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We are who we think we were: Updating the Role of Historiography in Christian Ethics

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We are who we think we were:

Updating the Role of Historiography in Christian Ethics

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Aaron D. Conley

June 2011

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Title: We are who we think we were: Updating the Role of Historiography in Christian Ethics
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ABSTRACT

Christian ethicists often ground their claims on historical precedent. Unfortunately, this precedent is “accessed” using historical theories and methods taken ad hoc from a wider socio-historical Geist or are derived from their confessional commitments to their theological traditions. The results, however, are often the same—a universal projection of socially located historical truths that exclude, silence or discredit the histories and memories of marginalized communities. Up to now there has been little work done systematically relating current trends in historiography to the historical analyses operative among Christian social ethicists. This dissertation directly addresses the outdated historical methodologies in use in Christian social ethics and outlines some of the consequences stemming therefrom. Adopting the postmodern post-structuralist position of historian Elizabeth Clark, ethicists must learn to read for the gaps, silences and aporias existent in historical texts as well as in the histories that represent them. In turn, these textual elements will illicit the text's socio-theological logic and political unconsciousness, thereby revealing the socially constructed nature of history and the ideological assumptions informing our understandings of the past. This reading strategy is applied to Stanley Hauerwas' narratological approach to history. While he rejects the historical methods of modern historians, he still bases his view of the Christian church on the master narrative, Constantinianism. He then uses this master narrative to derive meaning from Tertullian and his virtue of patience that accords less with Tertullian's
textually discursive conditions and more with Hauerwas' own ideological presuppositions. In the end, this dissertation calls ethicists to a critical self-reflexive historiography equally capable of self-critique as it is at reading for the gaps and silences of history. The importance of a critical self-reflexive historiography for ethics will be found in our ability to construct new histories and formulate new ethical norms that more justly account for the discontinuities and differences characterizing our diverse conceptions society.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Seldom are projects of significant size and breadth the results of a single person. This certainly is true of the present volume and my efforts will fail to mention many individuals who have contributed to thinking and writing. For this reason I humbly apologize and hope for future opportunities to provide them with proper recognition. To begin, I would like to thank my generous and shepherding dissertation committee, Dr. Miguel De La Torre, Dr. Albert Hernández and Dr. Gregory Robbins. Without their direction, feedback and encouragement, this project certainly would not have been well conceived or carried through to completion. I would also like to thank those participants of the ethics reading group who not only read my manuscript but took it seriously enough to provide substantial criticisms and suggestions for improvement. Numerous friends and colleagues deserve mention as well including Rodolfo (RJ) Hernández-Díaz, Ben Sanders III and Michael Hemenway for their intellectual and technical support. A note of special thanks is reserved for Dr. John Yates, who, although self-admittedly a stranger to Christian social ethics, volunteered countless hours to editing selected chapters. John's mastery of the mechanics of language can be read throughout these pages. Finally, I am indebted to my loving and patient wife, Kelly, who accepted and endured the hardships of these past years at the cost of countless personal and familial sacrifices. Without her support this project would not be.
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Tertullian's Works:

Ad Scap.  Ad Scapulum
Adu. Marc.  Aduersus Marcionem
Adu. Prax.  Aduersus Praxeam
Apol.  Apologeticum
De cor.  De corona militis
De prae. haer.  De praescriptione haereticorum
De spect.  De spectaculis
De virg. uel.  De virginibus uelandis
Pat.  De patientia
CHAPTER 1
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 inter-connectedness 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 dissertation 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 tail 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.

While certainly lacking the romantic backdrop of such great narratives such as *Romeo and Juliet*, the present work explores many of the conditions of human experience, both past and present. It also calls the reader to a 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. Much like the intimate space between two lovers, the intimate space between ethics and history is one wherein 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 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’ copulations.

Based upon the general observation that the way we access the past largely influences the types of ethics we espouse, this dissertation identifies and critiques the most dominant or normatively employed historiographic trajectories operative within Christian social ethics. Only afterwards 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 dissertation 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 existent 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 their own.2 Largely but not exclusively comprised of white, middle-class, heterosexual males, these “dominant” ethicists approach history as if history was self-

2. The binaries between “center” and “margin” as well as between “normative” and “marginal” are contrived social conventions used throughout this dissertation 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, NJ: 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), 251-272.; Miguel A. De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [Dannés de la terre.] (New York: Grove Press, 1965); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991); Marcia Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003). Countless other sources make use of these binaries.
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—i.e. histories that claim objective and universal applicability—will we begin to see the beautifully diverse tapestry of Christian history. Unfortunately, so much of what constitutes normative Christian ethical discourse still needs to appropriate more 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. Since Hauerwas' ethic falls just short of what I call a critically reflexive ethical historiography, much of this dissertation 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, our stories can be told in other ways.


4. The Greek word, scandalon, translates into English as “stumbling block.” Its meaning 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 [Bouc émissaire.] (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 216.

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.”
This current chapter provides evidence for the need of updating historiography in Christian ethics. It offers a representative sampling of Christian ethicists over 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 which have been devised to accentuating the overall thesis in this dissertation. 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. The figures 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 later in this dissertation. 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 correspond with a general historiographic approach. First, there are those ethicists who employ the tenets of high modernist historiography with its methodological objectivism whereby social facts legitimate universal historical claims. For these ethicists, history is self-evident and access to the knowledge it supplies 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. Most of this chapter's analysis focuses on these figures since they are the ones in most need of a historiographic update. While attending to history, generally, they fail to recognize the extent to which their constructions of historical realities coincide with their ideological commitments. In short, they remain credulous to their own master narratives.

The third approach to history among ethicists corresponds with 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. This final category highlights the ways a few liberation ethicists connect how 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 furthered 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.

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6. The field may in fact be moving in this direction. The most recent and implicating history of Christian social ethics is provided by Gary Dorrien, Social Ethics in the Making (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2009). In this massive 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 dissertation moves in his direction by calling for a historical methodology capable of a serious engagement with dominant theories and ideologies that inform and guide current ethical discourse.
Modern Historiography in Early Christian Social Ethics: Historicism

During the beginnings of the Social Gospel movement at the on set of the twentieth century, Christians scholars began moving away from the personal values-based tenets of moral philosophy and gravitated instead towards social ethics. 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 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 should gain 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. 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.” De-robing the

7. The “invention” of social ethics is again a thesis of Dorrien. Its rise corresponds with the similar rise of the social sciences which 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, it was positioned better to deal internally with social conditions. Included in David J. O’Brien, Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage, 2010, Expa ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

subjectivities 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 U.S., 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 the “Hells Kitchen” district in New York to take a teaching job in the German and History departments at Rochester Theological Seminary. His time ministering to congregants in 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 Evangelische Gymnasium in Gutersloh, Germany. He then attended seminary in Rochester where his father taught, although he resisted the more conservative rejections of modern historicism and biblical criticisms of his father. Even though he never received formal training in history, Rauschenbusch's commitment to the historical Jesus guided his pastoral and academic
concerns, orienting him towards the afflictions of the poor in 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.” He then spends the better part of the first third of the book setting precedents from the early church for 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 validate the actual life and work of Jesus and the early church by confronting the individualistic and ahistorical piety of Protestants 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.” Thus, historical-critical methods provided the access to forgotten knowledges, whereby

10. Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st 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, i.e. 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.

sociology was the bridge between historical facts and contemporary meanings capable of invoking specific actions in the lives of contemporary Christians.

Much of Rauschenbusch's historical methods were informed by the works of Adolf von Harnack and Leopold von Ranke, who were his contemporaries although Ranke died in 1886. 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.\(^\text{12}\) 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.”\(^\text{13}\) 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.”\(^\text{14}\) 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.”\(^\text{15}\) He continues by stating that few eclipses are total, which is why the

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12. This general thesis is picked up by numerous scholars, including John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, whose deployments of Constantinianism are treated below. A more thorough treatment of Harnack's thesis is reserved for chapter three in this dissertation.


14. ibid., 115.

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.’”

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. Rauschenbusch unapologetically relies upon a modern historical-critical method and helped centralize its place in Christian social ethical analysis. Yet he certainly was 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?”

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


17. Rauschenbusch maintains a firm belief that Christian eschatology guides historical understandings. In Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel (New York: The Macmillan company, 1917), 5, 208, 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. He does, however, reject religious apocalypticism and rightly connects questions of human destiny to contemporary social conditions.

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 co-found the Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr—a settlement house that housed up to 25 women and reached out to over 2000 community members per week. The true history of Jesus, she notes, 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

For these early social ethicists, a return to this ideologically-free historical Jesus is a return to true religion. 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: Confessional 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 less 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 Augustinian anthropology with the influences of Karl Marx, Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. He became a socialist and political activist in the early 1930s, abandoning any misgivings about the church's moral supremacy in society. Then during the later '30'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 WWII, 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 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 first-hand 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 towards 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 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

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


²³ ibid., 7.

²⁴ ibid., 23.
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 typology, Niebuhr's distinctions between 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 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 — not

25. ibid., 51.

26. ibid.
social-historical conditions — is what provides knowledge about agape. 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.

Niebuhr's historical approach operates under a quasi-confessional historiography in an effort to avoid the historicism of the social gospelers. History, he held, 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. Certainly, modern liberal historians aggrandized 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.” It does not have a finis but outlasts time and supplies history with meaning by nature of its “above” perspective of temporal history. 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

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27. True religion instructs Christian individuals in the knowledge and ways of agape. Society understood as human institutions is incapable of meeting the demands of agape since self-preservation is its 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.


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.
from a spatially symbolized end we obscure all the richness and variety which is expressed in its many parts.”

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.” The second dimension of history concerns the “life of the individual” and the third focuses on “the process of history as a whole.” Each dimension of historical meaning proceeds on the assumption that the Christian can grasp a true understanding of 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 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: 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.

31. ibid., 301.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
The implications of his other two historical dimensions follow suit. 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 totalizing dimensions. For Niebuhr Jesus as God and Messiah is the end upon which all three dimensions of historical understanding rely. This Jesus is 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 understand how Christ supplies the telos necessary for mastering human history from temporal and eternal perspectives? Niebuhr's response is confessional because he points 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,

\(^{34}\) 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.
Niebuhr uses Nietzsche 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. 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, which are themselves confessionally derived. 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 subsequent 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.

37. ibid., 163.
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 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
his historicist methodology and its corresponding implications for Christian theology and

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\(^{38}\) His five typologies explaining Christian involvements in the world are 1. Christ against
transforming culture. Niebuhr advocates for the last one.


\(^{40}\) See his *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, with Supplementary Essays* (London: Faber
and Faber, 1960), 144.

\(^{41}\) 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
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.”

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 backwards-
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.”

Revelation informs 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

43. ibid., 37.
contextual variants lest they lose their significance as a source for God's revelation.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, Niebuhr aligns with Karl Barth's defense of the on-going nature of revelation.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{46} In true Kantian fashion, the knowledge of concrete historical beings must conform to the internal parameters of space and time.\textsuperscript{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

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{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 directly to 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.

\textsuperscript{45} Barth outlines his understanding of revelation in the first part of Book 1 of his great \textit{Church Dogmatics}. See Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics} [Kirchliche Dogmatik.], ed. George Thomas Thomson et al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988).

\textsuperscript{46} Niebuhr, \textit{The Meaning of Revelation}, 38.

\textsuperscript{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, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} [Kritik der reinen Vernunft.], Rev 2 ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
\end{flushleft}
“irreplaceable and untranslatable” and the confessor who is compelled to repeat it, initiates an event that perpetuates the living nature of the Christian community. 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 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 does 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 (i.e. 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 for discerning historical truths. Present historical interpretations must accord with presiding understandings of the Christian story. 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. 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. 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.

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 U.S. including 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 towards an Augustinian-Thomism,

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.
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 which 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 communally interactive participation towards the good in society.

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 amoralism set by Nietzsche which denies any common good,

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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 towards 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.
or it can follow the more ancient teleological goodness of Aristotle. Throughout the rest of the book, MacIntyre romantically presumes that society would be much better off by following this move backwards towards 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.\footnote{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 Alasdair C. MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory}, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 191.}

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 \textit{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 morally-adrift moral philosopher contemporaries, 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.”

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 moderns 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.”

Following his logic, we could reasonably assume that historicist 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 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 does not self-identify with the pseudo-scientists. This implies that his rediscovery of Aristotelian virtue is not subject to fragmentation or incompleteness. Quite the contrary, it is up to him and those who


55. ibid., 2.
follow him to reclaim it and restore the preexistent centrality of virtue.\textsuperscript{56} This task is possible because he can and does 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.”\textsuperscript{57} Aristotle 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.”\textsuperscript{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 ethical 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. The reason for this is because one is required to participate in the values and, through habituation, he or she will be internally transformed in orientation of the greater good. Without the practice of virtue, value cannot be extracted from the facts.

\begin{itemize}
\item 56. ibid., 36.
\item 57. ibid., 52.
\item 58. ibid., 81.
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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) misunderstand virtue and telos. 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? 

**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 preceding figures explored in this section. As a Mennonite, Yoder carefully crafted his work with a keen awareness for the multitude of ways our language and actions perpetuate violence. However, while

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59. ibid., 11. I offer 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 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 and 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.
making moves in the right critical direction, 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 earned 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 WWII. 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 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 theology⁶⁰. He revived a case for pacifism and nonviolence during a period when figures like the Reinhold Niebuhr were calling Christians into a synergistic

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⁶⁰ The contributors to John Howard Yoder et al., *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), praise Yoder for his many years of service to their field and for the legacy he leaves behind.
relationship with the state. Yoder refers to this synergy as Constantinianism, a term which describes the happy union of church and state. He looks 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 not only is, “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.”

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. 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 of the past. He discusses the historical reality of Jesus and relates the texts of the gospel narratives to a “social event.”


difficulties of “knowing in what sense this event came to pass or could have come to pass.” But, he continues, the gospel “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, i.e., 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 pre-modern and modern times in order to challenge the assumption that meaning can be easily extracted from historical sources. He admits that “these

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.
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...”

By focusing on linguistic complexities inherent in the process of meaning making, Yoder employs a critical historiography that comes close to the one advocated for in this dissertation.

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

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

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66. Emphasis original.

67. Yoder states that from the very earliest of 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.
Christian will “be like Jesus” when “servanthood replaces dominion, [and] forgiveness absorbs hostility.”

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. 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 as one with power that can be revoked, than it does universally across the Christian church. So too do those conditions wherein obedience can be 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.” 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.

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 particularly positive mark upon Stanley Hauerwas and his call for Christians to reject modern liberalism and renew their devotion to the

69. ibid., 134.

70. ibid., 145.

71. ibid., 156n.
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 in this dissertation fleshes out Hauerwas' 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. Christians can go around trying to rid the world of injustice, but only at the cost of forsaking the character and virtues that distinguish Christians from the world. To be the church, Hauerwas admits, is the only ethic to which Christians should subscribe. 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. Hauerwas clearly draws from Yoder's political Jesus, Reinhold Niebuhr's sacred/secular binary and MacIntyre's virtue-precedes-action 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 (i.e. attending worship services) and partaking in the sacraments (Protestant: Preaching,

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Eucharist, marriage and baptism), a Christian lives faithfully in accordance with the Christian story.\textsuperscript{73}

Hauerwas' awareness of historiography rivals all of the other preceding figures in this section with the exception maybe of Yoder. Among other things, he studied history while at Yale during his undergraduate years. Hauerwas' turn towards 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 to 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.”\textsuperscript{74}

This distinction 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 sands 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.\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{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," \textit{Pro Ecclesia} 17, no. 1 (12/01, 2008), 15.
Hauerwas’ 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. Following Yoder, he suggests how “vulnerability needs to be folded into docility—a willingness to be instructed and formed by truth.”\(^{76}\) The truth is possessed by the historical Christian church 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 a call to an uncritical confessionalism, an acceptance of church teaching on its own terms. As described in further detail in the chapters to come, Hauerwas' self-legitimating approach to narrative projects a universalist conception of the church and lacks the necessary critical resources needed for a critical self-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.

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

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 concern for the marginalized, oppressed and hegemonic cultural structures that truncate justice and equality. Specifically, 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. 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 and sustained 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, thus, are easier to spot as practitioners of both 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. Their historical approaches cast light into the deep recesses of ideology and privilege that otherwise have remained hidden or unnoticed.

**Gloria Albrecht**

Gloria Albrecht is co-director and Professor Emerita of Religion and Ethics at University of Detroit Mercy. She earned a B.A. from the University of Maryland, separate masters degrees from Johns Hopkins University and St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, and a Ph.D. from Temple University in 1992. 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.”

Rejecting the social constraints of both her and her mother's generational views on women, Albrechts' intellectual roots are grounded in materialist feminism, liberation theology and radical historicism. She remains an active member in the Society of Christian Ethics.

Albrecht is committed to the situated-ness of epistemology as is evidenced 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.”

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By socially locating her own knowledge, she not only prepares the way for examining the unexamined social location of Stanley Hauerwas' ethic, which is the aim of her book, but also demonstrates 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' lack of self-awareness and it positions her to expose the violence of his universally applicable virtues of obedience and suffering.³⁰

Albrecht's treatment of social located-ness of knowledge is not analyzed for the sake of knowledge itself. Her radical historicism always points beyond social data towards 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 this were the case 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

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³⁰ Hauerwas “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.
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

81. ibid., 13.
82. ibid., 86.
83. ibid., 87.
facts of history that characterized the pursuits of high modern historicism, Albrecht takes to the post-structural role of language impacting the production of meaning in both past and present contexts. In other words, she remains attuned to the textuality of historical meaning. Albrecht states, “Meaning is always being produced from a particular, historically located, and interested position.”

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.”

Equipped with post-structuralism and radical historicism, Albrecht launches an internal critique of Stanley Hauerwas’ 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.” She demonstrates the various ways Hauerwas projects his social location onto his understanding of what it means to be a story formed community, but without any recognition of the consequences. She notes further that “Hauerwas’ description of ‘the Christian narrative’ functions to deny differences in the same manner

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.
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 St 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 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 no

87. ibid., 101. I launch a similar argument against Hauerwas in Chapter 3.

88. ibid., 101.

89. ibid., 68.
representation either in traditional black theology or in feminism.  
Operating in 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 that “Womanist reflection is far from monolithic in voice and tone.”

Perhaps this particularity is the reason 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’ 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.”

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.” This distinction between suffering and pain is important. While suffering can be

93. ibid., 84.
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 calls for justice.

When she moves from deconstruction to construction, Townes differentiates between memory and history. While history is constructed to offer an objective reconceptualization of a past event or condition, memory shapes and lives in history. The loss or distortion of memory by objectivist histories have 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.”

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.” 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

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94. ibid., 88.

95. ibid., 88-89.
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 as 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 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

96. ibid., 90.


98. ibid., 3.

99. ibid., 12.

100. ibid., 12.
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' womanist historiographic approach to ethics. As she gravitates towards 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


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

103. ibid., 14.


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 microhistories of African Americans as “a window into understanding the dynamic of systematic, structural evil in our societies.”

This approach to historiography illuminates the interconnectedness of our 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. 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

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.”

to the implementation of action in society, or praxis, 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 legitimation 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 currently 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 dissertation. 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 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 dissertation 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 towards texts is indicative of larger epistemological shifts towards 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 comprehensive 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. Hauerwas turned towards 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 pacificist, which requires Christians to cultivate the

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.
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' ethic gives flesh to Adolf von Harnack's master-narrative approach to the “fall” of the early Christian church in the fourth century CE. 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' work as the place-holder 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 Christian identity. I then test my hypothesis by evaluating Hauerwas' 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' 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 relates to Christian ethical discourse.

The final chapter of this dissertation offers a comparison between my historical approach and that of Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas' 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—i.e. 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 dehumanizations 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.¹⁰⁹

CHAPTER 2:
A CRITICAL SELF-REFLEXIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY
FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The staking of claims on data gleaned from historical sources, whether it be memory, myth or artifact, is a practice long observed through the centuries. Ancient Israelites, for example, continually harkened back to their memories of the trials and triumphs they experienced in the past. The Hebrew Scriptures are replete with exhortations to remember figures like Noah, Abraham and Moses. Such memories oriented present concerns according to the examples of the past as a reminder for who they are and where they are going.¹ Similarly, late-ancient Christians and Romans also went to great efforts to link their own identities with the past. When Tertullian addressed Roman magistrates regarding their unjust treatment of Christians, he appealed almost exclusively to Roman ancestral traditions, calling them to consult their histories.² In this instance, his rhetoric appealed to the value placed on ancestral traditions to inform present Roman legal codes. And this emphasis on ancestry marches through Medieval Europe on the backs of the most gifted writers of the time. Even a cursory glance at

¹ The Hebrew root word zakar (ZKR) translates into English as “remember.” It is used heavily throughout Hebrew Scripture. Of the 399 occurrences, it is used most often in the Psalms and other wisdom/poetic sections (99 times), and coincides with the Hebrew word for heart (lēb). The heart was the locus of knowledge, and to recall something was to know something. And since Hebrew “history” unveils the reality that God remembers God's people, they in turn must remember their relationship with God.

² Apol. 5.3. Consulite commentarios ventros.
Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* reveals a historical legitimation whereby his arguments are supported, validated, or attested to by either the Philosopher (i.e. Aristotle), the Gospels, or Paul, as well as numerous Fathers and theologians of the Western and Eastern churches.

This general and uncomplicated reliance on the past to supply meaning for the present eventually was called into question with the rise of history as an academic discipline. Armed with the new binaries of fact/fiction and objective/subjective, early historians in the mid nineteenth century methodologically began to separate true history from myth in pursuit of objectivity and universalism. Yet historical knowledge is dependent upon historical access, which is informed by historiographic assumptions, whether explicit or assumed. Our memory and identities are often a product of our historical memories. Whether we admit it or not, our conception of the past determines in part the structures by which we understand ourselves and the world around us.³

The present chapter enters the intimate space between history and ethics by offering a genealogical history of history designed to familiarize Christian ethicists with the theories, debates and assumptions of a neighboring field. In its larger goal, the chapter warns against taking history for granted and provides ethicists who employ various levels of historical analysis with the groundwork for a better historical method. This chapter explores the rise and “fall” of modern historical methods, elevates the work of historian Elizabeth Clark for providing a more critical historiography for the future of

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³ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Wahrheit und Methode.], 2, rev ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 601. Gadamer keenly points out that while we presume to control our direction and understanding of the past, we are equally under the control of past conceptions of history and the imposition of their structures that play our lives. I elaborate on this imagery in the final section of this chapter.
history, and ends by calling Christian ethicists to employ a critical self-reflexive 

historiography in their ethical analyses. Taking each of these elements in turn, we move 

now to the disciplinary rise of modern historiography.

The Primer

In Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a variety of 

revolutions occurred that systematically transformed the “ancient is better” mentality to 

the sentiment that “newer is best.” Enlightenment modes of reasoning stood in direct 

contrast to the perceived stagnant authority of the Catholic Church whose task it was to 

silence innovation that contradicted its centralized authority. Helped along by the 

European “Age of Reason” and its proponents such as Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes 

and Isaac Newton, Enlightenment thought promised a new source of authority. Its 

validity would not be ratified by confessional ascents to a metaphysical god, but rather by 

the fruits of rational scientific verification. Scientific verification brought with it its own 

truths about the material cosmos codified in symbols and methods that transcended 

language and cultural differences. De-robed of religion, truth could now be sought with a 

methodological objectivism. The advancement of our knowledge through science later 

became known as positivism. 5 Positivism is the belief that humans are progressing

4. For a general introduction to the Scientific Revolution in the Age of Reason, see Steven Shapin, 

*The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Richard S. Westfall, *The 

Construction of Modern Science: Mechanisms and Mechanics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 

1977); and David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in 

Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University 


5. Positivism suggests that all knowledge comes from “positive” information of observable 

experience, and presumes that the scientific method is the best way of accessing this knowledge. Auguste 

Comte was the first to apply this term in the 1830’s relating it to an understanding that history was 
governed by the same universal laws that governed the natural world. See Auguste Comte and Harriet 

Martineau, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* [Cours de philosophie positive.], 2nd ed. (London:
steadily towards their own social betterment via knowledge. Enlightened Euro-Americans marched steadily towards progress, while those concerned with the preservation of tradition were left to the “backwards” ways of their own mythological or superstitious dogmatism.

Enlightenment thinkers continued to evoke the past but from the vantage of their new objective/subjective binaries. Remembrance of historical figures and events became a foil against an alternative epistemological mode. Immanuel Kant, for example, prefaced the second edition of his first critique with the caveat that the field of logic was sealed by Aristotle and has not made any progress since, save for the addition of tangential concerns such as psychology, metaphysics or anthropology. Yet for all of his self-aggrandized pomp, Kant still relies upon past figures to build his systems, albeit figures of a more recent past. He admits that he could not have made any progress in delineating the boundaries of the knowable had it not been for his skeptical predecessor, David Hume. Hume, however, is not used by Kant in exactly the same way that Abraham was used by the Hebrews. Hume “awoke” Kant's “dogmatic slumber,” in such a way that freed him from the constraints of certain ancestral ways of viewing the world. Even though he wrestled with questions raised millennia ago, Kant did not rely upon history to tell him who he was and what was important to think. Instead, he built upon Hume's skepticism and rested upon his own “Cartesian-inspired” self-autonomous reason

Trübner, 1875).


to validate his views on metaphysics as he posited his own complete philosophical system.\footnote{“Complete” is a loaded term. For Kant, his first Critique effectively reigned-in the entire debate concerning metaphysics. He held that his Critique could finally solve the disputes that arise from metaphysical philosophical inquiry by identifying the limits of what we can know with “abject certainty.” Empirical science and synthetic \textit{a priori} are the only two epistemic areas that can provide abject knowledge. All other truth claims that lay beyond these two areas may be thinkable, but can never be a proper object of knowledge (or objectively known). While thinkable, God, spirits, the soul and a host of other ideas are beyond the bounds of reason alone.}

However, when it came to explicating a system of ethics, Kant turns his gaze to the dogmatic authority of convention. In both 	extit{Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals} and 	extit{Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone}, Kant posits God as the ultimately conceivable authority upon which we can be “compelled by reason” to obey.\footnote{He denounces this move from a purely philosophical standpoint, as the reference above is appropriated from 	extit{Critique of Pure Reason}, 5. But for grounding one's ethic on an ultimate principle of authority, God is an entirely \textit{useful} category. Immanuel Kant, Allen W. Wood, and J. B. Schneewind, 	extit{Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals} [Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten.] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Immanuel Kant, Theodore Meyer Greene, and Hoyt H. Hudson, 	extit{Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone} (Chicago, London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1934).} As rational beings, we must will the highest good, and since no higher good can be conceived than an ultimately good God, we are obliged by reason to assume God's existence as the moral force behind our moral actions. The good God that Kant posits turns out to be the very same Christian God attested to by the previous centuries of Christian dogmatists. These examples reveal a shift in historical disposition. Instead of looking to history or historical concepts to validate present knowledge, the invocation of the past became a matter for either saying, “see, they understand the principles of truth of science,” or “see, they are mired in unscientific dogma.”

At the risk of over-generalization, this broad trajectory of Western intellectual shifts paints a picture of changing historical dispositions. The once ubiquitous reach
backwards to past authorities was replaced with an authority that is both forward facing and rooted in a scientific method that promises universal and objective knowledge or facts. Such knowledge becomes self-authenticating when harmonized with its methodology. This methodology quickly made its way into the social sciences of the mid nineteenth century. During this same time the academic discipline of history arose along side the social sciences and equally was eager to adopt and apply a new objective methodology.

**Birth of a New Discipline: Ranke, Harnack**

In 1949, architect Philip Johnson completed his private residence in New Canaan, Connecticut. Using the best in modern industrial design and materials, Johnson produced his iconic “Glass House” using only steel, glass, and a minimal amount of brick. Johnson focused on symmetry, minimalism and the clean, uncluttered lines so indicative of modern architecture. Although Glass House was not the first residential home to be constructed with these materials, its greatest contribution was its discourse on the blurred boundaries between inside and outside spaces, the nature of public and private, and the transparencies of modern life.° All four walls are glazed in glass, which allows for a nearly seamless transition to the exterior landscapes as inside becomes outside and vice-versa. Yet, since this structure was designed as a residence rather than as a greenhouse, art gallery or other commercial or industrial space, the glass facade accordingly becomes a means to facilitate voyeurism. From the outside, one can peer into the lives of those inside and describe that inner environment down to the smallest detail.

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10. Johnson’s modern aesthetic was patterned on the work of early twentieth century German architect, Mies van der Rohe.
Early modern historians approached historical documents as if approaching Johnson's Glass House. This section explores how their methodological assumptions determined what they claimed to see on the “inside.” The academic discipline of history is a relatively young enterprise despite the fact that people have involved themselves in remembering the past for longer than the development of the written word. In its infancy, history grew from an amateur hobby in the mid nineteenth century to a bonafide “science” by the turn of the twentieth century.11 Relying upon the tools provided by neighboring social sciences, historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed they could clean the dirt of myth and superstition off the window of time. The further back into history the historian reached, the thicker the grime on the windows and the greater the need for historical excavation. The assumption stood that if historical documents were approached scientifically, our knowledge of their objects would be validated under the authority of an “objective” methodology.

**Leopold von Ranke**

Prussian historian Leopold von Ranke was one of the first amateur historians to establish professional standards for university-level historical training in Berlin. As Wilhelm Dilthey described, “Ranke is the representative of the age which instituted the modern study of history. He taught it to be critical, to be colourless, and to be new.”12

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11. That history is or is not a valid science has sparked much debate since its inception in the university in the late nineteenth century. Historians such as Leopold von Ranke and G. R. Elton pioneered and championed a historical methodology consistent with other social sciences. However, elements such as narrativity, textuality and subjectivity, not to mention the type or quality of “data” have always made history a bastard child to the hard and soft sciences.

Ranke advocated the use of primary sources whereby historians could scrutinize and accurately reconstruct the past.\textsuperscript{13} He validated his work on the presumption that his histories, or the works he produced based on his syntheses of historical data, could be unmediated by biases that normally cloud the vision of theologians, philosophers, or others who rely upon theory. Ranke called his colleagues to refrain from interjecting their own judgments concerning the past and simply write what actually happened.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, theory was ejected from the discipline from the very start. Ranke produced over sixty volumes chronicling the political triumphs of Europe.

Rankean methods permeated the historical discipline doubtlessly on account of the fact that he got to set the rules for doing history.\textsuperscript{15} Historians Anna Green and Kathleen Troup summarize the "core tenets of scientific, empirical history as it stood at the turn of the century" as "the rigorous examination of knowledge of historical evidence, verified by references; impartial research, devoid of \textit{a priori} beliefs and prejudices; and an inductive method of reasoning, from the particular to the general."\textsuperscript{16} Out of these core tenets came a host of particular, concrete, singular histories, each focusing on a particular


\textsuperscript{15} Ranke's emphasis on the critical study of historical documents was the only element of his thought that was appropriated by American historians. Unlike their European colleagues, American scholars largely ignored Ranke's theological commitments and Christian idealism that viewed all history as the working out of divine will.

moment in time and each seeking to unify these moments with the universal spirit of the time. Disciplinary foci expanded during the twentieth century from original source and social contexts to include other elements such as authorial intent (Quentin Skinner) to the multi-disciplinary and multi-factorial approaches of the French *Annalistes*. All the while, the unadulterated recovery of the past remained the primary aim of this self-proclaimed objective science.

