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USING SCRIPTURE IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS:  
INTERACTING WITH RICHARD HAYS'S *THE*  
*MORAL VISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Christopher Archie Vinson

May 2008

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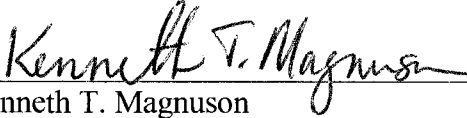
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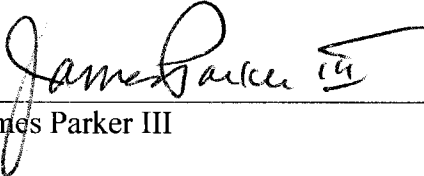
USING SCRIPTURE IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS:  
INTERACTING WITH RICHARD HAYS'S *THE  
MORAL VISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*

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To Jessica, my beloved,  
whose patience, encouragement, and love  
made this work possible.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>AusBR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin of Biblical Research</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>Christianity Today</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>FJ</i>	<i>Founders Journal</i>
<i>FT</i>	<i>First Things</i>
<i>HDR</i>	<i>Harvard Divinity Review</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAMA</i>	<i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRE</i>	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Modern Reformation</i>

<i>MSJ</i>	<i>Master's Seminary Journal</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Modern Theology</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

## PREFACE

Though this dissertation bears my name, it has been influenced and shaped by many people. I am grateful to Dr. Ken Magnuson for his support and friendship throughout my program. I chose to enter the doctoral program in part because of Dr. Magnuson's encouragement and counsel. He often challenged me to examine ethical problems from more than one angle. Dr. Jim Parker provided valuable insight and analysis as well.

I cannot thank Dr. E. David Cook enough for his endurance throughout my time of study. When circumstances led me to ponder whether I would continue in the doctoral program, he encouraged me. Even as he suffered major health concerns, he remained engaged and helpful. He is a tremendous asset to the defense of the faith, and an indispensable advocate for life in the kingdom of God.

If possible, however, I must give even more credit to my family. Jessica has been extremely patient, loving, and supportive, giving me encouragement and time to research and write. Our children provided much joy and a welcome distraction at many points along the way.

Last and most importantly, thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who "through His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Christopher A. Vinson

Vidalia, Georgia

May 2008

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Writing in 1970, Brevard Childs lamented, "In spite of the great interest in ethics . . . there is no outstanding modern work written in English that even attempts to deal adequately with the Biblical material as it relates to ethics."<sup>1</sup> There had been sufficient interest in the field of biblical ethics, but biblical scholars and Christian ethicists frequently had little contact with each other.<sup>2</sup> Near the end of the decade, however, many were beginning to notice a change. Allen Verhey could optimistically report, "Recently, there has been an increasing interest in 'bridging the gap' between biblical studies and ethics."<sup>3</sup> Despite its benefits, such an interest raised a more fundamental problem. In seeking to bring Scripture and Christian ethics together, the need arose for an appropriate methodology in moving from Scripture to moral claims. Put another way, how does the Bible function when making ethical decision? What role should Scripture have, or, as Brunt and Winslow asked, "Is it reasonable to expect such an ancient collection of documents to speak to the moral issues of contemporary society?"<sup>4</sup> In their article "The Bible's Role in Christian Ethics," Brunt and Winslow summarize five current approaches to this issue.

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<sup>1</sup>Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 124.

<sup>2</sup>See *Ibid.*, 242 n.1.

<sup>3</sup>Allen Verhey, "The Use of Scripture in Ethics," *RSR* 4 (1978): 28.

<sup>4</sup>John Brunt and Gerald Winslow, "The Bible's Role in Christian Ethics," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 3.

### Scripture and Ethics—Five Approaches

The first methodology, according to the authors, is commonly held by fundamentalists and evangelicals. It views biblical ethics as the same thing as Christian ethics. This approach emphasizes the revealed morality that Scripture represents. Brunt and Winslow consider Carl F. H. Henry to be the epitome of this approach. For Henry, "There is no ethical decision in life which the biblical revelation leaves wholly untouched and for which, if carefully interpreted and applied, it cannot afford some concrete guidance."<sup>5</sup> According to this model, "Scripture provides a unique, revealed morality that addresses any situation a Christian might face so that there is no ambiguity of duty. . . . Basically, Christian ethics consists of discovering what the Bible says and, as converted persons, acting on this."<sup>6</sup>

The second approach summarized by Brunt and Winslow is expressed best by Jack Sanders. He considers biblical ethics irrelevant for Christian ethics. Two factors make the Bible's morality irrelevant—the diversity of Scripture and the imminent eschatological expectation of the New Testament writers. Since the biblical writer's expectation was not realized, the church is left to deal with the complexities of life in a world that continues. Jesus does not offer any help either, since "his ethical teaching is interwoven with his imminent eschatology to such a degree that every attempt to separate the two and to draw out only the ethical thread invariably and inevitably draws out also strands of the eschatology."<sup>7</sup> This approach stands at the opposite pole of the first method. Whereas the first approach equated biblical ethics with Christian ethics, the

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<sup>5</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 339, quoted in Brunt and Winslow, "The Bible's Role," 5. It is not clear that Brunt and Winslow read Henry sympathetically here.

<sup>6</sup>Brunt and Winslow, "The Bible's Role," 5.

<sup>7</sup>Jack Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 29, quoted in Brunt and Winslow, "The Bible's Role," 7.

second considers the Bible irrelevant for Christian ethics. The last three methodologies fall in between these two extremes.

Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer epitomize the third approach, which emphasizes that God is free to command. In this method, the essence of Christian ethics is obedience to the command of God, which is not, however, identical with the content of Scripture. God's commands leave no room for application or interpretation, only for obedience or disobedience. For Barth and Bonhoeffer, one becomes a contemporary of the biblical writers as he confronts Scripture and as together with them he listens to the concrete command of God. That may not mean simply doing what they did or taught, however. "In fact, we might do that, and still not be following God's command. We must follow God's concrete command to *us*."<sup>8</sup>

A fourth methodology emphasizes the Bible's role in building character. "This model recognizes the difficulty of moving directly from Scriptural injunctions to contemporary decisions, but it affirms the relevance of Scripture for ethics by shifting the focus of Scripture's relevance. The focus of this relevance is not the decision-making process, but the process of character formation."<sup>9</sup> J. L. Houlden expresses this position well in *Ethics and the New Testament*.<sup>10</sup> Houlden rejects the notion that the New Testament might apply to contemporary ethics primarily because of its diversity. One cannot find the "New Testament view" of morality. Instead, Scripture forms the Christian mind which can respond morally. Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen argue along similar lines in *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*.<sup>11</sup> For them, "The most effective and crucial

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>11</sup>Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).



impact of the Bible on Christian ethics is that of shaping the moral identity of the Christian and the church."<sup>12</sup> Stanley Hauerwas has emphasized the role of Scripture in developing character, but his methodology differs slightly from those previously mentioned. Hauerwas stresses the communal aspect of character development. Scripture is not primarily an agent for shaping individual character so much as the identity of the Christian community. For Hauerwas, even asking the question "how Scripture should be used in ethics" is a distortion of scriptural intent. Scripture is not a problem solver. Instead, the traditions in Scripture provide a means for the community to find new life. The specific commands of the Bible are reminders to the community of faith of what kind of people they must be.<sup>13</sup>

The fifth methodology seeks to extract the strengths of each of the previous approaches. Those scholars who appreciate this model consider two elements key.

First, while agreeing that there is no one-to-one correspondence between biblical material and many contemporary dilemmas, they also hold that a process of reflection on Scripture is essential to Christian ethics. Second, they hold that Scripture does provide norms, either as specific rules or as general principles or presumptions.<sup>14</sup>

Brevard Childs and James Childress model this approach well. Childs, in *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, devotes a chapter to the question of the Bible's role in ethics. He suggests "a process of disciplined theological reflection that takes its starting point from the ethical issue at stake . . . and seeks to reflect on the issue in conjunction with the Bible which is seen in its canonical context."<sup>15</sup> Childs' rather short chapter does not provide

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 112. In their chapter on how the Bible is used in Christian ethics, Birch and Rasmussen also argue for the Bible's role in decision-making. Thus, their emphasis is not solely on character development.

<sup>13</sup>Brunt and Winslow, "The Bible's Role," 12.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>15</sup>Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 131.

much by way of methodology, apart from a few broad outlines. James Childress, in "Scripture and Christian Ethics,"<sup>16</sup> is more explicit. Childress counters the notion that Scripture's primary role in ethics is character formation. "Scripture aids in moral justification because its moral statements yield principles and rules which give structure to the moral life by establishing presumptions in favor of or against certain courses of action."<sup>17</sup> Other scholars, such as H. E. Everding and D. M. Wilbanks,<sup>18</sup> see a broader influence of Scripture beyond principles and rules. They stress the place of Scripture's images and symbols in moral reflection. This last model is commendable for its willingness to take seriously the need for Scripture in moral discernment and the need to engage the actual content of Scripture. It also recognizes the diversity of Scripture in light of the complexity of current ethical issues.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Richard Hays's *The Moral Vision***

Other scholars have addressed this methodological issue in more recent years,<sup>20</sup> but none so persuasively and popularly as Richard Hays. He wrote *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (hereafter *The Moral Vision*) to answer "the question of how the New Testament might inform our perennially inadequate efforts to respond faithfully

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<sup>16</sup>James Childress, "Scripture and Christian Ethics: Some Reflections on the Role of Scripture in Moral Deliberation and Justification," *Int* 34 (1980): 371-80.

<sup>17</sup>Brunt and Winslow, "The Bible's Role," 14.

<sup>18</sup>H. E. Everding and D. M. Wilbanks, *Decision Making and the Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1975).

<sup>19</sup>Brunt and Winslow, "The Bible's Role," 15.

<sup>20</sup>See the bibliography in Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), especially Thomas Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); and Richard Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

to God's calling."<sup>21</sup> The methodology that Hays lays out follows in the stream of the fifth approach mentioned above. Yet, more than any book before it, *The Moral Vision* has garnered attention and respect from scholars all over the theological spectrum.

*Christianity Today* included *The Moral Vision* among its list of the 100 most important books on religion in the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Reviews of the book were positive almost without exception.<sup>23</sup> Hays has found a reception among such a diverse group precisely because of the deft method of using Scripture in Christian ethics proposed in *The Moral Vision*. Hays builds the case that the New Testament is the supreme authoritative voice in ethical decision-making. He further argues that ancient Scripture still speaks to contemporary dilemmas and should instruct Christians in the ethical choices they make. Hays's approach calls for Christians to "engage in the ambitious imaginative project of discerning analogies between our world and the world of the New Testament writers."<sup>24</sup> In this way, contemporary believers can find instruction from ancient Scripture.

### Thesis

Despite its ubiquitous approval, this dissertation will argue that *The Moral Vision* does not give the church a completely satisfactory method for appropriating

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<sup>21</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, xi.

<sup>22</sup>"Books of the Century," *CT*, 24 April 2000, 93-94. In his endorsement on the flyleaf of *The Moral Vision*, James D. G. Dunn gushes, "Hays has pulled off, with a success for which I can think of no contemporary parallel, one of the most difficult tasks in theological and biblical writing today. . . . [He] has produced one of the boldest and most successful attempts to demonstrate how the New Testament can effectively provide norm and guidance for contemporary ethics."

<sup>23</sup>Major reviews include Douglas J. Moo, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard B. Hays, *BBR* 9 (1999): 271-76; Reinhard Hütter, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard B. Hays, *MT* 14 (1998): 455-57; and Gilbert Meilaender, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *FT* 78 (1997): 61-64. The lone negative review is Ralph Martin, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *JBL* 117 (1998): 358-60.

<sup>24</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 298.

Scripture in Christian ethics. *The Moral Vision* does not sufficiently answer the question the church continues to ask, namely, what is the role and proper use of Scripture in Christian ethics. A thorough critique of *The Moral Vision* will reveal shortcomings in the following areas: first, Hays's program of appropriating Scripture is built on his view that Scripture speaks in disunity. That view of the canon necessitates that Hays identify three focal images to locate a coherent moral voice. This leads him to a second weakness, namely the focal images serve to develop, despite Hays insistence to the contrary, a canon within the canon. Third, Hays gives priority to narrative in his system, which opens his method up to greater subjectivity and personal bias. Lastly, Hays's approach provides no criteria for judging whether an appropriation is faithful, it unwittingly relies on transcendent ethical principles, and it fails to distinguish between interpretation and application.

After offering a critique of *The Moral Vision*, the dissertation, in conversation with Hays, will propose an original method for appropriating Scripture in ethics. That proposal will seek first to acknowledge some foundational convictions regarding Scripture and ethics. Building on those presuppositions, the dissertation will prescribe how one might rightly read the ancient text of Scripture and from there draw some conclusions about how the Bible gives ethical instructions today. At every turn, the dissertation's interest will be concerned primarily with methodology rather than specific ethical conclusions. The prescriptive section will close by drawing specific conclusions about one contemporary ethical issue (*in vitro* fertilization) in order to test the methodology prescribed and help the reader see how this method might proceed (even if here only in a cursory way).

### Outline

Brunt and Winslow asked, "Is it reasonable to expect such an ancient collection of documents to speak to the moral issues of contemporary society?" Through an interaction with Richard Hays's *The Moral Vision* this dissertation will answer

affirmatively and provide one method for the appropriation of Scripture in contemporary ethics. Chapter 2 will describe the major arguments put forward by Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision*. Each of the four major sections of the book (the Descriptive Task, the Synthetic Task, the Hermeneutical Task, and the Pragmatic Task) will be summarized. Throughout the chapter, attention will be given to Hays conclusions, primarily as they relate to his methodology. Chapter 3 will present a critical evaluation of Hays's book. The chapter will present five key strengths and four major concerns of *The Moral Vision*. Chapter 4, drawing on the critical review of Hays, will prescribe a methodology for using Scripture which avoids the weaknesses found in *The Moral Vision* but capitalizes on its strengths. Chapter 5 will conclude the dissertation by offering some practical application of the findings of this dissertation for the church and the academy. It will also suggest various questions for further research and discussion.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPOSITION OF *THE MORAL VISION* OF *THE NEW TESTAMENT*

The intention of this chapter is to describe in detail the major arguments put forward by Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.<sup>1</sup> Hays contends that each of the four parts of *The Moral Vision* is essential to his strategy for appropriating Scripture in Christian ethics.<sup>2</sup> Thus, before evaluating Hays's strategy, a thorough description of *The Moral Vision* is necessary. What follows is an uncritical exposition of the four sections of *The Moral Vision*—the Descriptive Task, the Synthetic Task, the Hermeneutical Task, and the Pragmatic Task.

#### **The Descriptive Task**

By far the largest of the four sections, the Descriptive Task is where Hays provides detailed exegesis of "the messages of the individual writings in the canon, without prematurely harmonizing them."<sup>3</sup> His purpose is to note distinctive themes and patterns of reasoning of the individual writers. In this section of the book, Hays tries to clarify the explicit and implicit moral teaching found in the New Testament. Implicit

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>Hays gives this advice at the beginning of the final section: "Do not read Part IV of this book without having first read Parts I through III. The normative judgments offered here are meant to be read only in light of the foregoing analysis of the content of the New Testament and the methods appropriate to using it as an authority for Christian ethics" (ibid., 315).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 3.

moral instruction is found in "stories, symbols, social structures, and practices that shape the community's *ethos*."<sup>4</sup> Hays calls this the symbolic world of the community of faith. The job of the contemporary church is to read the New Testament and reconstruct a "thick description" of this world which "creates the perceptual categories through which we interpret reality."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Hays is looking for more than moral imperatives. He is seeking to distill the moral vision embodied in the various NT witnesses.

Hays does not examine all of the NT witnesses. Instead he looks at Paul, the four Gospels, Acts, and Revelation, as these are "most important by virtue of their substance and historic influence."<sup>6</sup> This selective approach serves Hays's purpose in the Descriptive Task which is to "display a representative sample of the material with which we must work in doing New Testament ethics."<sup>7</sup>

### **The Order of New Testament Witnesses**

Typically a survey of New Testament ethics would begin by reconstructing the ethics of Jesus and follow those traditions through the early church into the gospels. Hays, however, begins with Paul. He does so for three reasons. First, since Paul's letters are actually the earliest Christian Scripture, to begin with the Gospels tends to distort one's perspective. By beginning with Jesus, one gets the impression that Paul is interpreting or reacting to the Gospels. Yet Paul makes only a few references to the teachings of Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor 7:10, 11:23-25). As Hays puts it, "We stand a better chance of appreciating Paul's distinctive patterns of moral reasoning if we consider his letters in their own right before turning to the Gospel materials."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 14.

The second reason not to begin by reconstructing the ethics of Jesus is that Paul, of all the NT writers, "offers the most extensive and explicit wrestling with ethical issues."<sup>9</sup> Paul often encounters a specific problem and reveals his reasoning through to a solution. Because Paul's moral reasoning lies on the surface of his writings, examining his writings first serves a heuristic purpose: "reading his work will allow us to develop analytical categories that will prove useful in examining other New Testament texts in which the logic of moral arguments is less explicit."<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, the Descriptive Task begins with Paul because Hays is not interested in presenting a developmental history of Christian ethics. Hays's interest lies in the final form of the biblical texts and their subsequent interpretation.<sup>11</sup> Hays rhetorically asks, "Does it matter for the church's normative ethical reflection whether Jesus of Nazareth really told the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23-35) or whether it is an imaginative creation of Matthew's community?"<sup>12</sup> No matter its origin the parable is a part of the canonical text and "exerts a normative claim on the Christian tradition."<sup>13</sup>

## **Paul**

A brief exegetical survey of the Pauline material pertinent to NT ethics is ambitious. Hays begins by asking whether Paul's ethic is based on a coherent set of theological convictions or whether he has taken them from traditional sources unreflectively.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Hays adds, "The reconstructive historical task is valid and interesting—perhaps even necessary—but it is subsidiary to the concerns of New Testament ethics as a theological discipline (ibid.)."

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.



**Is Paul's ethic theologically grounded?** The question here is simply whether moral norms for Paul are derived from a logic internal to the gospel or are they derived from traditional sources. Hays sets the context for this discussion by referring to Martin Dibelius, who held "there is no direct connection between Paul's ethical prescriptions and his theological proclamation."<sup>14</sup> Hans Dieter Betz picked up on this line of argument and contended that "Paul's gospel may provide motivation to do what is right, but it does not generate a singularly Christian account of 'what is right.'"<sup>15</sup> Hays clarifies the significance of this issue when he states, "If there is no integral relation between Paul's ethics and his theology, the normative status of his particular ethical teachings is tenuous. . . . If, on the other hand, Paul's ethic does have a material relation to his theology, then the normative status of his moral teaching is inextricably bound up with the authority of his gospel."<sup>16</sup> Essentially the issue at stake here is the authority and relevance of Paul's moral instructions. If Paul is giving advice based on commonsense standards of decency and morality then his instructions are time-bound and perhaps useless for the church today. However, if the truth of the gospel requires the counsel Paul gives, then his instructions are relevant for the church today. After surveying the various positions, Hays reveals his own position: "I will offer a reading of Paul that seeks to demonstrate how his ethical teachings are rooted in his theological thought. . . . Paul is not simply repeating already formulated doctrines; rather, he is theologizing as he writes, and the constant aim of his theological reflection is to shape the behavior of his churches."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 17, referring to Martin Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1936), 143-44, 217-20.

<sup>15</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 17, summarizing Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermenia Commentary (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>16</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 18.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

Hays concedes that the best approach to studying Paul's ethic would be to take the ethical issues as they are treated specifically by Paul in his letters. However for the sake of space, Hays chooses to sketch Paul's moral vision in summary form. He begins by exploring three recurrent, interlocking theological motifs that provide the framework for Paul's ethical teaching.

**The theological framework for Pauline ethics.** Three themes structure Paul's moral thought. The first of these is "New Creation." The death and resurrection of Christ signaled an apocalyptic shift from the old age to the beginning of the new age. "Paul's moral vision," according to Hays, "is intelligible only when his apocalyptic perspective is kept clearly in mind."<sup>18</sup> Jewish thought held out hope for a coming day when the present evil age would be supplanted by the messianic age—an age of perfect justice and righteousness. The church age has inaugurated this era, but its completion is yet future. "Paul thinks of the present time as an anomalous interval in which the 'already' and the 'not yet' of redemption exist simultaneously in dialectical tension."<sup>19</sup>

So how does this eschatological theme shape Pauline ethics? Hays examines several Pauline passages (1 Thess, 2 Cor 5, Rom 8) and summarizes the issue with the following observations. First, the "here but not yet" perspective allows Paul a high tolerance for ambiguity. For instance, suffering and joy are present together in this age, and will be until the end. Second, the Christian community is engaged in a cosmic

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 19. Victor Furnish comes to a similar conclusion: "The Pauline eschatology is not just one motif among numerous others, but helps to provide the fundamental perspective within which everything else is viewed" (*Theology and Ethics in Paul* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1968], 214).

<sup>19</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 20-21. See J. Paul Sampley, *Walking between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 285-320; and George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 595-614.

conflict. The church should expect the same sort of opposition Jesus and Paul encountered. The battle is fought not with violence but the truth. Third, moral imperatives are all the more important given the imminence of the coming of the Lord. These moral imperatives primarily are tasks of love and mutual service. Fourth, God is at work within the community of faith, sanctifying it through his Spirit. Lastly, Paul contends that all of life will be redeemed. The new creation of redemption is a renewal of all things in Christ.<sup>20</sup> It will help to quote Hays at length:

In sum, Paul's eschatology locates the Christian community within a cosmic, apocalyptic frame of reference. The church community is God's eschatological beachhead, the place where the power of God has invaded the world. All Paul's ethical judgments are worked out in this context. The dialectical character of Paul's eschatological vision (already/not yet) provides a critical framework for moral discernment: he is sharply critical not only of the old age that is passing away but also of those who claim unqualified participation already in the new age. To live faithfully in the time between the times is to walk a tightrope of moral discernment, claiming neither too much nor too little for God's transforming power within the community of faith.<sup>21</sup>

The "New Creation" signals for Paul a radical shift in how the community presents a faithful moral vision of life.

The second theological motif that provides a framework for Paul's ethical teaching is "The Cross."<sup>22</sup> Paul speaks about Jesus the man little but when he does, invariably the references point to the cross.<sup>23</sup> There is one interpretation of the cross, however, which Hays considers determinative for Paul's understanding of the church's ethical responsibility. Hays contends that "for Paul, Jesus' death on the cross is an act of loving, self-sacrificial obedience that becomes paradigmatic for the obedience of all who

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<sup>20</sup>See the extended discussion on 2 Cor 5:7 in *The Moral Vision*, 19-20.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 27-32.

<sup>23</sup>"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

are in Christ."<sup>24</sup> To be sure, the cross dealt with sin. "Nonetheless, [the cross] does become for Paul also an example, a paradigm for the life of faith."<sup>25</sup> This paradigmatic significance is developed most thoroughly by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11. There the apostle takes an early Christian hymn intended for worship and uses it for moral exhortation. Christ is presented, according to Hays, as "an 'exemplar' who illuminates the way of obedience."<sup>26</sup> This same connection between the cross and moral instruction is found in Romans 5:12-21 and Galatians 2:19-20. "The twin themes of conformity to Christ's death and the imitation of Christ are foundational elements of Paul's vision of the moral life. . . . Obedience to God is defined paradigmatically . . . by Jesus' death on the cross."<sup>27</sup> This interpretation of the cross is so prominent in Hays's reading of Paul that Hays concludes that "to be in Christ is to have one's life conformed to the self-giving love enacted in the cross."<sup>28</sup>

The last of the three recurrent, interlocking theological motifs that provide the framework for Paul's ethical teaching is "Redeemed Community."<sup>29</sup> For Paul, it is uniquely through the Spirit-created community of believers that reconciliation and healing come. This is why Paul is interested in the unity of the churches to whom he writes. Their conformity to Christ is expressed in their communal practice of loving, mutual service. The reader of the New Testament sees this same idea expressed clearly in

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<sup>24</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 27.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. For contrasting interpretations of Phil 2:5-11 in recent literature see Stephen Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1990), 92-95; and Ralph Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

<sup>27</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 31.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 32-36.

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12-14. According to Hays, in Paul's thought, eschatological salvation is always cast in corporate terms. "God transforms and saves a *people*, not atomized individuals. Consequently, the faithful find their identity and vocation in the world as the body of Christ."<sup>30</sup>

These three themes—new creation, cross, and redeemed community—frame Paul's ethical thought. Yet it remains to be seen how these themes structure Paul's moral reasoning.

**Paul's moral logic.** Hays understands Paul to teach that the *positive warrants*<sup>31</sup> for obedience to God are based on the change that has taken place in the believer in Jesus Christ. The first warrant for obedience intrinsic to Paul's gospel is the union with Christ believers share. Believers have a freedom in Christ from the Law, precisely because they have undergone with Christ a death and resurrection. Because of their union with Christ, believers "live by the Spirit" and should be "guided by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16-26).<sup>32</sup> Secondly, believers are called to obedience because God has liberated them from the power of sin: "Through baptism, believers are transferred from one sphere of power to another."<sup>33</sup> The final positive warrant for obedience for believers is based on the work of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith. "These are all positive warrants that ground the moral imperative in what God has already done or is doing in the midst of the community. . . . Paul seems to see moral actions as a logical entailment of God's redemptive action."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>31</sup>Although Hays never defines precisely what he means by "warrant," one gets the impression he uses the term to mean the "justifying reason or ground for an action, belief, or feeling" (*Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. s.v. "warrant").

<sup>32</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 37.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 39.

There are, however, *negative* warrants in Paul's moral reasoning. These are sanctions against sinful behavior. At times, Paul seeks to encourage obedience by reminding believers that God will punish disobedience (e.g., 2 Cor 5:9-10; Rom 2:1-16; 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-17; 1 Thess 4:23-25). At other times, Paul issues warnings to his readers based on his apostolic authority (2 Cor 13:2; 1 Cor 4:18-21). "In some contexts, Paul wields strong negative warrants to discourage certain behaviors in his churches."<sup>35</sup> Yet Paul's preferred approach is to commend an action to the community based on thorough arguments which set out the positive warrant. "Only when the theological arguments seem to be failing . . . does he begin appealing to negative warrants."<sup>36</sup>

What then does such obedience look like? Or, put another way, how should Christian faithfulness be defined? Are Paul's norms derived from Hellenistic culture or his Jewish heritage? Hays answers, "When we examine Paul's actual ethical arguments, we find that such cultural traditions play a relatively slight role in comparison to two fundamental norms to which he points repeatedly: the unity of the community and the imitation of Christ."<sup>37</sup> Thus, the baseline definition or norm of Christian obedience concerns maintaining the unity of the community of Christ and fleshing out the example of Christ in that unified community.

What believers need in order to fulfill this calling—the power for the moral life—is the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Unlike the man in Romans 7, believers have entered the sphere of the Spirit's power, where they find themselves empowered for obedience.<sup>39</sup> For Paul,

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 45. "The Holy Spirit is a source of power enabling Christ's people to 'walk' in a way that fulfills the real meaning of the Law."

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. Hays offers two recent interpretations of Rom 7 as support. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); and James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word Publishing,

obedience is a response of a saved heart not a condition for salvation. Hays acknowledges that the Spirit works through means (e.g., Scripture, Paul's teaching, and community worship), but he maintains that the Spirit of God is the motivating power behind all obedience.

Hays's view of Paul's moral vision is best articulated by quoting *The Moral Vision* at length:

Paul sees the community of faith being caught up into the story of God's remaking of the world through Jesus Christ. Thus, to make ethical discernments is, for Paul, simply to recognize our place within the epic story of redemption. There is no meaningful distinction between theology and ethics in Paul's thought, because Paul's theology is fundamentally an account of God's work of transforming his people into the image of Christ.

The distinctive shape of obedience to God is disclosed in Jesus Christ's faithful death on the cross for the sake of God's people. That death becomes metaphorically paradigmatic for the obedience of the community: to obey God means to offer our lives unqualifiedly for the sake of others. . . . Ethics cannot be sufficiently guided by law or by institutionalized rules; instead, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-discerned conformity to Christ is required.<sup>40</sup>

### **Pauline Tradition**

Since, according to Hays, "the majority of New Testament scholars" consider 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus compositions written under Paul's name by his followers after his death, Hays considers these letters separately.<sup>41</sup> He does think Paul authored 2 Thessalonians and Colossians. However, regarding the other epistles, Hays adopts "the working hypothesis that Ephesians and the

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1988), 374-412.

<sup>40</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 45-46. Having described the theological framework and moral logic of Pauline ethics, Hays concludes his overview of Paul with an appendix on Paul's understanding of the relation between men and women, which is extraneous to the purposes of this study.

<sup>41</sup>For matters of authorship, Hays refers to Werner G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975); and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

pastorals are products of second-generation Pauline Christianity. . . . Even if Paul is the author of these letters," Hays asserts, "their portrayal of the church and of the faithful Christian life diverges so significantly from the picture drawn by the other letters that they would in any case demand separate consideration."<sup>42</sup> In order to draw out the vision of the moral life presented in these "deutero-Pauline Epistles," Hays concentrates on Ephesians and 1 Timothy.

**Ephesians.** Hays considers the ornate style of Ephesians un-Pauline, even if the theological motifs of election, redemption, and adoption are characteristically Pauline. Yet more important is the great emphasis given to the cosmic significance of the church, the fulfillment of God's design in Christ. The long hidden mystery that is now revealed is made clear "through the church . . . to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:9-10). Hays sees this as a significant development in the Pauline view of the church. "In Ephesians, the church is . . . the singular medium of revelation to the whole creation, including cosmic powers that still oppose God's purposes (3:10; 6:10-20)."<sup>43</sup> The primary implication of this truth for the church is the necessity of a visible unity of the church. With that theological background, Ephesians then offers three chapters of moral exhortation and instruction (chapters 4-6). Hays sees this outline of the book as essential for understanding the moral vision it purports. For instance, regarding the household code in 5:21-6:9, Hays suggests that it "articulates a vision for a community whose social relations are impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>44</sup>

The Pauline heritage is adopted and adapted in Ephesians. The letter deemphasizes Paul's eschatological framework, yet it magnifies the cosmic significance

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<sup>42</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 61.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.



of the church. The greatest difference in Ephesians from Paul's letters is it lacks situational specificity. Thus, the letter develops a greater role for the church in the universal work of God. "The church's moral action has two fundamental aims: to manifest the truth of God's cosmic design and to extend God's reconciling power into the world through the growth of the body of Christ toward full maturity."<sup>45</sup>

**First Timothy.** Hays sums up the development of Paul's ethical tradition in 1 Timothy this way:

There are passing allusions to eschatological judgment and hope . . . . The death of Jesus is promulgated as a confessional mystery, but [as with eschatology] it plays no visible role in the formulation of ethical norms. The strongest thread of continuity with the other Pauline letters is the emphasis on the moral formation of the community as a matter of central concern.<sup>46</sup>

But even in that continuity there is a discernible shift in that 1 Timothy does not use the community's well-being as a warrant for ethical living (as in 1 Corinthians). Hays sees these differences between 1 Timothy and authentic Pauline letters as proof that "1 Timothy represents a second-generation reception of the Pauline heritage."<sup>47</sup> The fact that 1 Timothy contains scant ethical argumentation leads Hays to contend that the greatest difference between the authentic Pauline letters and 1 Timothy is that in the former

Paul wrestles constantly with the hermeneutical task of relating the gospel freshly to the situation in his 'target' churches; 1 Timothy assumes that the norms must be merely guarded and passed along. . . . [In] the authentic Pauline letters, the churches are repeatedly exhorted to discern the will of God anew under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; in 1 Timothy, there is no call for discernment because the will of God has already been sufficiently made known in the 'sound teaching' of the tradition.<sup>48</sup>

Hays is not sure that discarding the work of ethical discernment is progress. He concludes

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

the Pauline Tradition section this way: "The presence of the pastorals in the New Testament canon requires the church to ponder the importance, as well as the dangers, of order in the household of God."<sup>49</sup>

### **Gospel of Mark**

Hays divides his evaluation of the moral vision found in Mark into five sections: Finding "Ethics" in the Story of Jesus, Mark's Christology, Discipleship, Eschatological Expectation in Mark, and Mark's Narrative World as a Context for Action.

**Finding "ethics" in the story of Jesus.** Because the gospel is a different genre than Paul's letters, the task of finding Mark's moral vision is a bit different, though simpler in some ways. Since the gospels "clothe their message in the form of a story about the past" they more readily address the whole church, regardless of time and place.<sup>50</sup> Even though many stories in the gospels teach moral lessons, the genre is most valuable, according to Hays, because stories "form our values and moral sensibilities in more indirect and complex ways, teaching us how to see the world, what to fear, and what to hope for."<sup>51</sup> Consequently, in order to discern the moral vision of each gospel, one must understand and appreciate the shape of the story as a whole. In Mark, that approach is all the more important, given that this gospel contains very little explicit ethical teaching.<sup>52</sup> The place to begin to formulate a view of the gospel's moral vision is

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 73. This idea is essential to Hays's program of using Scripture in ethics, such that he gives narrative material priority over didactic passages.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Hays (*The Moral Vision*, 91) references J. L. Houlden, who speaks of the "paucity of ethical material" in Mark and notes that "even the ethical material which Mark includes is for the most part not present as a result of purely ethical interest" (J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973], 46).

with Mark's presentation of the crucified Messiah.<sup>53</sup>

**Mark's Christology.** In Mark's gospel, Jesus is constantly on the move and constantly demonstrating his power and authority. Mark's description of Christ builds to a climax at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus interviews his disciples about his identity. In Matthew's account, Jesus praises Peter for his answer; Mark, however, describes a different response. Mark reports that Jesus strictly charged them to tell no one about him (Mark 8:30).<sup>54</sup> Literally, Jesus rebuked them because he wanted to make clear he came as a suffering Messiah.<sup>55</sup> Hays contends that Mark, in particular, presses this issue because Jesus' followers are called to follow him in the way of suffering, rejection, and death. The cross, according to Hays, is "the controlling symbol for interpreting Jesus' identity."<sup>56</sup> And therefore, the Christology of Mark, dominated as it is by Jesus' march to the cross, makes a radical declaration to followers of Christ. "Those who are the Messiah's disciples

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<sup>53</sup>This method of evaluating Mark's gospel differs from two currently popular methods. First, Hays's approach differs from a *redaction-critical method* which seeks to identify Mark's theology based on distinctive Markan material. Wolfgang Schrage exemplified this approach in *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). The other popular approach attempts to identify the precise *historical circumstances* surrounding Mark's composition. Hays discounts this sort of approach because, according to him, all such reconstructions "are highly speculative. We simply do not have enough evidence to determine the exact date and setting of this Gospel's composition" (*The Moral Vision*, 74). Hays contends that his "portrayal of Markan ethics would be compatible with several of the competing reconstructions, but it does not require any of them for its intelligibility" (*ibid.*, 75).

<sup>54</sup>Hays refers to the "distinctive Markan motif of the 'messianic secret'" (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 91, n.14). See William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*. Trans. J. C. G. Greig (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1971); C. M. Tuckett, ed. *The Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>55</sup>Hays translates 8:30: "Jesus rebuked (ἐπετίμησεν) them." Mark used the same root word in 3:12 when Jesus "rebuked" (ἐπετίμα) the demons for the same reason. According to Hays, "Jesus sharply censures speakers who declare the truth about his identity" (*ibid.*, 78).

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

are called to follow him in the way of suffering, rejection, and death."<sup>57</sup> In this way, Mark's Christology is intertwined with his call to Christian discipleship.

**Discipleship.** Mark's gospel presents the cross in two ways. First, the cross is a place of vicarious sacrifice. Secondly, and more importantly, for Hays, in Mark the cross is a demonstration of exemplary character. That is, the cross is a pattern for believers to follow. On three different occasions Jesus predicted his coming death, yet each time Jesus ends by focusing on the call to suffering discipleship. "To be Jesus' follower is to share his vocation of suffering servanthood, renouncing the world's lust for power."<sup>58</sup>

Mark's gospel also presents a message of inevitable failure for Christ's followers. The moral vision cast in Mark is rather sober in light of human impotence. "Mark is hardly a cheerful optimist about the human capacity to fulfill the will of God. He knows well the weakness of the flesh, the deceitfulness of the heart, and the darkness of the mind."<sup>59</sup> Yet Mark, unlike Matthew, concentrates on simple external obedience rather than on motivation. And unlike Paul, Mark places no emphasis on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for obedience. In Mark, it remains a mystery how disciples are empowered for service.

The *norm* for discipleship is defined by the cross in the second gospel. Jesus' own death, portrayed by Mark as a pattern of faithful servanthood, gives believers a singular example to emulate. Interestingly, the concept of love is not a prominent part of Mark's ethical vision. Mark focuses on it only once (12:28-34), yet Hays considers that passage key to understanding Mark's view of the law. In 12:28-34 Jesus summons God's people to radical love of God and neighbor. Yet even in this light, for Mark, Jesus does

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

not consider love a distinctive mark of discipleship. Rather, "the way of the cross is the way of obedience to the will of God, and discipleship requires following that way regardless of cost or consequences."<sup>60</sup>

**Eschatological expectation in Mark.** Mark's gospel, from the first chapter to the last, is eschatologically driven. From the Isaiah prophecies fulfilled by Christ in the first chapter to the abrupt ending without a resurrection appearance, Mark's gospel continually reminds the reader that the character of the kingdom of God is still future.<sup>61</sup> Hays suggests three implications of how Mark's eschatology shapes his vision of the moral life. First, the expectation of Christ's immediate return excludes all possibility of compromising the radical demands of discipleship. Christ's followers are expected to endure regardless of the consequences. Christ's return is imminent and therefore readiness is all the more urgent. Second, the imminence of the "here but not yet" kingdom makes the norms of the old order—which include the Torah—dramatically relative. In Mark, "the new eschatological reality eclipses the old rule-based norms, which are portrayed as rigid and sterile."<sup>62</sup> Lastly, followers of Christ are called to live a life of suffering discipleship without the presence of the Lord. "There will be consolation when the Son of Man comes in glory, but for the present there is only the sober call to take up the cross and follow."<sup>63</sup>

**Mark's narrative world as context for action.** When Hays refers to narrative world he is thinking of the context of moral action. He suggests six observations about the narrative world of Mark. First, the world for Mark is a world torn open by God. God

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 88.

chooses often to involve himself in the created order, ultimately so in the cross. Second, in Mark's gospel time is compressed. "Mark's Jesus has no time for leisurely discourses about the lilies of the field. This Gospel plunges us into the midst of a cosmic conflict careening forward."<sup>64</sup> Third, God has reversed the positions of insiders and outsiders. Those of privilege and authority reject Jesus while the lowly and despised receive Christ with joy. Fourth, "Mark's gospel redefines the nature of power and the value of suffering."<sup>65</sup> Those who use power abusively are shown to be villains and pawns of forces beyond their control. On the other hand, suffering is portrayed as meaningful and useful in God's will. Fifth, the moral vision in Mark is ironic. Because God's revelation is characterized by hiddenness, reversal, and surprise, "there can be no place for smugness or dogmatism in ethical matters."<sup>66</sup> Lastly, the lack of closure in this gospel demands an active response from the reader. "It is a Gospel of uninterpreted gestures and suggestive silences. Precisely for that reason, it summons readers to supply the ending by taking up the cross and completing the interpretation in their own lives of discipleship."<sup>67</sup>

### **Matthew**

Matthew's gospel, though it incorporates all of Mark's material, typically seeks closure, resolves mystery, and explains ambiguity.<sup>68</sup> According to Hays, in order to grasp Matthew's moral vision, one must appreciate three aspects of Matthew's symbolic world: (1) Jesus as teacher, (2) discipleship as community formation, and (3) eschatology as a warrant for ethics.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 94.

