

## ***The Bad Jesus, Love, and the Parochialism of New Testament Ethics***

Hector Avalos, Professor of Religious Studies, Iowa State University

A substantial portion of my research has focused on the Christian biases in what is otherwise called “historical critical” scholarship. This focus can be seen in *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (2005), which addresses how modern scholarship looks at violence in the sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. That focus continued in *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship* (2011), which sought to show how modern biblical scholarship seeks to mitigate slavery in biblical texts through a variety of devices, including socio-rhetorical criticism. Most recently, *The Bad Jesus: The Ethics of New Testament Ethics* (2015) examines how most of the academic field of New Testament ethics portrays Jesus as a paragon of ethics. Jesus, for example, is supposedly an anti-imperialist who helps the poor. He is a liberator and a herald of equal rights for women.

Indeed, if one reads almost any treatise on Christian ethics written by academic biblical scholars, one finds something extremely peculiar: *Jesus never does anything wrong*. This oddity even flies in the face of Jesus’ own reply to the man asking about how to secure eternal life: “And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone”” (Mk 10:18). The Gospels record others judging Jesus as immoral: “the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!””(Mt. 11:19).<sup>1</sup>

Rather, what we find typically are descriptions of Jesus such as those voiced by Rudolf Schnackenburg, a prominent New Testament ethicist, in his *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*:

The Early Church, and with it, Christianity, throughout the centuries was profoundly convinced that the greatest of Jesus' achievements in the moral sphere was the promulgation of the chief commandment of love of God and one's neighbour. The message of Christian *agape*, the model and highest expression of which is the mission of the Son of God to redeem the sinful human race, brought something new into the world, an idea and reality so vast and incomprehensible as to be the highest revelation of God, and quite inconceivable apart from revelation.<sup>2</sup>

For Schnackenburg, Jesus represents the acme of human ethical development. The rest of the book finds nothing but praise for Jesus, and not a whit of criticism.

Perhaps this unrelenting praise of Jesus' ethics can be expected because Schnackenburg was a Catholic priest with an openly Christian commitment. But the fact is we can find it in the work of many scholars who work in public secular institutions.

Indeed, prominent scholars with open religious commitments and scholars with seemingly secular commitments can agree that Jesus never did anything wrong. This uniformly benign picture of Jesus' ethics is peculiar because when historians study Alexander the Great or Augustus Caesar, they note the good and

the bad aspects of their actions.<sup>3</sup> When academic biblical scholars study Moses or David and other biblical figures, they might note their flaws.<sup>4</sup> Today, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, icons of peace and justice, have had biographies that painfully detail their personal flaws.<sup>5</sup> Even God has received moral criticism.<sup>6</sup>

So how is it that most current academic biblical scholars still do not consider anything that Jesus does as wrong or evil? The answer, of course, is that most biblical scholars, whether in secular academia or in seminaries, still see Jesus as divine, and not as a human being with faults. Their Christology is high enough to exempt Jesus from any evil sentiments or ethical malpractice.<sup>7</sup> The feminist scholar Mary Daly argues, as I do, that “[a] great deal of Christian doctrine has been docetic, that is, it has not seriously accepted the fact that Jesus was a limited human being.”<sup>8</sup>

Most New Testament scholars are affiliated with religious institutions and are part of what I have called an ecclesial-academic complex that has no counterpart in any other areas of the humanities. For example, most, if not all, scholars of Greek religion are not a part of some Greek religious movement or organization. Despite biases that always exist in the study of the classics, it is fair to say that few have any personal stake in whether Zeus or Tiberius was good or bad because those entities don’t constitute any sort of authority for their actions. That is not the case with Jesus, who is still viewed as the paradigmatic authority for most Christian scholars. Such New Testament ethicists are still studying Jesus through the confessional lenses of Nicea or Chalcedon rather than through an historical approach that we would use with other human beings.

