

Landscapes of Historiography in Christian Social Ethics

From William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to Søren Kierkegaard's *Diary of the Seducer* to Julius Epstein's 1942 screenplay *Casablanca*, Western audiences have long been in love with the literary motif of love.¹ We cannot seem to get enough of the romance, strife, and embodied desire that these works elucidate. They fill our souls with a deeply rooted sense of interconnectedness while attesting to the passion and embodied-ness that accompany human experience. And regardless of their outcome—whether tragedy, repulsion, or romance, as in the case with the above listed titles—these works of love invoke the audience to enter into the intimate spaces existing between lover and beloved.

In a similar way, this book peers into the intimate spaces that exist between historiography and Christian social ethics. The discipline currently known as Christian social ethics emerged on the academic scene in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Its key players were not ethicists but philosophers, theologians, and practitioners who expressed deep concerns over the deplorable effects of industrialization in their communities and around the world. These first “ethicists” and those who would follow drew heavily from the historical resources of the Christian tradition in order to recapture, reclaim, and renew the true essence of Christianity. In so doing, they cultivated an intimate relationship between ethical discourse and historical analysis wherein the current conditions of injustice could be corrected by better aligning with the true spirit, or religion, of Christianity.

1. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); Søren Kierkegaard, “Diary of a Seducer,” in *Either/Or A*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Julius Epstein et al., *Casablanca*, ed. Hal B. Wallis and Jack L. Warner, film (USA: Warner Brothers, 1942).

While certainly lacking the romantic contexts of such great narratives such as *Romeo and Juliet*, the present work does explore many of the conditions of human experience, both past and present. It also calls the reader to participate in its logic and passion by advocating a new historical methodology for Christian ethics that is equally as adept at self-criticism as it is at textually based historical analysis. The intimate space between ethics and history is much like the intimate space between two lovers: personal convictions are felt so deeply that the boundaries separating rationality and emotional pathos are fused into a singular horizon. Entering these intimate spaces must be done with great caution and intentionality so as not to isolate artificially the rational from the pathos or to script them with external grand narratives and false continuities. Ultimately, an encounter in these intimate spaces will illuminate the methodological conventions and historical constructions resulting from the lovers' embrace.

Based on the general observation that the way we access the past largely influences the types of ethics we espouse, this work identifies and critiques the most dominant or normatively employed historiographic trajectories operative within Christian social ethics. Only afterward does it provide theoretical guidance for a more conscientious or critically reflective ethical historiography. Great attention should be devoted to the issues involved with historical (re)construction to the extent that the intimacy between history and ethics remains normative. More specifically, this book argues that, since we tend to look to the past to supply meaning for our identity and action in the present, we ethicists must relax our grip on outdated and limited historiographic techniques in order to unveil the determinative ideological commitments fueling our interpretations of history. Once this work is underway, we must interrogate the ethical consequences of our historiographies to see how well they are shaped by and incorporate the voices of the poor and marginalized who have been traditionally silenced, neglected, and rejected from normative ethical-historical discourses.

Important to this thesis is the realization that histories are neither created *ex nihilo* by present scholars nor exist in any pristine state but are the product of multiple linguistic and contextual variants. While many "marginal" ethicists have not taken for granted their approaches to history, many more "dominant" ethicists assume the naturalness of theirs.² Largely but not exclusively comprised of white, middle-class, heterosexual males, these "dominant" ethicists approach history as if history was self-evident and *there* for the taking. Dominant ethicists, myself included, must courageously enter those deep and intimate spaces between history and ethics and expose them to the light of current

historiographic criticisms. We will discover an intimate and vulnerable space that necessitates a dramatic rethinking of who we are and what we ought to do.

Only by relaxing our grip on normative histories—that is, histories that have objective and universal applicability—will we begin to see the beautifully diverse tapestry of Christian history.³ Unfortunately, so much of what constitutes normative Christian ethical discourse still needs to appropriate fully current trends in historiography. Those who get close like, Stanley Hauerwas, continue to stumble upon the same *scandalon* that trips those who intentionally adopted the methods of high modern historicism.⁴ Since Hauerwas's ethic falls just short of what I call a critically reflexive ethical historiography, much of this book is devoted to why this is so. In the end, adopting the postmodern/poststructuralist historiography of Elizabeth Clark will help ethicists realize that, along with Emilie Townes, out stories *can* be told in other ways.⁵

This chapter provides evidence for the need of updating historiography in Christian ethics. It offers a representative sampling of Christian ethicists over

2. The binaries between “center” and “margin” as well as between “normative” and “marginal” are contrived social conventions used throughout this book to elucidate the various levels upon which knowledges are appropriated and/or taken seriously in academic discourses. References to “center” and “normative” typically, but not always, point to ethicists and theories who are generally validated among the majority of academicians, whereas “margin” and “marginal” point to competing, yet rejected or neglected theories and methods by peoples from discursive and geographical locations different from those in the “center.” Several groups such as feminists, liberationists, postcolonial theorists, and womanist scholars are responsible both for pitching these binaries and challenging their limitations. See Marianne DeKoven, *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Laurie Finke, “The Rhetoric of Marginality: Why I do Feminist Theory,” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5, no. 2 (Autumn, 1986): 251–72; Miguel A. de la Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1965); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991); Marcia Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women versus Male Power in the Black Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003). Numerous other sources make use of these binaries.

3. Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996). In this work, Robbins explores the many depths and dimensions of Christian representations in late antiquity through a complex reading strategy that he calls a “socio-rhetorical interpretation.”

4. The Greek word *scandalon* translates into English as “stumbling block.” Its meaning in this sense is elaborated by literary theorist René Girard with a description of a blind person who cannot see the obstacle and continues tripping over it. It is in this sense that I apply the term to the pervasive use of high modern historiography among Christian ethical-historical analyses. See René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

5. Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 7. “These voices can then be included into the discourse—not as additive or appendage—but as resource and co-determiner of actions and strategies.”

the past century who have used history in one way or another to validate their ethical claims. The ethicists under examination fall into three typological categories that have been devised for the purposes of accentuating the overall thesis in this book. This literature review is in no way exhaustive, for such an endeavor would likely monopolize this entire project. That being said, the figures discussed represent key players in normative ethical discourses that have ensued for the better part of the twentieth century. Each figure in the first two sections also contribute in significant ways to the high-ecclesial ethic espoused by Hauerwas and therefore provide relevant background to issues discussed in the following chapters. The few ethicists comprising the third typological section respond to and against those ethicists in the preceding sections. As such, they each play a significant role in applying, developing or challenging the wider historical methods in use in Euro-American scholarship.

Each of the following sections roughly corresponds with a general historiographic approach. First, there are those ethicists who follow the assumptions of high modernist historiography by employing a methodological objectivism whereby social facts legitimate universal historical claims. For these ethicists, history is self-evident and access to the knowledge is open to anyone with the trained liberal eyes to see it. The second historical response among Christian ethicists is one that reacts against the first group. Instead of uncritically adopting the socially contextual historical approaches of the first group, these ethicists resort to varying levels of confessionalism to counteract a perceived loss of Christian distinctiveness. However, the point at which these ethicists fall short is in their inability to extricate their historical interpretations from their specific social locations. This chapter focuses a majority of its energy on these figures since they are the ones in most need of a historiographic update. While cognizant of some of the more recent trends in historiography, they fail to recognize the extent to which their constructions of historical realities coincide with their ideological commitments. In short, they remain credulous of their own master narratives.

The third approach to history among ethicists corresponds to the directions the field of Christian ethics should take, namely, one in which current theoretical and epistemological trends in historiography overlap and intertwine with liberative ethical discourses.⁶ This final category highlights the ways a few liberation ethicists connect one's reading of history contributes to or walks in solidarity with the sufferings of marginalized and forgotten people throughout time. The efforts of these ethicists to spotlight the gaps and absences in normative ethical-historical records have gone a long way to reshaping the memory of the past. Showing how these efforts may be continued by

employing a theoretically reflexive ethical-historical method is an essential element in the work against the oppressive structures of injustice that persist in our representations of the past.

MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS: HISTORICISM

During the beginnings of the social gospel movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, Christian scholars began moving away from the personal values-based tenets of moral philosophy and gravitated instead toward social ethics.⁷ By this time, the historical *zeitgeist* that swept through Europe and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century had already begun eroding the confessional subjectivity of memory and dogma and replacing it with objective data. The sciences were overtaking the modern university discourses and Christian social ethicists understood that they would have to interject the new language of science into the old tradition of moral philosophy if ethics was to maintain any purchase in modern moral life. These early Christian ethicists, most of whom were Protestants, proceeded under a bold claim that Christian social ethics had to be more Christian than it had been in moral philosophy.⁸ This is because, as Gary Dorrien notes, “Moral philosophy, like historic Christianity, obscured the gospel with dubious accretions and traditions, but liberal Protestant scholarship stripped away the inventions of human mediators to regain the religion of Jesus.”⁹ De-robing the subjectivities

6. The field of Christian ethics may in fact be moving in this direction. The most recent and implicating history of Christian social ethics is Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making* (Chichester: Wiley, 2009). In this extensive volume, Dorrien identifies the inability of Christian social ethicists to establish their field as a recognizable academic discipline due to its lack of distinct methodology. As a result, the future of the field hangs in the balance of redefinition or extinction. In part a response to Dorrien’s warnings, this book moves in his direction by calling for a historical methodology capable of a serious engagement with dominant political theories and ideologies that inform and guide current ethical discourse.

7. The “invention” of social ethics is again a thesis of Dorrien. Its rise corresponds with the similar rise of the social sciences that promised new, progressive, or modern interpretations of past and present identities.