**Jesus as teacher.** Matthew's Christology is built on his presentation of Jesus as the authoritative teacher of the people of God.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Matthew places the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The sermon ends, according to Matthew, with the crowds being "astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes" (7:38-39). According to Hays, "To know the Matthean Jesus rightly, then, is to acknowledge his authority by obeying his word."<sup>70</sup>

Jesus' teaching in Matthew differed from the scribes but it was continuous with the Torah. Near the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stresses that he did not come to abolish the Law and prophets but to fulfill them (5:17). Thereafter Matthew recounts six antitheses (5:21-48) where the authority of Jesus is set against the authority of traditional understandings of the Law. Matthew's Jesus does not subvert the Law. Instead he reinterprets its standards of righteousness as pointers to "a more radical righteousness of the heart, intensifying the demand of God far beyond the letter of the Law."<sup>71</sup> So Jesus' teaching is continuous with the Law. Yet Jesus fulfills the Torah "in the sense that his life is the typological completion of numerous Old Testament prophecies and stories. Matthew often points to various events in Jesus' life and ministry as fulfillment of what the prophets had spoken."<sup>72</sup> Hays calls this "the 'scripted' character of

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 95. Hays goes even further: "Indeed, as a consequence of Matthew's placement as the first Gospel in the New Testament canon, this image of Jesus as pedagogue came to exercise a disproportionately weighty influence in the early church's piety" (ibid.).

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>The exact number of fulfillment references is debated. Some scholars count from eleven to as many as fourteen, "depending on how strictly the formula is defined" (ibid., 110 n. 7). Krister Stendahl broke ground in this area of Matthean studies with *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).

salvation history; nothing is random or uncertain."<sup>73</sup>

**Training for the kingdom.** In light of Matthew's presentation of Jesus as a teacher, those who follow Christ are seen primarily as a community of learners. This is evidenced by the great commission, wherein believers are to "make *disciples* of all nations . . . *teaching* them to *obey* everything that I have commanded you" (28:19-20).<sup>74</sup> Matthew is highly interested in the community's role in spiritual formation. Only in Matthew does Jesus speak of the *ekklesia* ("church" in 16:18 and 18:17). "Unmistakably, Matthew depicts Jesus as the founder of the church. To join his movement is to join the community of disciples that he has expressly called, taught, and authorized. . . . One cannot follow Jesus, according to Matthew, except by becoming part of the community that he trained to carry out his mission in the world."<sup>75</sup>

Specifically, being a part of this community demands rigor in discipleship and modeling obedience to a watching world. Yet Matthew does not outline what such obedience looks like. Even though the Sermon on the Mount instructs believers regarding anger, lust, violence, hypocrisy, pride, and materialism, such rules, "are exemplary not comprehensive, pointers to the kind of life expected in the community, but not a map of acceptable behavior."<sup>76</sup> Matthew's call for moral perfection is not a call to obey a comprehensive system of rules but a call to transformation of character and heart. "Matthew's Jesus is concerned less with action-guiding principles as such than with the elemental attitudes and orientation of persons."<sup>77</sup> Matthew thinks of actions as growing

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<sup>73</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 96.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 98, quoting Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 140.

<sup>77</sup>Thomas Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Louisville:



organically out of character. Of course, this does not displace the role of laws and commandments. Rather, "Matthew's vision is generated precisely by the paradoxical tension between his stable deontological moral categories and his message that the coming of the kingdom transforms everything, including the people who live under accountability to those categories."<sup>78</sup>

In Matthew's vision of the moral life, speech and actions are mere expressions of one's heart. Hays calls this an "expressivist view of ethics."<sup>79</sup> Since action flows from character, and character is training in righteousness, those who submit to Jesus' instruction will find themselves formed in a new way so that their action will be wise and righteous.<sup>80</sup> According to Hays, Matthew's moral vision, in this way, "has much in common with Israel's wisdom tradition, though Matthew is more concerned with community formation than with the cultivation of wisdom and virtue in the individual."<sup>81</sup>

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus emphasizes the character trait of mercy, twice referring to Hosea 6:6 ("I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice"). For Hays, the repetition of Hosea shows that mercy is key to understanding Matthew's ethic. After discussing the context of those two citations (9:10-13; 12:1-8), Hays concludes that "Jesus' teaching provides a dramatic new hermeneutical filter that necessitates a rereading of everything in the Law in light of the dominant imperative of mercy."<sup>82</sup>

Matthew's Jesus transforms the law by elevating mercy as a supreme character

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Westminster John Knox, 1983), 111, referenced by Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 98-99.

<sup>78</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 98.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 99. Hays points to, as an example, the parable of final judgment (Matt 25:31-46) where the sheep did not even know that their actions were serving Jesus. They were simply expressing "the goodness of their character" (ibid.).

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 100.

trait. He does the same with love. This is made explicit in Matthew 22:34-40. Not only is love for God and neighbor the first and second greatest commandments, but Matthew adds to Mark's account that "on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (22:40). The result of this statement, Hays contends, is that "the double love command becomes a hermeneutical filter—virtually synonymous with Hosea 6:6—that governs the community's entire construal of the Law."<sup>83</sup> Hays makes the significance of this for Matthew's moral vision explicit, stating, "Those who are trained for the kingdom of heaven are trained to evaluate all norms, even the norms of the Law itself, in terms of the criteria of love and mercy."<sup>84</sup>

Hays sees this causing a tension for the Matthean community between the rigor of obedience demanded by Jesus and the hermeneutic of mercy, leading believers "to subordinate the Law's specific commandments to its deeper intent."<sup>85</sup> The answer to this "apparently contradictory" vision is found in Matthew 18:1-35, a discourse on church discipline. The conclusion of the process calls for the sinner to be treated as a Gentile and a tax collector. However, this means he becomes an object of the community's missionary efforts. "The goal of the community's disciplinary action must always be the restoration of the sinner to fellowship. Thus the three-step disciplinary procedure . . . both upholds the community's rigorous moral norms and provides for forgiveness and reintegration of the wrongdoer into the community's life."<sup>86</sup>

**Matthew's eschatology.** Unlike Paul and Mark, eschatology for Matthew plays a different role in his moral vision. First, there is a relaxation of eschatological

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 102.

urgency. Certain aspects<sup>87</sup> of Matthew's gospel indicate Matthew expects a protracted historical period prior to the eschatological consummation. The reality, not the timing, of the final judgment is crucial. A second factor is Matthew conviction that Jesus is present in and with his church. The conclusion to Matthew's gospel ("And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" 28:20), echoes a theme found throughout Matthew: "the proclamation of 'God with us' in Jesus . . . underlies the whole Gospel."<sup>88</sup> Finally, in Matthew, eschatology is a warrant for moral behavior. Reward and punishment serve as motivation for obedience in Matthew, much more so than in Paul and Mark.

**Matthew's narrative world.** Hays offers these conclusions to how Matthew's gospel defines the context of moral action. First, Matthew's world is stabilized and given meaning by the authoritative presence of Jesus Christ. Right and wrong are clear and obedience is considered a normal way of life for those in the church. Second, the present age is significant for this is the time to make disciples of all nations. Third, God's ultimate judgment will be based on concrete works of love and mercy, specifically outreach to the weak and needy. Fourth, the conflict between the leaders of the synagogue and Matthew's community remains unresolved. Fifth, the church is characterized by humility, patience, and concern for little ones. Sixth, Matthew, in opposition to Paul, represents obedience as a simple possibility for those who hear the word of Jesus. Matthew never presents persons as deeply flawed or in some bondage to powers beyond their control. Lastly, taken together this vision presents the church as "a community in which people can find security and can act with moral confidence."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Hays notes several, such as the fact that Jesus established a church, which has a mission to proclaim the gospel to the whole world (24:14), a project that will no doubt take time (ibid., 104).

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 110.

## Luke-Acts

Hays seeks to capture Luke's moral vision by summarizing his Christology, his presentation of the Spirit-empowered community, and his eschatology.

**Luke's Christology.** In Luke, Jesus is understood primarily in terms of what he has done, in terms of the role he has played in salvation. Christology in Luke is functional. The three most prominent Christological images found in Luke are (1) the Spirit-empowered servant, (2) the prophet like Moses, and (3) the righteous martyr. Jesus is presented as the Spirit-empowered servant most prominently in the narrative following his wilderness temptations. Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth and begins teaching from Isaiah 61:1-2. The end result of this incident is a declaration that Jesus has been empowered by the Spirit to inaugurate the liberation of God's people.

There are two passages in Acts that identify Jesus as the prophet like Moses. In Acts 3 Peter tells the crowd that Jesus is that prophet whom Moses promised God would "raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me" (3:22). The second passage is Acts 7:37 where Jesus is the one spoken about by Moses. Hays then notes: "All of this has major implications for understanding the ethical imperatives that confront the church. As the new people of God summoned by the prophet like Moses, they are to journey with him, to heed his teachings, to know themselves as the new covenant people who are to fulfill the Deuteronomic vision of Israel's destiny."<sup>90</sup>

Finally, Jesus is presented in Luke's gospel as the righteous martyr. More than anywhere else, Luke stresses Jesus' innocence.<sup>91</sup> Unlike Mark's account, in Luke the centurion at Jesus' death confesses 'Certainly this man was innocent!' (23:47). Twice in

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>91</sup>For one interpretation of Luke's intention behind this theme, see Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 137-41.

Acts, Jesus is called the 'Righteous One' (3:15, 7:52). This presentation of Jesus as a martyr is intended to present him as a model to follow. His life is a paradigm of faith.

**The church in the power of the Spirit.** The book of Acts presents the church as continuing the ministry of Jesus. The Spirit's coming at Pentecost signals a new day of empowered ministry by all believers.<sup>92</sup> The Spirit calls for all believers "to take up Jesus' vocation," namely that of suffering obedience.<sup>93</sup> "The apostolic hardships of the Acts narrative can be read as the fulfillment of Jesus' call to surrender everything and take up the cross in order to follow him."<sup>94</sup>

A second emphasis of the Spirit's work in the church concerns the formation of a new people of God. This is clear in the gospel but most prominent in Acts. Luke portrays the church after Pentecost as the fulfillment of the Deuteronomic ideal of the covenant community. According to Deuteronomy 15:4, "There will, however, be no one in need" among the covenant community. Hays sees the economic sharing in the church's early days as "the fruition—or at least the first fruits—of the mission that Jesus announced in Luke 4:16-21: to bring into being a restored Israel in which good news is proclaimed and enacted for the poor and oppressed."<sup>95</sup>

A third emphasis of the Spirit's work in the church involves the church's relationship to the world. Interacting with Conzelmann and Cassidy,<sup>96</sup> Hays summarizes

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<sup>92</sup>According to Hays, "The power of the Spirit extends in a . . . comprehensive and egalitarian way to the whole people of God" (*The Moral Vision*, 121).

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 124. Hays contends that "possessions in Luke-Acts function as symbols of response to God." The generous hearts of the early church "are the sure signs of the presence of God's spirit in their midst" (ibid., 125). See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

<sup>96</sup>Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 137-41; and Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978).

his view of Luke's argument for the church's role this way: "the transformative power of the church . . . turns the world upside down not through armed revolution but through the formation of the church as a counter culture, an alternative witness-bearing community."<sup>97</sup>

**Luke's eschatology.** According to Hays, Luke mutes the apocalyptic emphasis found in Mark's gospel. This is best seen by observing how Luke redacted the material he inherited from Mark.<sup>98</sup> After summarizing several passages, Hays concludes that Luke "has taken pains to tell the story in such a way that Jesus never encourages the notion of an immediate end."<sup>99</sup> Hays approvingly quotes Joseph Fitzmyer who argues that Luke has sought to "shift Christian attention from an exclusive focus on imminence to a realization that the present Period of the Church also has a place in God's salvation history."<sup>100</sup>

**Luke's narrative world.** Hays offers seven summary statements of his view of the narrative world of Luke's material. First, Luke gives his readers help in understanding their place in the story of God's redemptive faithfulness. At each step believers are secure in God's providence. Second, since the church is the new Israel, the church's present experience "must be prefigured in and consistent with the promises of God in Scripture."<sup>101</sup> In light of its continuity with Israel, the church must see itself as journeying to a promised destination. The journey, however, involves risk, suffering, and sacrifice.

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<sup>97</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 128.

<sup>98</sup>For instance, in the "trial scene in the passion narrative, Luke downplays the allusion to Daniel 7:13-14, omitting any reference to the Son of Man's 'coming with the clouds of heaven' (or indeed to any future coming at all)" (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 130).

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 131, quoting Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Anchor Bible, vols. 28 and 28A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 235.

<sup>101</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 134.

Fourth, the world is painted in much brighter light than in other gospels. The community in Acts is not a defensive community withdrawing from the evil world (as in John), but is world-affirming. Fifth, Luke's narrative is characterized by joy and praise. Sixth, the Spirit empowers the work and witness of the church. That work primarily is "to bear witness in word and deed to the power of the resurrection."<sup>102</sup> Lastly, where the Spirit is working, liberation has begun. Specifically, this involves good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and deliverance to the oppressed.

### **John's Gospel and Epistles**

For Hays, John's gospel offers so little ethical instruction that "it would be difficult indeed to base any specific Christian ethic on the teaching of Jesus" from John alone.<sup>103</sup> Hays concludes that in John ethics has been crowded out by Christology, but the ethical significance of a book cannot be restricted to its didactic content. As usual in evaluating a writer, Hays considers the Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology found in the Johannine writings.

**Christology.** John's presentation of Jesus is unique. He has supernatural knowledge, he apparently does not hunger for ordinary food, and he mysteriously disappears from hostile crowds. Unlike the Synoptics, in the fourth gospel, Jesus manifests divine glory from start to finish.<sup>104</sup> John describes Jesus as simultaneously heavenly and earthly, the redeemer of the created order who also created all things. In Christ, then, creation and redemption are held together. Hays then tries to flesh out "the importance of this for ethics" in the rest of the chapter.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 140-57.

**Loving one another.** It is clear in John that believers are to follow Jesus and pattern their lives after his. The problem, according to Hays, is that in John Jesus "does not actually do much of anything except make grandiloquent revelatory speeches."<sup>106</sup> The answer, according to Hays, is found in the great work of declaring the truth, which Jesus does often in John. Therefore, "The community's preeminent responsibility is to glorify God by proclaiming the truth about Jesus."<sup>107</sup>

Believers proclaim this truth about Jesus primarily through loving acts toward one another (13:34). For John, love means humble service of others, as Jesus made explicit by washing the disciples' feet (13:3-15). John places that story before the crucifixion, in order to show how Jesus' self-sacrificial act of love establishes the cruciform life as the norm for discipleship.<sup>108</sup>

A word needs to be said about the seeming antagonism found in John's gospel for the Jews. Hays suggests the answer may be found in David Rensberger's book *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*. Rensberger suggests that John writes to those being called upon to step across a fateful line out of Judaism into a new community—a dangerous social relocation.<sup>109</sup> Believers in Jesus are called to stand in opposition to Roman authority as well as Judaism. The only allegiance for the community of believers is Jesus. Thus, Jesus' death by crucifixion "is a powerful precedent and symbol for the social experience of those who follow him."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>109</sup>David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988). This reading of John's gospel shapes Hays's approach to anti-Judaism in the final section of *The Moral Vision* (407-43).

<sup>110</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 148.



**Eschatology.** The gospel of John, more than any other book in the New Testament, reformulates early Christian eschatology. The *parousia* was delayed, but John's gospel contains three theological themes which helped the early Christian community deal with the delay. First, John's gospel makes it clear that judgment has already occurred in Jesus' encounter with the world. With Jesus' coming into the world all people are either "condemned already" (3:36) or have "passed from death to life" (5:24). Therefore, for believers, eternal life is now. This stands in stark contrast to the Synoptics. Love within the community is "the sign and guarantee that those who belong to Jesus are free from the grip of death."<sup>111</sup> Love is essential to this vision of the ethical life.

A second theological theme is key to John's eschatology: the Holy Spirit remains present and active in the community of faith. The Spirit's work is to teach the community, remind them of what Jesus taught, and testify about Jesus before the world (15:26, 16:7-11). The Spirit is "not only God's continuing presence within the community but is also a source of continuing revelation."<sup>112</sup> Thus, for Hays, reflection on Johannine ethics must take seriously the community's being led by the Spirit.<sup>113</sup>

The resurrection on the last day is the third theological theme which shapes John's eschatology. John's gospel, in places like 5:28-29, "is unwilling to dissolve the resurrection into a purely figurative sense."<sup>114</sup> Yet Hays sees John's eschatological view of resurrection as "seemingly paradoxical" in places. In John, one finds "alongside the spiritual realized eschatology several texts reaffirming the traditional early Christian

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>113</sup>Hays suggests this revelatory work of the Spirit "may provide a partial explanation for the near absence of specific moral instruction in these texts" (151).

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 152. Bultmann called John 5:28-29 (and others similar) the work of a "ecclesiastical redactor," seeking to "accommodate John's theology to a more conventional early Christian framework" (Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955], 2:39).

future-oriented eschatology."<sup>115</sup> Despite this dual emphasis in eschatology, John's eschatology does not provide warrants and norms for ethics. Those are located "almost exclusively in conformity to the person of Jesus."<sup>116</sup>

**John's narrative world.** The framework found in John's gospel for moral discernment is not built on a large body of didactic passages. But according to Hays, "The ethical significance of the New Testament narratives cannot be restricted to their didactic content."<sup>117</sup> From John's symbolic world Hays draws nine conclusions. First, for John, time blurs and recedes into the background. Believers enjoy a oneness with Jesus that eclipses chronological sequence and orderliness. Second, for John the world is black and white with opposites in stark contrast. All that is in the world is aligned with one of the two polarities: good or evil, light or darkness, life or death. Third, and as a result of the former, the Johannine church is alienated from its cultural roots and immediate social environment. For John, that alienation is part of a larger acrimonious relationship with the Jewish community.

Fourth, in stark contrast to the controversy with the Jews, the relationships within the community of believers is marked by solidarity and fellowship. Believers are known by their love for one another, a love expressed in humble service to others.<sup>118</sup>

Fifth, there is in John a clear formal rejection of sin and a mandate to live righteously. "The distinguishing mark of the community is not so much sinlessness as the

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<sup>115</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 152. Even if the latter is less prominent in the fourth gospel, Hays thinks the paradoxical nature reveals more about John's theology than about the source-critical history of the document (ibid., 153).

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>118</sup>This discussion of the community allows Hays to interject that the Johannine community was notably egalitarian: "The Johannine literature offers no hint that women are to play a subordinate role in the life of the church" (ibid., 155).

willingness to bring their sins into the light, to confess them, and to receive forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:5-9)."<sup>119</sup> Sixth, the Holy Spirit is present to guide the community of believers in moral decisions. Seventh, the word of God subverts the world's conception of power. The cross permanently and paradoxically redefines the character of power. Eighth, John has an ironic vision of the world beyond just his view of power. John delights in dialogue that has two layers of meaning, the deeper layer being understood only by believers. "Such irony produces group solidarity within a community of interpreters who can respond appropriately to the evangelist's nods and winks."<sup>120</sup> Lastly, the incarnation is essential to John's ethical system, for the incarnation deconstructs dualism. Jesus' coming in human flesh affirms the goodness and significance of creation. The ethical implication is that believers following Jesus will learn an ethic of love "for they follow a Lord who gives his own flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51)."<sup>121</sup>

### **Revelation**

Hays rejects the evaluations of Revelation put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche, Jack Sanders, and Krister Stendahl.<sup>122</sup> Instead he considers the Apocalypse a "political resistance document" which rejects the legitimacy and authority of earthly rulers. It looks

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Nietzsche characterized the book of Revelation as "the most rabid outburst of vindictiveness in all recorded history" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956], 185, quoted by Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 169). Hays summarizes Sanders' view of Revelation this way: "it encourages individuals to withdraw from attempting to solve social problems" (ibid., 169). See Jack Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 115. Stendahl compares Revelation to a "script for a horror movie" (Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976], 39, quoted in Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 169)

to the future where God will reign supreme and calls the seven churches to stand courageously against a seductive culture.<sup>123</sup>

**Apocalyptic symbolism.** One might interpret Revelation in one of three ways. A predictive interpretive strategy reads the text as a literal record of future historical events. This approach understands the text as "a coded allegory of contemporary political events."<sup>124</sup> Hays calls this method of interpretation fundamentally mistaken. An alternative method, the historical interpretive approach, reads Revelation as commentary on political events and figures of the author's own time.<sup>125</sup> This method is valuable for it demands that Revelation be reckoned as a message for the church in a specific situation. Yet Hays finds another method more satisfying: the theopoetic interpretive method. Revelation "is a visionary theological and poetic representation of the spiritual environment within which the church perennially finds itself living and struggling."<sup>126</sup> Hays concludes, "To read [Revelation] this way is the most adequate interpretive strategy, and the most productive for New Testament ethics."<sup>127</sup>

**The lamb that was slaughtered.** The book of Revelation makes it clear that Christ's lordship stands in opposition to the rulers of this world. Yet, the great mystery which the Apocalypse reveals is that "God overcomes the world not through a show of

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<sup>123</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 169.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 171. Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) popularized this interpretive approach.

<sup>125</sup>See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

<sup>126</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 173. This view of Revelation is suggested by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

<sup>127</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 173.

force but through the suffering and death of Jesus."<sup>128</sup>

**The vocation of the saints.** The calling of those who swear allegiance to the lamb is to suffer and follow him unto death. Yet specifically, the most detailed ethical instructions are found in the letters to the seven churches. "The overall message of the seven letters is to call for sharper boundaries between the church and the world."<sup>129</sup> The fundamental calling of God's people is to bear witness and endure the onslaught of opposition of a hostile world. Above all, believers are to resist the impulse to violence.

**A new heaven and a new earth.** Hays suggests two ways the book's eschatology shapes its moral vision. First, apocalyptic eschatology sustains the possibility of resistance to the present unjust order in the world. Second, the threat of judgment serves to motivate obedience in Revelation. Equally prominent are rewards promised for those who conquer. "Thus, the word of eschatological promise provides motivation for the church to bear up under suffering and to endure faithfully."<sup>130</sup>

**The narrative world of Revelation.** The moral vision of Revelation is bound up in the symbolic world of John's apocalyptic vision. Hays identifies six principles that structure John's vision.<sup>131</sup> First, much like the Johannine literature, the world is divided and everyone stands either with God or with Satan. Good and evil, right and wrong are givens that need no elaboration. Second, this dualism is expressed most fully in the relationship between the Christian community and the hostile world. Third, and perhaps because of the previous idea, the community of faithful is unified. Believers stand together in a common cause.

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 181-84.

Fourth, eschatological urgency is a prominent theme in Revelation. The events prophesied will occur very soon. Fifth, John's vision expresses a deep confidence in the moral orderliness of the universe. Martyrs who have been "slaughtered for the word of God" expect to have their blood avenged (Rev 6:9). Lastly, God's justice will bring a radical reversal. "The book's imaginative power annihilates the plausibility structure on which the status quo rests and replaces it with the vision of a new world."<sup>132</sup> Hays considers the most important reversal to be directed at the present world's oppressive use of wealth and power. For Hays, Revelation can be read rightly only by those actively struggling against injustice.<sup>133</sup>

### **Conclusion**

At the end of the Descriptive Task, having surveyed the Pauline writings, the Pauline Tradition, Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, the Johannine writings, and Revelation, Hays is confident he has captured a rough sketch of the moral vision of the New Testament.<sup>134</sup> He has described the major content of the New Testament. In the next section Hays seeks to locate a synthesis within NT ethics, out of what he sees as disparate voices in New Testament ethics.

### **The Synthetic Task**

For Hays, the New Testament is not a homogenous body of truth. "No matter how devoutly we might wish it otherwise, we cannot hear these texts as a chorus speaking in unison." In order to find the moral vision of the New Testament, one must

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 183.

<sup>133</sup>Hays contends: "Revelation will elicit a fitting theo-ethical response only in those sociopolitical situations that cry out for justice" (ibid., quoting Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 124).

<sup>134</sup>Hays's intention was always only to display a representative sample of the material with which one must deal in doing New Testament ethics (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 13).

first "let the individual texts have their say, to allow the distinctive voice of each to be heard."<sup>135</sup> If this work is skipped over, one is "likely to succumb to the temptation of flipping to some comforting cross-reference to neutralize the force of any particularly challenging passage."<sup>136</sup> Having allowed the distinct voices to be heard, the question of coherence remains. Hays states the problem thusly: "The church has traditionally regarded the New Testament as a guide to faith and practice, but how can it serve as a guide if it is not internally consistent?"<sup>137</sup>

The method Hays follows will "first lay down some procedural ground rules and then propose a set of focal images that enable us to perceive significant unity among the New Testament witnesses."<sup>138</sup>

### **Procedural Guidelines**

The first guideline which Hays considers essential for finding a synthesis of the New Testament ethical voices is to confront the full range of canonical witnesses. All of the relevant texts must be gathered and considered. Texts on both sides of an issue must be weighed. Secondly, the interpreter must let the tensions stand. No matter how different two witnesses appear, the tension must not be resolved through exegetical distortion of the texts. As Hays puts it, "The individual witnesses must be allowed their own voices."<sup>139</sup> It will not do either to force harmony through abstraction or to average out the texts to arrive somewhere in the middle. A healthy synthesis will not force harmonization of the New Testament's diverse perspectives. Thirdly, the interpreter must

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 190.

attend to the literary genre of the texts. It will not do to seek "universal maxims or principles from texts whose literary form is not readily amenable to such reductionistic analytic procedures."<sup>140</sup>

According to Hays, these three guidelines keep the interpreter honest. He must work with the texts as they are. Yet, in light of these guidelines, it is legitimate to ask whether it is possible "to discern within the New Testament firm common ground on which a New Testament ethic can be construed?"<sup>141</sup> The church historically has agreed that such a unity can be found. According to Hays, it is best found in three focal images.

### **Three Focal Images**

In Hays's understanding, the New Testament is a collection of documents that retell and comment on a single story. Hays summarizes that story this way:

The God of Israel, the creator of the world, has acted (astoundingly) to rescue a lost and broken world through the death and resurrection of Jesus; the full scope of that rescue is not yet apparent, but God has created a community of witnesses to this good news, the church. While awaiting the grand conclusion of the story, the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called to reenact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and thus to serve as a sign of God's redemptive purposes for the world.<sup>142</sup>

While different writers emphasize different aspects of the story, all the canonical writings share three key images. Therefore, "by looking for fundamental images," Hays contends, "we stand a better chance of identifying common elements present in these different types of discourse without imposing conceptual abstractions on narrative texts and without forcing pastoral letters into a narrative mode."<sup>143</sup>

Hays further explains the role of these focal images. They are "root metaphors

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 194.



embedded in the New Testament texts: they encapsulate the crucial elements of the narrative and serve to focus our attention on the common ground shared by the various witnesses. Thus they serve as *lenses* to focus our reading of the New Testament: when we reread the canonical documents through these images, our blurry multiple impressions of the texts come more sharply into focus."<sup>144</sup> Hays reiterates that these focal images "do not *replace* the New Testament texts; rather, they serve to focus and guide our readings and rereadings of the New Testament, which itself remains the primary source and authority for our theology and ethics."<sup>145</sup>

Before proposing his focal images, Hays reveals his own criteria for evaluating themes or images proposed as focal images. First, the proposed focal image must find a textual basis in all of the canonical witnesses. That is, only an image represented widely throughout the New Testament may claim to articulate a part of the New Testament's coherent moral vision.<sup>146</sup> Second, the proposed focal image may not stand in serious tension with the ethical teachings or major emphases of any of the New Testament witnesses. Lastly, the proposed focal image should highlight central and substantial ethical concerns of the texts in which it appears. "One might find agreement across the canonical spectrum on some matter of minor significance that would nonetheless fail to provide a sufficiently broad view of the New Testament's range of moral concern."<sup>147</sup>

In light of this criteria, Hays suggests three focal images which guide ethical reflection about the New Testament's moral vision: community, cross, and new creation.

**Community.** "The church is a countercultural community of discipleship, and

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 194-95.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid. This criterion is a significant reason why Hays rejects love as an acceptable focal image (see discussion below).

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

this community is the primary addressee of God's imperatives."<sup>148</sup> The biblical story focuses on God's people, and thus, the primary sphere of moral concern is not the individual but the corporate community. The word "community," as Hays uses it, "points to the concrete social manifestation of the people of God."<sup>149</sup> Hays admits, "The [New Testament] does certainly offer moral exhortation and guidance for individuals. Nonetheless . . . the corporate obedience of the community is the primary concern of the NT writers. This concern differs so markedly from the usual individualistic assumptions of Western liberal culture that strongly worded guidelines are necessary in order to recall us to the NT's ecclesially oriented perspective."<sup>150</sup>

**Cross.** Hays chooses the cross as his second focal image. "Jesus' death on a cross is the paradigm for faithfulness to God in this world."<sup>151</sup> In the New Testament, Jesus' death is consistently seen as an act of self-giving love, and the community is consistently called to follow in the way of Jesus' death by taking up the cross.

**New creation.** Hays's final focal image is new creation. The church "embodies the power of the resurrection in the midst of a not-yet-redeemed world."<sup>152</sup> According to Hays, Paul's image of "new creation" is a "shorthand signifier for the dialectical eschatology that runs throughout the New Testament."<sup>153</sup>

Would it be fair to conclude that these three focal images become de facto a

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid. Hays notes that the term "church" would serve equally well except for the fact that it might be "misunderstood in terms of a institutional hierarchy" (196).

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 204 n. 11.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 197.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

canon within the canon? Hays answers that question with a qualified yes. His three focal images are a canon within the canon "in the sense that they provide a 'rule' or guide for interpretation. They do not, however, replace or exclude any of the canonical writings."<sup>154</sup> For Hays, these focal images "are *lenses* that bring our reading of the canonical texts into sharper focus as we seek to discern what is central or fundamental in the ethical vision of the New Testament as a whole."<sup>155</sup>

Only one further questions remains. Why is love not a sufficient focal image? Hays gives three reasons. First, love fails Hays's initial criteria for focal images; love is not a central thematic emphasis in all New Testament writings, including Mark, Revelation, Hebrews, and Acts. Secondly, love is not an image but an interpretation of an image. Thirdly, love is not a useful focal image because it is too broad.<sup>156</sup>

These three focal images—community, cross, new creation—bring the New Testament's ethical vision into focus. Beyond that, according to Hays, they provide a matrix within which one can derive a unified ethical message from the New Testament.<sup>157</sup>

### **The Hermeneutical Task**

Richard Hays's primary task in the third section of *The Moral Vision* is to help the contemporary church read the New Testament as relevant ethical instruction. Put another way, "What interpretive strategies shall we adopt to allow these ancient writings to continue speaking nineteen hundred years after their composition?"<sup>158</sup> In an effort to

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<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Hays refers to Stanley Hauerwas who contends, "The ethics of love is often but a cover for what is fundamentally an assertion of ethical relativism" (*Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1981], 124, quoted in Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 202.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 207.

answer this important question, Hays examines five twentieth-century theologians and considers the way they have used the New Testament in setting forth normative accounts of Christian ethics. Hays hopes that by "examining their practices of interpreting and employing Scripture, we can gain a sense of the range of possible hermeneutical strategies and see what is at stake in their differing methodological decisions."<sup>159</sup> The five major twentieth-century interpreters Hays examines are Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.<sup>160</sup> In lieu of a complete survey of the use of the New Testament by each scholar, Hays chooses to limit his evaluation to each scholar's treatment of two issues: war and violence. Such an approach will reveal enough of each scholar's methodology to make comparisons and to draw conclusions.

### **Diagnostic Questions**

Before turning to the five scholars, Hays proposes some "diagnostic categories"—a list of questions to pose to the various scholars which will help more clearly frame their use of Scripture in ethics.

**Modes of appeal to Scripture.** The first set of questions deals with "the *mode* of ethical discourse in which biblical warrants may function authoritatively."<sup>161</sup> That is, what sort of work does Scripture do in ethical discourse? Hays suggests four modes of appeal to Scripture: rules, principles, paradigms, and a symbolic world.<sup>162</sup> *Rules* are direct

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Hays admits that these five do not "represent a comprehensive typology of hermeneutical strategies," yet they are sufficiently diverse to exemplify an instructive spectrum of hermeneutical options. "For the purposes of this book, however, the five thinkers selected for attention here will serve to raise the major hermeneutical issues for New Testament ethics" (ibid., 208).

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>162</sup>Here, Hays is following James Gustafson's categories outlined in his article "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Int* 24 (1970):

commandments or prohibitions of specific behaviors (e.g., the New Testament prohibits divorce). *Principles* are general frameworks of moral consideration which govern decisions about behavior. Jesus employed a principle when he linked Deuteronomy 6:4-5 with Leviticus 19:18 and formed the double love command (Mark 12:28-31). A paradigm is a story or summary account of characters who model exemplary conduct. The *paradigm* mode is found in Jesus' use of the parable of the good Samaritan to answer the question "who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29-37). A *symbolic world* involves perceptual categories through which one interprets reality. For example, consider the diagnosis of the fallen human condition in Romans 1:19-32 which does not specifically define any moral categories.<sup>163</sup>

**Sources of authority.** The second diagnostic category through which Hays will examine the five representative scholars deals with authority. Specifically, what is the relationship of the New Testament's authority to others sources of authority for theology?<sup>164</sup> For Hays, "The slogan of *sola Scriptura* is both conceptually and practically untenable, because the interpretation of Scripture can never occur in a vacuum."<sup>165</sup>

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430-55, reprinted in James Gustafson, *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974), 121-45. Gustafson argues that believers use Scripture in one of the following typological ways. First is the use of Scripture as moral *law*: "Those actions of persons and groups which violate the moral law revealed in Scripture are to be judged morally wrong" (ibid., 130). Second is the use of Scripture to judge actions according to their success at embodying the moral *ideals* set forth in the Bible. Third is the use Gustafson refers to as *analogy*, where persons engage in behavior analogous to behavior condemned or encouraged in Scripture. The fourth use of Scripture involves the various *biblical literature*, including moral laws, visions of the future, historical events, moral precepts, paraenetic instruction, parables, dialogues, wisdom sayings, and allegories.

<sup>163</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 209.

<sup>164</sup>For a recent answer to this question, consider Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 81-98.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

Therefore, a part of the hermeneutical task is to specify as clearly as possible the relationship between Scripture and other sources of authority. Hays follows the conventional Wesleyan Quadrilateral proposal of four sources of authority: tradition, reason, experience, and Scripture.<sup>166</sup> With tradition Hays is thinking specifically of "the church's time-honored practices of worship, service, and critical reflection."<sup>167</sup> Reason refers to understandings of the world attained either through systematic philosophical reflection or scientific investigation. Experience for Hays refers to both individual experience and the experience of the community of faith collectively.<sup>168</sup> "The right relation of Scripture to each of these other sources of authority has been a perennial problem for theology."<sup>169</sup> Thus, as Hays assesses each of the five representative scholars, he intends to "ask how each one weighs the relative importance of these four sources for theology and how their interpretations of the New Testament ethics are shaped by that methodological decision."<sup>170</sup>

**Enactment of the word.** The final question to pose to each scholar is what sort of communities have resulted or might result from putting their readings of Scripture into practice. "The operative assumption of this inquiry, then, is that a clearly articulated and

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<sup>166</sup>See Albert Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—In John Wesley," in *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas Langford (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 75-88; and Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>167</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 210.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 211. Hays acknowledges that the Anglican tradition includes experience under reason, but he contends "it is more heuristically useful to consider experience as a separate category, thus distinguishing between scientific and philosophical investigations (i.e., reason) on the one hand and the evidence of intuitive and anecdotally reported spiritual *experience* on the other" (*ibid.*, 213 n. 6).

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*

faithful reading of the ethics of the New Testament ought to contribute to the formation of communities that palpably embody the love of God as shown forth in Jesus Christ."<sup>171</sup>

Hays concludes the introductory chapter by proposing a diagnostic checklist (Descriptive, Synthetic, Hermeneutical, and Pragmatic) which corresponds to the four-part outline of *The Moral Vision*. The checklist serves to aid Hays as he assesses the role of Scripture in the work of the five theologians.

### **Normative Proposals**

It is not necessary here to rehearse Hays's evaluation of each theologian. More important are the conclusions he draws from those evaluations. His purpose in examining these theologians is merely to "raise the major hermeneutical issues for New Testament ethics" and see how a representative cross-section of theologians use the New Testament in Christian ethics.<sup>172</sup> For this dissertation, the useful part of that interaction is the normative proposals which arise out of Hays's evaluation.

**Summary and normative reflections.** Hays posits several reflections. "First of all . . . a theologian who wrestles with sustained close reading of the New Testament texts is likely to produce more compelling and sophisticated results than one who reads the texts casually or superficially."<sup>173</sup> Secondly, a reading of the New Testament that includes all the canonical witnesses is on firmer ground than a more selective reading. Lastly, Hays values a reading of the New Testament witnesses that finds a unified moral vision despite textual tensions.

Regarding the modes of ethical appeal in Scripture, Hays contends, "New

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<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 291.

Testament texts must be granted authority (or not) in the mode in which they speak."<sup>174</sup> This means that one must be careful not to read all New Testament ethical texts in one mode only. It also means that one mode of appeal to Scripture cannot override the witness of the New Testament in another mode.

