

ESCHATOLOGICAL PARADIGM AND MORAL THEORY IN
CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN ETHICS: STEPHEN CHARLES MOTT
AND THOMAS W. OGLETREE

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Twentieth-century reinterpreted eschatology introduces a paradigm for Christian ethics that engenders significant divergence among Christian ethicists in the way its application influences moral theory. These divergences indicate the need to clarify the issues revolving around its methodological application in order to bring credible structure for applying the eschatological paradigm in Christian ethics.

A set of analytical distinctions and procedural suggestions in this study provide an extensive framework for comparatively observing where ethicists begin, move, and end in terms of using eschatology as paradigm in their moral theory: (1) role and function of paradigms, (2) levels of paradigm operation (macro, meso, micro), (3) levels in ethical structure (philosophical/theological bases, principles, area rules), (4) three principles of verification (role of Scripture, community, and the nature of social involvement), and (5) three conceptually interwoven and complementary components of the paradigm (*already/not yet, reign of God, horizon of future*). A correspondence is proposed between the levels of paradigm operation and the ingredients in ethical structure. A complex interplay is indicated between the paradigm's components and the principles of verification which highlight the methodological nuances the paradigm elicits.

Mott and Ogletree were selected because they represent the latter phase of twentieth-century reinterpreted eschatology and its application toward moral theory. Their projects elucidate the complex nature and subtle interplay between the various ingredients involved in using eschatology as paradigm and the ever-present presuppositions of those seeking to apply it—illustrating what happens if you take the eschatological paradigm and apply it this way or that way. Their diversity suggests that the question of the use of eschatology in Christian moral theory remains open. Their respective orientation to Scripture shows considerable contrasts with respect to consistency, specificity, and relevancy of eschatological paradigm application. Their projects suggest that the question of the role of Scripture alone gives promise of bringing stability to the use of the eschatological paradigm in Christian ethics. The paradigm functions best when expressing biblical ethics rather than moral philosophy.

Perspectives for using eschatology as paradigm are proposed along with its relation to other paradigms in Christian moral theory and directions for further study.