8. That Christian social ethics arose primarily among Protestants and not Catholics attests to a deficiency in Protestant theology and life to speak into the degenerated social conditions of the Industrial Revolution. As Protestants “find” their sense of social awareness at the turn of the twentieth century, Catholics already were underway in addressing social ills. In May of 1891, Pope Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum*, the first of many socially directed encyclicals. Herein, he responds to issues of labor and capital calling for a living wage, advocating unions, rejecting communism and unrestricted capitalism, and emphasizing a preferential option for the poor. Since Catholicism was able to centralize their “social stance” via papal response, they were positioned better to dealing with social conditions internally. Included in David J. O’Brien, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, 2010, Expa ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010).

of myth and dogma from the true religion of Jesus required the use of the newly found tools of the social sciences, including the new biblical criticisms. The sayings of Jesus were realigned within their socially re-constructed contexts, which enabled contemporary scholars to find new meanings that effectively connected the biblical texts with current social conditions.

WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH

With the arrival of the modern German historical consciousness to the shores of the United States, many Protestant theologians and biblical scholars were eager to apply its positivistic methods to their disciplines. Among them was Walter Rauschenbusch, who ended his eleven-year pastorate at Second German Baptist Church in “Hells Kitchen” district in New York City to take a teaching job in the German and History departments at Rochester Theological Seminary. His time ministering to congregants in a Hells Kitchen deeply impacted his understanding of Jesus and the present necessities of working for structural social change. Born in 1861 into a family of six generations of German Lutheran pastors, Walter’s pietistic father broke from the Lutheran fold and joined the Baptists. Young Walter traveled back to Germany several times to remain connected with his German heritage and he eventually earned a degree from the Evangelische Gymnasium in Gütersloh, Germany. He then attended seminary in Rochester where his father taught, although he resisted its more conservative rejections of modern historicism and biblical criticisms. Even though he never received formal training in history, Rauschenbusch’s commitment to the historical Jesus guided his pastoral and academic concerns, orienting him toward the afflictions of the poor within an unjust capitalistic economic system.

In his groundbreaking book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch asserts that a social impetus is intrinsic to “primitive” Christianity and that the historical faith provides the necessary evidence for addressing, correcting, and transforming the social crises we face today. He opens this book with the claim that “history is never antiquated, because humanity is always fundamentally the same.”¹⁰ He then spends the better part of the first third of the book setting precedents from the early church for

9. Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, 15.

10. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the Twenty-First Century: The Classic That Woke Up the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 1. In this work he asserts that a social impetus is intrinsic to “primitive” Christianity, that is, the Christianity following out of Judaism and embodied by Jesus of Nazareth, and that this social impetus provides the necessary evidence for addressing, correcting, and transforming the social crises we face today brought on by the systemic malady of Capitalism.

contemporary radical social engagement. By connecting the past with the present, Rauschenbusch believes he is both making Christian ethics decidedly Christian and reconciling modern Christianity to the imperative social demands of Jesus. These goals validated the actual life and work of Jesus and the early church by confronting the individualistic and ahistorical piety with the imperatives of the past. His reliance on a historical-critical method for interpreting scripture is then augmented by modern sociological prescriptions. According to Harlan Beckley, “Rauschenbusch insisted that every biblical book originated from a historical environment, and only within that environment could its meaning and power be accurately understood.”¹¹ Thus, historical-critical methods provided the access to forgotten knowledges, whereby sociology was the bridge between historical facts and contemporary meanings capable of invoking specific actions in the lives of contemporary Christians.

The roughly contemporary works of Adolf von Harnack and Leopold von Ranke informed much of Rauschenbusch’s historical methods. Rauschenbusch extensively quotes from Harnack in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, adopting much of his content when reconstructing the social dynamics of the early Christian church. Foremost of Harnack’s theories to shine through is a fall-from-grace master narrative that assumes the church existed in some pristine state prior to Constantine’s conversion, after which the church suffered an irreparable decline.¹² Rauschenbusch claims that the earliest documents of the church dealing specifically with “social feelings and hopes” “became antiquated and uncongenial to the churchmen of the later age, especially after the Church had emerged from its oppressed condition and was fostered and fed by the Empire.”¹³ Extrapolating this loss of social awareness into modern times, he later claims that “in the social direction of the religious spirit [of our times] we found a like decline.”¹⁴ In his later book *Christianizing the Social Order*, Rauschenbusch makes this point much more explicit. He states, “but hardly had the social ideal of Christianity risen above the horizon when it went into a long eclipse.”¹⁵ He

11. Harlan Beckley, *Passion for Justice: Retrieving the Legacies of Walter Rauschenbusch, John A. Ryan, and Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 37. Here, Beckley quotes from Rauschenbusch’s essay, “The Value and Use of History,” *The Rochester Theological Seminary Bulletin: The Record* 65, no. 3 (November 1914): 38.

12. Numerous scholars, including John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, whose deployments of Constantinianism are treated below, pick up this general thesis. A more thorough treatment of Harnack’s thesis is reserved for chapter 3 later in this book.

13. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the Twenty-First Century*, 84.

14. *Ibid.*, 115.

15. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 69.

continues by stating that few eclipses are total, which is why the social spirit of Christianity can be found and renewed by historical critical analysis. More pointedly, Rauschenbusch admits, “I believe with the great historian von Ranke that ‘the only real progress of mankind is contained in Christianity;’ but that is true only when Christianity is allowed to become ‘the internal, organizing force of society.’”¹⁶ Therefore, not only must Christianity reclaim its true social meaning, but doing so satisfies the goal that will radically redeem unjust social systems and be salvation for the world.¹⁷

FRANCIS GREENWOOD PEABODY AND JANE ADDAMS

Rauschenbusch unapologetically relied upon a modern historical-critical method and helped centralize its place in Christian social ethical analysis. Yet he was certainly not the only social ethicist to draw heavily from high modern historiography. Francis Greenwood Peabody, for example, established the first department of social ethics at Harvard. In *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, Peabody asks, “What, then, is the teaching of Jesus, when it is stripped of the theological interpretations which have obscured it, but the gospel of a working-man’s movement, the language of a social agitator, the historical anticipation of the modern programme of social democracy?”¹⁸ Peabody’s assumptions in this statement are akin to those of other social scientists and historians of the modern academy at the turn of the twentieth century. He assumes if we can shed theological and dogmatic interpretation from history, and approach the facts as they objectively stand, we will be left with the reality of social interactions. As such, the true meaning of Jesus exists in these unmediated social realities. Jane Addams is another social gospel adherent who dipped into high modern historical trends. She remained committed to the tenets of the early social gospel movement and its goal of returning Christianity to its original socially centered roots. Addams was a Nobel laureate, sociologist, and the first woman to occupy the role of public philosopher. Her commitment to uplifting the dilapidated social conditions of Chicago led her to cofound the Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr—a settlement house that housed up to twenty-five women

16. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the Twenty-First Century*, 458, quoting Fichte.

17. Rauschenbusch maintains a firm belief that Christian eschatology guides historical understandings. In *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), he asserts that “religion is always eschatological” because it is concerned with questions of human ends (physically what happens after we die) as well as with the ultimate destiny of the human race (208). He rejects, however, religious apocalypticism and rightly connects questions of human destiny to contemporary social conditions.

18. Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question: An Examination of the Teaching of Jesus in its Relation to some of the Problems of Modern Social Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 57.

and reached out to over two thousand community members per week. The true history of Jesus reveals a religion whereby “the impulse to share the lives of the poor, the desire to make social service, irrespective of propaganda, express the spirit of Christ, is as old as Christianity itself.”¹⁹ A return to this ideologically free historical Jesus is a return to religion itself. However effective their application of the social gospel, the assumption found in Rauschenbusch, Peabody and Addams concerning a value-free historical reality drips with the modern Euro-American lack of self-awareness of how we read ourselves onto history. I now turn to those social ethicists whose burgeoning self-awareness of the limits of high modern ideals leads to a confessional-orientation of Christian history.

HISTORIOGRAPHICALLY REACTIONARY ETHICISTS: CONFESSONAL RESPONSES

As the field of Christian social ethics progressed, numerous challenges were raised in response to the Social Gospel movement. These challenges included its eschatological and soteriological assumptions as well as its historical methods. Again in the United States, avenues of realism were opened to counter the dreamy-eyed idealism that characterized the social gospeler’s view of pristine Christian beginnings. Not all Christian theologians and moral philosophers were content to yield their ground completely to sociology and so they refused to accept the idealistic fantasy that societies and institutions could be redeemed. Following the changing trends occurring in historiography in the 1930s and 40s, these realist ethicists attempted to recapture a general sense of historical realism to counter the idealistic social histories of figures like Rauschenbusch. In so doing, they returned to a form of Protestant confessionalism that elevated the theological language of sin, love, responsibility, and obedience. These ethicists would look no longer to the liberal academy to supply Christianity and Christian ethics with the ultimate sources of meaning and direction for Christian conduct.

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr led the charge of Christian realism for early and mid century Christian ethicists. Niebuhr mixed a low Augustinian anthropology with the influences of Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth. He became a socialist and political activist in the early 1930s, abandoning

19. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 122.

any misgivings about the church's moral supremacy in society. Then during the later 1930's and 40's, Niebuhr devoted much energy to an attack on liberal Protestantism for its idealism, which he viewed as lacking a thorough understanding of the nature and use of power in modern society. He firmly embraced the centrality of human sinfulness (Augustine), placing all of his hope in Christ's crucifixion as the profound means of transcending the human condition. After World War II, he moved completely away from socialism and condemned totalitarian communism. These theoretical and ideological shifts in Niebuhr necessitate the delineation of maturation stages in his corpus.²⁰

Reinhold was born in 1892 in Missouri to German immigrant parents. His father, Gustav, was a pastor of small Evangelical Reformed churches that tended to downplay the role of the intellect in spiritual life. His mother was the daughter of an Evangelical Synod pastor and helped Gustav in his parish ministry. In spite of his commitments to his socially conservative denomination, Gustav remained liberal in this theology believing that Christians had a responsibility for societal improvement. This liberal spark was planted deeply in both Reinhold and his brother Richard. Reinhold deeply looked up to his father even though as a young adult he could hardly wait to be free of Gustav's authoritarianism.