Hays is quick to point out, however, despite all that was said above, that it is necessary to assign hermeneutical primacy to one mode of ethical appeal. According to Hays, the paradigmatic mode is primary because "the New Testament presents itself to us first of all in the form of story."<sup>175</sup> The gospels, Acts, and the Revelation are all cast in the form of narrative. In Hays's interpretation, even the epistles are less propositional theology than reflection on the story of Jesus.<sup>176</sup> The "narrative texts in the New Testament are fundamental resources for normative ethics," because they are "more fundamental than any secondary process of abstraction that seeks to distill their ethical import."<sup>177</sup> Rules and principles must find their place within the story of God's redemption and the symbolic world of the New Testament is coherent only as expressed in that story.

Hays also clarifies his position on the four sources of authority. As a minimum guideline, he argues that "extrabiblical sources stand in a hermeneutical relation to the New Testament; they are not independent, counterbalancing sources of authority."<sup>178</sup> Reason, tradition, and experience have a subordinate role in normative judgments.

**Moral judgments as metaphor-making.** In order to understand a New

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 295.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 296.



Testament text one must "discover analogies between its words and our experience, between the world that it renders and the world that we know."<sup>179</sup> Believers must always discern how their lives, "despite the historical dissimilarity to the lives narrated in the New Testament, might fitly answer to that narration and participate in the truth that it tells."<sup>180</sup> This imaginative work would not be necessary if interpreters could separate out timeless truths in the New Testament from culturally conditioned elements. According to Hays,

every jot and tittle of the New Testament is culturally conditioned. . . . These are texts written by human beings in particular times and places, and they bear the marks—as do all human utterances—of their historical location.<sup>181</sup>

Hays suggests an alternative hermeneutical strategy, which calls for juxtaposing metaphors from the interpreter's world and the world of the text.<sup>182</sup> "Metaphors are incongruous conjunctions of two images—or two semantic fields—that turn out, upon reflection, to be like one another in ways not ordinarily recognized."<sup>183</sup> Hays considers this sort of metaphorical hermeneutic fundamental to New Testament ethics. Thus, "normative appeals to Scripture will most often be in the *paradigmatic* mode or in the mode of *symbolic world* construction."<sup>184</sup> The church may distinguish between good and bad metaphorical appropriations, Hays contends, by asking whether it is consonant with

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<sup>179</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 298.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid. This work is empowered by the Holy Spirit, according to Hays, for "where faithful interpreters listen patiently to the Word of God in Scripture and discern fresh imaginative links between the biblical story and our time, we confess . . . the Spirit is inspiring such readings" (ibid., 299).

<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

<sup>182</sup>Hays draws on Steven Kraftchick, "A Necessary Detour: Paul's Metaphorical Understanding of the Philippian Hymn," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 15 (1993): 1-37.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 303.

the fundamental plot of the biblical story as identified by the focal images of community, cross, new creation.

**Proposed guidelines for New Testament ethics.** To this point in *The Moral Vision* Hays has offered several methodological proposals for how the New Testament should function in Christian ethics. At the conclusion of "The Hermeneutical Task" section Hays gathers these proposals together into the following list:<sup>185</sup>

1. Serious exegesis is a basic requirement. Texts used in ethical arguments should be understood as fully as possible in their historical and literary context.
2. We must seek to listen to the full range of canonical voices.
3. Substantive tensions within the canon should be openly acknowledged.
4. Our synthetic reading of the New Testament canon must be kept in balance by the sustained use of three focal images: community, cross, and new creation.
5. New Testament texts must be granted authority (or not) in the mode in which they speak (i.e., rule, principle, paradigm, symbolic world).
6. The New Testament is fundamentally the *story* of God's redemptive actions; thus, the paradigmatic mode has theological primacy, and narrative texts are fundamental resources for normative ethics.
7. Extrabiblical sources stand in a hermeneutical relation to the New Testament; they are not independent, counterbalancing sources of authority.
8. It is impossible to distinguish 'timeless truth' from 'culturally conditioned elements' in the New Testament.
9. The use of the New Testament in normative ethics requires an integrative act of the imagination; thus, whenever we appeal to the authority of the New Testament, we are necessarily engaged in metaphor-making.
10. Right reading of the New Testament occurs only where the Word is embodied.<sup>186</sup>

Hays admits that not every reader will agree at every point with his guidelines. He assumes proposals numbered 4, 5, 7 and 9 will be particularly controversial. Hays counters that "those who do not accept these guidelines should take up the challenge to articulate alternative guidelines that will promote equal methodological clarity."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 310.

<sup>186</sup>See the explanation and critique of these ideas, particularly of points 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10, in the next chapter.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

### The Pragmatic Task

In the final section of *The Moral Vision*, Richard Hays attempts to illustrate how a community of faith might implement his approach for using scripture in Christian ethics. Specifically, Hays addresses violence, divorce, homosexuality, anti-Judaism, and abortion, in order to illustrate "*methodologically* how the proposals made in Parts II and III work out in practice when applied to different configurations of evidence within the New Testament itself."<sup>188</sup>

Hays's procedure with each particular issue includes a preliminary sketch of the problem, discussion of key texts addressing the issue, placement of the keys texts in canonical context with the aid of the three focal images of community, cross, and new creation, hermeneutical reflection about the mode in which the texts speak and relation to other sources of authority, and finally normative conclusions.

#### Violence

Hays's concern in this chapter on violence more specifically is whether it is ever God's will for Christians to employ violence in defense of justice. Asked another way, what norms concerning the use of violence might be derived from the New Testament? The place to begin is with the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' instructions concerning violence.

**Key text: Matthew 5:38-48.** For Hays, this is the only key text worth examining on this issue, a passage in which Jesus imposes "terribly difficult

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<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 314. For Hays, the New Testament bears univocal and pervasive witness concerning violence. With divorce, the New Testament texts share a similar perspective but offer varying casuistic judgments and applications. Regarding homosexuality, Hays contends, a few passages treat it but those passages are not closely related to the fundamental plot of the gospel story. Beyond that, "other serious moral arguments seem to weigh against the univocal witness of the canonical texts" (ibid.). As for anti-Judaism, the New Testament contains texts at odds with one another. And no New Testament texts directly address abortion.

requirements" on his followers.<sup>189</sup> He demands that his followers "not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matt 5:39). Hays begins his analysis of this text by proposing and then dismissing various common interpretations of the passage. Since "none of [those] proposals renders a satisfactory account of Matthew's theological vision," Hays moves on to examine the place of this passage in its literary framework.<sup>190</sup>

In the first section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus lays out six antitheses which define the character of the new community that Jesus is creating. "The transcendence of violence through loving the enemy is the most salient feature of this new model polis; it is noteworthy that the antitheses dealing with these themes stand at the climactic conclusion of the unit (5:38-48)."<sup>191</sup> This view of discipleship fits the broader Matthean context. Throughout the first gospel, Jesus renounces violence and the options of power and resistance. In fact, his very death was a choice against violence, since the only other option available to Jesus was armed resistance.<sup>192</sup> Hays concludes, "Thus, the death of Jesus exemplifies the same character qualities that are taught as normative for Jesus' disciples in Matthew 5."<sup>193</sup>

**Synthesis: Violence in canonical context.** Hays considers Matthew 5:38-48

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 320.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 322.

<sup>192</sup>Regarding Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, John Howard Yoder asks, "What was the option with which he was struggling? . . . The only imaginable real option in terms of historical seriousness, and the only one with even a slim basis in the text, is the hypothesis that Jesus was drawn, at this very moment of temptation, to think *once again* of the messianic violence with which he had been tempted since the beginning" (John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 46).

<sup>193</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 322.

more than a bare rule about violence against enemies. This commandment of Jesus serves as a focal instance of discipleship, or a metonym, "illuminating the life of a covenant community that is called to live in radical faithfulness to the vision of the kingdom of God disclosed in Jesus' teaching and example."<sup>194</sup> So the question for Hays becomes does the rest of the canon agree with this key text. He concludes that the New Testament speaks univocally against all use of violence. Jesus came as the suffering Messiah rather than as a conquering Messiah. The implication for Jesus' followers is that they must deal with their enemies in the same way that Jesus dealt with his. Hays summarizes: "Thus, from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in *accepting* suffering rather than *inflicting* it."<sup>195</sup> Hays then examines this synthesis through the images of community, cross, and new creation. The entire discussion of violence in the context of the community comes back to the work of believers in reconciliation. The church is called to live as "a city set on a hill, a city that lives in light of another wisdom, as a sign of God's coming kingdom."<sup>196</sup> The example of the cross shapes a believer's view of violence as well. Since the "passion narrative becomes the fundamental paradigm for the Christian life,"<sup>197</sup> any reading of the New Testament in a way that denies the normativity of the cross for the Christian community is out of focus. The view of all things through the lens of the new creation promises that suffering and injustice will be judged by God eschatologically.

**Hermeneutics.** Hays moves from the synthesis of the texts on violence to the

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 329.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 332.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 337.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 337-38.

hermeneutical appropriation of that synthesis. He notes that all four modes of ethical instruction—rule, principle, paradigm, and symbolic world—denounce violence. Hays's conclusion is that in all four modes "the evidence accumulates overwhelmingly against any justification for the use of violence."<sup>198</sup> The place of other sources of authority stands in significant tension with that univocal voice of the New Testament, however. The church has traditionally, since Constantine, endorsed war under certain conditions, yet this tradition, for Hays, simply cannot stand the normative test of New Testament ethics. Nor can reason and experience negate the univocal voice of the New Testament which stands against all forms of violence.

**Living the text.** The implications of this issue for Hays are enormous. He contends that the church's commitment to nationalism and violence make its sexual sins seem trivial. "Only when the church renounces the way of violence will people see what the Gospel means, because then they will see the way of Jesus reenacted in the church."<sup>199</sup>

### **Divorce and Remarriage**

The prevalence of divorce, especially among evangelical Christians, should urge the church to engage in fresh theological and pastoral reflection about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, according to Hays. Such reflection must begin by grappling with the texts of the New Testament.

**Reading the texts.** Mark 10:2-12 is the first of five passages which, according to Hays, directly address the issue of divorce. Mark places this discussion of marriage in the context of Jesus' instructions about discipleship precisely because marriage is one

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., 340.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 343-44.

aspect of discipleship. Jesus issues a declaration against the divorces Moses permitted. "Those who follow Jesus are called to a higher standard of permanent faithfulness in marriage."<sup>200</sup> Here Jesus appeals behind the Law of Moses to God's original intention, found in the creation story. That original creation was for marriage to be an indissoluble bond. Jesus left in place the allowance for sin which the Mosaic Law contained. Yet, followers of Jesus will live in light of another vision, one in which marriage is seen as God originally purposed it. Hays suggests that another way of framing the issue is that "the Pharisees quiz Jesus about the *rule* governing divorce, but Jesus reframes the issue by appealing to the Genesis narrative as constituting the *symbolic world* within which marriage must be understood."<sup>201</sup>

Regardless of how one interprets Jesus' statement that divorce and remarriage is adultery,<sup>202</sup> Mark 10 makes it clear that divorce is a violation of God's intent. Those who follow Jesus will renounce divorce along with other prerogatives in order to follow the way of the cross.<sup>203</sup>

The second key text is Matthew 19:3-12. Matthew's account differs from Mark 10 in three ways. First, Matthew omits the phrase commits adultery "against her." Second, Matthew omits the provision for a woman divorcing her husband. Both of these omissions effectively bring Jesus' teaching back in line with conventional Jewish teaching. The third alteration is most troubling, however. Matthew adds the exception clause, which specifies grounds on which a husband may divorce his wife. Hays finds

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<sup>200</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 350.

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>202</sup>Hays offers two options: (1) Jesus intends to forbid any remarriage after a divorce, or (2) Jesus forbids all divorce, for such is adultery, whether or not remarriage follows. According to Hays, the second view gives greater internal continuity to Mark 10 (*ibid.*, 351-52).

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 352.

good reason to think this exception clause "represents Matthew's own casuistic adaptation of the tradition."<sup>204</sup> The *porneia* clause refers to a variety of offenses related to sexual immorality. Hays assumes Matthew, an ecclesiastical politician and reconciler of differences, is seeking to find a balance between rigor and mercy.

The third and fourth key texts parallel each other. Matthew 5:31-32 and Luke 16:18 seem even more clearly to identify Jesus' view with the school of Shammai. The effect of this instruction from Jesus is to declare the Deuteronomic divorce law null and void except for *porneia*. With this teaching, Jesus calls his disciples to fulfill the deeper requirements of the Law.

The final passage is actually the earliest chronologically. Hays calls 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 a consciously reflective pastoral adaptation of Jesus' teaching on divorce. Here Paul makes clear that participation in the community of faith is a more fundamental commitment than marriage. Therefore, when an unbelieving spouse seeks a divorce, the believer is bound by Christ to seek peace. Hays notes in closing that it is hard to imagine Paul would prohibit categorically remarriage for the believer divorced by an unbelieving spouse.<sup>205</sup>

**Synthesis.** Hays's synthesis of the five key texts on divorce and remarriage affirms that marriage is a permanently binding commitment in which man and woman become one. Hays, after a discussion of the canonical narrative context, asserts that "permanent marriage between one man and one woman is the literal embodiment of God's will in creation and, at the same time, a figurative sign of the longed-for eschatological union of Christ and the church. . . . For those in Christ, therefore, divorce is to be avoided in every way possible, for it is incongruous with the gospel of God's

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid., 353.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., 361.



reconciling love."<sup>206</sup>

Hays proceeds to read the key texts through the lenses of community, cross, and new creation. The lens of community reminds believers that divorce and remarriage is an issue that affects the health and witness of the whole community. Particularly in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul's instructions relate to the up-building of the community. "Decisions about divorce can never be made apart from a concern for the community's vocation to make disciples of all nations by exemplifying the righteousness that Jesus teaches."<sup>207</sup> The lens of the cross reminds believers that marriage is often difficult and costly. Hays also contends that the cross reminds Jesus' followers that Christ has reversed the world's power structures—husbands are called to follow Jesus' example of servanthood. The lens of new creation reminds believers that marriage is a sign of the eschatological redemption of all things. Hays concludes bluntly, "If marriage is the New Testament's final symbol of eschatological redemption, then divorce cannot be consonant with God's redemptive will."<sup>208</sup>

**Hermeneutics.** The New Testament speaks to the issue of divorce and remarriage in all four modes of ethical appeal. The emphasis is on specific rules and much less on narrative paradigms. All five of the key texts speak in the rule mode. In each case Jesus is the speaker. Principles, on the other hand, "play a decidedly minor role in the New Testament with regard to this issue."<sup>209</sup> The same could be said for the paradigm mode, since the New Testament gives us surprisingly little from this mode of appeal. The symbolic world of the New Testament, however, "is richly instructive about

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 364.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 365.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 366.

<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 368.

the context in which marriage and divorce ought to be interpreted."<sup>210</sup> The New Testament speaks against divorce primarily in two modes: rules and symbolic world. In order to justify divorce, one must dismiss several clear rules. Yet, in order to do that, the interpreter must construct a different symbolic world, since the rules make sense only within the symbolic world portrayed by the New Testament. Many interpreters have done that very thing, finding mitigating authority in favor of divorce outside of Scripture.

The church's tradition regarding divorce and remarriage has been mixed. Generally, the church has upheld the rule against divorce while expanding the range of situations treated as exceptions to the rule.<sup>211</sup> While reason plays a minor role in discussions about divorce, experience occupies a major role. According to Hays, for many believers pursuing divorce, experience overrides Scripture and tradition. "What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus if it does not mean to learn the discipline of forgiveness even where it proves most difficult and painful, closest to home?"<sup>212</sup>

Hays offers the following conclusions to the hermeneutical appropriation of the New Testament's witness regarding divorce and remarriage.<sup>213</sup> First, the church must recover the New Testament's vision of marriage as an aspect of discipleship and a reflection of God's unbreakable faithfulness. Second, the church must affirm that divorce is contrary to God's will, except in certain extraordinary circumstances, specifically sexual infidelity and desertion by an unbelieving spouse. Third, marriage is grounded not in feelings of love but in the practice of love. Fourth, the church must continue to love and support those whose marriages end. Fifth, remarriage after divorce may be

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>Hays considers this action an extension of the "hermeneutical trajectory that we see within the New Testament itself" (ibid., 370).

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 371.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 372-74.

permissible. Sixth, the church must seek to provide fellowship to those who choose not to remarry after divorce. The church must find creative ways to make the New Testament speak to the issue of divorce and remarriage in the contemporary day, just as the early church did in its day.

**Living the texts.** The great need in the church regarding this issue is for clear teaching. It ought to be a part of the regular preaching and teaching ministry of the church. Rather than waiting until a couple's marriage is in crisis, the church must set forth the New Testament's teaching on marriage and divorce regularly.

### **Homosexuality**

Hays begins the chapter on homosexuality with a personal anecdote of a gay friend who died of AIDS. Hays wrote the chapter in hopes of sparking compassionate and reasoned theological reflection within the community of faith about homosexuality.<sup>214</sup>

**Reading the texts.** Hays begins the exegetical section by noting that homosexuality is relatively unimportant to the biblical witness, in terms of emphasis. Hays begins with Genesis 19:1-29, the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, a text Hays calls "irrelevant to the topic," given that "there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse."<sup>215</sup> A second set of texts, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, condemn homosexual behavior unambiguously. This legal prohibition against same-sex intercourse stands as the foundation for the subsequent universal rejection of homosexual behavior within Judaism. As with many aspects of the

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<sup>214</sup>The chapter on homosexuality is an expansion of Hays's essay "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality," which appeared first in *Sojourners* 20 (1991): 17-21.

<sup>215</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 381. Hays further contends, "There is nothing in the rest of the biblical tradition, save an obscure reference in Jude 7, to suggest that the sin of Sodom was particularly identified with sexual misconduct of any kind" (ibid.).

Mosaic law, the church must determine how to appropriate this instruction originally given to Israel. The third group of texts come from the New Testament (1Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:10; Acts 15:28-29). In these texts Paul presupposes and reaffirms the holiness code's condemnation of homosexual acts. Without question, the most important text for Christian ethics regarding homosexuality is Romans 1:18-32. Hays calls it the most important text because it is the only passage "that explains the condemnation of homosexual behavior in an explicitly theological context."<sup>216</sup> Hays considers the discussion of homosexuality in Romans 1 illustrative of a larger theological point. Homosexuality "serves [Paul's] rhetorical purposes by providing a vivid image of humanity's primal rejection of the sovereignty of God the Creator."<sup>217</sup> Homosexuality is an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator's design."<sup>218</sup> Hays concludes his reading of Romans 1 this way: Paul singles out homosexual intercourse because it graphically illustrates how humanity has distorted God's created order. Homosexual acts are not, therefore, specifically reprehensible sins. They are no worse than other sins, such as covetousness or gossip, mentioned in the passage (1:29-31). Homosexual acts will not incur God's punishment; rather, it is its own punishment, a result of being given up by God.

Hays discounts the attempt by many to argue that Paul merely is condemning homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons. "The fact is that Paul treats *all* homosexual activity as *prima facie* evidence of humanity's tragic confusion and alienation from God the Creator."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 383. Much of this discussion on Rom 1 is adapted from Hays's "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *JRE* 14 (1986): 184-215.

<sup>217</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 386.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 389.

**Synthesis.** There is no synthetic problem for New Testament ethics regarding this issue since all of the pertinent texts disapprove of homosexuality without qualification. Yet a broader reading of Scripture is necessary—a reading which considers human sexuality as a whole and which considers how these key passages relate to the larger canonical framework. Scripture repeatedly shows that God's creative intention for human sexuality is that man and woman were made for one another and that sexual desire rightly finds fulfillment in heterosexual marriage. Fallen humanity, though infected and in bondage to sin, is morally accountable to God's righteous judgment. Sexual fulfillment, within this fallen world, is not the epitome of full and meaningful life.

Hays then seeks to apply the three focal images of community, cross, and new creation to the issue of homosexuality. Regarding the lens of community, Hays stresses the need for the church to remember the Bible forbids homosexual behavior "for the health, wholeness, and purity of the elect *community*. . . . According to Paul, everything that we do as Christians, including our sexual practices, affects the whole body of Christ."<sup>220</sup> The cross is connected to the issue of homosexuality implicitly in Romans 1. Humanity's rebellion, summarized in Romans 1:18-32, creates the crisis that necessitates the death of Jesus. This means that God loves sinners, even while in rebellion. It also means that the cross brings power from sin, such that no one is psychologically or biologically determined to continue in sin. Paul puts homosexual conduct "within the realm of sin and death to which the cross is God's definitive answer."<sup>221</sup> The promise of a new creation is but a promise. Christians, who have been freed from the power of sin through Christ, continue to struggle to live faithfully in the present time. Some persons "may find disciplined abstinence the only viable alternative to disordered sexuality."<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 391-92.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 393.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid.

**Hermeneutics.** The difficult questions for the church, according to Hays, are all hermeneutical. The New Testament is clear and univocal in condemning homosexual behavior. The New Testament contains no *rules* prohibiting homosexual practices, yet some passages do contain principles which govern sexual conduct. The only paradigms offered by the New Testament for homosexual behavior are negative without exception. Hays contends that "the mode in which the New Testament speaks explicitly about homosexuality is the mode of symbolic world construction" in which homosexual practices are viewed "as a distortion of God's order for creation."<sup>223</sup>

Other sources of authority stand against homosexuality more emphatically. Regarding tradition, the church has for nineteen hundred years opposed homosexual behavior. However, the issue of authority is more difficult when it comes to reason and experience. Advocates of homosexuality make the strongest case when they appeal to experience, since "there are numerous homosexual Christians . . . whose lives show signs of the presence of God."<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, the hermeneutical guideline articulated by Hays earlier undermines these claims: "Claims about divinely inspired experience that contradicts the witness of Scripture should be admitted to normative status in the church only after sustained and agonizing scrutiny by a consensus of the faithful."<sup>225</sup>

**Living the text.** Finally, Hays moves on to practical reflections on the issue of homosexuality. Specifically, he makes seven suggestions for the contemporary church regarding issues surrounding homosexuality. First, the church should support civil rights for homosexuals. According to Hays, to deny civil rights to homosexuals would be

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<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 396.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid. 398.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 399. Hays adds, "I think it prudent and necessary to let the univocal testimony of Scripture and the Christian tradition order the life of the church on this painfully controversial matter."

"malicious discriminatory treatment." Second, church membership should be open to homosexual persons. Hays compares homosexual behavior to envying, and argues that if the church is going to exclude people from membership "there are other issues far more important than homosexuality where we should begin to draw the line in the dirt: violence and materialism, for example."<sup>226</sup> Hays calls for the church to continue to seek moral transformation in all members, and thus to challenge homosexuals to conform their identity to the gospel. That is the task of the church for all members, whether racists or proponents of just war or homosexuals. Third, Christians with a homosexual orientation who participate in homosexual erotic activity do so contrary to Scripture.

Fourth, the church should not sanction and bless homosexual unions. Fifth, persons of homosexual orientation are in the same position as the heterosexual who would like to marry but cannot find the appropriate partner. They are called to obedience and fidelity while groaning for the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23). Sixth, regarding changing their orientation, Hays suggests that the "not yet" aspect of God's kingdom looms large, and perhaps the best one can hope for is to live a disciplined life of abstinence, free from obsessive lust. Lastly, Hays addresses whether homosexually oriented persons should be ordained. He concludes that it is arbitrary to single out homosexuality as a special sin that precludes ordination. Rather, "a person of homosexual orientation seeking to live a life of disciplined abstinence would clearly be an appropriate candidate for ordination."<sup>227</sup>

### **Anti-Judaism and Ethnic Conflict**

Hays addresses anti-Judaism because "the New Testament contains texts in fundamental tension with one another, some of which appear . . . profoundly

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid., 400.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 403.

objectionable."<sup>228</sup> The interpreter, therefore, is forced to make a choice between irreconcilable options. Thus, Hays hopes to demonstrate how to formulate normative ethics in a way faithful to radically divergent Scripture.

**Reading the texts.** Hays begins by noting the new "consensus view of critical scholars" of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.<sup>229</sup> According to this view, four observations are pertinent. First, first-century Judaism was diverse, not monolithic. Numerous varieties of Judaism flourished especially before 70 C.E. Second, early Christianity began as a Jewish sectarian movement. The first Christians did not think they were creating a new religion. Third, by the end of the first-century, the success of the gospel among Gentiles and failure among Jews created a major crisis of communal identity. This crisis is the reason for the various stances toward Judaism in the New Testament writings. Lastly, Hays suggests that the hostility toward Jews and Judaism found in some New Testament texts is an expression of sibling rivalry. In order to see this divergent view of Judaism Hays evaluates four New Testament writers: Paul, Luke, Matthew, and John.

Paul's teaching about the relation of the church to Israel is found most clearly in Romans 9-11. According to Hays, two points are key for Paul. First, God's grace is extended to Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul succeeded in impressing upon the church this idea. Yet with the second point—that God has not broken covenant with Israel—Paul's letter to the Romans failed. Hays concludes, "Within a couple of generations, his concerns were no longer even intelligible to a Gentile church whose attitudes toward the

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<sup>228</sup>Ibid., 314. Hays even calls some texts pertinent to the church-Israel question "vicious and morally reprehensible" (ibid., 409). After describing a number of instances of ethnic prejudice (from individuals outside the church against Jews), Hays asks, "Is there some sense in which Christian theology or even the New Testament itself underwrote" these tragedies? (ibid., 408).

<sup>229</sup>Ibid., 409-11.



Jewish people came to be shaped increasingly by Matthew and John."<sup>230</sup>

Luke presents Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. In the gospel and in Acts, Luke shows how the church becomes Israel. Yet Luke does not conclude that the Jewish people have come under final judgment. His view of Israel is similar to Paul's, yet Luke even more so emphasizes the fulfillment of salvation history in the church. "For Luke, the story is told in a simpler and more linear fashion: God has acted in Jesus to confirm and fulfill the promises to Israel, giving the people a clear choice. They can repent and believe or they can reject the word. If they do the latter, they are "utterly rooted out of the people."<sup>231</sup>

Hays considers Matthew's gospel a polemic against the Jewish people. Matthew repeatedly quotes Old Testament prophets to indicate Jesus fulfilled "what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (e.g., 1:22). Matthew intends to indict the Jews for spiritual blindness and culpability. Hays contends, "In this respect Matthew is the point of origin for a major trajectory of anti-Jewish polemic in the Christian tradition."<sup>232</sup> More important, however, is the way Matthew redacts Jesus' parables, making them allegories of God's rejection of Israel. For example, Matthew includes the parable from Mark of the wicked tenants, yet he adds at the end: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (Matt 21:43). According to Hays, Matthew turns the parable into a story about God's rejection of the Jewish people for another people.<sup>233</sup> Matthew often

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<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 417.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., 421.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., 422.

<sup>233</sup>See Amy-Jill Levine for an alternative reading of Matthew (Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History: "Go Nowhere Among the Gentiles . . ."* (Matthew 10:56), *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity*, vol. 14 [Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 1988]).

lays the responsibility for Jesus' death on the Jewish people, yet no where more clearly than in 27:24-25 ("Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!"). Matthew "clearly ascribes responsibility for the death of Jesus to the whole Jewish people *and to their descendants*."<sup>234</sup> Hays views this passage as an example of Matthew's dispensationalist construct which governs the logic of his narrative. Thus Matthew is the "preeminent canonical voice of supersessionist Christian theology: the church *replaces* Israel."<sup>235</sup>

In Hays's view, of all the New Testament writers, John is most polemical toward Jews. Hays states, "In this Gospel 'the Jews' become the villains; whereas the term 'the Jews' appears no more than five or six times in each of the Synoptics, John uses it more than seventy times, almost always in a pejorative sense."<sup>236</sup> As J. Louis Martyn previously observed in his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*,<sup>237</sup> John's narrative is a "two-level drama" in which Jesus' words to the Jews also serve as the message for the Johannine community to its contemporary opponents. According to Hays, reading John this way paints a vivid picture of the conflict between John's community and the Jewish community near the end of the first century. This view of the Jews, Hays contends, which is found throughout John's gospel, "Later became the pretext for a Christian majority to hate and oppress and kill Jews, when the relations of social power were reversed."<sup>238</sup>

**Synthesis.** Attempting to synthesize the New Testament's teaching regarding

<sup>234</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 424.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid.

<sup>236</sup>Ibid. With this view of John, Hays is following the interpretation of Raymond Brown, put forth in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

<sup>237</sup>J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

<sup>238</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 426.

the church's treatment of Jewish people, Hays recognizes several points of agreement and several divergences. He then suggests the following line of attack. First, one must let the tensions stand. There is no way of compromising or harmonizing the differences of the New Testament writers. For example, Hays contends that "John really does adopt a stance toward Judaism that can only engender polemics and hostility."<sup>239</sup> Since no compromise or harmony is available, one must choose between the various positions. Hays chooses Paul as determinative for Christian attitudes toward Jewish people. Thus, "Other New Testament writings must be either interpreted or critiqued within this Pauline framework."<sup>240</sup>

**Hermeneutics.** Regarding the mode of ethical teaching on the relation between church and synagogue, one finds no rules or principles in the New Testament. One does find a paradigm for Christian thought and action in Romans 9-11. The paradigm is based on Paul's instructions to Gentiles not to become proud for having been grafted in. Rather, they should stand in awe (11:20). Yet the clearest mode of ethical instruction is the symbolic world sketched by Paul in this passage. Paul tells a world-story within which Christians are to locate themselves. Gentile Christians should understand they are not the culmination of God's saving work. The last act of the drama involves God saving all Israel.<sup>241</sup>

When Hays moves on to consider other sources of authority, he gives tradition and experience a major role in the discussion of the church's treatment of Jews. Church

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<sup>239</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., 430. Hays concludes the section: "Regrettably, I do not believe this synthetic strategy will help with regard to the Gospel of John. . . . Thus, forced to make a choice among conflicting New Testament witnesses, we choose to see John's position on this issue as a historically understandable but theologically misconceived development. The church will do far better to enter dialogue with Judaism on the basis of the Pauline position" (ibid., 434).

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 434-47.

tradition carries a legacy of prejudice and hatred toward Jews. "Thus, in the case of attitudes toward Judaism, *tradition* is of relatively little help in disentangling the difficulties that Scripture presents."<sup>242</sup> Experience caused the church after the Holocaust to reassess its theology and its use of Scripture. For Hays, no other issue (treated in *The Moral Vision*) is more influenced by experience than anti-Judaism. Thus he concludes, "The theological trajectory that begins in John 8 ends—one fears—in Auschwitz."<sup>243</sup>

**Living the text.** Hays sums up the practical outcome of this investigation, noting that the New Testament argues for the transcendence of ethnic divisions within the church. Insofar as the church lives out this vision, it will have a powerful effect in society. "Once the church has caught the vision of living as a sign of the new creation in which racial and ethnic differences are bridged at the table of the Lord," Hays asks, "How is it possible for the community of Christ's people to participate in animosity toward outsiders?"<sup>244</sup>

### **Abortion**

Hays chooses abortion as a final test case because no New Testament text addresses it explicitly. However, Hays argues throughout *The Moral Vision* that the study of ethics can be restricted neither to passages that give explicit moral exhortation nor to issues that are explicitly treated. Thus, a broad reading of the texts is necessary.

**Reading the texts.** Hays notes that both abortion opponents and proponents seek to support their claims from Scripture. To appeal to Old Testament prohibitions against murder (e.g., Exod 20:13, Deut 5:17) only begs the question. No one in the debate

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<sup>242</sup>Ibid., 437.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid., 438.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., 441.

favors murder. Exodus 21:22-25, however, provides a more helpful avenue for discussion. Using the New Revised Standard Version, Hays reads this passage as commentary on the penalty for causing a miscarriage ("When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage . . .").<sup>245</sup> He contends that the text "seems to posit a qualitative distinction between the fetus and the mother; only the latter is legally a person with reference to whom the *lex talionis* applies."<sup>246</sup> In any case, the text deals with accidental injury, not with deliberate abortion.

Hays contends that Psalm 139:13-16 is a pertinent text to consider. It conveys a symbolic world in which God forms the unborn life in the womb. God knows the individual even before birth. This text, however, "must be interpreted within the poetic genre to which it belongs, not as a scientific or propositional statement. . . . its bearing on the abortion issue is very indirect indeed."<sup>247</sup> With regard to Luke 1:44, where the baby John leaps in Elizabeth's womb, Hays is similarly cautious. He notes, "The text might indirectly shape a symbolic world. . . . But the text cannot be used to prove any particular claim about prenatal personhood."<sup>248</sup> Hays concludes the section: "In sum, we have no passages dealing with abortion, though a few texts poetically declare God's providential care for all of life, even before birth or conception. This gives us very little material for the construction of a normative judgment."<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup>Newer translations favor a neutral reading of Exod 21:22 which does not call the result of the fight a miscarriage (e.g., the English Standard Version reads: "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm . . ."). See Russell Fuller, "Exodus 21:22: The Miscarriage Interpretation and the Personhood of the Fetus," *JETS* 37 (1994): 169-84; and Joe Sprinkle, "The Interpretation of Exodus 21:22-25 (*lex talionis*) and Abortion," *WTJ* 55 (1993): 233-53.

<sup>246</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 447.

<sup>247</sup>*Ibid.*, 447-48.

<sup>248</sup>*Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>249</sup>*Ibid.*

**Synthesis and hermeneutics.** The matter of synthesizing the textual material is simple when it comes to abortion. Since no texts deal with the issue, there is no problem of canonical diversity.

Regarding hermeneutics, the New Testament provides no rules or principles regarding abortion. The way ahead will only be found by placing the problem "in the New Testament's symbolic world and then reflecting analogically about the way in which the New Testament might provide implicit paradigms for our response to the question."<sup>250</sup> According to this symbolic world, God is the creator and author of life. People are God's stewards, and thus, to "terminate a pregnancy is not only to commit an act of violence but also to assume responsibility for destroying a work of God. . . . abortion—whether it is 'murder' or not—is wrong for the same reason that murder and suicide are wrong: it presumptuously assumes authority to dispose of life that does not belong to us."<sup>251</sup>

Hays then shows how his proposal for metaphor-making—placing the New Testament texts and the modern world side by side—might provide some answers for the abortion debate. He turns first to story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus rejected the lawyer's casuistic attempts to circumscribe moral concern for others by drawing sharp definitions about who is a neighbor. In just the same way, Hays argues, to define an unborn child as a nonperson narrows the scope of moral concern. Rather, believers are called to show mercy and intervene on behalf of the helpless.

Hays turns to the Jerusalem community (Acts 4:32-35) for a second effort at metaphor-making. According to this passage, the community should take responsibility for the care of the needy. Thus, there should be no economic justification within the church for abortion.

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<sup>250</sup>Ibid., 450. Hays suggests, as an example of such an approach, Paul Hinlicky's "War of Worlds: Re-Visioning the Abortion Dilemma," *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993): 187-207.

<sup>251</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 450.

Lastly, Hays turns to the imitation of Christ (Rom 15:1-7) as an opportunity for metaphor-making. According to this passage, "The community is to forswear seeking its own self-defined freedom in order to render service to others, especially the 'weak.'"<sup>252</sup> This paradigm suggests that children, both born and unborn, should be welcome, even when they might cause serious hardship.

Regarding other sources of authority, Hays contends that in the absence of explicit scriptural teaching, interpreters should give a greater role to tradition, reason, and experience in shaping one's attitude toward abortion. Christian tradition bears a strong and consistent witness against it. "The recent shift in some branches of liberal Protestantism to advocacy for abortion rights is a major departure from the church's historic teaching."<sup>253</sup> Hays suggests that most appeals to reason in abortion debates are out of bounds: "Some ways of framing the issue [are] fundamentally inappropriate because they stand in irreconcilable tension with the New Testament's understanding of the community's life under God."<sup>254</sup>

**Living the text.** Having addressed the issue of abortion strictly within the confines of the church, Hays moves out from there to discuss how believers might embody God's word on the question of abortion. First, it is essential that the church stop seeking to coerce moral consensus on this issue in a post-Christian culture. Since pro-life convictions are intelligible only within the symbolic world of Scripture, it is futile to compel the state to enforce Christian beliefs against abortion. A much more profitable

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<sup>252</sup>Ibid., 452.

<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 453. See Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish, and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982).

<sup>254</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 454. Thus, the issue of a right to privacy (as in *Roe v. Wade*) or the question of when a fetus become a person are fundamentally flawed ways of framing the discussion in view of the symbolic world rendered in the New Testament.

course is to "form a countercommunity of *witness*, summoning the world to see the gospel in action."<sup>255</sup> The second aspect of living the text calls for the church to embody its commitment to life as a gift from God. "When the community of God's people is living in responsive obedience to God's word, we will find, again and again, such grace-filled homologies between the story of Scripture and its performance in our midst."<sup>256</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the concluding chapter of *The Moral Vision* Hays makes explicit that what he has proposed is not an exact method for ethical enquiry. Rather, it is a framework for discerning the will of God in ethical matters. Hays makes clear his conclusions are merely one effort in the imaginative task of New Testament ethics. It is not Hays's conclusions, however, which are most important for the purposes of this dissertation. Rather, what is significant is how Hays appropriates Scripture in ethical deliberation. It remains to be seen whether Hays's method is imitable or whether there are changes which would improve it. The next chapter will offer a critique of Hays's method put forth in *The Moral Vision* and thus provide the foundation for an original method for appropriating Scripture in Christian ethics.

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<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 458. In contrast to Hays's approach, Kathleen Kaveny argues for a pro-life jurisprudence since the law is a teacher of virtue ("Toward a Thomistic Perspective on Abortion and the Law in Contemporary America," *The Thomist* 55 [1991]: 343-96).

<sup>256</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 460.



## CHAPTER 3

### CRITIQUE OF *THE MORAL VISION* OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The previous chapter described the major lines of argument in Richard Hays's *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. As the Introduction pointed out, Hays presents a method for appropriating Scripture in ethical reasoning which has garnered considerable recognition.<sup>1</sup> Yet the argument of this dissertation is that his approach has significant shortcomings. This chapter will offer a critique of *The Moral Vision* and hopefully clear a path for a better method for using Scripture in Christian ethics.

It will prove helpful, first, to point out the strengths of *The Moral Vision*. The critical analysis will then focus on the shortcomings of Hays's work. The primary purpose of this chapter is to interact with the methods of scriptural dialogue proposed by Hays in *The Moral Vision* in order to propose a constructive approach in the following chapter.

