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Interdisciplinary studies are emerging rapidly to meet the demands of the modern age. To bring together biblical interpretation and Christian ethics is a potentially creative undertaking. Such dialogue is attempted in this work, at a time when much attention is being paid to *reading texts* and the *interpretive tradition*. The author's principal concern is to read the Bible in the context of moral concern. Attention is paid to the liberal quest and to eschatology and ethics, before the post-modern age is studied under the rubric 'participation in meaning'.

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NEW STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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In recent years the study of Christian ethics has become an integral part of mainstream theological studies. The reasons for this are not hard to detect. It has become a more widely held view that Christian ethics is actually central to Christian theology as a whole. Theologians increasingly have had to ask what contemporary relevance their discipline has in a context where religious belief is on the wane, and whether Christian ethics (that is, an ethics based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ) has anything to say in a multi-faceted and complex secular society. There is now no shortage of books on most substantive moral issues, written from a wide variety of theological positions. However, what is lacking are books within Christian ethics which are taken at all seriously by those engaged in the wider secular debate. Too few are methodologically substantial; too few have an informed knowledge of parallel discussions in philosophy or the social sciences. This series attempts to remedy the situation. The aims of *New Studies in Christian Ethics* will therefore be twofold. First, to engage centrally with the secular moral debate at the highest possible intellectual level; second, to demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate – either in moral substance, or in terms of underlying moral justifications. It is hoped that the series as a whole will make a substantial contribution to the discipline.

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BIBLICAL
INTERPRETATION
AND CHRISTIAN
ETHICS

BY

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in the University of Edinburgh*



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Victoria 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1993

First published 1993

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

McDonald, J. I. H.

Biblical interpretation and Christian ethics / by J. I. H. McDonald.

p. cm. - (New studies in Christian ethics)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-43059-3

1. Christian ethics - Biblical teaching. 2. Bible - Criticism, interpretation, etc. 3. Christian ethics - History - 19th century. 4. Christian ethics - History - 20th century. 5. Bible - Criticism, interpretation, etc. - History - 19th century. 6. Bible - Criticism, interpretation, etc. - History - 20th century. I. Title.

II. Series.

BS680.E84M43 1993

241 - dc20

93-16555 CIP

ISBN 0 521 43059 3 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

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General editor's preface

This is the second monograph in the *New Studies in Christian Ethics* series. Fundamental to this series is the attempt to write about Christian ethics in an interdisciplinary context. Authors are encouraged to bring together recent discussions in philosophy, literary studies and the social sciences with the very best in Christian ethics. This is meant to be an intellectually challenging series and, as such, it inevitably makes heavy demands on contributors. In the first monograph Dr Kieran Cronin used his philosophical and theological skills in *Rights and Christian Ethics*. It is an admirable example of interdisciplinary study.

In this second monograph Dr Ian McDonald also adopts an interdisciplinary approach. He is already a well-established scholar with impressive qualifications and books in both biblical studies (specialising in the New Testament) and Christian ethics. He brought these two skills together most notably in the well received *The Quest for Christian Ethics* that he wrote with the philosopher Ian Fairweather. Now he brings them together again in this new study.

The approach that Dr McDonald adopts in this monograph is to view the last century of biblical interpretation in relation to Christian ethics as consisting of three phases. In the first phase liberal scholars responded to the new methods of biblical criticism and sought to make sense of biblical ethics from perspectives derived from the Enlightenment. In the second phase, a more radical disjunction between biblical culture and present-day culture was seen (for example on eschatology). Various attempts were made to cope with this disjunction,

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General editor's preface

ranging from outright scepticism to existentialism. In the third phase, sometimes termed post-modernism, the relation between text and interpretation is seen as distinctly more problematic. There can be no handling of texts – in relation to ethics or to anything else – which is independent of interpretation.

I have no doubt that such an analysis of biblical interpretation and Christian ethics is overdue, and that this new monograph will be a significant contribution to an exceedingly problematic area of scholarship. Biblical scholars themselves are increasingly influenced by literary and sociological theories, and have opened up new and fascinating areas of scholarship as a result of these influences. The 'Bible' is now often seen as a series of texts with lengthy processes of interpretation inescapably attached to them. Biblically dependent forms of Christian ethics are naturally subject to the same processes. Dr McDonald offers a timely guide in these largely uncharted waters.

