

the majority of the scholars are South African which offers a unique (non-American/British) perspective on the subject. But other contributors include Richard Hays (introduction), Cilliers Breytenbach (Gospel of Mark), Michael Wolter (1 Corinthians), Petrus Gräbe (Philippians), Patrick Hartin (James), Ben Witherington III (Colossians) and Hans-Josef Klauck (Hebrews). Some of the scholars working in South Africa include Jan van der Watt (Gospel of John), Gert Steyn (Acts), and Dirk G. van der Merwe (Johannine epistles). A second unique feature of this collection is its scope. In similar kinds of treatments on the New Testament, the canonical Gospels and the letters of Paul are often highlighted to the neglect of other books. However, every book of the New Testament is treated here (except Jude) and 2 Clement is included as a final chapter before the summary.

The first essay, 'Mapping the Field: Approaches to New Testament Ethics' (R. Hays), is one of the strongest chapters with a survey of the how scholars in the past have approached the topic. He divides approaches to NT ethics into five categories: (1) Ethnographic Description of the Social World of the Early Christians (e.g., W. Meeks), (2) Extraction of Ideals or Principles (e.g., R. Niebuhr), (3) Cultural Critique of Ideologies in the New Testament (e.g., E. Schüssler Fiorenza), (4) Character-Formation and 'the Ethics of Reading' (e.g., S. Hauerwas), and (5) Metaphorical Embodiment of Narrative Paradigms (e.g., R. Hays). Hays does not evaluate what approach the essays in this book take, but it would seem that the contributors were aiming at a simple descriptive, exegetical approach with a view towards finding, what van der Watt calls, 'some golden threads that could be identified as running through all the documents' (p. 611).

As often is the case with collections of essays, the quality of the chapters varies considerably. Particularly noteworthy for clarity of thought and original expression are those on the Gospels of Mark and John, Romans, and the Apocalypse of John. As a whole, though, there are some weaknesses in this book. Though there is intentionality in the freedom of each contributor to focus on whatever he may wish regarding ethics, ethos, and identity, it seemed a bit too haphazard. A major contribution to this problem was the lack of research on and representation of what 'identity' is, how it is changed, and how discourse (or rhetoric) affects it. The book, then, would have benefited from some more preliminary work on *why* identity and ethos are important. There is a great deal of research on social identity and the relationship between ethos and identity in social-scientific studies, but this resource seemed to be untapped by the authors of this volume.

These criticisms should not prevent anyone with an interest in NT ethics from reading this book. Its fresh approach and perspective, if a bit inchoate, brings an important contribution to the topic. In the epilogue, van der Watt underscores the significance of such 'golden threads' as the will of God, the example of Christ, and

the aid of the Holy Spirit as recurring elements in the ethical orientation of the New Testament. Hopefully such research will provide a stimulus for more work in NT ethics that considers how ethical behavior is carried out in communal life (i.e., ethos) and the existential and cognitive influences on ethics (i.e., identity).

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### *Imitating Jesus:*

#### *An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*

Richard A. Burridge

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 xxii + 490pp.,

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#### SUMMARY

This book sets out a reconstruction of New Testament ethics grounded in the Jesus of history. It suggests that the genre of the gospels implies that the New Testament as a whole proposes an ethic of imitation of Jesus, and moves from the historical Jesus through the writings of Paul and the gospels, taken in chronological order. It is suggested that the New Testament as a whole points to an inclusive and pastoral ethic subsuming the rigorist teachings of the New Testament.

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses Buch legt eine Rekonstruktion der Ethik des Neuen Testaments vor, die im Jesus der Geschichte gründet. Burridge regt an, dass das Genre der Evangelien impliziert, dass das NT als Ganzes eine Ethik der Imitation Jesu vorschlägt. Er geht vom historischen Jesus aus und geht dann in chronologischer Reihenfolge durch die paulinischen Schriften und die Evangelien. Burridge schlägt vor, dass das NT als Ganzes auf eine inklusive und pastorale Ethik hinweist, die die rigoristischen Lehren des NT subsumiert.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre vise à une reconstruction de l'éthique du Nouveau Testament en se fondant sur le Jésus de l'histoire. L'auteur considère que le genre littéraire des Évangiles implique que le Nouveau Testament dans son ensemble invite à une éthique de l'imitation de Jésus. Il part du Jésus historique, puis traite des écrits de Paul, puis des Évangiles, en les considérant dans l'ordre chronologique. Il pense que le Nouveau Testament dans son ensemble pointe vers une éthique englobante et pastorale, qui canalise ses enseignements rigoristes.