#### **Strengths of *The Moral Vision***

*The Moral Vision* is a significant contribution to Christian ethics. Its structure and comprehensive scope make it a challenging yet refreshing look at New Testament ethical issues. Five aspects of *The Moral Vision* stand out as particularly useful. First, the book is exceptionally useful because of its structure.<sup>2</sup> Hays crosses and defies the

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<sup>1</sup>See Max Turner, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Evangel* 16 (1998): 58-60; Frank Matera, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *TS* 58 (1997): 537; and Phillip LeMasters, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *PRS* 24 (1997): 469.

<sup>2</sup>Speaking of its structure, Turner calls it a refreshing "breakthrough in conception and execution" (review of *The Moral Vision*, 58).

disciplinary boundaries between exegesis, theology, and ethics. The first section of the book—the Descriptive Task—is an ambitious attempt to survey the major voices of the New Testament. Hays's background in exegesis is on display in this section, where he wrestles with textual issues not normally addressed in a textbook on ethics. The third section of the book—the Hermeneutical Section—is a massive theological critique of five contemporary scholars. Hays demonstrates an ability to engage critically each of the theologians. In the final section of the book, Hays offers practical ethical suggestions for reflection.

The structure of the book, therefore, is unique in that it engages the biblical scholar, theologian, and ethicist alike, though not in isolation. Hays considers the four distinct parts dependent on one another, therefore no one section can or should stand alone. He advises the reader at the beginning of the Pragmatic Section not to read "Part IV of this book without having first read Parts I through III. The normative judgments offered here are meant to be read only in light of the foregoing analysis of the content of the New Testament and the methods appropriate to using it as an authority for Christian ethics."<sup>3</sup> In this way, the structure of *The Moral Vision* is not only comprehensive but immanently helpful. Only those readers who attempt to read a portion of the book in isolation from the broader structure will fail to see the connection between Hays's pragmatic conclusions and the textual and methodological foundations he builds upon.

A second strength of the book comes in Hays's desire to make application to a broad spectrum of individuals, in particular those normally overlooked in particular moral issues. One reviewer of *The Moral Vision* contends that the book "represents an uncomfortable challenge for about every possible camp in the church as well as in

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 315.

theological academia. Close to everybody will find a cause of offense."<sup>4</sup> Even though Hays draws definitive conclusions about certain moral issues like homosexuality and abortion, his applications and arguments are broadly directed. For instance, in the chapter on homosexuality, Hays confronts both those practicing homosexuality and those inside the church who are excessively condemnatory. Hays says, "The New Testament offers no loopholes or exception clauses that might allow for the acceptance of homosexual practices under some circumstances. . . . Scripture affirms repeatedly that God has made man and woman for one another and that our sexual desires rightly find fulfillment within heterosexual marriage."<sup>5</sup> Later in the chapter Hays addresses the church: "Insofar as the church fails to teach clearly about heterosexual chastity outside of marriage, its disapproval of homosexual coupling will appear arbitrary and biased."<sup>6</sup> Rather than solely focusing on individuals engaged in homosexual behavior, Hays seeks to make application for everyone involved.

Hays is equally inclusive in other applications he makes. After building a case against abortion from the symbolic world of Scripture, Hays addresses fathers of unborn children and the church. He contends that "a man who has fathered an unborn child should be required and helped, within the fellowship of the church, to take responsibility for supporting the pregnant woman . . . and to assume continuing responsibility for the child after its birth."<sup>7</sup> Hays makes application to the church as well. "Paul's call to imitate Christ is addressed to the community of faith, not just to individuals. Thus, this word about welcoming children cannot be addressed just to the individual pregnant woman. . . .

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<sup>4</sup>Reinhard Hütter, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard B. Hays, *MT* 14 (1998): 455.

<sup>5</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 394, 390.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 452.

this call is a charge laid upon the church as a whole."<sup>8</sup> Hays's effort to be inclusive in his application strengthens his arguments. The reader of *The Moral Vision* is impressed that Hays struggles to deal with moral issues in an inclusive way rather than merely castigating one group involved in the issue.

Third, Hays generally builds a sound exegetical basis for his conclusions about New Testament ethics. He labors to chronicle the reasoning behind his ethical arguments, as the first section—a full one third of the book—clearly shows. Of course, Hays does not intend for *The Moral Vision* to be an exegetical work on New Testament passages pertinent to ethics. However, the discussion is broad and thorough. Douglas Moo applauds Hays's "awareness of the exegetical issues" and the fact that Hays "insists on letting each text have its say in the conversation."<sup>9</sup> The notes at the end of each chapter reveal that Hays is aware of broader discussions taking place about his key texts. Hays demonstrates his exegetical skill with conclusions that are "up to date and representative of mainstream NT scholarship."<sup>10</sup> "Missing entirely is the out-of-context proof-texting that mars many surveys of ethics."<sup>11</sup> Of course, the benefit of such a thorough exegetical foundation for the reader "is that he knows how Hays is interpreting the New Testament and how these texts can be applied to moral issues."<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, many evangelicals find *The Moral Vision* appealing because, for Hays, Scripture is the primary source of authority in ethics. Hays argues that tradition, reason,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 453.

<sup>9</sup>Douglas Moo, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *BBR* 9 (1999): 272.

<sup>10</sup>Colin Hart, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Anvil* 14 (1997): 320.

<sup>11</sup>Moo, review of *The Moral Vision*, 272.

<sup>12</sup>Gary A. Anderson, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *HDR* 26 (1997):11.

and experience "*stand in a hermeneutical relation to the New Testament; they are not independent, counterbalancing sources of authority*. In other words, the Bible's perspective is privileged, not ours."<sup>13</sup> Of course, not everyone appreciates Hays's evangelical view of authority. Dale Martin calls Hays's view of scriptural authority "uncritical foundationalism" and the "fundamental weakness" of the book. To Martin, it is impossible to interpret Scripture apart from reason, experience, and tradition. Therefore, it is illegitimate for Hays to treat the New Testament as an agent who speaks, independent of culture or the interpreter.<sup>14</sup> Hays acknowledges this very difficulty at the beginning of the Hermeneutical Task, stating, "No matter how seriously the church may take the authority of the Bible, the slogan of *sola Scriptura* is both conceptually and practically untenable, because the interpretation of Scripture can never occur in a vacuum."<sup>15</sup> Thus, Hays recognizes the very objection Martin raises. Hays openly concedes, "The New Testament is always read by interpreters under the formative influence of some particular tradition, using the light of reason and experience."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, such an admission does not eliminate the need to prioritize the sources of authority. Nor does it mean that Hays treats the New Testament, as Martin accuses, as an "Archimedean fulcra *extra nos*" that controls its own application.<sup>17</sup>

A related aspect of Hays's view of scriptural authority is his appreciation of the canon in its final form. For Hays, the historical background and literary process which brought forth the New Testament text ultimately is not significant. What is significant for

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<sup>13</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 296, italics original.

<sup>14</sup>Dale Martin, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *JBL* 117 (1998): 358.

<sup>15</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 209.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Martin, review of *The Moral Vision*, 358.

ethical deliberation is the shape of the canon in its current form. This is why Hays considers the pastoral epistles and Ephesians authoritative, despite the fact that he denies Pauline authorship. Since those epistles are in the canon, the church must deal with them.

One other strength of Hays's work deserves mention. For a New Testament ethics text, *The Moral Vision* is thoroughly practical. The fourth section of the book illustrates how a community of faith would apply Hays's method of using Scripture in Christian ethics. For greater benefit, Hays considers five ethical issues of varying amounts of textual evidence with which to form conclusions. Another reason Hays addresses these five issues is to show his decisions are not based on ad hoc prooftexting.<sup>18</sup>

Hays's desire to be practical involves more than simply adding a "pragmatic" section to the end of the book. Throughout his exegetical discussion Hays often keeps his eye on practical implications. For example, when discussing Mark's Christology, Hays argues, "Jesus affirms that he is to be a suffering Messiah." Thus, those "who are the Messiah's disciples are called to follow him in the way of suffering, rejection, and death."<sup>19</sup> Throughout *The Moral Vision* Hays draws out practical implications of theological truth. In this way he emulates the indicative and imperative structure of Paul's ethical arguments.<sup>20</sup> Little will be said about the specific conclusions reached by Hays in the pragmatic section. The purpose of this dissertation is to address the method of using Scripture in ethical deliberation. With these five strengths in mind, the critical evaluation

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<sup>18</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 314.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 79. See pp. 91-93 of this dissertation for an evaluation of this specific application and the place of the cross in the call to discipleship.

<sup>20</sup>See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 253-58; William Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics," *CTJ* 14 (1979): 55-78; Georg Strecker, "Indicative and Imperative According to Paul," *AusBR* 35 (1987): 60-72; and Michael Parsons, "Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing," *EvQ* 60 (1988): 99-127.

must now address the major shortcomings of the method proposed by Hays.

### **Shortcomings of *The Moral Vision***

Four significant shortcomings of *The Moral Vision* demand attention. First, Hays's program of appropriating Scripture is built on his view that Scripture speaks in disunity. Second, that view of the canon necessitates that Hays identify three focal images to locate a coherent moral voice. The focal images serve to develop, despite Hays's insistence to the contrary, a canon within the canon. Third, Hays gives priority to narrative in his system, which opens his method up to greater subjectivity and personal bias. The last shortcoming relates to the larger proposal of *The Moral Vision* for using Scripture in Christian ethics. Hays's approach proves unsound because it provides no criteria for judging whether an appropriation is faithful, it unwittingly relies on transcendent ethical principles, and it fails to distinguish between interpretation and application.

### **A Fragmented View of Scripture**

A key component of Hays's approach to Scripture is finding synthesis among the diverse New Testament witnesses. He wants to note distinctive themes and patterns of reasoning among the individual writers. Only after letting the texts speak individually, does Hays attempt to find a coherence among the witnesses. Yet, despite his commitment to canonical authority, Hays ultimately is not convinced the New Testament witnesses speak in harmony.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, Hays defends canonical unity in the beginning. He states in the Introduction, "I shall contend . . . that the task of discerning some coherence in the

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<sup>21</sup>Hays states rather conclusively, "The problem of unity and diversity has long been a central issue of NT theology" (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 11 n. 11). He then refers the reader to J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); Hendrikus Boers, *What is New Testament Theology? Guides to Biblical Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); and Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990).

canon is both necessary and possible."<sup>22</sup> The problem with Hays's method is that the canonical unity Hays ultimately finds is a unity he creates. His approach posits three focal images which govern his reading of New Testament texts. Hays explains his choice of community, cross, and new creation this way:

Because these [New Testament] texts retell and interpret a narrative, their message reflects the complexity and temporal movement of emplotted experience; consequently, we need a cluster—or better, a sequence—of images to represent the underlying story and bring the texts into focus. . . . These three images, I would propose, can focus and guide our reading of the New Testament texts with respect to ethical issues.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Hays chooses community, cross, and new creation as his focal images because they are "capable of providing a framework that links and illumines the individual writings."<sup>24</sup> Yet in that admission Hays demonstrates the first concern with his method, namely that the unified moral vision posited in *The Moral Vision* is a product of his own construction.

Throughout *The Moral Vision*, Hays emphasizes the disunity between the biblical writers. Highlighting that disunity is one of the major purposes of the first section of the book, because "only when we set their differing perspectives side by side will we rightly perceive the synthetic problem. Our first responsibility as interpreters is to listen to the individual witnesses."<sup>25</sup> After listening to the diverse voices, Hays finds unity by interpreting each witness through the focal lenses of community, cross, and new creation. Yet, in so doing, Hays creates unity through his proposed focal images, rather than locating unity in core theological or ethical foundations. Brian Brock rightly criticizes Hays for shifting "the locus of moral authority away from the text and toward its

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<sup>22</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 4.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 196, 198.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.



synthesis."<sup>26</sup> Hays, of course, affirms that "the *Bible's* perspective is privileged, not ours."<sup>27</sup> But, as Brock notes, "One wonders whether 'focal images' are the Bible's perspective or ours. *Sola Scriptura* . . . means that the key to Scripture *is* Scripture, and that this key comprehends and criticizes all that is, including our interpretive schemas."<sup>28</sup> The unified moral vision posited by Hays is not uncovered by his focal images so much as it is created by them. His fragmented view of Scripture necessitates he posit a schema to deal with dissonant ethical voices.

At other times, Hays's schema simply disregards such passages. A useful example of this approach is found in chapter thirteen. Hays reports an incident in which A. Katherine Grieb asked him, in private correspondence, "Is it ever unethical to submit ourselves to a Biblical text?" According to Hays, only when one text contradicts the will of God as revealed in the fuller canonical witness:

I would answer along these lines: when I speak of submission to "the text," I do not mean individual texts (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:11-15) construed as prooftexts; rather, I mean the text of Scripture as a whole, construed in light of the images of community cross, and new creation. To submit to isolated teachings might indeed sometimes be "unethical" or unfaithful to the will of God as disclosed in the fuller canonical witness.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, when his focal images offer no help in unifying a passage with the broader narrative of the New Testament moral vision, Hays disregards such a text in favor of the "fuller canonical witness." In this respect, however, Brock's question, posed earlier, is insightful. When Hays claims that the Bible's perspective is privileged, does he mean the Bible's perspective constructed by his focal images?

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<sup>26</sup>Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 252.

<sup>27</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 296.

<sup>28</sup>Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God*, 252-53, italics original.

<sup>29</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 312 n. 25.

Hays's view of canonical unity determines that he read Scripture through lenses he has manufactured instead of allowing Scripture to shape and criticize his focal images. Reading Scripture through focal images is necessary for Hays because particular passages may contradict the message of Scripture as a whole. According to Hays, focal images help to shape and clarify the unity he finds in Scripture. Yet it is worth pursuing whether the focal images shape and clarify that unity or actually *create* it.

The problem for Hays is this: Since he claims to hold firmly to the final form of the New Testament canon, he cannot easily disregard texts or arguments<sup>30</sup> which seem to stand in tension with other portions of the canon. How then can Hays find a coherent ethical vision from the New Testament if he begins his exegetical work with the assumption that the texts often stand at odds with one another?<sup>31</sup> The only option available for Hays is to impose his own categories of interpretation onto the biblical witnesses. Hays acknowledges as much in the second section of *The Moral Vision*, saying,

The adjective 'synthetic' can carry the connotation of 'artificial,' signifying that an entity (e.g., a fabric) is the product of human artifice rather than 'naturally' occurring substance. Similarly, we cannot escape acknowledging that any synthetic account of the unity of the New Testament's moral vision will be a product of our artifice, an

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<sup>30</sup>As Douglas Moo contends, "On some issues, [Hays] argues, we have to choose which of the contradictory voices in the canon we will heed as finally authoritative for the Christian church" (Douglas Moo, review of *The Moral Vision*, 273). This is Hays's approach in the discussion of "Anti-Judaism." After reading John's gospel and finding it diametrically opposed to Paul, Hays chooses Paul, stating, "Thus, forced to make a choice among conflicting New Testament witnesses, we choose to see John's position on this issue as a historically understandable but theologically misconceived development" (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 434). Hays never reveals the criteria by which he makes such a judgment, a point which is all the more telling given his professed commitment to the whole canon.

<sup>31</sup>Whether Hays begins his exegetical work presupposing disunity or whether his exegetical work leads him to such a conclusion is not clear from *The Moral Vision*. In the introduction to the book Hays sets out the disunity problem as the primary obstacle to the one who wishes to use the Bible in ethics.

imaginative construct of the interpreter.<sup>32</sup>

The synthetic categories Hays uses are his focal images of community, cross, and new creation. To be sure, Hays has an exhaustive criteria for choosing his focal images.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, since the New Testament is read through the lenses of Hays's own choosing, the unity he finds is a unity he manufactures.

Hays states baldly that biblical writers often stand in conflict with one another and it is illegitimate to interpret one in terms of the other. For instance, Hays considers Paul and Luke to stand in tension over the place of personal wealth for followers of Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> According to Hays, Luke demands that followers give up all their possessions (14:33), whereas Paul's demands are much more reasonable. It is enough for Paul that believers contribute generously to the collection in order that there be a fair balance (2 Cor 8:14). Since Hays rejects the notion that Jesus is using hyperbole in Luke 14:33, he believes unity can be found only by reading these texts through the focal images of community, cross, and new creation. Yet it is apparent from this example that whatever unity Hays finds will be created by the focal images through which he interprets the texts. The necessity of focal images grows out of Hays's fragmented view of Scripture.

### **Hays's Focal Images**

A second shortcoming in Hays's method of using Scripture in ethics is found in his use of focal images. According to Hays, these three key images (Community, Cross, New Creation) are commonly shared by the canonical writers in presenting their moral vision. The focal images not only help encapsulate the ethical message of the New Testament but they serve as lenses through which the text should be read.

The New Testament is not a compendium of ethical theory any more than it is

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>33</sup>See p. 44 of this dissertation.

<sup>34</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 188.

a textbook on theology.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, a schema such as Hays's focal images may be needed to appropriate Scripture to ethics. Some approaches to Christian ethics seek a fundamental principle around which ethics should be centered. Chris Sugden and Oliver Barclay offer contrasting approaches in *Kingdom and Creation in Social Ethics*. Barclay argues that it is impossible "to understand or apply correctly many features of biblical ethics unless we recognize that they are essentially based on creation."<sup>36</sup> Alternatively, Sugden suggests that the kingdom of God ought to serve as the fundamental principle for Christian ethics: God's "will for creation must be understood with reference to its fulfillment in the Kingdom, and to how Jesus demonstrated its life in a world where it conflicted with the kingdom of darkness."<sup>37</sup> In *Resurrection and Moral Order*, Oliver O'Donovan seeks to overcome this confrontation between creation ethics and kingdom ethics by arguing that Christian ethics depends upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Thus, O'Donovan argues, "The very act of God which ushers in his kingdom is the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the reaffirmation of creation."<sup>38</sup> Others take love as the principle around which an ethical framework should be constructed.<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup>Richard Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 26-27. As Charles Cosgrove put it, Scripture is "ad hoc and largely occasional, rather than systematic, in its ethical teaching" (*Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 67).

<sup>36</sup>Chris Sugden and Oliver Barclay, *Kingdom and Creation in Social Ethics* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1990), 4. See also Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, "Jubilee Institutional Norms: A Middle Way between Creation Ethics and Kingdom Ethics as the Basis for Christian Political Action," *EvQ* 62 (1990): 37-62.

<sup>37</sup>Sugden and Barclay, *Kingdom and Creation*, 14. See Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>38</sup>Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 15.

<sup>39</sup>Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2002); and Francis Eigo, ed., *Called to Love: Towards a Contemporary Christian Ethic* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1985).

variations and approaches continue to multiply. Yet Hays has a unique approach to the issue. Much could be said regarding the validity of his approach, yet, it is more advantageous to address the problems the focal images create for Hays's own system. Before proceeding with this critique, however, it is needful briefly to review how Hays uses focal images in his reading of the New Testament.

**Lenses for reading the New Testament.** According to Hays, the unity of the New Testament is best captured by a single fundamental story. The New Testament writers emphasize and comment on different aspects of that story. In order to capture a unified ethical message from the different canonical tellings one needs to identify certain key images which "catch up what Christianity is basically all about."<sup>40</sup> Hays's confidence in this approach lies in his belief that one stands "a better chance of identifying common elements present in these different types of discourse without imposing conceptual abstractions on narrative texts and without forcing pastoral letters into a narrative mode."<sup>41</sup> Hays summarizes the role of focal images this way:

They encapsulate the crucial elements of the narrative and serve to focus our attention on the common ground shared by the various witnesses. They serve as *lenses* to focus our reading of the New Testament: when we reread the canonical documents through these images, our blurry multiple impressions of the texts come more sharply into focus.<sup>42</sup>

From this summary, two things are clear. First, the focal images do not replace the New Testament texts. Instead they serve to focus and guide one's reading of Scripture. Second, the images are lenses through which one's reading of the New Testament is brought into sharper focus.

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<sup>40</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 194, referring to David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 159.

<sup>41</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 194.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 194-95.

**Canon within the canon.** Yet immediately a problem with Hays's focal images is apparent. The focal images become the standard through which the larger "story" is measured. Thus, as lenses through which Scripture is read and interpreted, the images become a canon within the canon. Hays dismisses this concern, contending that his focal images are a canon within the canon only insofar as they provide a "rule" or guide for interpretation. They do not, however, replace any of the canonical writings, nor should they be treated as principles applicable to ethics "without reference to the texts from which they are derived."<sup>43</sup> The problem is that despite his desire not to limit or mute the voices of the New Testament, Hays's focal images do in fact limit the interpretive force of some passages. For instance, when Hays treats anti-Judaism and ethnic conflict in chapter seventeen, he virtually sets aside the gospel of John in favor of the theological position taken by Paul in Romans 9-11. Hays contends, "Paul's approach to the church-Israel question most adequately preserves the continuity with the larger scriptural story," captured in the focal images of community, cross, new creation.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, despite his devotion to narrative, Hays concludes that "the theological position taken by Paul in Romans 9-11 ought to be judged determinative for Christian attitudes and actions toward the Jewish people, and that the other New Testament writings must be either interpreted or critiqued within this Pauline framework."<sup>45</sup> Or consider again Hays's encouragement that believers refuse to submit to some particular passages but instead "submit to the text of Scripture as a whole, construed in light of the images of community, cross, and new creation."<sup>46</sup> According to Hays, "To submit to isolated teachings might indeed sometimes be 'unethical' or unfaithful to the will of God as disclosed in the fuller canonical

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 430.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 312 n. 25.

witness."<sup>47</sup> Thus, the images of community, cross, and new creation serve as lenses through which scriptural texts are understood. Or, put more provocatively, Hays considers only those passages which conform to the ethical vision summed up in his focal images morally binding.

**Pauline primacy.** A second concern with Hays's focal images is whether they betray a Pauline primacy in his ethical system.<sup>48</sup> Community, cross, and new creation are eerily similar to the categories Hays uses to organize Paul's moral teaching. Only the order is different. Perhaps this fact reveals more of a bias toward one canonical writer than Hays admits. While each of the three focal images is readily apparent in Pauline material, it is not so clear that new creation is a major emphasis in Mark or that the cross is widely represented in James. Yet, the criteria by which Hays admits these three images and excludes, for instance, love, demands that a focal image find a textual basis in all of the canonical witnesses.<sup>49</sup> Hays favored Paul in the descriptive task and he favors Paul just as much when seeking focal images through which the New Testament should be appropriated. It is no wonder, then, that in the brief section in which Hays unveils his focal images, Pauline citations outnumber all other canonical writers twelve to one. Of course, giving Paul primacy in his ethical system may not negate Hays's approach, yet it is unfortunate that Hays, who consistently decries ethical approaches built around a particular author, nowhere defends or addresses this partiality.

**The uniqueness of Jesus' cross.** A third difficulty with Hays's focal images is found in the second image, the cross, and in Hays's failure adequately to distinguish the

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>See Allen Verhey's critique of this issue in his review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *Perspectives* 12 (1997): 15.

<sup>49</sup>See p. 44 of this dissertation for Hays's full list of criteria.

peculiar nature of the cross in Jesus' vocation. Hays contends, "For Paul, Jesus' death on the cross is an act of loving, self-sacrificial obedience that becomes paradigmatic for the obedience of all who are in Christ."<sup>50</sup> Hays later clarifies, adding, "To be sure, the death of the Son of God on a cross is a unique event, unrepeatable, reconciling humanity to God. . . . Nonetheless, it does become for Paul also an example, a paradigm for the life of faith." He later adds, "Jesus' death on a cross is the paradigm for faithfulness to God in this world."<sup>51</sup> True enough, in just the same way, everything Jesus did is a paradigm for believers to emulate. Paul holds up Christ's willingness to die, even a death on the cross, as a model of a humble spirit (Phil 2:1-11).<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Paul tells the Ephesians, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph 5:1-2). Clearly the New Testament points to the cross of Christ as a paradigm for obedience to God.

The concern with Hays's use of the cross as a focal image is that he occasionally loses sight of the fact that Jesus' cross is uniquely set apart from the crosses taken up by believers.<sup>53</sup> The significance of Jesus' cross lies in its efficacy in making sinners right with God. Only because of the peculiar effects achieved by Christ on the cross is obedience and self-sacrifice possible for believers. Yet Hays gives the impression, perhaps unwittingly, that Christians simply join with Jesus in self-sacrifice

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<sup>50</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 27.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 27, 197.

<sup>52</sup>See J. B. Webster, "Christology, Immitability, and Ethics," *SJT* 39 (1986): 309-26; and David Alan Black, "Paul and Christian Unity: A Formal Analysis of Philippians 2:1-4," *JETS* 28 (1985): 299-308.

<sup>53</sup>Consider Carl Henry's cautious instructions: "There are, of course, reasons for not picturing Jesus as the absolute example of Christian conduct. His redemptive work can be duplicated by none other, and this unique vocation called for singular ways of living" (Carl Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 410). See also E. J. Tinsley, "Some Principles for Reconstructing a Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ," *SJT* 25 (1972): 45-57.



by taking up their crosses, as though they are seeking to achieve with their crosses what Jesus achieved through his. This is one danger of imitation language. It tends to blur the distinction between the achievements of Christ won for believers and the aspects of Christ's life which are a paradigm for believers to imitate.

A good example of this sort of confusion is found in the first chapter of *The Moral Vision*. "The paradigmatic role of the cross is suggested," according to Hays, "by the contrast in Romans 5:12-23 between Christ's obedience and the disobedience of Adam. Adam is the initiator and prime symbol of humanity's rebellion against the will of God; Jesus, through his radical obedience [on the cross], reverses the consequences of Adam's sin and becomes the initiator of a new, obedient humanity."<sup>54</sup> The point being made by Paul in this passage is not that Jesus' obedience in going to the cross serves as a paradigm for believers. Paul's argument, in contrasting Adam with Christ in Romans 5 should be understood in redemptive historical terms. As Thomas Schreiner puts it, "Adam introduced the age of sin and death through his sin, while Christ inaugurated the new age of righteousness and life through his death and resurrection."<sup>55</sup> The point of the passage is not to call believers to emulate Christ. Paul's intention is to point out that "all human beings are either in Adam or in Christ."<sup>56</sup> Such is the case with most of the New Testament's reference to the cross of Jesus. It does not serve as a paradigm so much as a historical fact with theological implications.<sup>57</sup> New Testament writers considered the

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<sup>54</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 31.

<sup>55</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 149-50.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>57</sup>"In Pauline thought, man is alienated from God by sin and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ [on the cross] that sin is overcome and wrath averted, so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear" (David Wells, *Search for Salvation* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978], 29).

cross of Jesus altogether distinct from the cross the believer is called to take up.<sup>58</sup> That distinction occasionally is overlooked in *The Moral Vision*. The cross of Christ is indeed central to the moral vision of the New Testament, but primarily in the sense that those who are in Christ have had their old self "crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that [they] would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6). Hays fails to make clear the peculiar nature of the cross in Jesus' vocation and the resulting implications which flow from it for believers.

**Individual or corporate obedience.** Yet another concern with Hays's focal images is his near-exclusive emphasis on community obedience. Hays states his purpose in *The Moral Vision* is "to encourage the church in its efforts to become a Scripture-shaped community," a "community more closely conformed to the will of God as disclosed in Scripture."<sup>59</sup> Throughout, Hays insists that a proper reading of the New Testament can only happen in the context of a community of faith. Similarly, moral reasoning is an activity for the whole people of God. Therefore, it is not surprising that when Hays identifies the ethical matters at the heart of Christian discipleship, he names four issues which echo this community emphasis: (1) the renunciation of violence, (2) the sharing of possessions, (3) the overcoming of ethnic divisions, and (4) the unity of men and women in Christ.<sup>60</sup> This list not only indicates Hays's interest, but reveals something of a lacuna in Hays's ethical program. What is the role of personal obedience in Hays's

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<sup>58</sup>D. A. Carson suggests, "It is worth observing that most of the injunctions in the Gospels to follow Jesus or to do what he does are bound up with his self-abnegation: e.g., as he is hated, so we must expect to be hated (John 15:18); as he takes the place of a servant and washes his disciples' feet, so we are to wash one another's feet (John 13); as he goes to the cross, so we are to take our cross and follow him (Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Luke 14:27)" ("The Tabula Rasa Fallacy," *MR* 8, no.4 [1999]: 30-31).

<sup>59</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 463, 470.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 313. Douglas Moo points to this very issue in his review of *The Moral Vision*, 276.

thinking? For instance, based on Romans 12 and 2 Corinthians 5, Hays argues that "the primary sphere of moral concern is not the character of the individual but the corporate obedience of the church."<sup>61</sup> However, God saves individuals, not communities, and God transforms communities only through the personal transformation of individual believers.<sup>62</sup> Granted, it may be difficult to distinguish the work of God in an individual over against his work within a community, nevertheless, it is true that the New Testament describes both. Even Philippians—instrumental to Hays's emphasis on community—closes with ethical instruction for two individuals (4:1-3). At the heart of Christian discipleship, more likely, is "the new heart created by God's Spirit in the individual believer—the 'renewed mind' of the Christian," fleshed out in the gathered community of God's people.<sup>63</sup>

Questions abound regarding the adequacy of the three particular focal images Hays chose. For instance, how can love not be central to the moral vision of the New Testament when Jesus summarized the entire moral law as love for God and neighbor (Matt 22:36-40)?<sup>64</sup> Taken individually, the criticisms proposed here are not fatal to Hays's method, however, the collective weight of these criticisms reveal the insufficiency of Hays's program.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Priority of Narrative**

A third concern with the method promoted by Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision* is the priority in his methodology that he gives to narrative material. The New

<sup>61</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 196.

<sup>62</sup>See Moo's evaluation, review of *The Moral Vision*, 276.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Hill, *The How and Why of Love*, 34-42.

<sup>65</sup>See Gilbert Meilaender, review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, by Richard Hays, *FT* 78 (1997): 62-63.

Testament, for Hays, is fundamentally a story.<sup>66</sup> A community of believers is called to shape analogies between the story it reads in the New Testament and the life it lives out everyday. The difficulty with this approach, however, is that narrative texts, by nature, are less explicit in their ethical prescription than didactic passages. Therefore an ethical vision derived primarily from narrative texts will be shaped by the interpreter's subjectivity more than an ethical vision which gives priority to didactic passages.<sup>67</sup>

Hays is explicit that a moral vision of the New Testament should give priority to narrative passages. According to Hays,

the New Testament presents itself to us first of all in the form of story. The four Gospels present the figure of Jesus through the medium of narrative, the Acts of the Apostles relates the story of the earliest expansion of the gospel message in the Mediterranean world, and the Apocalypse offers a grand symbolic narrative of the consummation of God's dealings with the whole creation. Even the New Testament Epistles ought to be understood less as propositional theology than as reflection upon the story of Jesus Christ, as told in the early church's passion/resurrection kerygma.<sup>68</sup>

In his survey of how Barth, Niebuhr, Yoder, Hauerwas, and Schüssler Fiorenza use Scripture in ethics, Hays pointed out four modes of ethical appeal to the Bible—rules, principles, paradigms, and symbolic world.<sup>69</sup> According to Hays, "The presence of all of these modes of discourse within the New Testament suggests that all of them are potentially legitimate modes" for one's normative reflections. However, even if all are legitimate, Hays contends, they are not equally profitable. Since the New Testament

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<sup>66</sup>Compare Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 24-30.

<sup>67</sup>See the discussion in the next chapter of this dissertation (157-61).

<sup>68</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 295. Hays argues in two other places that this is the best way to interpret Paul: Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, SBLDS 56 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), and his contribution to *Pauline Theology*, vol.1, *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, ed. Jouette Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

<sup>69</sup>See pp. 47-48 of this dissertation for Hays's definitions of these categories.

presents itself first of all in the form of story, "a Christian community that is responsive to the specific form of the New Testament texts will find itself drawn repeatedly to the *paradigmatic* mode of using the New Testament in ethics . . . . Thus, *narrative texts in the New Testament are fundamental resources for normative ethics.*"<sup>70</sup> The New Testament, for Hays, is a narrative in which the modern church tries to locate itself. "The stories told in the Gospels and Acts subliminally form the Christian community's notions of what a life lived faithfully might look like. Those stories become the framework in which we understand and measure our lives; the narratives are more fundamental than any secondary process of abstraction that seeks to distill their ethical import."<sup>71</sup> Therefore, paradigm is the most profitable mode of appeal to Scripture, because narrative texts are primary in Hays's method.

This approach to Scripture in which Hays gives priority to narrative texts presents two problems. First, by prioritizing narrative, Hays undermines his own emphasis on canon. As noted earlier, Hays expressed concern that the interpreter not exclude parts of the canon that do not fit one's predetermined agenda. Yet, that is the very result of Hays's prioritizing narrative texts. Second, this approach allows for personal bias and greater subjectivity in interpretation. Each of these difficulties needs further exploration.

**Undermining the idea of canon.** In the second section of *The Moral Vision*, Hays lays out his approach to addressing diverse voices in the New Testament. Specifically he gives three procedural guidelines. The first demands that the reader "confront the full range of canonical witnesses."<sup>72</sup> This procedure involves considering

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<sup>70</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 295, italics original.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 189.

all of the relevant texts. "The more comprehensive the attention to the full range of New Testament witnesses, the more adequate a normative ethical proposal is likely to be."<sup>73</sup> Thus, it appears that Hays wants to include a broad range of texts in his reading of the New Testament. But that statement is undermined by Hays's own approach, which gives priority to narrative texts. This is clear even in Hays's choice of which New Testament books to include in his Descriptive Task. One can hardly fault Hays for not being more inclusive in a section totaling almost two hundred pages. Yet, he clearly does not value didactic material of the New Testament as much as he does narrative. He leaves out some of the most ethically instructive texts in all of the New Testament. Hays excludes James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude, and Hebrews altogether. There is in that choice by Hays disregard for his own procedural guideline. When Hays contends that "even the New Testament Epistles ought to be understood less as propositional theology than as reflection upon the story of Jesus Christ," he is speaking volumes about how he reads didactic material vis-à-vis narrative texts and how he views the canon of Scripture.

By assigning priority to narrative passages, essentially Hays is establishing, along the lines suggested by F. F. Bruce, a distinction between basic texts and less basic texts.<sup>74</sup> For Hays, rules and principles found in didactic passages are too rooted in first-century culture to inform the modern church. Instead the church must turn to the paradigms within the narrative of Scripture. Through narrative texts, Hays argues, the church engages in an integrative act of the imagination where "faithful interpreters listen patiently to the Word of God in Scripture and discern fresh imaginative links between the *biblical story* and our time."<sup>75</sup> The result of this approach is that specific and intentionally

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 190. Bruce is distinguishing between "basic principles" and "less basic" texts in the discussion of the role relationships of men and women. Nevertheless, the principle of elevating some texts over others is the same.

<sup>75</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 299, emphasis added. See the "Metaphors and

prescriptive passages are softened or muted. For instance, Hays dismisses 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 ("the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission") as an interpolation that is not consonant with the larger story. Such a passage "was not written by Paul but added by a later scribe or editor, such as the author of the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8-15)."<sup>76</sup> Hays arrives at the same sort of conclusion regarding much of 1 and 2 Timothy, which at times, according to Hays, fail to line up with the broader story of the New Testament.

In the end, Hays's view of the canon is handicapped by giving priority to narrative texts. Despite laudable comments about preserving the entire range of canonical voices, non-narrative material is subjugated to the larger biblical "story" and, in the process, didactic texts lose their imperative force. When Hays elevates the larger "story" of the New Testament in order to capture the single unifying message of Scripture, he simultaneously muffles the voice of more explicit and prescriptive texts.

**Greater subjectivity in interpretation.** The larger problem with Hays's approach to narrative and didactic passages is the influence his method has on interpretation. It is not the purpose of this work to point out or correct misinterpretations from *The Moral Vision*. The concern here is the method proposed by Hays and the results one comes to using that method. Hays's approach, giving priority to narrative, involves greater subjectivity in interpretation.<sup>77</sup> Paul Nelson argues along these same lines in *Narrative and Morality*,<sup>78</sup> showing that "biblical narrative as a whole can be interpreted

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Moral Judgments" section below for more on the place of principles in moral deliberation.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>77</sup>See the discussion by Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 4-6.

<sup>78</sup>Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 83-84.

in different ways and used to warrant a variety of substantive theological proposals."<sup>79</sup>

Paul Lauritzen demonstrates this sort of subjectivity by showing the contradictory conclusions Hauerwas and Metz come to based on their commitment to narrative.

For Metz, the result is a life committed to near revolutionary social action; for Hauerwas, a life given to a sort of sectarian pacifistic witness. . . . if the truthfulness of the Christian story is to be judged by its practical consequences, and those consequences are as varied as Hauerwas' and Metz's writings would suggest, how does an appeal to narrative establish the truthfulness of Christian convictions, even on pragmatic grounds?<sup>80</sup>

It is too simplistic to argue that a commitment to narrative leads one interpreter to revolution and another to pacifism. The argument proposed here, however, is more modest. The priority each places on narrative involves greater subjectivity in interpretation and more readily opens up the text to personal bias.

A commonly accepted hermeneutical principle maintains that since didactic passages primarily aim to instruct, they, not narrative, should be given priority in interpretation.<sup>81</sup> Millard Erickson calls this "the more traditional approach of giving primacy to the didactic statements of Scripture and interpreting the narratives in light of these."<sup>82</sup> Narrative passages, of course, do instruct, but not as explicitly.<sup>83</sup> Hays affirms as

<sup>79</sup>William Spohn, summarizing Nelson's argument, in *What Are They Saying about Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 89. See also Michael Goldberg, "God, Action, and Narrative: Which Narrative, Action, God?" *JR* 68, no.1 (1988): 39-56.

<sup>80</sup>Paul Lauritzen, "Is 'Narrative' Really a Panacea? The Use of 'Narrative' in the Work of Metz and Hauerwas," *JR* 67 (1987): 336. See also Jeffrey Stout, *Flight from Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1981).

<sup>81</sup>James M. Boice, *Standing on the Rock: Biblical Authority in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 82. See also Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 233-34, and R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 68-75.

<sup>82</sup>Millard Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 73.

<sup>83</sup>The wording here is intentional. Narrative passages certainly do instruct. Yet the instruction is less explicit than didactic passages, where the authorial meaning is



much when he contends that the stories in the Gospels and Acts "*subliminally* form the Christian community's notions of what a life lived faithfully might look like."<sup>84</sup> Since ethical instruction found in narrative texts is less explicit than didactic texts, the interpreter depends on the author of the narrative to make explicit the ethical import of the text.<sup>85</sup>

At this point, two clarifications are needed. First, both narrative and didactic passages contain propositional truth, and second, both narrative and didactic passages are particularized by the author, his purpose in writing, and the context of his intended audience.