Niebuhr attended Elmhurst College and Eden Theological Seminary before completing an M.A. at Yale Divinity School. Initially following his father's footsteps, he was ordained in the German Evangelical Synod of North America in 1913 and pastored a church in Detroit for thirteen years. His time in Detroit corresponded with the beginning of the boom in the automobile industry and he observed firsthand the impact of industrial society on factory workers. This experience impacted him more deeply than any of the books he had read and he began questioning his training in the Social Gospel and liberal Protestantism. He implored his Detroit congregation to challenge the capitalistic social order, pressing toward a greater realism of the pervasiveness and subtlety of human pride and sin. Niebuhr left Detroit in 1928 to begin teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York.²¹ In his remarkably successful academic career, he delivered the Gifford Lectures, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964, founded the Americans for Democratic Action, influenced future leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy,

20. Amid the sea of serious engagements with Niebuhr's thoughts over the past several decades, Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), provides a thorough and nuanced account of his subject's biography and intellectual engagements

21. Without an earned doctorate, Niebuhr earned tenure after just three years at Union and later served as its dean from 1950–1960.

and even Barack Obama and was widely considered to be America's public theologian.

In one of his later works, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr berates the liberal claims that characterize the social gospel claiming that instead of benefiting humanity, they have "accentuated the problem of justice."²² Modern society is so engrossed in its own self-interested egoism that wider ethical systems of benevolence are impossible. Consistent with its nature, collective society always exists to protect its own self-interests. Social cohesion via morality, then, must be demanded by military or economic force.²³ Niebuhr advises a return to "pure religion" that "would increase the benevolence and decrease the egoism of the human spirit."²⁴ But instead of a "pure religion" born from the recovery of socio-historical realities, Niebuhr's religion is found in the culmination of justice and agapeic love that stands in the shadow of Christian tradition. This religion has never been fully realized in history and cannot be rationally forced into existence. Pure religion surpasses reason by dealing instead with the human conscience. It relates specifically to the individual, who is more capable of enacting agapeic love than corporate society, albeit by approximation only. Society is incapable of approximating love on account of its self-interestedness, so it looks to justice as its baseline. Injected with a hearty dose of Augustinian two-cities, Niebuhr's distinctions between of love and justice and individual and society are an attempt to leave room for a God who oversees, guides, and interjects divine will into human history.

With regard to historical methods, Niebuhr's mid and later work rejects the lofty ideals espoused by modern liberal theologians. He states, "The belief that a [historical] revival of religion will furnish the resources by which men will extricate themselves from their social chaos is a perennial one."²⁵ A few lines later he implicates modern liberals, "whose chief interest is in the social problem," with mistaking "religion as a hindrance rather than a help in redeeming society from its ills."²⁶ Several issues surface when interpreting the point of Niebuhr's critique. He clearly calls out liberal Christians for their misplaced idealism in social questions. Had they adopted a more realistic perspective on human nature, which Niebuhr derives from Augustine and Nietzsche, they would have realized that society cannot be redeemed. He

22. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* Reinhold Niebuhr, Introduction by Langdon B. Gilkey (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001; 1960), 2.

23. Ibid., 7.

24. Ibid., 23.

25. Ibid., 51.

26. Ibid.

also accuses historical-critical attempts to recover the social meanings of Jesus of falsely assuming that dogmatic or theological Christianity is to blame for missing the point of religion. Theology and not social-historical conditions is what provides knowledge about agape.²⁷ Leaning into the sacred and secular binary, the secular world cannot but be immoral when held to the standard of true religion. Therefore, for Niebuhr Christian ethics should focus on increasing the morality, or agapic love, of the individual and assist society in approximating the demands of justice.

In terms of his specific historical approach, Niebuhr operates under a quasi-confessional historiography in an effort to avoid the historicism of the social gospelers. History is understood from either a temporal or an eternal axis, or perspective. The temporal axis represents the linear historical continuum that “takes its meaning from the whole process” of acts and events.²⁸ Certainly, modern liberal historians aggrandize this perspective and pursue it as though it was the only historical perspective. The eternal axis “stands at the end of time in the sense that the temporal process cannot be conceived without a *finis*.”²⁹ It does not have a *finis* but outlasts time and supplies history with meaning by nature of its “above” perspective of temporal history.³⁰ For Niebuhr, these two historical perspectives dialectically complement each other. He states, “If we look at history only from ‘above’ we obscure the meaning of its ‘self-surpassing growth.’ If we look at it only from a spatially symbolized end we obscure all the richness and variety which is expressed in its many parts.”³¹

The Christian faith, Niebuhr continues, enables Christians to comprehend the meaning of history by supplying three additional dimensions to history’s two axes. First, historical interpretation must account for “the partial fulfillments and realizations as we see them in the rise and fall of civilizations and cultures.”³² The second dimension of history concerns the “life of the individual” and the third focuses on “the process of history as a whole.”³³ Each dimension of historical meaning assumes the Christian can grasp a true understanding of

27. True religion instructs Christian individuals in the knowledge and ways of agape. Society understood that human institutions are incapable of meeting the demands of agape since self-preservation is the primary interest. As such, society cannot meet the demands of agape and therefore cannot be redeemed. The closest it can get to agape is justice, and that only by approximation.

28. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 301.

29. *Ibid.*, 300. Emphasis original.

30. The eternal axis cannot be unearthed by the objectivist methodology of the social historian but needs theology to supply the categories for understanding the temporal *finis*.

31. *Ibid.*, 301.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

the *finis* of history. Niebuhr's first historical dimension calls for a historical mastery that parallels the great master narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet is legitimated by theological rather than social ends. Theologically inscribed ends, Niebuhr claims, are essential to the ways we read meaning back onto history and when combined with a perspective from "above." However, Niebuhr fails to account for how theology generally supplies meaning without succumbing to the institutional degradations of society. The reader must ask from whence comes theology and how does any particular instantiation of theology meet the test of agape love? Unfortunately, Niebuhr implicitly works out the answers to these questions by providing a master narrative approach that is confessionally borne from his own theological genealogy.

The implications of his other two historical dimensions follow suit behind the first. The relation of an individual's life to history is both immanent and transcendent as it corresponds to temporal and eternal perspectives. Here, Niebuhr's individualist existentialism shines brightly as he plays with the dialectics of transcendence, freedom and community.³⁴ Further, when approached as a whole, history "represents a total realm of coherence which requires comprehension from the standpoint of its ultimate *telos*."³⁵ Understanding history requires a commitment to a historical continuity that is supplied by its end and total dimensions. For Niebuhr Jesus as God and Messiah is the end upon which all three dimensions of historical understanding rely. This Jesus is not only the temporally historical Jesus who occasioned a certain socio-religious ethos, but also the Jesus of eternity who is attested to by Scripture and theology.

Niebuhr's historical approach assumes a general confessional aura because it uncritically relies upon a theological understanding of Jesus that is filtered through his own theological location. How do we know that Christ supplies the *telos* necessary for mastering human history from temporal and eternal perspectives? Niebuhr's response is to point back to the Jesus of Christian tradition. Since Jesus and the church claim this truth, it is true. Yet Niebuhr's historical turn is quasi-confessional to the extent that he relies upon Nietzsche's power analysis and will to power to support his claims for an immoral society.³⁶ But true to his two-cities or sacred and secular binary, Niebuhr uses Nietzsche

34. Niebuhr drew from Kierkegaard's existentialism the account of man's dialectical position between time and eternity because it corresponded well to the theological understanding of man's transcendence and finitude. Niebuhr's explanations of time and eternity are treated in greater detail below.

35. *Ibid.*, 313.

36. See Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 13, 63, 231.

to illuminate only the secular side of this binary. Nietzsche appropriately describes the historical realities of the world while Jesus supplies the true *telos* and totalizing interpretive frameworks for appropriating all knowledge. Granted, Niebuhr never designates power as a purely negative force but rather saw its presence or absence as an indicator for inequality.³⁷ But power operates on the justice-based societal level rather than on the agapeic individual level. Ultimately, Niebuhr fails to examine how power and self-interestedness impact the moral Christian's construction and understanding of his *telos* and macro-historical orientation. His historical approach lacks the methodological tools for a self-critical portrayal of its own truth and operates instead within the confines of his own meta-perspectives. And just as his realist ethical approach influenced so many subsequent ethicists, theologians and presidents, so too does his historical methodology find its way into the historical awareness of normative ethical analyses.

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

Helmut Richard Niebuhr takes his place behind his brother, Reinhold, of mid-twentieth-century Christian realists. Much of his biographical information parallels that of his older brother and so I highlight only a few pertinent details. Like Reinhold, Richard viewed religion primarily from the perspective of power that could sometimes be beneficial and sometimes be detrimental to society. Unlike this brother who never earned a doctoral degree, Richard received his from Yale in 1924, writing on Ernst Troeltsch's philosophy of religion. He took from Troeltsch a deep appreciation for historicism that, while shining most brightly in his early works, persists throughout his academic career. His most famous work is *Christ and Culture*, wherein he provides five rigid typologies to describe the ways Christianity interacts within the larger culture.³⁸ Clearly advocating for a Christ that transforms culture, Richard wanted to take the world seriously without, in the words of Gary Dorrien, "compromising the transcendence of God or the gospel."³⁹ When delving into ethics proper, Richard considered himself a relational value theorist.⁴⁰ Two main questions framing his work are how can Christians think theologically in

37. *Ibid.*, 163.

38. His five typologies explaining Christian involvements in the world are (1) Christ against culture, (2) Christ of culture, (3) Christ above culture, (4) Christ and culture in paradox, and (5) Christ transforming culture. Niebuhr advocates for the last one.

39. Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, 242.

40. See his *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, with Supplementary Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

all situations and how can they be responsible in all situations. With these two questions at the forefront of his concerns, he advocated a third-way position between deontology and consequentialism.⁴¹ This third-way is represented by the concept of responsibility. Responsibility to ones' self and community is the primary basis for making ethical decisions. It is for Richard the ultimate means for achieving justice in a fallen world.