Efforts by German/Prussian-inspired historians to gain credibility in the academy required them to jettison philosophy, theology and anything that smacked of politicization. After all, the only thing separating them from the truth of the past was a dirty pane of glass. And given their commitment to inductive reasoning, they attended to narrative only insofar as narrative provided the medium through which the true content of history could be communicated. Ranke did admit in his final nine volume opus, *Universal History*, that “the universal tendencies alone do not decide the outcome of history, they always require the great personalities to bring them into play.” What emerged from their gazing at historical particulars was the identification of large-scale


themes. By in large, historians stuck to their principles and analyzed historical particulars in an inductive way so as to avoid shortcomings they identified in more theoretically driven areas of scholarship. Ranke noted that the “facts, facts, facts” of historical documents “carry within themselves their lessons and their philosophy[...] the truth, all the truth, nothing but the truth.”20 Through statements such as this, Ranke repudiated all forms of Romanticism so pervasive in his time in favor of a sort of historical realism. The past could speak for itself, that is, so long as a well trained and unbiased modern historian was present to unlock its meaning and truth.

Adolf von Harnack

The resulting truth of the past found its way out of its contextual particularities and into the grand or meta narratives that have come to characterize modern objectivist historiography.21 Although Ranke extrapolated grand themes concerning European political history, it was Adolf von Harnack who established the grand narratives that would come to haunt our understandings of early Christian history.22 A product of his time, Harnack had no use for dogmatic confessionalism and the normative weight of


21. Throughout this chapter and dissertation I employ the terms “grand narrative,” “meta-narrative” and “master narrative” interchangeably. Modern objectivist historiography can be and has been criticized for more reasons than just its establishment of grand narratives, but this concern is of particular importance in the following chapters for my critique of the unsophisticated historical methodology in use among Christian ethicists. Many historians and theorists have explored the numerous shortcomings to Rankean-based historical methods; see Ernst Breisach, Historiography: Ancient, Medieval & Modern, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and On the Future of History: The Postmodernist Challenge and its Aftermath (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Clark, History, Theory, Text; Green and Troup, The Houses of History; Georg G. Iggers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, Telling the Truth about History (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994); Novick, That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession.
ecclesiastical tradition. He dismissed the religious authority of the New Testament, claiming that first century contexts should be allowed to speak for themselves. After reading and commentating on various early Christian figures, Harnack deduced that Christianity unconsciously took the Roman imperial system as a model for its own polity. He claimed that church structure progressed in a linear crescendo from the local house (oikos), to the city (polis) to then to the wider province. He also worked this thesis out further in his great *History of Dogma* and in *Marcion*. In the latter work, he traced the militaristic imagery early Christian writers use to describe themselves. Christians saw themselves as soldiers in a real battle against a real enemy. However, prior to Constantine, the battle and the enemy that Christians faced were primarily waged against the evil spirits of this world. But it was this militaristic language that enabled the seamless transition to post-Constantinian Christianity. After Constantine's conversion, Christians viewed themselves as actual soldiers of the Empire and fought in the material and violent battles of the Empire. The progression, or rather regression from spiritual

22. Harnack was recognized in his own time as being the first to attempt construction of a “comprehensive scheme” of Christian origins. See A. C. Headlam, "Methods of Early Christian History," *The English Historical Review* 14, no. 53 (1899), 25.

23. Headlam notes that “progress” in our knowledge of Christian origins “has depended on the adoption of certain methods,” of which the renunciation of traditional authorities is primary. He goes on to state the methods that have made “Harnack's 'Dogmengeschichte' possible” have required us to lose “the belief which inspired the 'Divina Commedia.'” See “Methods of Early Christian History,” 1-2.


25. ibid., 160.


27. Harnack states, “To the extent that the sayings of Jesus were later torn from their historical contexts, those which sounded warlike would gain more latitude than they originally posessed,” in Adolf von Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*.
grace into material debauchery played into Harnack's mounting thesis that the whole empire converted to Christianity under Constantine. The more Harnack read early Christian texts, the more he honed his “fall from grace” theme until it eventually came to frame his entire conception of early Christianity. In true inductive fashion, he believed that this reading was entirely self-evident, and therefore it was scientifically valid and supplied normative weight as the proper understanding of Christian history. Like Newton and gravity, Harnack simply organized the data and gave it a name. Despite the various counter arguments, his “fall from grace” grand narrative continues to actively shape understandings of Christian history across disciplinary boundaries.

In simple terms, a grand narrative is a story about a story. Grand narratives such as Harnack's “fall from grace” represent the fruits of the inductive approach to history where large amounts of data are systematized into a whole and unified general theme. Once posed, grand narratives serve as the guideposts for determining and understanding new data that may surface as a result of archaeological or archival discoveries. In other words, grand narratives are conceived broadly enough to catch and reign-in all existent data on any given subject. Modern historians have left us definitive titles such as Ranke's *Universal History* (1881-1886), William J. Bossenbrook's *The German Mind* (1961), William J. Durant's *The Story of Civilization* (1935-1975), Adolf von Harnack's *History* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 29.


29. For example, David L. Balas, Richard A. Norris, Ekkehard Muehlenberg, and Robert L. Wilken write that their thesis of the influence of Greek thought on Christian claims of universalism “is nothing else than a reformulation of Harnack,” albeit with a different judgment of the outcome. Instead of having negative consequences as Harnack suggests, these authors believe Hellenization “made it possible for early Christianity to make its claims intelligible.” See Balas, David L., Richard A. Norris, Ekkehard Muehlenberg, and Robert L. Wilken, "The Study of Early Church History," *Church History* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 1972), 442.
of Dogma (1879-1900), and Johann Gustav Droysen's seminal Geschichte Des Hellenismus (1858). And thus, we arrive at a historiographical universalism via the historian's objective reading and synthesis of the past. But unlike the universalism of rationalist philosophers, e.g. Kant or Hegel, whose theories move deductively, modern historians believed they could provide a universalism argued inductively from particular facts to the larger geists of the past.

Internal and External Critical Responses: Nietzsche, Finley, Saussure

During the first half of the nineteenth century history made in-roads into many of the other academic disciplines including Christian social ethics. Similarly, evolutionary biology and geology as well as law and politics all discovered the importance of understanding their own historical trajectories as well as those of their subject matters. As the sciences became more historical, history responded to the challenge by becoming more scientific and assumed the role as the new queen of the “sciences” for humanities and liberal arts disciplines. But just as Ranke and others jettisoned philosophy and theory, theorists and philosophers followed suit by rejecting modern historical presumptions. Generally, philosophers and other theorists inclined towards what would become postmodernism took aim at the larger objectivist and correspondingly universalist powerhouses of the sciences and threatened the very existence of a field so relatively new on the academic scene. But as most battles go, modern historiography would not go down without a fight.30 Empirically-based historians like Wilhelm Dilthey

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30. Perhaps the impetus for many of the early postmodernist outcries against objectivity and universalism stem from the rise of the study of religions from disciplines like sociology and anthropology. Begun by Emile Durkheim, and later fueled by figures like Mircea Eliade, the early academic study of religion was founded upon sweeping generalizations about human nature and religious devotions. Recent scholarship has rightly confronted the unexamined assumptions of earlier theorists and, much like
and G. R. Elton fervently defended their guild against the “voluntaristic subjectivism” and renunciation of “humanity itself” that were the natural consequences of Nietzschean madness.31

Freidrick Wilhelm Nietzsche
One of the earliest critics of modern historiography and one that so many historians and ethicists respond to is Freidrick Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose denunciation of the field of history prior to the twentieth century helped to spark the later flames of postmodernism. Nietzsche, himself an admirer of ancient Greece, saw through the false pretenses of modernist claims on objectivity and chided the emerging professional historians of his day for killing the life-sustaining vitality that history is capable of supplying. He states,

“A historical phenomenon, completely understood and reduced to an item of knowledge, is, in relation to the man who knows it, dead: for he has found out its madness, its injustice, its blind passion, and especially the earthly and darkened horizon that was the source of its power for history. This power has now become, for him who has recognized it, powerless; not yet, perhaps, for him who is alive.”32

Few readers miss the rhetorical thrust of Nietzsche's life and death motifs. The objectivist presumptions of modern historians that reduce history to an “item of knowledge” have effectively killed the life-giving spirit that should accompany any postmodern historians, has complicated the nineteenth century foundations upon which the discipline was built. See Jonathan Z. Smith, Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004); Ivan Stenski, Thinking about Religion: A Reader (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006); Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, Or, how European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).


exploration of the past. For the person “who is alive,” and who resists the modern historical spirit, “historical study is only fruitful for the future if it follows a powerful life-giving influence, for example, a new system of culture.”\textsuperscript{33} Nietzsche's English translator, Adrian Collins, points out that “the historical sense became a 'malady from which men suffer,' the world-process an illusion, evolutionary theories a subtle excuse for inactivity.”\textsuperscript{34} The proper use of history, then, is that knowledge of the past is affective. In its affect, there is room for transformation. History only has meaning when it speaks into the lives of present peoples in such a way that they become stirred to some sort of action. And where there is meaning, if we follow Nietzsche and Michel Foucault much later, there is power. What transforms or moves people to action, however, is not mummified indices of knowledge, scientifically discerned and objectively categorized. Instead, “as long as the soul of history is found in the great impulse that it gives to a powerful spirit, as long as the past is principally used as a model for imitation, it is always in danger of being a little altered and touched up, and brought nearer to fiction”.\textsuperscript{35}

Nietzsche's understanding of “fiction” plays upon the modern binary between fact.\textsuperscript{36} Modern historians who decry historiography as a valid science do so by distancing themselves from myth, legend and dogma, as though these categories are inherently inaccurate. Instead, their methodological scientific pursuits, they believed, yielded

\textsuperscript{33} ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{34} “Introduction” in ibid., x.

\textsuperscript{35} ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{36} “Fact” is understood as that which can be verifiably proven to be true, and falsity, or the notion that since something cannot be proven, it must be make-believe and, therefore, nonessential to human existence.
objective knowledge that conformed to the concept of truth and its image: what is true is knowledge resulting from positivist science. In several of his longer works, including *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche keenly points out that values shape both our past and present view of the world. He countered objective histories in part by positing the notion of genealogy. The concept of genealogy more appropriately takes into account the situated-ness not of the historical context, but of the historian in the present, and highlights interests and value systems embedded in present objectivist histories.

**Moses I. Finley**

Nietzsche's unveiling of modern historiographical assumptions paved the theoretical way for a number of other important theorists and practitioners of history. Historian Moses Finley (1912-1986) plays off of Nietzsche's above quoted book, *Thoughts Out of Season: The Use and Abuse of History*, with his book simply titled, *The

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38. Indeed, both works represent an early attempt at deconstruction by genealogically tracing the development of morality. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche asserts that “in real life it is only a question of strong and weak wills” (emphasis original). In *Genealogy*, the herd mentality comes about as a result of weak willed individuals ascribing to a constructed sense of morality in order to alleviate guilt. See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 51; *Genealogy of Morals*, 299.

39. Nietzsche's impact has been felt across academia spawning significant developments for Liberation theologies, feminist theories and post colonialism. His thought has even flooded popular culture in America through media productions such as the television sitcom, *Seinfeld* (1990-1998), and movies like “Little Miss Sunshine.” See Kevin L. Stoehr, *Nihilism in Film and Television: A Critical Overview, Citizen Kane to the Sopranos* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006).
Use and Abuse of History. Herein, Finley faults historians for naively accepting what ancient writers say. He asserts that the classics and classical authors are not immune from ideological biases, and thus, do not present troves of “facts” which can be objectively mined by a nineteenth or twentieth century scholar. Since the ancient writers consciously approached their work with ideological biases, historians today have an obligation not to take these documents at face value. Instead, historians must ask questions that go deeper than the surface “realities” presented in historical texts. The burden of the historian is not to uncover the past as it actually happened since this is an impossibility, but to draw from history’s power by discerning meanings that move our self-understandings and actions in the present and the future.

In another essay, Finley takes up Nietzsche's distrust of the modern distinction between fact and fiction. He offers a brief survey of the various ways the ancients (namely those of Greek and Roman heritage) relied upon myth to make the past meaningful for present realities. He states, “Long before anyone dreamed of history, myth gave an answer. That was its function of myth, or rather one of its functions. Myth made the past intelligible and meaningful by selection, by focusing on a few bits of the past which thereby acquired permanence, relevance, universal significance.” According to Finley, myth served a functional purpose by supplying a community with stories about


41. Finley responds to Ranke's concern for “how things really were” by asking the question, “what 'things' merit or require consideration in order to establish how they 'really were?'” in Finley, The use and Abuse of History, 13.

42. ibid., 75.

43. Moses I. Finley, "Myth, Memory, and History," History and Theory 4, no. 3 (1965), 283.
itself and stories that helped make sense out of present circumstances. Myth was intentionally subjective not for the interests of the individual, but for the entire community. Myths existed in part by providing answers to questions of corporate identity: Who are we? from what stock do we come? and upon what do we draw for our strength or success as a people? These questions did not rest upon rationalistic or factual verifiability, nor was their truth contingent upon any principle of abject certainty, to borrow Kant’s terminology. Just as “memory leaps instantaneously to the desired point and it then dates by association,” myth was not contingent upon the linear, or even factual actuality of the past.44 Myth was, however, consistent with the contingencies of oral traditions wherein a tradition is established that is both created and maintained out of disparate and sometimes contradictory elements. Even so, factual reliability remains irrelevant or at least secondary, “so long as the tradition is accepted, it works, and it must work if the society is not to fall apart.”45

Ferdinand de Saussure

As Nietzsche attacked modern historiography from a philosophical perspective and Finley did it from within historiography, the most substantial criticisms would arise out of the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and his developments in linguistics. Saussure pioneered linguistics as the third major branch of the study of language, advancing upon grammar and philology. In doing so, he indirectly undermined the foundations of the correspondence theory of truth, which held that language points

44. ibid., 293.

45. Nietzsche, Complete Works, 296.
directly to reality in the world. Instead, Saussure highlighted the arbitrariness of language signs by explaining how the mind intercedes between a sign and its referent object. The mind recognizes a symbol when it is spoken and identifies or constructs a corresponding concept that gets transferred to the object in reality. Language signs are arbitrary precisely because synchronic and diachronic movements through time occur independently from all referential objects. Saussure ultimately shows us that there is no natural link between signs and extra-linguistic things.

Saussure's contributions to epistemological conversations harmonized with many other philosophers in their rejection of the academic discipline of history. Nineteenth century inspired historiography simply assumed an unmediated connection between the past and the historian's interpretations thereof. If language no longer relates directly to the world but relates instead only to itself, we must ask along with Elizabeth Clark, “how could historians argue that their discourse about the past matched up with ‘what really happened’?” Refracted now through the lenses of post-structuralism and new historicism, the contributions of Nietzsche, Finley and Saussure to historiography have successfully shaken the foundational assumptions of early modern historians. Together, they have forever unveiled the situation that history is really an instantiation of contemporary constructions based upon the projection of one's current self onto the past.

46. Clark summarizes that correspondence theories of truth assume “a metaphysical realist position, namely, that knowledge claims could be verified if a statement referring to the ‘real world’ could be verified if a statement referring to the ‘real world’ could be shown to be true.” See Clark, History, Theory, Text, 195 and n. 10.

47. Ferdinand de Saussure et al., Course in General Linguistics (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1986), 100-102.

48. Clark, History, Theory, Text, 47.
New Historiographic Directions: Derrida, White, Foucault

Beginning in the 1960's, the academic world in the North Atlantic began wrestling with possible alternatives to the modern paradigm. Through what now is known as the “Linguistic Turn,” theory (generally) came to define history in new ways. During this decade historians began to reassess the nature and composition of historical texts. Theorists began to posit that our knowledge of the past is not only contingent upon the ideological commitments of the historian, but is limited by the semiotic structures that comprise language itself. For many, direct access into the past was rejected wholesale; past realities represented in historical documents could no longer be accessed by simply peering into their facts through clear glass walls. Nietzsche and Finley taught us this. Instead, historical documents became more like a cloudy mirror simultaneously revealing and concealing the historian than allowing access to some objective reality on the other side.

Jacques Derrida

An encroaching postmodernism threatened the scientifically rigorous fibers of history that Ranke and others fought so hard to weave into a coherent discipline. Three theorists, Jacques Derrida, Hayden White and Michel Foucault, deserve particular attention for their innovations and corresponding contributions to historiography's “linguistic turn” and specifically to the critical self-reflective method offered in this dissertation. Derrida, although he was concerned more with philosophy than with history, acknowledges that since the past no longer exists, access to certain realities has been inextricably cut off. Since historical documents and other artifacts are entirely
contingent upon the language structures that give them rise, knowledge of the past is contingent upon the limits imposed by language. The most appropriate means for studying the limits of language is through the study of linguistics, which leads to issues of text and textuality. Texts hint at a past reality, pointing in particular directions, but can never unveil reality as it actually happened. The contextual hints we glean from one historical text are contingent upon other contextual traces that are preceded further by contexts ad infinitum. These contexts can never be absolutely discerned given the arbitrariness of the linguistic signs that comprise them. In a sense, texts stand alone and are self-referential.

Derrida contests the nineteenth century fascination with quests for origins and first causes. These contestations led to two observations that further changed the direction of historiography. First, our knowledge exists in the form of traces, which are both present and absent simultaneously. Derrida asserts that the concept of “origin” is a “transcendental-arche” that “must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased.”49 A trace, then, “is not only the disappearance of origin,” and thus, the reciprocal constitution of the origin, but is also the “presence” of an “empirical mark” by which some “thing” is constituted as having an origin.50 Consciously slippery in his terminology, Derrida suggests that a trace represents the presence of an absence, or that which exists as a result of a silence.51 This absence is conveyed to a reader across an


50. ibid., 61.

51. Gayatri Spivak uses the term “trace” in her 1976 translation of *Of Grammatology*. Like the English word, “track,” a trace is like a footprint left in the sand. The print/track/trace points to a “presence” that once occupied the space, but is no longer “there.” “Translator's Preface,” xvii.
irretrievable context. In this framework, retrieving an author's original intention, while
certainly a viable idea, does little to resolve questions of original meaning since texts
continue to speak, or “act,” in an author's absence. And, thus, a wedge is driven between
authorial intent and the multitude of meanings that can be derived from a text. This move
destabilizes the structuralist position following Saussure's view of language. The
divorce between author and text doubtlessly has revolutionized critical scholarship. It
has tempered claims of historians such as Peter Brown, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Elizabeth
Clark who now admit that the past can only be known approximately, and serves as
an impetus for reading historical texts for gaps, silences and aporias.

Derrida's second major contribution to historiography follows from the first and is
exemplified by his often quoted, *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* (there is no outside the text).
Since a sign and a signifier carry no intrinsic connection with a thing-in-itself (borrowing
again from Kant), and we are left only with the trace of a connection between them, the
idea of *différance* arises in relation to the constant interplay between one sign and the
next. *Différance* is the conferring of the meaning of a sign in relation to its relationship
to other signs within a similar system. For example, the word “apple” bears meaning
because it is not the same as “pear” or “car” or “snake.” Its identity, or meaning, is
forged negatively according to what it is not. Returning to the historiographic subject at

52. An move that squarely located Derrida as a post-structuralist. See Breisach, *On the Future of
History: The Postmodernist Challenge and its Aftermath*, 101. Structuralism and the ensuing post-
structuralism have enjoyed more acclaim in France than in the United States. See François Dosse's seminal
two volume work originally published in French in 1991-2, *History of Structuralism* (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1997). In general, post-structuralists ascend to Saussure's basic insights
about the structures of language, but move out from beneath its more obvious limitations. The “post” better
reflects “after” rather than “beyond” or “in opposition to.” These limitations include the ideas that writing
is an extension of speech, and that historical contexts and authorial intent are self-evident.

hand, if knowledge of the past is only available via traces, and these traces are endlessly referential while remaining fixed by the linguistic parameters in which they are contained (i.e. diachronic systems), then linguistic context widens to incorporate the meanings we associate to all of life's actions or events. And since all meaning is linguistically contextual, life becomes married to textuality and is thereby held captive by the linguistic structures that enable its composition. Put simply, the moment we “speak” the categories for understanding what is “spoken” are irreversibly linguistic, and therefore, are subject to textual boundaries. Thus, there is no outside the text. Discerning meaning, then, requires the deconstruction of all written and verbal signs according to the negative principle of *différance*. Here, interpretation opens for historians on negative rather than positive consitutions of the sign. This negativity is the trace and is the topos for a text's absences, gaps, and aporias.

**Hayden White**

A second figure to impact the trajectories of historiography after the “Linguistic Turn” is Hayden White. White did the most, according to Dominique La Capra, to awaken historians from their “dogmatic slumber.”  

White proposes that histories could be categorized by narratological patterns that determine what type of history the historian will espouse. He posits a typological understanding of historiographic styles. In *Metahistory*, he takes four dominant and representational nineteenth century historians and carefully shows how each of their written histories is bounded by the parameters of

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their chosen narratological patterns. These patterns, or modes of emplotment, do much to illuminate the ideological starting points of each of the authors.\textsuperscript{55} Since language determines the parameters for expressing the past, there can be no objective or unmediated history.

\textit{Metahistory} received much criticism for what appeared to other historians as historical determinism. Either in response to critics or as a further working out of its implications, White's subsequent work tempered deterministic sentiments by expanding his reference to language, generally. In \textit{The Tropics of Discourse}, he focuses more narrowly on discourse and its relation to reality. Relying on the idea that a trope is the way in which language is used to convey meaning that lies beyond its ability to capture, White approaches discourse as the back and forth dialogue between parties. He explores how language conveys reality through various formulations of discourse. Through this examination, White shows that the “deep structures” that define human consciousness have a degree of stability that yields sound representations of reality.\textsuperscript{56} In so doing, White sews a thread between discourse and event without succumbing to the nineteenth century assumptions that essence can be fully grasped and explained.

Since reality is always already textual, we arrive at the concept of discourse. A discourse is the constitution of the ground upon which we comprehend the world around

\textsuperscript{55} Emplotment is the representation of plot structures, or the guiding motifs that organize a narrative. The four primary modes of emplotment White explores are romance, comedy, tragedy and satire. Ranke's work exemplifies comedy in \textit{Metahistory} since “His objectivity, critical principles, tolerance, and sympathy for all sides of the conflicts he encountered throughout the historical record were deployed within the sustaining atmosphere of a metahistorical prefiguration of the historical field as a set of conflicts that must necessarily end in harmonious resolutions, resolutions in which 'nature' is finally supplanted by a 'society' that is as just as it is stable” Hayden V. White, \textit{Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 167.

\textsuperscript{56} White manages to hold in tension the freedom of the imagination to construct new narratives and the idea that the imagination itself is governed by the “deep structures” of human consciousness.
us. White notes that a discourse points us to the back and forth, ebb and flow, or to and fro exchange “between received encodations of experience and the clutter of phenomena which refuses incorporation into conventionalized notions of 'reality,' 'truth,' or 'possibility.’”57 By moving back and forth between experience and the linguistic structures organizing the understandings of experience, discourse remains as critical of itself as it is of those it criticizes (and is thus ironic or aporetic in this methodology), always questioning the very logic upon which it is comprised.58 Meaning, then, remains in a constant state of flux and, in so far as discourse is concerned, always resists static representation.

This turn towards discourse begs the following question: How does discourse analysis relate to the historical enterprise? Once a historical document leaves the hands of its creator, or author, it speaks into and out of larger discourses that appropriate and move the meaning of the document towards other ends. This movement is not necessary malignant nor is it always generated out of a quest for domination and/or propaganda, although the “tropics of discourse” do not exclude the possibility of nefarious ends. Instead, the very nature of linguistic representation initiates the transfer of meaning back and forth between interpreter and text, and between interpreter and interpretation. That “there is no outside the text” should cue the historian to the inevitable interplays of language and make her aware of her inability to remove herself from the process of interpretation, regardless of methodological assumptions.


58. Ibid., 4.
Michel Foucault

The third key theoretician to pave a new for historiography out of the “Linguistic Turn” is Michel Foucault. Foucault awoke historiographers further to issues of discourse, as well as to discontinuity and power. In his, Archeology of Knowledge, he abandons the subject-centered approach to history as pioneered by Ranke seeking instead to draw out differences between discourses. Attuned to linguistics, he offers a discourse on discourse. Writing in response to a Saussurian structuralist historiography, he states, “Originally, history was the attempt to ‘memorize’ the moments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say.”59 He continues, “Now, history is that which transforms documents into moments.”60 Regardless of which direction the historian preferences, either from the outside in or from the inside out, both the modern historian and the structuralist historian strive after a totalizing description of the past. Foucault continues by explaining that this quest for a total description “draws all phenomena around a single center – a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape”61 In essence, both approaches seek to establish some sense of unity, cohesion or continuity.

But Foucault, like Derrida, was concerned not with themes of continuity, but with discontinuity, aporias, and gaps that loom ever-present in historical texts and knowledges.


60. ibid., 7.

61. ibid., 10.
History after all, is the quest “to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.”

This concern is why he adopts the language of archeology, for archeology is “that science devoted to silent moments, inert traces, objects w/out context and things left by the past.” Archeology can only identify varying discourses and point to possible interrelations. It is the exploration of the structures of discourse and the revealing of those “internal rules.” It in no way is sufficient to speak definitively for the artifacts of its discovery. With archeology as the science that discovers, or more appropriately, emphasizes the fissures in our knowledge, genealogy is (in its Nietzschean sense) the necessary method needed to tell the discursive stories into which our artifacts of knowledge surface. Approaching history as a genealogy avoids the epistemological trappings of universalism and objectivism by explicitly locating the historian in relation to the subject at hand. Furthermore, a genealogical approach to history illuminates aspects of the “deep structures” at work in historical discourse analysis. And Foucault's exploration of deep structures opens-up discussions of the “truth” of reality by linking the creation of truth to the production and maintenance of power. Power's symbiotic relation to knowledge is self-validating as new knowledge yields new power. As knowledge and power coalesce, Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, for example, demonstrates that all


63. ibid., 7.

64. ibid., 114.

65. Foucault never abandoned the principles of archeology, but he did turn more towards genealogy in his later writings, since it was better equipped to deal with social, economic and geographical conditions.
knowledge is an ascent to power and those with power are able to control knowledge, and
behavior, correspondingly.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, he shows that the principles of punishment are not
natural, but constructed in such a way as to increase power and authority over the human
body and soul.

Foucault's presumptions about the deep structures of historiography were initially
more welcomed by literary scholars than by historians. But more recently, his insights
into the creation and maintenance of power via the production of knowledge have
received more attention among historians. Judith Perkins wonderfully employs
Foucauldian analysis to examine the development of early Christian identities that focus
on suffering and death. In \textit{The Suffering Self}, Perkins follows the development of
Christian self-presentation that serve various ends in the ancient world.\textsuperscript{67} By presenting
themselves as willing sufferers, the earliest Christians challenge normative conceptions
of the self that revolve around death, marriage, and sickness, to name a few. Perkins
notes that these Christians consciously present themselves as sufferers, which grants
them social power within the larger discourses of the Empire. Later, however, and under
differing circumstances, this same discourse continues, yet changes to suit the contexts of
social control within a rapidly Christianized imperial structure. Suffering moves from the
empowerment of persecuted communities to the control of individual behavior.

Thus far, this chapter has surveyed some of the important historiographic
assumptions that arose out of wider Euro-American intellectual trends during the rise of


the historical profession in the nineteenth century. Of these trends the most significant is the epistemological drive to uncover the truth of the past via a historical method that yearned to be validated as an objective and verifiable universal science. Leopold von Ranke led the charge through the annals of history and derived many grand organizing themes from the disparate and chaotic minutia of historical facts. Convinced by the promise of history, Adolf von Harnack boarded the modernist historiographic ship and set sail to explain the origins of Christianity. Together, they held fast to their disciplinary methods believing their “science” would lead them to new horizons of historical knowledge. Yet due in part to their dismissal of theory and their unexamined assumptions about the importance of logical positivism, they overlooked the many textual limitations of historical documents. Almost as quickly as it began, critics arose from various disciplinary fields to counter modern historiographical assumptions. Nietzsche in the late 1800s and Finley in the early 1900s worked hard to reunite modernist historians, and their affective commitments and ideological biases with the construction of history. After the 1960s, postmodern and post-structuralist theorists arose to counter further these modern historiographic assumptions. Then in the presence of linguistics and its implications for textuality, Derrida, White and Foucault extended our gaze of the historian's ideological footprint to include the larger impacts of the historian on the allegedly objective historical enterprise. These theorists and those whom they influence have come to grips with both the limitations of knowledge gleaned from realities no longer existent, and with the very notion that knowledge serves larger structures of power and control.
Leading the Way: Postmodern Post-Structuralism and Elizabeth Clark

Reflecting on his own work and profession, architect Philip Johnson who gave us the iconic Glass House comments that “purpose is not necessary to make a building beautiful...sooner or later we will fit our buildings so that they can be used...where form comes from I don't know, but it has nothing at all to do with the functional or sociological aspects of our architecture.” As a purveyor of modern ideals, Johnson reveals his assumption that “form” exists independently from “function or sociological aspects” that govern the rest of life. In this sense, the artist/architect pulls “form” together out of content that would otherwise remain shrouded in the chaos of functional life. The Glass House and the rest of Johnson's compound were willed to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which now manages the site like a museum. People come and peer into the immaculate house whose every furnishing has been meticulously arranged to convey the “form” that Johnson had originally envisioned. It seems that even in his absence, the quest trudges-on to resuscitate the factual reality of the past.

Newly found theoretical motifs and methods have successfully challenged the epistemological split between form and function, to use Johnson's categories, or between subject and object or historian and history. Risking criticism for being too presentist, postmodern and post-structuralist theorists rightly critique the naturalness of objective and universal historical knowledge by conceptualizing historians as architects of the past. Even architects, they might claim, cannot escape the discursive and material conditions that give rise to their art. But with new theories come new questions. Is the past made

irrelevant or obsolete as a result of our turn towards form and content of the historian's history? What happens to the historical “event” if the past is irretrievable and the discourse on discourse holds us in the present? And if objectivism and universalism are rendered bereft of their *a priori* status, is some version of historical relativism the only option available?

Historiographer Elizabeth Clark offers the most recent theoretical contribution to the field providing answers to these questions and goading historians to rethink their discipline. Her approach is best described as a collaboration with the numerous theoretical voices that have pushed and prodded the discipline for the past half century. Specializing in the history of late ancient Christianity, Clark approaches the past primarily through written texts. She hopes to convince us that texts are “highly amenable to the types of literary/philosophical/theoretical critiques that have excited – and indeed have now transformed – other humanities disciplines under the rubric of post-structuralism.”\(^6^9\) But this acknowledgment does not necessitate the unalterable loss of the past as “event,” nor does it leave us stranded on the shores of relativism. Instead, historians ought to look more for the gaps and aporias in texts rather than at continuities, origins and causes. Historians must recognize that “grand narratives” such as the so-called “rise and triumph of Christianity, often cloak ideological assumptions and that issues of power will always “inform the interpretation of the past.”\(^7^0\) In essence, she rightly warns that there is no “politically innocent historiography.”

