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MEDIA VIOLENCE AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

How can audiences interact creatively, wisely and peaceably with the many different forms of violence found throughout today's media? Suicide attacks, graphic executions and the horrors of war appear in news reports, films, websites and even on mobile phones. One approach towards media violence is to attempt to protect viewers; another is to criticise journalists, editors, film-makers and their stories.

In this book Jolyon Mitchell highlights Christianity's ambiguous relationship with media violence. He goes beyond debates about the effects of watching mediated violence to examine how audiences, producers and critics interact with news images, films, video games and advertising. He argues that practices such as hospitality, friendship, witness and worship can provide the context where both spectacular and hidden violence can be remembered and reframed. This can help audiences to imagine how their own identities and communities can be based not upon violence, but upon a more lasting foundation of peace.

JOLYON MITCHELL is Senior Lecturer in Theology, Ethics and Communication at the University of Edinburgh and a former BBC World Service producer and journalist.

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Christian ethics has increasingly assumed a central place within academic theology. At the same time the growing power and ambiguity of modern science and the rising dissatisfaction within the social sciences about claims to value-neutrality have prompted renewed interest in ethics within the secular academic world. There is, therefore, a need for studies in Christian ethics which, as well as being concerned with the relevance of Christian ethics to the present-day secular debate, are well informed about parallel discussions in recent philosophy, science or social science. *New Studies in Christian Ethics* aims to provide books that do this at the highest intellectual level and demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate – either in moral substance or in terms of underlying moral justifications.

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*To Jasmine, Xanthe and Sebastian
In Memory of Mark Birchall*

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General Editor's preface

Jolyon Mitchell's new monograph, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*, breaks new ground for this series. Media and film studies have developed strongly in the academic world over the last few years, but so far they have attracted comparatively little attention within Christian ethics. The combination of a multimedia approach with a specific focus upon media violence is particularly novel and welcome in this series. It picks up on themes of evil and violence addressed earlier in Gordon Graham's *Evil and Christian Ethics*, albeit paying particular attention to violence depicted in different media forms. It also complements Anthony Bash's very recent *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics*. Like other monographs in the series, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics* fulfils well the two key aims of the series as a whole – namely to promote monographs in Christian ethics which engage centrally with the present secular moral debate at the highest possible intellectual level and, secondly, to encourage contributors to demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate.

Jolyon Mitchell is well aware that there are deep ambiguities lying at the heart of a study of media violence and Christian ethics. In an original fashion, he vividly demonstrates how portraying spectacular violence can also obscure other more hidden forms of violence. A simplistic Christian approach might be just to denounce each and every depiction of violence in media, forgetting in the process that some representations serve important social and even moral functions. In contrast, he makes the significant observation that Christian responses to violence are often ambiguous because there is a violent act at the heart of the Christian story. Artists for many centuries and now film-makers have portrayed this violent act graphically, sometimes in the interests of piety and worship. Yet ironically some Christians today have simultaneously deplored media violence and applauded Mel Gibson's graphically violent film *The Passion of the Christ*. Ambiguity to violence and to violent depictions runs through Christian history, and Jolyon Mitchell depicts this carefully.

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He also finally shows that amidst the ambiguity of Christian responses to violence there are still biblical longings for peace beyond present violence – involving witness, hospitality, friendship and worship – which form important correctives within an often violent world. This is a welcome and challenging book.

ROBIN GILL

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I have adapted, expanded and updated two previously published articles: 'The Ethics of Photojournalism', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 13.1 (2000), pp. 1–16, and 'Seeing through the Drama: Reframing Violent News', in Trevor Hart and Steven Guthrie (eds.), *Faithful Performances: The Enactment of Christian Identity in Theology and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 123–46. I valued Esther Reed and Trevor Hart's helpful remarks on these essays. I am grateful to the publishers of these pieces, as well as to all the copyright holders of the pictures reproduced in this book. Specific credits are to be found by the images. Once any additional production costs are covered, royalties from this book will be donated to *The Samaritans*.

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Figure 0.1. Man carries body of a girl in Qana, Lebanon, Sunday 30 July 2006. Photo: Frederic LaFargue / Gamma, Camera Press London. Reproduced with permission.