Whereas Reinhold discussed history but never directly related it to his ethical system, H. R. Niebuhr directly, albeit briefly, discusses the connections between history and ethics. In his book, *The Meaning of Revelation*, Niebuhr elaborates extensively on his historicist methodology and its corresponding implications for Christian theology and ethics. Pointing to the intimate space between the two, he states, "It remains true that Christian faith cannot escape from partnership with history, however many other partners it may choose. With this it has been mated and to this its loyalty belongs: the union is as indestructible as that of reason and sense experience in the natural sciences."⁴² His underlying thesis is positioned between a totalizing "external history," which looks only to socio-scientific historical facts, and the completely subjective spirituality of religious experience that we sees in idealists like Fredrick Schleiermacher. Richard's responsibility ethic bridges these two extremes by positing an internalization of the self's specific revelation from God that occurs in a concrete historical situation. Historical validation then is based upon the degree to which the individual's appropriation of revelation corresponds to the tradition of revelation that comprises the Christian narrative.

Niebuhr's commitment to historicism requires him to account for the particularity of human experience in relation to past and present contexts. Interpretation and meaning cannot be understood outside of those contexts that give rise to them. For this reason, the Christian story which is mediated through the prophets and Jesus requires a backward-read hermeneutic. He affirms that the Christian's connection with his story is one that recognizes how "a history that was recorded forward, as it were, must be read backward through out history if it is to be understood as revelation."⁴³ Revelation informs

41. His third-way approach to ethics runs throughout his other works as well. For example, in *Responsible Self*, which is mentioned below, asserts that "responsibility" is the middle way between deontology and consequentialism. In *The Responsible Self* he states, "But the approach to our moral existence as selves, and to our existence as Christians in particular, with the aid of this idea [of the responsible self] makes some aspects of our life as agents intelligible in a way that the teleology and deontology of traditional thought cannot do." H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self, an Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 67.

42. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 43.

our understanding of history, but only in so far as historical particularity is the necessary precondition for God to “speak” into human existence. At this point, Niebuhr’s historicism shines brightest. The scriptures cannot be divorced from their particular contextual variants lest they lose their significance as a source for God’s revelation.⁴⁴ Thus, Niebuhr aligns with Karl Barth’s defense of the ongoing nature of revelation.⁴⁵ He claims, “A Jesus of history apart from the particular history in which he appears is as unknown and as unknowable as any sense-object apart from the sense-qualities in which it appears to us.”⁴⁶ In true Kantian fashion, the knowledge of concrete historical beings must conform to the internal parameters of space and time.⁴⁷ Since nothing can be thought outside of its historical particularities, revelation as a special and internal knowledge must also conform to the boundaries of our ability to understand, even, Niebuhr admits, when such knowledge defies logical explanation. However, revelation establishes the boundaries for interpreting history and for understanding its relationship to responsibility.

Niebuhr’s defense of the historicity of human knowledge, must be understood in conjunction with his confessionalist stance on revelation. Since the early church fathers confessed their faith by continually recalling the story of Jesus, the contemporary church must adopt a similar confessionalism so that its story corresponds to theirs. This story is “irreplaceable and untranslatable” and the confessor who is compelled to repeat it, initiates an event that perpetuates the living nature of the Christian community.⁴⁸ Thus, God’s revelation continues in time rather than finding its completion in the written script of the Bible. Given the historicity of the early Christian story, a necessary relationship exists between Jesus, the contemporary church and the rest of the Christian

43. *Ibid.*, 37.

44. H. R. Niebuhr is cautious not to equate Scripture with revelation, as is so often the tendency of Protestant Christians. While revelation can come from Scripture, the biblical texts themselves are too steeped in their particularities to directly translate across time and space in a revelatory way. Instead, Niebuhr looks to the concept of the living Spirit of God to do this work of translation for us. This work is revelation.

45. Barth outlines his understanding of revelation in the first part of Book 1 of his great *Church Dogmatics*. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. George Thomas Thomson et al. (New York: Scribner, 1988).

46. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 38.

47. Kant refers to space and time as the “pure categories of intuition.” These are the grid built into the mind, or rationality, that enable us to categorize and understand both rational and empirical knowledge. See Immanuel Kant and Norman Kemp Smith, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Rev 2 ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

48. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 34.

story. However, like his brother, H. R. Niebuhr fails to account for how the Christian story gets constructed in its backward-reading through the prophets and Jesus. He wants the particularities of the ancient texts to shape Christian understandings of the Christian community while leaving room for God's Spirit to direct this process. But like his older brother, he leaves a critical reader with more questions than satisfactory answers. By what criteria might this backward reading proceed? What, besides one's confessional stance, can guide how the story is read, understood, and related to an ethic of responsibility?

Niebuhr's only medium for navigating the construction and memory of the content of the confession (that is, the story) is God, or God's Spirit. By appealing to the highest authority and its implantation of knowledge via revelation, he legitimates his history upon an indisputable source. In the end Niebuhr proposes a confessionally tempered correspondence theory as his fail-safe for discerning historical truths. Present historical interpretations must accord with presiding understandings of the Christian story. Yet this reliance upon such a continuity presupposes a singular and normative Christian story. It assumes that his reading of the Christian story is *the* Christian story as is evidenced by his repeated use of "we" and "our" pronouns when discussing the church.⁴⁹ Christian history is normative, it is homogeneous, and it is universal; and since the Christian story is universal, so too is his understanding of the community to whom his responsibility ethic is directed.⁵⁰ In looking for a historically grounded ethic in the halls of his "universal collective" based on responsibility, he homogenizes the entire Christian tradition according to the precepts of his own Euro-American imagination.⁵¹

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

A third ethicist who relies on historical analysis yet lacks in providing a robust critical historical method is Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre was born in Scotland in 1929 and received his education and taught at various schools in the United Kingdom before coming to the United States in 1970. Early in his career he held fast to a Marxist materialist approach to political philosophy until he turned to a more radical critique of modern liberalism from an Aristotelian perspective. He has held positions in a variety of schools in the United States including

49. He states, "When we speak of revelation in the Christian church we refer to *our* history, to the history of selves or to history as it is lived and apprehended from within." *Ibid.*, 44, emphasis original.

50. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 88–89. "The responsible self is driven as it were by the movement of the social process to respond and be accountable in nothing less than a universal community."

51. One such example is found in Niebuhr's insistence that the Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety "colors our lives" as a universal collective of modern people. See *ibid.*, 140.

Boston University, Vanderbilt, Yale, Duke, and Notre Dame. He is currently Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Aristotelian Studies in Ethics and Politics at London Metropolitan University and Professor Emeritus at Notre Dame University. He has written on theology and virtue for the majority of his academic career, yet his conversion to Catholicism did not come until he was in his fifties. Now he focuses his moral philosophy toward an Augustinian-Thomism, preferring to allow these historical Christian giants to fashion the parameters of his calls for moral political action.

Although not a social ethicist by discipline, MacIntyre's work in moral philosophy has contributed greatly to contemporary theological and ethical discourses as he is credited with giving rise to virtue ethics. MacIntyre turned to Aristotle in an attempt to recapture a sense for virtue that seemed absent in modern liberal societies. In his most widely discussed work, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre bemoans the loss of a collective good (*telos*) among Enlightenment thinkers that has resulted in the incommensurability of language. Since emotivism is now the primary operative principle for moral reasoning, society is morally adrift amidst a sea of individualism that has rendered morality mute. He calls for the recovery of Aristotelian virtues but tempers them with Christian Thomism in order to make them palatable for contemporary society. Thomism provides MacIntyre with the narratological center needed to achieve and continually strive for our forgotten *telos*.⁵² This narratological center exceeds H. R. Niebuhr's responsibility ethic by downplaying individualism in favor of a socially interactive participation toward the good.

MacIntyre's historical gaze stretches well beyond his extensive use of Aristotle and Aquinas. He structures *After Virtue* as an intellectual history of philosophy. Herein he diagnoses the morally adrift nature of modern life in chapters 1–8 and brings the history of modern moral philosophy to its crossroads in chapter 9. Society can either continue in the trajectory of amorality set by Nietzsche that denies any common good, or it can follow a more ancient teleological goodness articulated by Aristotle. Throughout the rest of the book, MacIntyre romantically presumes that society would be much better off by following this move backward toward the recovery of a lost ideal. Without attending to the social concerns of historicism, he calls for a return to a nostalgic retrieval of virtue through the denial of Nietzsche and any other philosophical enemies of the good as he sees it.⁵³

52. Good, for MacIntyre, follows the Thomistic line as the *ratio* of a goal, or *finis*. Paraphrasing Aquinas, he states, "A good moves an agent to direct her or his action toward that goal and to treat the achievement of that goal as a good achieved." Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, vol. 20 (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 23.

Not uncommon for a philosopher, MacIntyre approaches history from the perspective of the history of ideas, or intellectual history aimed at his resistance to Enlightenment-driven society. He opens *After Virtue* with a thought experiment that challenges historical legitimation based on contingent and contextual details. The narrative proceeds as follows. A scientifically based culture catastrophically loses touch with its scientific ways of knowing. Labs, books and scientists are destroyed and forgotten over the long course of time. Eventually, curious thinkers in the future find small traces of the scientific culture that once existed and attempt to piece this culture back together. Their curiosity leads them to become pseudo-scientists since they can never recover science as it once was. MacIntyre's main point is that such reconstructive efforts will never succeed in fully remembering the true reality of that lost culture.

At first glance, MacIntyre's narrative seems to align well with points made by postmodern theorists following the "Linguistic Turn." He emphasizes the fragmentary nature of historical recovery by emphasizing some of the epistemological and contextual constraints inherent in understanding the past. Relating those future pseudo-scientists to his contemporary morally adrift moral philosophers, he states, "What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived."⁵⁴ Here MacIntyre implies that virtue cannot be reconstructed under the conditions created by post-Enlightenment revolutions against morality. The slow sclerotic decline of the good in modern society has conditioned modern peoples into ethical emotivism and has occasioned their inability to think morally about morality. He elaborates on the loss of virtue, saying, "we continue to use many of the key expressions [of the lost morality]. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, for morality."⁵⁵ Following his logic, we could reasonably assume that attempts to recreate contexts for a virtue-oriented society are destined to fragmentation, haphazardness, and incompleteness.