\(^6^9\) Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, ix.

\(^7^0\) ibid., 157.
Clark's historiographic approach comes at a crucial developmental point in her own sub-discipline. Late ancient Christian studies in the twentieth century somehow neglected wider theory-based epistemological developments that have highlighted the political nature of historiography. This field jumped from confessional theology with its emphasis on philology between the late 1800s to the mid-1900s to an emphasis on the social sciences during the 1970's and 1980's. The leap passed straight over structuralism and other theory-based developments that have informed virtually every other historical discipline dealing with antiquity, including classics and New Testament scholarship. In so doing, late ancient Christian scholars have missed the larger literary and theoretical currents initiated by both structuralism and post-structuralism. Clark notes that by landing squarely on the social sciences, new life was breathed into the discipline, but that “[n]onetheless, these social-scientific appropriations obscured the fact that scholars of late ancient Christianity deal not with native informants, nor with masses of data amenable to statistical analysis, but with texts—and texts of a highly literary, rhetorical, and ideological nature.” Because the sources from this historical period are so highly literary in nature, she warns that they should be read first as literary productions before they are read for their social data. This approach tempers either/or tendencies by attending both to textuality and to contextuality, but grants textuality primacy since changes in linguistic structures present the greatest limitations to our historical understandings. What is now needed is for scholars of this guild to invoke issues of textuality raised by structuralists and post-structuralists.

71. ibid., 158.

72. ibid., 159.
Clark remains committed to postmodern post-structuralism. 73 Relating to the few important themes of structuralism a la Saussure outlined above, post-structuralism arose to clarify and improve upon these themes. Despite the numerous variances between them most post-structuralists would agree with Saussure that knowledge of “reality” does not exist outside of the language or linguistic structures that construct the world in intelligible ways. Once Saussure opened the door to the acknowledgement of the disconnect between linguistic sign and external referent, the “obvious response,” according to Gabrielle Spiegel, was to “decode and 'deconstruct'” language. 74 And the movement from language to literature is fairly seamless since a language system has built into it the means for understanding the world while literature is the instantiation of a linguistic utterance. Deconstruction explores the various excess meanings that exist within literature that allows room for questions regarding authorial intent. Since a plurality of meanings of “intent” can and do exist for any given text, deconstruction challenges the stability of such meanings by illuminating contradictions, gaps and aporias. It is precisely at this point that post-structuralism enters the scene. The “post” in post-structural is the continuation of linguistics while acknowledging its limitations and seeking to unmask aporias. These aporias prohibit claims of certainty concerning a “proper” or correct meaning of a text and, thus, shatter all presumptions of universality.

73. The boundaries between postmodernism and post-structuralism are permeable, to say the least. They both critique the human subject, historicism, philosophy, and meaning. Introductory guides generally are helpful on this point. See, for example, Madan Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

74. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). 7. Jacques Derrida is credited with carrying Saussure's split between sign and referent to its furthest extreme and for bringing deconstruction to the forefront of scholarly attention in post-Saussurian linguistics, which has subsequently impacted almost every other academic field in one way or another.
Interpretations proceed *ad infinitum* and change in accordance with differing referential factors.

The implications of post-structural deconstruction for historiography are profound, particularly as they relate to themes of discontinuity. The sources upon which the historian draws are inextricably bound by linguistic structures. Beyond written tracts, treatises and the like, knowledge of “non-verbal” artifacts such as architecture and paintings are bound-up in semiotic language structures that make them intelligible for human understanding. The history that a historian produces involves meaning making via the interpretation of language on a minimum of two levels: to those linguistic structures pertinent to historically occasioned events and to the present historian’s occasioned discourse. First, the historian encounters a document or artifact that is already situated in its own contexts and dealing with reality on its own linguistic terms. For historians of late ancient Christianity, the task of interpretation is veiled by the distances of time and space, not to mention by the use of forms of languages that are themselves translations (the interpretation of a document that occurs in coding a text into a different language system). Take Tertullian, for example, of which chapter four of this dissertation is devoted. Tertullian wrote during the end of the second century and the beginning of the third from Carthage, North Africa. He wrote primarily in Latin, although he knew and spoke Greek and in his native Punic tongue as well. The 39 extant codices we have of his *Apologeticum* date from the ninth century to the sixteenth, complicating our direct access to the author.75 What is more, Eusebius and Jerome offer

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scant biographical sketches of Tertullian up to a century after Tertullian's supposed death. Eusebius either quotes *Apologeticum* from memory or relies on a poor Greek copy of the text, while Jerome simply quotes second hand from Eusebius. Historians must sift through these various interpretive layers in order even to approximate what Tertullian may have intended his audience to hear. The further removed we are from the “original” and the more spotty the trail of evidence, the more difficult becomes the process of interpretation.

The second linguistic interpretive factor the historian must attend to is the historian's own discursive environment. This is to say that the historian produces a history that is itself housed within its own context and systems of semiotic references. Through the process of writing, the historian enters into the endless textual interplay between signs and referents. Neither the historian's subjects/objects (historical documents) nor her present realities exist outside the “rules of the linguistic universe inhabited by the historian,” as Gabrielle Spiegel warns, since reality is “always already constructed in language” and is “anterior to our knowledge of the world.” Thus, all unmediated access to the realities of the past conveyed in historical documents is forever severed for a post-Saussurian epistemology.

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77. La Capra always asks the question about how the past is in a reciprocal conversation with the present, whereby the historian is responsible to return again and again to historical texts. This perpetual return to texts yields new insight through the recognition of the blurred boundaries between reality and conceptions of reality. Despite La Capra's openness to the interplay of meaning between past and present, he still aligns with the post-structural commitment to reading for gaps, silences, and aporias in texts. Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

78. Spiegel, *The Past as Text*, 8, 5, respectively.
A host of factors residing between these two environments must also be appropriated even when such factors conflict. Clark utilizes the foundational concepts discussed in the preceding section on criticisms to modern historiographic assumptions. Her post-structuralist work demands a multifarious approach to interpretation, even when sources, theories or ideologies contradict one another. Clark's brilliance resides in her ability not only to analyze the various trajectories of historiography over the past century and a half, but to posit a constructive model for the “future of history” (to borrow from Breisach) that incorporates the diverse voices of her field. When diverse and sometimes disparate theories are held in tension, the historian is better equipped to identify the cracks and fissures in historical documents and correlate these cracks and fissures in ways that honors the complexities of any given represented reality.79 Attending to these two interpretive layers of past and present discursive environments provides a base line for Clark's historical approach.

Clark is right to apply post-structuralism to late ancient Christian texts since they are so heavily reliant upon metaphor. The textual presence and dependence on metaphor signals two important observations. First, is the recognition that the originating source carries a meaning other than that which is expressly stated. Here Tertullian provides another fitting example. He was an adherent to the Antiochene school of scriptural interpretation that favored literalism over the allegorical interpretations of the Alexandrian school of thought. Yet, despite his calls to read for the “letter” in order to ward off the dangers of heresies, he widely employed metaphor when explicating the

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79. Perhaps this notion of balancing complexity is why La Capra's dialogical approach with the past gains great conceptual traction. In dialogue, exchanges are made continually between past and present through the medium of textual documents.
meanings of passages that he discerned to be too ambiguous for his audiences. Second, a metaphor proposes one set of signs but its meaning directs the reader to an alternative set of signs. It is important to remember that the recovery and understanding of original contexts is increasingly problematized the further back into history one delves. However, the acknowledgment that metaphoric tropes were created within particular linguistic structures of a particular linguistic context and yet they bend those structures providing sufficient theoretical justification for not jettisoning the concept of original contexts wholesale.

With these recognitions, we encroach more upon Clark's specific historiographic method and claims. Clark is deeply indebted to Gabrielle Spiegel for her work that attends to textuality and contextuality. Seeing the dangers in a literature-only based approach to history, or that of the Linguistic Turn, Spiegel reads texts for a “situated” use of language. In other words, texts represent and convey a specific reality that occurred in the past. In her seminal book, The Past as Text, she seeks to uncover the imaginative reality of the Middle Ages by using postmodern/post-structural deconstructions to get at the silences and aporias of texts. In this light, she takes seriously the challenges posed by the “Linguistic Turn.” But instead of completely collapsing texts and context into one homogenous textuality, she thinks we can get at historical imaginative realities by reading for the social-logic of texts. The social-logic of the text is the

80. Thoroughly skilled in rhetoric, Tertullian employs typology, metaphor and illusion in order to make his points when arguing against proposed heretics. For examples, see Adu. Marc. 3.7, 16.


82. Historians, whether modern, postmodern, structuralist, or post-structuralist, are charged with the task of “providing lucid, accessible—above all knowable and known—context.” Historians employ
acknowledgement that “texts, as material embodiments of situated language use, reflect in their very materiality the inseparability of material and discursive practices and the need to preserve a sense of their mutual involvement and interdependence in the production of meaning.”

In other words, the social logic attends to the double concern for a text's “site of articulation and its discursive character as articulated 'logos.'”

“Social logic” is crucial because through it a text reveals its silences while continually pointing to a material context in which the silence bears significance.

Clark states that all historians must come to grips with Spiegel’s thesis, especially if historians influenced by the “Linguistic Turn” hope to continue their craft. Clark appropriates Spiegel's “social logic” and expands it to include a theological component as well—a point that no doubt conditioned by her disciplinary focus. But a point of departure for Clark is her thorough use and synthesis of post-structuralist theory. While Spiegel wants to maintain a sharp distinction between texts and contexts since, according to Clark, “political and social practices [should] not be treated as 'cultural scripts.'”

Might Spiegel's concern here signify an attempt to hold on to some notion of “real” that

“discursive 'codes'” that “ironically, imply the existence of the same messages” about context and reality that historical documents attempt to convey. See ibid., 19-20.

83. ibid., 25. This quotation follows on the recognition of the post-structuralist argument that “language constitutes the social world of meaning” and that language is granted authority only within a particular material and historical context.

84. Clark, History, Theory, Text, 162-3.


86. Clark, History, Theory, Text, 164.
stands aloof of literary production? While probable, her concern for distinguishing
between texts and contexts seems to have more to do with her clear distinction between
literary texts and historical documents. Clark, on the other hand, maintains that late
antique Christian documents are better approached as literary works rather than as
documents since they are so literary in nature. These writings contain such a high
literary construction that they “refuse 'domestication,’” and “address—and contest—even
the commonplace in exceptional ways that subvert as well as reinforce tradition.”
Furthermore, post-structuralism better allows for scholarly synthesis of a broad range of
theories while maintaining an acknowledgment of the limited reach of historical
knowledge. Thus, Clark calls historians of patristic Christianity to attend first to issues of
textuality, with a mind towards deconstruction, before moving towards social realities of
the past.

A focus on social-theological logic opens other avenues of historical inquiry that
would otherwise be passed over by more modern approaches to historiography. A social
logic unearths the “political unconscious” of a text, which then reveals possible avenues
of authority out of and towards discourses residing within the range of a text's purview.
A text's “political unconsciousness” is a concept Clark borrows from Fredrick Jameson.88

87. ibid., 165 She also acknowledges that scholars of patristic Christianity must address approach
their work via textuality given their limited access to knowledge provided by archeology, coins and
inscriptions are.

a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981). After him, it is widely used and
appropriated by theorists with Marxist historical materialist sympathies and by others interested in the role
of ideology. Also see, Gabrielle Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the
Middle Ages," Speculum 65 (1990), 59-86; and more recently in political science and other fields in Noëlle
McAfee, Democracy and the Political Unconscious (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Leslie
H. Hossfeld, Narrative, Political Unconscious and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina (New
York: Routledge, 2005).
It assumes that texts function in society in at least two ways. First, and one that has been assumed up to this point, is the belief that texts are political. Taken in the broad sense of the term “political,” historians and theorists who have been influenced by the “Linguistic Turn” relate “political” to the wider ideological factors influencing interpretation. Hayden White argued for the “politics of interpretation” by examining various ways ideology functions in language. Because ideology is thoroughly embedded in interpretation it is a factor necessitating constant attention. Another way the concept of socio-theological logic informs historical inquiry is through a text's unconsciousness. The “unconscious” aspect of a text assumes a presence existing below its textual surface. This rather anthropomorphic description of a text attests to a living, or active, text that operates on more than just one level. That texts actively create particular visions of reality or that meanings can be found in multiple layers has been acknowledged for centuries. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, read Scripture on various levels in order to ascertain the deeper spiritual meanings that lay hidden below the surface narratives (i.e. the literal “letter”). Yet this simple fact was lost in the nineteenth century quest for “facts.” In relation to Clark, a text's unconsciousness functions in a manner similar to Scripture for Gregory. But instead of grounding sub-meanings in spiritual or

89. Closely associated with Marxist theory, ideology is denotes a person or society's dominant religious, political, or legal superstructure that informs the organization of that society and ensures its social reproduction. Terry Eagleton clearly describes ideology in five characteristics: “unifying, action-oriented, rationalizing, legitimating, universalizing, and naturalizing.” Terry Eagleton, Ideology (New York: Logman, 1994), 45.

metaphysical truths, the political unconscious is rooted in the larger textual-material embodiments of discourses concerning power, ideology and persuasion.

Clark concludes *History, Theory, Text* with an application of her historiographic thesis by offering a series of postmodern post-structural reading, among others, of Macrina. Macrina is the sister of Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great Cappadocian Fathers credited in traditional patristic scholarship for their contributions to the doctrines of God and Christ. On the surface, Gregory both writes in Macrina's voice and sings her praises in *Life of Macrina* and *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. He is careful to convey that although she never received a formal education, she stands as his teacher of wisdom based solely on her study of Scripture. She is described as being a virgin, perfect in virtue and an exemplary figure who, clear from the “defects of femaleness,” achieves the ascetic status of being “without sex.” Yet, despite Macrina's purported wisdom, a reading for the social-theological logic reveals that Gregory uses Macrina as a trope to speak to and revise “Origenist themes without aligning himself too closely with 'heresy.'” Further, Gregory shows no concern for representing “the 'real' Macrina” beyond any idealized ascetic characteristics. In terms of the political unconsciousness of Gregory's texts, Macrina is presented as a portrait of wisdom, but this portrait is

91. Connections are difficult to miss between Gregory and Origen on the androgynous primal human. Origen's cosmological conception of humanity's true or ideal state (i.e. both pre- and post-materiality) is one of non-material rationality. See *De principiis* II.2. Commenting on Genesis in *De opificio hominis*, Gregory reads 1:27b as a departure from the “prototype” of Christ that is found in Galatians 3:28. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 127.


93. ibid.
painted to “shame less diligent Christians—namely men.” If effect, Gregory uses his younger sister in order to shame Christian men for their lack of concern for asceticism. Through shaming, Gregory locates himself and his ascetic tradition as the primary center of authority for what and how Christianity should be expressed in his fifth century world. Through his text, Gregory speaks into and toward a discourse of Christian asceticism that positively acknowledges women only in so far as they represent the virginal androgynous prototypical human. In contemporary terms, Gregory joins a discourse that normalizes the current gendered social structure by granting it theological justifications.

**Relating Historiography to Christian Ethics**

If Clark is correct in her assessment that historians in the twentieth century have paid “scant attention” to issues raised by theorists concerning the inadequacy of language to relate directly to reality, the same can be said about Christian ethicists. Phillip Wogaman brought this realization to the surface back in 1993 when he published his general historical introduction to Christian ethics. In his concluding chapter, Wogaman acknowledges that the sorts of discussions occurring in his field during the majority of the twentieth century have simply recapitulated the same questions that have afflicted Christian dialogues for several centuries.

This final section is devoted to defining and explaining a more conscientious historiography for Christian social ethics that is patterned after Clark's work. Herself a

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94. ibid., 178.
95. ibid., 6.
theorist and practitioner in the field of history, Clark's overall thesis is written to and
intended for scholars in her own guild. For this reason, her historiography hints at
possible applications beyond history, and this by way of ideology critique, but remains
bounded within discussions concerning the history of ideas, or intellectual history. Since
this dissertation concerns the use and abuse of history among Christian ethicists, it moves
Clark's ideas beyond the boundaries that she and her guild establish and makes them
relevant for ethical discourse and praxis. This dissertation also provides one of the first
sustained explorations of historiography in Christian social ethics. Granted, Wogaman
produced a general history of Christian ethics, which after nearly two decades, finally
was revisited. More recently, Gary Dorien's Social Ethics in the Making (2008). Yet
both Wogaman and Dorien provide historical readings of their discipline and not critical
analyses about the historical methods in use in this field.

What, then, should a critical analysis of the historiographic approaches in ethics
look like? The remainder of this chapter answers this from a variety of vantages but
before jumping straight into attributes, it is necessary first to name and define the
methodological approach of this project. Clark calls for a postmodern post-structuralist
historiography that reads texts for their discontinuities and gaps which then illuminates
possible socio-theological logics and political unconsciousnesses. This approach requires
an awareness of how interpretation and representation function for the “author” of the
text as well as the “author” of the history related to that text. A similar historiography for
Christian ethics must attend to the same sorts of issues with the main difference being
that the ethicist stands-in for the historian.

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Calling this historiography critical self-reflexive captures the basic thrust of what Clark espouses. Christian ethicists must be critical, meaning they must begin their historical analyses from postmodern and post-structuralist approaches that take seriously issues of interpretation, power and discourse. They also must be self-reflexive of how issues of interpretation, power and discourse function both in their own readings of history and in the histories and historical texts they appropriate. We must ask questions such as how does ideology impact my work and how does it impact the text I am reading? Where are the blind spots in my historical approach and in this or that historical account? How does this text and interpretation include or exclude other voices and why? And, does my interpretation sufficiently capture a view of identity or action that is as diverse, disparate and particularized as is reflected in contemporary ethical landscapes? In the end, our interpretations of history coincide with the sorts of ethics we espouse. It is finally time Christian ethicists cultivate an intentional historiography for the future.

This methodology begins by critiquing “normativity.” Normativity as a process does two things. One, it defines or determines a set of common values or norms for a particular social group. Two, it ratifies those values based on the authority of the normative group by integrating these values into the social structures that inform how the group knows and thinks about itself. When informed by modern objectivist and universalist epistemologies, these values become naturalized, giving rise to a system of moral assessments that then judge between good or bad, right or wrong, correct or incorrect based on the conditions of “nature.” For historians of the long nineteenth century, their synthesis of data was deemed “natural” on account of scientific rationalism.
When Euro-American normative ethical claims become naturalized, they got embedded into the political-unconsciousness of Enlightenment epistemologies, which then limits the group's ability to see the particularity of their values. Ultimately, naturalized values are universalized values.

Critiquing normativity in Christian ethical discourse as in historiography requires a deconstruction of unacknowledged power structures that undergird normative assumptions. Just as there is no “politically innocent historiography,” there is no politically innocent ethical system or analysis. We all come to our academic work with ideological assumptions that carry consequences in the real world. Thus, the adjective “Christian” in Christian ethics does not preclude the existence of power, ideology, rhetoric or textuality with respect to the historical moral tradition. At the risk of aggrandizement, Christian ethicists have an even greater responsibility to attend to post-structural theories because they must navigate a wide range of concerns between concrete behaviors in increasingly complex social environments. 97 We can no longer assume that Christian ethicists are immune to post-structural self-examinations.

As Clark has shown with historiography, post-structuralism is an incredibly valuable tool for denaturalizing normative assumptions. By applying the most current theoretical approaches to her field, she advocates for the “systematic unsettling of meaning” assumed to be natural. The same application is needed on a more thorough basis within Christian ethics. But lest the previous generation of scholars, or even the

97. Or at least this should be the task of ethicists. Unfortunately, what passes for ethical analysis too often takes the form of esoteric philosophizing with generalities and abstractions that bears little on the behavioral decision making processes of the non-academic. This is not to say that general theorizing is unimportant or tangential to ethical analysis. On the contrary, theoretical work is essential for discerning among and between differing ethical paradigms, as this dissertation attempts to prove.
present one, assumes that the destabilizing of norms will lead inevitably to full-blown relativism, be ware: a critical self-reflexive ethical-historical analysis does not destabilize norms as an end unto itself, nor does it destroy all forms of normativity. A perceived threat based upon theoretical extremes must not be allowed to stymie much needed changes in our approaches to history. Clark addresses this similar concern among historians. 98 Following up, she states, “scholars should seek to understand the differing cultural and moral views of past and present societies—and to recognize the limited and often provincial quality of their own.” 99 For the social ethicist, justice remains the highest standard upon which to judge the effectiveness of its historiography.

Elaborating further, the image of play as extrapolated by Hans-Georg Gadamer assists our understanding of this postmodern post-structuralist position. Gadamer pioneered new avenues of hermeneutics in the twentieth century by concentrating on the dialogical or conversational aspects of communication. On the image of play, he states in Truth and Method, “all play is being played.” 100 Put in a context of historical interpretation, Gadamer's statement reveals the idea that while historians construct stories about the past, these constructs create systems that in turn play the historian. Theologian Delwin Brown drew heavily from Gadamer's notion of play in an effort to show historians the extent to which our histories play us unawares and to move the historian

98. Clark, History, Theory, Text, 157. She reassures her readers that hints of relativism need not mean that “everyone's opinion is equally good.”

99. ibid., 157. The classic Hegelian synthesis is difficult to miss here. It may be that the theorist described in this section are deliberately looking for such a synthesis, or that in positing their alternatives, they unwittingly encroach upon the marked brilliance of Hegel's observation. Perhaps this provides yet one more example of how even our theoretical postulations are framed by modernity. Regardless of dispositions, a sort of synthesis can be achieved without necessarily succumbing to the teleological impetuses of Hegel's system.

100. Gadamer, Truth and Method, 106.
towards the role of an actor rather than a spectator of history. This theme is also picked up by White, whose development of emplotment implicates historical narratives according to determined narrative structures as explained above. Each of these positions brings the present historian into a complex relationship with the past wherein knowledge and meaning transfer in two directions rather than just one. Attending to the complexities of this double transference is what post-structuralist historiography is about, and I argue that it is what Christian ethical historical reflection should be about as well.

However useful Gadamer’s play imagery might be when coming to terms with the double transference of meaning in historical work, it fails to break free from the confines of a discursive exercise and operates on an assumption that meaning moves equally or laterally between “conversation partners.” To play and be played frames the task of interpretation as a game. Even if light-hearted in nature, approaching history as a game trivializes the many political and ethical dimensions that coalesce in the process of historical meaning making. Additional work is needed in order to transition from a self-referential linguistic enterprise (or from the game), to the concrete realities that inform our historical self-understandings and ethical postulations. Further, even if historical inquiries are approached as a conversation between past and present and yet fail to attend


102. “Conversation partners” is my term to designate the historian and the sources the historian uses to illuminate and understand the past.

to inequalities inherent in issues of power and ideology, we reinforce the same privileged methodology that characterizes nineteenth century historical objectivity.

Ethicists who undergird their work with historical analysis already are employing distinct historiographies, whether or not they realize it. It stands to reason, then, that these ethicists should come to grips with current trends in historiography. Unfortunately, as revealed in the previous chapter, many “normative” ethicists have yet to take postmodernism and post-structuralism seriously. They end up relying upon a commonsense-based analysis that is shaped by the larger normative and epistemological trends of the dominant social location. By adopting a critical self-reflective historical approach to ethics, we will begin to see that all histories are and are subject to interpretation, and interpretations are linguistic constructions and that all constructions can be refreshed, remodeled, or rebuilt when they prove inadequate to the ethical demands of justice.

The following chapter looks at the work of Stanley Hauerwas and analyzes how his ethic aligns with his historical methodological assumptions. He is selected as a case study for review because of he acknowledges the textual considerations of postmodern post-structuralism, yet resists their insights when it comes to calling for a normative Christian ethic. His historical approach is critical of the modern liberalism, but fails the test of self-reflexivity on account of his church/world binary and his reliance upon Constantinian master narrative. As such, his example teaches us that ethicists from the centers of privilege and power still have a long way to go in fully developing a critical self-reflexive historiography for Christian ethics.
CHAPTER 3:

METANARRATIVES ARE A HARD HABIT TO BREAK

“Stanley Hauerwas hates Liberalism,” writes Max Stackhouse in response to Hauerwas and Willimon's 1989 release of Resident Aliens. ¹ Stackhouse's comment illuminates the explicit rhetoric in this book against all things modern: a theme that characterizes much of Hauerwas' work. Liberalism, for Hauerwas, is broader than what gets labeled as “liberal” by contemporary politics. For him it denotes the entire tradition of Western political thought from Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant and John Locke, to John Rawls and Robert Nozick. ² This tradition presents us with a story about who we are, and for Hauerwas this “story” represents the greatest threat to the development of the true Christian church as a community committed to and distinguished by the “story” of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through his criticisms of liberalism, Hauerwas generally and deliberately fortifies the classical distinction between sacred and secular in order to assert an ideal type of Christian identity. Deeply rooted in historical assumptions, he conceives

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of true Christian identity as established by a commitment of oneself to a community that takes seriously the truth of its historical narrative.

This chapter examines the inadequacies of Hauerwas' anti-liberal claims by exposing the liberalism inherent in one of his fundamental background assumptions, the grand narrative of Constantinianism.\(^3\) Constantinianism is an idea that arose primarily among Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation. For these anti-Catholic groups, it was the general theory that the church existed with pristine values until the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century CE. After which, the church colluded with the state vying for worldly power and adopted violence as a solution for securing that power. This theory became known as the Constantinian synthesis and is still used widely among those in the Anabaptist tradition.\(^4\) Hauerwas assumes the validity of this theory, but takes it a step further by channeling every detail of the Christian story through it. Thus, Constantinianism functions as a master narrative throughout his corpus. Specifically, Hauerwas uses Tertullian's language of patience to create a bridge between the early and contemporary church. Reading Tertullian and the virtue of patience through

\(^3\) Once again, the use of “grand, master or meta” as a modifier for narrative are used synonymously. For the majority of this chapter I favor the term “master” because it conveys a stronger political or ethical range of meaning and coincides better with Hauerwas' own pedagogical philosophy. For an explanation of training graduate students, see Stanley Hauerwas, "Between Christian Ethics and Religious Ethics: How should Graduate Students be Trained?" *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 3 (Winter, 2003), 399.

Constaintinianism, Hauerwas concludes that a particular pre-Constintinian instantiation of patience must be embraced as a universal virtue in order for the church to be what it was originally intended to be. His method, however, means that the parameters and results depend on a false assumption.

Hauerwas’ approach to history offers a valuable case study for understanding the relationship between ethics and history among so called normative ethicists. While loosely drawn from the “Linguistic Turn” in historiography in the late 1960's, Hauerwas emphasizes narrative over and above the recovery of “facts” that consumed the historicist pursuits of figures like Walter Rauschenbusch. In his rejection of methodological objectivism expressed through historicism, he turns to narrative and acknowledges that our stories are constructed by and within communities of interpretation. He states along with William Willimon, “Story is the fundamental means of talking about and listening to God.”

Yet, beyond the assertion that the church interprets itself, Hauerwas provides no other parameters by which one may discern his interpretation of the Christian story. By bypassing the many interpretive cautions raised by a postmodern post-structuralist historiography, he precludes the church from its theoretical appropriations. Unfortunately, Hauerwas is not alone in employing a truncated historiography, which is why this analysis of his ethical-historical approach applies more broadly to normative Christian ethics. This chapter concludes by arguing that these cautions are necessary because they unmask our ideological commitments that contribute to the linguistic and material social structures of oppression that discount or reject other legitimate

narratological constructions of history. These cautions are especially important for scholars from the center like Hauerwas because they so often fail to recognize the multiple ways that ideologically-driven societal privileges are imbedded within the theories and methods we use to interpret the past.

**War on Liberalism**

Hauerwas formulates his conception of Christian identity around two independent yet interrelated interpretive categories of “church” and “world.” He elevates these categories to an absolute binary and in so doing, he falls into the long line of Augustinian thought. Yet in accordance with most of Hauerwas' biblical and theological appropriations, he fits his connection to Augustine's two-cities into his predeterminations about the Christian story; they are essential components to his master narrative.

**Social Locations**

Before delving into Hauerwas' disdain for liberalism and its corresponding historiographic implications, it is first important to catch a glimpse of “Stan the Man” to understand his social location. He was born and raised in a small Texas town to hard-working, blue collar parents who were deeply committed to Christian piety and Methodism. He would initially reject this community as “backwards” while attending

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7. William Cavanaugh prefaced *The Hauerwas Reader* with an essay entitled, “Stan the Man: a Thoroughly Biased Account of a Completely Unobjective Person.” In this essay, Cavanaugh supplies a biography of Hauerwas that he deems necessary for understanding the smattering of essays contained in this reader. He covers everything from Hauerwas' Texas upbringing and his contentions with other scholars (or rather, the contentions other scholars have with him), to his major theoretical influences and pedagogical approach. See William Cavanaugh, "Stan the Man: A Thoroughly Biased Account of a Completely Unobjective Person," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 17-32.
graduate studies at Yale, but later embrace it in his professional career as the locus for what it means to live as a community. Shortly after accepting a teaching position at Notre Dame in 1970, Hauerwas stumbled across some pamphlets by John Howard Yoder and became thoroughly convinced by Yoder's depiction of a nonviolent Jesus. While at Notre Dame, Hauerwas engaged Roman Catholic traditions and learned the practices of the church.\(^8\) Then in 1984, he moved on to the Divinity School of Duke University to accept an endowed position in theological ethics, where he currently teaches.

Hauerwas takes with him the tragedy and triumph of his relationships, both academic and personal. His mother is remembered as being overbearing and continually worried over issues of (lower) class status, attributes carrying both positive and negative consequences for her son's thought life. His father was a bricklayer who took pride in young Stanley's hard work ethic that he eventually transferred over to academics. Stanley endured a long twenty-five year marriage to his first wife, Anne, who suffered from a mental illness. During this time, he grew very close to his son, Adam. Stanley remarried Paula Gilbert in 1989, an ordained Methodist minister. He remains deeply committed to the figures in his academic training and career who have shaped his thinking. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hans Frei, H. R. Niebuhr, George Lindbeck, James Gustafson and Rowan Greer among others are all highly valued in Hauerwas' work despite his constant differentiation of his own work and from theirs.

Hauerwas affirms that he comes from an admittedly Texan perspective. He recognizes that he cannot help but be a Texan, and I appreciate this admission even though he fails to account for how his own privilege affects his ethics in a society that

\(^8\) ibid., 23.
grants much power to white males from the middle and higher classes of society. I also appreciate his particularly candid memoir, *Hannah's Child*, for its explorations of difficult trial and error events and relationships that have contributed to the “Stanley Hauerwas” that was honored as “Best theologian in America” by *Time* Magazine in 2001.9 Along with his attempts at self-location, it is important to know how or why Hauerwas writes. It is obvious that he feels compelled to write against all things that stain the purity of the church.