The first clarification contends that propositional truth is found in both narrative and didactic texts. One of the key truths reemphasized by the biblical theology movement is that every passage of Scripture was written for a specific teaching purpose.<sup>86</sup> Narrative passages teach, often times indirectly, through the propositional

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purposefully made plain. Douglas Moo argues that the interpreter is dependent on the author of the narrative to make explicit what is paradigmatic from the text (Moo, review of *The Moral Vision*, 271-76).

<sup>84</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 295, emphasis added. The argument here is not that doctrine is important and narrative is less important. Hauerwas seems to propose just such a straw man when he contends, "Doctrines, therefore, are not the upshot of the stories; they are not the meaning or heart of the stories. . . . Narrative is not secondary for our knowledge of God; there is no 'point' that can be separated from the story. The narratives through which we learn of God *are* the point" (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 26). This argument misses the issue. This dissertation is not arguing that narrative is irrelevant. The point is that narrative requires greater subjectivity by the interpreter in order to "learn of God."

<sup>85</sup>Daniel Block argues along similar lines. Whereas in didactic texts "the intended message is declared explicitly, in narrative the permanent lesson is often, if not generally, implicit in the telling. . . . The authoritative meaning of the author is not found in the event described but in the author's interpretation of the event" (Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary, vol. 6 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 604).

<sup>86</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980); and Richard Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 38 (1976): 281-299.

truths they contain. Thus, it would be illegitimate to give priority to didactic passages based on the notion that they alone contain propositional truth.

The second clarification contends that narrative passages are equally particularized by context and culture as didactic passages. Much has been made of the occasional nature of New Testament epistles, yet narrative texts also were written for specific people in specific circumstances to address specific topics. Therefore, it is illegitimate to give priority to narrative texts based on the culturally conditioned nature of didactic passages. That is, there is nothing inherent to narrative passages which make the truths taught in narrative any more "trans-historical" than those taught in didactic passages. In summary, these clarifications make two points. Narrative and didactic passages both contain propositional truths, and both types of text are, in a sense, occasional. Given the similarity between the two types of text, therefore, it is illegitimate to give priority to either type of text based on these two issues.<sup>87</sup>

For what reason then should one assign priority to didactic passages? The answer historically has been found in the genre itself. The instruction in didactic passages is, because of the genre, necessarily more explicit. Therefore the work of locating the moral vision detailed by a narrative passage necessarily involves greater subjectivity on the part of the interpreter. An example from *The Moral Vision* will help make this point explicit.

Hays argues at length against violence in defense of justice. Yet in his chapter against violence, Hays uses only Matthew 5:38-48 as his "key text." The primary mode of ethical appeal for Hays is the paradigm of Jesus' self-sacrificial obedience and submissiveness to God's purposes. Hays contends that this willingness to suffer pervades Jesus' entire ministry.

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<sup>87</sup>Daniel Doriani makes a somewhat similar point in *Putting the Truth to Work* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 191. He argues against prioritizing one type of passage over another—an argument this dissertation rejects (see pp. 155-58).

In the temptation narrative (4:1-11), Jesus renounces the option of wielding power over the kingdoms of the world . . . . In the three passion predictions (16:21-23, 17:22-23; 20:17-19), Jesus foretells his fate as one who will be 'persecuted for righteousness' sake,' and he intimates that those who follow him will suffer the same fate (16:24-26). In Gethsemane, Jesus struggles with this vocation but aligns his will with the Father's will that he should drink the cup of suffering (26:36-47).<sup>88</sup>

Hays finds Yoder's argument persuasive, which asserts that the temptation to refuse the cup is precisely the temptation to resort to armed resistance. Jesus, however, "chooses the way of suffering obedience instead of the way of violence."<sup>89</sup> For Hays, this paradigm of Jesus is the most instructive aspect of the New Testament's teaching on violence. He summarizes the importance of the paradigm of Jesus' life by concluding, "The death of Jesus exemplifies the same character qualities that are taught as normative for Jesus' disciples."<sup>90</sup> So for Hays, the *narrative* of Christ's submissive life and willing death most clearly instructs the church regarding non-violence.

Even if one agrees that the paradigm of the life of Christ teaches non-violence—an argument that is by no means universally held—the fact remains it does so less explicitly than many other didactic passages. Paul's instruction to believers in Romans 12 is much more explicit.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Live in harmony with one another. Repay no one evil for evil . . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:14, 16-21)

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<sup>88</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 322.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, referring to John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 46, where Yoder asks, "What was the option with which [Jesus] was struggling? . . . The only imaginable real option in terms of historical seriousness, and the only one with even a slim basis in the text, is the hypothesis that Jesus was drawn, at this very last moment of temptation, to think *once again* of the messianic violence with which he had been tempted since the beginning."

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*

Didactic passages like Romans 12 are abundant (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:9-13). Yet Hays gives greater emphasis to the paradigm of Jesus' life in order to teach non-violence. As indicated, this approach is problematic because narrative passages are less explicit than didactic passages and allow for greater subjectivity in interpretation. This subjectivity is demonstrated precisely by Hays's emphasis on the paradigm of Jesus' life to teach nonviolence.

Jesus came to suffer redemptively (Mark 8:31). Yet his suffering was unique since it accomplished salvation for sinners. Hays, of course, would agree with that. He would then add that it was also a paradigm for how believers should respond to suffering. Yet the Biblical writers nowhere explicitly make that connection. As Douglas Moo argues, "The biblical authors will often have narrowly historical reasons for narrating certain events. We can only know what is paradigmatic and what is not by the biblical author's commentary on these narratives."<sup>91</sup> Gilbert Meilaender adds, "Hays's emphasis upon the way in which the text shapes a symbolic world that provides paradigms for action . . . may blur more than it ought the distinction between what the Bible narrates or reports and what it teaches."<sup>92</sup> Hays insists that the call to imitate Christ is a call to follow him in taking up the cross, the way of nonviolence. To be sure, the New Testament does call for believers to imitate the example of Jesus. But it is not clear that the New Testament writers are specifically encouraging nonviolence by calling for believers to imitate Christ. At the most the call to take up the cross (Matt 16:24) is a call to suffer persecution willingly and submissively for the sake of the gospel.<sup>93</sup> The uncertainty of the narrative passages, Moo argues, should lead the interpreter back to the

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<sup>91</sup>Moo, review of *The Moral Vision*, 275.

<sup>92</sup>Meilaender, review of *The Moral Vision*, 63.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid. Meilaender is insightful: "The Cross is the embodiment of Jesus' vocation. The several crosses taken up by his followers in different times and places will not be reenactments of his" (62).

"crucial evidence of teaching passages."<sup>94</sup> Apart from explicit commentary by the author as to what is paradigmatic in the narrative passage, the interpreter should give primacy to didactic passages in which application is more explicit.

**When narrative is primary.** A good example of the danger of giving narrative passages primacy in interpretation is seen in the writings of many open theists. Millard Erickson, in *What Does God Know and When Does He know It?*, demonstrates that some open theists, in building their doctrine of God, give priority to narrative passages over didactic texts.<sup>95</sup> It is common for openness theologians to emphasize narrative portions of a passage such as 1 Samuel 15, in which God is said to "regret" that he made Saul king, while simultaneously marginalizing a didactic section in the same context that emphasizes that God is not like a man that he should repent (1 Sam 15:29). This sort of interpretation is common to openness theology, as Pinnock makes clear, admitting, "In terms of biblical interpretation, I give particular weight to narrative and to the language of personal relationships in it."<sup>96</sup> John Sanders, in *The God Who Risks*,<sup>97</sup> "goes to great lengths to establish patterns from narrative passages on divine-human relationships and then uses those patterns to reinterpret clear, didactic Scriptures. The stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Gideon, Moses and David are all cited as examples of God changing his mind, repenting, being disappointed or caught off guard by what happened."<sup>98</sup> In fact, it is accurate to say that "most of the biblical case for openness

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<sup>94</sup>Moo, review of *The Moral Vision*, 63.

<sup>95</sup>Erickson, *What Does God Know*, 73-76.

<sup>96</sup>Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 20.

<sup>97</sup>John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

<sup>98</sup>Tom Ascol, "Pastoral Implications of Open Theism," *FJ* 46 (2001): 10.

comes from narrative passages and the Old Testament Prophets, which are not ideal types of literature for [deriving] doctrinal conclusions. For learning who God is, passages that have as their objective to teach that doctrine are much more satisfactory."<sup>99</sup>

The sum effect of this interpretive strategy is that the plain meaning of many passages is distorted, if not completely denied. The story of Joseph is a useful example. At the end of the narrative, Joseph makes a famous declaration to his brothers which reveals his confidence in God's sovereign, detailed providence over his life: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen 50:20). Sanders exemplifies the typical openness interpretation of this passage. He writes,

I take this to mean that God has brought something good out of their evil actions. . . . Although [Joseph] acknowledges that they sold him into Egypt, he suggests that everyone look on the bright side—what God has done through this. Their lives and those of the Egyptians have been spared the devastating effects of the famine.<sup>100</sup>

For Sanders, Joseph cannot mean that God planned and sovereignly guided the events of history. "From a profound, theological declaration of God's unmitigated providence, Sanders reduces Joseph's words to, 'Serendipity!'"<sup>101</sup> It may be an overgeneralization to say that giving priority to narrative texts *produces* such novel interpretations. It may even be possible to be committed to the priority of narrative and remain faithful in exegesis. However, a much surer footing for proper interpretation is found with a prioritization of didactic passages.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 488. Here, I understand Thomas to say simply that narrative passages do not teach doctrine as explicitly as didactic texts.

<sup>100</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 55.

<sup>101</sup>Ascol, "Pastoral Implications," 11.

<sup>102</sup>The interpreter who comes to the narrative of Joseph and prioritizes other less subjective texts (e.g., 1 Tim 6:15; Ps 115:3; Dan 4:35; Rom 9:15-21) will surely arrive at less novel interpretations.

The point here does not concern particular conclusions. After all, there seem to be relatively few similarities between Hays's conclusions and those of John Sanders and other open theists. What Hays shares in common with them is an interpretive strategy which prioritizes narrative texts.<sup>103</sup> That strategy seems to lead open theists to some historically novel conclusions regarding God's foreknowledge. The result is not so disastrous to Hays's conclusions, yet it certainly does strike at the very heart of his method of using Scripture in ethics.

Hays, for his part, argues that deemphasizing "the narrative particularity of the New Testament" has deleterious effects. One sees an example of this sort of mistake, according to Hays, in Reinhold Niebuhr's treatment of the ethic of Jesus. Niebuhr "isolates the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount from their narrative context and ignores the story of the passion. Thus, he is able to characterize the ethic of Jesus as an 'impossible ideal.'"<sup>104</sup> Niebuhr's mistake was in not reading Matthew's gospel as story. Hays maintains, "A hermeneutic that attends to the narrative form of the gospel message will insist that Jesus' disciples are called to follow him in the suffering love of enemies. Thus, the meaning of love as an ideal or principle is specified for us in and through the story."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>The key is the methodology of prioritizing narrative. The same issue is found in the debate regarding the role relationships of men and women. Harold Hoehner argues for women pastors based on the fact that "Priscilla, along with Aquila, taught Apollos the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:25-26), which would indicate that a woman may not be limited to teaching only women" (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 546). Hoehner bases his view on an incidental reference in the narrative of Acts, and is thus prepared to overturn an explicit prohibition from 1 Tim 2:12. While the issue of women in ministry is certainly larger than these two passages, hermeneutical sensibility demands that one admit these two passages are not equally explicit (i.e., it is not clear from the Acts narrative what role Aquila had in the instruction and whether the instruction was public or private). The two passages cannot stand equal in interpretative significance, given they are not equally explicit.

<sup>104</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 295.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

The problem with this example is that many other interpreters who, along with Niebuhr, reject "narrative particularity"<sup>106</sup> would nevertheless agree with Hays's strict call to discipleship. That is, rejecting giving priority to narrative does not necessarily lead the interpreter to dismiss the high demands of Christian discipleship. That issue may have been instrumental in Niebuhr's own appreciation for how believers are to love their enemies (a question extraneous to this dissertation). The point here is simply that such a link is not necessary.

Therefore, the connection Hays tries to make between rejecting "narrative particularity" and faulty exegesis, is not inevitable, either for Niebuhr or this dissertation. One might argue, presumably, that Hays will not inevitably come up with faulty interpretations because of his commitment to "narrative particularity." This is true. However, narrative texts are by nature more susceptible than didactic texts to the subjective influences of the interpreter. For that reason, it seems best to reject narrative priority as a hermeneutical principle. More will be said below in defining a better approach to didactic and narrative texts.

### **Metaphors and Moral Judgments**

At this point, it is apparent that some significant concerns exist with the method of using Scripture in ethics employed in *The Moral Vision*. Having addressed concerns related to Hays's fragmented view of Scripture, his use of focal images, and the priority he gives to narrative, one other issue deserves attention: Hays's system of appropriating ancient biblical texts to current-day settings—a process he calls metaphor-making. This evaluation will begin with a brief sketch of Hays's prescription and then raise several points of concern over his presuppositions and application.

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<sup>106</sup>The phrase "narrative particularity" is used here synonymously with prioritizing narrative. It is a phrase Hays uses (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 295).



**Imaginative analogies.** Hays's desire in *The Moral Vision* is to lay out a strategy to allow an ancient book to continue speaking nineteen hundred years after its composition. That task is complicated by, among other things, the distance of time and differences of culture between the text and the reader. What is needed, then, to make an ancient text applicable to contemporary readers is some method to make "the Word leap the historical gap." Hays suggests this is done when a community of believers "formulate imaginative analogies between the stories told in the texts and the story lived out by [the] community in a very different historical setting."<sup>107</sup>

Of course, it is no surprise that Hays emphasizes the stories of the biblical text. As mentioned earlier, Hays lays great stress on the primacy of the paradigmatic mode of ethical instruction. He aligns himself with Barth, Yoder, and Hauerwas who read the New Testament primarily in the form of story. The gospels, Acts, and the Apocalypse present an unfolding drama of God's involvement with and eventual victory in the whole creation. Story even lies behind the epistles, since they are the early church's attempts to reflect on the story of Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Story is certainly prominent in Hays's reading of the New Testament. Beyond that, however, Hays sees all of life as story. Contemporary believers seek analogies in the biblical story that correspond to the story being lived out in their own community. Such work calls for discerning analogical relations between the biblical text and the community's life and then reforming communal life so that those analogies will be made more clearly visible.

Hays calls this work an integrative act of the imagination. The task is to discern how contemporary believers, despite a cultural and historical gap, might answer

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 298. This approach bears some resemblance to William Spohn's *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* In an endnote, Hays says Spohn's work "came to my attention too late to be integrated into the following discussion of moral judgment as an act of analogical imagination" (ibid., 311).

<sup>108</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 295.

to and participate in the truth narrated by the New Testament story. According to Hays, that task calls for metaphor-making—the process through which a community of believers places their life imaginatively within the world articulated by the biblical texts.

Metaphors are incongruous conjunctions of two images—or two semantic fields—that turn out, upon reflection, to be like one another in ways not ordinarily recognized. They shock us into thought by positing unexpected analogies . . . . Thus, metaphors reshape perception.<sup>109</sup>

A few of the examples Hays uses may clarify how metaphors do this.

Hays contends that metaphor can work at the level of the individual image or sentence (e.g., Jesus statement in John 6 "I am the bread of life"), as well as at the higher level of story (as it does in the parables in the synoptic Gospels). It may occur on an even larger scale (e.g., when one comes to understand the Gospels, with the story of a crucified Messiah). In each case, the basic work of metaphor is to shock one into thought by positing unexpected analogies.<sup>110</sup> One useful example of how metaphors provide a spark of imagination is found in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus originally told the parable to Pharisees who were lovers of money (Luke 16:14), but Hays maintains, "when we read the text metaphorically, we hear it as told to us" for a "metaphorical shock occurs when we see our own economic practices projected side by side with those of the rich man who ignored poor Lazarus at his door."<sup>111</sup> This metaphorical shock helps the word leap the gap. Another example is found in Acts 2:42-47 in which the early church's economic practices are described as causing a metaphorical shock. Hays maintains that the text gives no rules or principles for life, only a story that calls for the contemporary church to live analogously. Again, the word leaps the gap. Hays considers this metaphorical hermeneutic fundamental to New Testament

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 301-02.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 302.

ethics.

Having clarified what Hays is calling for, it is increasingly apparent that serious questions with this method deserve attention. The place to begin is the issue of how one can be certain an analogy is appropriate.

**Certainty of judgment.** The work of positing analogies between the biblical text and contemporary situations involves the interpreter's imagination. Therefore it is reasonable to ask how one can be certain a judgment is faithful. That is, upon what basis can a community of believers conclude that its metaphorical appropriation of Scripture is faithful to the will of God? Hays offers three answers. First, he appeals to the Holy Spirit, contending, "Where faithful interpreters listen patiently to the Word of God in Scripture and discern fresh imaginative links between the biblical story and our time, we confess—always with reverent caution—that the Spirit is inspiring such readings."<sup>112</sup> Hays offers a second guideline when he insists that a given metaphorical reading "must be tested prayerfully within the community of faith by others who seek God's will along with us through a close reading of the text."<sup>113</sup> A final way of evaluating whether a particular analogy is faithful is to ask whether it harmonizes with the fundamental biblical story as identified by the focal images of community, cross, and new creation.

It is not clear, however, that these answers actually treat the uncertainty inherent to metaphor-making. For instance, what marks distinguish the Holy Spirit's guidance in making analogies? How can a believing community know their appropriations are inspired by the Spirit? What characteristics do "faithful interpreters" exhibit? What does it mean to listen patiently to Scripture? Hays's second answer is no more profitable. Pertinent questions include the following: what is the relationship

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 304.

between individual interpreters and the community of faith? How is a given metaphorical appropriation tested prayerfully in a believing community? How does a community's reading of the text relate to an individual's metaphorical appropriation when the individual claims to be guided by the Spirit? The third criteria Hays suggests raises questions as well. Are the focal images of community, cross, and new creation transcultural, theological symbols or are they inculturated aspects of the biblical story that need to be "translated."<sup>114</sup> In what sense is an appropriation "consonant" with the biblical story?

One can only anticipate how Hays would answer some of these concerns. Hays would likely conclude that a consensus reached by members of a believing community would, in fact, be consonant with the images of community, cross, and new creation. Yet what about contrasting conclusions reached by distinct communities of faith. Such is the issue with many social ethics issues today such as homosexuality, abortion, and the role of women, in which believing communities arrive at conflicting conclusions. Are contrasting metaphorical appropriations equally valid? Can metaphorical analogies drawn from the New Testament that approve of abortion be as equally valid as those analogies drawn from the New Testament that disapprove of abortion? Of course, Hays would deny (as his "Pragmatic Section" demonstrates) that distinct perspectives are equally valid. Nevertheless, *The Moral Vision* fails to help the reader determine what is a faithful appropriation of Scripture.

The issue of the Spirit's role raises yet another concern. Hays contends that as the community of faith grows in maturity the "Spirit reshapes the community into unexpected metaphorical reflections of the biblical stories and thereby casts new light

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<sup>114</sup>Gordon Fee uses the term "translate" to refer to the way exegetes appropriate biblical passages that are culturally relative to modern day situations ("Hermeneutics and Common Sense," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 161-86).

back onto the text. [A] transformed community reflects the glory of God and thus illuminates the meaning of the text."<sup>115</sup> Hays concedes that such acts are "impossible to predict and difficult to discern." Therefore, if such actions of the Spirit are hard to discern, can certainty ever be gained regarding whether it is the Spirit at work as opposed to the predilections of the interpreter? Furthermore, in what sense does a community illuminate a text? Scripture affirms that the Spirit illuminates God's word, but nowhere indicates that the transformed community (or individual) does the same.<sup>116</sup> Paul asserts that believers have "received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand" (1 Cor 2:12). For Paul, understanding comes through human "words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13). It is clear that the Spirit illuminates Scripture; it is unclear that 2 Corinthians 3:18 teaches, as Hays maintains, that as the church becomes more like Christ the community itself illuminates the word of God.<sup>117</sup>

**Metaphor-making and violence in defense of justice.** To see how uncertain Hays's approach is, one need only apply it to the first moral issue presented in the pragmatic section of *The Moral Vision*—violence in defense of justice. In this chapter, Hays denounces all forms of violence and condemns the church for being "deeply compromised and committed to nationalism, violence, and idolatry."<sup>118</sup> Hays calls the church massively faithless in this area. But such a diagnosis causes a problem if

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<sup>115</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 304-05.

<sup>116</sup>See John Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 217-35.

<sup>117</sup>If Hays simply means that as the community comes more and more to reflect the image of Christ, it will understand and apply Scripture more accurately, he would be correct. He seems to go beyond that, however, contending that the community actually illuminates the text.

<sup>118</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 343.

one applies Hays's criteria for evaluating faithful imaginative analogies between the New Testament and the contemporary day. One mark of a faithful analogy, according to Hays, is that it is commended by the community of faith. Hays argues, a faithful reading is "tested prayerfully within the community of faith by others who seek God's will along with us through a close reading of the text."<sup>119</sup> However, two forms of violence—self-defense and just war—are acceptable to the overwhelming majority of Christian communities. Is Hays's reading faithful if the majority of Christian communities disagree? Is Hays's reading faithful if his own denomination affirms the use of military force?<sup>120</sup> Is either position wrong? According to Hays's own criteria, his imaginative analogy about violence is lacking in validation. The point here is not to argue against Hays's particular judgments about non-violence, but to point out that Hays's system does not help an interpreter be certain an analogy is faithful.

**Enculturated truth and timeless principles.** According to Hays, it is improper to subject texts that are predominantly narrative and occasional to analytic procedures which abstract general principles from them. Such an approach is impossible since the ethical norms of Scripture are thoroughly "enculturated." Hays is reacting to the method of applying the New Testament to modern-day situations by abstracting ethical principles from the text and discarding the husk of history and culture. That method is illegitimate, according to Hays, because ethical norms have their roots in the earth, not in the air. Hays's argument is undermined by two things: his own metaphor-making approach depends on timeless principles, and the nature of morality as rooted in the character of God.

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 304.

<sup>120</sup>Consider Hays's "Open Letter to United Methodists," in which he recognizes the stark disagreement that exists between his own view and that of his denomination over the war in Iraq ("A Season of Repentance: An Open Letter to United Methodists," CC 121, no.17 (1994): 8-9.

Hays gives several examples of how the modern-day church should appropriate the ethical norms of the New Testament. In particular, he interacts with several texts, such as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The contemporary church should read the story and be shocked when it sees its own economic practices projected side by side with those of the rich man who ignored poor Lazarus at his door. According to Hays, this is a warning for the contemporary church, because "the Word leaps the gap."<sup>121</sup>

A concern with Hays's suggestion arises immediately, however, over what part of the word leaps the gap. What aspect of the story of the rich man and Lazarus makes the leap? If, as Hays argues, there are no timeless principles which stand outside of enculturated narrative, what aspect of the story leaps to the contemporary situation? Most commentators agree that there is a close connection between the parable and the preceding section in which Jesus said "No servant can serve two masters . . . . You cannot serve both God and money" (16:13).<sup>122</sup> If that connection is legitimate,<sup>123</sup> then the story of the rich man and Lazarus depends on the timeless principles taught earlier.<sup>124</sup> Beyond that, other moral principles are clearly implied though never specified. The larger context of the gospel of Luke, with his special concern for one's moral obligation to the weak and

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<sup>121</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 302.

<sup>122</sup>See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 632-39; and Darrel Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 1360-1379.

<sup>123</sup>See George W. Knight, "Luke 16:19-31: The Rich Man and Lazarus," *RE* 94 (1997): 277-83; Adolph Schlatter, *Das Evangelium des Lukas* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960).

<sup>124</sup>A thorough discussion of principles will come below, but here it is enough to distinguish principles from rules. Principles are broad commands which guide behavior without specifying particulars. Rules dictate actions in specific situations. See Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 244-45; and Jack Kuhatschek, *Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 33-35.

poor, supplies the backdrop to this story.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the message that leaps to the modern-day is genuine love for neighbor, devotion to God more than money, and concern for the poor. So the aspect of the story that the interpreter appropriates to his modern-day context is principles which lie behind the story and are left unspecified. The fact that they are unnamed, however, does not negate the importance they play in informing the reader of the story's intended meaning. In fact, this is the only possible means of appropriating an ancient (and especially a narrative) text. The interpreter is dependent on other Scripture which makes these timeless ethical principles explicit. Therefore, Hays is actually depending on timeless principles to inform the contemporary reader of how to appropriate the ancient text. Hays does not discount the notion of ethical principles,<sup>126</sup> but he also does not call the reader to identify such principles while seeking imaginative analogies between the text and the contemporary day.<sup>127</sup> Perhaps another example would clarify this point.

Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37, according to Hays, offers a positive paradigm for the church to appropriate. He considers this story a useful metaphorical text because it provides "neither rules for community life nor economic principles."<sup>128</sup> Instead, the text offers an opportunity for contemporary believers to live analogously apart from specific economic principles and in this way the word leaps the gap. Of course, although Hays does not identify them, timeless principles are at work in this story, even if unstated.

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<sup>125</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of Charity," *Int* 31 (1977): 251-62.

<sup>126</sup>See Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 208-09, 293-96.

<sup>127</sup>The argument proposed here is not that Hays does not use timeless principles, for surely he does (*ibid.*, 208-09). However, his approach does not specify a particular way in which the reader identifies and employs these timeless principles when seeking to appropriate the ancient text to modern-day situations. Hays calls for the reader to work backwards; instead of bringing the principle in the text to bear on modern life, the interpreter should seek to "relocate [his] contemporary experience onto the pattern of the New Testament's story of Jesus" (*ibid.*, 302).

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*



Behind the actions described in this narrative lie the principle of selflessness and considering others more important than oneself (Phil 2:3), as well as the principle of love for other believers (1 John 3:14-18). In this example provided by Hays, the modern-day church lives analogously when it appreciates the timeless principles behind the actions described in the text and finds avenues to apply those same principles in modern-day circumstances. A community of believers which emulates the pattern of life described in Acts 4:32-37 apart from the timeless principles behind the narrative may simulate the economic practices described by Luke yet never live analogous to the story. For instance, a community of believers in a socialist state could emulate the pattern of activity of the early church and completely miss the appropriate response to the biblical text. Therefore, it is essential that the modern-day church determine which ethical principles lie behind the actions narrated by the text and find appropriate avenues for applying those principles. Without appreciation for those timeless principles, simulating the behavior described in the narrative fails to fulfill the ethical purpose of the text.

Walter Kaiser suggests one way to discover the permanent and abiding aspect of any passage is to ask what "informing theology" lies behind (or previous to) any given text. For Kaiser, only this informing theology ("*antecedent* theology" is Kaiser preferred term) can inform a passage, yet the "diachronic accumulation of theology provides the same heart of the message for all peoples in all times."<sup>129</sup> Even in a text with historical particularity (which all texts have), there lies behind it an accumulating theology shaped by principles of enduring ethical implication. Evaluating Kaiser's suggestion, it is not clear that such a devotion to antecedent theology is warranted. Often times a principle is stated more clearly or explicitly in subsequent revelation. Indeed the very notion of progressive revelation entails this. An interpreter finds validation for his reading of

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<sup>129</sup>Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 162.

principles behind a text when he uses the analogy of Scripture. A unified, internally consistent view of the canon bolsters the method of finding abiding principles in both antecedent and subsequent theology.

There is a second problem with Hays's argument about enculturated principles which will be touched on briefly. Perhaps unwittingly, Hays roots the ethical mandates of the Bible in the culture of the biblical text. He considers it essential not to denigrate the particularity of the New Testament texts: "The storied, culturally specific forms of the apostolic testimony are to be received and heeded just as they present themselves to us."<sup>130</sup> Of course, the ethical implications within the text are tied to the "historical wrapper" of the text. But a distinction between the historical wrapper and the ethical principles within the text does not denigrate the historical specificity of the text and should not lead to it being discarded. Such ethical principles are not, as Hays argues, rooted in the culture of the text. They are rooted in the transcendent character of God.<sup>131</sup> Since God is the author of the biblical text, it is his character (and the ethical principles which flow from it) which stands above cultural limitations and historical specificity.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps if Hays gave a greater place to the Old Testament in his system the significant changes in culture and historical specificity would force him to consider the transcendent nature of the ethic of Scripture.

**Combining interpretation and application.** Readers should have one other concern with Hays's method described in *The Moral Vision*—Hays's confusion of

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<sup>130</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 300.

<sup>131</sup>Scott Rae contends, "Morality is not grounded ultimately in God's commands, but in his character, which then expresses itself in his commands" (*Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 32). See pp. 124-127 of this dissertation.

<sup>132</sup>Jack Kuhatschek, in *Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible*, calls believers to "look beyond the specific commands, examples and promises of Scripture in order to seek the mind and heart of God" (62).

interpretation and application. Hays maintains that a crucial insight into the hermeneutical relation between the New Testament and the church is found in Paul's declaration that the Corinthian church is a letter of Christ (2 Cor 3:3). As a community of believers is transformed to reflect the glory of God it increasingly illuminates the meaning of the text. Hays maintains that "*right reading of the New Testament occurs only where the Word is embodied*. We learn what the text means only if we submit ourselves to its power in such a way that we are changed by it."<sup>133</sup> Later, Hays restates his position by quoting Nicholas Lash: "The fundamental form of the *Christian* interpretation of scripture is the life, activity, and organization of the believing community."<sup>134</sup> One might think that Hays means simply the believing community is in the best position to interpret Scripture clearly when it is seeking to obey that Scripture which it already understands. But that is not what Hays means. For Hays, "Until we see the text lived, we cannot begin to conceive what it means."<sup>135</sup>

But is that true? Is proper interpretation dependent on application? Is application even a part of interpretation? Robert Thomas surveyed current conversations taking place over the definition of "interpretation" and concludes that the meaning of the word is far from clear. In contemporary literature, the word interpretation "has the following variations: (a) an understanding of the authorial intention, (b) an understanding of the authorial intention and the present-day relevance, (c) an understanding of the present-day relevance, and (d) a practical compliance with the contemporary application."<sup>136</sup> Thomas traces this development back to the influence of philosophy and

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<sup>133</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 305, italics original.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., quoting Nicholas Lash, "Performing the Scriptures," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), 42.

<sup>135</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 306.

<sup>136</sup>Robert Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?," *JETS* 39 (1996): 248. See also Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: North Western University Press, 1969), ch. 3.

modern linguistic theory in the field of biblical hermeneutics, as introduced by the work of Wimsatt and Beardsley and most prominently through Gadamer and Ricoeur.<sup>137</sup> These authors have changed the complexion of the interpretive enterprise during the last half of the twentieth century.<sup>138</sup>

It may seem that Hays stands in good company when he combines interpretation and application. There is, however, sufficient reason to reject Hays's suggestion. Accurate interpretation and appropriate application are found only in a process in which the two disciplines are distinct. Brian Shealy suggests two dangers of failing to distinguish between interpretation and application.<sup>139</sup> First, "failure to isolate application from interpretation creates human-centered, rather than a God-centered, interpretation of the Bible."<sup>140</sup> When application and interpretation are not distinguished, the reader is no longer primarily interested in questions such as "Is it true?" and "What does the text mean?"<sup>141</sup> Instead, the reader is interested primarily in making the Bible useful for contemporary life. Shealy asserts that application is certainly important, however, it should not be the proverbial tail wagging the dog.

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<sup>137</sup>Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends," 249, referencing W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468-88.

<sup>138</sup>Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends," 249, referencing Walter Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 28-29. Kaiser contends, "The impact each [man] has already had on our generation of interpreters—not to mention the future generations of interpreters of all types—has been nothing short of a major revolution in the way we assign meaning to written materials, including the Bible. Hardly any sphere of the interpretive process has escaped major restructuring and rethinking" (ibid., 31).

<sup>139</sup>Brian Shealy, "Redrawing the Line between Hermeneutics and Application," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 165-94.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>141</sup>Such questions were characteristic of the older exegetical approach typified by Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970). See Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 10.

The second problem, Shealy notes, with failing to distinguish interpretation from application is the atmosphere of confusion such an approach creates.<sup>142</sup> The older method maintained that for each passage "Interpretation is one, application is many."<sup>143</sup> The newer method asserts that each passage has as many potential meanings as it has interpreters. James DeYoung and Sarah Hurty's book *Beyond the Obvious* encourages this sort of confusion.<sup>144</sup> The authors suggest that "New Testament writers applied the Old Testament to their own situations and thereby derived new *meanings* for numerous passages of the Old Testament."<sup>145</sup> DeYoung and Hurty commend an approach to modern-day interpreters that calls for "finding out how the Scriptures apply to twentieth-century situations and contextualizing its message to fit modern audiences."<sup>146</sup> Shealy concludes that pervasive confusion would ensue from such an approach since it would promote variable meanings for each passage applied. Hays seems to indicate this is a possibility when he assigns interpretive authority to the community of believers led by the Spirit. Oddly enough, Hays does not operate this way when he interprets Scripture in the first part of *The Moral Vision*. But that sort of contradiction is typical of those who support this new hermeneutic, according to Moisés Silva:

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<sup>142</sup>Shealy, "Redrawing the Line," 181.

<sup>143</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 113.

<sup>144</sup>James DeYoung and Sarah Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious* (Gresham, OR: Vision House, 1995).

<sup>145</sup>Shealy, "Redrawing the Line," 181, emphasis added. In contrast, see Greg Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994); Robert Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (2002): 79-98; Dan McCartney, "New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutics*, ed. Harvie Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 101-16; and Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>146</sup>Shealy, "Redrawing the Line," 181.

From time to time, one may hear a scholar at a professional meeting who seems to adopt the newer approach at least theoretically but whose actual interpretive work does not appear substantially different from standard historical exegesis. In other words, the abandonment of authorial and historical interpretation would be difficult to document from the usual articles published in the recognized journals of biblical scholarship.<sup>147</sup>

Essentially Hays proposes a method of integrating interpretation and application that he does not follow. That is why, in many respects, Hays's own interpretive work is better than the method he proposes.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to examine the methods proposed by Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision*. Several strengths were enumerated along with four problems that arise from his use of Scripture in Christian ethics. Hays begins the task of moral deliberation with a fragmented view of Scripture and must impose a structure of synthesis on the text in order to hear the biblical witnesses speaking in one voice. Such an approach ultimately fails, because it creates the very unity it seeks and therefore shifts the locus of authority away from the divine text and onto the reader. Secondly, Hays proposes three focal images which help focus the disparate moral voices of the New Testament into a unified moral witness. His focal images create a canon within the canon by guiding interpretation and effectively dismissing those portions of the New Testament which do not fit the continuity of the larger scriptural story.

A third concern with Hays's method involves the priority he places on narrative texts. There are two problems with such an approach. First, Hays undermines his own emphasis on the canon. It is possible that despite his desire not to exclude parts of the canon that don't fit one's predetermined agenda, Hays does exactly that. Second, by prioritizing narrative, Hays opens the door for personal bias and subjectivity in interpretation. Lastly, Hays's process for appropriating Scripture by the modern-day

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<sup>147</sup>Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 234-35.

believer raises serious concerns as well. Hays gives little help in determining whether an analogy is faithful to the will of God. The process relies on transcendent ethical principles, though the interpreter is never called on to identify them explicitly. Finally, the process fails because Hays combines the work of interpretation and application.

The next chapter will propose a method, in conversation with *The Moral Vision*, for appropriating Scripture to contemporary ethical issues. Such a method will build on presuppositions regarding the nature of Scripture and the nature of Christian ethics. Given these views of Scripture and ethics, the argument will be made that it is possible to locate a unified moral voice in Scripture, using harmonization and the analogy of Scripture. The chapter will then show how one moves from the ancient text to understanding and on to application. Finally, the chapter will demonstrate the method prescribed, giving particular attention to application.

CHAPTER 4  
SCRIPTURE AND ETHICS:  
A PRESCRIPTIVE MODEL

The previous chapter pointed out four primary problems with Hays's *The Moral Vision*. Much of his approach is beneficial. Chief among the strengths of Hays's method is the role of the community in implementing the ethical instruction of Scripture. Yet the problems addressed in the last chapter are deleterious enough to Hays's method that another approach is needed. This chapter seeks to meet that need. The chapter involves three sections. The second section—the primary component of the chapter—prescribes the steps to follow in order to use Scripture in moral deliberation. The final section tests the prescribed model by examining the modern-day ethical issue of *in vitro* fertilization. Before turning to the prescriptive plan, the first section will acknowledge certain presuppositions.

**Presuppositions for Building a Prescriptive Plan**

With any plan for using Scripture in ethics, one necessarily will presuppose certain things. Presuppositions serve as foundational convictions upon which the structure of the plan is built.<sup>1</sup> Richard Hays is not exception in this regard. Some of Hays's presuppositions were addressed in the previous chapter. For instance, Hays presupposes that the ethical vision of the New Testament is rooted in the culture or history of the period in which it was recorded.<sup>2</sup> This is clearly a presupposition because

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<sup>1</sup>Bultmann argued that exegesis cannot be done without presuppositions, but the argument is equally valid for any theological endeavor (Rudolph Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible," *Encounter* 21 [1960]: 194-200).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross,*



he does not buttress the assertion with arguments.<sup>3</sup> In the interest of clarity, the presuppositions upon which this proposal is built will be made plain in the beginning. This chapter will attempt modest justifications for the particular beliefs stated herein, but obviously entire chapters could be devoted to defending these views. Two sets of presuppositions serve as foundational convictions for the plan to use Scripture in Christian ethics presented in this chapter. First, convictions about the nature of Christian ethics will be clarified, and second, convictions about the nature of Scripture will be made clear.

### **The Nature of Christian Ethics**

Among the many introductory things that could be said about Christian ethics, three aspects of its nature need to be articulated. Christian ethics is fundamentally Trinitarian. First, it is grounded in the character of God. That is, Christian ethics is not based on divine fiat. It is based in God's nature. Second, this divine standard is revealed in the word of God, initially in the written word and finally and completely in Jesus Christ, the incarnate word. Third, individuals are empowered for ethical living by the Holy Spirit, who shapes one's character and then produces behavior in line with godly character. Christian ethics is a Trinitarian discipline because it is rooted in the character of God, revealed most fully in the incarnate word of God, and empowered by the Spirit of God. Each of these aspects of the nature of Christian ethics deserves discussion.