However, MacIntyre moves his explanation of this narrative in a completely different direction. Fragmentation and incompleteness only apply to post-Enlightenment thinkers who have lost their ability to think morally about morality. By letting go of all instantiations of the good in society, they

53. MacIntyre defines virtues as "an acquired human quality to possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods." See *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 191.

54. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2.

55. *Ibid.*, 2.

have forfeited their epistemological links to moral knowledge. In his thought experiment, these post-enlightenment thinkers correspond to the pseudo-scientists rather than to those who revolted against science. Fortunately, and for reasons MacIntyre fails to explore, he himself does not correspond to the pseudo-scientists. This means that his rediscovery of Aristotelian virtue is not subject to fragmentation or incompleteness. Quite the contrary, it is up to him and those who follow him to reclaim it and restore the preexistent essence of virtue.⁵⁶ This task is possible because they can and do maintain direct access to the intellectual history of Aristotle.

Aristotle provides the bridge between a philosophical justification for morality, or the intellectual musings of “man-as-he-happens-to-be,” and the teleological calling of people into “man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature.”⁵⁷ He becomes the missing link needed to reunite the forgotten past with present conceptions of morality. In MacIntyre’s logic, a return to Aristotle revives a necessary concern for the good or *telos* within society and moves ethical discourse back in the right direction. He rightly points out that seventeenth and eighteenth century moderns “stripped away interpretation and theory and confronted fact and experience just as they are.”⁵⁸ What they gained from their “enlightenment” of the natural world they lost in self-awareness. Aristotle provides the necessary corrective; instead of focusing on an unmediated fact and experience, the use of Aristotle interjects value to facts in an effort to substantiate experience with relation to a common *telos*. When faced with the difficult questions of “what ought we to do?” or “what kind of person do I want to become?” only Aristotle’s value laden teleology with its emphasis on the cultivation of virtues will yield sufficient answers. One is required to participate in the values and through habituation will be internally transformed in orientation of the greater good. Without the practice of virtue, value cannot be extracted from the facts.

Virtue, therefore, stands at the center of human existence, always informing, molding, and disciplining us in accordance with its *telos*. It is the necessary precondition for overcoming the modernist revolt and forgetfulness of what matters most, namely, the way we are in the world. Yet, upon what grounds should MacIntyre’s retrieval of Aristotle be accepted? He oversteps the historical limitations that he places upon post-Enlightenment thinkers. The reader is left to assume that the opening story in *After Virtue* is less a keen historiographic insight and more an anecdote to show how *they* (moderns)

56. *Ibid.*, 36.

57. *Ibid.*, 52.

58. *Ibid.*, 81.

misunderstand virtue and *telos* while *we* (virtue theorists) get it right. Given his education and involvement in post-Enlightenment modern academic institutions, would not his conception of morality also suffer the effects of an imperfect memory and thwart his attempts to discover a “true historical narrative” of virtues?⁵⁹ How is it that recovering the true or right kind of virtues magically immunizes MacIntyre from the limits of historical recovery he imposes upon post-Enlightenment thinkers?

JOHN HOWARD YODER

John Howard Yoder provides an ethic with an intentional and unapologetically confessional historical approach, yet he too blends it with certain historiographic nuances. In many ways his historical approach mirrors the others in this section. Instead of following these paths yet again, Yoder’s work is analyzed for how he tries to incorporate issues of ideology and power in the construction of history. As a Mennonite, Yoder carefully crafted his work with a keen awareness of the multitude of ways our language and actions perpetuate violence. However, while making moves in a constructive critical direction with respect to violence, Yoder fails to account for how his own social location informs his historical approach as well as his pacifistic ethic.

Born in 1926 in Smithville, Ohio, Yoder ambitiously completed a four year B.A. degree from Goshen College in two years and went on to earn his masters degree the following year. He later went on to earn Th.D. under Karl Barth at the University of Basel in Switzerland. In 1949, Yoder traveled to France to serve in a Mennonite relief program for children orphaned or displaced by World War II. A few years later, he spearheaded a relief project in Algeria after a major earthquake in 1955. Here he witnessed the onset of the violent Algerian struggle against French colonial rule. These European experiences made a deep impression on Yoder’s understanding of theology, politics and nonviolence. He returned to the United States and taught at Goshen Biblical

59. *Ibid.*, 11. One further pertinent example to corroborate the difficulties in accessing Aristotle’s thought. The text that generally is published as *Ethics* or *Nicomachean Ethics* is now generally assumed to be a compilation of lecture notes and at least two separate treatises on ethics. See Jonathan Barnes, “Introduction,” in *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 13–16. As a scholar who is thoroughly versed in Aristotelian thought, MacIntyre is most certainly aware of these historical difficulties. Yet he fails to acknowledge them or even acknowledge that he uses Aristotle’s work in its discursive textuality. Instead, he looks to Aristotle through the unmediated glasses of essentialism to stake his authoritative claim on the centrality of virtue. Further, he bypasses the textual in interpretive complexities raised by postmodern and post-structural theories because they are pseudo-scientists whose fragmented knowledge will always keep them from understanding the morality of morals.

Seminary between 1965 and 1984, which later joined with Mennonite Biblical Seminary to become the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He also held a teaching position at the University of Notre Dame in the late 1970s where he eventually became a Professor of Theology and a Fellow of the Institute of International Peace Studies. For four years beginning in 1992 he was under the review of the Michigan Conference of the Mennonite Church for allegations of sexual misconduct, to which he acknowledged and apologized for his actions. He died in his office at Notre Dame of a heart attack in 1997.

The impact of Yoder's pacifistic ethic continues to resound across the fields of Christian ethics and theology.⁶⁰ He revived a case for pacifism and nonviolence during a period when figures like the Reinhold Niebuhr were calling Christians into a synergistic relationship with the state. Yoder referred to this synergy as Constantinianism, a term which generally describes the happy union of church and state. He looked to the active witness of Jesus Christ and the earliest Christian church for relevant and normative examples for contemporary social ethics. According to Yoder, for Christian ethics to be Christian it should be thoroughly committed to the life of Jesus and the implications thereof. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder's most widely read book, he argues for the political relevancy and potency of the gospels. He asserts that Jesus is not only "according to the biblical witness, a model of radical political action, but that this issue is now generally visible throughout New Testament Studies, even though the biblical scholars have not stated it in such a way that the ethicists across the way have had to notice it."⁶¹

Generally, Yoder maintains a nuanced and deliberate historical methodology based upon particularities rather than universals. He remains aware of the strengths and weaknesses of using historical events in social ethical analysis, and relies more heavily on biblical texts than on extra-biblical sources.⁶² Not to be confused with social gospel attempts at socio-historical reconstruction, Yoder offers a historical reading strategy that looks more to the production of meaning of existent texts than it does to a factual reconstruction

60. The contributors to John Howard Yoder et al., *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009) praise Yoder for his many years of service to their field and for the legacy he left behind.

61. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 12.

62. As an example of Yoder's concern for making Christ essential to Christian ethics, he critiques H. R. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, claiming that Niebuhr's understanding of Jesus is not contingent upon the Jesus of the New Testament. John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. Glen Harold Stassen et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

of the past. He discusses the historical reality of Jesus and relates the texts of the gospel narratives to a “social event.”⁶³ As an event, its history is shrouded by the difficulties of “knowing in what sense this event came to pass or could have come to pass.” But, he continues, “it is a visible socio-political, economic restructuring of relations among the people of God, achieved by his intervention in the person of Jesus as the Anointed and endued with the Spirit.”⁶⁴ The historical particulars are important, difficult to access, and yet never exist on their own terms. The biblical texts attest to an actual historical event, but we determine their meaning in relationship with a broader socio-political reading of contexts. Yoder approaches the biblical texts for the meanings they imply rather than for the relevancy of their factual data.

In an unpublished essay he presented to a seminar on homosexuality at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in 1982, Yoder examines current questions regarding homosexuality through an analysis of Medieval Christian history. In this essay Yoder deals with presuppositions, ideologies, and semantics inherent to the hermeneutical process of historical interpretation. Presuppositions do not cease to influence interpretation, he begins, simply because they happen to be named at the beginning of one’s argument. Instead, they “stay with us through the debate.” Then he warns, “for the sake of conversation our use of language must be self-critical. We must ward off ideology, that is, the bending of language to make a point we already know.”⁶⁵ To demonstrate, Yoder highlights semantic variances in the concept of homosexuality expressed in premodern and modern times in order to challenge the assumption that meaning can be easily extracted from historical sources. Finally, he admits that “these considerations do not tip the scales on the question of truth, yet being careful about them relates to the truth of the *process*. We can’t learn if we don’t restrain our lunge toward too easy certainty.”⁶⁶ By focusing on linguistic complexities inherent in the process of meaning making, Yoder rightly asserts a critical historiography that comes close to the one advocated in this book.

Unfortunately, Yoder steers his historiographic ship too soon to the shores of continuity and interpretive certainty. He does this by reading Christian history through the lens of his Constantinianism⁶⁷—the result of collapsing the

63. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 39.

64. *Ibid.*

65. This quote and the others that follow from this essay can be found in Yoder’s essay, John Howard Yoder, “History and Hermeneutics” (1982). Page numbers were not included in the online version of this document.