Therefore, I decided to engage in a broader exploration of Jesus' ethics as a vehicle to critique the religionist and Christian orientation of modern biblical scholarship. Briefly, my broader argument has the following interrelated elements:

1) Biblical scholarship is still primarily a religionist apologetic enterprise despite claims to be engaging in historico-critical and descriptive scholarship.

2) A more specific Christian orientation is clearly revealed in the manner in which the ethics of Jesus are predominantly viewed as benign and paradigmatic, even among supposedly secular academic scholars.

3) However, many of the fundamental ethical principles announced or practiced by Jesus actually would be antithetical to those we otherwise describe as "acceptable" or "good" by some of the most widely accepted standards of ethics today.

4) Accordingly, such a predominantly benign view of Jesus' ethics signals a continuing acceptance of Jesus as divine or as morally supra-human, and not as the flawed human being who should be the real subject of historico-critical study.

I don't have the space here to reproduce all of the definitions and nuances relating to each of these elements. For the purposes of this essay, I would like to clarify that mine is a study of *Jesus as he is portrayed* in the New Testament. The historicity of anything Jesus said or did is not my main task. I will briefly discuss the claim that Jesus was a love “innovator” as one example of how modern New Testament ethics magnifies Jesus's ethical accomplishments despite historical evidence demonstrating that Jesus does not deserve that magnification.

### ***Jesus as an innovator on Love***

In an interview published in April 2012 issue of the popular evangelical Christian periodical, *Christianity Today*, Amy-Jill Levine, a prominent professor of New Testament studies at Vanderbilt University, was asked: “So what is truly original about Jesus?” Her response was:

He's the only person I can find in antiquity who says you have to love your *enemy*. But you have to look at the entire person to see his distinctiveness. Other people told parables. Other people referred to God as Father. Other people debated how to follow Torah. Other people lost their lives on Roman crosses. Other people proclaimed that God's justice will be breaking in, and that we can live as if we've got one foot in that world to come.

But the way Jesus puts it together makes him distinctive: the striking

images that he gives, the loyalty he engendered from his followers such that they were willing to leave their homes and families to follow him and give up their lives for him. In that particular time he was able to give fellow Jews hope that some of them did not find elsewhere. To look at any one aspect of his tradition does not give us the full impact that he would have made on his followers.<sup>9</sup>

What is remarkable about this response is that it comes from a self-identified Jewish scholar who would not be expected to adopt so uncritically some of the claims made by Christian apologists for Jesus' innovative ethics.

Indeed, one can argue that crediting Jesus with innovation reaches back to the New Testament where the onlookers represent Jesus' ability to exorcise through his own authority as a novel doctrine: "And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him"" (Mk 1:27). Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165 C.E.), the early Church Father, represents Jesus as emphasizing innovation in Mt. 5:46: "If ye love ye that love you, what new thing [τί καινόν] do ye?"<sup>10</sup>

John P. Meier is one of the few modern Christian scholars who has a very nuanced and cautious position on the role of love in Jesus' ministry. He concludes that "the historical Jesus never directly connects his individual halakic pronouncements to some basic or organizing principle of love."<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, the

idea that Jesus was an ethical innovator, especially in the role of love, is standard in works by Christian literati and scholars.<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned, Rudolf Schnackenburg thought that “[t]he message of Christian *agape*, the model and highest expression of which is the mission of the Son of God to redeem the sinful human race, brought something new into the world, an idea so vast and incomprehensible as to be the highest revelation of God.”<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Burridge, who admits the problems of reaching consensus on the historical Jesus, still proclaims: “At the heart of Jesus’ ethics is the double command, to love God and one’s neighbour, given in response to a question about the greatest commandment (Mk 12:28-34)...The centrality of love in Jesus’ ethics extends to the love of enemies.”<sup>14</sup>

Burridge is referencing the oft-cited directive first found in Lev. 19:18, which reads in whole: “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”<sup>15</sup> However, as Harry M. Orlinsky, the prominent scholar of Hebrew, has noted correctly, the Hebrew term (רֵעֵךְ) translated as “your neighbor” is actually best understood as ‘your fellow Israelite.’”<sup>16</sup> The verse’s final instruction to love your fellow Israelite as yourself, therefore, follows logically on the instruction not to hate “any of the sons of your own people” (בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ) in the first half of the verse. Similarly, John P. Meier concludes that:

There is no good reason to think that, when Jesus cited, Lev. 19:18b, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” he meant

anything other than what the Hebrew text means by *reā*<sup>c</sup>, namely, a fellow Israelite who belongs to the cultic community that worships Yahweh alone as the one true God (as proclaimed in Deut. 6:4-5).<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, and despite the recent argument to the contrary by Richard E. Friedman, Lev. 19:18 does not obligate universal love, but, in fact, is premised on privileging love for fellow Israelites over love for non-Israelites.<sup>18</sup>

J. Ian H. McDonald, a biblical ethicist at the University of Edinburgh, is more emphatic about how Jesus' ethics differed from those of other cultures:

The distinctiveness of this new praxis is not to be underestimated. While Graeco-Roman moral teaching expressed the beauty and obligations of friendship, the general consensus was that one should hate (= not love) one's enemies. Even the Jewish tradition could take the form of love for the "sons of light" and hatred for "all the sons of darkness." Covenantal language in itself need not be interpreted to include love for God's enemies. Jesus took faith praxis beyond such boundaries into awareness of the need to meet anger with understanding and violence with non-aggression, and thus the practical means of reintegrating the estranged.<sup>19</sup>

The religiocentricity and ethnocentricity of such ethical claims by McDonald are not difficult to detect.<sup>20</sup> The entire Greco-Roman world supposedly has a consensus “that one should hate (= not love) one’s enemies.” Yet, McDonald does not even bother to offer any supporting documentation. The fact is that some scholars of Greco-Roman religion have found the opposite to be true. Runar Thorsteinsson’s study of *agapē* and his comparison with Stoicism, concludes that “the moral teaching of Roman Christianity do not teach unconditional universal humanity. It is conditioned by adherence to a particular religion.”<sup>21</sup> Thorsteinsson finds that it is Stoicism that is universal in its ideas of human kinship, not Christianity.

Even when some New Testament ethicists admit that the Hebrew Bible and pre-Christian Jewish tradition already have injunctions to love the enemy, it is still claimed that Jesus brought an innovation nonetheless. Willard Swartley tells readers:

Since the Torah calls for kindness and help to the enemy in need (Exod. 23:4-5; Deut. 22:1-4), Jesus’ love command is not altogether novel, William Klassen contends. But Marius Reiser’s close study of both the Greek and Jewish ethical traditions argues the opposite. While in both traditions one can find injunctions not to retaliate in kind...the explicit positive initiative to love *enemies* is unique to Jesus...The theme of “love” toward injurers, however, applies only to local personal conflict

(*Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*) not to situations of socio-political oppression by outsiders.”<sup>22</sup>

Swartley’s distinctions between loving in the context of a “local personal conflict” and loving in the context of “socio-political” oppression are difficult to understand and not clearly made by Jesus or by other non-Christian writers.

Otherwise, why was Jesus credited with an innovation that can also be read into other non-Christian writers?

### ***Loving the Enemy in the Ancient Near East***

The raw historical record shows that loving the enemy is not an innovation at the time of Jesus. It is certainly not true, as Levine claims, that Jesus is the only person “in antiquity who says you have to love your *enemy*.” Already in a collection of Mesopotamian texts known as the *Counsels of Wisdom* one finds this advice: “**Requite with kindness your evil doer. Maintain justice to your enemy. Smile on your adversary.**”<sup>23</sup>

In *The Instruction of Amenemope*, an Egyptian wisdom text perhaps composed in the Ramesside period (c. fourteenth to eleventh centuries BCE), one finds this advice: “Don’t raise an outcry against one who attacks you; Nor answer him yourself.”<sup>24</sup> Why can’t *Amenemope*’s advice apply to those attacking the victim in a personal conflict *and* in a case of socio-political oppression by outsiders? Applying to both types of cases would satisfy and/or exceed Swartley’s standards for Jesus’ supposedly unique teachings?

