

Articles Report

Referee: Dr. Benedict Kwok

Author: Wah Kei Lo

1. Introduction

There are ten selected articles focus on Christian ethics to review the aspect of biblical, theological, social and political ethics for church community in current context. The Christian ethics is encountering with contemporary challenges and dilemmas. This paper intends to summarize and reflect on the issues.

2. Summary

The Reformation Christian ethics is in a critical situation that looking for changing. The models or paradigms of its theology are rooted in the Christian traditions within the Reformation heritage. It concerns the human nature in the will of God and translates the “spirit” into rational substance for the public. Protestant ethics has its particular perspective related to its culture and theology that might contradict with the social norms in pluralism nowadays. The Protestant ethics is about good works acting on the community through the Christian’s behaviors particular with the concept of freedom. Hans Ulrich claimed, “*Freedom is seen as given with the exclusive relation between human beings and God, becoming present by faith. This relation is considered as constitutive for a human subject, empowered within this relation to be responsible and to be the origin of ethical judgment and knowledge*”

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It paves a ground for the study on the issues

2.1 Biblical Ethics

The unpredictable changing of contemporary context and pluralism are disturbing the fundamental ethical decision-making. It obscures the standard of “truth” and collapses into chaos. The influence of the feminist and liberation hermeneutics and theologies provokes the criticism. The biblical norms and authority is no doubt to be challenged. The integrating, unifying and single rationale of ethics is hard to draw from Bible directly. [\[2\]](#)

2.1.1 Old Testament Ethics

Robin Parry claimed the OT ethics relates to its stories referred to divine commands, natural law and the “Imago Dei”. It shapes the individual and communal identity. [\[3\]](#) The virtues and goodness are the ultimate foundations for this identity and reflected on the creation order.

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It set the model of morality for following and teaching in the divine community. This forms the paradigm for the laws and ethical principles that places as a bond to sustain a relationship with God.

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However, some postmodernists reject this constructive model to fashion the speech into a set of manner, and criticize for the power of interpretation.

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Walter C. Kaiser intends to propose the new approaches for biblical ethics. He affirms Scripture as the foundation for Christian ethics and morality, but is far from the modern life context. He highlights three significant difficulties and possibilities for doing the Christian ethics in current context.

For Difficulties

a. *Modern uneasiness with an underlying rationale for ethical principles.* It is hard to draw a unity and coherence of the OT ethics. The diversity of the interpretation occurs to the individuals and social groups. The ethical norms and popular morality cannot be easy to measure up to the standard of the text reactively

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b. *The problem of the particularity and specificity of OT laws.* There have the constructed Scriptural periscopes for the moral and ethical principles of teaching concluded in OT as the “*Laws*” that claims to reflect the God’s will. However, those principles or rules are applied to certain class and manner. The discontinuity happens in between the biblical cultures and life today

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[\[8\]](#)

c. *The diversity of recalcitrant materials.* The conflict of moral standards lurk the internal contradictive rules of teaching between OT and NT. It drives the separation of the development of OT and NT . [\[9\]](#)

For Possibilities

a. *A paradigm shift has taken place in the last half of the twentieth century.* The tendency of ethical response of the biblical authors is accounted for their community and horizon. The interpretation cannot exact the meaning from the author directly and literarily. The “merging of horizons” considers for the modern hermeneutics

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b. *The social context of ethics now becomes the controlling factor in shaping morality.* The ethical teaching of OT, called as “wisdom”, unto the principle in NT has been claimed to cognitive style. The consideration of the inner feelings, attitudes or orientations and cultures is highlighted for the intertextual meaning of text itself in order to do the comparison with the forms of life of community over the time correspondingly

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c. *The search for the relevance of OT ethics to Christian faith continues.* The OT laws and principles are presented with wide variety of social situations and circumstances. It reveals the goodness on the creation of God and also reflects the “natural morality” as the moral consensus for all people . [12]

2.1.2 New Testament Ethics

Kyle D. Fedler claimed the NT ethics has to focus on the teachings, life, death and resurrection of Christ that is further expanded into Pauline epistles. [13] The apostle Paul emphasizes the salvation of Christ as the grace to construct his theological context. He considers various ethical issues to the laws for moral action and exhorts the Christian community to follow, but the distinction of historical and cultural context in early apostle periods has to pay the attention nowadays. The significant subjects of justification, faith, nature of sin, grace, laws and the power of Holy Spirit are the depiction of human condition and the factors in the relationship with God. [14]

The moral life of Christian is the response to God’s grace through the faith in Christ that encourages to live as if Christ’s characters and actions. [15]

However, this presentation is referred to the sources of the ethical concerns of early Christianity.