66. Emphasis original.

binary between the true Christian, who models the radical political example of Jesus, and the world that operates according to its own violent power mongering. By implication, people exist in one of three categories: the world, the true church that properly models Jesus, or the Constantinian church that has given into the violent modes of the world. When making a case against reading Jesus as advocating violence in some situation, Yoder notes how “every pericope in the section [Luke] 19:47-22:2 reflects in some way the confrontation of two social systems and Jesus’ rejection of the status quo.”⁶⁸ Jesus does not give in to the two social systems but provides a third way that is characterized by being obedient to a nonviolent confrontation of the world’s system. A Christian will “be like Jesus” when “servanthood replaces dominion, [and] forgiveness absorbs hostility.”⁶⁹

Near the end of this work, Yoder advocates for the ethical maxims of servanthood, subordination, and obedience as necessary for modeling the life of Christ. He calls Christians to accept powerlessness by remaining obedient to God. In so doing, a true Christian reflects the character of God.⁷⁰ The revoking of one’s power demonstrates faith that God is in control and that his peace will shine through the person’s refusal to return violence for violence. But having power that can be revoked reflects more upon Yoder’s own social location than it does more broadly across the Christian church. So too do those conditions wherein obedience is upheld as the counter virtue to agency. It is upon these grounds that Yoder dismisses “that violent revolutions might be justified if directed against hopelessly unjust social situations in (for instance) Latin America.”⁷¹ He then goes on to quote two Anglo studies that corroborate this thesis. In the end, true Christians are obedient servants to the nonviolent example of Jesus that is equivocal to the Mennonite reading of Jesus that Yoder espouses all along.

67. From the very earliest times, the Christian church “prepared itself gradually to become the religion of the established classes, a development that culminated in the age of Constantine three centuries later.” Through this quick and unqualified glance at the church, Yoder aligns himself with the popular reading of the church’s “fall from grace” hypothesis that was advanced by Adolf von Harnack in the early twentieth century. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 169.

68. *Ibid.*, 52.

69. *Ibid.*, 134.

70. *Ibid.*, 145.

71. *Ibid.*, 156n.

STANLEY HAUERWAS

The selection and analysis of each of the ethicists thus far in this chapter are significant to understanding the ethics and historical approaches of Stanley Hauerwas. Each ethicist in this section has left a positive mark upon Stanley Hauerwas and his call for Christians to reject modern liberalism and renew their devotion to the Christian story and what it means to “be the church.” To his credit, Hauerwas is never remiss to emphasize their significance to his work. By acknowledging his indebtedness to scholars who have come before him, he underscores the formational significance of one’s community. For this reason according to Hauerwas, it is imperative that Christians attend to the character of their communities in order to live out the true narrative of the Christian church. Chapter 3 of this book fleshes out Hauerwas’s historiographic approach to ethics in much greater detail. I offer here only a highlight of the most relevant macro assessments of his historically conditioned ethic.

Hauerwas emphasizes *being* over and against *doing* throughout his corpus. While Christians can go around trying to rid the world of injustice, they do so at the cost of forsaking the character and virtues that distinguish Christians from the world. Instead, Christians should focus on being the church. To be the church, Hauerwas admits, is the only ethic to which Christians should subscribe.⁷² Why? The church is among other things a highly political entity by nature of its founder, and it possesses a character that counters the world’s liberalism. Up to this point Hauerwas clearly draws from Yoder’s political Jesus, Reinhold Niebuhr’s sacred/secular binary and MacIntyre’s virtue-precedence formula. Continuing, Christians are obliged to live as witnesses to the world of the transformative reality of Christ and the Christian narrative. Here we catch sight of H. R. Niebuhr’s responsibility ethic. What does it mean, then, to be the church? For Hauerwas, being the church means participating in what it means to be the church—namely, doing what the church does. By participating in the Christian community (that is, attending worship services) and partaking in the sacraments (Protestant: eucharist and baptism and the added marriage and preaching), a Christian lives faithfully in accordance with the Christian story.⁷³

Hauerwas’s awareness of historiography rivals all of the other preceding figures in this section with the exception perhaps of Yoder. Among other

72. Stanley Hauerwas, “Remembering as a Moral Task: The Challenge of the Holocaust,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 341.

73. Stanley Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 382–84.

things, he studied history while at Yale during his undergraduate years. Hauerwas's turn toward narrative is entirely intentional. He rejects the modern liberal hubris of objectivism and seeks to ground the Christian church in a living and self-creating history. Narrative, or *story* as he prefers, ties the present with the past in ways that cannot be dissected and paraded around in some encyclopedia or article of dogma. Story connects the social reality of Jesus' life with the words he spoke and with the development of the community that bears his name. Hauerwas states that by "recovering the narrative dimension of Christology we will be able to see that Jesus did not *have* a social ethic, but that his story *is* a social ethic."⁷⁴ This distinction between having and being is crucial. The material historical reality of Jesus endows Christians with less meaning than the story that proceeds from it. Here Hauerwas draws his lines in the historiographic sand to differentiate himself from the factually based liberal socio-historical interpretations of Christianity. In a story, the "reader" is free to make associations between the context of the story and his or her own life. For this reason, the story of Jesus continues to speak into the life of the church.⁷⁵

Hauerwas's laudable turn to narrative is accompanied by a call for the church to cultivate its story into the lives of contemporary Christians. Its story is one of self-propitiation whereby the church sustains its differentness from the world throughout time. Adopting this story requires an openness to receive it and this openness stands in direct contrast to the individualistic narrative of liberalism. He suggests how "vulnerability needs to be folded into docility—a willingness to be instructed and formed by truth."⁷⁶ The historical Christian church possesses the truth, and it imparts its "interpretive categories" in order for Christians to understand reality clearly and without error.⁷⁷ Yet beyond his ill-defined conception of tradition, Hauerwas never elaborates the grounds upon which the Christian story is to be understood. In other words, Christians will comprehend reality only after they have accepted the interpretive categories constructed by the church throughout history. His call to docility is

74. Italics mine. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 37.

75. At times, Hauerwas takes great liberties with the associative nature of story. Commenting on a biblical commentary Hauerwas wrote on Matthew, Joseph Mangina observes that "Hauerwas ranges freely between the first and the twenty-first centuries, though in an ad hoc way and without any obvious 'method' for bridging the gap." Joseph L. Mangina, "Hidden from the Wise, Revealed to Infants: Stanley Hauerwas's Commentary on Matthew," *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 1 (December 1, 2008): 15.

76. As quoted in Kathleen Roberts Skerrett, "Radical Democracy and Ordinary Time: Reflections on Hauerwas and Coles," *Theology Today* 66, no. 1 (April, 2009): 75.

77. Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 106–8.

a call to an uncritical confessionalism, an acceptance of church teaching on its own terms. As I describe in further detail in the chapters to come, Hauerwas's self-legitimizing approach to narrative projects a universalist conception of the church and lacks the necessary critical resources needed for a critically reflexive historiography. With these criticisms in view, we turn now to the third approach to historiography among Christian ethicists and to a historical conscientiousness better equipped to navigate through the intimate spaces between history and ethics.

HISTORIOGRAPHICALLY CONSCIENTIOUS ETHICISTS

This final section turns to an ethics and a corresponding historical approach that differs in many ways from the ethicists mentioned above. The few ethicists presented in this section share a liberationist perspective that operates with a general hermeneutic of suspicion while privileging marginalized communities and voices. These scholars offer an ethical-historical analysis unique in the dominant discourses amongst Christian ethicists in the United States. While in no way representative of liberation theology or ethics as a whole, some commonalities surface among them that arise out of common concerns for the marginalized, oppressed and hegemonic cultural structures that truncate justice and equality. The two liberation-leaning ethicists discussed, Gloria Albrecht and Emilie Townes, appropriate postmodern and post-structural theories into their ethics, not because they believe subjectivity will dissolve truth into pure relativity, but because they find in them tools necessary for dismantling hegemonic knowledges. This is a central component of their critical approaches to their field. With goals similar to early social ethicists like Rauschenbusch, their critical ethical and historical methodologies are informed by postmodernism and post-structuralism and address the degenerated social conditions produced in modern society. Tapping into these *post*-theory bases aligns them with many of the historiographic developments that will be explored in the following chapter. Commonalities, therefore, are easier to spot as practitioners of both history and ethics disciplines share convictions regarding the fragmentary nature of knowledge, analyses of power and the linguistically constructed nature of culture and reality. Finally, categorizing these liberationist ethicists as historiographically conscientious is my way of approximating (borrowing from Reinhold Niebuhr) the historiographic work of Elizabeth Clark for Christian social ethics. The historical approaches of Albrecht and Townes cast light into the deep recesses of privilege-based ideology that otherwise has remained hidden or unnoticed by those normative ethicists presented in the previous section.

GLORIA ALBRECHT

Gloria Albrecht is codirector and Professor Emerita of Religion and Ethics at University of Detroit Mercy. She earned a B.A. from the University of Maryland, separate masters degree from Johns Hopkins University and St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, and in 1992 a Ph.D. from Temple University. She is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and served as pastor to a primarily white, middle-to-upper class congregation in Detroit. Her mother too was a minister but one whose ministerial career could not officially begin until her four kids were raised and her husband had passed away. Albrecht acknowledges that she is part of a generation of women following her mother's who were "expected to get a college education before marrying."⁷⁸ Rejecting the social constraints of both her and her mother's generational views on women, Albrecht's intellectual roots are grounded in materialist feminism, liberation theology, and radical historicism. She remains an active member of the Society of Christian Ethics.

Albrecht is committed to the situated-ness of epistemology as is emphasized throughout her work. In *The Character of our Communities*, she admits that she is a "white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian feminist clergywoman" in order to clarify that she thinks from "the margins in some social relations and in the center of others."⁷⁹ By socially locating her own knowledge, she not only prepares the way for examining the unexamined social location of Stanley Hauerwas's ethic, which is the aim of her book, but also asserts the inevitable particularity of all knowledge. She applies this relatively simple principle to Hauerwas to reveal an ethic that is as damaging to women and communities of color as it is blind to its privileged social location. Ever aware of her own presence, Albrecht embodies her epistemological commitments. This embodiment stands in direct opposition to Hauerwas's lack of self-awareness and it positions her to expose the violence of his universally applicable virtues of obedience and suffering.⁸⁰

Albrecht treatment of social located-ness of knowledge is not analyzed for the sake of knowledge itself. Her radical historicism always points beyond

78. Gloria H. Albrecht, *Hitting Home: Feminist Ethics, Women's Work, and the Betrayal of "Family Values"* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 26.