Other writers that are more contemporary with Jesus also voiced the concept of loving the enemy. In his treatise on Exodus Philo tries to explain the reasons for the instruction given in Exod. 23:4: "If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him." According to Philo, "It is an excess of gentleness if in addition to not harming an enemy one even tries to be of help. In the second place, it is a prohibition and shaming of greed. For he who is not willing to harm an enemy, whom else will he wish to harm for his own profit?"<sup>25</sup> Later in his discussion, Philo links this sort of attitude toward the animals of enemies to a wider human kinship: "For who would disregard any human being with whom he has a single natural kinship, when he has been taught by the divine Law and is accustomed not to disregard even a beast?"<sup>26</sup> If so, then this undermines the idea that love of enemies pertains only to local personal conflicts, as Philo's ideas can be extended to outsiders and they make no distinction between local conflict and some larger oppression by outsiders.

In the *Community Rule/Manual of Discipline* (1QS X 17-18) from Qumran, one finds a speaker saying the following about his enemies: "I shall not repay anyone with an evil reward; with goodness I shall pursue the man. For to God belongs the judgement of every living being."<sup>27</sup> Although this is an instance of what I call "deferred violence" (non-violence that is expedient for the moment because vengeance will come later), it does show that Jesus' instructions in Mt. 5:39-46 had possible precedents at Qumran.<sup>28</sup>

A more elaborate argument for extending kindness to enemies is found in ancient Greek war narratives. For example, there was an assembly in ancient

Syracuse (Sicily) to discuss what to do with the Athenians whom they had just defeated. According to Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE), there was a three-way debate. A man named Diocles argued that the defeated Athenians should be tortured to death. Another man, named Hermocrates, voiced support for moderation. Finally, an elder named Nikolaus, who had lost two sons in the war with the Athenians, gave an extended speech outlining reasons for mercy. In part, Nikolaus says:

Good it is indeed that the deity involves in unexpected disasters those who begin an unjust war [τούς αδίκου πολέμου καταρχομένους]...Do not, therefore begrudge our country the opportunity of being acclaimed by all mankind, because it surpassed the Athenians not only in feats of arms but also in humanity [φιλανθρωπία]...the spirits of civilized men are gripped I believe, most perhaps by mercy, because of the sympathy [ὁμοπάθειαν] that nature has implanted in all.<sup>29</sup>

Nikolaus' arguments, though ultimately unsuccessful with the Syracusans, demonstrate well-developed philosophical Greek tradition that thought about the value of kindness, even to enemies. The whole notion of philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία) was not just about being kind to friends or strangers, but also to enemies, as Nikolaus' speech shows.<sup>30</sup>

Levine's reference to people willing to leave their families for Jesus is also not that extraordinary in the ancient world. There were many well-known

historical figures who have much better documentation for the claim that they were able to persuade multitudes to leave their families to follow them. That was the case with Alexander the Great, who was able to lead thousands of men to near the ends of the known world. One could argue that these men were making an investment in riches and glory that Alexander's victories could attain for them. As I show in more detail in *The Bad Jesus*, this is not so different from Galilean disciples who also thought they might obtain some more permanent heavenly or utopian benefit if they really believed Jesus could do what he claimed.

Lesser known teachers, who were not rich nor promising great material rewards, also had loyal followers. One example is from the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus:

And how shall I free myself? Have you not heard over and over again that you ought to eradicate desire utterly, direct your aversion toward the things that lie within the sphere of moral purpose, and these things only, that you ought to give up everything, your body, your property, your reputation, your books, turmoil, office, freedom from office?<sup>31</sup>

Despite demands to rid oneself of possessions, such philosophers found followers because those followers were looking for benefits that were not necessarily material. So, why would that make Jesus so distinctive? In fact, there were probably profoundly negative consequences for women and children left behind

by followers of these leaders, but those negative consequences are usually not the subject of reflection by Christian scholars who laud the ethics of Jesus.

