Ethics Reading Review

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The paradigms for the moral teachings for Christians continued to develop throughout history. From the Old Testament (hereafter OT) time to the present, believers tried to seek a guide to live as God's people. It has developed over time according to the historical contexts and culture of the believers and the problems they are facing at their times. Different paradigms developed in line with different theological concepts. [1] However, systematic study of it did not begin in the Christian circle (including Catholics) until the 19

th

century.

Moral theology, later also known as Christian ethics or ethical theology, existed mostly in forms of moral manuals for textbooks of priests in the 19th and early 20th century. Among which, the most influential English manuals were from Thomas Slater, Henry Davis, and Heribert Jone.
[2]
These manualists became less concern about the modern problems than keeping the church order. Thus, moral theology became unable to address the real issues of the day.
[3]

However, as World War II came to pass, it raised many questions for moralists that changed the direction of moral theology ever since. The manuals seemed to be unable to answer the sufferings of a large number of people at the time. Christian needed new guidance for acting towards the problems in this world. Also, many new ideas were developing during the war period, like Tillman's and Lotten's, which were made available for the lay people. [4] Thus, these bases for a new paradigm helped moral theology to take a turn in agenda after WWII. It added the "love" factor to the suffering community.
[5]
It changed from obedience by following Church rules to having the conscience for living a responsive and responsible life of disciples, God's children. Christian moral theology also looked at Christ as the ultimate basis and examples.

[6]

Since then, different paradigms and/or models of Christian moral theology, or ethics, continued to develop. Biblical ethics became an important part of the discourse; ethicists and theologians offered different OT ethic and New Testament (hereafter NT) ethic paradigms. Thus, a paradigm shift occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. [7]

The new way of modern living and social contexts posted challenges to the Biblical authority, the biblical laws and standards. [8] People questioned whether ethical answers can be found in the Scripture.   [9] Reader centered and reader response hermeneutics became available.   [10] More and more people objected using biblical ethics to deal with modern situations.
[11]
Christians lack a unified and consistent rationale that connects the whole cannon. Although there are still hope and faith in God's words and revelations and suggestions like having a matrix of insights and understanding is also helpful by Clements, modernity greatly challenged the field of OT ethics.
[12]

In respond, Parry developed a new paradigm to answer to the modern problems. He used Barton's three models for OT ethics as his basis: Christians follow ethics because God commands it, because it is the "natural law," or because it is an imitation of God. [13] Building on this background, Parry proposed that the basis for all ethics came from the virtues and goodness of God and laid his foundation for the metanarrative model.
[14]

Since the divine commands, natural law, and imitation of God are best understood in the context of the Israeli narrative, Parry then tried to find a synthesis of the ethics of the entire Bible through his metanarrative model, which he agreed was an abstraction. [15] He argued that the overall unity of the biblical teachings does not require total sameness and suggested that this metanarrative, one single narrative that includes all Biblical stories, can reflect the entire Bible and beyond, fitting in Christians' modern contexts as well.
[16]
This model provided a more holistic view of the Bible and tried to understand ethics from the canonical approach. It also tried to provide a biblical ethics that allow Christians to deal with problems in the modern world. Here, Parry correlates virtues with ethics; his ethics seeks to find what is virtuous for human.
[17]

This perspective of ethics might not be a holistic one in terms of OT ethics. However, as McDonald suggested, it is relevant in the NT ethics because of the Hellenistic ideology of virtues as a divine attribute, relating to moral excellence.
[18]

One of the important paradigms of NT ethics was the one suggested by Richard Hays. Hays used the themes of new creation, the cross, and the redeemed community to framed Pauline and NT ethics. [19] McDonald pointed out the importance of cultural context in Paul's ethics, which Hays did not fully consider. He argued that hermeneutics require attention to the historical and cultural context. [20] It must also consider the community that the ethics is living out. [21] Therefore, contextual factors are essential in any Pauline ethics or NT ethics studies.
[22]

