

Book Review

The Moral Vision of the New Testament

A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics

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Chapter 3 The Gospel of Mark & Chapter 4 The Gospel of Matthew

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New Testament Ethics (2023)

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Chapter 3: The Gospel Of Mark : Taking Up The Cross

The excerpt discusses the distinctive nature of the Gospels, particularly focusing on the Gospel of Mark, in contrast to the Pauline letters. The author emphasizes the narrative mode of presentation in the Gospels, which tells stories about Jesus rather than offering explicit moral teachings to specific communities. The central argument revolves around the idea that the moral meaning of the Gospels cannot be confined to explicit didactic passages; instead, it permeates the entire narrative, shaping values and moral sensibilities indirectly.

The author contends that stories, especially in the Gospel of Mark, play a crucial role in forming ethical perspectives. While acknowledging that the Gospels, including Matthew, contain stories representing Jesus as a moral teacher, the author argues that understanding the ethical significance requires examining the narrative as a whole. The approach presented encourages readers to explore how Jesus' life and ministry are portrayed, how his call to discipleship transforms characters, and how the narrative interprets significant events, such as Jesus' violent and unjust death.

One notable point is the rejection of certain prevalent methods for interpreting Mark theology, such as redaction-critical approaches that focus on isolating distinctive Mark material. Instead, the author opts for a more literary method that analyzes the total shape of Mark's narrative, considering the narrative world he constructed. This approach prioritizes understanding the overall depiction of Christian discipleship rather than attempting to pinpoint specific sources or historical circumstances of the Gospel's composition. The author also dismisses attempts to determine the precise historical circumstances of Mark's composition, highlighting the speculative nature of such

reconstructions. Instead, the focus remains on how the narrative itself contributes to an understanding of Mark ethics, irrespective of competing historical conjectures.

In summary, the author advocates for a narrative-centered approach to interpreting the Gospel of Mark, suggesting that the ethical significance of the text lies in the total shape of the narrative and its portrayal of a life lived faithfully before God. This perspective encourages readers to delve into the broader contours of Mark's storytelling, examining how the narrative shapes moral values and offers insights into Christian discipleship.

Chapter 4: The Gospel Of Matthew : Training for the kingdom of Heaven

The analysis contrasts the narrative strategies of Mark and Matthew, particularly focusing on their respective endings and overarching storytelling approaches. While Mark's Gospel concludes with an open-ended promise, encouraging readers to supply their imaginative completion, Matthew takes a different narrative route. The concluding verses in Matthew explicitly tie up the story's threads and assign a clear task to the disciples and, by extension, to Matthew's readers.

The author highlights the commissioning of the disciples in Matthew 28:16-20, where Jesus instructs them to make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them to obey His commandments. The immediate presence of the risen Lord is emphasized, assuring that Jesus will remain with them always, providing a solid foundation for the life and mission of the church.

The contrast between Matthew and Mark extends beyond their conclusions, permeating their entire narratives. Matthew, incorporating much of Mark's material, consistently seeks resolution, explanation, and closure throughout the story. The author employs a narrative typology suggested by John Dominic Crossan, categorizing narratives based on their relationship to the cultural understanding of reality. In this typology, Mark is likened to a parable, disrupting the established world, while Matthew aligns more with the myth/apologue end of the spectrum, creating an ordered, symbolic world and defending it against competing worldviews.

The narrative world constructed by Matthew is depicted as one where Jesus holds all authority, and this world is both created and defended against alternative

perspectives. The author further explores how Matthew portrays Jesus as a teacher, defines discipleship as community formation, and adapts eschatology to provide a foundation for ethics. The text concludes with a promise to delve into the historical background influencing Matthew's creative use of the Jesus-tradition, offering insights into Matthew's narrative world as a context for moral discernment and action.

In summary, the review provides a nuanced exploration of the distinctive narrative strategies employed by Mark and Matthew, shedding light on their respective approaches to storytelling, symbolism, and the commissioning of disciples. The utilization of Crossan's narrative typology adds depth to the analysis, offering a framework for understanding the narrative sensibilities of these two Gospels.