### ***The Parochialism of New Testament Ethics***

Why do so many New Testament ethicists believe that Jesus was an innovator in love for enemies? As already indicated, part of the answer is pure religiocentrism and ethnocentrism. However, there is also evidence that some of this notion has to do with how New Testament ethicists are trained. One expects most New Testament scholars to be acquainted with Greco-Roman and Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. There are, of course, some New Testament scholars who are well trained in ancient Near Eastern literature (e.g., Adela Yarbro Collins). But the vast majority the primary works in New Testament ethics still display a parochialism in the comparative set of data from ancient Near Eastern sources. That lack of either acquaintance or unwillingness to engage with that literature explains the predominance of the idea that Jesus was an innovator.

Consider “state of the art” surveys of New Testament studies, which often lack chapters or essays dealing with ancient Near Eastern parallels other than Greco-Roman. For example, not a single chapter in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* edited by Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborn is devoted to parallels from the ancient Near East.<sup>32</sup> The indices of works cited in New Testament scholarship likewise offer a good metric of the extent to which New Testament ethicists utilize any pre-Hellenistic Near Eastern Literature

from Anatolia (Hittites), Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, or Ugarit. I have collected some basic information from the indices of major works in New Testament ethics in the Appendix of *The Bad Jesus*, but observe for now that none of the listed works that identify their sources ever cite pre-Hellenistic Near Eastern sources.

In particular, the citation indices of Richard Hays' *Moral Vision of the New Testament* cites no sources from ancient Anatolia, Egypt, Phoenicia, Mesopotamia or Ugarit.<sup>33</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's classic work, *In Memory of Her*, cites no extrabiblical sources at all.<sup>34</sup> It is no wonder that the Jesus-As-Love-Innovator trope persists with this lack of awareness of his predecessors.

## **Conclusion**

New Testament ethics is still affected by a Christian bias that relies on denigrating and diminishing the ethical accomplishments of other Near Eastern cultures to bolster the reputed founder of Christianity. Otherwise, the field of New Testament ethics usually ignores the advances of other Near Eastern cultures in order to render Jesus as an innovator on ethics. In *The Bad Jesus*, I offer many detailed examples of Jesus' practices and teachings, as portrayed in the Gospels, that would be antithetical to modern ethical norms on violence, the treatment of women, imperialism, poverty, the environment, and human equality. Far from being a paragon for modern ethics, Jesus was another ancient figure who was a reflection of the ethics of the biblical authors and their cultures. Many of those

ethical precepts could be viewed as harmful or negative today if anyone other than Jesus held them.

## APPENDIX

Representation of Christian and non-Christian cultures in selected works on New Testament ethics as reflected in the indices of any works cited besides the Bible and Apocrypha. Pages are those of where the respective indices are found.

Burridge, Richard A., *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 488-490

“Pseudepigrapha”

“Rabbinic Literature”

“Dead Sea Scrolls”

“Josephus and Philo”

“Christian Writings (Including Nag Hammadi)”

“Graeco-Roman Literature”

Green, Joel B. (ed.), *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2011), pp. 861-889

Nothing listed outside of Bible and Apocrypha

Hays, Richard B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), p. 496

“Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha”

“Dead Sea Scrolls”

“Early Christian Literature”

“Rabbinic Literature,”

“Other Ancient Writings”

Longenecker, Richard N., *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

No citation index for any work

Matera, Frank, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 311-319.

Nothing listed outside of Bible and Apocrypha

Sanders, Jack T., *Ethics in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1986), pp. 139-144

Nothing listed outside of Bible and Apocrypha

Schnackenburg, Rudolf, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (trans. J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O’Hara; London: Burns and Oates, 1975).

No citation index for any work

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 353-57.

Nothing listed outside the Bible.