**Rooted in the character of God.** One of the major concerns raised in the previous chapter dealt with Hays's view of ethical norms. His conviction is that ethical

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*New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 299.

<sup>3</sup>I do not consider the argument in chap. 13 a *justification* for Hays's belief that ethical norms in Scripture are rooted in culture so much as an argument for "[valuing] rather than denigrating the particularity of the New Testament texts" (ibid., 300).

norms have no ahistorical character since they are rooted in the culture in which they are espoused. Such a view, however, stands in tension with Scripture's view of the moral life. According to Scripture, ethical norms are rooted in the character of God:

That which gives wholeness, harmony, and consistency to the morality of the Bible is the character of God. Thus the ethical directions and morality of the Bible were grounded . . . in the character and nature of God. What God requires was what He Himself was and is.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible instructs persons made in the image of God how to live because the ground of ethics is the person and character of an holy God. Thus, God commands Israel, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). The ethical norms of Scripture are rooted in God's character such that God can say through the prophet Jeremiah that to know the Lord is to know how to live:

"Did not your father have food and drink?  
He did what was right and just,  
so all went well with him.  
He defended the cause of the poor and needy,  
and so all went well.  
Is that not what it means to know me?"  
declares the LORD. (Jer 22:15-16 NIV)

To know God is to know what is right and proper. "Christian morality," Carl Henry argues in *Christian Personal Ethics*, "is not the revelation of an ideal that exists eternally in the Divine mind to which man is summoned. It is the revelation of a perfection realized eternally in the Divine nature that is validated forever by the divine will. It is the ethics of the Holy God."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, answers to questions such as "What kind of person should one be?" and "How then shall one live so as to do what is right, just, and good?" is

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<sup>4</sup>Walter Kaiser, "Ethics," in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 442.

<sup>5</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 206. See also Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), 199-203.

located in the character and will of God.<sup>6</sup>

There are only two alternatives to such a position. According to Arthur Holmes, if ethical obligation is not imposed by God, it is either self-imposed or imposed by society. Jean Paul Sartre's view that moral obligation is self-imposed ought to be rejected by evangelicals because it operates with atheistic assumptions in which no higher authority than self exists.<sup>7</sup> The other alternative is a socially-imposed ethic, such as the social-contract theory suggested by John Locke.<sup>8</sup> Again however, the self is the ultimate authority in such a system, since the power of moral imperatives depends on the kind of person one wants to be and the way of life one prefers.<sup>9</sup> Scripture rejects both of these alternatives.<sup>10</sup> The roots of Christian ethics, contrary to Hays, are not in the earth or in the

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<sup>6</sup>Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 206. See especially chap. 7, "Transcendent Revelation as the Source of Christian Ethics," 188-208.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur Holmes, *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 70. Holmes argues, "A human being is nothing but what he makes of himself, so that we each bear the full responsibility for shaping our existence. But in choosing what we want to be, [Sartre held,] we 'at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be' (ibid., quoting Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman [New York: Philosophical Library, 1947], 20).

<sup>8</sup>See John Locke, *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, Great Books in Philosophy (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986).

<sup>9</sup>See R. M. Hare, *Essays on the Moral Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 20-21; idem, *The Language of Morals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>10</sup>Carl Henry argues, "The doctrine that the good is to be identified with the will of God cuts across secular ethics at almost every point. It protests against Utilitarianism, and its validation of the good by an appeal to consequences alone. It indicts Kant's supposition that duty and obligation rest upon a wholly immanent basis. According to Kant, the human will alone imposes man's duties upon him and affirms for him the categorical imperative. This theory of morality mediated to the modern man the artificial hope that the objectivity of the moral order could be maintained by a deliberate severance of duty and the good from the will of God. The Hebrew-Christian ethical perspective also challenges the many species of humanistic ethics so influential in the Western world today. Biblical ethics discredits an autonomous morality. It gives theonomous ethics its classic form—the identification of the moral law with the Divine will. In Hebrew-Christian revelation, distinctions in ethics reduce to what is good or what

sky, but the character of God. Peter argues from this basis in 1 Peter 1:14-15 when he instructs his readers, "do not to be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

**Christian ethics revealed in God's word.** Christian ethics is rooted in the person of God and it is discovered in God's self-revelation. According to Carl Henry, the very term "Christian ethics" implies a supernatural orientation.

Christian ethics derives its content and sanction and dynamic and goal from God—not from some inference from anthropology or sociology. It does not approach the problem of morals from the manward side and attempt to work its way to God. It is not only super-social and super-national, but supernatural.<sup>11</sup>

The ethical norms that properly define Christian ethics are supernaturally derived. The character and will of God are tied up together in the divine self-disclosure of God's word—written and incarnate.

God's character and will is made known to humanity through his word. Writing a century ago, R. L. Ottley asserted, "The Christian system takes as its point of departure the revelation of God . . . . The Christian ethic is, so to speak, theocentric. Its foundation is laid not so much in the study of man's nature, functions and capacities, as in revealed truths respecting the purpose and character of God."<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, Ottley's conviction is no longer universally accepted. Carl Henry noticed this shift in thinking fifty years ago. He complained, "Christian ethics is embarrassed today by scholars who profess to set forth the nature of revealed ethics by appealing to the will of God, and yet who fall into frustration in defining its content.

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is pleasing, and to what is wicked or displeasing to the Creator-God alone" (*Christian Personal Ethics*, 209-10).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>12</sup>R. L. Ottley, *Christian Ideas and Ideals: An Outline of Christian Ethical Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1916), 18.

When the traditional link between the Bible and the revealed will of God is severed, where is knowledge of the divine will to be found?"<sup>13</sup> Christian ethics, properly understood, is a revealed ethic with a transcendent basis rooted in the special revelation of God in Scripture.

Yet speaking of ethics that way raises one further question. If this system is, as Ottley described it, a "theocentric ethic," why call it 'Christian ethics' instead of something like "the Divine imperative" or "covenant morality"? Precisely because Christianity affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is the supreme revelation of God.<sup>14</sup> The ethical system rooted in God's character is, to be sure, communicated in Scripture through laws and wisdom writings, through narratives accounts of faithful and often unfaithful persons, through prophecies, and through epistles. But the character and will of God is revealed "in these last days" (Heb 11:2) most fully and completely in the revelation of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Nevertheless, the glory of Jesus is not simply that he exegeted God to man (John 1:18), but that in him God's character and will is incarnate. "His is by definition a perfect humanity, sharing fully the limitations, temptations, adversity and obligations of mankind, yet achieving within these temporal conditions a *human* perfection."<sup>15</sup> Jesus is the enfleshed revelation of the holiness of God, such that "in ethics as in soteriology 'Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes.'"<sup>16</sup> Given that

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<sup>13</sup>Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 237. Henry decries the methods of the leading ethicists of his day such as Emil Brunner (*The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics*, trans. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947]); Reinhold Niebuhr (*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935]); W. G. D. MacLennan (*Christian Obedience: The 1945 Kerr Lecture* [London: Nelson, 1948]); and C. J. Barker (*The Way of Life: A Study in Christian Ethics* [London: Lutterworth Press, 1946]).

<sup>14</sup>"The term 'Christian ethics' shows clearly that this ethics is rooted transcendentally within the Godhead" (Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 237).

<sup>15</sup>R. E. O. White, *Biblical Ethics* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 231.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

God's character and will is made known finally and fully in Christ, the incarnate word of God, it is appropriate that this system be called "Christian ethics."<sup>17</sup>

**Empowered by the Spirit.** The final aspect of Christian ethics that this dissertation presupposes is that the Holy Spirit empowers individuals to obedience. He accomplishes this through character transformation which produces holy living. It needs to be stated explicitly that the work of the Spirit "is not a new source of guidance independent of the Word; it is rather a new impulse to walk in the paths of righteousness revealed in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures."<sup>18</sup> The Spirit gives this new impulse as a result of the transformation he works within the heart. Therefore it is inappropriate to neglect character formation in order to concentrate on behavior as much as it is inappropriate to neglect behavior to concentrate on character formation. As William Spohn noted, "Virtues are not complete alternatives to moral principles; both are needed for ethics to be practical."<sup>19</sup> The salutary aspect of Christian ethics that has given emphasis to virtue or character rightly opposed the reduction of ethics to nothing more than moral dilemmas which can be solved by applying defensible ethical principles.<sup>20</sup> Yet it would be equally improper to dismiss the role of behavior and decisions in Christian ethics in an effort to raise an awareness about character. The two are twin emphases of the Spirit as he

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<sup>17</sup>See J. Douma, *Responsible Conduct: Principles of Christian Ethics*, trans. Nelson Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 30-31, in which he evaluates (and ultimately decided against) the appropriateness of other terms such as "biblical ethics" and "theological ethics."

<sup>18</sup>David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 70.

<sup>19</sup>William Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics," *TS* 53 (1992): 60-75.

<sup>20</sup>Whether this stream of ethical theory is rightly called Virtue Ethics or Character Ethics is outside the concern of this dissertation (see James Donahue, "The Use of Virtue and Character in Applied Ethics," *Horizons* 17 [1990]: 228-43). The more pressing concern is to stress the work of the Spirit in shaping character as well as behavior.

empowers Christian ethics.

Defining Christian ethics this way does not free nonChristians from moral responsibility. "The moral law is permanent, universal, and equally binding on all men and women in all times."<sup>21</sup> Since all people are made in God's image, the character of God revealed in Scripture sets the norm for all peoples, nations, and times. This moral standard to which all persons are called is lofty, however, so lofty that Jesus condemned mere external obedience to the moral law (Matt 23:23-28). The moral law demands not simply a particular behavior but behavior flowing from a particular character. According to Murray, "Behind all overt action is the dispositional character or complex which is the psychological determinant of action. Hence ethics must take into account the dispositional complex of which the overt act is the expression."<sup>22</sup> For unbelievers, "The real problem of ethics is not finding the rule to direct [them] how to glorify and enjoy God but in having the will to make this [their] aim in the first place."<sup>23</sup>

For believers, Christian ethics is first a call to recognize what they are in Christ. Scripture calls believers "saints" (Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1) and "those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2). Such terms describe what believers are in Christ and what they are in the process of becoming (the indicative of the gospel). Subsequent instructions regarding behavior are the call to live out what one actually is (the imperative based on the gospel). Both character formation and behavior are central to Christian ethics just as indicative and imperative are central. William Dennison claims, "The indicative and the imperative is the basic structure of the whole of Biblical ethics, whether under the rubric of the old

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<sup>21</sup>Walter Kaiser, "Ethics," 442.

<sup>22</sup>John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 13.

<sup>23</sup>David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 37. Jonathan Edwards makes this argument in *Religious Affections, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2:241.

covenant or the new covenant. . . . a case can be built for the fact that the basic ethical structure of the whole Bible is the indicative and the imperative."<sup>24</sup> The Holy Spirit works within the Christian to shape the kind of character that leads one actually to live in a way that aligns with the character of God.

Christian ethics is a Trinitarian enterprise. It is rooted in the character of God, it is revealed in God's written word and in the incarnate word, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and finally it is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### **The Nature of Scripture**

In order to draft a method for using Scripture in Christian ethics, the dissertation now needs to make some fundamental convictions about Scripture explicit.

**The unity of Scripture.** One of the major aspects of Hays's system is focal images. The need for focal images arises because of Hays's conviction about the disunity of Scripture. Focal images capture a unified ethical message from the different canonical tellings of the narrative of Scripture. The previous chapter raised several concerns over reading and interpreting Scripture through extra-biblical lenses. Yet such a synthetic measure is unnecessary for those who approach the interpretive process with a conviction regarding the unity of Scripture's moral witness.

Ultimately, holding to the internal unity of Scripture is essential for Christian ethics. J. L. Houlden contends that the moral teaching of the New Testament is bound up with the theology of the New Testament. He writes, "In venturing to write on the moral teaching of the New Testament, we need to see it always in the closest relation to the

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<sup>24</sup>William Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics," *CTJ* 14 (1979): 76 n. 72. Dennison refers to two other sources to validate his claim: Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1969), 241-55, and Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (London: SCM, 1967), 329.



New Testament's message as a whole."<sup>25</sup> Houlden goes on to argue that the way to understand this message is to "investigate the teaching of each of the main writers in turn, not assuming they necessarily sing in unison or even in harmony."<sup>26</sup> It then becomes clear that Houlden's view of authorship dictates his position on the unity of Scripture:

The idea of the canon, as a collection of writings accorded religious authority, is an anachronism. The New Testament writers were not, like the contributors to a volume of essays, men consciously engaged on a cooperative venture. They wrote for their own reasons in their own circumstances, unaware of the future role of their work.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, one's view of the authorship of Scripture influences his opinion about the unity of Scripture. If Houlden is correct that the moral teaching of the New Testament should be seen in the closest relation to the New Testament's message as a whole, then one's view of the nature of Scripture determines one's perspective on the moral teaching therein. J. I. Packer, in an article titled "Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today,"<sup>28</sup> argues this very point. Packer presents two views of the canon. The first view affirms its unified, divine nature. It entails that

God himself created the canon as one of his saving acts, a stage in *Heilsgeschichte*, and that he did this first by inspiring the various books and then by enabling the Church to discern them as being inspired and therefore to acknowledge them as the divinely given rule of faith and life.<sup>29</sup>

This unified view of the canon stands in stark contrast to the other model.

Model two treats the canon as essentially a human compilation, a sort of heritage collection of literature, brought together in the interests of maintaining and

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<sup>25</sup>J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>28</sup>J. I. Packer, "Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today," *JETS* 25 (1982): 409-14. See also A. M. Hunter's, *The Unity of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1957).

<sup>29</sup>J. I. Packer, "Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today," 412.

deepening a sense of group identity by constantly presenting to the group (in this case the Church) the traditions that made it what it is, and to be valued now because of its proven power to trigger insights about the living God.<sup>30</sup>

Richard Hays represents this second model fairly well. Even while writing about Scripture's unity, he is emphasizing the human aspect of its origin:

The unity that we discover in the New Testament is not the unity of a dogmatic system. Rather, the unity that we find is the looser unity of a collection of documents that, in various ways, retell and comment upon a single fundamental story.<sup>31</sup>

A significant difference between these two views of the canon is the interpreter's opinion about Scripture's origin. The former view contends that the canon of Scripture is internally consistent since all sixty-six books come ultimately from the mind of God. Each author should be read as part of a whole and in light of the whole. It is the divine authorship of Scripture which led Jacques Ellul to speak of "the radical unity which the thought of the Bible exhibits from end to end, over and above the diversity of authorship, schools of thought, and literary forms."<sup>32</sup>

Not only is divine authorship of Scripture behind a conviction about its unity, but related to that conviction is the inspiration of Scripture. E. J. Schnabel sees a direct connection between inspiration and unity: "The inspiration of Scripture establishes its unity and legitimizes the attempt to harmonize discrepancies and tensions in the text. The unity of Scripture prohibits any criticism of the content of scriptural assertions ('*Sachkritick*')."<sup>33</sup> Looking at the issue from this perspective, unity of Scripture is a logical corollary to inspiration. If the Bible is inspired by God, then considering one part

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 193.

<sup>32</sup>Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 142, quoted in David Gill, "Jacques Ellul's View of Scripture," *JETS* 25 (1982): 471.

<sup>33</sup>E. J. Schnabel, "Scripture," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 41.

of it to be in disagreement with another part is to make God contradict Himself. However, if the Bible is the word of man without inspiration, unity is not merely questionable but highly improbable.<sup>34</sup>

If someone objects that belief in inspiration is presupposed, it is worth considering whether the opposing view of Scripture is not presupposed.<sup>35</sup> Schnabel is correct when he argues that those who oppose inspiration and unity do so because of prejudice they bring to the text: "The dissolution of the unity of OT and NT, of each individual Testament, and even of the individual books of Scripture, to which the biblical criticism of the last 200 years bears witness, has been partly a result of increased specialization, but more often a result of critical *prejudices*."<sup>36</sup>

The immediate implication of scriptural unity for Christian ethics ought to be clear. As Packer contends, "Contemporary emphasis on the diversity of Scripture . . . negates something that the other model [unity of Scripture] affirmed and sought to justify—namely, the real possibility of applying Scripture . . . with genuinely normative force."<sup>37</sup> There is no need for synthetic methods such as Hays's focal images to locate a unified moral witness when the interpreter approaches Scripture convinced that the Bible is an inspired, unified word from God. This conviction does not negate real tensions

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<sup>34</sup>R. C. Sproul, "Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 134.

<sup>35</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy recognizes this when he says, "Disunity in the Bible is as much a function of the non-theistic presuppositions of Enlightenment thought as unity is the function of theistic presuppositions" (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 194). See Norm Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norm Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 113-22; and R. C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," in *Inerrancy*, 165-78.

<sup>36</sup>Schnabel, "Scripture," 41, emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup>Packer, "Upholding the Unity of Scripture," 410.

within the text, which is why it is necessary to recognize Scripture's diversity as well as its unity.

**The diversity of Scripture.** Affirming the unity of Scripture does not mean one may not also recognize its diversity. This is the other side of scripture's authorship. The Bible was written by over forty human authors, in different times and places, to different audiences to address distinct circumstances, using various literary genres. Each book displays unique purposes and themes. The human role in Scripture's composition is central to Blomberg's appreciation for biblical diversity. He states, "The key to a proper appreciation of the diversity in biblical theology, therefore, is to interpret each book as a literary integrity in its own right, in the light of the unique circumstances and purposes that generated it, and of antecedent Scripture and other relevant historical background."<sup>38</sup> Viewing Scripture from this angle emphasizes the diversity of the individual author, context, literary genre, and time period.<sup>39</sup> Maintaining the proper perspective of unity and diversity is essential to proper interpretation of a given passage. "Without an appreciation of the diversity that comes from hearing each text, book and author on its own terms, one

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<sup>38</sup>Craig Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 70.

<sup>39</sup>D. A. Carson argues along these same lines seeking to explain the diverse theological and ethical emphases found in the New Testament ("Unity and Diversity in the New Testament," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 86-90). First, diverse emphases in the New Testament often spring from diverse pastoral concerns. Much of the New Testament is occasional documents of the first century. Even the gospels contain many of the typical characteristics of occasional documents. According to Carson, "Not all New Testament diversity can be accounted for by appealing to diverse circumstances; but a surprising amount of it is surely influenced by such considerations" (ibid., 88). A second explanation relates to the diverse personal interests and idiosyncratic styles of the individual writers. "Different New Testament writers may focus on different aspects of truth and from quite different perspectives, whether for apologetic or personal reasons, and such diversity must be taken into account" (ibid., 90). See also Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 53-60.

risks misinterpreting Scripture and not discerning what God intended to say to his people at any given point in their history."<sup>40</sup> In this respect, Hays is correct when he declares that the full range of canonical witnesses must be confronted.<sup>41</sup> Appreciating this diversity calls for interpreting each passage as a literary unit in its own right. If such interpretation is done faithfully, however, will it unearth contradictions? When Hays speaks of the diversity of Scripture, it seems he means that Scripture is contradictory. So it is worth asking, does diversity mean disagreement?

The previous chapter pointed out that Hays struggled to harmonize various portions of the New Testament's moral witness. He writes about "*divergent* New Testament texts," "*conflicting* New Testament witnesses," and "the apparent irreducible *diversity* of perspectives within the New Testament."<sup>42</sup> Is it possible, however, to recognize diversity among various authors amidst a broader ethical unity? Does speaking of Scripture as divergent entail complete disunity in ethical instruction? Is it possible to understand the New Testament as both diverse and unified? Or does diversity necessarily mean Scripture is contradictory?

The first way to answer these questions is to point out that what are commonly considered disagreements are not, upon closer inspection, actual contradictions. "We . . . recognize," Graeme Goldsworthy contends, "that what are sometimes taken as evidence of disparate and *contradictory* theologies in the Bible are, in fact, expressions of disparate and *complementary* theological foci."<sup>43</sup> The same argument applies to ethical arguments made by biblical writers. A second line of argument deals with biblical authorship. If the Bible were nothing more than human opinions, from a long stretch of time, about a vast

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<sup>40</sup>Craig Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture," 71-72.

<sup>41</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 189.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 430, 434, emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 194, italics original.

number of issues, written in various literary genres, then such diversity would necessitate contradiction. But the evangelical affirmation about Scripture is that it is more than a human record of God's word. Scripture is inspired. To speak of Scripture as inspired means the Holy Spirit moved upon the human authors of the Bible in such a way that they wrote exactly what God wanted written. Therefore, one can rightly and confidently claim that to read the Bible is to read the very words of God.<sup>44</sup> "Diversity does not destroy coherence unless there is no transcendent unifying principle. . . . [Since] the Bible represents a unified Word of God, coherence is not only expected, but assured."<sup>45</sup> So the human authorship of Scripture (diverse human authors writing to unique situations out of varying circumstances) along with the divine authorship of Scripture (inspired and authoritative) leads one to affirm both diversity and unity. Such affirmations are not at odds.

**Harmonization and the analogy of Scripture.** The question remains, however, how one should handle apparent tensions in the text? Hays's method uses focal images which serve as lenses through which the text is read. If contradictions persist and his synthetic strategy will not help, then Hays subjugates one text to another which most closely aligns with the larger scriptural story.<sup>46</sup> An alternative to Hays's method, which flows naturally out of a conviction regarding the unity of Scripture, is harmonization. The term harmonization is used broadly here to refer to the work of integrating all that one

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<sup>44</sup>N. M. Cameron, "Bible, Inspiration of," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 60-61.

<sup>45</sup>R. C. Sproul, "Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 122.

<sup>46</sup>For instance, on the issue of anti-Judaism, Hays rejects John's position as "a historically understandable but theologically misconceived development" (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 434). See this dissertation's previous discussions of this issue on p. 70 n.240, and pp. 89-90.

finds Scripture teaching.<sup>47</sup> It seems that "anyone seeking to resolve difficulties or searching for agreements is suspect of imposing a preconceived unity on the evidence."<sup>48</sup> As argued earlier, however, every Bible interpreter approaches his task with presuppositions about the unity or disunity of Scripture. According to Carson, "No exegesis is ever done in a vacuum. If every theist is in some sense a systematician, then he is a systematician *before* he begins his exegesis."<sup>49</sup> Presupposing unity should not rule out legitimate uses of harmonization, though unnatural straining to achieve agreement must be rejected as well. Many assume that harmonization is in itself intellectually taboo. But such a stance does not do justice to the evidence since it prematurely places a premium on the diversity of Scripture over and against its unity.<sup>50</sup> Blomberg cautions the interpreter against assuming too hastily he has found contradictions within the text. Instead he should work toward harmonization.

The pervasive unity of Scripture means that if the resulting interpretations of two different passages or writers produce an irreconcilable contradiction, it is legitimate to ask if one has interpreted both correctly. That Jews and Christians have historically believed that no Scripture, properly interpreted, contradicts another, means that one should exhaust all reasonable options for harmonizing texts before announcing the discovery of an insoluble problem.<sup>51</sup>

Through the years scholars have suggested various (and some truly fanciful)

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<sup>47</sup>Paul Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 59.

<sup>48</sup>Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 56.

<sup>49</sup>Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament," 91.

<sup>50</sup>Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 31 n. 39.

<sup>51</sup>Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture," 70. Blomberg contends that all historians, whether they employ the term or not, practice some kind of harmonization as they seek to reconstruct the truth of past events ("The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986]).

harmonizations of diverse texts. The fact that some interpreters have proposed implausible harmonizations, however, does not invalidate the method.<sup>52</sup> The goal should not be to find another method, but to arrive at more legitimate harmonizations.

Based on a conviction about the unity of Scripture, one component of faithful harmonization involves the analogy of Scripture. A common way of using the analogy of Scripture is "interpreting what is peripheral by what is central, what is obscure by what is clear, and what is ambiguous by what is orthodox in the sense of firmly established through exegetical and theological testing."<sup>53</sup> A brief history of the analogy of Scripture and a description of how it should be used in exegetical work will clarify how it is useful in seeking the unified moral witness of Scripture.

**Analogy of Scripture.** It is possible to attribute the idea of the analogy of Scripture first to Calvin, who understood Romans 12:6 to mean that Paul required all interpretation of Scripture to conform to the analogy of faith.<sup>54</sup> Understanding the principle more broadly,<sup>55</sup> however, H. Wayne Johnson argues that convictions about the unity of Scripture go back to the apostles. For the apostles, the analogy of faith was

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<sup>52</sup>Craig Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture," 71.

<sup>53</sup>J. I. Packer, "In Quest of Canonical Interpretation," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 231 n. 4.

<sup>54</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.32.

<sup>55</sup>According to Charles Hodge, "This rule of interpretation is sometimes called the analogy of Scripture and sometimes the analogy of faith. There is no material difference in the meaning of the two expressions" (*Systematic Theology* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999], 1:187). For the Reformers, the cry of *Sola Scriptura* meant the analogy of faith and the analogy of Scripture were very closely related if not identical. See also Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 170-72; and Henri Blocher, "The Analogy of Faith in the Study of Scripture," in *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology: Essays in Approach and Method*, ed. Nigel M. de Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1987), 17-38.



conformity to apostolic teaching and writing.<sup>56</sup> Tertullian seems to be the first of the Fathers to affirm explicitly that Scripture is consistent with itself and thus does not contain contradictions.<sup>57</sup> Later on the analogy of faith became a tool in the hands of the church to guarantee catholic orthodoxy. Yet in the Reformation, the analogy of faith became a primary interpretive principle, as the cry of *Sola Scriptura* called for conformity to what Scripture alone teaches rather than conformity to papal dogma. Those who followed in the path of the Reformation continued to affirm the internal unity of the faith as defined by Scripture. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* held, "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture . . . it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."<sup>58</sup> This same principle is taught explicitly in *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, the Church of England's defining doctrinal statement. The twentieth article contends that the church may not "so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another."<sup>59</sup> The result of using this approach in scriptural interpretation is a control on meaning. It limits the meaning of any text to that which fits with the rest of Scripture. Of course, phrasing it that way raises concerns over the role of the analogy of Scripture in exegesis.

The first problem arises when the analogy of Scripture is considered so important that it dictates exegetical method. Johnson attributes this approach to Augustine who gave the analogy of faith priority over context as part of his exegetical

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<sup>56</sup>H. Wayne Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith' and Exegetical Methodology: A Preliminary Discussion on Relationships," *JETS* 31 (1988): 69-70.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 70, refers to *Against Praxeas* 18.

<sup>58</sup>Westminster Confession of Faith (I.ix), as found in *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, ed. Phillip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 2:604.

<sup>59</sup>The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, as found in *ibid.*, 500. See Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:151-52.

methodology.<sup>60</sup> Luther, similarly, allowed the analogy of Scripture to determine his method of exegesis.<sup>61</sup> For Luther, "Every word [of Scripture] should be allowed to stand in its natural meaning, and that should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it.' Luther here reveals that there might be occasions when the natural meaning of the text must be abandoned, and this only because the analogy of faith necessitates it."<sup>62</sup>

A second problem in using the analogy of Scripture in exegesis is when it is substituted for the actual exegetical work. Tertullian provides one of the earliest examples of this practice. He wrote *Prescription* against heretics who were claiming Scriptural grounding for their beliefs.<sup>63</sup> Tertullian refused to engage their arguments on the exegetical level. Instead he dismissed their views as irrelevant because their views ultimately contradicted the orthodox analogy of faith. Johnson cites Calvin for this practice as well. In dismissing a connection between baptism and putting on Christ from Galatians 3:27, Calvin argues that "the uniform doctrine of Scripture, as well as experience, appear to confute this statement."<sup>64</sup> Johnson concludes, "Calvin does not argue here on the basis of exegesis in a grammatico-historical sense. . . . All that is really being said is that within Calvin's own system (what he perceives as the clear teaching of Scripture) this passage cannot mean what a literalistic interpretation would seem to

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<sup>60</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 71, refers to *On Christian Doctrine* 3.2.

<sup>61</sup>See Daniel Fuller's argument that both Calvin's and Luther's use of the analogy of faith clashed with *Sola Scriptura*: "Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith," in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, ed. Robert Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 195-213.

<sup>62</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 71, quoting Luther's *Werken*, 19. See also Otto Hof, "Luther's Exegetical Principle of the Analogy of Faith," *CTM* 38 (1967): 242-57.

<sup>63</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 72, refers to *Prescription* 1.19.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 73, quoting John Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 111.

imply."<sup>65</sup> Arguing this way is not always a mistake. At times, it is valid to argue that no matter what exegetical arguments are raised from a particular passage, certain tenets of Biblical truth (made explicit by other Scriptures that speak more clearly) are not negotiable. When there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture, it must be searched and known. The challenge is deciding which aspects of Biblical truth have the preponderance of Biblical evidence and are thus nonnegotiable.

Some scholars have reacted to the above mentioned abuses by calling for a new approach.<sup>66</sup> One option is to employ the analogy of Scripture only subsequently to exegesis. Robert Thomas suggests that the analogy of Scripture "not be a part of the exegetical process at all but that it be utilized as a double-check on completed exegesis."<sup>67</sup> Thus, it would not propose interpretations but only negate erroneous ones. One problem with such an approach, as Thiselton has pointed out, is that no one exegetes a text without a preunderstanding of what it means. Agreeing with Bultmann, and Dilthey before him, Thiselton argues there cannot be such a thing as presuppositionless exegesis: "No one expounds the Bible . . . without bringing to the task his own prior frame of reference."<sup>68</sup> No interpreter can separate himself from his preunderstandings, including his biblical-theological preunderstandings.<sup>69</sup> It is impossible, therefore, to exclude the

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<sup>65</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 73.

<sup>66</sup>See Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 134-36, in which he calls for using the "analogy of antecedent Scripture."

<sup>67</sup>Robert Thomas, "A Hermeneutical Ambiguity of Eschatology: The Analogy of Faith," *JETS* 23 (1980): 53.

<sup>68</sup>Anthony Thiselton, *Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 114, 234-40; and Rudolph Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible," 194-200.

<sup>69</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 77. D. A. Carson and Richard Gaffin have contributed arguments along these same lines from the evangelical perspective (D. A. Carson, "Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends," *Themelios* 5 [1980]: 12-20; and Richard Gaffin, "Contemporary Hermeneutics and the Study of the New Testament," *WTJ* 31 [1969]: 129-44).

analogy of Scripture from the exegetical task since one's preunderstanding of the text is part and parcel of the exegetical work itself.

So what role in exegesis should the analogy of Scripture have? One option worth pursuing places the analogy of Scripture in a category similar to parallels. The analogy of faith is preunderstanding and thus always has a role in the exegetical process. Yet the analogy of faith is not a description of all preunderstandings that one brings to Scripture but rather "those preunderstandings concerning what Scripture clearly teaches."<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the analogy of Scripture is but one of the many elements involved in exegesis. Johnson suggests using the analogy of faith to determine parallels between texts being examined and truths affirmed previously from other texts. "We read a passage of Scripture to perceive harmony or tension with our own analogy of faith. This tension or harmony is related to those passages that we perceive as being parallel in some way to the particular passage at hand."<sup>71</sup> Exegetes often use parallels when studying stylistics, linguistics, and semantics, and perhaps a similar use of parallel theological emphases is just as acceptable. According to Johnson, "In using the analogy of faith, carefully assessed theological parallels should contribute to the exegesis of a passage. These parallels, when viewed as part of the exegetical process, should be considered as one significant element in a mass of exegetical evidence."<sup>72</sup> Following such an approach, exegesis of a particular passage is not wholly determined by those preunderstandings

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<sup>70</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 78. Graeme Goldsworthy speaks of a hierarchy of presuppositions so that the interpreter need not "start every new theological or hermeneutical endeavor by going back to the absolute basics." Yet, as one builds his systematic theology as an interpretive presupposition, "it is important that it does not become set in concrete. Doctrinal confessions or subordinate authorities must not become ultimate authorities. Thus, although we do not reestablish our basic assumptions every time we come to the text, it is still an ongoing concern that we constantly check them to see that they are true to Scripture" (*Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 51-52).

<sup>71</sup>Johnson, "The 'Analogy of Faith,'" 77.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.

concerning what Scripture clearly teaches, yet it may not be done independent of such preunderstandings. The analogy of Scripture helps build a theological unity from within the textual evidence, rather than creating a unity by imposing one's own categories of interpretation. In this way, diverse theological emphases are not flattened, yet what is central clarifies what is peripheral and what is explicit sheds light on what is obscure.

The benefits of using the analogy of Scripture this way in exegesis are multiple.<sup>73</sup> First, the exegete is not limiting the relevant context of a passage to the book in which it is located or to historically antecedent Scripture. Rather, the exegete uses parallels from other authors and passages that occur later in redemptive history, provided the exegetical evidence warrants that they are true theological parallels. "This is what should be expected if we take seriously that the Scriptures form a single canon from one divine author. . . . 'the exegetical process is incomplete until it is exegeted in light of the entire canon.'"<sup>74</sup> Secondly, passages are not prematurely flattened when the analogy of Scripture is used this way. It is but one part of the exegetical process and the analogy is not allowed arbitrarily to dictate the meaning of a passage. For instance, James' instruction that true faith is works-producing (2:14-26) is allowed to stand, rather than being flattened by Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace alone.

Thirdly, this approach to the analogy of Scripture allows the exegete to use it as a paradigm of Biblical revelation rather than as a dogma set in concrete. Perhaps using the analogy this way will give theological communities greater opportunity to recognize tension between their faith commitments and particular Biblical texts, leading to shifts in their theological framework. Finally, using the analogy of Scripture this way forces the exegete to approach the Bible with more humility and teachability, since his individual

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<sup>73</sup>These benefits are suggested by Johnson (*ibid.*, 79-80).

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, quoting Bruce Waltke, "Historical Grammatical Problems," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 122.

biases are under continual modification.

**Harmonization and ethical issues.** Using the analogy of Scripture this way helps the interpreter discern harmony between various biblical texts. Hays cautions against flattening the various New Testament witnesses into a bland uniformity.<sup>75</sup> The sort of harmonization being suggested here avoids that. Rather, what is peripheral in Scripture is clarified by what is central, and what is obscure by what is clear. But in each case, the interpreter is grappling with the meaning of each individual text in light of the unity of Scripture. Harmonization seeks to locate the unified ethical voice of Scripture.

Occasionally, harmonization struggles to produce a satisfying solution. In those instances, the traditional evangelical position holds:

Because our presupposition is that the Bible is true in all its parts, we seek solutions where there appears to be error. When we cannot solve a problem, we admit it. We do not conclude, however, that it cannot be solved. Rather, because of loyalty built on the solid foundation of strong evidence of trustworthiness, and honestly facing the alternatives with which disloyalty would leave us, we hold in abeyance problems yet unsolved.<sup>76</sup>

It is hard to see how it is preferable to disregard a particular text because it does not fit with the scriptural story as interpreted through focal images, as Hays does. Adjudicating a conflict of interpretations according to Hays's focal images "is as likely to produce hermeneutical debate as hermeneutical closure."<sup>77</sup> Instead, the interpreter should work toward harmonization based on a core conviction about scriptural unity, while occasionally leaving a problem unresolved. The benefit of following such a strategy is that as the interpreter comes to a better understanding of certain texts, opportunities arise

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<sup>75</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 187.

<sup>76</sup>Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 204.

<sup>77</sup>Charles Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 180.

for harmonization of earlier problems left unresolved. In each case, the nature of Scripture helps the interpreter move from a diversity of texts to a unified moral witness.

### **Scripture and Ethics**

Having laid out some foundational convictions about the nature of Christian ethics and the nature of Scripture, the way is clear for proposing a method of appropriating Scripture in Christian ethics. The first aspect of this method involves reading the ancient texts. Given the nature of Scripture, the challenge is not merely to understand what the text originally meant, though that must be the initial concern for the interpreter. The second concern is to understand the significance of the text, extrapolating a transhistorical submeaning from the historical meaning.<sup>78</sup> The final step in the process calls for applying the meaning to the contemporary ethical concern.

Contemporary application that is appropriate and insightful depends on a clear understanding of the author's original meaning. It is that process of determining the author's original meaning to which the dissertation now turns.

### **Appropriating the Ancient Text to Contemporary Ethical Concerns**

Hays is surely right that the moral instruction of Scripture cannot be confined to passages that contain explicit ethical teaching. The interpreter must investigate the full range of biblical material, because "The church's moral world is manifest not only in the *didachē* but also in the stories, symbols, social structures, and practices that shape the community's *ethos*."<sup>79</sup> This means that the entirety of Scripture is involved in shaping Christian ethics. While Hays affirms this, he comes to an altogether different conclusion than that posited in this dissertation, namely that it is impossible to define or narrow in on

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<sup>78</sup>McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 161.

<sup>79</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 4.

a specific moral vision of Scripture. To do so may effectively exclude an aspect of Scripture's ethical reasoning. Unlike Hays, no attempt will be made to explicate in detail the message of the individual writers. Rather, the more urgent need, and more fundamental skill, is the ability to read and understand the texts of Scripture as they relate to an ethical issue at hand. Understanding what the text originally meant is the initial task in appropriating Scripture to ethical issues.

### **Understanding What the Text Meant**

Hays devotes the largest section of *The Moral Vision* to sketching the moral perspective embodied in the New Testament texts. He considers it important to explicate in detail the messages of the individual writings of the canon. The purpose of this dissertation is different. In order to appropriate Scripture to ethics one must be able to read the text well.<sup>80</sup> Reading well involves, first of all, understanding what the text meant.

**Determining the meaning of a text.** Any discussion about understanding the text must first deal with the question of what or who determines the meaning of a text. A significant shift in understanding took place over this issue throughout the last century.<sup>81</sup> Traditionally, the assumption was that the author was the determiner of a text's meaning. The text meant what the author consciously willed to convey through the words he had written.<sup>82</sup> That perspective changed considerably beginning in the 1930s with the rise of

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<sup>80</sup>This section of the work will prescribe a method for reading the text. It is explicit in detail in order to explain the type of reading of the text that is needed for ethical engagement. In the final section of this chapter (Testing the Prescribed Model), the dissertation will not model the type of reading that is prescribed here. Instead, that section is much more concerned with the application aspect of the work. So this section is detailed in order to prepare the reader for the task of interpretation.

<sup>81</sup>See David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); idem, "Study and Interpretation of the Bible," in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 36-54.

<sup>82</sup>See E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University



New Criticism. No longer was meaning located in what the author intended. Instead, the text itself was interpreted as an independent unit, having been isolated from its author. After the author penned the text he lost control of it. The text was viewed as "literature" rather than a form of communication. As such, it possessed semantic autonomy and therefore had its own meaning.