Comments and Critiques:

Chapter 3:

Comment: Clear Articulation of Central Arguments: The excerpt effectively communicates the central arguments regarding the distinctive nature of the Gospels, particularly emphasizing the narrative mode of presentation and its impact on ethical perspectives. The reader gains a clear understanding of the author's viewpoint. Emphasis on Narrative's Role in Ethical Perspectives: The author makes a compelling case for the significant role stories, especially in the Gospel of Mark, play in shaping ethical perspectives. This emphasis adds depth to the analysis and underscores the importance of considering the broader narrative context. Critical Evaluation of Interpretative Methods: The rejection of redaction-critical approaches in favor of a more literary method is a noteworthy choice. It provides a fresh perspective on interpreting Markan theology and encourages a holistic understanding of the narrative world, rather than isolating specific elements. Acknowledgment of Speculative Nature: The acknowledgment of the speculative nature of attempts to determine the historical circumstances of Mark's composition adds a layer of intellectual honesty to the analysis. It recognizes the limitations of available evidence and avoids unfounded conclusions.

Critiques: Clarity on Redaction-Critical Approaches: While the rejection of redaction-critical approaches is justified, a bit more clarity on the reasons behind this rejection and the potential drawbacks of such methods could strengthen the argument.

Engaging with opposing viewpoints would add depth to the discussion. **Balancing Historical Context:** While the focus on narrative is commendable, a brief acknowledgment of the potential insights that considering historical context might bring could provide a more well-rounded perspective. **Striking a balance between narrative analysis and historical context could enhance the overall argument.** **Specific Examples or Illustrations:** Adding specific examples or illustrations from the Gospel of Mark to support the arguments could make the analysis more tangible for readers. This could include instances where the narrative method is particularly effective in conveying ethical meaning. **Potential Addressing of Counterarguments:** Including a section addressing potential counterarguments or criticisms of the narrative-centered approach could strengthen the author's position. This would demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

In conclusion, the excerpt presents a thought-provoking analysis of the narrative-centered approach to interpreting the Gospel of Mark. While the central arguments are well-articulated, addressing potential counterarguments, providing specific examples, and balancing historical context could further enrich the discussion.

Chapter 4:

Comment: **Clarity in Contrasting Narrative Styles:** The review effectively highlights the contrasting narrative styles between Mark and Matthew, especially in terms of their conclusions. The emphasis on the divergent endings and the specific tasks assigned to disciples in Matthew adds clarity to the comparison. **Effective Use of Scriptural References:** The inclusion of specific scriptural references, such as Matthew 28:16-20, adds credibility and allows readers to engage directly with the text. It helps ground the analysis in concrete examples from the Gospels. **Insightful Application of Crossan's Typology:** The application of John Dominic Crossan's narrative typology to analyze the storytelling approaches of Mark and Matthew is insightful. It provides readers with a framework to understand the narrative sensibilities of each Gospel and sets the stage for a deeper exploration.

Critiques: **Need for Further Explanation on Crossan's Typology:** While the application of Crossan's typology is intriguing, the review could benefit from a bit more clarification on how each Gospel aligns with specific categories within the typology. A

brief explanation of why Mark is considered a "parable" and Matthew is more aligned with the "myth/apologue" end would enhance the reader's understanding. Expansion on Historical Background: The promise to delve into the historical background influencing Matthew's use of the Jesus-tradition is intriguing but leaves readers anticipating more. Expanding on this aspect, even briefly, would strengthen the narrative and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the context. Incorporate Counterarguments or Alternate Views: To enhance the depth of the analysis, the review could consider incorporating potential counterarguments or alternative views. This would acknowledge the complexity of biblical interpretation and contribute to a more well-rounded discussion. Engage with Matthew's Critics: Given that Matthew is noted for resolving ambiguities and bringing closure, it might be beneficial to address any criticisms or scholarly debates regarding this approach. Engaging with potential critiques could further enrich the discussion.

In conclusion, while the review effectively contrasts the narrative strategies of Mark and Matthew and successfully applies Crossan's typology, a bit more explanation and expansion on certain points could enhance its overall depth and engagement. Additionally, addressing potential criticisms would contribute to a more comprehensive analysis.