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Those sources have embedded in particular social setting and issues. The implicit implication finds in the language reflected on the text. Leander E. Keck claimed the moral reasoning as a constraint on human behavior. The NT ethics has its own theological ideas to form the principles of moral judgement.

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The ethical teachings in NT have to consider the characteristic and pattern of Greco-Roman

philosophical traditions and early Christianity context.

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Those NT writers is not oriented toward the comparative concept of “good”

, but the will, character, and the action enacted the Christ-event. Therefore, the constructing process of NT ethics has to consider many additional matters and intertextuality referred to OT. Christ-event places as a center in NT exchanged the God-events in OT for revealing the ultimate moral sanction of God’s judgment.

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It points toward the kingdom of God from the period of apostles to future. And Paul brings the missionary purpose to the gospel for both of Jews and Gentiles, hence the ethical teachings must be included practical implications.

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The cross as the symbol of the salvation, righteousness and ultimate love of God presents the paradigmatic pattern for the imitation of Christ in the Christian’s life. This living standard is as the ethical norms rooted in the redemptive act of Christ.

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2.2 Theological Ethics

Father James F. Keenan gives a global review on the contemporary theological ethics before and after Vatican II. He considers the Christian community and reframes the anthropological assumptions.

[\[22\]](#) The reconsideration of moral theology as science arises from the postwar in the late modern period.

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He finds the lack of effective response to the current issues reflected on the content of Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917. The guidances and moral manuals are invalidated to the Catholic identity and church life that looking for the ground. The modern human psychology becomes a dominant discourse to depict the human inner mind and soul. The notion of sin has been reinterpreted and virtues of manualist theology has been denied. The moral manualist theology referred to canon law integrates closely to dogmatic or fundamental theology that is unable to address the current critical issues.

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In Europe, after World War II, a numerous scholars contribute to study the new path for moral theology and reconstruct the dogmatic theology from the biblical and patristic sources, but lost the conection to ascetical and mystical theology. The moral theology has to relate to Christian life, as the growing process toward the virtue. [25] The moral issues have been considered as contemporary, communal and global challenges. The church has to stand with the world and develop the content of moral judgment for the conscience in freedom.

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In the United States, people initiate rejecting the moral manuals around 1968. The human rights becomes the common values and norms. The theologians do not stand by with the council of Vatican II and criticize the higher authority. The division between right and left happened in conference. The encyclical *Humanae vitae* issued in 1968, focuses on many issues of the moral law, but recevies various response. [27]

In Latin America, liberation theology brings an alternative to theological ethics on the concern for poor and suffering. This issue has not be noticed in the moral manuals from 16th to 20th century. The poverty is the new historical event for the country all over the world. It shifts the propose of theology and changes the hermeneutical principle for interpreting the legitimacy. The theological ethics claims as the action to respond to the world of suffering and reconsiders the social sin and the structures of sin (the economic and social power).

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In Africa, the African theologians brings further concern about human suffering as a social reality. They emphasize the characters of the gospel message that confront the local cultures. The theology is doing for the church community and the world to express the love of Christ in

the kingdom of God. The liberating inculturation theology adapts to African culture and entering its second generation. [\[29\]](#)

At the last three decades of 21st century, number of theologians study for finding moral truth and the paradigm of moral theology is shifting from manual teachings to personal judging in conscience. A person as the ultimate source of moral judgment himself drive the autonomous ethics. The discussion on conscience and faith are referred to the grace and virtue.

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Some theologians suggest to put the Catholic social tradition into the framework of theological ethics.

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The blent framework and the engagement of local religious and cultural narratives are the future vision to encounter the current issues.