Many of his published works, an ever growing and extensive body, are “occasional” essays concerned with theology, political science, medical ethics, and the mentally handicapped, to name just a few topics. Many of these essays have been collected into over thirty published books. Hauerwas uses the medium of the essay to highlight the tentative nature of his claims, according to Michael Cartwright, and implies that there is no system to be found in his theological ethics.10 Believing in the “historical and therefore, provisional nature of all human discourse,” Hauerwas sees his work as “not set in stone” and he readily admits that he does not have the last word when it comes to Christian ethics.11

In contrast with his assertion not to “have the last word,” Hauerwas' basic claims, namely, that the church has been tainted by liberalism and that it must reassert itself in opposition to the “world” have not altered much over the past four decades. He writes as


11. ibid., 625, 627.

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though he does have the last word concerning the state of the Christian church, or at least as if he has tapped into the truth of the gospel story that should have the last word in Christians’ lives. As stated above, a primary issue at stake for Hauerwas is the clash of myths, or stories that shape our identities.

With Stan the Man in clearer view, I reciprocate with a brief account of my own social location. Born in rural Wyoming, my family moved to northern California in 1987 so my father could begin a second career as a junior high school wood-shop teacher. As a family, we always attended small Baptist churches that instilled in me a deep sense of piety based upon the tenets of a political and theological conservatism. I “surrendered” to a call to ministry at the age of twelve and remained committed to it until I neared the end of my studies at California Baptist University (Riverside, CA) when I discovered a passion for higher education. The years following college brought many changes as I moved to Waco, Texas to attend seminary at Truett Theological Seminary, married a mathematics major I met at Cal Baptist and moved three more times across the country before landing in Denver, Colorado. Once in Denver, I found employment with Habitat for Humanity and built houses for them for a few years before resuming graduate studies at Iliff School of Theology and University of Denver.

Intellectually, I became a devotee of Christian nonviolence as a result of reading Rene Girard and Walter Wink at the close of my seminary education. Upon deep

12. Hauerwas writes “the remarkable richness of [the stories of Israel and Jesus that reveal God] requires that a church be a community of discourse and interpretation that endeavors to tell these stories and form its life in accordance with them.” He immediately follows this statement with a claim of Christian universalism—granted a universalism founded upon the particulars of these stories—that forms the community of God. Such a stance homogenizes varieties of interpretations within Christianity and assumes his interpretation of these stories to be universally valid. See Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 92-93.
introspection and precipitated by a nearly failed marriage, I recognized that these nonviolence theories served as a mask behind which I was able to hide from a deeply rooted sense of existential insignificance. They brought continuity and order out of the chaos and instabilities all around me. I have painfully worked through those socio-theological upbringing and no longer affirm a linear connection between Jesus' violent death and the outworking of my privileged adolescent and self-inflicted “suffering” at the hands of similarly privileged “non-Christians.”

Identifying my social location is precipitated by several methodological aims. First, it reciprocates the self-located-ness found throughout Hauerwas' work. It also provides a necessary backdrop by which my readers may evaluate my sympathies and criticisms with Hauerwas' work. As such, its presence in this dissertation substantiates an acknowledgement of the “self” in a critical self-reflexive ethical-historical method. Epistemologically, the acknowledgement of an author's social location helps to identify important factors associated with ideology and relative degrees of societal power and privilege. Finally, identifying my social location begins the process of reciprocation proportional to the appropriation of ideas, concepts and narratives from marginalized perspectives.


14. Gloria Albrecht's critique of Hauerwas' A Community of Character offers a fitting example. She identifies her own location as well as that of Hauerwas to emphasize the particularity of knowledge and its connections with one's explicit and latent ideological assumptions. See The Character of our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

15. In the Ethics Section panel on “Ethical Contributions of Marginalized Communities in the United States: New Ethical Methodologies, Critiques, and Approaches to Moral Reason” at the 2009
particularity for granted, I embark upon the journey towards a critical self-reflexive
historiography.

Disdaining Liberalism

Hauerwas' categories of church and world operate interdependently. On the one
hand, the church is necessary for teaching the world that it is the world; “without the
church the world literally has no hope of salvation since the church is necessary for the
world to know it is part of a story that it cannot know without the church.”16 The church
exists for the world's benefit as it demands the existence of the “other” in order for “it” to
benefit from what “we” have. In this sense Hauerwas embraces the alterity of the world
because the church identifies itself in opposition to the world. What “we” have is the

American Academy of Religion National Conference in Montréal, Canada, Stacey Floyd-Thomas began
her response to the panelists with the claim that one cannot “appropriate before one reciprocates” the key
insights of Womanist scholarship. This command was directed at the scholars of privilege (i.e. primarily
but not always males and non-blacks) whose work often take for granted their privilege and proceed sans
particularity. Floyd-Thomas' remarks destabilize the assumptions of those in discursive centers by
exploring the unexamined epistemological assumptions legitimating certain forms of race, gender and class
and not others. Certainly, she is not alone in this observation, as marginalized scholars in the United States
from feminist, queer, Womanist, Latina/o and Black perspectives decry the normative assumptions of the
dominant “classes.” In addition to Albrecht, see, Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the
Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990); Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Mining the Motherlode:
Methods in Womanist Ethics (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006); Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Deeper Shades of
La Torre, Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking (Waco: Baylor University
Press, 2010); Ada María Isasi-Díaz, En La Lucha [in the Struggle]: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology
(Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power (New York: Seabury
Press, 1969); David B. Batstone, Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas (New York:
Routledge, 1997). This thesis concerning the center/margin epistemological assumptions is still needed
since it has yet to hit the “tap root” of normative Euro-American scholarship. But it is important to
recognize that the center/margin binary is a construction equally subject to critique. In Monica A.
Coleman, “Must I Be a Womanist?” Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 22, no. 1 (Spring, 2006), 85-96,
she problematizes the image of the “Womanism” for its inability to account for black lesbian women's
experience. By consequence, if womanism covers over the experiences of black lesbians, it too is capable
of over-determining the binary between center and margins. Sympathetic to both arguments, I proceed as a
white heterosexual male who listens to and learns from marginalized discourses, realizing along with
historian Vernon Robbins, “that most people regularly live in two, three or more worlds at the same time.”

16. Stanley Hauerwas, After Christendom?: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and
a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 36.
truth of history as understood through the gospel story. On the other hand, the world is necessary for the existence of the church. If the world did not digress from the will and favor of God there would be no need for the existence of a church. The very existence of the church stands as a testimony against the world.

This brief account of the church/world binary anticipates Hauerwas' disdain for liberalism. *Resident Aliens*, along with many other of his works, attempts to justify the place of the Christian church within the larger historical salvation process of which God remains in constant control. Without the world, there is no need for the church to stand in witness against it. The existence of the church provides testimony of God's plan of salvation for this world. Christians are to be the outpost or colony established in a “hostile environment” that will in “subtle but deadly ways, corrupt and co-opt us” if Christians lack vigilance.\(^\text{17}\) The church must always reject the world's categories if it is to convict the world of its sin and need for repentance. It does this by being the church, which is the only political alternative to the world.\(^\text{18}\) And in the past few centuries the categories of the world have been supplied by liberalism.

The modern societies that emerge from the Enlightenment are plagued not simply with the tripartite evils of racism, sexism and classism, as decried by many feminist, womanist and liberationist theologians and ethicists.\(^\text{19}\) These evils are themselves

\(^{17}\) Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 139.

\(^{18}\) Stanley Hauerwas, "Preaching Repentance in a Time of War," *Journal for Preachers* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2008), 16-17. See also his, *A Community of Character*, 84, where he states, “The challenge is always for the church to be a ‘contrast model’ for all polities that know not God.” The church is political because it stands as an alternative to the *polis* of the world. Much evidence for this view is found in *After Christendom?*, 192.

\(^{19}\) Refer to Chapter 1 for my treatment of these themes by ethicists and the welcomed addition of a fourth arena of sexual orientation.
products of the values of liberalism, which stresses a humanistic and therefore, mistaken, understanding of equality and justice. He states, “Liberalism is successful exactly because it supplies us with a myth that seems to make sense of our social origins.” But liberalism is also “coercive” because it tempts us into believing that “we are free to make up our own story” since “we have no story” to begin with. We are told that we are free, autonomous agents that can shape our own individual destinies.

Hauerwas thinks the stories provided by liberalism are born out of the misconception of human freedom. The extent to which the church adopts or accepts liberalism is proportional to the loss of its true Christian identity. Put a different way, the true church loses its witness to and against the world when it adopts the forms of thinking that come from the world. The more enlightened the church becomes by Enlightenment thought, the less relevant is its message of salvation to the world and the less the church exists as the world's alternative.

Liberals, according to Hauerwas, want Christians to believe that identity formation is necessarily a convergent process, or the result of overlapping contingencies. This process stresses commonality or togetherness as a result of its founding myths of objectivism and universalism. But commonality results from the presumption that we are all individual and autonomous selves running about trying not to infringe upon any one else's autonomy. Indeed, this autonomy is what drives Hauerwas' understanding of

20. After Christendom?, 78.
21. ibid., 84.
22. Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 78.
justice from a Rawlsian perspective.\textsuperscript{23} The Christian who believes this fallacy allows the world to tell her who she is and, thus, falls victim to the Constantinian synthesis.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Church as the World's Alternative}

Focusing on liberalism as his chief opponent, Hauerwas portrays the church as the only viable alternative to the world. According to Hauerwas, existence within society automatically makes both individuals and communities political. Existence cannot help but be political because of the social dynamics of living together in a society bent on asserting the autonomy of the individual. The contemporary “world” operates on the myths of liberalism and, both passively and actively, forces those myths on its citizens, thus constraining their actions and attempting to shape their mindsets. In like manner, the church possesses its own identity-shaping myths and is political precisely because it exists as the world's alternative. Claiming an ontologically political ground for the church, Hauerwas attempts to escape his critics when they accuse him of sectarianism.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Hauerwas, \textit{After Christendom?}, 45-49. In this section, Hauerwas begins by presenting the justice theory of John Rawls as a type of liberal views on justice, but ends by implying that if someone agrees with the concept of justice then they believe in Rawls. Through this move, Hauerwas conflates Rawls, justice and liberalism.

\textsuperscript{24} Hauerwas is well aware of the mechanisms within the United States that perpetuate its myths. For this reason, he continually argues against the public school system for inaugurating our youth into the myths and presumptions of our times. Although mostly explicated through his critiques of higher education, he and Willimon provide a telling case of Willimon's daughter. They state, “We believe nothing is more destructive for Christians in North America than the habits of mind we are taught in public schools. The narratives we are taught in those schools obscure the church as the teller of the tale of what it means for us to know the world as world.” When she enters high school chemistry class, she is given a white lab coat and goggles as an initiation into the new “religion” of scientism, and taught to think in accordance with this new “religion.” This example is offered as a warning against the dangers of world as it inculcates our children to “think” like, or identify with, the world. See Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Where Resident Aliens Live}, 47, 78-80. See also “Between Christian Ethics and Religious Ethics: How Xn ethics students should be trained” \textit{Journal of Religious Ethics} 31. no. 3 (winter, 2003): 399-412; \textit{After Christendom?}, 140-144; James Stoner Jr. et al., "Theology as Knowledge: A Symposium," \textit{First Things}, no. 163 (May, 2006), 21-27, with Hauerwas' response included therein.

\textsuperscript{25} The most famous sectarian accusation against Hauerwas came from his former teacher, James Gustafson. Gustafson warned against turning God into a "tribal God of a minority of the world's
The church loses its relevancy and political potency, however, when it homogenizes its concerns and identity with those of the world. The church denies its ontological otherness when it falls victim to Constantinianism and, consequently fails to provide a viable political alternative to the world, stumbling instead into a mode of being that presents “a hard habit to break.”

As the world's alternative, the true Christian church provides a contrasting myth that redefines what it means to be a person in a community. The church teaches us that Christians inherit a story that reconstitutes their identity. The foundation of this pre-existing story is Jesus; it is Jesus' story that gives organizational form to the church. However, while Jesus provides the force for this new myth, the myth itself was formed by the story of the Israelites and was later adopted by the ensuing Christian tradition. Today

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27. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 72, and *After Christendom?*, 18. The Constantinianism Hauerwas writes about is an important carry-over from his intellectual mentor, John Howard Yoder. Yoder claims that Constantinianism is more than just the existence of a Christian emperor, “but about Christians weakening, thinning, or giving up any ethic that was critical of the emperor's policies and demands for loyalty.” He points to Justyn Martyr as the example of the first Christian to be Constantinian. John Howard Yoder et al., *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 20.
each individual person who converts to Christianity must adopt this story over against the prevailing stories of the outside world.

Conversion is an essential component of Hauerwas' conception of Christian identity as it relates to the church/world binary. David Hester even criticizes Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens*, saying “there is no room [in their conception of an inherently hostile world] for dialogue, only conversion.” 28 For Hauerwas, Christian conversion is a total transformation from one mode of living/thinking, to another. This concept of conversion follows George Lindbeck's analysis of the need to derive new categories in order to meet the challenges of liberalism in new ways. 29 Conversion is the giving up of a false set of narratives in favor of true ones. Christian conversion juxtaposes two competing categories of identity: just as there can be no overlap between the gospel story and the story of liberalism, a convert's identity is so thoroughly metamorphosed that there ought be no regression to his former life. If, however, regression does take place, it denies the true story of the church and the convert sinks into the mire of Constantinianism. 30

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30. A full description of Constantinianism in Hauerwas' work is discussed below. 117
Salvation for Hauerwas is most clearly seen through the image of the undoing of Babel, which he uses to make a linguistic argument. Conversion requires Christians to learn to speak a new language. As Wittgenstein points out, “in order to discover whether the picture [corresponding with reality] is true or false we must compare it with reality.” For Hauerwas, Christian identity is solidified under new concepts and ways of thinking that are inherently Christian, i.e. in a properly “ordered relation to God.” Christians stand in a unique relationship with reality because their narrative declares its truth through its God-ordered language. This properly ordered relationship to God in the Christian story is reality, and, therefore, is true. The new language Christians learn contains meaningful and coherent narratives consisting of metaphors and stories that “suggest how we should see and describe the world—that is, how we should 'look-on' ourselves, others and the world.” Hauerwas claims that “we cannot understand the world until we are transformed into persons who can use the language of faith to describe the world right.” This new language enables Christians to see “world accurately and


32. Hauerwas discusses this concept of learning a new language in several of his essays and books. In After Christendom, for example, he uses the analogy of learning to lay bricks as requiring an initiation into a long history of a trade and the learning of how to speak the language of the bricklayer. However, Hauerwas fails to account for differences of language within construction trades not only of nomenclature, but also of actual building methods. This analogy transfers over quite well to my discussion of the nature of the church in the last section of this chapter and in Chapter 6.


34. Hauerwas, The Church as God's New Language, 144.


36. Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 28. Hauerwas and Willimon claim that Christian language “works quite differently than the world's language” because it requires self-transformation in order to understand. It works differently because its agenda is not “set by the dominant culture.” See Hauerwas and Willimon, Where Resident Aliens Live, 58-59, 70. Relying on MacIntyre's Whose Justice?
without illusion.”37 Thus, the church is the only true community because it possesses the truth about all existence.

With this move towards language and meaning, Hauerwas moves from a quasi two-cities theme and into another Augustinian theme. Hauerwas adheres to the crede, ut intellegas (believe so that you may understand) dictum and he uses it to separate the language of liberalism from the language of the church.38 The language of faith is essential for the church to know what it means to be a church consistent with its own story. Christians undergo a full transformation of the self and this new self sees reality through this transformation. Reality can only be understood rightly from the inside of the church's language structures. By implication, critique and criticisms of the church or its story are only viable if generated by those within this transformed community.39 The Christian is “engrafted” into the church through its sacraments, which serve as a conduit for the story of which she is now a part.40 The church's language operates in isolation from the meanings of the world's signs and significations and confounds the world when

37. Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 50.

38. This classic formulation of the relationship between faith and reason, whereby faith epistemologically precedes understanding has been elaborated by many Christian thinkers since Augustine. Anselm of Canterbury, for example, offers the most famous articulation of fides quaerens intellectum (faith seeking understanding).

39. Here, I return to Hauerwas' general approach to pedagogy. He boasts about how his students are required to master his work before they are capable of producing any thought worth discussing. Critiques of his work become meaningful only after one has proven to be a worthy student of his thought.

40. Hauerwas, The Church as God's New Language, 149.
it offers prognoses about the church. Evaluation from outside the bounds of the sacramental community lack the truth of reality and, therefore, the authority to say anything meaningful at all. Fortunately for Hauerwas the church is justified in interpreting the world since it possesses truth.

**Criticizing the Critic**

**Hauerwas' Criticism of Postmodernism**

Much to their delight, Hauerwas and Willimon are finding that “the epistemological assumptions undergirding liberalism are beginning to unravel.” Due in large part to the epistemological shifts generated by the “Linguistic Turn” in the 1960s, postmodernism has played a significant role in destabilizing the methodological objectivism of modern liberalism. Hauerwas finds postmodernism to be a useful ally for its bombardment against liberal thinking. In so far as modernism has become “enshrined in the academic disciplines dominating the modern university,” postmodernism is useful for challenging the assumption that “the way things are is the way things have to be.”

He also credits specific postmodernist theorists such as Michel Foucault for posing a meaningful challenge to modern forms of knowledge and then calls theologians to a similar “radical and imaginative” task.

Yet even in his admiration of Foucault, Hauerwas finds postmodernism to be “a far too comforting story” for saying anything useful about the church, since the church

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43. ibid., 36-37.
already rejects liberalism.\textsuperscript{44} Instead of following modernism's positivistic creation of history under the guise of the objective sciences, postmodernism operates by a total denial of history.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, it swung too far in the opposite direction. Hauerwas challenges other common aspects of postmodernism, namely anti-foundationalism, extreme skepticism and atheism. Interestingly, as Hauerwas combats these other aspects of postmodernism we begin to get a sense for his categories of language. According to Derrida's principle of \textit{différance}, negative attributes constitute the identity of a symbol. Stating that postmodernism is \textit{not} anti-foundationalist, skeptical and atheistic, Hauerwas never follows through with explaining what postmodernism is. For him it is enough simply to criticize it for not being being “post' anything” and then dismiss it as another substance-less liberal hypothesis.\textsuperscript{46}

Along with its lack of substance, Hauerwas criticizes postmodernism for its denial of history. Bemoaning this influence on the contemporary church, he asserts that “Christians have a stake in history” despite the fact that Christian theologians have allowed modernism and postmodernism to creep into theology.\textsuperscript{47} The church, he contrasts, serves and protects the historical truth of the gospel of Christ and possesses within itself the means for “a critique of its own mistakes in a way that modernity and

\textsuperscript{44} ibid., 37.

\textsuperscript{45} ibid., 39. Hauerwas is following Nicholas Boyle's critique of postmodernism and largely agrees with Boyle's assessments.

\textsuperscript{46} ibid., 37. See also note 5 on p 223. Since, according to Hauerwas, postmodernism has no attributes it is an extension of modernism, and therefore is complicit with liberalism.

\textsuperscript{47} ibid., 37-38.
postmodernity cannot provide.” 48 Thus, Hauerwas denies that the church has any use for
critical tools used to deconstruct modernist ideologies because it already
possesses, somehow and for reasons not fully described, tools for that purpose.

The long tradition of Christianity is for Hauerwas, both the affirmation of history
that postmodernism is said to discard, and the rejection of the self-made and detached
history projected by modernism. In order to substantiate further the church as the
alternative to the world, Hauerwas looks at the sources of authority we rely upon to make
claims about reality. He asserts that “there can be no knowledge without appropriate
authority” and unlike power, authority “takes its rationale not from the deficiencies of
community but from the intrinsic demands of a common life.” 49 Since modernism and its
cognate, postmodernism, locate authority in the rational and autonomous individual, they
discount the necessity of the sanctioning community, and this is their great error.
Furthermore, since Hauerwas rejects postmodernism's claims to have moved beyond
modernism, postmodernism ultimately lacks the qualifications for fully extricating the
church from its reliance on liberalism that Hauerwas and Willimon had hoped for.
Postmodernism's misunderstanding of authority corroborates their view that the church is
oriented correctly in view of reality.

**Postmodern Traces**

Hauerwas actually demonstrates a key postmodern position when trying to
authorize the church as the locus of truth over and above postmodern academes. Traces
of postmodernism are existent in Hauerwas' rejection of postmodernism. For evidence

48. Ibid., 37.

49. Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, 105; and *A Community of Character*, 60.

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we turn to the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard works through issues related to the re-legitimation of authority in the move from modern to postmodern epistemology. Instead of following the modern modes of knowledge that were once self-legitimated according to the statutes of scientific methods, postmodern epistemology finds its legitimation by entering the “metadiscourse” of science based on questioning rather than on totalization.\(^{50}\) Pressed by postmodern calls for the re-legitimation of knowledge, the sciences responded by rejecting the use of grand narratives via self-legitimation, opting instead for external and smaller narratives to justify the epistemological authority they once had. These *petit recit* localize knowledge and situate truth in relationship to the particularized linguistic structures that constitute the social bonds of those localities. Hauerwas' notion of Christians learning a new language upon their conversion is an attempt to re-legitimate knowledge in relation to the particular narrative of the church. By making this move, he relocates authority by taking it away from the forms of modern liberalism and placing it in the hands of an alternative and localized social bond: in this case, the Christian church. This move is not a step beyond postmodernism as Hauerwas might desire, but *is* in fact an application of Lyotard's postmodern methodology.

Despite his misgivings about his own complicity with postmodernism, Hauerwas unwittingly highlights a recognized co-dependence between modernism and postmodernism. Drawing again from *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard explains that

at its most basic, postmodernism represents an “incredulity toward metanarratives.” ⁵¹

Lyotard wrestles with the interconnections between modernism and postmodernism and
then publishes an essay eight years later in which he recasts the postmodern enterprise as
a perpetual “rewriting of modernity.” ⁵² Lyotard's delineates in this essay how
postmodernism re-narrates the histories (or stories) cast by modernism, but does so in full
view of the limitations and blind spots discovered by its deconstructive methodology.

Because the “post” in postmodern does not come after modernism in a purely
linear sense, it offers Hauerwas no alternatives to what already exists in the world.
Emphasizing this point, he states, “Christians must be able to narrate postmodernism in a
manner that postmodernism cannot narrate Christianity. Or more adequately: we must
show how Christianity provides the resources for a critique of its own mistakes in a way
that modernity or postmodernity cannot provide” ⁵³ Thus, Christians do not need
postmodern deconstruction since they can identify their own blind spots, aporias and
unconscious ideological commitments for themselves.

For Hauerwas, the church possesses the capacity for self-criticism in part because
of the definitional boundaries he imposes upon it. As indicated above, the church is the

⁵¹. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, xxiv. Even with this acute observation, Lyotard never explicitly makes the connection in this book between the modern credulous acceptance of some meta-narratives and the postmodern unacknowledged reliance on other meta-narratives. Fredrick Jameson accentuates this omission in his preface to the later-added English edition of this work to which he applies his notion of a “political unconscious.” See Fredrick Jameson, "Forward," in Lyotard, Jean François, the Postmodern Condition, xii.

⁵². Jean François Lyotard, "Re-Writing Modernity," SubStance 16, no. 54 (1987), 3-9. The improvement lies in a double displacement: a lexical commutation from "post-" to "re-"; and a syntactical one dealing with the transfer of the prefix which is now connected with "writing" rather than with "modernity." This essay does not present a break from his earlier observations about the postmodern condition, but offers a further working out of the implications of his original position.

alternative to the world. It is a community formed and directed by its own story. Again referring to the notion of *différance*, the church is *not* the world and the world is *not* the church. Whenever Christians cross over to the world, assuming its identities and categories, they are immediately guilty of the sin of Constantinianism. When the church commingles with the world, it is mixed or hybrid, and as such, it is not pure, not natural, and not true. These boundaries establish the parameters upon which the church must be understood.

By defining the church and world in this way, Hauerwas edges up against a tautology. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), an influential figure for Hauerwas' understanding of story, describes two extreme cases existing among truth-conditions, stating, “In the one case, the proposition is true for all the truth-possibilities of the elementary propositions. We say that the truth-conditions are *tautological*. In the second case the proposition is false for all the truth-possibilities. The truth-conditions are *self-contradictory.*”54 Since Hauerwas' definition and subsequent characteristics of the church are always valid and universally unconditioned, they contain the conditions set by Wittgenstein for a tautology. Even if Hauerwas' binary exceeds the parameters for a full-fledged tautology, it comes close enough to problematize its relationship to reality.55 By definitionally over-determining the church with rigid boundaries, he smooths-over the many textures of Christian expression and practice and reifies the dominant tradition's neglect for the gaps, silences and aporias of its history.


55. ibid., 99. In Wittgenstein, “in the tautology the conditions of agreement with the world—the presenting relations—cancel one another, so that it stands in no presenting relation to reality.”
Traces of Modernism: Constantinian Christianity

True to the definitional boundaries of his church/world binary, Hauerwas turns all distinctions between the two into essential and unbridgeable categories and relies upon Constantinianism to historically validate this position. The church exists as a community faithfully adhering to the truth of the gospel as lived by Jesus. The church must rely on its connection to its story and on its faith that God is the one figure with complete control over the formation of this story. For Hauerwas, the church's quintessential ethic is to live into its definition and simply be the church. Individual Christians practice this ethic when they participate in the church's story through the doing of the sacraments in worship to God. Sacramental participation actualizes the Christian story in the lives of believers, supplying them with their true identity as the only alternative to the world.

As Hauerwas describes, the church authorizes or legitimates the truth of its story by nature of its connection to Jesus. The concept of Constantinianism is Hauerwas' hermeneutical “key” for accounting for the unruly middle space between church and world. In this sense, Constantinianism becomes an essential part of a totalizing narratological theme. It functions historically as a first-cause for the church's decline into the corruption of worldly power structures and narratologically as a comprehensive explanation for the lose ends in his church/world binary. Ultimately, Hauerwas' use of the Constantinianism mirrors both the form and content of similar master narratives driven by modern liberal and historical sources. His reliance upon it determines his reading of history and implicates him in the patterns of his despised liberalism.

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56. See for example, Stanley Hauerwas, "Remembering as a Moral Task: The Challenge of the Holocaust," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 341. The church does not have a social ethic, but is a social ethic.
Criticism of Hauerwas' complicity with modern liberalism begins with an observation by Gloria Albrecht. Albrecht acutely points out how Hauerwas' turn to narrative represents a “new foundation for the assertion of universal truth.”57 His use of narrative does not necessitate a collusion with universalism, but the ground upon which he understands and communicates narrative does. Albrecht connects the various ways Hauerwas assumes a singular normative Christian narrative rooted in his particular social location. For example, he proposes that all Christians adopt the virtue of “freely suffering” and “freely serving” since these are hallmarks of the kingdom of God.58 Not only are they hallmarks, but they sufficiently guide the church in its quest for nonviolence. Yet these virtues are only seen as virtues for Christians whose privilege it is to willfully take-on a posture of suffering and service. For Hauerwas, even Christians from the margins, for instance, for whom suffering and serving are not an option but a requirement for existence, must freely embrace these virtues. In this light, Hauerwas' church must universally adopt the principles of the Christian tradition that Hauerwas identifies.

Elaborating on her initial observation above, Albrecht's most noteworthy examples criticize his individualistic universalization of Christianity.59 She points to the “we” in Hauerwas' discussions of the church as evidence that the way Hauerwas

57. Albrecht, *The Character of our Communities*, 26. She is careful to clarify at the very least that Hauerwas asserts what is “universally Christian.”

58. Part of the reason Hauerwas rejects liberation theology, of which he only discusses Gustavo Gutierrez, on account of Gutierrez's opposition to “freely suffering.” A stance against suffering and

addresses the church presupposes universal application. His social location includes the
privileges and assumptions shared by other white male middle-class citizens of the
United States. Because of Hauerwas' failure to account for his socially located
knowledge, the Christian character he universally applies to the entire church are
necessarily suspect. 60 It is suspect not because is stems from a particular social location,
but because Hauerwas fails to acknowledge that his social location is a factor in the
construction of the sorts of character he espouses.

Along with his views regarding a universal Christian church, Hauerwas' rejection
of the liberal autonomous individual excludes the possibility for a multifarious approach
to Christian identity. Christian identity is imparted by the church upon conversion and as
the convert learns the church's language, he or she will become more Christian and less
anything else. 61 Although Hauerwas might appreciate the postmodern emphasis on local
narratives, he resists the idea of heteronomous understanding of Christian identity. He
actually demonizes this idea by equating it with the liberal virtue of “diversity” or
“multiculturalism.” 62 By definition, the church has nothing to do with liberalism.

60. Miguel De La Torre raises a similar critique against Hauerwas' and his universalized and
idealistic vision of the church. De La Torre calls Hauerwas out for discounting the importance of justice as
a central ethical concern for Christians. De La Torre states, “[Hauerwas] confuses an unapologetic
conviction of the truth of the Christian narrative with a Eurocentric interpretation of what the truth might
be, thereby converting his truth claims into a facade masking a power that reinforces Eurocentric Christian
dominance in the discourse as well as the culture.” De La Torre, Latina/o Social Ethics, 22.

61. Albrecht provides succinct textual evidences for Hauerwas' dismissal of women, persons of
color and lower socio-economic classes, and homosexuals in her essay, Gloria Albrecht, Unmasking the
Differences: Nonviolence and Social Control, 16-27.

Without this distinction the church could never be what it is, namely the nonviolent alternative to a world governed by violence and coercion.\(^63\)

Turning now to history and interpretation, Hauerwas reads history through a totalizing narratological scheme, i.e. through a master narrative. He uses Constantinianism to impose distinctions, continuities and unities between the current and past formulations of the church. Throughout his corpus, Hauerwas harkens back to the church's great fall in the fourth century CE where Christians “attempted through force of the state to make the world into the kingdom” of God on earth.\(^64\) In so doing, they adopted Constantine's vision, which “changed the original order of things” thus leading to the blurring of boundaries between church and world. In short, the church lost its identity and way beginning in the fourth century and ever since have run the risk of becoming a completely irrelevant church.\(^65\)

Constantinianism functions as a historical first-cause for Hauerwas. Constantine's inauguration of peace with Christianity serves as a static referent for the beginning of Christianity's slow march to modern liberalism. Hauerwas generalizes that “Constantine knew that, in order to keep the Empire afloat among people were no longer classically pagan, they would have to be made imperially Christian.”\(^66\) He then goes on to explain how “the best [Christian] minds were enlisted in the Constantinian enterprise of making

\(^{63}\) Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 45, 50. I expand upon the theme of Christianity and violence later in this chapter and again in chapter 5.


the faith credible to the powers-that-be so that Christians might now share in those powers.”67 Not only does Hauerwas oversimplify Constantine's “conversion” to Christianity and neglect the highly complex textual complexities involved in late ancient interpretation, he finds in the fourth century CE the ultimate historical scapegoat on which to pin the ills of present day Christianity.68

By moving from Constantine the Emperor to Constantinianism the phenomenon, Hauerwas develops a context for the church's original sin.69 When defending the image of the church as colony, he and Willimon state, “when Christians were the enemy of the Roman Empire, they knew who their enemy was. The Enemy was 'out there.'... Once Christians, however, had made peace with Rome they began to think that salvation had to do with the inner life.”70 With Constantine as the linchpin, the true, natural or original state of the church inevitably fell into depravity. As Christians moved towards Rome they severed their ties from the pure church. This logic is necessary to Hauerwas' understanding of the Christian story. Without a concrete historical fall-guy, Hauerwas would have no historical precedent upon which to describe subsequent marriages between church and state.

