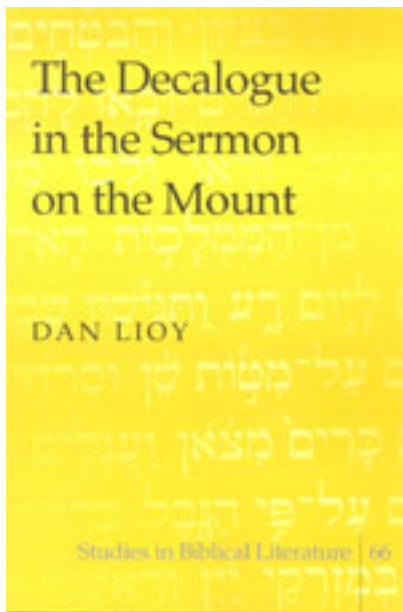


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The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount

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From its title, one might expect *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount* to be an exegetical comparison of these two foundational texts. However, Lioy has a larger goal: “One goal is to determine the nature of the relationship between the two. A second aim is to consider how that relationship affects the extent to which the moral law has ongoing pertinence for the Christian church today” (8). He investigates five central issues: the biblical and theological relationship between the two texts; the links between their structures; the extent to which Christians are obligated to obey the Sermon on the Mount; the relevance of moral law for Christians today; and their obligation to obey it (8–9).

Lioy is candid about his assumptions concerning the absolute truth and accuracy of Scripture and the authorship of the Pentateuch, Matthew, and Luke by Moses, Matthew, and Luke, respectively (11). The “orthodox Protestant” audience for which he writes will not object to these assumptions, but other readers may question his treatment of biblical texts and his derivation of moral laws (11). Even so, this text provides a useful resource on debates about many key issues in these two texts.

Chapter 1 introduces his goals and assumptions for this study. Lioy summarizes common theories on the connections between the Old and New Testaments and the relevance of

the moral law. He then discusses theories on the general relationship between the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount and various problems and debates in their interpretation.

In chapter 2 Lioy examines the concept of law in the Bible in terms of its nature and relevant vocabulary. He divides the Mosaic laws into three groups—moral, civil, and ceremonial—concluding that only the moral laws are still binding upon Christians (33). He further suggests that Jesus’ teaching did not break the law but “represents an elucidation of the Old Testament law and a reapplication of it to new circumstances” (33–34).

Chapters 3 and 4 then analyze the Decalogue with a focus on its moral principles. In chapter 3 Lioy emphasizes the division of the Decalogue into two parts: one outlining our “obligations to God” in Exod 20:2–11 and the other outlining our “obligations to fellow human beings” in Exod 20:12–17 (48). He examines the Sabbath as an example of laws that have moral elements and relevance for Christians apart from literal observance. In chapter 4 he analyzes each of the commandments, looking for their moral components and their appearance in the rest of the Bible.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer a similar analysis of the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5 Lioy emphasizes its chiasmic structure, with Matt 5:17–7:12 as the central part. While he does not analyze the structure in any more detail, he suggests that this chiasm emphasizes God’s law and how those with a proper relationship to the law find joy and other blessings, while those with an improper relationship find sorrow (116). He argues that Jesus was upholding the law and its timeless moral precepts against the “legalism” and “distortions” of his time (116). Chapter 6 then identifies which commandments are parallel to the concerns of each section of the Sermon on the Mount, concluding that “the moral law of God and the nature of its absolute requirements are of central importance to understanding the overall thrust of Jesus’ Sermon” (187).

In chapter 7 Lioy summarizes his findings for the questions he introduced at the beginning. For each commandment, he lists verses where its principles appear in the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the Bible. He concludes that the Decalogue’s bipartite structure does not influence the Sermon, which is instead chiasmic in form. He suggests that Christians should take the Sermon on the Mount at face value, while acknowledging its literary nature, but that they are only obligated to keep its moral precepts. He then argues that since Jesus upheld and taught the true meaning of the moral law, “Christians are obligated to obey all of the moral law. They can neither disregard the Decalogue nor be inattentive to its injunctions” (200).