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2.3 Social Ethics

The NT ethics is rather focused on the Paul's teaching, as the limitation of Jesus' social teaching. Jesus presented in NT has no special program for social change or reform. His teaching uses plenty of domestic examples, but breaks a lot of the social norms in his times of background. And his teaching target group is usually small group or individual. [\[33\]](#) However, it did not mean Jesus' teaching is unreal or irrelevant. It reveals Jesus' teaching not only limited to particular social context or cultural content. It drives the hearer to have a broader social framework. Love, justice and regin of God are the subject matters in His ethical teachings that points towards the kingdom of God. It gives an imagination of new social order in the God's Regin. [\[34\]](#)

For Paul's teaching, J.Ian H. McDonald highlights the conflict in the conjunction between his ethics and right now generation. The hermeneutical problem finds in the historical and social context . Pauline ethics is under the Greek and Jewish traditions of virtue that is core value reflected on his religious community.

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The nature of the community and lifestyle are interacted with the outside world that presented

in his ministry under the particular culture. Paul gives a demonstration of contextualization between ethics and theology.

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NT shows the love and justice as a core value for the society in Christian community. It is the virtue as the goals of social life. Therefore, the social ethics is not about mere decision-making, but to understand the basic directions of our responsibility in society. [\[37\]](#)

2.4 Political ethics

Hans Ulrich bases on Lutheran-Reformed tradition to rethink the Christian political ethics. This tradition concerns "law" and "right" as the central topic of ethics and fundamental theological issues. It roots on the biblical understanding of God's commanded law unto the political form. Each society has its form, but the religious community would build up the form and practice according to its beliefs and traditions. [\[38\]](#) The Christian tradition concerns the relationship between God and His people. It presented in the commandments are given by God to His people. The commandments are the medium as the covenant that the people of God obeys in all dimensions. It establishes a context of living in the particular

"law" and gives

a specific political reality (its practices, procedures, relations, and institutions).

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The church is as a political entity and practises the

"political worship"

in the congregation. God in this political worship becomes a justice as His loyalty, governance, government and salvation .

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In Lutheran theology, the concept of God's two kingdoms signifies His governance, government and salvation in its differentiated coherence

[\[41\]](#)

The human law, natural law and Spiritual law are the constraint for His people in their political community. People practise in their real life governed by Spirit for the common good—the virtue. Spirit guides the political activity and works that addresses and communicates to His people

[\[42\]](#)

3. Reflection

The complexity, difficulty and urgent of doing the Christian ethics are revealed on the summary of those selected articles. The foundation and methodology of hermeneutics are challenged by contemporary culture and thoughts. The diversity of theology development occurs in different region. Love, law, justice, freedom and virtue are the keywords for the ethical theology study. There are going to highlight some reflections:

1. *Separation of Old and New Testament ethics*

Canonical Bible is looked at one book with two testaments. However, the contradiction of formality, contextuality, substantiality, fundamentality happens between OT and NT. Although a number of scholars propose a new approach to reconsider the possibility, the academic development of OT and NT drives into two specific and professional aspects. The inherent risks of fragmentation will be highlighted.

1. *Orders of Creation*

The creation order is the essential foundation for doing the Christian ethics. However, process theology brings a new perspective and argument on the issue. It builds on the feminist hermeneutics to argue for the on going creation. It breaks the original framework rooted on this order.

1. *The Identity of Church Community*

The identity of the Christian community is built on the particular social setting and tradition in order to form the Christian ethics. However, it is harder to practice this tradition under the current pluralistic content. And the diversity and differentiation in the social media communities urge the paradigm shifting of Christian ethics. The ecclesiology will be influenced directly.

1. *Freedom*

The concept of freedom in NT related to the grace that Christ set us free by faith. It transformed by justification from OT rooted on God's work. However, the freedom is emerged into individualism and human rights' issue in postmodern context. Freedom is no longer related to propose of the ethics that becomes the personal choices.

1. *Anthropology*

Along the history of ethical theology study, the human being places in the passive role to follow the “laws” and commandments. The human law claimed as a nature law refers to the “orders of creation”. However, I believe the anthropology would be the coming issue for reexamining. The Christian ethics consider the relation between God and human being that has to be impacted on its framework.

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