67. ibid., 22.

68. The flat Christinized view of Constantine has been challenged in recent years and substituted with a more nuanced reading of this fourth century CE emperor. For examples, see Leithart, Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom; and Hans A. Pohlsander, The Emperor Constantine, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004); Jeremy Schott, Christianity, Empire and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

69. Emphasis added. While the church's downfall began immediately after 313 CE, Hauerwas depicts the downfall of the world as occurring not so much with Adam and Eve like in the classical Judeo-Christian tradition, but with the Tower of Babel. It was through the episode of Babel that violence and war entered human existence, and, according to Hauerwas, violence and war are the penultimate representations of human sin. Hauerwas, The Church as God's New Language, 142-162.

Christendom and all other forms of civic religion are types of Constantinianism. As mentioned above, the appeal to merge church interests with state interests is found in the Christian's desire for power.\textsuperscript{71} In Hauerwas' totalizing binary, all discourse concerning justice by the church and by Christian ethicists (here he means social ethicists) stems from a desire to share governmental power and serve as a “social actor.”\textsuperscript{72} Thus, all discussion and work towards justice is Constantinian. Governmental power and social action are for Hauerwas two sides of the same coin, i.e. the denial of God's control over the course of history and the search for significance and relevance exterior to the walls of the church. By joining with the state, the church becomes “complicit with the hegemonic liberalism of the world” and neglects the reality that its entire identity is found exclusively in the story of God.\textsuperscript{73}

Narratologically, Constantinianism functions in Hauerwas' corpus as a master narrative, ordering the story and infusing its meaning into its every detail. Ironically, even though Hauerwas' notion of Constantinianism possesses a historical referent, his application of the term operates in exclusion of any historical particularity.\textsuperscript{74} Constantinianism provides an overarching rubric that organizes and supplies meaning to the rest of the Christian narrative. It operates under the same conditions of other master narratives used by nineteenth and early twentieth century historians that governed and legitimated modern forms of knowledge. The remaining portion of this section

\textsuperscript{71} Hauerwas, \textit{After Christendom?}, 60.

\textsuperscript{72} ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{73} An observation articulated by Miguel A. De La Torre, \textit{Latina/o Social Ethics}, 22.

\textsuperscript{74} Hauerwas' turn towards narrative occurs as a reaction against the supposed “facts” that “create, or at least legitimate, the public world.” Hauerwas, \textit{After Christendom?}, 63.
reconnects Hauerwas’ Constantinian master narrative with high modern historiographic master narratives that typically claim essentialist objectivity or rationalized universality.

**Constantinian Habits**

Hauerwas is not naive when it comes to analysis. He has worked hard to root out liberalism from his thinking and to derive a “system” for how the church should exist in a post-liberal way. However, his insistence that the Christian story exists in isolation from Enlightenment myths underestimates the depths of modern paradigms in his own thinking. Ferdinand de Saussure pointed out that language signs carry a range of diachronic and synchronic semantic ranges. These ranges can be manipulated in various ways but are never under the complete control of one linguistic context or referent. Even though Hauerwas thinks his scholarship escapes modern liberalism, the wider semantic ranges of modern liberalism restrict him from completely extricating it from his understanding of history.

It is not difficult to identify specific examples of Enlightenment and modern assumptions in Hauerwas' work. A student of Christian history, especially of late ancient Christianity, would be remiss if she failed to see certain parallels between Hauerwas' use of Constantinianism and the treatment of Constantine by Adolf von Harnack. Harnack has had a tremendous influence on late ancient Christian studies and on historiography as

75. See my treatment of Saussure's work in the previous chapter.

a whole generations of scholars have reframed, rebutted or supported his work. Harnack saw no limitations to the conferral of master narratives onto his scientific reconstruction of the past; master narratives supplied the categories and questions with which he approached history.

In *Militia Christi*, Harnack espoused a Constantinian theory about the decline of a pristine Christianity by directly relating it to Constantine. This theory of Christianity's “fall from grace” unfolds with three distinct parts that are comparable to the story of Christianity told by Hauerwas. First, Harnack describes the nature of the early Christian church prior to Constantine in the fourth century as primarily being pacifistic. Second, Harnack makes grand assumptions about the nature of a person's identity following conversion. Third, Constantine is interpreted as the fulcrum around which Christianity is irrevocably altered.

With relation to the nature of Christianity prior to Constantine, Harnack states that since all Christian sources prior to 170 CE are silent about issues of the military, it was a non-issue in the life of the church.\(^77\) By implication, he asserts that prior to this date the church was in unanimous agreement that Christian participation in state military service was unacceptable. He claims that prior to Constantine, Christians rejected literal warfare even though Christian writers routinely used militaristic imagery to orient Christian identity.\(^78\) The widespread use of militaristic imagery later spawned a great deal of


\(^{78}\) According to Harnack, several Christians between 170 and the great Constantinian shift came out strongly against violence and warfare, but continued to use military imagery to describe the Christian life. Origen, for example, argued that the monk was the purest and most real Christian combatant, condemning murder by both word and sword. Likewise, Tertullian appeals to the example of Peter's disarmament in order to convince Christians against joining the imperial legions.
confusion between literal and figurative interpretations that led Christianity through a relatively easy transition to imperial Christianity under Constantine.  

Harnack's observations concerning the role of militaristic language that played into imperial Christianity deserve merit. This argument is the closest any high-modernist historian comes to discourse analysis. However, Harnack's description of a pacifistic pre-Constantinian Christianity remains suspect. The story Harnack tells of early Christianity is one of unity and cohesion. His story is corroborated entirely upon a lack of evidence to the contrary. John Anthony McGuckin refutes Harnack's portrayal of Christianity's "sclerotic decline" that culminates in Constantine's conversion and Christianity's theologically justified use of coercive force. Instead of assuming that a lack of sufficient evidence reflects cohesion and unity, McGuckin reads between the lines to understand the "success" of Constantine. Instead of a magic transition to power, McGuckin outlines that imperial changes were effective as a direct result of an already "powerful lobby." of Christians. Without this lobby and its existent structure, we can speculate that Constantine would not have been as successful as he was. Thus, the church in the fourth century CE did not undergo a magical switch as a result of state power, but state powers developed out of a context ripe for the making.

79. ibid., 99.


81. ibid., 192.

82. ibid., 192.
Similarities between Hauerwas and Harnack also exist with relation to a singular understanding of Christian identity. Harnack claims that Roman citizenship ceased when one became a soldier of Christ.\textsuperscript{83} This new type of soldier represented the invisible reality of the kingdom of God by visibly participating in the Christian oath of baptism. The difference between the Christian soldier and the Roman centurion was that Christianity's concept of war and warfare inverted the traditional understanding of soldiery. Instead of the warrior's obedience, courage, loyalty and self-abnegation coming as result of the cult of the emperor, the Christian warrior found these virtues organized under a God who warred on their behalf.\textsuperscript{84} Implied is the assumption that Christian conversion unraveled all identity-based allegiances to the empire as well as its corresponding privileges. Simply stated, once someone converted to Christianity, he or she became Christian. A shift in allegiances ratified by the ceremony of baptism was sufficient to reorient one's entire identity in favor of another cultural orientation and to create clear-cut boundaries between the church and the rest of the Roman world.\textsuperscript{85} Just like with Hauerwas, Harnack compartmentalizes all expressions of identity and disallows the possibility of Christians being subject to multiple identity centers simultaneously.

A third parallel between Harnack and Hauerwas concerns Constantine himself and the new version of Christianity that ensues there from. Harnack reads Constantine's conversion as occurring the night before the battle of the Milivian Bridge when military

\textsuperscript{83} Harnack, \textit{Militia Christi}, 44.

\textsuperscript{84} ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{85} I pick up this argument again in chapter four with a discussion of Tertullian's punic identity. Even an apologetic rhetorician such as Tertullian is able to hang-on to cultural expressions of identity while also advocating for Christian distinctions, without relegating church and world into mutually exclusive categories.

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victory was promised under the Christian insignia, Chai-Rho (X-P). The ensuing victory won Constantine the imperial crown and represented the winning over of original Christian convictions to the imperial power structures and leading the way towards the debauchery of the Middle Ages. 86 Although existent historical evidence suggests that Christians began joining the Roman legions as early as 170 CE, according to Harnack, Constantine concretizes what until this time is a minority opinion among Christians. Constantine serves as the fulcrum forever shifting the direction of the Christian church.

By prioritizing the Milivian Bridge episode, Harnack overlooks other political and theological factors leading to massive shifts in the late Roman Empire. 87 Under the umbrella of his Constantinian master narrative, such details are non-essential. We ought to remember, McGuckin cautions, that Harnack offers a positivistic story “that took its origin as part of a whole dossier of similar stories meant to describe the movement of Christianity through history in terms of early promise, followed by rapid failure and succeeded by the age of reform and reprimission of the primitive righteousness.” 88 For McGuckin, this grand story is crude because it reads all early Christian texts through the same lens and, therefore, dismisses important distinctions between Eastern and Western Christian writers. 89

86. Militia Christi, 103.

87. Constantine's conversion later in life is now generally accepted, but so too is the fact that many Christian emperors delayed baptism until later in life. It was not until 324 CE that Constantine began openly revealing his preference for Christianity by enacting a series of reparations to Christians. Yet later emperors such as Constantius II and the two Theodosians who passed and enforced extreme anti-pagan legislations. See Pohlander, The Emperor Constantine.


89. McGuckin goes on to argue for a non-western reading of Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Basil. By parsing them out with reference to an eastern Christian emphasis on the “Two Ages,” which never collapse this age of turmoil with the coming age of God, McGuckin shows how Harnack's view of
Even though Hauerwas rejects modern objectivism and claims to use Constantinianism more as a “conceptual tool” than as an objective historical fact, he falls into the trap of ignoring his own ideological biases. Hauerwas' commitment to narrative is a welcomed departure from Harnack's positivistic historicism. However, his application of Constantinianism subverts his efforts towards the particularity of narrative by homogenizing the multitude of Christianities under a singular/universal umbrella. Both Harnack and Hauerwas depict early Christian identity as forming in isolation or above all other influencing identities. They each posit a pristine Christianity before the era of Constantine and, especially in the case of Hauerwas, devote much work to calling Christians to a “reinstatement of the primitive righteousness.” Ultimately, whether history is factually or narratologically approached, the uncritical use of master narratives commandeers their efforts and leaves them adrift in their own universal realities.

**Implications: Tertullian's “Patience” in Hauerwas' Ethic**

Having demonstrated Hauerwas' reliance and application of Constantinianism to his church/world binary, the final section of this chapter examines the ramifications of his

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91. It may be worth keeping in mind the fundamental difference between Harnack's universalism and that of Hauerwas. For Harnack, his theory is true for all humanity and human experience, as it is “natural” in the sense that it directly corresponds with nature (the world “out there/experienced by everyone). Hauerwas' universalism only applies to the church and only corresponds with the nature of that historical community, rather than for all humanity generally.

92. Hauerwas, *The Church as God's New Language*, 146. Here he talks of a unity found in Pentecost that had not been known since Babel. So as Pentecost is the undoing of Babel, Constantinianism is the attempt to create a unity that cannot exist. Constantinianism is the redoing of Babel.
master narrative on his reading of Tertullian and his virtue of patience. Hauerwas employs Constantinianism to orient the interpretation and meaning of the historical Christian narrative. True to form, Constantinianism functions as a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains Tertullian in the context of church tradition. In Saussurian terms, Constantinianism reflects the diachronic universality of the church/world binary through time; what was relevant for the Early Church Fathers is relevant in the same ways for Christians today. As such, Hauerwas employs his narrative mastery by applying Constantinianism to each Christian figure he discusses.

It is no small observation that Hauerwas relies heavily on Tertullian's use of patience. Not only was Tertullian the first Christian to write at such length on one particular virtue, but the virtue itself bears great significance for themes of suffering and death. Hauerwas' interpretation of Tertullian's patience is explained principally in his essay “Practicing Patience: How Christians Should be Sick.” While this exploration provides a snap-shot into Hauerwas' historical methodology, pairing Hauerwas, Tertullian, and the virtue of patience is important for understanding the historical foundations of Hauerwas' pacifistic ethic. As Hauerwas describes, the world is a hostile


94. This essay first appeared in Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). It was reproduced in The Hauerwas Reader on pages 348-366. All references to this article are from Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, "Practicing Patience: How Christians should be Sick," in The Hauerwas Reader, 348-366. I chose this essay for its specific reference not only to Tertullian's understanding of patience, but also that of three other prominent early Christian writers. Tertullian and the theme of patience crops-up fairly consistently throughout Hauerwas' corpus, especially in conjunction with the virtue of hope. Selected references include: Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 127-128; The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 103-106; The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999); and in various places in Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004).
place where violence and power-mongering are the laws of the world. In sharp contrast, the church is unified and peaceful, born into nonviolent teachings and existing as an outpost for refuge. Hauerwas looks to Tertullian because he believes this late ancient Christian apologist shares his ecclesiastical concerns for the “purity” of the church within a pre-Constantinian context of violence and Christian oppression. What is more, since Hauerwas maintains such a high ecclesiology and commitment to the church's story, Tertullian provides a poignant early Christian voice for community purity within a context of rigid identity boundaries.

Hauerwas and Tertullian share many structural and rhetorical similarities—points that need be addressed before moving into his Constantinian interpretation of Tertullian. Both men make use of an essay format to communicate key points without succumbing to the systematic constraints imposed by larger treatises. They also are deeply committed to a particular instantiation of the Christian church and vehemently defend its existence and distinctiveness in the world. Tertullian viewed idolatry as the chief obstacle threatening the existence of the church. He labored to convince his audiences that their customs needed to be different from the customs of the world (saeculum), especially if rejecting the world's customs brought persecution and death upon the Christian. Tertullian proudly claims that large masses of people were converting to the faith on account of the steadfast witness of Christians who were being persecuted and killed by the hands of the state. In an often quoted passage in his Apology, he rhetorically warns his local proconsul that the

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95. In Hauerwas' corpus, Tertullian is the third most quoted Church Father, coming in behind Augustine and Aquinas.
“blood of Christians is seed.”96 For him, a Christian's life began with her baptism, which necessitated an ascension to the “rule of faith,” and culminated in her martyrdom.

Hauerwas and Tertullian also both employ a militaristic rhetoric when countering arguments that threaten their conceptions of Christian identity. While Hauerwas will not apologize for being at war with the war and violence of this world, he unapologetically belittles his critics in defense of his own convictions.97 He wields accusations as weapons against James Gustafson and Gloria Albrecht, to name a very limited number of his critics, because they fail to accept reality as he presents it.98 Rebutting Albrecht in back-and-forth essays published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Hauerwas quips that she has misunderstood his work because she has not “read what I have read.”99 Presumably, Albrecht would not misunderstand Hauerwas because everything he has read self-evidently and universally results in *true* reality. Tertullian similarly wields his rhetoric as a weapon against his opponents. He boldly rose to every occasion to verbally destroy “heretics” who threatened his church. In *Against Marcion*, Tertullian goes so far as to insult the very region from which Marcion came in order to prove that Marcion was as despicable as was this geographic place of origin.100 By highlighting or fabricating

96. *Apol.* 50.


98. I elaborate on the violence of Hauerwas' rhetoric in greater detail in the final chapter of this dissertation.


Marcion's inferiority, Tertullian arises into a position of mastery over issues pertaining to Christian dogmatism.

Another important parallel between Hauerwas and Tertullian is found in their proposed pacifistic social position rooted in Christian patience. Hauerwas claims that “genuine Christian pacifism, that is, pacifism that is determined by the reality of Christ's cross, assumes we must be peaceful not because peace holds out the hope of a world free from war but because as followers of Jesus we cannot be anything other than peaceful in a world inextricably at war.”\textsuperscript{101} True Christian character, according to Hauerwas, is marked by peacefulness as it faces a violent world. Christians must cultivate those virtues that contribute to peacefulness, the most important of which is patience. Patience allows Christians to develop the spiritual discipline necessary “to better hear God's word for our particular lives.”\textsuperscript{102} Patience is not just one of a variety of virtues Christians must cultivate, but is an essential virtue enabling the church to be the world's alternative and to be in proper relationship to God.

Tertullian advocated for a form of pacifism that simply was enabled by the virtue of patience. Just as he called Christian converts in the military ranks to set aside their laurels, he implored them to lay down their weapons and not participate in the idolatries of the empire. He writes, “only without the sword can the Christian wage war: for the Lord has abolished the sword.”\textsuperscript{103} As I detail more fully in the following chapter,

\textsuperscript{101} Stanley Hauerwas, "On being a Church Capable of Addressing a World at War: A Pacifist Response to the United Methodist Bishops' Pastoral "in Defense of Creation"," in \textit{The Hauerwas Reader}, 431.

\textsuperscript{102} Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, 138.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Cor.} 11.2.
Tertullian postulates how patience is part and parcel of the essence of God, guiding the Christian in her march towards martyrdom. In *On Patience*, Tertullian recasts the entire gospel narrative with respect to patience, showing that on its account Jesus endured his sufferings while cursing “for the time to come the works of the sword.”

With these few similarities in view, we now turn to Hauerwas' specific reading of Tertullian's patience and analyze its relationship with Constantinianism. In Hauerwas and Pinches' essay on patience, they link the doctor-patient nomenclature and the “liberal” fear of dying to the virtue of patience and develop it through key figures in Christian history. They begin with Tertullian and Cyprian's admonition of patience as a means to overcome idolatry and not return evil for evil. They then move to Augustine and report how patience does not come from “the strength of the human will, but rather must come from the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit imparts the gift of charity, without which there would be no patience, and this charity is responsible for countering the “lust of the world.” Picking up Augustine's theological anthropology along the way, they move into an analysis of Thomas Aquinas treatment of the virtue of patience. Aquinas describes a “natural patience” that is observable in everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike. Yet, in outlining the specific nature of Christian patience, Hauerwas and Pinches find in Aquinas the seeds for dealing with modern existential angst. They interpret Aquinas as linking the “sadness and dejection about our [Christian] condition” to the suffering of Christ in order to remind “us” that sorrow is “present in every


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Christian's life.”\textsuperscript{106} For Aquinas, creaturely sadness is overcome by Divine patience because it supplies the Christian with hope and joy. Hauerwas and Pinches then conclude by stating that Christians need not fear death, dying or sickness since true Christian patience sustains “our” hope. The Christian community should patiently welcome the inevitability of death with “grace and courage.” In so doing, Christians “risk” being different and testify to the “truth of the story of God's patient care of God's creatures.”\textsuperscript{107}

Hauerwas links Tertullian's brief reference of “the refusal to return evil for evil” with “the very character of God.”\textsuperscript{108} He claims that Tertullian “makes much” of Matthew 5:43-48 where Jesus implores his listeners to love their enemies and be perfect like God is perfect. Yet Hauerwas' connections between God, the love of enemies and patience are curiously suspect when one compares them with Tertullian's use of them in \textit{On Patience}. First, Tertullian does not “make much” of Matthew 5:44-48 as he only once directly quotes a line from Matthew 5:44-45.\textsuperscript{109} While he does mention Christian patience in the context of not returning evil for evil, he does not equate “the refusal to return evil for evil” with the character of God. In fact, this biblical passage is never related to God's nature because Tertullian establishes that “patience is God's nature” near the very

\textsuperscript{106} ibid., 359.

\textsuperscript{107} ibid., 366.

\textsuperscript{108} ibid., 357. Pinches drops out of this discussion for convenience only. When referencing this essay, the reader should always assume I mean Hauerwas and Pinches.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Pat.} 6.4.
beginning of his essay. The refusal to return evil for evil is for Tertullian an effect of patience in so far as the Christian has adopted patience as a result of his or her faith.

Continuing this point, Tertullian does not connect “evil” in this section with physical violence as Hauerwas' reading suggests. He connects the “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” with violence, but “evil for evil” with “usury.” While certain forms of usury could be considered today a type of violence with deep structural roots, Tertullian never calls it out as such. Hauerwas contorts Tertullian's use of “evil” and Matthew 5 to refer to violence in every instance, which is why he then moves directly into a discussion of Tertullian's connection between mental and bodily patience. Fortified by a patience that relates to the body, Hauerwas sets the stage for a totalizing rejection of violence that slips effortlessly into his present day concerns with death and dying.

With respect to Constantinianism, Hauerwas uses Tertullian and Cyprian to establish a pre-Constantinian consensus on patience and Augustine and Aquinas (post-Constantinian figures) to trace the continuity of the virtue in the Christian narrative within the church. Since all four figures discuss patience from a Christian perspective, Hauerwas assumes that they each mean the same thing by it. Establishing the virtue first with two pre-Constantinians, Hauerwas legitimates the observations of the two post-Constantinians. This is how he is able to account for a continuity of Christian narrative after Constantine.

110. Pat. 3.11.

111. In the attempt to distance himself from Judaism, Tertullian writes the “law” ruled the world prior to Christ. He states, “For men of old won't to require 'eye for eye, and tooth for tooth' and to repay usury 'evil with evil;' for, as yet, patience was not on earth, because faith was not either.” It was Christ who brought faith, and patience correspondingly. Pat. 6.4.
Augustine is used to provide to solidify the boundaries between insiders and outsiders with regard to true Christian patience while Aquinas is used to bestow upon patience the dual status of “natural virtue” and a patience that is the “gift of the Spirit.” The category of natural virtue explains why patience sometimes can be seen in “wicked men.” Conversely, patience originating from the Holy Spirit empowers the Christian to be capable “of being rightly saddened [by the suffering in the world] without succumbing to the temptation to give up hope.” Those who give up hope in favor of “depression, despair, or apathy” are not bearers of Christian patience.

Remembering that Constantinianism is the grasping for worldly power, it is curious that Hauerwas omits any connections between Augustine and Aquinas and their complicity with violence given that they are credited with developing or supporting rationales for just war theories. Since these two figures represent post-Constantinian Christianity, the reader is left to assume that both men are already enmeshed with the powers of the state. After all, Augustine's turn towards violent coercion and Aquinas' explication of the just war theory are well known and widely surveyed in current scholarship. But Hauerwas simply assumes that they true Christians because they represent two of the most dominant voices of the Christian tradition in the West. To go against these figures would be to go against the established Christian teaching that Hauerwas submitted to when he became a true Christian.

113. Hauerwas and Pinches, Practicing Patience, 360.
114. ibid.
What, then, differentiates a Constantinian Christian yearning after worldly power from a true Christian who is faithful to the church's narrative? Even though Augustine and Aquinas conceded to violence, their story remains consistent with the story of Christ because their rhetoric concerning the virtues can be made to align with the pre-Constantinian church. Ratified by the witness of “tradition,” the church has accepted Augustine and Aquinas into its story on account of contributions to the tradition. Therefore, by aligning with them, contemporary Christian communities can draw from their authority without fear of being lost to the wiles of liberalism.

Applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to Hauerwas' progression of patience from Tertullian to Aquinas exposes the effects of his master narrative. As Hauerwas constructs an understanding of patience, he begins with Tertullian and Cyprian, who wrote roughly a full century before Constantine. This fact situates them as pre-Constantinian Christians. Hauerwas then proceeds to draw a straight line from patience in Tertullian to patience in Aquinas. This direct line forms an interpretive continuity linking a pre-Constantinian virtue to post-Constantinian Christianity. By implication, the line is extended effortlessly into Hauerwas' contemporary context and applied to his ethic of being a nonviolent alternative to the world. Through this methodology, he taps into late-ancient and medieval conceptions of a concept to legitimate its use in his current audience.

By stressing continuity, Hauerwas manages to overlook the clear shifts in the meanings of patience that occur between Tertullian and Aquinas. Tertullian is very clear that “patience is the nature of God,” without which charity and hope are impossible. He adheres to this prioritization of virtues because he is ultimately concerned with
empowering Christians to “endure” martyrdom. However, when Hauerwas recasts Aquinas' exposition of patience, he highlights the point that charity is the highest virtue and that patience emanates forth from it. Why the discrepancy? Does Hauerwas miss this reorientation of virtues? Two points of concern might illuminate Hauerwas' position. First, the discrepancy between patience and charity does not readily enhance the content of Hauerwas' Constantinianism, and therefore, rests as a minor point. Hauerwas is concerned with the application of virtue in the lived story of the Christian community. The details themselves are secondary to his point. Further, virtue imparts character and, as he states, “our character is constituted by the rules, metaphors, and stories that are combined to give a design or unity to the variety of things we must and must not do in our lives.”

The master narrative that guides the cultivation of character requires Hauerwas to make distinctions between purity and impurity, between true and false, and between church and world. Thus, so long as the true (pure) community rightly emphasizes virtues and connect them to Christ as their model exemplar, the parameters separating “us” from “them” are properly upheld. Since both patience and charity are essential Christian virtues, there is little need to quibble over their pecking order.

The second point of concern with Hauerwas' understanding of patience as a subset of charity is related more specifically to his universalization of the church. Both Tertullian and Aquinas discuss patience from a similar Christian theological anthropology. They also relate patience to God in a particular way, and use patience to elucidate boundaries between Christian faith and everyone else. These similarities lend patience a degree of continuity from which Hauerwas is able to draw and speak of

“patience” as an important Christian virtue. An important discrepancy arises, however, when interpreting the usage of patience in two radically different historical contexts. If Tertullian's discussion of patience was a way of addressing Christian death of martyrdom and Aquinas talked about patience as a way of coping with sadness, then the meaning of patience underwent a shift over the course of a thousand years. In and of itself, this observation is unsurprising.

How, then, might a theory of interpretation help account for shifts in linguistic signs and referents (note: this is a question of historiography)? Post-structuralist and literary theorist, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) provides some insightful direction. He points out that readers of history collaborate with texts, engage in a “production” rather than “consumption” of meaning, and “liberate” the text from any fixed meaning.”\(^{116}\) Meanings can and do change, and presumably undergo greater change the farther removed they become from their “original” source. To rephrase the original question, if the similarities between Tertullian and Aquinas are sufficient to form a diachronic continuity of a Christian community through time, how are we ultimately to make sense out of textual incongruities? One might recognize that Tertullian wrote during a period of intense, albeit sporadic, persecution in colonized North Africa. As a colonized citizen of Punic descent and as an outspoken member of an illegal religion, Tertullian's material context differed greatly from that of Aquinas and even more so from Hauerwas. Yet Hauerwas fails to provide a convincing answer, opting instead to blame all incongruities on Constantinianism. Perhaps there is no pristine, original or natural Christian story after

all that requires narrative mastery in order to hold “reality” together. Perhaps the Christian story is really a desperate attempt to collapse all differences into one grand narrative in order to fend off the existential chaos that seems to threaten the social stability of a dominant Christian group in contemporary ethical discourses.

Aligning with Barthes further shows how Hauerwas' universalism represents “a swivel of bourgeois ideology, which turns culture into nature.” Hauerwas naturalizes and normalizes the church and its story according to his own social location. He does this by creating historical continuity to corroborate his historical interpretation. Limited by the parameters of his master narrative, Hauerwas cannot account for synchronic changes in patience, at least not in any meaningful way that honors either textual variations or the heterogeneity of Christian experiences throughout history.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Hauerwas' ethic of being as it relates to his war on liberalism, his binary between church and world, and his master narrative of Constantinianism. Because he cannot abide any hint of liberalism, he discounts postmodernism, at least in so far as it provides any meaningful analysis for the church. Hauerwas never directly addresses post-structuralism, but it is reasonable to assume he would reject this too since its interconnections with postmodernism resist attempts to clearly differentiate the two. Yet even in his disdain for liberalism and vision of what the church should be, Hauerwas cannot escape the trappings of modernist historiography. He univocally assumes that denouncing modern liberal is the same as eradicating it from

his presence. What happens when this equivocation is fueled by a modern master
narrative and a tautological definition of the church? The result is a story of stories that
precludes the option of deconstruction for purposes of reconstruction. Hauerwas gives
the world a church that lacks the tools necessary for identifying the blind-spots of its
modern identities. The operative assumptions of modern liberal historiography are still in
play, but in play below the surface of consciousness: i.e. they operate in the political
unconsciousness. Hauerwas remains credulous of his own master narrative. He so
narrowly defines what it means to be Christian that it ceases to have a stake in the larger
dialogue and risks losing its grip on reality. Thus, he is able to cherry-pick from
Tertullian's discussion on patience and uncritically redefine the virtue according to his
own historical-ethical categories.

As this dissertation moves into the following two chapters, the argument moves
towards an application of and a plea for a critical self-reflexive historical method.
Christian ethicists must take postmodern and post-structural challenges seriously
precisely because they provide necessary tools for illuminating gaps and incongruities in
our knowledge about the past. We must call out the limitations in our knowledge of the
past and our ability to directly access this knowledge regardless of whether this
knowledge is housed in facts or narratives.
CHAPTER 4:
RE-EVALUATING TERTULLIAN AND THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE

Dominique LaCapra approaches historiography as a conversation with the past.¹ Though his dialogical approach historical texts “speak” to the contemporary reader who, through a process of critical analysis, speaks back to the text to see if he is understanding clearly. The reader is then transformed by history “through his or her own reading or rereading of the primary texts.”² This process requires a reciprocity of interpretation and appropriation through “mutual” exchange enabled by the constant listening to and rereading of texts. As we read historical texts, the dialogue opens our eyes to new understandings and representations of the past. LaCapra relies upon Mikhail Bakhtin in order to substantiate this dynamic reading, drawing upon Bakhtin's notion of “carnivalesque” to help elucidate these new understandings and representations.³ In carnivalesque literature as in an actual carnival, the mask is an important object used to express or parody binary identities. The mask signifies “the ability to change in ways


2. Ibid., 48.

3. See M. M. Bakhtin and Caryl Emerson, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Vol. 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Rabelais and His World (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968). The latter work was originally submitted as part of Bakhtin's dissertation that was rejected after several years of debate. The idea of carnival stems from the medieval celebration of the Feast of Fools, which is roughly equivalent to today's Mardi Gras with some important distinctions. The Feast of Fools was performed by the lower ecclesiastical orders just before the Lenten season and symbolized the suspension of everyday life. It was a time/ceremony in which opposites were intermingled such as fools becoming wise and the wise becoming fools.
that destabilize fixed identities and suspend ordinary rules and role differentiations...” and it indicates “the incongruity of man with himself.” The idea of a carnival mask appropriately describes the presence of masked, multiple and overlapping identities. Once again, these textual representations are revealed through a dialogical exchange between the present and its historical subjects.

Often times, the masks LaCapra describes are not plainly evident, especially when one reads history through master narratives or what he refers to as the “documentary approach.” This is because these historical approaches flatten-out historical particularities in an effort to find or provide larger trends and themes. Describing LaCapra's ideas of dialogue and carnival masks in terms set by Jacques Derrida, the carnival mask represents the absence of a presence, or disappearance of the origin. The boundaries we create around our identity are at once bounded and limitless. Knowledge of our past is at once inside and outside of us; it occurs within language and beyond all signs. Ultimately, history exists as a “trace” that is never present and yet exists in some shadowy relation to reality. The boundaries we construct around identity and historical representation are never static bulwarks, but penetrate and are penetrated by traces from outside their borders. Identity is never fixed but continually shifts as it engages other boundaries and representations.

4. LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 300.


6. For more detail and bibliographic references, see the corresponding section in chapter two of this dissertation.
This chapter dialogues with Tertullian and his treatment of patience in an effort to identify the various faces behind the rhetorical masks evidenced in his writing. It does not proceed under the assumption that Tertullian's true face will ever be exposed, nor will the identification of his masks bring us closer to the true, natural or original meanings intended in his texts. Tertullian's true face, or whatever is meant by that, is clouded by inevitable interplay between contextuality and interpretation. As Elizabeth Clark states, “Although historians strive to uncover the views of the past authors they study, their own comprehension nonetheless affects the outcome of their investigations.” As a historical figure, Tertullian exists now in those texts attributed to his name and in the living interpretive traditions that revisit this pioneer of Latin Christianity. As a result, recovery of his conception of Christianity is always already fused with linguistic structures that inform contemporary understandings of identity.

This chapter proceeds with three specific aims in view. First, it explores some interpretive obstacles in Tertullian scholarship and then offers an overview of De patientia. The second aim of this chapter is to provide a re-evaluation of De patientia in

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7. Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ Pr, 2004), 112. Here Clark draws from Hans Gadamers and his observation that “writing history involves a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Horizontverschmelzung), that of the historian and that of the past, both of which are always in motion.” For references to Gadamer, see *Truth and Method*, 2, rev ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 268-273.


9. The fullest and most recent treatment of De patientia comes from Jean-Claude Fredouille. He provides an annotated commentary and a French translation from the Cluny edition of the Latin text. In his introduction, Fredouille gives a preliminary snapshot wherein he treats traditional issues of dating, composition and source criticisms. He labors to demonstrate Tertullian's connection to the tradition of forensic, or judicial rhetorical genre through various themes. Tertullian and Jean Claude Fredouille, *De La Patience* [De patientia,], Vol. no 310 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1984). All Latin quotations in this chapter are taken from this edition. In terms of identity, Homi Bhabha’s notion of “hybridity” provides a fitting description of the “in-between” spaces of culture in the late antiquity as opposed to the more modern
light of Elizabeth Clark's notions of the text's socio-theological logic and political unconsciousness. Its socio-theological logic arises from the textual gaps, silences and turns of rhetoric occurring within the text and directs us to its underlying ideological assumptions and assertions. Identifying ideological factors paves the way for understanding its political unconsciousness as it relates to the larger discourses on power and identity in Carthage in the late second and early third centuries CE. The third aim of this chapter explores how a critical self-reflexive historiographic approach to Tertullian matters to Christian ethical discourse. It provides an example of how one can approach history recognizing that there are no natural, original or true histories upon which to base our ethics. And just as this chapter constructs a particular reading of Tertullian, complete with theoretical and ideological biases, so too must ethicists adopt a historical approach that exposes these biases so that we can recognize that our histories can be constructed in ways better suited to the ethical demands of justice.

**Orienting Tertullian and *De Patientia***

Much attention has been paid in the several decades to Tertullian with regard to his rhetoric, to his dealings with the Jews and heretics, to his patriarchy, and to his supposed lapse into Montanism. But little notice has been given to the role Tertullian plays in the notions of diversity or multiculturalism. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 56.

10. Other examples such as the radical historicist position of Gloria Albrecht or the history and memory approach of Emilie Townes discussed at the end of chapter one are equally useful for this task. The element that they lack, however, is a thorough engagement with tensions occurring within the field of historiography. Both Elizabeth Clark's method (chapter 2) and my critical self-reflexive method capture this missing element.

11. The most important modern literature on Tertullian is compiled and categorized in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950), as well as in the first facsimile of Tertullian in the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina II*, 1953, X-XXV; See also Tertullian and Gilles Quispel, *De
cultural and political power dynamics of the late ancient world. This section situates Tertullian in relation to these power dynamics first by shaking his biography free from the constraints of later Christian writers and second by locating him within specific cultural and political conditions unique to Carthage in the late second and early third centuries CE. Situating him accordingly will not provide a vision of Tertullian on his own terms so much as it will establish important textual conditions necessary interpreting Tertullian's De patientia.

Biography and Biographers

With little archival evidence comes few claims of certainty. Tertullian reveals little substantial autobiographical details in his corpus and the existing excerpts we have from other Christian writers are dubious at best. In De virginibus velandis Tertullian states his name, Septimo Tertulliano. He tells us that he was brought up a pagan (De paenitentia 1.1), was married (Ad uxorem) and apparently committed adultery (De resurrectione carnis 59.3). He probably converted to Christianity as an adult (Apologeticum 50.15, if understood autobiographically). He was not a member of the clergy, but his exact leadership roles in the church are difficult to determine (De monogamia 12.3, De anima 9.4). We can reasonably infer from his writings that he was well educated in Greek and Stoic thought, that he possessed a superior knowledge of classical forms of rhetoric (a point explored in further detail below) and that he maintained a steady awareness of the

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political and religious happenings throughout the Roman Empire. He also possessed an
impressive knowledge of medicine and appears to have lived in Carthage during the
reigns of Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla. He wrote much over the course of
about two decades (circa 196/7212/13 CE, although his letter De pudicitia could be as
late as 220). He became more assertive in Montanist doctrines towards the middle of his
writing career and disappeared from our extant records leaving us to guess about his age,
manner and place of death.12

Less than a half-century ago scholars of late ancient Christianity held fast to a
biography of Tertullian based upon the brief descriptions by Jerome and Eusebius. The
surplus information gleaned from these sources presumed that Tertullian was a jurist who
converted to Christianity later in life, was a zealous advocate of the faith until he lapsed
into Montanism, and then died at an old age.13 Although sparse, the traces of
biographical knowledge proved substantive and definitive for modern historians like
Ernest Evans and S. Thelwall and P. Holmes.14 Timothy Barnes deserves much credit for
being the first to challenge critically the “given” historical tradition about Tertullian.15 By

12. Timothy David Barnes, Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1971), 1-59.

13. The most “complete” (i.e. longest) description we have is Jerome's De viris illustribus 53. 7;
See also Barnes, Tertullian, 231.

P. C. K, 1956), 197; Q. Septimii Florentis Tertulliani Adversus Praxeian Liber = Tertullian's Treatise
Against Praxeas [Adversus Praxean liber. English and Latin] (London: Spck, 1948); Thelwall and Holmes' various introductions to Tertullian and Tertullian's writings can be found in volumes 3-4 of Alexander
of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325, American reprint of the Edinburgh; rev a arrang with brief notes by A

15. Barnes' work on Tertullian has opened the field to new horizons. Roger Pearse provides an
extensive bibliography on his web site, www.tertullian.org, largely recognized as an essential reference for
all issues related to Tertullian. Pearse's bibliography distinguishes between scholars prior to Barnes and
those who have come after him.
examining Jerome's possible ideologies and theological/ecclesial commitments, his
credibility to speak authoritatively about Tertullian becomes necessarily suspect. Barnes
refers to Jerome as more credulous than Eusebius, from whom he draws a great deal
without ever questioning Eusebius' reliability. “What was in Eusebius presented as
surmise or mere rumour,” the claim is launched, “is for Jerome established and
indubitable fact.” In Jerome's *De virus illustribus*, the listing of past and contemporary
Christian writers is largely apologetic. Barnes further explains how “the persistent and
insidious addition of laudatory epithets cannot fail to convey to the reader an exaggerated
impression of the attainments of the Fathers of the Church.”

Unlike Jerome who fails to qualify his own statements, Eusebius nuances his
knowledge about Tertullian by identifying rumor as the source of his knowledge.
However, his admission of repeating rumors does not absolve Eusebius' own ideological
biases. Barnes adequately criticizes Eusebius for not concerning himself with the
Western parts of the Empire except where it impinging on the East. His Latin was
apparently poor and his only knowledge of Tertullian was through a poor Greek
translation of *Apologeticum*. Further, Eusebius, who lived in eastern parts of the
Empire, recorded these biographic references over a century after the supposed death of
Tertullian. Time lapse and geographic distance are important not because they inherently

16. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 231. Eusebius offers some qualification through statements such as,
“These things are recorded by Tertullian,” and “he reported this.” See *Ecclesiastical History* 2.2 and 3.33.

17. ibid., 4.

18. ibid., 5-6, 25. The existent Greek manuscripts come from Eusebius and from codex
*Vindobonensis graecus 64*. See Rodger Pierce's online compilation of articles and primary source
documents at www.tertullian.org. Harnack offers a German translation of the Greek manuscript in *Die
griechische Uebersetzung des Apologeticus Tertullians, Medicinisches aus der altesten Kirchengeschichte*
[microform] (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche, 1892).
negate Eusebius' account of Tertullian. Instead, issues of proximity are helpful in reconciling Eusebius with an ecclesiological Church structure that is undergoing centralization at the end of the second century. Under a rubric of post-colonialism, these “distances” represent a conferring of identity upon the distanced subject. In other words, while writing from Caesarea, Eusebius' interests align with those that concern a Christian church, broadly speaking, whose interests are more closely embedded in the discourses of the Empire.

This brief critique of Jerome and Eusebius functions to orient historians to issues that directly impact subsequent work in Tertullian scholarship. Much more evidence could be levied to further demonstrate this point. Challenging the facts upon which our knowledge of Tertullian rests shakes authorial intent from our hands, allowing for a more concerted textual approach to his writings. It also helps to destroy the illusion that we can get at the pure or true meanings of the past by organizing all data into prescribed master narratives. A destabilization of historical “facts” frees us into a recognition that, while based upon our ideas of the past, meaning is always a meaning in the present. This caveat serves as an important guide as we continue to reevaluate Tertullian and his depiction of patience.

**Socio-Political Conditions of Colonial Carthage**

Socio-politically, Tertullian lived in North Africa's Carthage as a “colonized” subject of the Roman Empire, and wrestled with issues of identity and injustice stemming

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therefrom. As a North African, Tertullian's geographic location distanced him from the
“civilized” people of southern Europe.20 Living and writing in Carthage, a city
considered at that time to be the African Rome, Tertullian held onto his North African
heritage. Carthage uniquely enjoyed two long periods of prosperity separated by a
century of ruin and rebuilding. The Punic era is commonly dated from sometime around
575 BCE until the Third Punic War in 146 BCE, when “the Roman province of Africa
replaced the independent realm of Carthage.”21 It was looked to as the center of the Punic
city-states spreading across North Africa, Greece and the southern parts of Spain. In the
words of D.B. Hardem, the “Romans did their work all too well” in 146 since we have
little archeological evidence remaining that points specifically to the Punic period.22
Instead, archeologists exhumed a two foot thick burnt stratum around the city that dated
to the second century BCE. After the Roman conquest of Carthage the great empire
proceeded to rebuild the city according to the values of Rome, which led to the eventual
stereotype of Carthage as being the African Rome.23 Although the city was destroyed, the
Punic language survived Roman conquest. And, where there is language, there is culture.

20. Peter Brown is careful to note that even into the time of Augustine, North Africa maintains its
rough and rural character, of which Augustine must overcome in order to become a “civilized” (i.e.
educated) elite. See Augustine of Hippo: a Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 7-
15. If this was the context of North Africa a half a decade after Constantine, it is certainly plausible to have
been the case during the time of Tertullian.

description downplays the utter devastation and destruction by the hands of the Romans, because, I think,
hes favors the "civilizing" influence Rome then had on this prominent North African city.

11.

23. Herodian, History of the Roman Empire since Marcus Aurelius, VII.6.1. The English
translation by Edward C. Echols is available on Roger Pearse's website, www.tertullian.org, with notes by
Jona Lendering.
It did, however, modify in form over the next several centuries until it became absorbed into Arabic after the city's final destruction by the "Moslem Conquest" in 698 CE.\(^\text{24}\)

What this evidence illuminates for textual-historical analysis is the continued existence of native North Africans in Carthage who maintained their indigenous identities.

Our knowledge of Christianity's inception in North Africa comes not from Christian's themselves, but from Apuleius of Madauros (c. 125-170 CE). Apuleius records a story of a miller's wife who claims devotion to one the Christian god.\(^\text{25}\) This woman is ridiculed for opposing the wider values of her husband and culture. We also know that persecution of Christians in North Africa began to a notable degree during the reign of Commodus under proconsul Vigellius Saturninus in 180 CE. Persecutions, although more sporadic than systematic, sparked much apologetic and hagiographic writings from Tertullian and others across the Empire during the next few centuries.\(^\text{26}\) As persecutions continued, so too did Christian responses that glorified its martyrs. Judith

\(^{24}\) Scullard, *Carthage*, 105.

\(^{25}\) Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, IX.14. Also known as *The Golden Ass*, it is the only Latin novel of its kind to survive in its entirety. There is much debate surrounding how Christianity came to Carthage. According to Barnes, W.H.C. Frend and H. Lietzmann rely upon Tertullian's *Praescriptione Haereticorum* 44.14 to justify the theory that Carthage was evangelized by missionaries from Rome. W. Telfer relies upon Tertullian's Greek texts to support the theory that Christianity came to Carthage from the East. Instead, Barnes denies textual evidence from Tertullian concerning any Apostolic succession and prefers to suspend certainty on the issue. See Barnes, *Tertullian*, 60-84.

\(^{26}\) This has become the dominant opinion among scholars of late ancient Christianity. Although Christian apologists such as Athenagoras and Justyn addressed their concerns to emperors, Tertullian's own writings, as well as those who come after him, turn instead to proconsuls. Prior to Decius, the emperors and Senate rarely if ever concerned themselves with Christian persecutions until Christians interfered actively. It was Septimius Severus (193-211), Emperor from Africa who officially declared Christianity and Judaism illegal, but emperors generally left it up to the local governors to enforce most actions against Christians. See Eusebius, *HE* 5.1; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 387-389; W. H. C. Frend, "Persecutions: Genesis and Legacy," in *Origins to Constantine*, ed. Frances M. Young, Margaret Mary Mitchell, and K. Scott Bowie, Vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 510; Maureen A. Tilley, "North Africa," in *Origins to Constantine*, ed. Frances M. Young, Margaret Mary Mitchell, and K. Scott Bowie, Vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 387-9.
Perkins describes the valorization of martyrs by Christians as essential to the growth of the Church because it offered distinct parameters of identity in continuity with the passion narratives of Jesus of Nazareth. In this light, Tertullian's dictum that the “blood of Christians is seed” may not be entirely hyperbolic. In his letter to Scapula, Tertullian implores him to cease his unjust persecutions lest Carthage be devastated. If we believe Tertullian, we have evidence of a large Christian community already in existence a decade into the third century.

David Wilhite offers one of the first scholarly applications of post-colonial critique to Tertullian in his book, *Tertullian the African*. Regarding the usefulness of post-colonial theory to the study of patristic literature he notes, “Postcolonialism has awakened scholars from various disciplines to the problems of representation, even representations of the past.” He asserts that a post-colonial lens is necessary because it allows the “subaltern to speak” out of histories that generally impose an identity upon them. In his


28. *Apol. 50.13. Plures efficimur quotiens metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum.*

29. *Ad Scap. 5.2.*


31. ibid., 3-4, 15, quoting Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-316. His admission for the necessity of this lens allows him to distinguish himself from nineteenth century historiographers who read texts as “historically-rich data fields” to be mined for objective information about the past. He also notes along with Spivak that history contains the discourse of identity, which implies that those who write history (Jerome and Eusebius for example) have the privilege
book, Wilhite describes Tertullian as a North African citizen during a time of Roman colonization and disenfranchised citizenry. It is within imperial expansion that “Rome created circumstances of postcoloniality,” Wilhite notes, “wherein varying groups came into conflict and various identities were formed.” It must be emphasized that Christianity during Tertullian's time was still considered an *religio illicita* (illegal religion) susceptible to legal consequences and social stigmas. Out of this context comes a way of reading of Tertullian's works that signifies a more indigenously North African Christian identity.

**De Patientia: An Overview**

*De patientia* reflects Tertullian's attempt to eulogize and explain one particular virtue. This tract is unique among Tertullian's prior writings because it deals exclusively with a characteristic of Christian conduct rather than with a particular Christian doctrine, apologetic stance, or point of heresy. It is also the first thorough treatment by a Christian of one particular virtue. This section provides a synopsis of *De patientia's* short sixteen chapters before moving towards a fuller re-evaluation of this tract in the following section.

Consistent with the rhetorical form of Quintilian and Cicero, the text opens with an *exordium* that describes patience as an ultimate ideal in the Christian life. Fitting for of determining the identity of the subaltern in contrast to their own. However, Wilhite fails to acknowledge the ambiguities of Spivak's “subaltern” position. In this omission, he presumes that he can speak for the subaltern, Tertullian, simply by applying various postcolonial critiques to historical texts. His argument would be more convincing had he first acknowledged his own relationship with colonial power structures and so situated his interpretations.


33. The forensic (legal) rhetorical speech divisions include an *exordium* (opening appeal), *narratio* (relevant background), *propositio* (stated main point), *partitio* (intent of the topic), *praemunitio* (main
such a divine eulogy, Tertullian distances himself from this ideal by claiming that he is often overcome by the heats of impatience (caloribus inpatientiae), while stressing that this treatment of patience is a Christian reading and not a caninae one.\textsuperscript{34} In spite of, or perhaps in light of a confession that he is unfit to adequately discuss patience (Confiteor ad dominum satis temere me, si non etiam inpudenter, de patientia componere ausum...)\textsuperscript{35} he proceeds with his commendation. Without actually mentioning the “rule of faith,” in chapter two Tertullian retells the gospel story of Jesus' birth, life and passion of Jesus with reference to patience, ending not with the great resurrection story, but with Jesus' suffering and with the pronouncement that patience is God's nature.\textsuperscript{36} Here, Tertullian sets up Jesus as the exemplar model for patience and his Christian audience (nobis in 2.1

\[\text{points to be discussed for the main argument to proceed), confirmatio (main argument), reprehensio (refutation of opponent), amplificatio (possible implications), and the peroratio (conclusion). See Dunn, Tertullian’s Adversus Iudaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis, 60 note 1 for specific references to Quintilian and Cicero. In this text, Dunn demonstrates how rhetorical analysis holds Adversus iudaecus together and demonstrates that rhetorical analysis provides a level of consistency capable of yielding new insights into Tertullian's writings. It is important to note, however, that while Tertullian uses these divisions, they never constrain him. He remained flexible in his application of these elements and deliberately employed or omitted them to suit his chief aim of persuasion. Robert Sider fails to see the presence of any deep rhetorical structure, “particularly as it was applicable to forensic oratory.” Instead, for him De patientia reflects the clearest example of how “the formal arrangement of themes can provide the basic shape of a treatise.” Sider, Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian, 38, 39, 199.}\]

\[34. \textit{Pat.} 2. \text{Standard abbreviation for De Patientia is De pat., but for the purpose of simplicity I use this truncated abbreviation instead. Certainly, his divergence from the manner in which Stoic writers dealt with this theme would not go unnoticed by the educated men in Carthage. But aside from the overarching treatment of patience as a theme, the general rhetorical elements of its structure, and the few references to philosophers, De patientia spends much more time with Judaism than it does with pagan philosophy. Perhaps he hoped this work would be read by Jews as well, who presumably would be persuaded by his rhetorical logic and convert to Christianity like in Adversus Iudaeos.}\]

\[35. \textit{Pat.} 1.1.\]

\[36. \textit{Pat.} 3.42. \text{For a Christian familiar with the letters of the Apostle Paul, one might expect God's character to be summarized by love, with patience representing a subset thereof. Instead, Tertullian reverses these virtues in chapter 12 to claim that God loves only because he has patience. Perhaps this is justifiable because Tertullian spends much time in chapters 3, 4, 9 and 11 connecting patience with the passion of Jesus and positioning this passion as the primary model for Christians facing their own potential passions.}\]
and 16.5) undoubtedly would recognize this summary of gospel story as the evidence upon which the author speaks authoritatively (i.e. non-heretically, loosely defined) on Christian matters.

After rooting patience in the nature of God and explaining its relationship to the life and work of Jesus, Tertullian appeals in chapter four to divine authority by emphasizing one's duty to imitate Jesus, who embodies patience. Here he links the Christian's practice of patience to the principle of obedience (obsequium). Much of this discussion is elaborated in greater detail in the following chapter of this dissertation. The only aspect of obedience requiring immediate delineation is that obedience is made possible by patience rather than vice-versa. This is important because obedience is a the practice that leads to patience, keeping in mind that patience is God's nature. Patience, and not obedience, is the supreme virtue of God and the means by which the Christian mimics Christ. Obedience functions rhetorically as a secondary motivation for those who might need a little external motivation for modeling the suffering of Christ.

Continuing in his commendatio et exhortatio (4.6) of patience, Tertullian addresses impatience to emphasize the superlative nature of patience. In this section, patience is defined by what it is not, namely, by its opposite. He accomplishes this definition by presenting a series of dualisms such as God/evil, good/evil, and life/death. These dualisms correspond to the patience/impatience dualism, not as absolute distinctions since Tertullian claims in chapter one to be sick with the fever of impatience (Ita miserrimus ego semper aeger caloribus inpatientiae), but as a rhetorical ploy further enhancing the divine nature of patience. Continuing with this ploy, he illustrates the
pervasiveness of impatience by tracing its trajectory from the Devil, to the woman 
(mulier: Eve), to Adam, and then to humanity (homo). Tertullian also makes a special 
effort to link impatience to Moses and the house of Israel.

It is important to note that Tertullian replaces the language of “sin” that his 
audience might expect with the language of “impatience.” This omission most likely 
functions rhetorically as Tertullian trusts his audience to make this connection for 
themselves when he gets to the end of chapter five. In chapter five he defines evil as the 
unwillingness to endure (inpatientia) what is good.\textsuperscript{37} Its definition reciprocates the 
negative formulation of good. Further, had Eve, Cain, Moses or the Israelites only 
demonstrated patience, they would have found their salvation. This entire section 
attempts to delineate the boundaries for Christians regarding which side of the 
Jewish/Christian divide they should ascribe. Clearly, Christians must side with the 
positive attributes of the proposed dualisms.

Having established these dualisms, in chapter six Tertullian chooses Abraham from 
within the Jewish tradition to demonstrate the superiority of true patience. Abraham 
demonstrated his patience both before and while God established a covenant with him. 
Tertullian clearly references Romans 6.3, 9, and Galatians 3.6 and 16 as evidence for 
using Abraham to transition from Judaism to Christianity. Faith is the great 
demonstration of patience since faith existed prior to the Law.\textsuperscript{38} At this point Tertullian

\textsuperscript{37} Pat. 5.21. \textit{Malum inpatientia est boni.} This short phrase demonstrates Tertullian's masterful 
economy of language and rhetoric. He uses \textit{malum} earlier in the chapter first to establish its dualistic 
relation to good (5.3, \textit{boni/o}) and then with respect to the Devil who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden 
(5.9). Since \textit{malum} can also translate as “apple” or “fruit,” it also functions typologically, which is how 
Tertullian can move from the original Fall of humanity to the rest of human vices (anger, murder, adultery, 
and immodesty) while connecting them directly to impatience.

\textsuperscript{38} Pat. 6.3.
turns to face Christianity more directly by addressing issues that he sees as only pertaining to his audience. Patience wounds a violent oppressor (improbitas) through endurance, sates the need for revenge, guides the appropriation of Jesus' beatitudes, and reorients all desire. Since Christians draw from God's patience, they can resist all temptations that afflict the rest of the world, or those outside the borders of the Christian faith.

Returning briefly to rhetorical structure, if chapter one is Tertullian's exordium, the narratio is expressed in chapters two through six, and the partitio is the demonstrationem and commendationem of patience (stated in 1.4 and 4.6), his main argument (confirmatio) begins with chapter seven. At this point De patientia turns from a eulogy (commendationem) of patience to an assessment of how patience should be lived out in the lives of Christians (demonstrationem) and so begins the ethical applications of the virtue. Chapters seven through ten present the “principle conditions for action” in relation to patience or impatience. Tertullian begins with a call for Christians to loosen their possessive grips on material objects and wealth. Such an action or disposition towards wealth prepares the Christian for giving up the more important things, such as his or her life. This preparation is crucial for modeling Christ's patience when verbal or

39. Here, Tertullian shifts in his language from talking about God in terms of Deus, dominus and magistro to the more familial, patris uestri caelestis, drawing from Matthew 5.44-45. In effect, the “new rules” (my interpretation) of faith found in the call to love one's enemies warrant a new orientation to the “law giver.”

40. Pat. 7.

41. Jean-Claude Fredouille believes that Tertullian's main argument begins immediately after the exordium in chapter two and stretches to the end of chapter fifteen. See, De La Patience, 53-54. Robert Sider, however, postulates how chapter six serves as the central theme around which the entire text spins. Sider, Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian, 39.

42. Pat. 11.1. Post has principales inpatientiae materias...
physical violence befalls the Christian as described in chapter eight.\textsuperscript{43} Chapter nine instructs Christians to be patient in their grief over those who have “fallen asleep” (\textit{Ne contristemini dormitione cuiusquam sicut nationes quae spe carent}), a quotation taken from I Thessalonians 4.13 and most likely a euphemism referring to the death of the martyrs. Furthermore, chapter ten indicates that Christians must also demonstrate patience by not seeking revenge when they or their fellow believers are harmed. Revenge is both superfluous and unnecessary because God is the Judge and Avenger of such cruelty.\textsuperscript{44} Overall, the dictum of not repaying evil for evil is absolute.\textsuperscript{45}

Tertullian emerges out of the specifics of his \textit{demonstrationem} with a general call for Christians to cultivate patience in their lives. This blanket calling is found in chapters eleven and twelve wherein patience is linked to the Beatitudes of Matthew 5, and to the Christian principles of forgiveness and brotherliness. Out of this call comes the bold pronouncement that patience enables charity, the highest virtue of the Christian faith (\textit{Dilectio, inquit, magnanimis est: id a patientia sumit}).\textsuperscript{46} Then, in what could be considered his \textit{amplificatio}, Tertullian ends his discussion on the attributes of patience with personification and an argument in favor of a bodily patience (\textit{Quae igitur negotiatio patientiae in corpore}).\textsuperscript{47} The embodiment of patience in chapter fifteen fulfills

\textsuperscript{43} Tertullian reads the narrative of Jesus’ passion literally because he calls contemporary Christians not only to endure persecutions willingly, but also to do so silently, since Jesus was silent. This behavior bears great significance because it is a testimony to the power of God and to the denial of satisfaction of persecutors whose pleasure comes from punishing or inflicting pain on Christians. \textit{Pat.} 8.7.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Pat.} 10.6. \textit{Quid ergo credimus iudicem illum, si non et ulterem?}

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Pat.} 10.3. Referencing Romans 12.17, \textit{Absolute itaque praecipitur malum malo non rependendum: par factum par habet meritum.}

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Pat.} 12.9.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Pat.} 13.2.
its literary function as he personifies patience with third person feminine pronouns and calls his audience to embody patience in their own lives. But more than this, Tertullian makes the claim that patience is the affliction of the flesh \( (Inprimis\ adflicitatio\ carnis) \). So to embody patience, the Christian must come to terms with the fact that physical suffering and a violent death are real possibilities.

Also contained within chapter thirteen is an argument that patience is not simply an intellectual or dispositional virtue, but a virtue that is perfected in the material bodies of Christians. In other words, while bodily patience is affliction \( (adflictatio) \), it is also the means by which affliction is overcome. Further, patience is not a matter for the mind or spirit \( (animo) \) only, as it is with the Stoics, but must be aligned with the body \( (corpore) \) as well. Here Tertullian resists a mind/body dualism that would link him with certain heresies and, in so doing, he provides a necessary link between the embodiment of patience and how Christians are to act in the face of persecution. Patience more than any other virtue will supply the strength needed stand firm when trials come, the spirit necessary for enduring imprisonment and isolation, and the fortitude required for

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 48. The reader should remember chapter three wherein God was embodied in Jesus and Jesus embodied patience.
\item 49. \textit{Pat.} 13.2.
\item 51. Tertullian vigilantly emphasizes distinctions that separate his writings from that of the so called heretics of the late ancient world. In this case, he fends off Marcion and other docetic adherents who advocate for firm distinctions between God the Father and God the Son. This passage also works against a purely Stoic interpretation of the virtue of patience since it removes patience from an entirely dispositional setting and places it in the passions of the human body.
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undergoing the “second baptism” (*secundae intinctionis*) of blood. And should Christians need further proof of the power of patience, Tertullian recounts in chapter fourteen the narratives of the great martyr Stephen, from the Acts of the Apostles 7 and the Hebrew Job, who faithfully endured life's unjust trials. In the end both characters partake in God's victory. By mimicking these ultimate acts of patience, the Christian effectively embodies Jesus's patience, thereby living out through the flesh what it means to be patient in the spirit.

Tertullian begins his *peroratio* or conclusion by outlining a long list of the attributes or promises of patience that flows forth from God. As God's “companion and handmaid” (*sua comite ac ministra*), patience fulfills all of God's requirements and enables the Christian with the means for enduring (*instrumento sustainendi*) martyrdom. 52 Then Tertullian reemphasizes the fact that *De patientia* is an exploration of Christian patience with one final rhetorical dualism. He stresses that Christian patience is heavenly (caelestis) and not an earthly or more common form of patience found among the nations (gentium terrae). 53 And in his closing lines, Tertullian uses one last rhetorical ploy to sway his audience towards his opinion. Just as he levied his appeal to obedience in chapter four as an secondary call towards one's duty to God, here he employs an argument from punishment for failing to practice patience along the lines he lays out. If up to this point the Christian is still unconvinced, the “subterranean fire awaits” as the ultimate testimony to the truth of Tertullian's words. 54

52. Pat. 15.

53. Pat. 16.1. This dualistic distinction echoes the discussion at the end of chapter one where Tertullian exalts his patience above the heights it reaches among philosophers.

54. Pat., 16.4. *subterraneus ignis expectat*.
With the overall argument in view, much could be said about the structure and content of *De patientia*. However, time and space permit only a few concluding observations from the scholarship pertaining to this tract. Fredouille, for example, refuses to give this tract a firm literary classification in terms of modern literary genres because these categories did not exist in the late second and early third centuries. He states that *De patientia* is presented simply as a reflection on the truth and reality of patience.\(^{55}\) Ronald Sider largely bypasses questions of genre, moving instead to questions of structure by identifying a chiastic arrangement that pivots on chapter six.\(^{56}\) He observes how parallel themes appear in chapters two and five, and then again in seven and thirteen, and are variously supported by the surrounding chapters. Sider asserts that Tertullian allowed the theme of patience to define the structure, and, by implication, the genre of this text.

While a chiastic structure might be plausible, its presence is in no way obvious. The formulation of a theme and its anti-theme are undeniable. For example, chapters two and three outline patience's divine origin and cause for superlative treatment, while chapter seven deals with the possible sources or causes of impatience. But if the chiasm hinges for Sider on chapter six, he dilutes its potency by identifying it simply as a “transition.”\(^{57}\) According to him, Tertullian uses chapter six to draw his audience from the one theme to another by highlighting the ways Christian patience remains superior to

\(^{55}\) Fredouille, *De La Patience*, 11.


