ABSTRACT

While many may agree that the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of Jesus’ ethics, many also recognize that the Sermon is often a riddle. The vastness and variety of literature demonstrates that the interpretation of the Sermon is subject to many disagreements. At the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, the antitheses (Matthew 5:21-48) become one source of polemics in the study of the Sermon. The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the scholarship of the Sermon on the Mount by addressing two problems in the study of the antitheses. The first concerns the nature of the moral demands in the antitheses. The second deals with their scope.

The intention of this dissertation is not to expose all possible misunderstandings of the interpretation of the antitheses but to examine some of the hermeneutical options to see how the nature of their presuppositions predetermines the logic of their conclusions. I will inspect two aspects of the antitheses which are basic in the interpretations that are given by the Roman Catholics, Helmut Thielicke, John Howard Yoder, Leonardo Boff, and John Calvin. These are (1) the universality (the nature) and (2) the individuality (the scope) of the moral demands in the antitheses. I will then demonstrate that the antitheses constitute moral teaching, which God specially reveals to Christians in Scripture, and as such are universal and binding on each human person. They are also intended to prescribe moral conduct of individuals and not of States.