Apart from his assumptions that may unsettle some readers, this book has several gaps and weaknesses that reduce its effectiveness. First, issues such as the sources and redaction of the texts receive little attention. Further, Lioy cites but does not quote the biblical texts and only briefly addresses the differences between the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy and between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain. He makes few references to rabbinic materials and the Dead Sea Scrolls, two bodies of literature that could help illuminate Jesus' teachings.

In his extensive structural and content analysis of the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount, Lioy never really describes his method. Since his goal is to outline the moral law in these texts, he examines each segment of the Sermon on the Mount for a direct or thematic connection to one or more of the commandments, but these connections are not always emphasized clearly. Furthermore, his selections of "timeless moral precepts" in the original biblical presentations are subjective, not to mention the difficulty in defining "all the moral law" (116, 200).

Although Lioy discusses references to moral themes outside the Decalogue and Sermon on the Mount, he often speaks as if they are unique to these texts, not found throughout the Bible. See, for instance, his affirmation of the dignity of all people, the moral principle underlying the command to love father and mother (190). In addition, he does not distinguish between shared themes that are never stated directly and explicit statements found in both texts, as in his discussion of peacemaking, which he argues represents the fifth through tenth commandments (129). He also shifts frequently between analysis of the biblical text in its original setting and modern morality, as in his discussion of wealth (168).

While Lioy's method is suitable to his comparative goals, there are other methods that could be useful for such a study. Historical, source, and redaction criticism could all contribute to his discussion. Sociocultural criticism might be the most useful here, especially in his examination of Jesus' intentions in the Sermon on the Mount. Many scholars have found honor/shame and patronage quite helpful in interpreting Jesus' teachings, but Lioy does not address these issues sufficiently.

Given his topic, Judaism and the law are central to Lioy's project. Unfortunately, his treatment of these topics is frequently simplistic, relying on accusations of hypocrisy and legalism (116, 122, 127, 136, 144). While Jesus' relation to the law and the Judaism(s) of his time are still hotly debated, a more nuanced discussion is necessary here. Any detailed consideration of biblical law and Judaism should include Neusner and Milgrom, and in this case, Jonathan Klawans's studies of moral impurity in the Hebrew Bible as well. Similarly, a deeper examination of work by evangelical scholars such as Dunn, Bock,

Witherington, and Bockmuehl would strengthen his argument, along with the extensive studies by E. P. Sanders and the recent *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. Some of these authors do appear in Lioy's bibliography, but several of their most important works are omitted and their arguments are not discussed at length.

On a more practical note, Lioy's use of endnotes is distracting. In 201 pages of text, he has 1,660 footnotes. In many cases, sentence after sentence contains a quotation or summary of another author's argument, without any clear response, analysis, or comparison. Instead of combining each paragraph's annotations into one endnote, each sentence has a note providing only source and page number. For readers unfamiliar with many of his sources, further analysis in the endnotes would have been particularly useful. Furthermore, while he does mention many recent studies, much of his argument draws on older, less-familiar treatises, most of them from conservative authors.

Lioy does develop answers to the five questions he raised, but he could have answered them more fully and highlighted more clearly the presence of various commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. His audience and assumptions account for some of these concerns. For instance, given his views on the authorship of the Bible, there was little need to address redaction. Even so, some discussion of the relationships between the Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and New Testament would have helped clarify the influence of the Decalogue on the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly, other concerns could have been addressed in a way that was still faithful to his audience and assumptions.

Despite these concerns, this book offers a helpful starting point for the discussion of important issues in one's understanding of the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Sermon on the Plain. Lioy has gathered and engaged with an impressive body of literature concerning these texts. Finally, he raises important questions of how these texts should be understood and implemented on our time. The answers may still be elusive, but he offers an important step toward their solution.