

Gordon Graham, *Evil and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. xviii + 241, Hb. £40, Pb. £14.95, ISBN.Hb 0-521-77109-9, Pb 0-521-79745-4,

As Gordon Graham observes, torture, rape and child molestation are generally thought to be horrible things; loyalty, generosity, self-sacrifice are generally thought to be good things (p. 25). But what is the difference between 'good' and 'evil' and why should we take this difference seriously? Why should humans avoid doing evil and take the happiness of others into account when deciding how to act? Why, indeed, should we bother with morality? Is it for the same reason that parents seek to instil good manners in their children — it makes living together easier and more pleasant? Is it because humans are part of a cosmic struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness? *Evil and Christian Ethics* is uncomfortable to read in the sense that it requires its readers to face these questions and proposes a traditional but unpopular resolution. Arguably, however, it draws readers back to a core New Testament witness: Jesus is 'an agent of cosmic history rather than a teacher of [moral] precepts' (p. 73). Written by a philosopher of religion schooled in the analytic tradition, the book does not dismiss lightly the philosophical and historico-critical challenges posed to Christian theology in the modern period with respect to the problem of evil. Its central claim, however, is that only a *theological engagement* with these challenges and questions can adequately account for the seriousness of morality and the reality of evil in the world. This makes the book not only interesting but deserving of careful attention.

Chapter 1 asks the question: 'On what, if not in personal choice and subjective opinion, *could* morality rest?' The main point is that only recourse to God allows humans to make sense of morality and offer reasons for action that are potentially persuasive. Chapter 2 reviews modern debates about 'the historical Jesus' with a view to reinstating discussions about 'the supernatural'. Graham recognises that grasping the theological meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection requires careful attention to the historical context of his day. The point, however, is that modern evacuation of 'the supernatural' from biblical theology

fails to do justice to central theological affirmations. Chapter 3 attempts a philosophical defence of the reality of evil and argues that theological claims have better explanatory and analytical power than the many available modern versions of humanism. The main dialogue partner is Immanuel Kant as Graham seeks to defend the logical possibility of moral faith, moral duty, divine providence, and the reasonability of hope. Chapter 4 brings the discussion into closer contact with examples of evil, notably the slaughter at Columbine High School. Graham makes the point that a biblically-informed explanation in terms of a cosmic struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, Satan and demonic-possession, is at least as convincing as predominant secular explanations. Chapter 5 picks up this discussion in the light of diverse naturalistic, humanistic and cultural theories; it engages with Darwin, Hegel and Collingwood as well as biblical scholars including Kelsey and Wink. Chapter 6 draws on the work of Jürgen Moltmann in outlining a 'theology of hope' that has implications for morality.

Possible weaknesses of the book include the eclecticism of the material chosen for special comment and the occasional imbalance in the amount of attention given to some topics. Was it, for example, really necessary to devote so much time to the history of New Testament scholarship when no attention is paid to approaches to these questions offered by major thinkers in the history of Christian moral theology? This aside, the book recalls the reader to a dimension of traditional Christian thinking that was abandoned in the modern era as 'mythological', philosophically meaningless and practically redundant. What do Christians mean when they sing: 'The strife is o'er the battle done/ Now is the Victor's triumph won'? Whether or not one agrees with Graham that evil results from Satan's work prior to his final defeat, the book is almost guaranteed to make its readers stop and think.

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