The most recent hermeneutical approach does not emphasize the author nor the text but the reader. Reader-oriented criticism gives the reader authority to determine the meaning of Scripture. As Walter Vogels put it, the written text in itself "is dead or in hibernation. The text only comes to life through the reader. He revives the text, he gives meaning to it."<sup>83</sup> In this new approach to understanding the text, "Reading is not merely a matter of perception but also of production; the reader does not discover so much as create meaning."<sup>84</sup>

There are a number of reasons to embrace the older method which holds that the author alone determines the meaning of the text.<sup>85</sup> As Robert Stein notes, the strongest argument in favor author-determined meaning is that it is the common sense approach to all communication.<sup>86</sup> "Much of the interpretive process that people perform almost unconsciously is based on the hermeneutical principle that the goal of

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Press, 1967).

<sup>83</sup>Walter Vogels, "Inspiration in a Linguistic Mode," *BTB* 15 (1985): 87.

<sup>84</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Reader in New Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 301.

<sup>85</sup>One might think such a discussion is unnecessary since Hays himself seems to operate under this same framework. However, in the section in which Hays evaluates Schüssler Fiorenza, he fails to speak clearly about the major problem with her exegesis—her desire to read out of every text a feminist agenda, irrespective of the biblical author's intended meaning (see *The Moral Vision*, 266-74).

<sup>86</sup>Robert Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *JETS* 44 (2001): 451-66.

interpretation is to arrive at what the author of a text meant."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, one cannot even have a meaningful debate about this issue without assuming this position. To read and interact with another person over this issue involves this very perspective of interpretation. A second argument in favor of an author-oriented approach to reading the Bible is that it best fits with the evangelical view of biblical inspiration.<sup>88</sup> If one believes that the Bible is inspired, where is this inspiration to be found? In the ink and paper used to convey that meaning? In the individuals who read it? The evangelical position is that the Spirit inspired the writers to convey the very meaning the divine mind intended (2 Pet 1:21). Lastly, if the author does not determine the meaning of the text, there is no basis upon which beliefs or doctrines could be considered orthodox or heretical. Apart from a fixed meaning, conceived in the mind of the biblical writer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, every interpretation is equally valid and binding.<sup>89</sup>

With a conviction regarding authorial intent established, the work of understanding what the author originally wrote is paramount. In order to understand the author's original meaning, the text must be studied grammatically and historically.

**Grammatical-historical method.** The work of interpretation is initially concerned with understanding what the biblical author intended by the words he wrote. The difficulty of interpretation is magnified by the fact that Scripture was written in Greek and Hebrew, in a much different culture. Thus, the term "grammatical-historical

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 455.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 456. Walter Kaiser contends that the authority of Scripture is at stake with this issue: "Is the meaning of a text to be defined solely in terms of the *verbal* meaning of that text as those words were used by the Scriptural author? . . . There hangs . . . the fortunes of the authority of Scripture" (Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 24).

<sup>89</sup>G. B. Caird argues, "If we try, without evidence, to penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the writers intended, that is our meaning, not theirs or God's" (*The Language and Imagery of the Bible* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980], 61).

method" indicates that the interpreter must pay attention to the language in which the original text was written and to the specific cultural context that gave rise to the text.<sup>90</sup>

Bernard Ramm begins a chapter on hermeneutics in his *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* by calling the interpreter to study the particular *words* of the text. "Words are the units of thought in most of our thinking and writing; they are the bricks of our conceptual formulation."<sup>91</sup> Individual words may be studied etymologically, comparatively, culturally, and in cognate languages and ancient translations. Etymological word study analyzes the root word from which another word is derived. Comparative word study investigates the word's usage throughout Scripture in order to determine the variety of meanings contained within a word. Cultural word study seeks to understand the use of the word in the culture (both before and up to the author's day). Cognate word study investigates the meaning of equivalent words in cognate languages.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, words make sense when joined together in *sentences*. Interpretation not only involves individual words but the syntax of a passage—the study of the structure of sentences. Even apart from an ability to read the original languages the interpreter should work to understand the relationships of subjects and predicates, the particular number, gender, mood, and tense of words in a sentence. Beyond that, it is useful to study a sentence or passage in light of *parallel passages* or cross references. According to Ramm, "What is said in one part of Scripture may illuminate what is said in another part of Scripture. . . . one of the marked characteristics of Holy Scripture is that there are

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<sup>90</sup>See Ellen Davis and Richard Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>91</sup>Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 128.

<sup>92</sup>William B. Tolar, "The Grammatical-Historical Method," in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 219-20.

many places where in one manner or other Scripture repeats itself."<sup>93</sup> Fourthly, grammatical interpretation must consider the *context* in which the sentence is found. The immediate context of any sentence is the material before and after it. The next layer of context is the particular book in which the passage occurs. The third layer of context of any passage is the Testament it is in. The location of any passage in the progress of redemptive history helps the interpreter determine the meaning. Lastly, the entirety of Scripture is the context of any passage, since the universe of discourse of any passage is the total Scripture.<sup>94</sup>

A fifth aspect of grammatical interpretation involves considering the *literary genre* of the passage. The particular literary genre in which a sentence is found largely will dictate its meaning. The biblical authors, in using various literary genres, "consciously submitted themselves to the rules governing these forms in order to share their meaning with their readers."<sup>95</sup> Failing to account for the rules under which the biblical author wrote will likely lead to misinterpretation. The final aspect of grammatical interpretation concerns whether the author intended his words to be taken *literally* or *figuratively*. Most figurative language finds its origin in the life and culture of the writer who used it. Therefore, in order to determine the meaning of figurative language, one must be acquainted with the cultural and historical context of the biblical author's era. Some commonly used figures of speech are simile and metaphor. Both communicate through comparison. A metonymy uses the name of one thing for another because of a close association of the two. Hyperbole is over-statement to make a point, and a euphemism is an understatement used to soften the effect of a something shocking.

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<sup>93</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 140.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>95</sup>Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75. See especially his chapter "Different Games in the Same Book: Different Forms of Scripture," 73-79.

Longer figures of speech include parables, allegories, and riddles. The interpreter must always determine whether the author intended for his language to be taken figuratively or literally.

These principles have not exhausted the variety of work incumbent for the interpreter, but adequately describe the core work involved in understanding the grammatical portion of the text. The other principle of proper interpretation involves the historical aspect of the text.

"While God certainly inspired biblical authors, he did not lead them to write in a historical vacuum. To be understood by their contemporaries required they communicate in known cultural norms."<sup>96</sup> Because biblical authors wrote from within a specific culture, subsequent generations must interpret the text in light of the culture from which it emerged. "The interpreter must bridge the gulf of explaining the cultural elements that are present in the text of Scripture, acknowledge his or her own cultural baggage as an interpreter, and then transcend both in order to [understand] the original message of Scripture."<sup>97</sup> In defining the key components of historical study, William Tolar points to four issues: key people, society, geography, and topography.<sup>98</sup> With regard to *key people*, the biblical author is obviously the most important of all. Questions about the identity of the author, his character, temperament, education, religious beliefs,

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<sup>96</sup>Tolar, "The Grammatical-Historical Method," 227.

<sup>97</sup>Walter Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 173.

<sup>98</sup>Tolar, "The Grammatical-Historical Method," 225-34. In clarifying the selection of these components, Tolar argues: "History is about people—and people live at places (geography) and in association with other people (society). They have things (material culture) and ideas (intellectual and religious culture). Some of their culture (including written records) often survives them and is studied by other people (anthropologists). All of these factors are true of the Hebrews and the Christians of the biblical era. This information greatly enhances our understanding of the biblical author's historical background and thus better equips us to interpret their documents" (225).

and the external circumstances of his life, are all significant issues in interpretation. Does the author reveal something of his motives for writing? Is he answering specific questions asked by his readers? Along with the writer, the original listeners or readers are significant. What is known of their culture, values, circumstances, character, and needs?<sup>99</sup> Similar questions about key people could be asked.

A second aspect of the historical work involves investigating the *society* from which a text came. "Archaeological discoveries in the last two centuries have revolutionized our knowledge of biblical cultures."<sup>100</sup> The finding and translating of thousands of inscriptions from the societies which biblical texts were written in has given interpreters fresh insight into the meaning of many passages. Likewise, understanding *geography* informs the interpreter's understanding of the historical background of a passage. Ramm comments, "Every event in Scripture has its geographical locus and part of the process of interpretation of Scripture is to find out as much as possible of the geography of the event, for either in small or in large it helps with the understanding of the text."<sup>101</sup> The same is true of *topography*, which can provide information for more accurate understanding of certain passages.<sup>102</sup>

In pointing out the cultural specificity of the biblical text, one need not

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<sup>99</sup>Discerning answers to many of these questions overlaps with questions raised earlier, since the hermeneutical task does not proceed in a chronological fashion. Instead, an interpreter is thinking and doing many things all at the same time. Of course, the priority in the hermeneutical task is grammatical understanding, since apart from an understanding of the words written by the author, the historical background would be irrelevant.

<sup>100</sup>Tolar, "The Grammatical-Historical Method," 227.

<sup>101</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 154.

<sup>102</sup>For example, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) is much clearer when one understands that to go down from Jerusalem to Jericho a person would travel through the Wadi Qilt—a dangerous route full of deep shadows and sharp turns (John J. Bimson, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Places* [Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1995]).

embrace historical critical methods which dispense with large portions of Scripture merely because they reflect the culture of their times. Speaking of these type of critical methods, Moisés Silva argues, "To interpret the Bible historically meant almost by definition to acknowledge that it contains contradictions . . . . assent to the view that the Bible was not totally reliable became one of the operating principles of the 'historical-critical method.'"<sup>103</sup> Scholars adopted such a perspective, not because of the historical nature of Scripture so much as the anti-supernatural worldview they presupposed.<sup>104</sup> Originally, understanding culture helped the reader better interpret God's revelation in Scripture. Now historical critics assert that because Scripture reflects the culture of the time most of it cannot be accepted as divine revelation.<sup>105</sup> Historical critical methods have shown themselves to do little for the interpretation of the text apart from creating such extreme skepticism about the historicity of biblical events that the very notion of revelation is questionable.<sup>106</sup> The use of historical investigation is not intended to diminish the authority of Scripture, but to shed light on the author's intended meaning. In order to be prepared to appropriate Scripture to contemporary ethical concerns, one needs to know the original meaning of the text. The grammatical-historical method is the most appropriate means of finding that meaning.

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<sup>103</sup>Kaiser and Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 236.

<sup>104</sup>Silva concludes: "Theological commitments can hardly be separated from decisions about hermeneutical principles. Given the claims of the Bible and the religious expectations it places on its readers, theological neutrality is a mirage. . . . we fool ourselves if we think we can approach the text of Scripture with unprejudiced minds" (*ibid.*, 237).

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>106</sup>Consider Carl Braaten's question: "Where can revelation be found at all, now that the traditional equation of Scripture with revelation can no longer stand unchallenged in the face of the historical criticism of the Bible?" (*History and Hermeneutics* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966], 11).

**Narrative and didactic texts.** Another aspect of interpretation demands attention, beyond the method just described. One of the concerns with Hays's approach raised in the last chapter dealt with his desire to prioritize narrative passages in the interpretive process. The problems associated with that approach were pointed out earlier.<sup>107</sup> At this point it is necessary to be explicit about the relationship of teaching passages and narrative texts. Some scholars, seeking to limit the role of narrative, go too far. Fee and Stuart argue, "Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is merely narrated or described can never function in a normative way."<sup>108</sup> This is overstating the case. However, their ability to instruct the interpreter does depend largely on other, more explicit instruction. Often times, narrative texts teach primarily by illustrating what is taught categorically and explicitly elsewhere.<sup>109</sup> To speak of narrative this way is not derogatory. Narrative is so profitable precisely because of its ability to illustrate truth explicitly taught elsewhere. "When a narrative world . . . seizes a reader, it reveals new possibilities. Stories create habitable worlds, and narratives become habitable texts; we can live in and by them."<sup>110</sup> The issue is not whether narratives teach. The issue is which type of text teaches most explicitly. The text that teaches most explicitly will involve less of the reader's subjectivity in interpretation.

A useful operating principle for interpreters is summarized by McCartney and Clayton this way: "A didactic or systematic discussion of a subject is more significant for

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<sup>107</sup>See pp. 94-96 of this dissertation.

<sup>108</sup>Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 89-106.

<sup>109</sup>A useful criterion for determining when this is so comes below. In summary, if the author does not declare his message explicitly, the abiding lessons found in the narrative must be understood *in light of* that same ethical instruction taught explicitly and categorically elsewhere (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 92).

<sup>110</sup>Daniel Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 2001), 191.



that subject than a historical or descriptive narrative."<sup>111</sup> The Bible student depends on the biblical writer to make explicit the ethical or theological significance of a historical report. Whereas in didactic texts "the intended message is declared explicitly, in narrative the permanent lesson is often, if not generally, implicit in the telling. . . . The authoritative meaning of the author is not found in the event described but in the author's interpretation of the event."<sup>112</sup>

At other times, however, the biblical author does not make the theological import of the narrative explicit. In this way, narratives teach implicitly by illustrating the corresponding explicit teachings of Scripture. For this reason, narrative texts must be interpreted in harmony with didactic passages elsewhere in Scripture. When studying narrative texts, the interpreter should give hermeneutical priority to didactic passages which are more clearly understood, seeking harmony through the analogy of Scripture. Such a process is appropriate for one who affirms the unity and inspiration of Scripture.<sup>113</sup>

One who rejects this approach is Daniel Doriani. He opposes this methodology for two reasons.

It is odd to grant ethical assertions priority over narrative when (1) the principle itself is extrabiblical and (2) Scripture is fundamentally a narrative account of God's redemption. The speeches of Moses, the declarations of the prophets, the letters of the apostles are not freestanding. They frequently comment upon or draw conclusions from narrative. When they do, the narrative is foundational and the

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<sup>111</sup>McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 207.

<sup>112</sup>Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 604.

<sup>113</sup>J. I. Packer argues, "Should it happen that for the present we can find no harmonistic hypothesis that seems sufficiently cogent, we should choose to wait for one to appear, and be willing temporarily not to know the answer, rather than be stampeded into joining those who in one way or another accuse particular biblical passages of theological or empirical falsehood" ("Preaching as Biblical Interpretation," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 199).

ethic is derivative.<sup>114</sup>

Two responses are helpful here. First, as Doriani suggests, the principle is indeed extrabiblical, but so are most of the principles of interpretation which are commonly agreed upon by scholars. The Bible does not give interpreters instructions as to the principles they should use. Therefore, his criticism hardly negates its validity. Secondly, modern-day interpreters are distinct from the apostles and struggle to follow their methods of interpretation for two reasons: (1) The apostles occupied a unique place in redemptive history, standing at the apex of God's salvific work. Therefore, they had a perspective on interpretation not shared by modern-day interpreters. (2) Most importantly, the apostles were not merely acting as human interpreters of the Old Testament but as divinely inspired writers of the New. Therefore their interpretations possessed a purity and insight not shared by modern-day interpreters. Giving narrative passages hermeneutical priority involves greater subjectivity and opens the door to the personal biases of the interpreter.

Richard Hays demonstrates this very concern in his published response to Douglas Moo's review of *The Moral Vision*. Hays writes,

It seems to me that Moo's method of allowing didactic passages hermeneutical control would have the result of making isolated rule-statements such as 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-15 determinative for the roles of women in the church.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 194.

<sup>115</sup>Richard Hays, "The Gospel, Narrative, and Culture: A Response to Douglas J. Moo and Judith Gundry-Volf," *BBR* 9 (1999): 292. It is worth pursuing whether the rule statements in 1 Tim 2:11-15 and 1 Cor 11:34-35 are, in fact, *isolated*. Does the emphasis of the New Testament actually stand in tension with these texts? Does the male leadership structure Jesus instituted with the apostles and which was prescribed by the apostles for the early church (1 Tim 3:1-13) not cut against Hays's statement? See James Borland, "Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 120-23. Borland argues, "Though highly valued and given a new dignity by Christ, [women's] roles were different from those of the men Christ selected for His top leadership positions" (*ibid.*, 121).

In contrast, Hays's method, drawing on narrative accounts of Phoebe, Prisca, and the Samaritan woman, allows him to suggest "broader possibilities for women in the ministry of the church."<sup>116</sup> Putting the issue of the role of women aside, it is certainly apparent that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 teach more explicitly than do the narrative accounts of Phoebe and Prisca. No matter how one interprets the teachings of those two didactic passages, one surely must concede that what the author(s) intended to say regarding the role of women is more explicit and involves the subjectivity of interpreter less than do the narrative passages involving Phoebe and Prisca.<sup>117</sup>

Didactic passages allow for less subjectivity and personal bias because they teach more explicitly. Therefore, interpreters should form interpretations in concert with other, clearer passages.

All of this does not dismiss the value of narrative texts, however, which often help interpreters understand a didactic text more fully. Psalm 86:15 says God is compassionate, but narrative accounts of God showing compassion (such as he did to the widow of Zarephath, first in providing her food and then by resurrecting her son - 1 Kings 17: 8-24) fill out the explicit teaching. One discovers what the compassion of God means through narratives that show it.<sup>118</sup> The didactic passages are like black and white drawings, lacking in color but explicit and precise. Narrative passages are like impressionistic art, lacking in precision but vibrant and multihued. The analogy is simplistic, but it does show the way the two types of text edify each other. Therefore, they should be used in concert with one another.

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<sup>116</sup>Hays, "The Gospel, Narrative, and Culture," 292.

<sup>117</sup>The narratives involving Phoebe and Prisca *may* in fact suggest broader possibilities for women in the ministry of the church, but if such conclusions are reached, the interpreter's subjectivity is involved more than in conclusions reached from 1 Tim 2 and 1 Cor 14.

<sup>118</sup>Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 194.

**The use of tradition and community.** The role of tradition is another aspect of the interpretative process. At every step along the way the interpreter is seeking to understand his text in conversation with church tradition and the living community of faith. Regarding the role of tradition, Hays appropriately follows the classic formula calling Scripture the *norma normans* ("the norming norm"), while tradition is *norma normata* ("the normed norm"). Tradition is helpful in interpreting the Bible in so far as it is "constantly exposed to the judgment of Scripture. Its relation to [believers] is ministerial, not magisterial."<sup>119</sup> While it is possible to give too much authority to tradition, it is equally possible to be too dismissive of the value of traditional interpretations. "Dismissing tradition as representing only the worldliness of the church reflects unbelief in the Spirit's work since Pentecost as the church's teacher; embracing the dogma of faultless tradition reflects a lapse into ecclesiastical perfectionism."<sup>120</sup> In interpretation, one must consider the church's traditional interpretations as a means of recognizing the Spirit's work in and through previous generations, while also recognizing that every previous generation had its own interpretive biases. Church tradition is not infallible nor is it insignificant. It is one component of the interpreter's resources.

Another component of faithful interpretation is the living community of faith. One of the healthiest aspects of the methodology proposed by *The Moral Vision* is Hays's emphasis on community. Hays uses this word to refer to the countercultural community of discipleship which is the primary addressee of God's imperatives. Interpretation is one area in Hays's methodology that the community *does not* play a significant role.<sup>121</sup> But it should. The role of the individual, as an interpreter or as an ethical agent, cannot be

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<sup>119</sup>Packer, "In Quest of Canonical Interpretation," 46.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>As the previous chapter pointed out, Hays's conviction about the proper use of military force contradicts his own faith community's conviction. See p. 113 n.120 of this dissertation.

disconnected from the larger community of faith. In this sense, the work of interpretation is a community affair. The interpreter may do much of his work *alone*, but it should never be done in *isolation*. At every step, his work must seek to engage the larger community's collective input. This is especially needed when an opinion conflicts with tradition. The community should be involved, not to be a final judge between opinions, but as fellow recipients of the Holy Spirit who desire to be faithful to the call of God in every area of life. The interpreter should seek unity of mind among the community of faith, both dead (tradition) and living (community).

### **Understanding the Ethical Instruction of the Text**

It is necessary at this point to delineate the ways in which Scripture gives ethical instruction. Later on, the interpreter will determine how to appropriate that instruction is to modern-day ethical issues. At this point in the interpretive process, however, one should be able to identify the various ways in which Scripture provides ethical instruction.

Obviously, the moral instruction of the Bible is broader than do's and don'ts. But it is also broader than mere instructions concerning behavior. Earlier, this chapter described the nature of Christian ethics as fundamentally both character formation and behavior directives. It is these two aspects of life to which Scripture addresses its ethical instruction in five distinct modes. Scripture provides ethical instruction in the form of rules, principles and virtues, human acts in narrative, redemptive acts in narrative, and doctrine.<sup>122</sup> These categories resemble Hays's categories of rules, principles, paradigms,

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<sup>122</sup>Here the dissertation attempts to interact with Hays's categories of ethical instruction while seeking to improve upon them. This list incorporates aspects of Doriani's seven biblical sources of application (*Putting the Truth to Work*, 82-92) and John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 38-43. Doriani's list is insightful because it considers the broad way in which Scripture gives instruction for living. Goldingay's work is helpful because of its concern for Old Testament passages which are often either passed over or applied

and symbolic world. His scheme is perceptive, but can be improved in three ways. First, his category of paradigms needs to be expanded to include both positive and negative human actions to be emulated or rejected. Secondly, since God is the primary actor in all biblical narrative, his redemptive action serves to model conduct and character that is exemplary and imitable. Thirdly, Hays's last category (symbolic world) proves too amorphous and ultimately is most appropriately narrowed down to doctrine. A definition and description of each category will help the interpreter identify Scripture's ethical instruction.

**Five forms of ethical instructions.** The most obvious form of ethical instruction in Scripture is *rules*. Rules are commandments regarding specific behavior. They demand specific action in narrowly defined cases. Rules are the easiest of all ethical instruction to apply when the specific situation they regulate exists virtually unchanged today. They pose much greater difficulty, however, when cultural aspects are different. Because many of Scripture's rules do not address familiar situations, some Bible interpreters ignore those rules which are culturally specific. What is needed, however, is to find the abiding principle that stands behind the specific rule.

*Principles* guide a broader range of behavior than rules without specifying particular actions. *Virtues* reveal what attitudes and beliefs are appropriate. Principles and virtues lie behind specific rules. Jesus spoke a general principle when he said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39). That principle finds application in rules that are specific and local, such as Philippians 2:4: "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." The virtue of gratitude (Col 2:7) lies behind Paul's rule that all things be done "without grumbling or complaining" (Phil 2:14).

*Human acts in narrative* is a broad category in which the actions of individuals

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wholesale without any appreciation for the theological subtleties that arise from Old Covenant moral instruction.

may serve as models to emulate or examples to repudiate. Jesus justified the search for ethical principles from narrative by using Israel's experience in the wilderness as a lesson about temptation (Matt 4:4-7). Jesus also pointed to David as an example to emulate when Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees about Sabbath observance (Matt 12:1-7).<sup>123</sup> Evidently Jesus considered that hermeneutical principle elementary since he rebuked the Pharisees for failing to draw the lesson from the text (Matt 12:3). Human actions serve to model for the biblical reader the appropriate response to God's grace, the proper attitude in difficulty, and the correct response to suffering. Likewise, they serve to warn against unfaithfulness, waywardness, and rebellion. The text often evaluates an individual's actions or character explicitly (e.g., "And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord," 1 Kings 15:11).

Occasionally, the text indicates how the reader should respond without explicitly evaluating the individual's action (e.g., the faith exercised by the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17). This is inherent to the genre of historical narrative. Some scholars have argued that "straightforward assertions cannot match the power of narrative to embody truth."<sup>124</sup> That may be true. However, the interpreter needs an ethical foundation from which he can evaluate human action in narrative. Without straightforward assertions of ethical principles found elsewhere in Scripture, the interpreter would not always be able to evaluate the propriety of human actions or character. In this way, the literary genres of the Bible complement one another. Hays's method stands in stark contrast. Whereas he prioritizes narrative, the argument of this chapter is that all the modes of instruction complement one another, yet the interpreter should prioritize didactic passages. The analogy of Scripture helps the interpreter locate a unified ethical message.

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<sup>123</sup>Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 88.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

*Redemptive acts in narrative* refers to the action and character of God revealed in each Bible story. The main character in every narrative is God.<sup>125</sup> This means that moral lessons are not the primary significance of biblical history. Theological lessons are. For instance, the primary significance of the forty years of desert wanderings was God's work of sustaining and leading his people. Preaching to the people toward the end of his life, Moses said,

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness . . . . And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna . . . that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (Deut 8:2-3).

According to Moses, God was the main character in those forty years of wandering. One of the great values of narrative Scripture is to see the redeeming work of God and divine character revealed in the text.<sup>126</sup> As the redemptive purposes of God become explicit, the character and person of God are more clearly articulated, calling for devotion and emulation by God's people. In this way, the redemptive acts of God serve as ethical instruction.

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<sup>125</sup>Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 86. He goes on to argue, "Therefore, while interpreters rightly draw moral lessons from biblical history, theological lessons should come first. . . . When teaching narrative, therefore, we should focus first on the redeeming work of God and the divine self-revelation embedded in it. Old Testament narratives focus on God's covenants with Israel: his grace in establishing them, his faithfulness in upholding them, his justice and his mercy toward those who violate them. In some way, each gospel narrative points to Jesus' death and resurrection; some also hint at his restoration of all things. They also disclose the deity and the moral character of Christ—his compassion, righteousness, and wisdom" (ibid., 86-87). In this way, the whole story of the Bible has God and his purposes of redemption at the center. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 11-18; and Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 157-87.

<sup>126</sup>First Corinthians 10 illustrates this point well. Paul argues that the responses of the Israelites to wilderness testing were written down for believers' instruction (v.11). Indeed, these things happened to them as an example. But clearly God is the central actor in the narrative, for Paul concludes the section by arguing that this narrative proves "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability" (v.13).



*Doctrine*, the last type of ethical instruction, helps the interpreter to see the world as it is and to see himself as he is. That is, doctrine helps individuals see the world from God's perspective. This final category of ethical instruction includes the cardinal truths of the faith. Doctrine leads the interpreter to understand what action or character is appropriate if a particular belief is true. For instance, one of the cardinal truths of Christian faith is that God created all things. As such, he has authority over all that he has made. The doctrine of creation helps frame one's view of the world and has an impact on ethical issues of life and death. Doctrines are less explicit than rules or principles in what sort of response they should elicit, yet doctrines are invaluable in helping frame one's view of reality.

The initial job of the interpreter is to locate the original meaning of the text as conceived in the mind of the biblical writer. Once he understands that meaning, and notes the ethical instructions found in that meaning, the interpreter must then seek to understand the significance of that text. This submeaning must preserve the integrity of the text in relation to its original context and author. That is, what the biblical author originally meant must be preserved. However, if Scripture is going to address today's problems, its significance cannot be limited only to what may have been in the original human author's mind.<sup>127</sup> In order to use Scripture to address contemporary ethical concerns, the interpreter must move beyond the original meaning to present-day implications.

### **Understanding the Text's Significance**

To speak of the *significance* of a text<sup>128</sup> refers to those submeanings that legitimately fall within the pattern of original meaning willed by the author, whether he

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<sup>127</sup>McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 161.

<sup>128</sup>Robert Stein's definitions in *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (37-60) prove helpful at this point.

was aware of them or not. The original meaning of what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:2 was that believers should pray for kings. A submeaning that falls within the pattern of original meaning intended by Paul is that believers should pray for officials in political authority. Legitimate submeanings flow from the author's original meaning. This suggests that the reader of the text does not create submeanings. He merely discovers them. They are not new meanings, but the significance which flows out of the author's original meaning. Robert Stein summarizes the issue,

Implications are not 'determined' by the interpreter. . . . By his willed pattern of meaning the *biblical author* has delineated what the implications of his meaning are. The interpreter of Scripture ascertains or discovers these implications, but it is the author alone who has determined them.<sup>129</sup>

As the interpreter seeks to address today's problems, he is seeking significance which addresses modern life—submeanings that flow from the meaning originally intended by the author. This is so for two reasons. First, the development of redemptive history demands that some aspects of revelation are no longer applicable in the same way they once were. Second, because of the contextual limitations of the original writing, the interpreter must seek a newer, fresher significance.

**Meaning and redemptive history.** Bible interpreters know that redemptive history changes the significance of certain passages. Reading portions of Exodus alongside Hebrews, one should recognize that what God commanded of Israel may be important for God's people today, but it does not apply exactly the same way as it did to Israel under Moses' leadership. Many of the ethical instructions of the Old Testament are important for God's people, but the significance is much different than it was for the original recipients. The same is true for other aspects of the Old Covenant, which have been superceded or fulfilled in the New Covenant, such as circumcision. So the original

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 40.

meaning of a text remains the same, but the submeanings for the contemporary reader change because of the shift in redemptive history.<sup>130</sup>

**Meaning and contextual specificity.** A second reason that Scripture's significance cannot be limited to what may have been in the original human author's mind is the specific context out of which he wrote. This is true of many aspects of the Old Testament, such as Moses' instruction that if an ox "has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death" (Exod 21:29). Contemporary individuals who do not own oxen would be left without any instruction if Moses' original meaning was all that was significant. The same is true of many New Testament instructions, such as Paul's instruction regarding meat offered to idols (1 Cor 10:27). Biblical texts are culturally located and their meanings are often specific to a particular cultural context.

Not every aspect of Scripture is culturally bound, however. Instructions regarding marriage, for example, transcend culture (as Jesus' and Paul's reference to Gen 2 make clear).<sup>131</sup> How then, can an interpreter determine if a portion of Scripture is limited by culture or is universal?<sup>132</sup> Three questions will help clarify a passage's

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<sup>130</sup>While it is true that some Christians continue to debate certain peripheral issues such as the place of "sign gifts" in the church today, redemptive history is no longer moving as it once did. That is, the movement of redemptive history is complete (Heb 1:1-2), even if some lesser aspects of theology are still debated.

<sup>131</sup>In Matt 19, Jesus appeals to Gen 1:27 and 2:24 as a final authority on the matter of what God intended regarding marriage. Carson notes, "Jesus essentially appealed to the principle: 'The more original, the weightier,' an accepted form of argument in Jewish exegesis" (D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1984], 412). Paul follows Jesus' lead in this regard, appealing to the creation account as support for his instructions regarding marriage relationships in Eph 5:31.

<sup>132</sup>Answers to this question are multiple. See chap. 7 of William Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

significance.<sup>133</sup> First, does the larger context of the same book limit the scope of the passage? For instance, the counsel of Job's friends proves to be unfaithful and ignorant—something the larger context of the book makes clear. Second, does subsequent revelation limit the scope of the passage? This is the case with the dietary laws found in the Mosaic Law. God revealed to Peter through a vision in Acts 10 that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim 4:4). Third, is the rationale for the passage rooted in something permanent like the creation order, the character of God, the work of redemption or the redeemed life that follows? The creation order refers to the way of life God ordained before the Fall. The work of redemption seeks to restore individuals and creation to what God originally intended. God's character, which never changes, carries moral obligations for everyone whom God has created.<sup>134</sup> Answering these three questions will help the interpreter determine the way to utilize an ancient biblical text.

In moving from what the text meant to its significance, the interpreter is making a significant move in the work of using the Bible in contemporary ethical deliberation. At this step the interpreter begins to see how the Bible relates to modern life. Previously, when seeking to understand what the text meant, the interpreter lived in the world of the Bible. At this stage, however, he has crossed the bridge<sup>135</sup> to the modern-day, as he seeks the submeanings of the text. With these in hand, he is ready to make

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<sup>133</sup>This list resembles that found in William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Kermit Ecklebarger (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 487-98; and Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 249-50.

<sup>134</sup>See p. 130 of this dissertation.

<sup>135</sup>This image of crossing a bridge originated with John Stott's description of preaching as bridge-building (*Between Two Worlds* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 135-79), and was picked up by Doriani in *Getting the Message* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 137-54). Doriani contends, "The great intellectual challenge to the application of Scripture is *to bridge the gap between the cultures of the Bible and current cultures*" (ibid., 143).

application.

### **Applying the Text's Meanings to Contemporary Concerns**

At this point in the process, the interpreter is ready to apply the meanings gained from the text to contemporary concerns. Before laying out the process of how application is made, it is necessary to define application and in so doing distinguish it from the task of interpretation.

**Defining application.** A useful definition of application is the practice of or belief in God's message.<sup>136</sup> Examples abound in Scripture of persons applying the truth of God's word to their lives simply by believing God's word. Other examples show how application involves taking action in response to God's word. At times, application will involve the entire community of faith. At other times, application demands individual response.<sup>137</sup> Hays is correct to point out the faith community's role in the moral vision of the New Testament—a vision that calls for doing and not merely hearing the word.<sup>138</sup> Scripture declares how it is appropriately applied when it claims "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Thus, appropriate application involves changing beliefs and behavior, a point made well by Doriani.

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<sup>136</sup>Compare Shealy's definition in "Redrawing the Line," 187.

<sup>137</sup>The English text does not always make clear when the individual is in view and when the community is in view (e.g., 1 Cor 3:16: "you [plural] are God's temple"). This means that Scripture often addresses the Christian community in ways that may not be readily apparent. Beyond that, the work of interpretation and application is a work entrusted to individuals in community. Judgment between faithful and unfaithful approaches is entrusted to the community (e.g., Paul's entrusting judgment of prophecy to the church in 1 Cor 14:29: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said").

<sup>138</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 3, 470.

Paul's quartet—teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness—falls into two categories: creed and conduct. Regarding *creed*, when Paul says Scripture is useful for teaching and refutation, he asserts that doctrine helps the church overcome error and grow in truth. Doctrine is practical; deviant ideas promote wickedness (2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:1-5). Regarding *conduct*, Paul says Scripture both corrects wrongdoing and trains us in righteousness. Scripture rebukes sin and promotes godliness.<sup>139</sup>

This dual emphasis of creed and conduct, or belief and behavior, equips the Christian community for every good work.<sup>140</sup>

Speaking of application this way, however, emphasizes the importance of a distinction involving Hays that was raised in the previous chapter.

**Distinguishing application from interpretation.** The previous chapter made the case that application and interpretation are separate aspects of the believer's work.<sup>141</sup> Application is subsequent to interpretation. Interpretation confines and controls the avenues of application. As Ramm declared, "Interpretation is one, application is many."<sup>142</sup> Such thinking stands in contrast with Hays's method. For him, the hermeneutical task does not end with analysis and commentary. "To interpret a text rightly," Hays maintains, "is to put it to work, to perform it in a way that is self-involving

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<sup>139</sup>Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 56. See also John Stott, *Guard the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 103; and George Knight, *Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 449-50.

<sup>140</sup>Douglas Moo is uncomfortable with the emphasis Hays places on community at the expense of giving "too little attention to the transformation of the individual believer" (review of *The Moral Vision*, 276). For Moo, "The absence of any sustained treatment of the transformation of the individual is certainly a lacuna in a treatment of NT ethics." Furthermore, Hays "puts more stress on the corporate than is fair to [the] texts. . . . I would argue, transformation into the image of Christ, while encouraged by and necessarily lived out in a community of like-minded people, is also an individual matter. The 'essence' of Christian ethics, as I would see it, is the new heart created by God's Spirit in the individual believer" (ibid.).

<sup>141</sup>See pp. 117-21 of this dissertation.

<sup>142</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 113.

so that our interpretations become acts of 'commitment at risk.'"<sup>143</sup> Hays's view of the interpretive task, though popular,<sup>144</sup> is fundamentally flawed, for it "robs application of its constraints and, for some, makes it the controlling factor in biblical interpretation."<sup>145</sup> Milton Terry, in a nineteenth-century monograph titled *Biblical Hermeneutics*, contends that the Bible student's first concern must be discerning authorial intent. "We do well to remember that the first and great thing is to lay hold of the real spirit and meaning of the sacred writer. There can be no true application, and no profitable taking to ourselves of any lessons of the Bible, unless we first clearly apprehend their original meaning and reference."<sup>146</sup> Distinguishing between the tasks of interpretation and application will help the interpreter seek the proper meaning of the text and thus, make appropriate avenues of application apparent.

At this point in the process the interpreter is already connecting themes and ideas from various passages, which come together to shape moral deliberation. Yet it may not be clear how some of that ethical instruction should be applied. The argument made in this chapter is that the Bible contains a unified ethical vision and instructs behavior and character through the following: rules, principles and virtues, human acts in narrative, redemptive acts in narrative, and doctrine. In each instance of ethical instruction, after interpretation is complete,<sup>147</sup> the individual must ascertain whether the instruction

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<sup>143</sup>Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 305.

<sup>144</sup>Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 251-53. See also the list of contemporary works on hermeneutics guilty of this approach chronicled by Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends," 243-55.

<sup>145</sup>Shealy, "Redrawing the Line," 173.

<sup>146</sup>Milton Terry (*Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947], 600), quoted in Shealy, "Redrawing the Line," 170.

<sup>147</sup>Interpretation is never complete, in the sense of being final and infallible. All interpreters—and thus, all interpretations—are continually in process, being reshaped and reformed through spiritual maturity and through interaction with the spiritual

pertains to the contemporary context identically, analogously, or whether it was typologically fulfilled.

**Identical, analogous, or typical.** If a passage of Scripture is determined to be universally binding and obligatory in just the same way as it was to the original recipient, then its application is *identical*. The instruction in Scripture regarding monogamous marriage applies identically today as it did when Moses wrote Genesis. That is why Jesus appeals to the creation order as the reason why sexual fidelity is appropriate (Matt 19:5).<sup>148</sup> A passage applies identically if its instruction is applicable in the same way as it was to the original recipients. Fee and Stuart contend, "Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar specific life situations) with the [original] setting, God's Word to us is the same as His Word to them."<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, if a passage of Scripture is culturally specific, it may apply *analogously*. While the specific meaning is culturally located, an application analogous to the original meaning may be appropriate. Such is the case with the law about a goring bull. Taken analogously, individuals are responsible for their actions and the damage they (or their possessions) produce. Finally, if a passage of Scripture is fulfilled or superceded in redemptive history, its significance is *typological*. Many aspects of the Old Covenant point to something that is either fulfilled in Christ or fulfilled through redemption in Christ. Portions of the Mosaic law that have been fulfilled or that seem to conflict with later biblical revelation are often typological. In order to apply a given text, the interpreter must identify whether a passage's significance is

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community (both living and dead).

<sup>148</sup>See n. 131 of this chapter. John Jefferson Davis argues that "social principles which are grounded in the creation order and explicitly taught in the redemptive economy are normative for the Church in all ages and cultures. This means that marriages which are monogamous, heterosexual, permanent, and patriarchal are the norm for the Church, not merely a matter of cultural convention" ("Some Reflections on Galatians 3:28, Sexual Roles, and Biblical Hermeneutics," *JETS* 19 (1976): 206.

