In his new book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation—A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, Richard Hays offers a descriptive exegesis of the NT’s ethical teaching that brings to light the diversity of moral voices in the NT (Part I). Can these diverse teachings nonetheless be seen as coherent? he asks, noting that the question is a crucial one if the NT is to serve as a moral guide. Hays develops a novel account of their coherence—while leaving room for the diversity—which he describes as “narrative coherence” (Part II). In brief, he argues that the unity we find is a unity of documents that retell and comment on a single story—namely, that God has acted to rescue the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus and has created a community of witnesses to this good news, the church, which is called and empowered by the Spirit to enact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and to serve as a sign of God’s redemptive purposes for the world whose full scope is yet to be revealed.\(^1\) The three key images in this story—the community, the cross, and the new creation—according to Hays, provide “focal lenses” that bring into focus what is central to the NT’s moral vision and show how it coheres.\(^2\) In the final sections of his book, Hays forays into the hermeneutical question of how to use the NT’s ethical teaching and offers his own normative proposals on five issues of contemporary relevance (Parts III and IV).

In this response I will interact with Hays’s descriptive exegesis and methodological proposal (Parts I and II) rather than with his hermeneutical and pragmatic proposals. In keeping with the theme on which the Institute for Biblical Research has chosen to focus in its session devoted to Hays’s book—the NT and sexual ethics—I will test this part of his thesis by focusing on Paul’s teachings on sexuality and gender as reflected in Gal 3:28 and 1 Corinthians, to which Hays devotes an appendix (“Paul on the Relation between Men and Women”).\(^3\) His discussion of this topic is not as extensive as the others he treats (in Part IV), yet he rightly sees that it is an important area of ethical concern for which any major proposal on coherence must adequately account. Paul’s teachings on sexuality and gender are especially appropriate for conducting a test case of “narrative coherence.”

---

You must have a subscription and be logged in to read the entire article. Click here to subscribe

visitor : : uid: ()