

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* by Richard A Burridge,

Review by: Stephen P. Hearne-Kroll

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theodicy questions that the book teaches readers as much about God as it does about Abraham—both the God of the ancient writers/redactors of Genesis and Fretheim's God (which are, at times, perplexingly difficult to distinguish from one another). Fretheim has long been interested in questions of the nature of God and human suffering, and these questions find resonance in the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, Ishmael and Hagar, and the binding of Isaac. In conversation with recent scholarship on Genesis 22, Fretheim posits a God who gives Abraham the command to slay his son without knowing the outcome, so that "the test is a witness to God's vulnerability, not just Abraham's" (134). Although Fretheim is a Lutheran pastor and seminary professor, his reading of Abraham's God is a far cry from the terrifying hidden God who Luther experienced in the stories of the patriarchs. It is also a far cry from the idea, internalized by many Christians, of an unchanging God who possesses complete foreknowledge and control over human affairs. Fretheim's God is, like Abraham's God, vulnerable and open to influence by human actions. God "midwifes . . . the moral order," which is "not a tight causal weave" (88); God's purposes can be impeded by human actions although never fully stymied; "God acts in and through human beings (and other creatures) to carry out the divine purposes in the world, with all the potential complications and difficulties related thereto" (117). It is not always clear whether such statements are meant to describe the God of Abraham or the God in whom the author has come to believe. But in the end, such a question dissolves in the book's conviction that Fretheim's God is the same as the God of Abraham, just as certainly as Abraham is the father not only of Christians but also of Muslims and Jews. Abraham trusted (and Fretheim trusts) in a God who people of faith do not have to fear, a God who is vulnerable but whose final word is promise.

Fretheim's book is difficult to categorize: it is at once biblical study, theology, history of exegesis, and plea for respectful interfaith relationships. Accessible to a general audience and rigorous enough to please scholars, this comprehensive reading of Abraham will be of equal interest to a process theologian, a Lutheran pastor or seminarian, or the curious bookstore browser who is dazzled by the book's dust jacket illustration, the Chinese painter He Qi's colorful rendering of the Binding of Isaac. Here too the reader sees the trustworthy God to whom Abraham and Fretheim cling: God's promised redemption has been fulfilled, a waterfall flows behind the cherubic Isaac, and the only sign of fear is in the face of the ram.

ELIZABETH MUSSELMAN, *Chicago, Illinois*.

BURRIDGE, RICHARD A. *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. xxi+489 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

Richard Burridge accomplishes several goals: he offers a major illustration of how the New Testament can be used fruitfully as a source for ethical reasoning that displays an extensive knowledge of relevant scholarship, he engages in a wide-ranging analysis of the writings of Paul and the Gospels, and he proposes a way to minimize the risk of using the New Testament in oppressive ways. Burridge begins with a review of scholarship (Chap. I), then treats the relevant New Testament books (Paul, the four Gospels, and Acts; Chaps. III–VII), and ends with a summative chapter that presents the book's implications (Chap. VIII). The book includes three unique elements worthy of particular note. First,

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in his final chapter, Burrridge attempts to synthesize his findings in dialogue with previous efforts to develop a method for using the New Testament responsibly as a source of ethical reasoning. Second, he grounds his analysis in his own research on the genre of the Gospels as ancient biography. And third, he begins his study not with Paul or the Gospels but with Jesus (Chap. II).

Burrridge enters into dialogue with previous scholars by testing a synthesis of their theories against the use of the Bible in pre- and postapartheid South Africa. He argues that the predominant mode of interpretation, which stems from James Gustafson ([1] obeying rules and prescriptive commands, [2] looking for principles and universal values, [3] following examples and paradigms, and [4] embracing an overall symbolic worldview; 363), resulted in the use of the Bible both to justify and combat apartheid. In response, Burrridge does not offer a corrective fifth element to the list but an “overall umbrella . . . way of reading together in an open and inclusive community, in order to imitate the example of Jesus as we have seen it develop throughout this book” (363). Burrridge’s argumentation here is quite compelling and effective, especially the use of South Africa as a test case in order to critique the prevailing hermeneutical methodologies.