\(^{57}\) ibid.
the old Jewish law, whose virtues are in *iudicium periculo licet*. The difficulty in asserting chapter six as a key transition in the text based on this argument is that Tertullian asserts the same distinction between Christians and non-Christians (i.e. Jews and pagans) several times in the other parts of the text. In chapter four, for example, Tertullian highlights how the patient man remains *obsequium* but the *numquam inpatiens obsequitur aut patiens quis [non] oblustatur*. If chapter six is a transition as Sider indicates, it is so only because its theme, the necessity of patience as both “subsequent and antecedent to the faith,” moves from exaltation to demonstration. But the central theme of the text is not how patience differentiates the Christian over and against the virtue of patience as expressed by those outside Christianity's borders. As explored in the following section, this differentiation exists, but only in so far as patience is first equated with martyrdom.

Throughout *De patientia*, Tertullian accomplishes his goals of eulogizing patience and exploring how it is evidenced in the life of the Christian. He praises patience with the highest accolades he can muster, which for him are the nature of God, the example of Christ and the evidence of the martyrs. He also clearly connects this divine virtue to the lived material experiences of Christians in Carthage, North Africa. Patience is necessary for loosening attachments to the things of this world, including life itself. By trusting fully in God, the Christian demonstrates patience and will stand firm in the face of persecution even unto death. Just as patience is God's “foster-child” (*alumna*), Christians

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58. *Pat. 6.20*. It must be noted that Tertullian presents his contrast between Christians and those under the Law primarily in the negative, i.e. the Christian is without (*sine*) danger of judgment, just as anger has been prohibited, their spirits restrained, the poison of the tongue extracted, etc. Each of these points is meant to signify to the reader the overarching superiority of the new patience demonstrated by Jesus over and against the old Law that stipulated an “eye for an eye.”

59. *Pat. 4.24.*
are adopted into the family of God when they embody the virtue of patience just as Jesus embodied it during his passion.

Re-Evaluating De Patientia

Tertullian eulogizes the virtue of patience and explores how it is lived-out in the lives of his Christian audience. While the virtue of patience is present in Stoic literature, this examination of patience represents the first text of its kind in Christian literature. Its success reaches beyond Tertullian as subsequent North African Christians, Cyprian and Augustine, write their own tracts on patience. 60 Doubtlessly, Tertullian engaged in a polemics of identity that preoccupied many Christians in late antiquity. Christians asserted their distinctiveness negatively in relation to the various “competing” identities surrounding them. 61 For Tertullian, fidelity to the name “Christian” demanded acts (actum) consistent with the lived example of Jesus of Nazareth culminating in one's willingness to undergo martyrdom. The main argument in this section contends that martyrdom, and not patience, represents the underlying socio-theological logic of De

60. Cyprian, De bono patientiae, ed. C. Moreschini, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, vol. 3A, 118-133; and Augustine, De Patientia, ed. J.P. Migne, in Patrologia latina 40, 611-624. For a comparative analysis on these three North African Christian treatments of patience, see Kossi Adiavu Ayedze, "Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine on Patience: A Comparative and Critical Study of Three Treatises on a Stoic-Christian Virtue in Early North African Christianity" (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2000). It is Ayedze's thesis that the lines drawn in these tracts between Christian, pagan and Jew work to solidify for the first time the concept of religion in so far as religious distinctions and not cultural ones determine Christian identity.

61. See Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). In this wonderfully articulate work, Boyarin explores the convex relationships between early Christians and Jews in the late Antiquity. As each group sought to carve out its identity in relation to the other, Boyarin asserts that desires for exclusive group identities led to the bitter discourses of heresiology. In his earlier work, Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), Boyarin identifies the situation in which the boundary lines between Judaism and Christianity by the second century were “so fuzzy that one could hardly say precisely at what point one stopped and the other began.” Martyrdom, he suggests, is a fruitful place for exploring the overlap between rabbinic Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity.
*patientia* whereby patience represents the mere vessel by which to arrive at the shores of the second baptism. If this assumption is correct, all appellations and demonstrations of patience should be read through the lens of martyrdom and reassessed for their corresponding impact upon Christian identity and action.

**Socio-Theological Logic**

To begin, let us briefly turn to questions of audience, recognizing that historical texts can only hint at ideal or intended audiences rather than actual audiences. 62 Tertullian writes to what is clearly a Christian audience, although the exact make-up of the Christian audience is more difficult to discern. Since our knowledge of the origins of Christianity in Carthage is fragmentary at best, we must follow the few extant traces. 63 The church in Carthage was well established by the middle to end of the second century. We have two existent Acta narratives that energetically proclaim the presence of Christian believers in North Africa and point to the existence of a lively community. 64 The first

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62. Vernon Robbins provides a clear distinction between the real audience and the intended, or ideal audience of ancient texts and distinguishes these actors from contemporaries readers. After explaining how a text's implied author is created by everything the reader/audience sees in the text, he states, "readers give 'voice' to verbal signs as they see them. That is, readers turn the signs into sounds that are 'language' among people. This is the means by which the verbal signs in a text become 'implied language.' In addition, readers hear and see phenomena in the context of the action and thought that are 'implied' information and material data. Finally, readers of texts create an image of a reader who can read a particular text with understanding. This is the 'implied reader.' If they themselves cannot understand the text, they create an image of a reader who the implied author imagined could read and understand the text." *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 23.


64. *Passio sanctorum Scilitanorum* and *Passio sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Both texts can be found in J. Armitage Robinson, *The Passion of S. Perpetua*. Newly edited from the Mss. with an
Acta is the narrative of a group known as the Scillitian martyrs who boldly assert their Christian identity to the proconsul, Saturninus, in 170. In this episode, six Christians speak directly to Saturninus, and refuse to take what must have been an offer of mercy when Saturninus informs them that he is not soliciting their immediate response regarding the legal accusations. On their insistence, Saturninus has little choice but to sentence the twelve Christians to death in the arena. Like the martyr narratives of the Apostles and Polycarp, the Acts of the Scillitian Martyrs—a specifically North African Christian expression of the verity of the faith and the model par excellence for future generations of Christians. Since the action of this Acta occurs in North Africa, its “reality” is that much closer to home for Tertullian and other North African Christians.

The second martyr narrative that similarly captured the hearts and imaginations of Christians in North Africa and others throughout the Empire is the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas. Commonly attributed to Tertullian on account of its Montanist assertions, the Passion occurs in Carthage between 203 and 220 CE. It arose to such popularity that Augustine would later instruct his congregants that it should not be equated with

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65. The editors and translators in Ante Nicene Fathers series, for example, make much of Tertullian's “conversion” to Montanism. For them, almost all chronology and dating issues are based upon the presence or absence of key Montanist undertones to determine when Tertullian joined the sect. Other commentators such as Rene Braun look more towards the degree of Montanist fervor in Tertullian's work rather than a specific turn away from the Catholic church. Braun extends the date range from 197 to 206 in “Deus Christianorum:” Recherches Sur Le Vocabulaire Doctrinal De Tertullien (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), 570, stating that it was influenced by the passion narrative of Perpetua. Barnes' revised chronology does not reject Montanist themes outright, but does not use it as a key factor for dating. Instead, Barnes employs “historical allusions, references to other works, doctrinal progression and style,” in Barnes, Tertullian 54. Internal and comparative evidence does seem to suggest that De patientia, contemporaneous with De paenitentia, was written during Tertullian's first literary phase.
Scripture. Its story recounts the biography of a young woman named Perpetua and recounts the trial, imprisonment and arena-based execution of a small group of Christians. Like the Acts of the Scillitian Martyrs, this martyrdom account plays into the broader identity discourse by making suffering a distinction of the Christian faith. Twice the narrator refers to martyrdom as the “second baptism.” Even with its strong Montanist overtones, the Passion reveals the existence of deacons, teachers, bishops, and prophets or prophetesses. If such a formalized church hierarchy was developing in North Africa during this time it might reasonably be assumed that Christianity was already well established and organized during the decades of Tertullian's literary energy.

These North African Christian Acta narratives cast much light on Tertullian's audience when viewed simultaneously with his other interlocutors of the text. As indicated in the outline above, Tertullian differentiates the Christian virtue of patience from Jewish Law and from pagan philosophy. Recognizing the three-fold distinction between types of patience, Fredouille notes that a tripartition de l'humanité, en Christiani-Iudaei-nationes, utilisée par les apologistes pour souligner la noubeauté et l'originalité du christianisme par rapport au judaïsme et par rapport au paganisme. True heavenly patience is derived from God, revealed in Christ and practiced in the lives of Christians. With an audience primed by a context of real physical persecutions,

66. De anima et eius origine, 1.10.2.


69. Fredouille, De La Patience, 30. Emphasis original.
Tertullian bounces the idea of patience back and forth off of these competing groups in order to clarify and solidify Christian boundaries.

When assessing the goals of *De patientia* in light of identity boundaries, the question arises: Is patience the only virtue capable of accomplishing these goals? Tertullian could have easily explicated one of these cardinal virtues of Stoicism if his chief aim was to Christianize Stoic virtues. Also, he could have eulogized a virtue more closely associated with Jesus' teachings and still managed to clarify and solidify Christian boundaries over against competing groups. Charity (*dilectio*), for example, could substitute almost directly for patience without requiring extensive revisions. The opening lines would read something like “how could I presume to write a treatise on Love given my unfitness for falling short of its demands.” Further, Christians would not be surprised in the least to associate love with God's nature. Perhaps this interchangeability reflects part of the genius of Tertullian's rhetoric.

But Tertullian did not choose to discuss any other virtue, nor did he mirror *De patientia*’s style or genre in any other of his tracts.\(^\text{70}\) Instead he picks the virtue of patience intentionally for its ability to communicate something more than a single virtue. Since he calls Christians to a ready and willing posture of suffering and martyrdom, possible reasons for his choice of patience resides in the semantic possibilities of this virtue. To start, the Latin noun *patientia* can be rendered into English as patience, endurance, forbearance or hardship. Similarly the adjectival form carries the volitional impetus of being willing or capable of standing up to hardships. Tertullian arrests

\(^{70}\) The closest he gets to singling-out another single Christian virtue is with *De oratione*, *De pudicitia*, or *De monogamia*. Yet none of these works eulogize their virtue to the same extent as patience is in *De patientia*.  

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*patientia* from its Stoic meaning “as a correct and rational judgment enforced by the will,” and opens it up to the concepts of endurance, suffering and martyrdom. 71  When exalted as the essence of God and lauded as the most important of all Christian virtues, *patientia* provides a specific range of semantic meaning necessary for delineating the boundaries of North African Christian identity.

The language Tertullian uses throughout this tract repeatedly points to a primary concern with martyrdom. Early on he talks about God suffering (*Deus patitur*) by being conceived in a womb, a point that springboards Tertullian into the physical and mental trials that Jesus underwent. 72 Tertullian provides a detailed explanation of the various instances where Jesus demonstrated patience in the midst of being spit upon, beat, derided, and disgracefully clothed and crowned (*despuitur uerberatur deridetur, foedis uestitur, foedioribus coronatur*) and then parallels this with local Christian experiences later on in the tract. 73 Chapter three not only outlines Tertullian's views on the person of Jesus in relation to God, thereby establishing his own authority to speak on matters concerning the church, but also tells the passion story in such a way as to emphasize the example and power of patience to be lived out under the conditions of persecution. Tertullian only includes those elements of Jesus' story that support his broader appellation of Christians as co-sufferers with Christ.

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72. *Pat*. 3.1. Tertullian was careful to distinguish between this claim of God suffering and the modal patripassionism that would later become synonymous with Sebellanism. Escaping modalism, Tertullian held that God co-suffered along with Christ.

By telling the story of Jesus in this way, the audience is drawn into the passion narrative and encouraged to see themselves in Jesus' place. Tertullian accomplishes this entreatment in two ways. First, at the end of chapter three he connects Jesus' teaching and suffering (*sermonibus, passionibus*) to those who believe (*credere*) in the Lord (*domini*). Tertullian expands upon this idea later in chapter thirteen when he argues for the union of patience in both mind and body; the virtue is known in the mind, but perfected (*perficitur*) in the flesh (*carne*) since the flesh is what wages war against persecutions. Therefore, just as Jesus met his oppressors with patience, Christians too must meet their persecutors with this same patience.

The second way Tertullian draws his audience into participation with Jesus' passion narrative is by emphasizing Jesus' future-oriented commands. Also in chapter three, Tertullian reminds his audience that Jesus “cursed for the time to come the works of the sword.” Himself an interpreter of Scripture, Tertullian transposes Jesus' statement about putting away one's sword into a command that his audience must follow. Akin to his other scriptural references, this reference to Matthew 27.52 invites his Christian audience into the passion narrative of Scripture. They must see themselves in Jesus' situation, as a “sheep is led up for the sacrifice” (*cum adducitur ut pecus ad uictimam*) and they must abide by the anti-violence or anti-retaliation demands of their authoritative text.

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74. *Pat.* 3.10.


76. *Pat.* 3.8. This is most likely a reference to Matthew 27.52 where, upon his arrest, Jesus tells one of his followers to put away his sword.

77. *Pat.* 3.7. It is important to note that Tertullian calls his audience to abide by his interpretation of Scripture and he remains steadfast in his calls for the church to maintain the highest moral standards.
As indicated above, missing from chapter three is any mention of Jesus' resurrection. In fact, Tertullian remains silent on this issue until chapter nine. What might this omission in chapter three suggest, especially since it is book-ended with grand statements about God. Certainly, one would expect to hear about the connections between patience and the supreme power of God to bring the dead back to life, especially given Tertullian's detailed descriptions of the passion narrative. Much like the semantic range of the term *patientia*, this omission directly relates to the tract's overall logic.

Tertullian is not concerned with presenting the story of Christ exclusively for purposes of establishing his “orthodox” authority. Instead, he remains skillfully selective in his telling of the story. It must tell what he wants it to tell, which is the story of martyrdom. What is more, Tertullian understands that by chapter three he still has much work to do to convince Christians to stand firm and to endure persecutions—a task that is begun by concentrating on the physical suffering of Jesus. By not jumping too quickly ahead, he carefully and deliberately leads his audience through pain in order to make the resurrection prize in chapter nine and thirteen all that much sweeter.

Before arriving at the hope of the resurrection in chapter nine, Tertullian describes other benefits of suffering along the way. Patience avoids the multitude of sins arising from impatience, inducts Christians into the family of God (*Vides quem nobis patrem patientia adquirat*), and exasperates the efforts of the persecutor. Tertullian describes other benefits of patience after chapter nine suggesting that the resurrection is but one element of Christian belief rather than its core. Continuing the benefits, patience also provides Christians with the highest form of legal defense. Although justice may be

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78. *Pat.* 5, 6.6, 8.7.
imperfect (or impatient) in this life, God will be sure to judge and avenge current injustices.⁷⁹ This call to endure injustices without retaliation is less a rally for inactivity since standing firm and meeting the blows of one's oppressors required active resolve. Finally, patience brings comfort to the Christian through the promise that God will always welcome him or her back into God's family. Tertullian explains this latter benefit in chapter twelve by using the prodigal son analogy from Luke 15 wherein the father patiently awaits, receives, clothes, feeds and makes excuses for the one who “had died.”⁸⁰

Explicit mention of Jesus' resurrection comes after Tertullian's exaltation section and after he is well underway in outlining how it is demonstrated in the Christian's persecuted life. In his discussions on patiently bearing one's grief concerning those who are “falling asleep” (contristemini dormitio ne cuiusquam sicut), Tertullian directs his audience back to their belief in the resurrection of Christ. He states, *Et merito: credentes enim resurrectionem Christi, in nostram quoque credimus, propter quos ille et obiit et resurrexit.* Here Tertullian asks a rhetorical question and provides the appropriate answer: don't you remember one of the central tenets of our rule of faith? The answer is, “Of course we believe in the resurrection of Christ and because of it, we find hope in our resurrection as well.” Another rhetorical question follows: What excuse is there, then, for not embracing persecution and even death? Given the placement of the resurrection within the argument of the text and that Tertullian already assumes his audience's belief

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⁸⁰. *Pat.* 12. *Illum quoque prodigum filium patientia patris et recipit et vestit et pascit et apud inpatientiam irati fratri excusat. Salus est igitur qui perierat, quia paenitetiam inquit.* Again, the reference to the perceived death of the son provides a euphemistic parallel to martyrdom and to the resurrection of the “child” presumed to be dead.
in it, he uses it in his argument only to further convince his audience of the connection between patience and martyrdom.

If his audience still failed to link patience with martyrdom in chapter eight, Tertullian makes it explicit at the end of chapter thirteen. After his euphemistic talk of “falling asleep” and its corresponding reference to the hope of the resurrection, in chapter thirteen he condenses down the framework of chapters seven through twelve into three parts. When persecution comes, patience goes to war against the desire to flee, offers a light in the isolation and bondage of imprisonment, and comes to one’s aid by enabling the Christian to embrace martyrdom. Such was the case with Jesus, and such will be the case with every Christian who is faced with similar trials.

In this same passage Tertullian uses three synonyms to elevate the act of martyrdom: the true experience of happiness (uero producitur ad experimentum felicitatis), the second baptism (ad occasionem secundae intentionis), and the act of ascending the divine seat (ad ipsum divinae sedis ascensum). By referring martyrdom to the divine, Tertullian comes full-circle to his dictum that “patience is the essence of God” in chapter three, thus occasioning a re-assessment of the eulogy portion of the tract. And in case Christians needed a refresher on how they might meet their bodily ends, he reminds them that patience provides the necessary strength to undergo beatings, fire, cross, beasts or the gladiator’s sword (ut uerbera, ut ignem, ut crucem bestias gladium). Regardless of the means of the ends, patience is always the bridge leading to the divine crossed by the prophets, apostles, and by implication, by Christians in North Africa.

81. Pat. 13.6-7. Si fuga urget, incommoda fugae caro militat; si et carcer praecedit, caro in uinculis, caro in ligno, caro in solo, et in illa paupertate lucis et in illa peruria mundi. Cum uero producitur ad experimentum felicitatis, ad occasionem secundae intentionis, ad ipsum divinae sedis ascensum, nulla plus illic quam patientia corporis.
While Tertullian never admits that the central theme of De patientia is martyrdom, the underlying socio-theological logic of the text makes this evident. From the beginning, Tertullian orients his audience to the suffering of Jesus and to the adoption into the family of God on account of patience. In chapters seven and eight when Tertullian prepares his audience to loosen their ties to lesser things as preparation of loosing even greater things. He then broaches the subject of martyrdom in his discussion on bereavement and revenge only to exalt it to the level of divine at the end of chapter thirteen. In chapter fifteen, just before his closing remarks, Tertullian confirms the centrality of martyrdom through his arrangement of a long list of promises. With female pronouns, Tertullian personifies patience with 25 characteristics. These characteristics cover the gamut of Christian experience ranging from bridling the tongue to teaching moderation to the wealthy. Located in the exact middle of this list is the “crown of martyrdom” (martyria consummat). This simple literary structure emphasizes the true thrust of Tertullian's text. Patience, therefore, is the mere vehicle, albeit a semantically necessary one, for asserting a Christian identity based upon the ideal image of the martyr.

Political Unconsciousness
As De patientia's inner textuality directs its audience to martyrdom, its intertextuality, or how it functions as an author's work, solidifies this conclusion and

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82. The personification of patience with feminine pronouns occurs in chapter twelve as well. In both sections, patience (feminine) is paired with God (masculine) in perfect union. The only other occurrence of a feminine person is Eve (mulier) in chapter five. Tertullian initially refers to Eve as “woman” in order to situate her as the first human to introduce impatience into the world. Interestingly, just as impatience enters the world through the woman, patience (she) is the means by which the martyr exits the world to be united with God.

83. Pat. 15.2.
elucidates Tertullian's political unconsciousness.\footnote{I am indebted to Vernon Robbins for supplying these textual categories for interpretation. This distinction provides a clear transition between reading for a text's socio-theological logic and its political unconsciousness. Robbins notes that a text's inner textuality is the “relationships between word-phrase and narrational patters that produce argumentative and aesthetic patters in texts.” Intertexture, on the other hand, does not consider the interpretive relationships between author and reader so much as it looks to the relationship between author and text. With the category of intertexture, our interpretation of \textit{De patientia} opens to include wider discursive environments. Vernon K. Robbins, \textit{The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse}, 46, 96.} The two \textit{Acta} described above testify to the heroism ascribed to those believers who met their death without wavering in their faith in the power of God. These texts glamorize the sufferer and universalize the conditions of persecution. Tertullian implicitly draws from these examples by expressing suffering and hardship as a common, if not accepted, reality of Christian life. In chapter eight of \textit{De patientia}, Tertullian has already transitioned from the exaltation of patience to its explication by discussing various forms of violence inflicted against Christians.\footnote{Chapter 8 is, by rhetorical design, the center of the text and it is at this point that Tertullian begins to focus his attention more narrowly on martyrdom. Guarding against the over-emphasis of this observation, the significance of the spatial placement of violence in the center of the text will become more evident when paralleled with chapter fifteen, below.} He admonishes his audience towards patience in the face provocation, “whether inflicted by tongue or by hand.”\footnote{\textit{Pat.} 8.1, 7. Reading \textit{Si manu quis temptauerit pro vocare} as “if anyone (or any band of soldiers) tries to provoke you.” Also: \textit{Nam omnis iniuria seu lingua seu manu incussa, cum patientiam offenderit...} Thelwall translates this phrase in the \textit{Ante Nicene Fathers} translation as “manual violence,” which carries the connotation of “instrumental” violence, whereby the tongue and the hand are used to inflict pain. My translation rightly places more emphasis on the Roman state as the instigators of persecution, thereby dialoguing more closely to the socio-political conditions of the other North African martyr narratives.} Tertullian avoids discussions regarding the justness or rightness of such injuries just as he does in \textit{De fuga in persecutione} and \textit{Ad martyras}. He does not so much assume that violence against Christians is essentially natural in any ontological sense, nor that it should be sought after, but simply accepts that it is a logical
consequence for breaking the laws of the state. What it means to be a Christian, just like what it means to have patience, is to assume joyfully the role of sufferer or martyr.

Tertullian expresses his concerns for the lived material conditions of Christians, both in *De patientia* and in the rest of his corpus. To this end, he seeks to solidify in the lives and hearts of fellow North African believers a Christian identity based upon the power he believes the Christian God provides. By expanding the semantic range of *patientia* beyond its Jewish and Stoic conceptions, Tertullian legitimates Christianity as a viable social actor, and thus, a viable center of power. The fact that Cyprian and Augustine also write a tract on patience testifies to high degree of social power Tertullian's discourse achieved. Tertullian works hard in *De patientia* to make Christianity distinct through martyrdom. But unlike *De fuga* or *Ad martyras*, *De patientia* offers an interior moment of reflection prior to any actualized persecution.87

Recalling briefly the postcolonial interpretation of David Wilhite, he examines the various ways Tertullian struggles against the social and political forces of the Roman Empire and asserts his Punic Christian identity.88 Granting Wilhite's assessments,

Tertullian not only carves out a space in *De patientia* for Christianity against Jews and

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87. Fredouille, *De La Patience*, 8. Textual referents to the audiences and occasions of works like *De patientia* and *De fuga in persecutione* reveal significant differences between them. *De fuga*, for example, is addressed to a small group of Christians already in prison and awaiting their fates, while *De patientia* leaves open the possibility of imprisonment. Yet while the audience in the latter work is not currently faced with the same emergency as is that of the former, Tertullian presumes his ideal audience should be preparing in advance for just such an occasion.

88. Wilhite draws upon various sub-disciplines within social anthropology, such as kinship theory, ethnicity theory, and class identity theory, to show that Tertullian fits well within the category of the indigenous North African. Using kinship theory, for example, Wilhite notes the various ways that Tertullian in *Ad uxor I* draws upon rhetorical devices to compare and contrast the meanings of *unuiira* and *saecula*. The “world” takes on an increasingly negative tone when Tertullian describes life in Rome. In contrast, the “virgin Church” represents the rejection of all things “gentile,” a positive virtue in Roman life. According to Wilhite, it is upon this basis that Tertullian rejects Roman values, and the corresponding Romanization of Christian life in North Africa. *Tertullian the African*, 97.
pagans, but also against the colonial forces of Rome. Together, this trifold socio-political space allows him the room to construct the ideal Christian and solidify it as a viable site for Christian resistance against competing identity structures.

The first hint of socio-political maneuvering exists in Tertullian's confrontation with the Roman Empire. He does this in this text by adopting militaristic imperial symbols and recasts them in a Christian context. In chapter thirteen just before he marches from the threat of persecution to the ascension to the divine seat, Tertullian proclaims that the patience of the flesh fights (proeliatur) against the demands of patience to resist flight.\(^8^9\) The noun proeliatur translates as fighter, warrior and sometimes as soldier. But if proeliatur proved too soft a term to point directly to the Roman military, Tertullian immediately deploys the verb, militat to describe the flesh warring against the incommoda fugae thus eliminating any comparative ambiguities.

The significance here is not that he uses military terms to describe the struggles Christians experience under threat of violence or injustice. As Harnack has pointed out, many early Christians viewed themselves as real soldiers engaged in real battles against good and evil. Instead, the significance of these military terms is the appropriation and redefinition of imperial symbols by a marginalized underclass. His Christian use of proeliatur and militat pacifies the violence inherent in the imperial symbol since the Christian soldier rejoices when cursed, thereby robbing the enemy of their joy to see

\(^8^9\) Pat. 13.6. All other references in this paragraph come from this section.

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Christians punished much like a weapon that is blunted when hit against an immovable stone.90

Tertullian's redefinition of patience from its Stoic meanings reflects the second instantiation of socio-political self-legitimation in De patientia. The virtue of patience was already firmly seated within Stoic philosophy.91 But unlike the Stoic virtue, which cultivated a detached or un-emotional response to fate and represented an end unto itself, Tertullian links patience with the suffering of God in chapter two and with the suffering of Christians in chapter thirteen. He also stresses that patience comes from God and is useful for bridging the mind and flesh. As Marcia Colish observes, “Here we see Tertullian emptying the virtue of patience of its autarchic Stoic meaning as a correct and rational judgment enforced by the will and substituting for a heteronomous supernatural explanation of its motivations and dynamics.”92 He states that the Stoic virtue of patience is dog-like (caninae) and shamefully false (falsa probrosa) when compared with the heavenly and true (caelestis et uerae) patience of Christians.93 Again, he takes a common symbol, or virtue in this case, and breathes new life into it. Such a transformation provides new knowledge by reorienting existing knowledge and shapes what it means to be Christian.

90. Pat. 8.7. quo telum aliquod in petra constantissimae duritiae libratum et obtusum.

91. In addition to the other references provided on Stoicism, Fredouille devotes much energy to outlining how patientia had been treated in Stoic and philosophical writings. De La Patience, 30.


93. Pat. 2.1, 16.1.
The third component of the socio-political and, in this case, religious, trifecta occurs in *De patientia* with reference to the Jews. In chapters five and six Tertullian pairs impatience (*inpatientia*) with most of the major Hebrew figures associated with the Law and Israel. Eve, Adam and Cain introduced all forms of impatience into the world, by which Moses, Aaron and all the Israelites “offended the Lord” (*dominum offendat*). Tertullian rescues patience, and therefore, God, from Israel by typologically appealing to Abraham and his magnanimous faith. He uses this typology to redeem the “Old Testament” God for the “New Testament” Christ, and in so doing, separates Moses (the Law) from the new covenant in Christ. And the casual reader, both in late antiquity and today, will hardly miss Tertullian's immediate jump from Abraham to the example of Jesus. Through these Scriptural examples, Tertullian forges resolute distinctions between Christianity and Judaism hoping to clarify the boundaries between two groups that share such a close kinship.

These redefinations and appropriations of imperial, pagan and Jewish symbols create new forms of knowledge particular to the Christian and to Christian experience.

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94. Tertullian's writings uphold some incredibly uneasy tensions between Christianity and Judaism. For example, in *Adversus Valentinianos*, he describes Christians as grafted onto the good vine of Judaism, while later depicted the Jews as “asps” in *Adversus Marcionem*. Additionally, he defends the Hebrew Scriptures and prophecies against Marcion's rejection of the “Old Testament” but, as in *De Patientia*, clearly links the Jews to the Devil, impatience, and every evil that has entered the world. Most likely, Tertullian takes from the Jewish tradition which that is of use for explaining the origins of Christianity, but rejects those elements that compete for religious primacy in his late second century world.

95. *Pat*. 5.22.

96. Tertullian does not have the luxury to simply jettison the Old Testament. He actually goes to great lengths in works like *Adversus Marcionem* to resuscitate it from “heretics.” However, and much like the other Christian writers during this period, he employs a renunciatory hermeneutic to navigate around those parts of the Old Testament that do not accord well with Christian teachings. For a lengthy and detailed analysis of this hermeneutic, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation : Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 420.
This new knowledge serves to legitimate Christian existence amongst competing cultural, religious and political worldviews by negating or pacifying (rendering useless) the competition. Commenting on the social function of Christian apologists during this time, James Dunn describes how their work arose to counter the Empire's unjust actions, and that their rhetoric (both discursive and classic) sought to “justify their existence to themselves, Jews and pagans like.”

Tertullian's rhetoric in *De patientia* as well as in his other works was designed for persuasion on these three levels. And although he does not explicitly advocate earthly justice on behalf of his community, his linguistic reversals implicitly challenge those power-centers against which Tertullian identifies Christianity.

Tertullian's appropriations of “external” symbols and symbol systems only goes part way towards legitimating his understanding of Christian identity. The rest of the way is carried by his argument of the Christian sufferer. Without a doubt, Tertullian capitalizes on the image of the Christian sufferer with such vehemence that the subject and the modifier must at all times be understood in relationship with one another—Christian identity becomes a suffering identity. Returning to and paraphrasing the tone of chapter thirteen in light of the text's socio-theological logic, “*When* the soldiers come for you, *when* the fear of bodily pain tempts you to flee, and *when* you are offered the chance to prove your faith through martyrdom, patience will grant you strength and perfect the divine in you.” Tertullian cares nothing for impotent possibilities; he keeps the reality of suffering at the forefront of his entire discourse. According to Judith Perkins, who reads history through a Foucauldian power analysis, the suffering self imagery “functioned to subvert the hierarchical structures holding sway in the early Empire” by locating new

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sources and avenues of power. By adopting the identity of a sufferer, a Christian in Tertullian's audience enters into a new-found power dynamic previously withheld from those on the geographical, ideological and religious boarders of the Empire. The image of the suffering Christian stands as a sufficient testimony to win converts to Christianity, thus increasing the power and authority of the church in the late ancient world. In the end, the political unconsciousness of De patientia is two-fold: it is the attempt to legitimate Christianity to itself and to the word by redefining patience according to boundaries of Christian identity, and it is the attempt to legitimate Christian identity according to the image of the martyr.

