

Van Til, K. A. *The Moral Disciple: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 2012. Pp. vi-160 incl. Indices. Paperback. \$13.09 U.S.

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Teachers of introductory courses are always looking for books that will inform and engage students in the instructor's respective discipline. The perfect book combines intellectual rigor, readability, and practicality. *The Moral Disciple* is one of those texts that achieves a respectable score on all three criterion. Van Til has written a text that not only educates, but also engages and encourages readers to think more deeply about behaving ethically.

Van Til organizes his text into 4 sections. Part one explains the topic of ethics explaining different sub-disciplines such as applied and meta-ethics. As can be expected with a text on Christian ethics, Van Til discusses the role scripture plays in informing and motivating Christian ethics. In part two, the reader is led through a discussion of ethics from the viewpoint of the individual. Van Til thoughtfully discusses the nature of responsibility, sin, and virtue. He avoids the error of treating the topics in a purely rational manner by including the role emotions play in ethical thinking. In part three, Van Til takes up the role of norms. He explains the different sources of norms as well as the thorny problems that occur when norms conflict. The final section, Consequences, explores the challenge of distributive justice as well as ethics viewed eschatologically.

Van Til utilized several elements of instructional design that aid student apprehension of the material. First, readers will find 3 to 8 discussion questions at the end of each chapter. While several address reader understanding, others require higher order reflection where nuanced and complex answers are required. Second, Van Til sprinkled the book's margins with call outs. Some highlight important concepts that must be understood, but others require readers to consider and answer on their own. Finally, Van Til sets forth 3 case studies addressing ethical dilemmas concerning private behavior, stewardship of money and stewardship of time. These questions help tie the book together as readers are to ponder them as they progress through the book. To ensure readers don't forget, Van Til touches on them periodically in the narrative.

I found Van Til's conversational rather than academic tone to be quite engaging. His prose made me feel like I was being exhorted to join him on the path of ethical reflection. In this regard, the title of the book is quite appropriate as Van Til does not preach, he shares. Despite the book's many positive attributes, it is not perfect. On several occasions Van Til makes assertions about Scripture or Christian theology that could be, at best, be considered disputable. For example, on page 20, Van Til suggests that Lev. 25:39,44 is an update or a revision of Ex. 21:2. While this may be true, it is also possible that Leviticus is providing further explanation to the way an Israelite could be enslaved. So rather than providing evidence of an ethical shift, Leviticus is simply clarifying the meaning set forth in Exodus. Elsewhere, Van Til overlooked nuances contained in scripture such as reading the 6th commandment as kill rather than the more accurate reading of "murder" (p.117). On another occasion, he says we should love God, one another, and creation (p.46). While the first two loves are certainly stated in scripture, it is not altogether clear that we ought to love creation directly rather than indirectly by loving its owner (God) and our fellow humans.

Despite the aforementioned blemishes, instructors looking for a helpful introductory ethics text to engage their students should definitely consider this one.