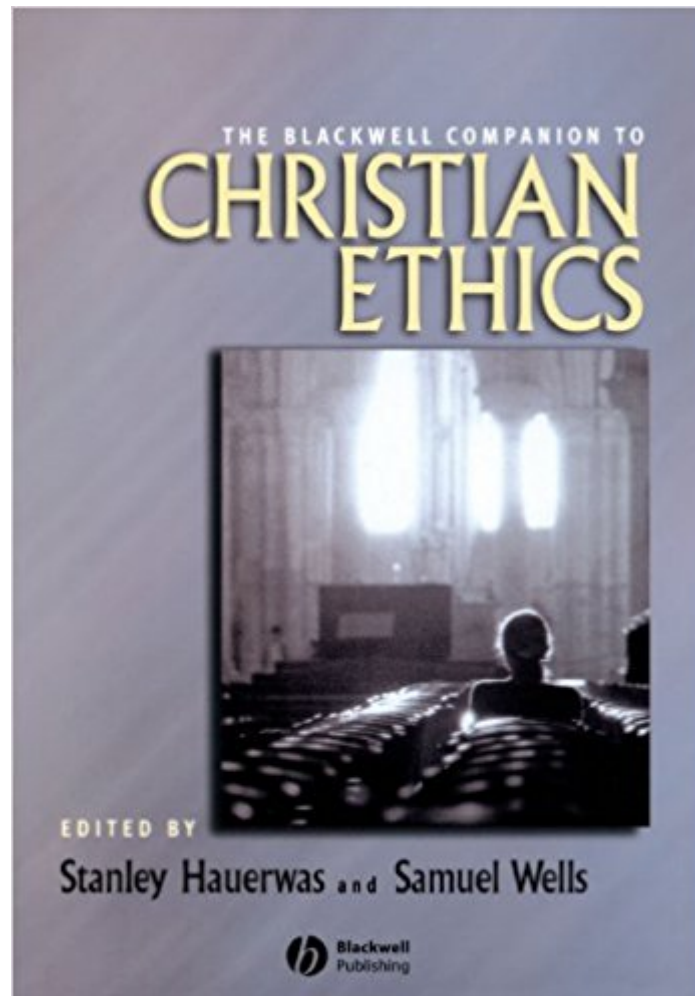




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The Blackwell Companion To Christian Ethics



Synopsis

The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics presents a comprehensive and systematic exposition of Christian ethics, seen through the lens of Christian worship. An innovative exposition of Christian ethics, seen through the lens of Christian worship Challenges conventional approaches to the subject Restores a sense of the integral connection between Christian ethics and theology Stanley Hauerwas is one of the most influential figures in Christian ethics around the world Embraces contributors from the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Mennonite and Pentecostal traditions Designed to be accessible to introductory students Will have a major impact on the discipline of Christian ethics

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Customer Reviews

"An important, often insightful and almost always provocative book that would be unwise to ignore." *Studies in Christian Ethics* "Substantial and significant" the early fruit of an important recent theological turn in theology, towards taking worship as a major source of insight, challenge and guidance Stanley Hauerwas is probably the most creative, provocative, and exasperating theologian in the English-speaking world. He has enlisted a mighty band of able and argumentative disciples who dominate much theological discussion today, especially in Christian ethics." *Times Literary Supplement* "Love God and love your neighbour have been the twin commandments in the New Testament from the beginning. Nevertheless, worshipping God and practising neighbourly charity have usually gone in tandem, essential but separate activities. At best, moral theology may come in as a sequel or even appendix to dogmatics. The originality of this book lies in grounding

Christian ethics not even in dogmatics but in the liturgy of the eucharist. Wonderfully worked out by the many fine scholars gathered by Hauerwas and Wells, this is a genuinely new turn in the history of Christian experience." Fergus Kerr, Regent, Blackfriars, Oxford

“This accessible volume will interest undergraduates and more advanced scholars alike.” Karen Melham, Emory University

“The volume offers a salutary reminder that Christian ethics is not simply one among other theoretical enterprises, but rather a sustained and disciplined attempt to understand the deepest dimensions of the Christian life. It rightly observes that Christian worship (at least when done well) is paradigmatic for discipleship and central means of moral information. The best chapters in this Companion communicate a deep sense of the distinctive nature of Christian ethics in a way that benefits us all.” Stephen J. Pope, Boston College

"I recommend this work especially for faculty of Christian ethics courses and worship courses at seminaries and church affiliated colleges." Teaching Theology & Religion

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The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells is one of the several ways in which one can approach the subject (and one I had not thought of until I encountered this book as a text in a class on Christian ethics). This should not be surprising, because the authors plainly declare that "We hope that, years from now, this book will be seen as a milestone for Christians....we are convinced that this book represents a new turn not only for