This idea was expressed by many other scholars, like Rosner, Keck, and Mott. They suggested that ethics, in view of Pauline ethics, cannot be isolated form other teachings in the Bible. [23] Each teaching has its own presuppositions behind it. It helped provide answers to the problems early Christian faced in their daily lives.
[24]
It is also deeply related to the social conditions and the communities, for Paul, were the Greco-Roman ones.
[25]
Thus, attention to both the theological context and the cultural context and influence on the NT is required.
[26]

Furthermore, NT ethics spurred from Jesus and the new community Jesus formed must be understood with its historical contexts of the OT, or the canon as a whole. [27] Thus, the Jewish inheritance and the OT scripture were also crucial to the understanding of Paul's ethics. It provided the historical context and a social context for the NT ethics.
[28]
This canonical approach not only helped to interpret Paul's theology better, but also helped the understanding of Paul's ethics.
[29]
Therefore, NT ethics is inevitably related to OT ethics.
[30]
There is a continuity of NT and OT that cannot be ignored.
[31]

In these frameworks, subtle differences occurred in the definition of ethics. For Mott, NT ethics is the principles behind the moral teachings in the Scripture that can transfer to the modern cultures. [32] Moral in a broader sense according to Rosner is simply what the gospel asks Christians to do. [33] For Keck, ethics is how Christians, as the faith community, relate their faith to their life choices. It is their reaction and remembrance of Christ's redemption. [34]
Fedler took a similar approach as he defined moral as the response to God's grace as God's "new creation."
[35]
It is not laws or rules Christians should follow. It is a respond from Christians after being saved, justified, and reconciled with God. They now can go into the world and live like people who are being saved, justified and reconciled.
[36]

On the other hand, Ulrich argued that ethics can also be based on theological traditions because it is crystalized, communicated, and articulated in the practices of people's existing reality. [37] The presupposition here became the theological ideologies. For example, the Luther's model of ethics focused on good works from the responsibility as citizens and loving neighbors within the Christian setting of the church, while the Protestant model called Christians to be sent into the world as witness of the reconciliation of God. [38] Ulrich, too, suggested a model of ethics in terms of "law," the grounds of ethics that is rooted from the reasons behind the practices of the "divine law."
[39]
However, the concern is that the
world did not follow God's governance and therefore unable to provide a context of living suitable for God's people to live as they are meant to.
[40]
So, how can people remain God's people? From God's commandments and their context of living, ethics were established. People in the world can thus be transformed within God's justice and be ruled under the "law" of God's government.
[41]
In this way, God's people can live out their daily lives naturally.
[42]

So, how can these models of ethics continue to fit the context of living of Christians today? Ulrich tried to give a new paradigm. According to Ulrich, the future of Christian ethics moves from within the Church and the Christian community to the world where Christians live in. It focused on how Christians can be witness to God in their daily-lives at the present contexts, which is based on God's continuous creative work in renewing and transforming the world. [43] More specifically, one subfield would be exploring vocation and institutional ethics, such as medical ethics and business ethics.

If we consider Ulrich's paradigms, one must wonder the relationships between ethics and non-Christians, people who do not consider themselves as God's people. Are they also bound to the same ethics? Are they included in these paradigms of ethics? Mott suggested that since Christians understand the principles behind the ethics and know why they obey them, they should also understand why non-Christians do not obey them. [44] Moreover, if we considered Keck's and Fedler's definition of moral ethics, then the focus is not so much on what Christians should or should not do, but on who they are accountable for and why.
 [45]
Therefore, if non-Christians do not follow Christ and do not understand His redemption and salvation, it is not reasonable to expect them understand and obey Christian ethics. This suggested that non-Christians are not bound by the same laws and standards in terms of Christian ethics.

So, should we and can we find ethical answer for modern day from the Scripture? [46] Yes and no. Perhaps ethics is not specific individual teachings that are pulled out from the Scriptures out of its contexts. It is more a holistic canonical understanding of God's words to Christians. They are not rules and laws forced on people, but a willing respond that spurred from the understanding of the salvation, redemption, and justification for the reconciled community of God. Then, it is always helpful in considering modern dilemmas in Christians' daily lives. The answers are found in the Scripture, but not always literally or directly out of the Scripture. If ethics is looked at under this paradigm, further studies are needed for practical uses in specific topics of moral or ethics.

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