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*Imitating Jesus* begins with the important observation that the literature on New Testament ethics rarely focuses on Jesus and his teaching. In this discourse, the ethics of the various New Testament books or writers are the main theme to the detriment of direct reference to Jesus himself. Richard Hays' influential *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* is an obvious exemplar of this, providing



Burridge's main dialogue partner as he sets out to rectify what he sees as a deficit.

His response is oriented by three basic theoretical commitments. The first is to work from the best historical-critical consensus on the historical Jesus, that is, using the "usual criterion of authenticity, such as dissimilarity, coherence and multiple attestation." The Q document and Josephus are the main non-biblical sources regularly adduced, and his is indeed a familiar and uncontentious biblical studies portrait of the historical Jesus.

The second and methodologically dominant move is to emphasize that the main texts providing access to the historical Jesus are the synoptic gospels, which Burridge is at pains to locate within the ancient genre of biography. "The central argument of this book arises from the fact that ancient biographies held together both words and deeds in portraying their central subject [and]...were written explicitly to give an example to others to emulate..." (73). Burridge regularly reminds us that none of the New Testament books function like an ancient ethical treatise, but draw their ethical force in implicitly or explicitly setting out a picture of Jesus to be emulated by his followers. Here the contemporary believer is intended to emulate not Jesus' particularities, but those things he said and did that are universally binding, namely, "his open pastoral acceptance of others, especially those whom some may consider to be 'sinners'." Furthermore, such following and such accepting have to be done within the community of others who also respond, yet who may be very different from ourselves" (77).

This understanding of the historical Jesus' ethic grows out of the stated aim to balance the extreme demands of Jesus' rigorist ethical teaching with his open-handed pastoral fellowship with sinners. A trajectory away from the rigorous and toward inclusivism is next discovered in the writings of Paul, who seems to be less concerned with Jesus' teaching, calling instead "for an imitation of Jesus' deeds in his accepting others, what we have called his open pastoral practice" (148). The material discussion concludes with a chronological journey through the gospels, in which Burridge finds, rather remarkably, that each evangelist in their own way is urging mimesis of Jesus' "open acceptance of others within the inclusive community of all who are following," (Burridge's gloss of Mark's emphasis on "discipleship", 184). Of the gospels, Burridge suggests that Luke best articulates Jesus' ethical ideal. The remaining New Testament books are not surveyed, primarily on the grounds that they are more difficult to fit into Burridge's biographical mimesis methodology. This survey treatment of the main texts of the New Testament has a familiar feel in a biblical studies genre that manages to be at once bulky and tantalizingly brief on difficult passages, though in most cases a comprehensive bibliography of contemporary scholarship is supplied.

A third but less explicitly articulated methodological commitment is to the importance of the reader's bio-

graphical honesty in promoting self-criticism. This is not systematically discussed (for that, see Daniel Patte's *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*) though it is regularly practiced, from the opening confession that the book was conceived in a pent-house hot tub, to the last chapter's regular references to private conversations with prominent figures in the South African church. In this last chapter Burridge tests his thesis against the fraught exegetical terrain in apartheid South Africa, commending a virtue ethic whose function is to remind us that moral change takes time and thus the church should accept people where they are. Burridge learns from the South African context that only the church that practices such inclusion can read scripture rightly. The role of biblical scholars in all this is as experts serving "ordinary" readers in the pews (again, the methodological implications of such a claim are much more fully developed in Charles Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*).

Three questions emerged for this reader. First, what does it mean if the historical guild, rather than the church, sets the basic criterion of what can be believed about Jesus? Burridge seems to suggest his own answer in one telling biographical footnote in explaining that he finds beginning with the historical Jesus appealing not because of his ecclesial commitments, but because he trained in classics in Oxford. Second, does beginning from the historical Jesus not screen out important parts of his life, and set up false dichotomies? Is it theologically necessary to polarize Jesus' teaching and deeds (as historians apparently must), and furthermore to begin as they do by subtracting the resurrection and ascension from the list of Jesus' authentic deeds? Finally, can pastoral and ethical concerns be pitted against one another? This book is probably best appreciated as a construal of Christian ethics in which pastoral concerns systematically *override* ethical discussion, at least those fraught discussions that appear to challenge the formation of wholly accepting communities. The New Testament's most striking ethical statements are typically diffused in this book by the claim that they stand as time-bound gestures of pastoral concern rather than strong moral claims to be taken seriously in their own right.

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