guidance to further reading. My text is full of quotations of, and allusions to, the Bible. There is no other way to arrive at a satisfying, persuasive ethics for biblical people.

I have highlighted many of my arguments in the text in what I think of as "billboards." If you must drive yourself quickly through my text (and not pore over each elegantly crafted phrase or snicker at each humorous aside), I want you at least to glance at these billboards and get the big picture as you are speeding along.

There are many analogies and illustrations along the way, but it is also important to consider some concrete examples of the good character traits we will study in part two. We need personal exam-





ples and models who show that the virtues of good character can be lived out in our place and time, but only God is in a position finally to approve somebody's "humility" or "integrity." I might be wrong in my judgments, and even when I am right, these people will be embarrassed! The course I have chosen is to encourage you to think about whom you have seen exemplify one trait or another (or a corresponding vice!). Maybe this can be safely shared in a small discussion group context.

Each chapter concludes with some questions for reflection or discussion. It is my hope that these will make *Becoming Good* of greater help not only to individual readers, but to classes and study groups of various kinds.

David W. Gill

