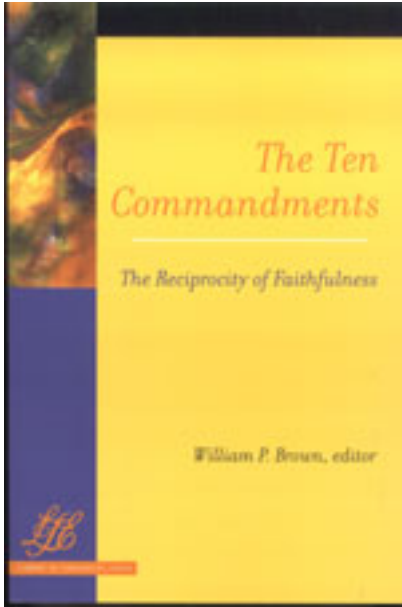


RBL 04/2005



Brown, William P., ed.

The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness

Library of Theological Ethics

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004. Pp. xiv + 349. Paper. \$34.95. ISBN 0664223230.

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This is a most successful volume. It owes its quality to the synergy of twenty leading modern specialists on topics related to the Decalogue and to half a dozen skillfully chosen extracts from “classical” writers in the past. It is no disrespect to say that the combination of efforts produces a work of a sustained overall quality that scarcely any one individual could have attained alone.

The work is well conceived, planned, and executed. Though stemming primarily from the Reformed tradition, the panel of contributors is drawn ecumenically and internationally, if primarily from the United States. Suitable points on the history of interpretation are marked, with introductory essays helpfully prefaced to the excerpts reproduced; some readers might have preferred a different selection or a fuller representation; for example, the church fathers and medieval Jewish interpreters, at least in their own right, are largely ignored. True to the aims of the series to which it belongs, the Library of Theological Ethics, the book seeks to develop the application of the Decalogue theologically and hermeneutically to the current scene. The directness of application, however, varies quite markedly from contribution to contribution; some leave readers to draw their own conclusions; others are quite topical. For example, the issue of the public display of the Ten Commandments in courthouses across the States is dealt with by at least two of the

contributors. General historical and theological essays come first, and then a chapter is devoted to each commandment in turn (two contributions in the case of the fourth commandment). Many of the essays have been published as articles or chapters in books elsewhere, sometimes in fuller form, and their republishing here is testimony to their ability to withstand the passage of time; however, a substantial minority appear for the first time.

The volume opens with an essay by the editor not only reviewing the field and the input of the various contributors to come but also, somewhat arbitrarily at first sight but presumably in an attempt to provide greater historical balance, an account of Philo's treatise *De decalogo*. Patrick D. Miller follows with general theological considerations, initially somewhat perplexingly for this reader with an exploitation of the notion of "divine-command theory" (the best interpretation of experience that ancient Israel could come up with, privileged from a faith perspective, might have more points of contact with the modern world, as when Miller himself moves on to "motivation and rationality"), and, incidentally, provides the evocative subtitle of the volume: *The Reciprocity of Faithfulness*.

The first section of the work, "History of Interpretation," appropriately cautiously subtitled "A Sampling," comprises an excellently thorough review of the Decalogue in the New Testament by Reginald H. Fuller; introductions to the topic of "Law in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas" by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, prefacing excerpts from the *Summa Theologiae* (1a2ae.100.3–11); extracts from an essay "Martin Luther and the Rabbinic Mind" by George Lindbeck, prefacing excerpts from vol. 35 of *Luther's Works*, "How Christians Should Regard Moses"; and John P. Burgess's essay, "Reformed Explication of the Ten Commandments," prefacing excerpts from Calvin's *Institutes*, 1.2.7.12–13; 8.1, 51–54, under the editor's title "On the Law and the Commandments." Excerpts from the writings of three early sixteenth-century "radical Reformers," Andreas Karlstadt, Hans Denck, and Peter Riedemann, are prefaced by extracts from an essay by Stuart Murray originally published in the collection *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*.

The second section of the collection considers the modern-day relevance of the Decalogue as a whole under the title "Contemporary Reflections." Three essays are included, each, as it happens, published for the first time. Marty Stevens writes on "The Obedience of Trust: Recovering the Law as Gift." Topical in view of the West's declared current mission of spreading democracy in the Middle East is Jean-Louis Ska's typically perceptive article, developing claims recently made by Eckart Otto, "Biblical Law and the Origins of Democracy." More domestic to controversies in the United States is

Nancy J. Duff's "Should the Ten Commandments Be Posted in the Public Realm? Why the Bible and the Constitution Say, 'No.'" "

The final section provides articles on each of the Commandments of the Decalogue seriatim by, respectively, Paul E. Capetz, John Barton (essentially on the significance of the different systems of enumerating the first and second commandments), Herbert B. Huffmon (notable for its thorough comparison with ancient Near Eastern exemplars), Kathryn Greene-McCreight (on the fourth commandment, perhaps the gem of this section, with impressive direct homiletical applications), Walter J. Harrelson, Gary M. Simpson (with topical consideration of the "just war" tradition), Hendrik Bosman, Cheryl B. Anderson, Walter Brueggemann (addressed in the first instance to preachers), and Marvin L. Chaney. The last, interestingly and perhaps significantly enough the oldest critical study in this group, is the most thoroughgoing in its historical-critical approach, providing a thrilling, if necessarily speculative, account of the association of the tenth commandment with the denunciations of social inequality by the prophet Micah (on the basis of חמד + בית in Mic 2:2). Other possibilities, such as the defense of the exiles' interests against the rapacious interests of those left behind in the land, are not considered. Exceptionally, a second study is prefaced to that of the fourth commandment: Abraham Joshua Heschel's lyrical celebration of the Sabbath from an observant Jewish point of view. The collocation of views sometimes sets up an interesting, if unarticulated and unexplored, dialectic between contributors and inevitably produces some overlap, such as in the discussion of whether "steal" in the eighth commandment means in fact "kidnap."

This is a rich quarry of first-rate materials, both in itself and in its bibliographical references, for which the editor of the volume, the editors of the series, and the publishers are to be congratulated and warmly applauded. Only the occasional solecism has been allowed to stand: the regrettable "As important as the natural law in us is" (47), whereby the conditional is assimilated to the comparative (the correct "as unemployed as ... landless" on 312 restores one's confidence) and "mitigates against" (134; "mitigate," as it happens, is correctly used on 304). The play on words "*Gabe-Aufgabe*," which succinctly expresses the "reciprocity of faithfulness" between God and humanity, is, I assume, unfortunately reproduced as "*Gabe-Ausgabe*" on pages 138–45. There is a marked difference in the incidence of footnotes: some contributions have none; others are heavily furnished. Some consistency would have been desirable, but in what is to a large extent an anthology such unevenness is inevitable (though the editor has intervened on occasion; see 239 n.1). These are minor quibbles; on the whole this is a most rewarding volume.