79. Gloria H. Albrecht, *The Character of our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 12.

80. Hauerwas's "universal" virtues are universal for the church only, but are intended to apply equally to every community within the church. He believes he escapes the objective universalism of liberalism by focusing on the church. Albrecht rightly identifies his over-appropriation of the church as a singularity without accounting for the deeper particularities produced by radically divergent social locations.

social data toward pragmatic implications of particularized knowledges. What is more, her admission of how one's social location influences one's thinking is not designed to negate the validity of another person's ethic. If such negation was the goal, her self-revelatory comments would undermine her own theoretical positioning. Instead, Albrecht looks to social location and particularized knowledges as a way of countering modern objectivist and universalist assertions. She believes in "using our particular locations of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation as critical categories by which to uncover the relationships of domination that exist within human society generally—and within Christianity particularly."⁸¹ These critical categories are essential because they provide an impetus for the transformation of structures of domination.

As an ethicist committed to liberation and justice, Albrecht understands the relationship between historical interpretations and ethical praxis. In conjunction with her epistemological commitment to particularity, she also advocates for the use of post-structuralism and radical historicism. Post-structuralism goes beyond Saussure's structuralism, she explains, by trying to explain the "plurality of meanings and the changeability of meaning within a language system."⁸² This plurality of meanings activates an analysis of language through which "the self is produced, or constructed, or encoded, according to socially specific discourses."⁸³ In other words, the language we use arises from socially contextual structures that play into political landscapes. By analyzing these structures we are confronted with the politicization of our language and are better able to see how our language plays into structures of domination and marginalization.

Albrecht's radical historical approach borrows from the works of Sheila Devaney and Itumeleng J. Mosala. Their flavor of historicism emphasizes the historical embedded-ness of meaning in the material conditions that occasioned the writing of a text. For Albrecht, radical historicism better accounts for historical particularities and diversities that would get white washed into universal or transcendent unities under alternative historical approaches. But instead of extracting meaning from the data or raw facts of history that characterized the pursuits of high modern historicism, Devaney, Mosala, and Albrecht look to the post-structural role of language impacting the production of meaning in both past and present contexts. In other words, they remain attuned to the textuality of historical meaning. Albrecht states, "Meaning is always being produced from a particular, historically located, and interested

81. *Ibid.*, 13.

82. *Ibid.*, 86.

83. *Ibid.*, 87.

position.”⁸⁴ Since language and the production of meaning are always political, “recognition of our fully historical consciousness and analysis of the humanly constructed discourses that compete for our embodiment lead to the conclusion that justice is integral to truth.”⁸⁵

Equipped with post-structuralism and radical historicism, Albrecht launches an internal critique of Stanley Hauerwas’s entire ethical system. She claims that she was initially drawn to his language of nonviolence, his critique of liberalism, and his talk of the political significance of the individual until she came to realize that “while we spoke the same words, they are embedded in different discourses that arise out of different social locations.”⁸⁶ She demonstrates the various ways Hauerwas projects his social location into his understanding of what it means to be a story formed community but without any recognition of the consequences. She further notes that “Hauerwas’s description of ‘the Christian narrative’ functions to deny differences in the same manner that liberal theory functioned.”⁸⁷ That is, the denial of difference leads to a universalization of his own particular location at the “expense of justice.”⁸⁸ As a result, his narrative presents a “dangerous memory” that excludes society’s marginalized voices from the process of constructing the meaning of that narrative, thus legitimating societal structures of violence and injustice.⁸⁹

EMILIE M. TOWNES

Also falling under the liberationist spectra is womanist ethicist Emilie M. Townes. As an ordained American Baptist minister, Townes earned her undergraduate, masters, and D.Min. degrees from the University of Chicago. She then earned her Ph.D. from Northwestern and went on to teach ethics at Saint Paul Theological Seminary in Kansas City and then at Union Theological Seminary in New York. She now teaches at Yale University, where she holds the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology

84. *Ibid.*, 89.

85. *Ibid.*, 138. In the same section, she clarifies this connection saying, “once we recognize the particularity of any perspective, of any narrative or text or tradition, or contemporary discourse, and once we realize the role that social power plays in privileging any one view as ‘truth,’ then we must address the social process of naming truth. It means realizing that a ‘truth’ is always a truth-in-process, to be held with humility. Therefore, the development of truth-in-process must be accompanied by a social (secular and ecclesial) commitment to empower those with unequal access to full participation in the conversations, dialogues, and debates necessary to the social construction of knowledge.”

86. *Ibid.*, 93.

87. *Ibid.*, 101. I launch a similar argument against Hauerwas in chapter 3.

88. *Ibid.*, 101.

89. *Ibid.*, 68.

chair. While having published only a small handful of monograph books, Townes has amassed an impressive list of articles and public speaking engagements including plenaries and conference presentations. In 2008 she served as the elected president of the American Academy of Religion.

Along with Katie Cannon, Deloris Williams, Marcia Riggs, and others, Townes helped to carve out a space in the academy for womanist scholarship. Womanism arose out of the needs and concerns of black women scholars whose voices found representation neither in traditional black theology nor in feminism.⁹⁰ Operating between these two academic spaces, each womanist scholar projects her own voice into the relevant theological and ethical discourses. Thus, Womanism can be defined by no singular set of characteristics, since each manifestation is particular to the experiences and appropriations of the individual womanist. Townes states, “womanist reflection is far from monolithic in voice and tone.”⁹¹ Perhaps this particularity is why Townes has edited more books than she has singularly written. Her edited books on Womanism bring together a variety of womanist authors to discuss their various perspectives around topics of suffering, oppression, and socio-cultural representation as well history, memory, and identity.

Emilie Townes’s historical approach is as purposeful as it is comprehensive. Since womanist historical interpretations are epistemologically and theologically rooted in the lived experiences of black women, she wrestles with the question of how to understand and to appropriate black women’s legacies. “A womanist ethic,” Townes boldly proclaims, “rejects suffering as God’s will and believes that it is an outrage that there is suffering at all.”⁹² The resurrection of Jesus testifies to God’s breaking into history to reject suffering and injustice and move humanity “past suffering to pain and struggle.”⁹³ This distinction between suffering and pain is important. While suffering can be mitigated by coping mechanisms, it is never overcome. Pain and struggle, on the other hand, can transform a person and community to a place of wholeness. She does not advocate for the dismissal or revision of dominant histories, but calls for their critical interrogation in order to see how they depict, (mis)appropriate and correspondingly inform the suffering of black communities. The results of these interrogations are what provide the impetus for her present calls for justice.

90. Katie Cannon’s published dissertation is the first exposition of womanist scholarship. See *Black Womanist Ethics*, vol. 60 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

91. Emilie M. Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 9.

92. Emilie M. Townes, “Living in the New Jerusalem,” in *A Troubling in My Soul*, 84.

93. *Ibid.*, 84.

When she moves from deconstruction to construction, Townes differentiates between memory and history. History is constructed to offer an objective reconceptualization of a past event or condition, while memory shapes and lives through history. The loss or distortion of memory by objectivist histories has the same effect on personal and collective identities. She asserts that the Hebrew and Christian stories can be used to recover memory and guide our understanding and action in the world in accordance with liberation and justice. This can only be done, however, when a “thorough hermeneutic of suspicion” is used to “investigate the conditions and circumstances of daily life.”⁹⁴ Here, “daily life” can refer to both past and present “realities.” She continues saying, “our discoveries free us from the misconceptions that promote injustice and social, political, and theo-ethical control.”⁹⁵ Then, she calls for a sharpening of critical tools that will identify oppressive structures. The suffering elements of loss, denial and sacrifice, which have characterized much of black identity in the past “must be reinterpreted and reimagined” if this generation and future generations of black people are going to escape from cycles of suffering.⁹⁶

Townes more directly addresses issues of history and memory in her book *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*.⁹⁷ She frames the entire work around the collaborations between history as it gets constructed and memory as it enlivens a real sense for the past. This collaboration is necessary for at least two reasons. First, Townes employs a postmodernist deconstruction against the nefarious portrayals of black women in the United States to illuminate “the awful impact they have on how a stereotype is shaped into ‘truth’ in memory and history.”⁹⁸ Drawing from Toni Morrison’s emphasis on truth and fact rather than on fact versus fiction, Townes rejects the simplistic equivocation of history and fact. Instead, history and memory coalesce in the “interior worlds of those who endure structural evil as well as the interior worlds of structural evil itself.”⁹⁹ By critically examining these interior worlds, Townes exposes the ways in which society produces and sustains “misery and suffering.”¹⁰⁰ Deconstructing

94. *Ibid.*, 88.

95. *Ibid.*, 88–89.

96. *Ibid.*, 90.

97. Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

98. *Ibid.*, 3.

99. *Ibid.*, 12.

100. *Ibid.*, 12.

these structures provides a necessary step in identifying and dismantling the cultural production of evil.

Second, Townes legitimates memory as a viable host for knowledge. Drawing upon the works of Pierre Nora, Werner Sollors, and Maurice Halbwachs, she teases out the historiographic potential of memory as a site for the “ignored or forgotten or discounted histories of real people experiencing the ebb and flow of their societies and their cultures.”¹⁰¹ Nora problematizes history by highlighting how its static reconstitution of the past fails to account for the “dialectic of remembering and forgetting.”¹⁰² The static nature of history dooms it to incompleteness. He advocates instead for sites of memory that are equally artificial and deliberate constructions of the past, but ones that can more effectively “help us live in our contemporary world in meaningful ways.”¹⁰³ Likewise, Sollors suggests that memory can become a counterhistory to “the false generalizations in exclusionary ‘history’” but only when we realize that histories can be told in different ways.¹⁰⁴ And Halbwachs examines the inherent ideological construction of memory since the very act of recreating the past flows out of the imaginations of the “present social milieu.”¹⁰⁵

These three theorists provide structure to Townes’s womanist historiographic approach to ethics. As she gravitates toward the interpretive power of memory, she understands that history and memory can function as co-determiners of the sinister cultural production of various evils. Just as history creates and sustains structures that lead to misery and suffering, so too can memory in so far as it reifies the nefarious identities produced within a society’s collective memory or culturally authorized history. Therefore, both history and memory must submit to deconstruction. Townes then looks to the particularized micro-histories of African Americans as “a window into understanding the dynamic of systematic, structural evil in our societies.”¹⁰⁶ This approach to historiography illuminates the interconnectedness of our

101. *Ibid.*, 14–15. Townes draws from Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring, 1989): 7–24.

102. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 13.

103. *Ibid.*, 14.

104. *Ibid.*, 15. Quoting Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O’Meally, “Introduction,” in *History and Memory in African American Culture*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7–8.

105. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 17. Here, she draws from Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

106. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 17. In particular, Townes looks at the “manifestations of Black lives in the United States through the stereotyping of Black femaleness.”

understandings of the past, our current projections of who we are and the structures and systems that contribute to our actions in the world.

Albrecht and Townes are certainly not the only two liberation-oriented ethicists to approach history from multi-vocal postmodern and post-structuralist perspectives. Miguel De La Torre, for example, approaches Christian ethical analysis from a generalized hermeneutical circle used by liberation theologians. It is based upon the principles of seeing, judging, and acting. The seeing step of analysis includes a consideration of the “historical situation that gave rise to the present situation,” yet it recognizes that history refers more closely to memory than it does any “official” objectivist history that omits the voices of the disenfranchised.¹⁰⁷ De La Torre’s hermeneutic then requires a thorough social analysis that draws upon the critical tools necessary for uncovering the influences of one’s social location as well as the social systems that justify racist, sexist and classist norms. Then the ethical analysis moves into a prayerful posture where biblical texts can speak into the analysis before moving finally to the implementation of action in society, or praxis, with the intent on countering the unjust systems that gave rise to the analysis. Through this hermeneutic, De La Torre sanctions the use of critical tools such as power analysis that arise from postmodern and post-structuralism. Despite his omission of any specific historiographic approaches provided by Albrecht and Townes, his reliance upon critical theories and his legitimization of marginalized knowledge sources allows him to avoid the historiographic pit-falls of Yoder, MacIntyre, the Niebuhr brothers and the other Euro-American ethicists whose voices dominate Christian ethical discourses.

The general acceptance and employment of critical analysis by means of postmodernism and post-structuralism better prepare the work of liberation ethicists for accepting the critically reflexive historiography argued for in this book. Yet there is no substitute for a well developed and critical historical methodology. Understanding the importance of how history is done, Albrecht and Townes have cultivated historical methods that attend to the many factors of historical interpretation. Albrecht does this by highlighting the particularity of knowledge and by calling for a radical historicity capable of bridging historical knowledge with concrete ethical praxis. Townes attends to the many factors of historical interpretation by connecting history, memory and the cultural production of evil with the ways historical knowledges infiltrate black identity in the United States. Both women base their analyses on postmodern and post-structural tenets in order to emphasize the multi-vocal and

107. Miguel A. De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 60.

discontinuous historical constructions without dissolving social ethics or Christianity into the absolute recesses of relativity. But since these women are not historians by training, I offer in the following chapter an extensive treatment of Elizabeth Clark's specific historiographic approach and the influences that give it rise. The appropriation of Clark's methodology by ethicists will go a long ways in updating the use of historiography in Christian social ethics.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The general survey presented in this chapter provides a necessary backdrop for the remainder of this book as I further explore the connections between historiography and Christian social ethics. In the following chapter, I look briefly at some of the key players and transition points in historiography that have occurred in the field of history over the past century and a half. I move through the famed Linguistic Turn in the 1960s and outline some of the ways textuality should take precedence over historicity. This overview is important to my project for two reasons. First and more broadly, the move away from facts toward texts is indicative of larger epistemological shifts toward postmodernism and post-structuralism occurring across the Euro-American academies. These two "posts" present an enduring epistemological challenge in so far as they can equip ethicists with critical tools capable of poking holes in hegemonic universal and objective knowledges. As seen in the writings of Albrecht and Townes, these tools are proving invaluable for the work of liberationist ethicists. Second, providing a survey of the disciplinary field of history is a way to introduce Christian ethicists to the particular details of a parallel field. I admit that my survey lacks comprehension. It is in no way intended to be a history of history. Instead, I offer a genealogy of a particular strand of historiography—culminating in the work of Elizabeth Clark—which is pertinent for liberationist discourses. Many liberationist scholars are already drawing from the same theoretical pools that have impacted historiography. Thus, I look to Derrida, Foucault, Saussure, and White, to name just a few, as a way of tying historical discourses to ethical ones. This chapter then moves into the historiographic world presented by Clark. Clark has contributed the most recent and provocative analysis of her field wherein she takes seriously both text and event. She advocates first approaching the past as text before turning to the social sciences. This approach honors the event as a historical reality, but does so while dealing with the contextual ideologies, gaps, and aporias that exist in the traces of history. Such an approach to historiography ought to be adopted by

Christian ethicists who confront and dismantle structural and systemic injustices in order to construct more just social conditions.

As I move into chapter 3, my argument takes a very particularized turn. I evaluate the work of prominent ethicist and theologian Stanley Hauerwas as a case study of the use and abuse of history among normative, white, male ethicists. I intentionally chose to analyze the work of Hauerwas not only because of his prominent standing among practitioners of his guild, but also because he attempts to take seriously the consequences of one's historical approaches.¹⁰⁸ Hauerwas turned toward narrative fairly early in this academic training. The results of this turn have played out over the past four decades with little variation. Hauerwas insists that the Christian church is a story-formed community with a rich tradition of character development in accordance with that story. In principle, the Christian story is pacifistic, which requires Christians to cultivate the virtues of charity, patience and courage. These virtues operate in contrast to the chaos, anxiety and power-mongering indicative of life in the world. The church, then, is the outpost or colony within the world and the ethic to which Hauerwas calls Christians is to simply be the church. Ideally, an indivisible binary should exist between church and world in order for the church to be a credible witness to and against the world. The wayward church of the United States that has bought into the world's liberal ideologies has forgotten what it means to live as a story-formed community.

I take Hauerwas to task for the reason described in the section above on ethicists who operate with an explicit historical methodology, but who implement it poorly. After describing his contentions with liberalism, I outline various ways that nineteenth century modern historical assumptions persist in his conception of the story-formed community. Hauerwas's ethic gives flesh to Adolf von Harnack's Constantinian master-narrative. Hauerwas makes much of the church's transition from persecuted church to imperial power-house under the fourth century emperor, Constantine, whose conversion and favoring of Christianity forever changed the story of the church. Constantinianism stands in Hauerwas's work as the placeholder for everything that could ever be wrong with the church. I contend that Hauerwas interprets *the* Christian story through Harnack and, as such, adopts a modern homogenized and universalized view of

108. Hauerwas was elected to be the vice-president of the Society of Christian Ethics at the annual meeting in 2010. Service to the society for this position lasts for a full calendar year before it transitions into the office of president the following year. Apart from the myriad of administrative duties, the president sets the trajectories and pace of this guild by determining the themes, plenaries and presidential addresses. This means that through the end of the 2012 annual meeting, Stanley Hauerwas will be the official voice of the Society of Christian Ethics.

Christian identity. I then test my hypothesis by evaluating Hauerwas's depiction of the virtue of patience as extracted from Tertullian in the second century. Hauerwas appropriates and alters Tertullian's patience as he reads it through Constantinianism. Ultimately, Hauerwas's conception of the Christian story is singular in its approach yet is universally applied to the contemporary church. Furthermore, his rejection of all things liberal robs him of any ability to ferret out the ideological commitments that give rise to his ethic. In the end, his ethic of being the church ends up reflecting his own tropic identity.

Chapter 4 represents the methodological application of this critically reflexive ethical-historical analysis. Having critiqued Hauerwas for his (mis)appropriations of Tertullian's patience, I offer my own reading of Tertullian and the virtue of patience in his work. However, instead of merely shooting from my historiographic hip or remaining credulous to my own master narratives, my rereading of Tertullian proceeds in those directions posed by Elizabeth Clark. Reading first for issues of text and then for context, I begin by challenging the "given" biography used by scholars until the beginning of the 1970s. I then provide a critical synopsis of Tertullian's *De patientia*, the tract in which he explicates the virtue of patience, taking into account its highly rhetorical framework. Patristic scholarship has largely ignored this little tract, focusing instead on his larger polemical and apologetic works. After orienting the reader on this work, I read it for its socio-theological logic and for its underlying ideological commitments. Ultimately, I contend that *De patientia* is less a work on patience, and more an argument in favor of martyrdom and that martyrdom solidifies Christian boundaries for Tertullian in ways that other images cannot. This chapter ends by explaining how this reading of Tertullian and his virtue of patience relate to Christian ethical discourse.

The final chapter of this project offers a comparison between my historical approach and that of Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas's wholesale rejection of postmodern criticisms leaves him with few critical tools for identifying and correcting unjust power differentials that govern his concept of narrative and tradition. Furthermore, his inability to recognize how his own master narrative impacts his understanding of patience aligns well both with his passive approach to injustice and the larger North American conservative white Protestant culture whose privileged place in society resists opposition to deep structural injustices. I then conclude by positing a few possible ways to move ethical-historical discourse forward, proposing that Christian ethicists better attend to the stories and master narratives that guide their ethical-historical analyses. This task requires an expansion of dialogue between past and present, and between one's own commitments and those from alternative ethical perspectives—that

is, to those on the margins of normative society who consistently bear the brunt of structural injustices. Finally, I acknowledge that there is no pure community just as there is no pure memory, story, or history. Updating the role of historiography in Christian ethics is not an excuse to baptize our memories and rewrite our histories under the rubrics of joy and hope. Quite the contrary, I call Christian ethicists to task to remember histories that were unjustly excluded from their stories. I want ethicists of privilege to come face to face with the sufferings, inequities, and de-humanizations that were conveniently omitted from their master narratives of progress and regress. I want to lead these ethicists to join the destabilized space of marginality. Only by entering this space can there we begin a true dialogue that acknowledges, in the words of Howard Thurman, that all of our backs are against the wall of injustice.