<sup>149</sup>Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 60.



identical, analogous, or typological. Some examples of Scripture's ethical instruction will make this process clearer.

**Biblical meanings and ethical instruction.** A *rule* from the Old Testament prohibiting stealing (Exod 20:15) applies identically today for two reasons. It is repeated again under the New Covenant (Eph 4:28) and it is an action that is inconsistent with the redeemed life (Rom 13:9). Conversely, Paul's *rule* about eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor 10:23-33) applies analogously to contemporary individuals far removed from the context of first-century, idol-prevalent Corinth. A *rule* from Exodus regarding animal sacrifice (e.g., Exod 29:10-14) is fulfilled in Christ typologically (Heb 13:11-12). *Principles* usually apply identically, since the human condition remains unchanged. For example, the principle of neighbor love is binding and unconditional (Matt 22:39), though the particular circumstances in which it may apply will vary. Virtues taught by the text apply identically also, since God's character and the character that God requires of man remain unchanged.

*Human action in narrative* usually applies in two ways. First, it can apply identically, either encouraging or discouraging similar behavior, when one's situation is similar to that in the narrative. David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) is a useful example. The account discourages the reader from following David's example, but one "will not find any such statements as, 'In committing adultery David did wrong.'"<sup>150</sup> The narrative does show the harmful effects of sin, but it does not explicitly teach about adultery. The reader needs the abiding *principle* of fidelity in marriage taught explicitly elsewhere (Exod 20:14) in order to judge David's action. Abiding principles from other passages help the reader see the application of a passage more clearly, allowing for identical application.

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<sup>150</sup>Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 93.

A second way in which *human action* in narrative can apply is analogously, as the example of Ahab shows. One may not covet a vineyard like king Ahab did, but Ahab's sin discourages the reader of 1 Kings 21 from allowing a desire to develop into wicked actions.

Human action in narrative can also apply typologically to Christ. David's defeat of Goliath (1 Sam 17) is a good example.<sup>151</sup> Matthew 5:44 contains a rule that

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<sup>151</sup>Sidney Greidanus points to the typology latent in the 1 Samuel narrative when he notes, "The essence of this story, therefore, is more than Israel's king defeating the enemy; the essence is that the Lord Himself defeats the enemy of his people. This theme locates this passage on the highway of God's kingdom history which leads straight to Jesus' victory over Satan. This history of enmity began right after the fall into sin when God said to the serpent (later identified as Satan): 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel' (Gen 3:15). Thus the battle between David and Goliath is more than a personal scrap; it is more than Israel's king defeating a powerful enemy; it is a small chapter in the battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—a battle which reaches its climax in Jesus' victory over Satan, first with his death and resurrection, and finally at his Second Coming when Satan will be thrown 'into the lake of fire and sulfur' (Rev 20:10)" (*Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 239).

David's actions apply typologically to the saving work of Christ. In answering the question of whether this sort of application inappropriately reads meaning back into the Old Testament narrative, Greidanus contends that this is "simply understanding this event in its full redemptive-historical context" (*ibid.*, 252). For Greidanus, some Old Testament types are predictive like prophecy is. Predictive types point forward *in their original historical context* to a later fulfillment. The tabernacle is a predictive type, for in the original context the antitype is anticipated. Other types are not predictive. They are discovered only retrospectively. They express a new significance that is seen only in the light of later events (see John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* [London: SCM, 1967], 92; Leonhart Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. D. H. Madvig [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982]). Such is the example of David, for nothing in the original context pointed forward to an antitype, yet subsequent revelation shows how David's action portended an ultimate fulfillment through Christ.

Dennis Johnson delineates five categories of typological texts from the Old Testament, moving from those most explicit and obvious to those that are more subtle and implicit. The David and Goliath story is a good example of Johnson's fourth category, in which the lines of connection between type and antitype are subtler, yet are supported by "multiple strands of connection between Old Testament pattern and New Testament fulfillment" (*Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007], 212-14).

forbids responding to a personal enemy the way David did to his enemy. Instead, disciples are to pray for their enemies. It would be unethical, then, to respond to a personal enemy like David did based on the narrative in 1 Samuel 17. David's action is unique in redemptive history, as it foreshadows the final defeat of God's enemy by Christ (Col 2:15).

One point made earlier in the chapter should be emphasized here. The reader is dependent on the biblical writer to evaluate a character's actions. If the biblical writer makes no evaluation the reader must rely on explicit ethical instructions from other passages in order to form moral judgments. Therefore, human action in narrative is not sufficient alone for ethical instruction, nor should it be primary. Whatever lessons one believes a narrative is teaching should be evaluated on two levels. Such lessons should be compared with explicit moral teaching from other passages for confirmation and they should be tested by the believing community for faithfulness.

*Redemptive acts in narrative* refer to the action of God in historical narrative. The action of God can apply identically to the believers, as when God speaks the truth or acts justly. The action of God can apply analogously as well. God's faithfulness in caring for Israel while they wandered in the desert encourages analogous expressions of faithfulness by God's people.<sup>152</sup> In this respect, the action of God in narrative is just as instructive for ethical application as human action is.

Finally, there is much ethical instruction contained in *doctrine*. Doctrine helps

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Even though David's primary action in the 1 Samuel 17 narrative is applied typologically to Christ, other aspects of the account apply differently. For instance, David expressed courage and hope in God (17:47), character *virtues* that apply identically and should be emulated. The *doctrine* that all things are possible with God, regardless of earthly appearances (17:50) applies identically today as well. A given narrative may contain multiple applications from the various ethical instructions it contains.

<sup>152</sup>Caution is needed when evaluating the actions of Jesus. While the slogan "what would Jesus do" appears to make ethical decisions simpler, the uniqueness of Christ's redemptive life and death remind the church that disciplined and oftentimes complex theological evaluation is necessary. See pp. 90-93 of this dissertation.

individuals process the issues of life from God's perspective. These cardinal truths of the faith help the interpreter understand what belief or action is appropriate in light of a particular belief. Doctrine is the most conceptual and least specific instruction. As such, it depends on other, more explicit ethical instruction for clarity in application. The doctrine of creation demonstrates this point. Scripture teaches that God was involved in creation intimately. Such a doctrine is significant for numerous ethical interests from the beginnings of life to climate concerns, yet applying the doctrine depends on other explicit ethical instruction.

It should be clear at this point that applying the Bible in moral deliberation is a complex endeavor. Since the Bible gives ethical instruction in a number of ways, the diligent student, in conversation with the faith community, will not merely look for rules that forbid or allow a specific behavior. He will seek help from each of the modes in which Scripture gives ethical instruction. When he finds ethical instruction in one mode he will allow the analogy of Scripture and the voice of faithful church tradition to evaluate his conclusions. He will give greater authority to those modes of instruction which speak explicitly than those which speak implicitly. He will give greater authority to those modes of instruction which speak identically than those which speak analogously. Finally, he will take the various meanings gained from all the relevant passages and seek a coherent application, looking always for confirmation from the living community of faith.

**Conclusion.** When an ethical issue arises the believer turns to Scripture for help. He gathers all the relevant passages together and begins working through them, deciding what each originally meant, what submeanings are valid, and how those apply today. This task should be carried out in conversation with other believers, both the living community of which he is a part and the community of faith whose testimony is written down and can be studied. This sort of interpretive work is often done in an unmethodical manner, as passages and cross-references spring to mind, as the analogy of Scripture

gives clarity to complicated passages, and as questions or concerns are raised by other passages. Since Scripture contains a unified ethical message, the process need not proceed uniformly. Occasionally rules under investigation lead to principles which lay behind the original rules. Principles often lead to doctrines which inform and shape one's worldview. If similar situations exist, human actions in narrative should be analyzed. Similarly, divine action in narrative should shape one's moral considerations. In each instance, the interpreter must resist the urge to assume he already knows what a passage meant. Instead, he should work through the process of interpretation. Here he engages in conversation with those who have faithfully read Scripture in the past. The question he is asking in these conversations is whether the meaning he has decided on is faithful. When it comes to the task of application, he must turn for help to the living community of faith, who read Scripture with a shared view of the contemporary context. The question he is asking in these conversations is, again, whether his reading is faithful, but beyond that whether this meaning applies identically, analogously, or is typologically fulfilled in Christ.

The strength of this approach, in contrast to Hays's method, lies in three components. First, it appreciates the unified ethical voice of Scripture. Based on a conviction regarding scriptural inspiration, the interpreter approaches Scripture as a whole, morally instructive unit. Second, it prioritizes those portions of ethical instruction that are most explicit and identical, leading to a less subjective application. Those portions of Scripture that give moral instruction most explicitly are deemed primary in interpretation. Finally, this method has appropriate criteria for evaluating whether a conclusion is faithful—it is complemented by the analogy of Scripture and confirmed by the faith community. Not only is the community of faith (both living and dead) involved in interpreting the text, it has a role in evaluating the propriety of an ethical conclusion.

### **Testing the Model Prescribed**

This final section seeks to test the model prescribed in this chapter. The

implications of *in vitro* fertilization will be examined in light of Scripture's ethical instruction and conclusions will be drawn. This section is substantially different from Hays "Pragmatic Section" in one significant respect, namely, the attempt of this final section is not exhaustive. Hays dealt with every passage which he thought had implications for the five practical issues he addressed, and he sought to address each practical issue from many different angles. This section of the dissertation, however, is much more limited in its approach. The purpose here is to indicate how the prescriptive approach in this dissertation might inform ethical deliberation, and thereby test it, with particular attention being given to the application aspect of the prescription. Thus, this section will not demonstrate the necessary work of determining the original meaning of the text and then move to contemporary implications, as prescribed by this chapter. The interpretation section of this chapter was significantly longer than the application section. In testing the method prescribed, the dissertation will seek to rectify that imbalance by emphasizing the work of application in ethical deliberation.<sup>153</sup> This test will show that the model prescribed in this chapter for using Scripture in ethical decisions is a viable alternative to Hays's approach.

### ***In Vitro* Fertilization**

The process of *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) is one of the more common reproductive technologies practiced today. Of the thousands of births each year from assisted reproductive technology, the majority are a result of IVF.<sup>154</sup> In this procedure, a woman's egg is recovered through laparoscopy. Often times, fertility hormones are administered to induce superovulation, causing the woman's body to make several eggs

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<sup>153</sup>Much of the interpretive work prescribed in this chapter is not presented in this section (though it lies behind and informs the discussion), in an effort to devote as much attention as possible to the application aspect of this model.

<sup>154</sup>Carey Golberg, "In Vitro Field Facing Slowdown," *Boston Globe*, 14 November 2005, sec. Health Science, p. A1.

available for retrieval. The process of removing the eggs from the female body is not without complications, however. "Essential biochemical interactions occurring within the gamete and surrounding ovarian support-cells may be interrupted."<sup>155</sup> The man's semen is obtained through masturbation, typically no more than ninety minutes before the fertilization attempt. A centrifuge is then used in order to concentrate the sperm for insemination. The sperm is then placed for fertilization in the egg in a petri dish, where embryonic cell division takes place in the laboratory culture medium designed to duplicate natural conditions. No environment, however, "is able to replicate satisfactorily that provided by nature—the female reproductive system."<sup>156</sup> Finally, the embryo or embryos are taken from the laboratory and placed for implantation in the female.<sup>157</sup> A successful IVF procedure results in the embryo implanting in the uterine wall and maturing unto birth.

IVF initially was developed to address the problem of infertility in women with blocked or damaged fallopian tubes. Since then it has been used to address other types of infertility, including cases of men with low sperm count or sperm motility problems.<sup>158</sup> With the number of infertile couples rising,<sup>159</sup> and thus the likelihood of

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<sup>155</sup>Gary Hodgen, "In Vitro Fertilization and Alternatives," *JAMA* 246 (1981): 593, quoted in John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993), 74.

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*, 596.

<sup>157</sup>For a detailed explanation of the procedure, see Brian Kearney, *High-Tech Conception* (New York: Bantam, 1998), 90-100.

<sup>158</sup>Greater ethical concern arises with modern reasons behind IVF, such as sperm selection (so as to avoid particular diseases or to locate the strongest sperm), and the use of IVF to bring children into gay or lesbian relationships.

<sup>159</sup>John Jefferson Davis quotes Ralph Dougherty, who contends that from 1930 to 1980 the sperm count of American males fell 30 percent, from 90 million to 65 million sperm per cubic centimeter. The number of infertile women has risen as well, in part due to increased sexual activity and low-level gynecological infections, which when untreated, damage the reproductive system (Lori B. Andrews, "Embryo Technology," *Psychology Today* [May 1981]: 63-64, referenced in John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical*

increased interest in IVF, it is necessary for the church to evaluate the ethical implications of this procedure.

### **IVF and Scripture's Ethical Instruction**

One of the primary means of ethical instruction which Scripture provides for this issue comes in the form of *doctrine*. The doctrine of God's sovereignty in creation and in the production of human life is a constant biblical theme. Scripture repeatedly celebrates the grace and power of God to give life. Even if one qualifies the significance of Psalm 139 regarding the status of the unborn,<sup>160</sup> one clear consequence of this doctrine is the wonder of the formation of a person by the hand of God. Genesis teaches that God himself gave life to Adam, breathing the breath of life into his nostrils (Gen 2:7). In like manner, the Bible reveals *divine activity* in 1 Samuel 1 when the Lord put life in Hannah's womb ("and the LORD remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son" 1 Sam 1:19-20). Paired with this doctrine is the value most evangelicals assign to the developing embryo. For many, fertilization is the moment life, and thus value, begins. Whether or not personhood begins at fertilization is irrelevant. The doctrine of God's ownership of life and authority in creating life, assign value to the developing fetus.

The implications of these doctrines for IVF take many directions. First, one objection to IVF concerns the significant wastage of embryos. This occurs because IVF has a very low success rate and because of how IVF is done. Most IVF clinics fertilize more than one egg and then choose the egg most likely to implant successfully. Increasingly, clinics insert more than one egg in order to raise chances of a successful

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*Ethics*, 72).

<sup>160</sup>Allen Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 203-04. Verhey argues, "It is poetry, and ought not be read as if the author intended to answer our questions about the legal or moral status of the fetus."



pregnancy. Inserting multiple embryos increases the likelihood of multiple births as well as the likelihood of embryo loss. Proponents of IVF argue that such embryo loss is not unlike natural reproduction in which many fertilized eggs are miscarried or never implant (some doctors estimate that as many as 70 percent of fertilized eggs are aborted naturally by the female body).<sup>161</sup> However, there seems to be a significant difference between the loss of an embryo in natural reproduction and loss through IVF. "The fact that all eggs fertilized normally by sexual intercourse do not implant is morally irrelevant because there is no human volition involved."<sup>162</sup>

Other Bible passages reveal ethical instructions which speak in harmony with these considerations. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) puts an end to a discussion about personal rights and raises questions, instead, about to whom one should show neighborly love. The abiding *principle* of love for others demands that the well-being of others, even potential others, be considered. Thus, disregard for embryos that are humanly engendered and subsequently destroyed fails the principle of neighbor-love. Along these lines, IVF is potentially problematic, depending on the policies of the clinic and doctors involved.

Alternatively, another *doctrine* found in the early chapters of Genesis may support IVF. Genesis 1:28 records God's mandate to man: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over [it]." Some interpreters argue that God intended for human beings to become co-workers with God's creative activity in maintaining and improving the patterns and processes of nature. Thus, one aspect of the dominion that God entrusted to humanity is creative capacities, such that IVF may be, not only permissible, but a responsibility. Man should express this dominion, not only in

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<sup>161</sup>David Sanford and Renee Sanford, "'Test-tube' Babies: Is Huxley's Brave New World Just Around the Corner?," *Other Side* 19 (1983): 22.

<sup>162</sup>James Childs, "In Vitro Fertilization: Ethical Aspects and Theological Concerns," *Academy* 36 (1979): 9.

caring for creation, but in using whatever means available to "be fruitful and multiply." Yet there is a fine line between God-given authority and sovereignty. The product of human genius is motivated by both good and bad desires. The quest to exercise dominion can easily become a quest for autonomy and human sovereignty—a quest that too often has brought misery and destruction. "While human manipulation on a limited scale . . . can contribute significantly to the humanizing of life, the temptation to 'improve' on the process of procreation may result in an assault on our self-consciousness as human beings."<sup>163</sup> This argument does not overturn the doctrine of human dominion; it only mitigates it.

Another line of argument that usually enters the IVF discussion is the suffering involved in childlessness. Many couples know the pain of childlessness that Rachel expressed when she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen 30:1). This *human action in narrative* is not explicitly condemned, but Jacob's response certainly indicates her desire for children grew out of envy and a misunderstanding that God alone gives or withholds "the fruit of the womb" (Gen 30:2). For many, the primary reason for supporting IVF is that it makes childbearing possible for couples who desperately want their own child. Yet that very experience of childlessness may be God's process of testing the genuineness of "faith—a faith more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire" (1 Pet 1:7). Would IVF then short-circuit God's design? Is sovereignty over human genesis a means of thwarting God's purposes? Proponents of IVF would ask whether such an argument applies to all medical treatment, so that any use of medicine which alleviates pain and suffering would be considered unethical? Or is infertility different from other types of pain and bodily malfunctions? Looking at the issue from another angle, if a couple has an obsessive concern with having their own genetically

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<sup>163</sup>Paul Jersild, "On Having Children: A Theological and Moral Analysis of *In Vitro* Fertilization," in *Questions about the Beginning of Life*, ed. Edward Schneider (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1985), 42.

related child, perhaps they are thinking of parenthood too biologically. The real meaning of parenthood is found in childrearing rather than childbearing. This is obvious from the strong biblical emphasis on the *doctrine* of adoption. "Parenthood before God is not fundamentally defined by its biology but by its nurture. . . . This means that the desire on the part of infertile couples to have their own child will have to be weighed in relation to other needs and resources of the community. It is not a right, nor even essential to the role of parenting."<sup>164</sup> Ultimately a childless couple must ask whether their desire for a child has slipped into idolatry—a danger, however, not unique to barren couples. "All parents are potentially prey to this sort of idolatry: a veiled worship of self and the continuation of self in future generations."<sup>165</sup>

### **Drawing Conclusions**

The foregoing discussion is the typical sort of give and take that occurs within a faith community when discussing a contemporary ethical concern. Much of the ethical instruction that was considered came from *divine acts in narrative, doctrine, and enduring principles*, simply because there are less instructions from rules or human action that is identical or analogous. There are many contemporary developments that the biblical writers do not explicitly address, but that does not mean that the Bible is silent about the underlying moral and human questions about God's will for humanity. Enough ethical instruction is available to draw some conclusions.

First, any procedure which creates extra embryos that will be stored or frozen is unethical. The God-given authority to rule over creation does not give humanity the authority to create life that may be discarded or used for research. Irrespective of one's conclusions about the nature of the embryo, the value of such an embryo ought not be

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>165</sup>Janet Dickey McDowell, "Ethical Implications of In Vitro Fertilization," *CC* 100 (1983): 936.

disputed. Even if one qualifies Psalm 139 as poetry (and therefore does not believe it contains technical instructions about the moral status of the fetus),<sup>166</sup> the language unmistakably denotes the fetus' value:

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . .  
 I was being made in secret,  
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
 Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
 in your book were written, every one of them,  
 the days that were formed for me,  
 when as yet there were none of them. (Psa 139:14-16)

Hays is surely correct that the *doctrine* (he calls it the symbolic world) of this passage reveals that God alone creates life. Combining these truths with the *principle* of neighbor-love, it is incumbent that every embryos created in IVF be given a chance to live. Leon Kass argues,

It is one thing voluntarily to accept the risk of a dangerous procedure for yourself. . . . It is quite a different thing to submit a child to hazardous procedures which can in no way be therapeutic for him. . . . This argument against nontherapeutic experimentation on children applies with even greater force against experimentation 'on' a hypothetical child (whose conception is as yet only intellectual). One cannot ethically choose for him the unknown hazards he must face and simultaneously choose to give him life in which to face them.<sup>167</sup>

All embryos created through IVF must be inserted into the uterus. Many couples follow this very plan—creating multiple embryos and inserting all of them at once. Such a procedure raises other problems, however, leading to a second point.

Second, fertilizing and implanting multiple eggs is morally wrong. Invariably, some eggs, once implanted, will be expelled by the female's body. In light of the view of the embryo presented above, the possibility of losing life makes this procedure immoral.

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<sup>166</sup>See Hays's approach to this text and his discussion of the embryo summarized in this dissertation (72-73).

<sup>167</sup>Leon Kass, "Making Babies—The New Biology and the 'Old Morality,'" *Public Interest* 26 (1972): 29-30, quoted in Jersild, "On Having Children," 40.

Janet Dickey McDowell argues in favor of the policy maintained by the Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk (which is the most "prolific" clinic in the U.S.).

Where more than one ovum is recovered through laparoscopy, all are exposed to sperm. Any which manifest successful cell division (and thus are 'alive') are inserted into the woman's uterus and thus given an opportunity for implantation. None is used for experimental purposes or destroyed.<sup>168</sup>

This approach is certainly better than freezing, destroying, or performing research on "extra" embryos. However, any loss of embryo inserted into the womb is loss of human life. To argue that this same sort of loss happens often in natural reproduction misses the point. The point is that *none* of these embryos would be in the position of possibly being aborted if not for a conscious choice to fertilize and implant them.<sup>169</sup>

What then, of a policy of fertilizing and inserting only one egg at a time? This satisfies the problem of creating more embryos than will be used. However, even in this scenario the possibility of creating life and ultimately losing it is too grave a chance to take. If the inserted embryo fails to implant in the uterus, the loss of life came about because of the deliberate acts of the doctor and couple to initiate a procedure which put the embryo in a precarious situation. Irrespective of the slim chance of success with IVF (estimated to be well below 25%),<sup>170</sup> the practice of creating life that may be lost is ethically problematic. Even if the success of IVF dramatically increases the concern remains. The problem is not the high loss of life. It is the fact that such loss would never have happened apart from the IVF procedure.

A third conclusion concerning character development comes up at this point. It

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<sup>168</sup>McDowell, "Ethical Implication," 937.

<sup>169</sup>John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 235.

<sup>170</sup>Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 74. For reasons why these numbers are so hard to pin down, see "Success Rates" by Georgia Reproductive Specialists [online]; accessed 3 January 2008; available from <http://www.ivf.com/success.html>; Internet.

is worth asking whether a couple's desire for children remains a healthy desire. Scripture speaks of children as a gift from God (Ps 127:3), but many good things can be turned into idols of the heart. Primarily at issue in this third argument is the character development of those unable to have children. Scripture often portrays barrenness as an act of God for definite purposes (consider again Jacob's rebuke of Rachel in Gen 30:2: "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?") Also see Heb 11:11-12). Therefore, does IVF subvert those divine purposes? Is IVF comparable to other medical procedures that restore health?<sup>171</sup> Regarding the couple's character, is it possible that God has intentionally held children back from them for divine, often mysterious purposes? These questions are appropriately asked of each individual couple. They pertain to the couple personally and are not related to the morality of IVF per se. For some couples, the answers to these questions may in fact make IVF improper.

Other conclusions may be warranted depending on the particulars of the situation. For instance, as mentioned above, IVF is being used to bring children into many gay and lesbian relationships. Therefore, concern would need to be given to the ethical instruction implicit in the Bible's teaching on the family, procreation, and sexual relationships outside of marriage.

The foregoing is an example of the sort of deliberation that will take place with contemporary ethical questions. Since every case is unique and since the biblical perspective is always coherent and consistent, moral deliberation will rarely proceed in a straight line toward resolution. There is usually ethical instruction that either mitigates or undermines an initial conclusion. Nevertheless, the analogy of Scripture helps resolve apparent discrepancies, as will interaction with the faith community. In this way, the

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<sup>171</sup>"As DeMarco says, 'There is a crucial distinction between helping an infertile woman and helping a woman with her infertility.' IVF focuses on the former, not the latter. As such, it treats a desire, not a medical problem" (Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 231-32). See also Leon Kass, "Making Babies—Revisited," *Public Interest* 52 (1979): 32-60.

interpreter will find a coherent moral position which is faithful to the thrust of Scripture's ethic and commensurate with the moral witness of the church.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a method of using Scripture in ethical deliberation. The prescribed model flowed out of a dialogue with Richard Hays's *The Moral Vision*. Four key problems with Hays's method were noted in the previous chapter. In response, the model prescribed here sought to alleviate those problems and provide a reproducible approach that is faithful to the ancient text and applicable to the contemporary context.

The upcoming, final chapter will conclude the dissertation by offering some practical application of the findings of this dissertation for the church and the academy. It will also suggest various questions for further research and discussion.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to provide a method for using Scripture in Christian ethics in dialogue with Richard Hays's *The Moral Vision*. The dissertation sought to summarize the major lines of thought in *The Moral Vision*, reading Hays sympathetically while presenting his method for using Scripture in ethics. The third chapter offered a critical evaluation of Hays's work. After describing useful aspects of Hays's work, the dissertation noted four key weaknesses. First, Hays begins the task of moral deliberation with a fragmented view of Scripture and must impose a structure of synthesis on the text in order to hear the biblical witness speaking in one voice. Such an approach ultimately fails, because it creates the very unity it seeks and therefore shifts the locus of authority away from the divine text and onto the focal images which create the unity. Secondly, Hays proposes three focal images which help focus the disparate moral voices of the New Testament into a unified moral witness. His focal images create a canon within the canon by guiding interpretation and effectively dismissing those portions of the New Testament which do not fit the continuity of the larger scriptural story as summarized by his focal images.

A third concern with Hays's method involves the priority he places on narrative texts. There are two problems with such an approach. First, Hays undermines his own emphasis on the canon. It is possible that despite his desire not to exclude parts of the canon that don't fit one's predetermined agenda, Hays does exactly that. Second, by prioritizing narrative, Hays gives a greater role to personal bias and subjectivity in interpretation. Lastly, Hays's process for appropriating Scripture by the contemporary believer raises serious concerns as well. Hays gives little help in determining whether an



analogy is faithful to the will of God. The process relies on transcendent ethical principles, though the interpreter is never called on to identify them explicitly. Finally, the process fails because Hays combines the work of interpretation and application. Having critiqued *The Moral Vision*, the need was apparent for an alternative methodology.

The last chapter presented an original method to the dilemma of how the Bible relates to Christian ethics. Before constructing such a method, certain presuppositions about the nature of Christian ethics and about the nature of Scripture had to be explicitly stated. Christian ethics, it was argued, is essentially Trinitarian. First, it is rooted, not in divine fiat, but in the nature and character of God. Unlike Hays, the argument of this dissertation is that the ethical norms of Scripture are not rooted in the culture in which they are expressed. "What God requires was what He Himself was and is."<sup>1</sup> Second, Christian ethics is revealed in the word of God. Initially God revealed His character and moral demands in his divine self disclosure of the written word. The final and complete expression of his nature came in Jesus Christ, the incarnate word. Jesus of Nazareth not only made God known to humanity, but he enfleshed the holy nature of God, making the holiness God demanded of man able to be heard, seen, and touched (1 John 1:1). But simply knowing what God demanded will never make humanity capable of obedience. So God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the believer. The Holy Spirit works within the human heart to shape the kind of character that leads one actually to live in a way that aligns with the character of God. The presupposition concerning Christian ethics dealt with its Trinitarian nature.

A second presupposition in which a method for using Scripture in ethics was developed concerns the nature of Scripture. Primary to any such method is the conviction

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Kaiser, "Ethics," in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 442.

that Scripture is unified. The unity of Scripture rests upon two foundational truths—the divine authorship of Scripture and the inspiration of Scripture. Apart from the first principle, one is likely to conclude like Hays that Scripture is "essentially a human compilation, a sort of heritage collection of literature, brought together in the interests of maintaining and deepening a sense of group identity."<sup>2</sup> Apart from a single divine author, a conviction about Scripture's unity is unlikely. The same is true for a conviction about inspiration. The inspiration of Scripture establishes its unity since the contrary view necessarily considers God to contradict Himself. This chapter also contended that Scripture, while unified, is also diverse. The argument made here is that Scripture, though it contains a unified message, also reveals a measure of diversity. This diversity is the reason for varying theological and ethical emphases. When these emphases appear to contradict one another, the interpreter should seek a harmonization. This is done primarily through the analogy of Scripture. This approach is superior to Hays's suggestion of setting aside a text which does not fit with the larger story of Scripture. With these presuppositions laid out, the dissertation sought to define the task of interpretation.

The work of interpretation is primarily interested in finding out what the text originally meant and what significance it now has. This chapter defined the grammatical-historical method of interpretation (an interpretive strategy which seeks to locate the original author's meaning through grammatical and historical study of the biblical text). With the original meaning in hand, the interpreter is better able to process the various ethical instructions found in the text. These come in the following five forms: rules, principles or virtues, human action in narrative, divine action in narrative, and doctrine. After noting the ethical instruction of the text, the chapter called the interpreter to find the meanings or implications of the text for the contemporary day. The original meaning and

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<sup>2</sup>J. I. Packer, "Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today," *JETS* 25 (1982): 412.

the contemporary submeanings are often different because of the shift in redemptive history or because of the original context's specificity. The dissertation then prescribed how to apply the meanings appropriate for today to the contemporary context. The five categories of ethical instruction relate to the contemporary context in one of the following three ways: either identically, in which case the application is the same as in the original, or analogously, in which case the application is similar, or typologically, in which case the application relates to Christ and his redemptive work.

Chapter 4 closed by testing the model prescribed. The case of IVF was considered in light of several categories of ethical instruction and an ethical argument was made against the use of IVF. More important than the specific conclusions reached regarding IVF, however, for many more similar conclusions could have been offered, was the test carried out on the prescribed methodology. While not demonstrating all of the actual work of interpretation, the dissertation demonstrated how such interpretive work might inform the discussion and help the interpreter analyze a contemporary ethical issue.

The work left for this chapter is to make application of this prescriptive approach and point out the tensions demanding further research.

### **Application**

The immediate application for the method prescribed here is for the church to use it to address the ethical concerns currently facing society. The type of modest confession with which Hays preface his method is certainly appropriate here: what this dissertation has provided is not the only method for using Scripture in ethics. It is rather one attempt to allow Scripture to inform the current ethical discussions of the day. The dissertation has appreciated the strengths and the weaknesses of Hays's method and proposed a method for entering conversation of contemporary ethical concerns. What is now needed is interaction with the concerns of the day, employing this method, bringing clarity to many complex and convoluted issues. Hays is correct that the church needs less

slogans and prooftexts. It needs thorough, biblical interaction. It needs ethical judgments that are formed from the broadest range of ethical instructions. Areas like medical ethics (of which IVF is just a part), where issues of life and human wholeness, God's will, and dignified death, call out for the church to be engaged.

In his article "Salvation and Health: Why Medicine Needs the Church," Hauerwas complains that though several ethicists have done extensive work in medical ethics, it is hard to tell how their religious convictions have made a difference for the methodology they employ.<sup>3</sup> The same may be said of the church and its convictions about Scripture. It is not always clear how Scripture has instructed the moral reasoning of the church. The church must engage medical issues with clear thinking and biblical wisdom. What is true of medical ethics applies equally to other contemporary concerns and the questions they pose. Are the older categories of just war still appropriate in an age of global terrorism? What does Scripture have to say about preemptive war strikes? Is torture ever appropriate and, if so, what is ethically appropriate when interrogating terrorist suspects? The church in the west needs to lead the way in suggesting the moral obligations a society has to the elderly. Specifically, what health care responsibilities does a society have to those who have paid into Social Security all their lives? What are a society's health care responsibilities to the aging in a culture of limited medical resources? The plan put forth in this dissertation will not answer all the questions being asked. But it gives avenues for dialogue and moral reasoning based on the ethical instruction preserved in the text.

Contemporary ethical concerns are cropping up faster than the church can respond. The methodological approach offered in this dissertation is not the type of response that only professional ethicists or biblical scholars can use. It is a methodology

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, "Salvation and Health: Why Medicine Needs the Church," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, ed. Stephen Lammers and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 76.

for the church, to be engaged in by the church. So the church must respond with fully informed Scriptural responses.

A second application is related to the previous. In order to address ethical concerns in a robust way, the church must do a better job of reading Scripture. Put another way, the church must read Scripture more wholly. It must read Scripture thoroughly, seeking ethical instruction that is theologically informed. Too often ethical decisions are based on casual readings of a few favorite texts, an approach not limited to theological conservatives, though it is certainly evident among them.<sup>4</sup> What is needed is a thick reading<sup>5</sup> of Scripture—the type that is suggested in this dissertation. A thick reading locates the passage in its literary context as well as the context of redemptive history. It seeks the meaning of the text in light of genre, literary symbols, and grammatical function. A thick reading, moreover, will deal with the host of ethical instructions from a passage and bring all of those instructions to bear on the ethical issue. Finally, a thick reading will not make premature judgments about a passage's applicability, without considering whether it applies identically, analogously, or typologically. The church must refuse to settle for simplistic readings which either draw implications prematurely or too narrowly. At the same time, the church must draw specific conclusions about ethical issues from this thick reading, despite cultural pressure to be morally progressive. The sort of reading of and reasoning from the text suggested in this dissertation will help the church do just that.

These are but two applications for the church flowing from this dissertation. The avenues of further research and analysis that arise from this work address the academy as well as the church.

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<sup>4</sup>Theological conservatives are most often chided for this sort of superficial reading of the text, often times by those scholars who disregard Scripture altogether in their reaction against proof-texting.

<sup>5</sup>See

### Suggestions for Further Research

One of the implications arising from this dissertation is the need for greater interaction between biblical scholars and ethicists. If the methodology suggested by this project is sustainable, then it demands cross-disciplinary work in which textual study bears upon ethical reasoning and ethical conclusions continue to form and reform the questions being asked of the text. Christian ethics cannot proceed apart from biblical instruction since it is the process of discerning the revealed will of God in the written and incarnate word. Biblical studies cannot proceed apart from Christian ethics without becoming anachronistic and disengaged. Because of this, one avenue of further research calls for a greater union of the two disciplines. It should not be the case that *The Moral Vision* is so unique in wedding biblical studies and ethics. The conversation between the two disciplines must continue.

A second suggestion for further research involves the issue of how Scripture is interpreted collectively by a community of faith. *The Moral Vision* emphasized, admirably, the community's role in embodying the moral vision of Scripture. This dissertation went on to emphasize the community's role in the entire process of scriptural interaction, from interpretation to application. Yet this project did not specifically define how such communal interaction would be carried out in interpretation. How is the entire community to take part?<sup>6</sup> The evangelical community does not want to return the interpretive task solely back to the clergy—a sort of anti-Reformation in which the Scriptures are removed from the people. Nor does the evangelical community want to affirm that every one's interpretation is equally true and equally useful. What then is the role of the community in interpretation? What is the relationship of professionally trained

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<sup>6</sup>This question is even more complicated for those who, like Hays, envision the Christian story primarily as a communal one. When Lesslie Newbigin writes of "the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel," it is clear that the task of interpretation is determining not so much what a particular author writes as what a particular community enacts. See Alan Jacobs, "What Narrative Theology Forgot," *FT* 135 (2003): 25.

scholars and pastors to laity when it comes to scriptural investigation? These questions are only part of this problem which needs further investigation.

One of the issues this dissertation was unable to pursue in detail was the relationship between character or virtue ethics and decision-making. For the most part, the concern of this work has been the relationship of Scripture in influencing moral decisions. The connection between character development and decision-making is a complexity that this dissertation was not able to pursue. The contention put forward in this work is that character and decision-making are not separate ethical schemes. Character informs and shapes one's decisions. It remains for others to pursue the specifics of how this works out practically. For instance, how do rules and principles regarding specific actions shape character? How do Scripture's ethical instructions regarding character inform one's specific actions? What role does character development have in moving a person from being a hearer of the word to a doer of it? Beyond these specific questions, the issue of how Scripture specifically is related to character development is a broader question than this dissertation was able to answer.

This dissertation only touched on one of the many aspects of the relationship between Scripture and ethics. There are deep and profound tensions involved in using an ancient book to address contemporary ethical issues. The hope of this work is that the method prescribed here will help the church hear the word of God and be doers of it as well.

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## ABSTRACT

### USING SCRIPTURE IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS: INTERACTING WITH RICHARD HAYS'S *THE MORAL VISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*

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One of the fundamental issues at the core of evangelical ethical debates involves the use of Scripture. Rejecting historical-critical methods on the one hand, and simplistic proof-texting on the other, Richard Hays wrote *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* in order to deal with this very problem. By most accounts, Hays's approach succeeds. This dissertation explores the method proposed by Hays in *The Moral Vision*, seeking to locate the strengths of his approach while noting its primary weaknesses. Upon finding Hays's method wanting, the dissertation posits a constructive proposal, in conversation with Hays, for using Scripture in ethics.

The first chapter of the dissertation introduces the problem and suggests *The Moral Vision* as an ethical text which has garnered sufficient accolades as to make it worthy of examination. Chapter 2 seeks to describe in detail the major lines of argument, giving specific attention to the method Hays proposes to use Scripture in ethics.

Chapter 3 offers a critique of *The Moral Vision*, beginning with several strengths. The thrust of the chapter, however centers on the following four weaknesses of Hays's method: first, Hays's program of appropriating Scripture is built on his view that Scripture speaks in disunity; second, that view of the canon necessitates that Hays identify three focal images to locate a coherent moral voice. The focal images serve to develop, despite Hays insistence to the contrary, a canon within the canon; third, Hays

gives priority to narrative in his system, which opens his method up to greater subjectivity and personal bias; and lastly, Hays's approach provides no criteria for judging whether an appropriation is faithful, it unwittingly relies on transcendent ethical principles, and it fails to distinguish between interpretation and application.

After offering a critique of *The Moral Vision*, chapter 4 proposes an original method for appropriating Scripture in ethics. That proposal seeks first to establish foundational convictions regarding Scripture and ethics. Building on those presuppositions, the dissertation prescribes how one might rightly read the ancient text of Scripture and from there draw conclusions about how the Bible gives ethical instructions today. At every turn, the dissertation's interest is concerned primarily with methodology rather than specific ethical conclusions. The chapter closes by drawing conclusions about one contemporary ethical issue (*in vitro* fertilization) in order to test the method prescribed and help the reader see how such a proposal might proceed.

The final chapter proposes application for the church that arises from the method proposed by this dissertation. The chapter also raises tensions for further research which lay outside the scope of this dissertation's purposes.

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