Verhey, Allen, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 525-26

“Early Christian Literature”

---

<sup>1</sup> John Kilgallen (“Was Jesus Right to Eat with Sinners and Tax Collectors?” *Biblica* 93 [2013], pp. 590-600) argues that Jesus was justified by the repentance of those with whom he ate, as in the case of Zacchaeus, who agreed to repay those whom he had cheated (Lk. 19:8). See also Mary J. Marshall, “Jesus: Glutton and Drunkard?,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3 (2005), pp. 47-60.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, (trans. J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O’Hara; London: Burns and Oates, 1975), pp. 90-91.

<sup>3</sup> In particular, Alexander the Great had a hagiographic phase, represented

---

by William W. Tarn, who authored a two-volume biography, *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948). Such hagiographic treatments came under sharp criticism with the work of Harvard historian, Ernst Badian. See further Frank Holt, "Alexander the Great Today: In the Interest of Historical Accuracy?," *Ancient History Bulletin* 13 (1999), pp. 111-117; Albert B. Bosworth and Elizabeth J. Baynham (eds.), *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). For moral evaluations of other Old Testament figures, see Michael James Williams, *Deception in Genesis: An Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon* (Studies in Biblical Literature 32; Frankfurt: Lang, 2001); Mary E. Mills, *Biblical Morality: Moral Perspectives in Old Testament Narratives* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001). Mikael Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence: The Jephthah Narrative in Antiquity and Modernity* (The Bible in the Modern World 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> For Gandhi, see Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), especially p. 43, where it speaks of Gandhi's abusive behavior toward his wife. For some criticisms by a fellow civil rights colleague of Martin Luther King's personal and adulterous conduct, see Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), especially pp. 470-75.

---

<sup>6</sup> R. Norman Whybray, ‘‘Shall not the Judge of the Earth do What is Just?’ God’s Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament’, in David Perchansky and Paul L. Redditt (eds.), *Shall Not the Judge of the Earth do What is Right? Studies in the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), pp. 1-19 (2); idem, ‘The Immorality of God: Reflections On Some Passages in Genesis, Job, Exodus and Numbers’, *JSOT* 21 (1996), pp. 89-120. See also Hector Avalos, ‘Yahweh is a Moral Monster’, in John Loftus (ed.), *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), pp. 209-236.

<sup>7</sup> For a study of early Christology, see Charles H. Talbert, *The Development of Christology during the first Hundred Years and other Essays in Early Christian Christology* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 140; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p 69.

<sup>9</sup> David Neff, ‘‘Jesus Through Jewish Eyes,’’ *Christianity Today* (April, 2012), pp. 52-54 (54).

<sup>10</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* 1.15.9 (ANF, I, p. 167).

<sup>11</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume 4: Law and Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 655. For a more laudatory view of Jesus’ love, see Daniel J. Harrington, *Jesus, The Revelation of the Father’s Love: What the New Testament Teaches Us* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2010).

---

<sup>12</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women* [repr., Köln: Könneman, 1998 [1792]. p. 19) suggested that Jesus was a “dangerous innovator.”

<sup>13</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). p. 50-51. Similarly, Lúcas Chan and James F. Keenan (eds.), *Biblical Ethics in the Twenty-First Century: Developments, Emerging Consensus, and Future Directions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), p. 57: “The heart of Jesus’ teaching is still the double command of love.” For a more a far more cautious assessment of the role of the love commands in the ministry of the “historical Jesus,” see Meier, *Law and Love*; Per Bilde, *The Originality of Jesus: A Critical Discussion and Comparative Attempt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013).

<sup>15</sup>For the dating and other issues pertaining to this text, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 27: Esther Eshel, “Leviticus, Book of,” in Lawrence Schiffman and James VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), I, pp. 488-93. A more technical report may be found in Emanuel Tov, “4QLev<sup>c,e,g</sup> (4Q25, 26a, 26b),” in David P. Wright, David N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (eds.), *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 257-266.

---

<sup>16</sup>Harry M. Orlinsky, “Nationalism-Universalism and Internationalism in Ancient Israel,” in Harry Thomas Frank and William L. Reed (eds.), *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), pp. 206-236, especially 210-211.