Christian ethics, but also for the way Christians learn to live in that time often identified as "late modernity". So this presents itself as a new approach, and I am not in a position to challenge that claim. One thing which is "old" is the fact that it uses "ethics" in a way different from those in Philosophy departments who write about morality. For them, Ethics is not the prescription of behavior. That is "morality". "Ethics" is the study of what questions does morality ask, and how does it justify its answers. For the Christian, that role is taken by theology. For the Christian, "Ethics" is virtually synonymous with the answer to the question "what is moral behavior?" What we have said so far means that this book would NOT be an acceptable text on the history of Christian ethics. For that, go to J. Philip Wogaman's "Christian Ethics". I might also point out that, with Hauerwas, at least, the theology behind this book is what is known as "narrative" or "post-liberal" theology, which is embedded in how a community understands its beliefs. And, since the ultimate act of Christian worship is the celebration of the Eucharist, it is around this and other themes of worship that the study of "what we ought to do" is based. I concur with the authors that I am surprised at this connection. The link with preaching, homiletics, and hermeneutics would seem make far more sense. But I also concur with the authors that it makes no sense that liturgy, ritual, creeds, and sacraments should not be kept in a separate, less important pigeon-hole. This separation can be traced back to Kant, who enshrined the split between doctrine and behavior, between the transcendental and the practical, which seemed to sunder morality from theology. The remaining three causes for the separation are elaborations on that one, except that the second is important in connecting Hauerwas' brand of theological thinking with pre-Kantian theology, especially as laid out by Jonathan Edwards. This aspect is the separation of action from beauty. This is the most artificial, as both morality and art come under the rubric of value. That means there are far greater similarities between judging a painting or a wine or a novel as good and judging behavior, than there is between all sorts of value judgments and matters of fact. Of course, if you are mistaken about the facts of the matter, that will unquestionably influence your value judgments. One of the simplest ways to explain the connection between worship and secular behavior is to compare worship, taken as a whole, the liturgical year, as a great play which offers us models by which we may guide our daily life. To take a simplistic example, by watching Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream", one may come away with a greater tolerance for the directions (and absurdities) the gales of romantic love may propel those so driven. Close attention to the creeds, the prayers of intercession, and even the hymns may strike a chord you can carry with you throughout the week. Does it not seem odd that it is so important to have the church officiate over once per lifetime birth, death and (in principle) marriage, once a year Christmas and Easter, and once a month (for many churches)

Eucharist, and we leave that all behind when we walk out of those heavy wooden doors. Hauerwas' narrative theology is based on the fact that life is cut from a single bold of fabric, and we should behave in that manner. The authors claim that Christian ethics is a recent invention, arising out of Kant's watershed work on the nature of moral philosophy. This is only partly true. What Kant did was to separate for good the difference between secular and theological ethics. But that split began at least as early as John Locke's works on moral thinking, and it was in full swing when Jonathan Edwards wrote the last major treatise which synthesized secular and theological virtue. But formal Christian moral thinking is at least as old as Clement of Alexandria's (150 - 215) second of three major works, the *Paedagogus*, an ancient guide to teaching morality to children / new Christians. Other major milestones are Augustine's writings, Aquinas' theory of Christian virtues, and Erasmus' (1466 - 1536) "Handbook of a Christian Soldier" (1503). What is new is the style of Christian thinking which evolved around the turn of the last century, with Ernst Troeltsch's "The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches" (1912), Richard Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture" (1951), and John Howard Yoder's "The Social Teaching of Christ" (1959). The way I interpret what Hauerwas is saying is that what is new is that the church went down the path laid out by Kant, which separated the practical from the emotional experience of the noumenal (value). I take the authors to mean that they wish to mend that rip in the fabric of Christian life. A tall task, but totally in keeping with Jesus' teaching that what we do should authentically reflect our intentions and ritual statements. The book is an anthology of 36 pieces, written by people from every color of the denominational spectrum, from Catholics to Mennonites, including, somewhere in the middle, no less than Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury. What surprises me is that there seems to be little representation of the notion of Discipleship. The emphasis is on both liturgical and public policy issues such as Baptism, Marriage, Communion, Euthanasia, Stewardship, Justice, Ecology, and the aesthetics of worship. That last subject I suspect is robust enough to be treated separately, but am glad to see it represented. The bottom line is that the editors have a particular agenda. If the book were to be used in a Christian Ethics course, it could not be the only text. You may not even want it at all, if your primary intention is social and practical issues. The level of narrative tends to be relatively abstract. If you are reading for your own information, you may prefer to start with Niebuhr and Yoder.

There simply is no other book like this on the market. In terms of Christian ethics, the editors require us to see that our worship, the manner in which we are liturgically formed, produces the kind of people we are. They begin with a few chapters explaining how Christian ethics came into being, and how they are determined by our worship practices. What follows are creative/provocative essays

that span a wide range of issues including: gender, war, abortion, money, marriage, euthanasia, sex, arts, politics, and the environment. What renders this such an incredible book is how the authors explore what the eucharist, baptism, hymn-singing, footwashing, passing the peace, prayer, and other Christian practices have to do with the aforementioned issues. If you are interested in Christian ethics, and you want to read an accessible book from reputable sources, then you can do no better than this book.

I was glad to receive the book in the excellent condition and in the prescribed time frame.

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