The second unique feature of this book—Burrridge’s focus on genre as a necessary element in the analysis of the New Testament—allows him to move beyond discussing the New Testament as an ethical treatise containing specific moral directives. Instead, he argues that because of the nature of the Gospels as ancient biographical narratives (*bioi*), interpreters must consider the way the stories portray Jesus in both his words and deeds. I completely agree with Burrridge on this point, which he relentlessly drives home throughout the book. This approach allows him to develop his hermeneutical key to using the New Testament responsibly in ethical reasoning: the imitation of Jesus within an open and inclusive community. He does this through a consistent process of looking at christology, the relationship between ethics and eschatology, the law and the love commands, the main ethical teaching on moral issues, and, finally, “how each gospel treats our major theme of following and imitating Jesus within an inclusive community” (159). He similarly argues for “an implicit narrative of the significance of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection underlying all of Paul’s writings” (389).

Burrridge develops his “major theme” by beginning with an analysis of Jesus (the third unique feature mentioned above). He notes that research on New Testament ethics is usually not based on Jesus but only on the writings about Jesus found in the Bible. Following Leander Keck, Burrridge thinks that all subsequent writings about Jesus are in some way based on “the Jesus event” (32), with the Jesus material as the foundational stratum; the Gospel of John as the latest stratum; and Paul, Mark, Matthew, and Luke/Acts, in that order, as the intermediate strata. But while, theoretically, the person of Jesus is the proper starting point for a New Testament ethics, Burrridge does not give enough credence to the slippery nature of trying to determine with a high degree of historical probability which Gospel passages accurately depict Jesus. Building from historical Jesus scholarship can result in very different pictures of Jesus, depending on the choices made by the critic. While Burrridge’s picture of Jesus is appealing, a fundamental doubt arises about how he arrives at this picture, and this methodological doubt colors the entire book because the basic framework that comes out of this analysis (his “major theme”) forms the lens through which Burrridge reads Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John.

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In addition, Burrige's lens becomes fairly narrow for the rest of his analysis. Although his procedure for treating the material from Paul and the Gospels is consistent (as noted above), and despite the fact that he claims to look at the material on its own terms, Burrige's conclusions repeatedly support the basic picture that he develops in the chapter on Jesus: Jesus is an inclusive friend of sinners and outcasts with a demanding ethic of love at the core of his teaching. There is certainly much material in all four Gospels that supports such a picture, but there is also a great deal that distinguishes the pictures of Jesus in each of the Gospels from one another. Burrige acknowledges these differences but claims that they are caused by the different audiences and historical settings of the evangelists—not by the content of the message. But the differences run much deeper at times, especially when one considers important questions such as why Jesus dies, what constitutes discipleship, how to understand the political dimensions of Jesus's ministry, or what establishes Jewish and Christian identities. The ethical ramifications of these issues are manifold and profound and must be considered in the context of the different Gospels. The tendency to homogenize the varying concerns of the Gospels consistently runs through scholarship related to biblical theology and ethics. Can scholars find a way to do New Testament ethics that allows each of the voices in the New Testament to say something different? This looks to be the next challenge for scholars of New Testament ethics, and Burrige's contribution, while insightful and edifying, does not push the conversation far enough in this direction.

STEPHEN P. HEARNE-KROLL, *Methodist Theological School in Ohio*.

GURTNER, DANIEL M. *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 139. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xxii+296 pp. \$90.00 (cloth).

This is a "minor revision" of a doctoral dissertation completed under the direction of Richard J. Bauckham at the University of St. Andrews. Its focal point is a single verse in Matthew's Gospel (27:51a); however, this one verse is like a thread of tapestry that when tugged proves to be connected to a whole network of key fibers that run throughout Matthew's narrative, particularly the evangelist's portrayal of the death of Jesus.

The author thoroughly expounds the meaning of the tearing of the temple veil, the first of a series of signs that result from the death of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (27:51a–54). Commentators have offered a variety of possible approaches and explanations for this sign. One key question is which veil of the temple is being referred to? The inner veil that shrouded the Holy of Holies? Or the outer veil that covered the sanctuary itself? A purely lexical solution is not decisive; the Greek term for the veil used in Matthew's text (*katapetasmata*) could refer to either of these possibilities. Others have attempted a solution based on "visibility": what veil could the centurion and his companions have seen from Golgotha? This would seem to rule out the inner veil. Yet, Gurtner notes, the signs Matthew includes are more "visionary" in nature, and, hence, visibility is not decisive (one commentator located Golgotha on the Mount of Olives to afford a better view of the temple area!). More promising solutions have concluded that the sign is "apologetic" in nature, implying the ultimate destruction of the temple in line with Jesus's prediction in Matt. 23:38 ("Be-