ROBIN GILL

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Preface

Inter-disciplinary studies are rapidly emerging to meet the insistent demands of the modern age. Nowhere is this more evident than in the two areas that provide the title for this work. Biblical interpretation is itself interdisciplinary, drawing together the biblical disciplines and others to address the problem of interpreting texts. Christian ethics is also multidisciplinary and thus no stranger to this new ethos, although in practice its relationship to biblical interpretation is often problematic.

To bring these two areas together is a potentially creative undertaking. It comes at a time when much attention is being paid to *reading texts*. Texts are always read in a context. Our task in this book is to consider how biblical texts may be read in the context of moral concern.

Yet, while interdisciplinary studies are mostly of recent origin, one is aware of a series of scholars who did not allow themselves to be narrowly confined within one discipline or who, like Schleiermacher for example, were at home in multidisciplinary endeavour. The direction taken in modern scholarship has been anticipated in some measure in each generation since the rise of critical studies. Hence, if one reads biblical texts in the context of moral concern, one is aware of standing in a *tradition* of interpretation: one which has had its crises and its fractures and its wrong turnings, but which nevertheless possesses coherence, logic and objectives from which much can be learned. The approach adopted here is therefore by way of the liberal quest, with its enduring results especially for social ethics, and thereafter through the period when eschatology dominated interpretation, differentiating

contextual worlds, but emphasising the address of the Other. And so to today: when it is no longer possible for the scholar to dwell in the peaceful haven of assumed objectivity. Participation is the name of the game. We are all together in the bundle of life, values and commitments.

Limited though this work inevitably is, it has been enriched by the interest and co-operation of many who did not even know of its existence: students and colleagues, particularly in Biblical Interpretation and Christian Ethics courses, and also in New Testament classes, at Edinburgh. Some of its material may have a familiar ring to them. More particularly, I must acknowledge gratefully the constant helpfulness and encouragement I have had from several colleagues at Edinburgh: Professor Duncan B. Forrester (Christian Ethics), Professor John O'Neill (New Testament Studies), Dr Kevin Vanhoozer in Biblical Interpretation and Dr Ruth Page in Modern Theology. My erstwhile colleague, Professor Robin Gill (now at Canterbury) and Alex Wright of Cambridge University Press first suggested that the book should be included in the present series, and have maintained a strong interest in it. I am much in their debt, as I am to Gillian Maude and the staff of the Press who have solicitously and industriously attended to the manifold requirements of the publishing process.

Finally – and this is far more than a conventional acknowledgement – I must express my deep indebtedness to my wife, Jenny, whose understanding and forbearance have meant so much to me during the years of increasing preoccupation with this work, and who has even mastered the dreaded word-processor in order to assist me materially with the final preparation of the book.

To cover the range with which this book attempts to deal means that procedures have had to be selective. What agony there is when one has to delete a favourite theme or topic! Doubtless, others would have selected on a different basis. Another consequence was that I have been obliged to draw heavily on the work of others: a left-handed compliment to the vitality of tradition! I have not hesitated to make wide use of translations, for biblical interpretation and Christian ethics are

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world-wide concerns, articulated not only in languages such as French and German in which I have a modest competence, but also in Spanish, Portuguese and others in which I have none.

When all is said and done, however, the final responsibility must be my own. The book goes forth with the hope that it may help to foster interest in this most vital type of study, and that others may be moved to carry the task further.

Abbreviations

<i>BA</i>	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology</i>
<i>BCE</i>	<i>Basic Christian Ethics</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Ethics and the Gospel</i>
<i>ENT</i>	<i>Ethics in the New Testament</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>Epworth Review</i>
<i>ESP</i>	<i>The Ethics of Saint Paul</i>
<i>Exp. T.</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>GL</i>	<i>Gospel and Law</i>
<i>HCE</i>	<i>History of Christian Ethics</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJ</i>	<i>Jesus and Judaism</i>
<i>KGPC</i>	<i>The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity</i>
<i>MPT</i>	<i>The Meaning of Paul for Today</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>PK</i>	<i>The Parables of the Kingdom</i>
<i>PRJ</i>	<i>Paul and Rabbinic Judaism</i>
<i>PPJ</i>	<i>Paul and Palestinian Judaism</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>The Revised English Bible</i>
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>RMT</i>	<i>The Relevance of the Moral Teaching of the Early Church</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount</i>
<i>STCC</i>	<i>The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>The Teaching of Jesus</i>
<i>TNT</i>	<i>The Theology of the New Testament</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>