<sup>17</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume 4: Law and Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 651.

<sup>18</sup> See Richard E. Friedman, “Love Your Neighbor: Only Israelites or Everyone?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40:5 (September/October, 2014), pp. 49-52. Another proposal to translate this verse as “You should care for persons in your surroundings the same way as you would like them to take care of you!” is offered by Bob Becking “Love Thy Neighbour...” in Reinhard Achenbach und Martin Arneith (eds.), “*Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben*” (*Gen 18,19*): *Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie. Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische and Biblische Rechtsgeschichte, 13; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), pp. 182-187 (185). Becking offers no convincing linguistic parallels for his reading.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ian H. McDonald, *The Crucible of Christian Morality: Religion in the First Christian Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Even some works ostensibly written to extol the contributions of Greco-Roman culture ultimately reflect a Christian attitude of superiority towards them. Thus, Gregory S. Aldrete and Alicia Aldrete, *The Long Shadow of Antiquity: What Have the Greeks and the Romans Done for Us?* [London: Continuum,

---

2012], p. 240) notes that the Romans had a vision of the afterlife, but that it could only be enjoyed by a few. On the other hand, Christianity democratized heaven because it was meant “for all believers.” Of course, that still means that one has to be in the in-group to achieve a life in heaven, and Jesus said that “many are called but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:14), a text Aldrete and Aldrete never mention in this discussion.

<sup>21</sup> Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of ancient Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 206. Julia Kindt (*Rethinking Greek Religion* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012]) also notes how Christianity has perpetuated misconceptions of Greek religion. For a Christian perspective, see Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Willard M. Swartley *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). p. 58. Swartley cites William Klassen, *Love of Enemies: The Way to Peace* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 12-66; Marius Reiser, “Love of Enemies in the Context of Antiquity,” *NTS* 47 (2001), pp. 411-27.

<sup>23</sup> Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), p. 101, ll. 42-44: a-na e-piš li-mut-ti-ka damiqta ri-ib-šu/a-na rag-gi-ka mi-šá-ra [ki]l-[la]-áš-šú/a-na šir-ri-ka [ka-ba]t-ta-ka [li-i]m-mir-šú See also, W. G. Lambert, “Morals in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *JEOL* 15 (1955-58), pp. 184-196. For other comments on this text, see Gordon M. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliatio*

---

*in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes and Social Contexts*

(Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 34-5.

<sup>24</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), II, p. 150; for dating see p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> Philo, *Quaest. in Exod.* 2.11 (Marcus, LCL).

<sup>26</sup> Philo, *Quaest. in Exod.* 2.12 (Marcus, LCL).

<sup>27</sup> Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, p. 16. According to the Hebrew edition of Eduard Lohse [*Die Texte aus Qumran: Hebräisch und Deutsch* (Munich: Kösel, 2nd edn, 1981)], p. 38:

. לוא אשיב לאיש גמול רע בטוב ארדף גבר כיא את אל משפט כול חי

<sup>28</sup> So Edmund Sutcliffe, "Hatred at Qumran," *RevQ* 2 (1960), pp. 345-56. See also, M. K. M. Tso, *Ethics in the Qumran Community: An Interdisciplinary Investigation* (WUNT, 2.292; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Alex P. Jassen, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Violence: Sectarian Formation and Eschatological Imagination," *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009), pp. 12-44.

<sup>29</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Historia* 13.21-24 (Oldfather, LCL).

<sup>30</sup> See further, David J. Leigh, "Forgiveness, Pity, and Ultimacy in Ancient Greek Culture," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 27 (2004), pp. 152-161.

<sup>31</sup> Epictetus, *The Discourses* 4.4.33-34 (Oldfather, LCL).

<sup>32</sup> Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborn (eds.), *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker, 2004).

Similarly, Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller (eds.), *Redescribing Christian Origins* (SBL Symposium 28: Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2004).

---

<sup>33</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), p. 496.

<sup>34</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 353-357.