

The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics

Richard Hayes

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RÉSUMÉ

Voici un ouvrage de la plus grande importance dans le domaine de l'éthique biblique. Hayes examine en premier lieu l'enseignement éthique de différents auteurs du Nouveau Testament, dans le but de mettre en lumière l'enseignement propre à chaque théologien du Nouveau Testament. Puis il essaie de montrer que l'unité de l'éthique du Nouveau Testament réside dans l'histoire que ses auteurs racontent, plutôt que dans les doctrines. Il propose trois images focales tirées des textes du Nouveau Testament pour servir de lentilles herméneutiques: la communauté, la croix et la nouvelle création. En dialogue avec divers théologiens du XX^e siècle, Hayes trace sa propre méthodologie pour la mettre ensuite en œuvre de manière judicieuse dans une série d'études de cas: la violence, le divorce, l'homosexualité, l'antisémitisme et l'avortement. Hayes apporte une contribution significative à la construction de l'éthique chrétienne.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem wichtigen Buch zur Beziehung von Bibel und Ethik untersucht Hayes zunächst die ethischen Aussagen der verschiedenen neutestamentlichen Schreiber je für sich bevor er auf die Einheit neutestamentlicher Ethik zu sprechen kommt, die er eher in der von ihnen erzählten Geschichte als in ihrer Lehre erkennen will. Aus der Anzahl neutestamentlicher Texte schlägt er drei Themen vor, die als 'hermeneutische Schlüssel' beispielhaft behandelt werden: Gemeinschaft, Kreuz, Neue Schöpfung. Mit Bezugnahme auf eine ganze Reihe von Theologen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts entfaltet er seinen eigenen methodischen Ansatz, der anschließend auf eine Reihe von ethischen Feldern angewandt wird: Gewalt, Ehebruch, Homosexualität, Antijudaismus und Abtreibung. Das Buch stellt einen wichtigen Beitrag zur bleibenden Aufgabe christlicher Ethik dar.

This book comes with no less than sixteen songs of acclamations from some big names in

the New Testament world on its inner and outer covers! To these I add my small voice of praise for what is a significant contribution to the ongoing task of Christian Ethics. Hayes is concerned with how the NT, an old and diverse collection of books, can function normatively in contemporary Christian ethical discourse. The first task in which one must engage is to describe the ethical content of each different NT book or collection of books (pp. 13-185). Hayes chooses to focus on the Pauline texts, deuterio-Pauline texts, Mark, Matthew, Luke, the Johannine texts and Revelation.

The discussion on Paul was especially helpful in that it was not (yet another) summary of Paul's views on various ethical topics but rather aimed to uncover the theological rationale that guided Paul's reflection. Paul's ethical reflections are defended as thoroughly Christian from the roots upward (in contrast to the claims of some NT scholars). Ephesians and 1 Timothy are (in Hayes' view) deuterio-Pauline and indicate how the Pauline tradition fared later in the 1st century. They contain some helpful ethical insights but also show signs of the tradition going stale. 1 Timothy in particular is considered to be mundane and conformist with the author no longer thinking through issues from the foundations up!

The discussion of Mark's theological cross-carrying ethic was very clear and helpful as were the chapters on Matthew and Luke. Hayes is especially good at showing the ethical implications of the narrative theology of the Gospels in a world that usually limits synoptic ethics to the Sermon on the Mount. John's Gospel, contrary to initial feelings about it, turns out to be a helpful contribution to Christian moral reflection. It needs supplementing from other texts but expounds a Christian theology with rich ethical implications. Finally, Revelation turns out to be a subversive text which sets up the power-abusing Roman authorities over against God and his people. Jesus is the warrior-lamb who overcomes by his own death. His followers are called to a non-violent resistance to the 'world' and solidarity with the disempowered.

Hayes' analysis of the above mentioned NT texts is often persuasive and powerful although every reader will find area to disagree with. For example we are treated to a survey of four possible interpretations of 1 Cor 14:33b-36 with no reference at all to what many consider the most plausible interpretation—that women may prophesy but not teach.

The second task is that of synthesising the diverse voices of the NT. This *cannot* be done in such a way that we have 'a chorus speaking in unison'. We must resist the temptation to mix the diverse NT views into a bland soup—the individual emphases of authors must be allowed to stand. Yet some unity must be found if the NT is to function authoritatively in the church. The ground rules are that (1) all relevant NT texts must be considered whether we like them or not, (2) tensions must be allowed to stand and (3) we must attend to the genre of the texts.

The unity that we find in the NT is not the unity of a dogmatic system but a unity in the telling and retelling of a single story—the story of the God of Israel saving a broken world through Jesus Christ. Three guiding images suggest themselves from the diversity of NT texts which can be used as hermeneutical glasses: community, cross and new creation. 'Love' and 'liberation' cannot serve as the guiding images but can be subsumed into 'cross' and 'new creation' respectively.

The use of such hermeneutical glasses that are induced from the texts is an important move and I am strongly sympathetic to Hayes' chosen three. However, my evangelical spine shivers at the level of *irreconcilable* diversity Hayes believes is found in the NT. I sympathise with him in that he reaches this conclusion from a respectful inductive approach to the texts and then tries to move constructively beyond the problem. Nevertheless Hayes is quite explicit that "all NT texts are equal but some are more equal than others" (not his words). For example 1 Timothy 2:11 ff is theologically weak and non-normative (pp. 67–68). I am not convinced that Hayes does succeed in allowing the NT to be authoritative but only that parts of it and an abstract theology deduced from it are. This should make evangelicals discerning in their use of the book.

In working towards his own proposals for a normative hermeneutical approach to the NT in ethics Hayes provides a discerning analysis of the approaches of Niebuhr, Barth, Yoder, Hauerwas and Schussler Fiorenza (pp. 215–282). The ten principles that sum up the methodological proposals of the book are helpfully summed up on p. 310. They draw on the insights of the above mentioned thinkers as well as points already made. I found the proposals to be very helpful. They allow the NT to be used in a hermeneutically sophisticated way so that the church can hear the word afresh.

The final section is intended to show how

the method can work in practice. Hayes examines a range of topics that have been selected to illustrate the methodological points. The issue of violence is, argues Hayes, a case where the NT witness is unequivocally pacifistic. Pacifism is rooted in the kerygma and well attested in the texts.

The issue of divorce is one where, although there are differences in the details in NT texts (over remarriage, for example) there is a clear underlying perspective. The NT witness on homosexuality is univocal but mentioned very rarely in the texts and is not closely related to the gospel story.

With regard to anti-Judaism, Hayes believes that the NT texts are fundamentally contradictory with Paul and John representing the extremes of pro and anti-Judaism respectively. One is thus forced to choose which texts are normative.

Finally, abortion is an issue on which no NT texts speak directly.

One cannot do justice in a review to these stimulating and passionately written chapters. I myself do not see the tensions Hayes finds in the NT (on divorce but especially anti-Judaism) to be nearly as strong as he does. I do not think that John is, for example, a strong and bitter anti-Jewish polemic (see Motyer- *Your Father the Devil*) thus one is not forced to choose between Paul and John.

On the positive side I found these chapters packed with wise and very challenging material. They are a model performance of how one may allow the NT to impact contemporary Christian ethical reflection: an excellent end for an excellent book.

Robin Parry
Worcester, England

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SUMMARY

These volumes present an up to date survey of