**Historiographic Appropriation and Ethical Importance**

This description and re-evaluation of Tertullian and his views on the virtue of patience are informed by Elizabeth Clark's historiographic concerns. Extrapolated in greater detail in chapter two of this dissertation, Clark draws upon postmodern and post-structural theories to illuminate hidden assumptions and muted themes in historical texts. By approaching the study of history with an eye for textuality before addressing issues of socio-historical importance, she acknowledges two indispensable factors contributing to the construction of history. The first factor is that the past represents a reality to which contemporary historians have no direct access. The second factor is that all histories are


99. ibid., 109. Perkins takes this image primarily from the Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis 9.1. It must be noted that Perkins never explores the possibility that Perpetua and other Christians believed this power to be the real presence of God in their souls. Instead, she muses about whether or not this power was the ability to endure, to accept pain and death, or to obtain social privileges. Tertullian gives us textual evidence that the power he and other suffering Christians draw upon is that of God, who is at war in the spiritual realm against the opposing powers of the Devil.
imbibed with the biases and ideological commitments of the historian. As such, she looks to postmodernism and post-structuralism for their ability to deconstruct and decode histories and historical texts by reading for their socio-theological logic and political unconsciousness. When historians attune their work towards the idea of socio-theological logics, especially those historians dealing with texts that are highly literary in nature, they are better positioned for more fruitful dialogues with the past as they begin to identify the shifting images of the historical carnivalesque.

With these theoretical concerns in mind, this final section compares the present Clarkian re-evaluation of Tertullian's *De patientia* with La Capra's descriptions of dialogue and carnivalesque. This comparison relates the martyr-centric socio-theological logic to the concept of dialogue whereby the process of reading and rereading illuminates the martyrdom theme in new ways. It also relates *De patientia's* power and legitimation-driven political unconsciousness to the concept of the carnival mask behind which Tertullian conceals and reveals issues of Christian identity. This chapter then concludes with a brief description of the benefits of adopting this re-evaluation of Tertullian for Christian ethical analysis.

La Capra's image of dialoguing with the past necessitates a critical reading and re-reading of historical texts. Like Clark, he approaches the text with postmodern and post-structural concerns for narrative and textuality. As such, his understanding of dialoguing with the past relies upon critical deconstructions of language capable of informing our present knowledge of the past in new ways. This image parallels nicely with Clark's concern for reading a text for its socio-theological logic. Both concepts require the
contemporary historian to come to grips with one's own ideological biases in order to see or read for the gaps and silences in historical texts. They also require the historian to challenge preconceived interpretations so that the gaps can “speak” more clearly and in new ways.

This chapter has attempted this synthesis. The brief criticism of Jerome and Eusebius initiated the turn towards self-consciousness by making the reader aware of the difficulties inherent in accessing a pure and true knowledge of Tertullian. Then, working through a detailed synopsis De patientia set the parameters for dealing primarily with its textuality. Thus, the conditions were set to re-evaluate, or dialogue anew with the virtue of patience. Moving from warm-up to main-event, the re-evaluation section provided a reading of De patientia that highlighted its socio-theological logic, discovering that martyrdom and not patience stands as the central concern of the text.

Armed with a socio-theological logic that unveils patience as a symbol for martyrdom, we are better positioned to discover how this logic functions with respect to the larger socio-political concerns for identity. This is where the La Capran/Bahktinian carnival mask and Clark's political unconsciousness enable further deconstructive insights. As described at the start of this chapter, important discourses and identities are often hidden behind the surface layers of representation in historical texts. Without a doubt, these sub-layers are incredibly difficult to access since they are based on the traces and excesses in linguistic meanings. At the moment we think we have spotted them, they disappear from view. Such is the nature of a trace. But gaps, aporias and silences in texts are no less “real” than any projection of the past in contemporary historical literature.
The image of the carnival mask provides an invaluable tool for a self-critical
historiography capable of exploring a text's gaps and silences. It is often out of these
gaps that a text's socio-theological logic can be heard. Further, recognizing that identity
and discourses are hidden beneath surface representations attunes us to a text or author's
political unconsciousness. This quasi-psychological concept underscores the presence of
ideological commitments that remain unstated or unrecognized. It is the mask behind the
mask. After identifying martyrdom as *De patientia's* key theme rather than patience, the
analysis moved to issues of discursive power and socio-political and theological
legitimation. Tertullian never states that he needs to legitimate a martyr identity: he
simply does it. As such, its legitimation lies below the consciousness of the text. To
create this image he commandeers preexisting discourses and re-appropriates them for his
specific purposes. This process creates new knowledge, and where there is new
knowledge, according to Foucault, there is power. Thus, the legitimation of the
Christian sufferer rests beneath Tertullian's commendation and demonstration of patience.

As this chapter concludes, we explore the final implications this re-evaluation of
Tertullian and his understanding of the virtue of patience has on Christian ethical
analysis. From the start, adopting a historiography more attuned to the theoretical
concerns of postmodernism and post-structuralism opens a variety of avenues for critical
and deconstructive readings of Tertullian. This methodology is essential to the task of

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100. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 27. Here, Foucault states, “We should rather admit that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.” Power comes from all directions, as Perkins describes Foucault's concern, and “new knowledge implies new power which, in turn, entails new institutions.” Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 10.
deciphering Tertullian's thick rhetoric as it relates first to the narratological elements of his texts and second to the larger socio-political and theological contexts informing his North African Christian discourse on identity. This historical methodology also reads against the grain of the dominant narratives of the Church that have appropriated and misappropriated him for their own ideological ends. Ultimately, it speaks out of the gaps, silences and aporias in Tertullian's texts and attempts to break those open to expose the traces of knowledge contained therein.

Each of these general methodological payoffs orient the ethicist towards the recognition that historical “facts” are just as constructed as are the corresponding stories that we tell about those facts. The recognition of the inherent constructed-ness of all historical narratives need not, as the present re-evaluation has shown, send us into flight towards the unsteady grounds of historical relativism. The importance of stories to recollect shared memories and form collective identities does not cease to exist by simply acknowledging that all narratives are sophisticated social constructions. Neither, though, should this recognition warrant the digging of our heels into the sands of continuity and universalism.

The recognition of the constructed nature of our histories should invoke a wider or deeper understanding of how each historical narrative impacts groups different from our own. Since I come to historical and ethical analysis with the liberationist bias and a “preferential option for the poor,” I must continually ask, “how do Tertullian's story, histories about Tertullian and my interpretation function in relation to the text's silences and gaps?” As an ethicist I must also inquire into the affect of histories on our sense of
identity and on the lived material struggles of the poor and marginalized whose actual voices cry out from society's gaps and silences. This re-evaluation of De patientia succeeds and fails at this task in the following ways. It succeeds to the extent that Tertullian's particular North African identity is acknowledged and not rationalized away or ignored in favor of a more homogenous depiction of Christianity in late antiquity. In effect, it upholds the distinctiveness of Tertullian's text without collapsing it into later interpretations by other Christian authors. By implication, Tertullian does not say what Augustine says or what Aquinas says. Further, it succeeds by reading Tertullian and the virtue of patience as existing under the materialist conditions of unjustified suffering. Even if Tertullian hyperbolizes martyrdom or universalizes the Christian experience of persecution (which he certainly does), this reading rejects the temptation to minimize the actual conditions of suffering imposed by Stanley Hauerwas, which uncritically equating them to existential angst.

However, the interpretation provided in this chapter also is grossly inadequate if taken as the way to understand Tertullian. I offer a fairly positive reading that may seem misdirected if one were to compare this reading of De patientia to Adversus Marcionem, for example, where Tertullian opens with adolescent name-calling or to De cultu feminarum I that has been long decried by feminists for solidifying a patriarchal church authority.101 In his other works, Tertullian is often bitterly sarcastic, theologically myopic

101. For a particularly poignant essay critiquing Tertullian from a feminist perspective, see Margaret Miles, "Patriarchy as Political Theology: The Establishment of North African Christianity," in Civil Religion and Political Theology, ed. Leroy S. Rouner, Vol. 8 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 169-186. Christianity in North Africa was marked generally by its emphasis on martyrdom and on the Holy Spirit, neither of which were restricted on account of gender. Margaret Miles points out that "conversion to Christianity brought with it, for women as for men, a strong sense of liberation from the conventional patterns of late Roman corporate life. But gender role expectations were one of the least malleable [and] most inaccessible carryovers from a Christian's former life" (173). Miles points out how
and down-right abrasive against other individuals and groups who do not share his convictions. Yet, this contrast between a positive critical evaluation and these important negative criticisms must coexist if we are going to resist universal and homogenizing histories of an incredibly diverse and particularized historical figure and time period. Ultimately, the ethicist who relies upon historical analysis must retell the stories of the past in ways that better account for our current standards of justice. Who and how the past is remembered and codified are inherently linked to the political and ideological ends of contemporary discourses.

Tertullian's rhetoric reveals his own discomfort with seeing women prophesying and speaking in congregational settings and that Tertullian eventually sides with the preexistent patriarchy of his Punic ancestry. Another important essay from a rigidly feminist perspective is E. Lamirande, "Tertullien Misogyne? Pour Une Relecture Du 'De Cultu Feminarum'," Science Et Esprit 39 (1987), 5-25, in which Lamirande denies that Tertullian was afraid of women. Instead, she argues that he sought to keep women in a subservient role. In contrast, see Turcan, Being a Woman According to Tertullian, 15-21, for a counter-balance to Miles and Lamirande. Turcan provides a wonderful survey of the feminist readings of Tertullian and juxtaposes Tertullian's nefarious comments about women with his comments regarding their positive characteristics. If nothing else, Turcan's efforts complicate a straight-forward dismissal of Tertullian on account of his views of women.
CHAPTER 5:
CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY AND THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE

Raymond Williams aptly asserts, “In spite of substantial and at some levels
decisive continuities in grammar and vocabulary, no generation speaks quite the same
language as its predecessors.”¹ Immediate knowledge of the past is always complicated
by the ever shifting appropriations of language in response to changing social conditions.
“The difference,” Williams continues, “can be defined in terms of additions, deletions,
and modifications, but these do not exhaust it.”² As each generation reads and responds
to past events, it appropriates these events on its own terms. A new generation
apprehends the knowledges left by previous ones in accordance with ever changing social
conditions and modifies language to correspond with its own understanding of those
social conditions. The poignancy of Williams' statement for a theory of interpretation
comes with the realization that “meaning is always produced; it is never simply
expressed.”³

This final chapter turns again to Stanley Hauerwas to investigate more directly
how he navigates through the intimate spaces between history and ethics. The

2. ibid., 131.
3. ibid., 166.
implications of and alternatives to this investigation will equip ethicists with a tangible starting point for re-evaluating the ethical consequences inherent in the production of historical meaning. The first section of this chapter highlights the various ways an emphasis on historical continuity functions to perpetuate universal and unified readings of the church's story. Tertullian uses a hermeneutic of selective continuity in order to socially legitimate Christianity and distinguish is from its neighbors. Hauerwas also employs a method for reading Christian history for its continuities. Constantinianism is the lens that enables him to produce seamless unities between present and past that uncritically unite the virtue of patience to his pacifistic ethic. Yet we must keep in mind that the presence of similar linguistic symbols in Tertullian and Hauerwas in no way necessitates that they speak the same language. The second section of this chapter emphasizes the need to read for history's discontinuities as a starting point from which to cultivate a critically self-reflexive historiography. Emphasizing discontinuity is imperative because it exposes the political unconsciousness of the historian or ethicist, destabilizes hegemonic constructions of universal histories, and opens a space in which alternative historical accounts can arise from the gaps, aporias and silences of history.\(^4\)

The third section of this chapter turns our attention more specifically to the ethics of historical analysis, or rather, the importance of historical analysis for ethicists. The destabilization of unity and continuity will rattle the identities of those required to give-up their false claims of unity and continuity, but let us find hope in the recognition that our stories can be told in better ways. This being said, postmodern post-structuralist

\(^4\) While I do not presume to speak for these silenced voices, I do point to a methodology of inclusion, diversity and heterogeneity that, if adopted by ethicists from the center, could facilitate more productive dialogues between center and margins.
destabilization has the potential to erode the divisive boundaries separating center and
margins and move us to produce ethical horizons better attuned the a wider application of
justice and equality.

**Impositions of Continuity on Interpretation**

We go to great lengths to unite the present with the past in coherent, meaningful
and directive ways. Specifically, Christians often look to the past as a source of
significance, hoping to find continuities within their own tradition capable of making
sense out of contemporary modes of life. Both Tertullian and Hauerwas find ways to
align their messages of patience with the life and teachings of Jesus and the developing
Christian tradition. Tertullian wrote that because Jesus “cursed for the time to come the
use of the sword,” and endured his enemy's wounds “as a sheep for a victim,” so too must
persecuted North African Christians undergo persecution and martyrdom. De patientia
does the hard work of mediating between Jesus' example and Tertullian's call for
martyrdom. Yet with less than two hundred years separating them, Tertullian's language
shifts from Jesus' language in response to differing linguistic and contextual conditions,
and rightly so since no generation speaks the same language. These shifts require
Tertullian to adopt an interpretive hermeneutic capable of bridging alterations in context.

Similarly, Hauerwas adopts a historical interpretive strategy, or hermeneutic, that
unites the church's past and present in direct and continuous ways. He draws upon
Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and upon the Christian story more generally, in an effort
to take the “Christian” in Christian ethics seriously. Yet unlike Walter Rauschenbusch

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5. *Pat. 3*. Quotes are taken from the S. Thelwall translation in the ANF series used exclusively by Hauerwas.
who was committed to a historicist biblical criticism or even Reinhold Niebuhr who appealed to a realist and universally applicable Christ, Hauerwas collapses text and interpretation into a singular notion of story. This is his method for unifying the church across the previous two millennia. The church establishes and maintains its story, which governs all interpretations of itself and Scripture.\(^6\) In other words, the church's story is self-authenticating.

Together, Tertullian and Hauerwas “speak” to Christian audiences by appealing to the continuity between their contemporary location and that of Christianity's sanctioned traditions. Both men have their own ways of establishing continuity. Tertullian habitually refers to the “rule of faith” throughout his work, claiming that it is the canon upon which Christians can decipher truth and heresy.\(^7\) In works like *De patientia* where he does not explicitly refer to the rule of faith, he recasts the gospel story of Jesus to fit the topics that occasion each tract. Hauerwas offers a similar formula but instead of referring to a specific baptismal confession of faith like the “rule,” he belabor's the existence of the church's singular story. Where, then, do contemporary Christians gain the skills to interpret the church's story? According to Hauerwas, they must first be a part of the church before they can read the Bible and understand its meaning. The story is

\(^6\) Rebutting the similar goals of fundamentalism and biblical criticism to derive scriptural interpretations apart from an interpretive community, Hauerwas states, “That Christians have thought it possible to translate our Scriptures should be sign enough that no strong distinction can be made between text and interpretation.” Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 28. Here he concurs with Stanley Fish's anti-objectivist assessment that no “real” meaning exists on its own terms, but that Scripture always necessitates an “interpretive community.” Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); See also his, *Doing what Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 142f.

told and retold under the interpretive authority of Christians who submit to the interpretive authority of the Christian church.\textsuperscript{8} The church keeps its story in good repair by supplying the interpretive categories for proper comprehension of biblical meanings.\textsuperscript{9} Without the church there can be no comprehension of Christianity's truth and, therefore, no steady union between past and present.\textsuperscript{10}

In many ways, Hauerwas' basic historical approach aligns with that of historians following the “Linguistic Turn” which rejects objective or unmediated histories or historical interpretations. Neither the Christian church nor the story of Jesus are housed in an essentialist reality that can be unlocked and fully comprehended via the sole reconstruction of social facts. Recognizing the false pretenses of high modern historicism and its misplaced trust in objective scientific methodologies, Hauerwas turns to the interpretive authority of the church. The contemporary church must read and understand Scripture in a manner different from the sciences. The church's interpretation of its own story remains self-authorizing so long as it maintains its distance from the world. Yet as soon as Christians buy into the interpretive categories of the world, the church falls out of continuity with the church's true story. Constantinian Christians must


\textsuperscript{9} Hauerwas finds continuity between his version of the Christian church and that of the early Church Fathers. He also labors to thread the truth of Christian through the linear historical record over the past two thousand years. Augustine, for example, wrote in the era immediately following the reign of Constantine. Hauerwas claims that Augustine's narratological explanation of evil, his letting go of platonism, and his distaste for Manicheism demonstrate that he would “agree with me” regarding the fact that Christianity is based upon a continual story and not static explanations. See Stanley Hauerwas, "Seeing Darkness, Hearing Silence: Augustine's Account of Evil," in \textit{Naming Evil, Judging Evil}, ed. Ruth Weissbourd Grant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 35-52.

\textsuperscript{10} Hauerwas states, “God certainly uses Scripture to call the Church to faithfulness, but such a call always comes in the form of some in the Church reminding others in the Church how to live as Christians...” Hauerwas, \textit{Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America}, 28.
learn to speak a new language that is based upon the story of Jesus as presented in the Gospels because the Gospels display the grammar of life. This grammar of life is found in the continuous Christian story. Christians can see “the world rightly and without illusion” when the language of contemporary life corresponds with the language of the Gospels mediated through the historical life of the church.

While Hauerwas makes room narrative, he over-generalizes the continuities that link his conception of the church with the diverse church of the Christian tradition. His focus on continuity flattens out the history of Christianity according to predetermined plots that gloss over the gaps and silences in the church's wider historical sources. This over-generalization is unsurprising given his Constantinian interpretive lens. Constantinianism structures the categories by which all of the Christian tradition must be understood. He states that the narrative of Scripture “renders a character” and a “community capable of ordering its existence appropriate to such stories.” Without any other mans described for guiding the church's self-interpretation, Hauerwas trusts in God to move through Scripture and affect the lives of those who read it within the confines of the church (i.e. community).

11. Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 40-42.

12. ibid., 50.

13. Paul Veyne notes how a historian's explanations depend upon his or her organization of the material around predetermined plots. These plots create a “deceptive continuity” by dissolving conflicting information within the historical sources. See, Writing History: Essay on Epistemology [Comment on écrit l'histoire.], 1 Wesleyan ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 17-18. Also referenced in Elizabeth A. Clark, History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 92.

14. ibid., 67.
Yet it is this trust in the story to function independently from wider issues of interpretation that leaves him vulnerable to postmodern and post-structural criticisms. Overlaying definitional and interpretive categories on the whole history of the Christian tradition forces unities where unities might otherwise never appear. The resulting depiction of Christianity ends up looking remarkably similar to the expressions of Christianity that correspond with Hauerwas' social location, or to those churches who adhere to the principles of Constantinianism. While the imposition of unity and continuity in Hauerwas' historiographic approach has already been discussed with regard to the virtue of patience, it can be demonstrated in three additional ways: his language of pacifism, his language of obedience, and his language of suffering.

**Continuity and the Language of Pacifism**

The first imposed continuity of Hauerwas' master narrative relates to his language of Christian pacifism. Saddled with Constantinianism, Hauerwas neatly compartmentalizes the variances and incongruities that constitute existent Christian testimonies against military service. Hauerwas often turns to Tertullian because Tertullian is one of the earliest Christians to come out strongly against the military—a point that parallels Hauerwas' own commitment to pacifism. In numerous works, Tertullian denounces Christian military service for tempting Christians with idolatry.\(^{15}\) Numerous scholars of early Christianity attest to Tertullian's rejection of the military on idolatrous grounds over and above other concerns.\(^{16}\)

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15. See *De cor.* for Tertullian's firm connections between idolatry and military service and *De spect.* for his rejection of the violence of Colosseum games on idolatrous grounds.

16. Early Christian scholarship during the 1900s focused much of its energies connecting the first Christian church to a full-fledged pacifism. Most of these scholars follow the sclerotic decline hypothesis of Adolf von Harnack. See Roland Herbert Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: a
However, when Hauerwas' reads Tertullian through Constantinianism, the particulars justifying early Christian pacifism fade in importance. Precedent is all Hauerwas needs to connect the early church directly to his pacifistic ethic. Throughout his work, Hauerwas belabors the point that Christians ought to have no business in the military. But unlike Tertullian who rejects the military for its inherent idolatries, Hauerwas rejects it for its propitiation of state-sanctioned violence in justification of liberal values. He states, “the state uses violence to restrain those who have no respect for the lives and rights of other people in that society.”17 He goes on to claim that Christians are often tempted to resort to violence in order to protect the same things. Such behavior is deplorable because it reveals the Christian's desire to be “in control,” or to share power with the state. Here the connection between pacifism and Hauerwas' master narrative coalesce as the language of pacifism flows out of the Constantinian grid. As a result, he expands Tertullian's condemnation of idolatry in reference to pacifism to include “offending God.”18 When read through the eyes of Constantinianism, the offense against God relates directly to the aforementioned desire to share power with the state. Thus, Hauerwas finds in Tertullian's general rejection of the military the continuity he

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was looking for to validate his particular concerns about violence, liberalism and military involvement.

**Continuity and the Language of Obedience**

The second imposed continuity between Hauerwas and Tertullian relates to the language of obedience. In *De patientia* Tertullian connects patience with obedience explicitly saying that obedience is made possible through patience.\(^{19}\) With patience as the operative principle in a larger context of persecution, obedience (*obsequium*) refers to the individual's free choice to mimic the suffering of Jesus. Here, obedience (*obsequium*) is not directly associated with the force of authority but with the willful participation in one's suffering when persecutions come to the Christian. Tertullian carefully differentiates *obsequium* from the more authority-based obedience (*obedientia*), which is exacted by slaves, cattle, beasts and brutes.\(^{20}\) *Obedientia* carries the notion of obligation or duty based upon one's relationship to a master under the threat of force. *Obsequium*, on the other hand, signals for Tertullian a willingness to mimic the sufferings of Christ, but not just because Christians are commanded authoritatively to do so, but because Jesus obediently (*obsequium*) endured (*patientia*) amidst similar persecutions.

Hauerwas often uses the language of obedience and projects it as a universal moral virtue. Much like Tertullian, Hauerwas distinguishes between the volitional and authoritative aspects of obedience by emphasizing the reasoned and consensual

\(^{19}\) *Pat.* 4.5. *ipsum quoque obsequium de patientia trahitur*

\(^{20}\) *Pat.* 4.3. Reading: *debitoribus pecudibus, and bestis*. Tertullian unproblematically understands these categories as useful in their own right (*usibus*), and as inappropriate reference points for fulfilling the call of *obsequium*.
obedience required to follow Christ.\textsuperscript{21} However, this distinction is filtered through his master narrative. To willfully submit to the authority of the church is to accept the interpretive terms set by the ecclesiastical tradition, which for Hauerwas are reflected through the dominant voices of the Christian tradition who remain pure of the Constantinian synthesis. As noted in chapter three, Hauerwas adopts Tertullian's language, but defines it according to the elaborations of Augustine and Aquinas. The interpretive implications here point to how Hauerwas grants Augustine and Aquinas a greater degree of authority over issues pertaining to the virtues of the church. This interpretive privileging succeeds in down-playing or silencing the textual nuances of the the less privileged source—in this case, Tertullian.\textsuperscript{22} To the contrary, he fails to see Tertullian under the terms of marginality that have been surfacing for the past three or four decades. At no point does Hauerwas begin with or even accept interpretations from the poor and marginalized concerned with adopting the historical language of the church and universalizing it to bolster his argument for the interpretive authority of the ecclesiastical tradition.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, even though Hauerwas uses Tertullian's language of


\textsuperscript{23} Evidence for this claim comes from his systematic lack of engagement with marginalized communities. He quotes Gustavo Gutiérrez, for example, but only to use them as stand-in for all liberation theologies. For a critique of Hauerwas' misappropriation of Latina/o perspectives, see Miguel A. De La Torre, Latino/a Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 25-26.
obedience and qualifies it accordingly, he imposes a general continuity between Jesus, Tertullian, Aquinas and himself incapable of accounting for the gaps and silences of history's poor and marginalized voices.

**Continuity and the Language of Suffering**

The third and final example of imposed continuities between Hauerwas and Tertullian is found in Hauerwas' language of suffering. For Tertullian, suffering accompanies one's obedience and commitment to patience. It is the inevitable reality of following Jesus' example in a socio-political climate where Christians in Carthage were subject to state-sanctioned marginalization and violence. Christians do not suffer because "we" (referring to *nobis* in *De patientia*) are commanded to or because it is a key virtue of the Christian life. Instead, we suffer because persecution and death are the real physical consequences for joining a subjugated illegal religious group. What is more, Christians are not to pursue suffering, but rather suffering comes to them.24 Here, the Christian is always the passive recipient of violence. Tertullian's concept of suffering is less at home with Hauerwas and more akin to black civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who called blacks in the South to endure the trials they would inevitably incur for boycotting the buses, participating in marches and disrupting the white status-quo. Suffering is not the goal or even the reason for the struggle, but the consequence for standing against the structural evils of racism. Even though later Christian writers such as Ambrose and Augustine recaptured the language of suffering and applied it in a

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24. An obvious contemporary example is the “suspect” status of Muslims in the United States following the World Trade Center bombings in 2001. Correlations between extremist Muslim terrorist organizations and the practice of Islam persist even today as demonstrated by public debates concerning the building of a Muslim cultural center a few blocks away from “ground zero.”

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radically different socio-political context, Tertullian's words embolden the believer to enter the lived-material space of insecurity, instability and even death.

Hauerwas' call to suffering parallels his call to Christian obedience and patience. He believes that the ultimate form of suffering facing the Christian is the existential uncertainty brought on by the realization of mortality. This is because suffering is a key characteristic or virtue of the church. Hauerwas' attempt to institute the virtue of suffering universally in the lives of contemporary Christians overlooks the question of agency. In *After Christendom* he accuses liberation theologians of misunderstanding the gospel because of their opposition to “freely suffering.” *25* Just like in the language of obedience, failure to willingly embrace suffering distances the liberation theologian from the “true story” of the church, which Hauerwas assumes to be self-evident, natural and consistent with the pure beginnings of the church. *In actuality, Hauerwas' universal call to suffering reveals his own location as a privileged, white, middle-class male who is not the recipient of structural injustices. As a person from the center, suffering is a matter of personal choice or of freedom—a thing that can be taken on as easily as it can be taken off. Katie Cannon rightly asserts, “In dominant ethics a person is free to make suffering a desirable moral norm.”*26* In contrast, the suffering that comprises the everyday hardships of marginalized communities does not stem from an overbearingly liberal quest for freedom. Freedom and the exercise thereof requires a level of social agency that is largely restricted under the oppressive conditions stemming from race, class, gender and

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25. Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 53. I return to this passage one additional time in the following section.

sexual-orientation inequalities. Yet because Hauerwas cannot conceive of the church beyond the boundaries of Constantinianism, he fails to see the discontinuities between Tertullian's view of suffering and his own.

As these three examples illustrate, a continuous line cannot be drawn so easily from Tertullian's use of pacifism, obedience and suffering to Stanley Hauerwas' Christian ethic. The same is true for interpretations of Tertullian's use of patience as discussed in chapter four. Instead, Hauerwas relies on a master narrative to create historical continuities. He believes that he knows and speaks the true language of the church and that this language somehow escapes the linguistic traps and power analyses appropriate to liberalism. In other words, he believes he can rightly interpret history without a working critical interpretive historical method, and relies instead on a singular church tradition whose interpretation is definitionally self-authenticating. Yet a self-authorization that appeals to ecclesiastical authority does not magically immunize him from the diseases of liberalism. By reading the Christian story through the interpretive lens of Constantinianism, he universalizes his own of the tradition to the exclusion of marginalized communities within the Christian tradition, and reifies the structures of interpretation that continue to silence marginalized views.

**Discontinuity and Its Critical Self-Reflexive Potential**

Summarizing Williams' remarks at the beginning of this chapter, as contexts change they birth different interpretive conditions, or conversely, meanings derived from new conditions will differ from preceding ones. Williams' quote illuminates how one generation adds to and subtracts from the meanings of the previous generation. Williams
organizes his observation around generational differences, suggesting that interpretation proceeds linearly through time. Thomas Kuhn's seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, attests to the linear and diachronic aspects of interpretation. But appealing strictly to the linear shifts in interpretation across time misses a more obvious point that interpretations vary between groups within the same generation. This section begins with a historically-contingent account of the differences of opinion existing between Hauerwas and Gloria Albrecht. It then posits a deconstructive approach to history that privileges themes of discontinuity over and against continuity as a means for discerning historical gaps, aporias and silences. Finally, it ends by identifying some of the fears and risks associated with adopting a critically self-reflexive historiography. While this ethical-historical approach may threaten dominant historical understandings, it is a necessary step in the construction of new and more justice-centric histories.

**A Difference of Opinion on Difference**

Recalling briefly the debates between Hauerwas and Albrecht discussed in chapter 3, the two ethicists quipped back and forth about the character of the Christian church. Albrecht responded to Hauerwas' book, *A Community of Character* with a book entitled *The Character of our Communities*. Then, the two of them exchanged essays in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*. In these essays and responses, Hauerwas accuses Albrecht of completely misreading and misunderstanding him on account of her commitments to liberal feminism. According to Hauerwas, Albrecht fails to “comprehend” his interpretation of the church because she neither has read all the things that he has read nor

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has sufficiently rid her feminism of its liberalism—a necessary precondition for submitting to the authority of the Christian story.” 28 He claims, “my difficulty with much of feminist theory is, in short, not that it is feminist, but that it is so often liberal Protestant theology in a different key.” 29 Albrecht, on the other hand, acknowledges that while they use the same words of “community, nonviolence, the critique of liberalism, [and] the political significance of the personal,” their words are “embedded in different discourses that arise out of different social locations.” 30 According to Albrecht, Hauerwas cannot hear her because he has universalized his own social particularity and made it normative for the rest of the Christian church. Unsurprisingly, substantive disagreements exist between these two scholars to the degree that they can no longer engage each other without making serious concessions against their convictions. 31

This example attests to the obvious reality that people come to different conclusions even when drawing from similar sources. Even persons within the same religious tradition who draw from the same words and stories cannot always overcome their differences of opinion. This is because the social and interpretive differences cannot be forced into linear continuities without diffusing the important differences that give


29. ibid., 234.


31. William Cavanaugh recounts the anecdote of one of Hauerwas’ “more persistent critics” who, when the two of them met on an elevator during an annual meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, agreed that they “don't really have much to say to one another.” But while Cavanaugh uses this episode to point to Hauerwas' steadfast commitment to resolving conflicts peacefully without resorting to coercion to “enforce the truth,” he misses the fact that their inability to resolve their differences stems more from fundamental differences in who and what the church is. William Cavanaugh, "Stan the Man: A Thoroughly Biased Account of a Completely Unobjective Person," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 27.
them rise. It attests to how a naturalized interpretation cannot comfortably coexist along side another one that is logically generated from the same linguistic structures. In the framework of impassable binaries, the difference must either conform or be rejected. For this reason, a historical reading strategy must be adopted to account for difference. The methodology put forth by Elizabeth Clark offers such a strategy because it exposes the ideological assumptions informing the interpretive approaches of universalist histories. We must look to the gaps, silences and aporias in historical texts to see how they press against and rupture dominant, continuous and natural interpretations of the past. These ruptures in the dominant historical narratives carry with them the potential to expose existent discontinuities in our historical consciousness, thus arresting us to the wider diversities in our historical frame of reference and open spaces for alternative conceptions of history.

**Discerning the Gaps**

Palimpsest analysis provides a fitting image upon which to understand the type of historiography Clark advocates. A palimpsest is an ancient scroll or book parchment where a text was scraped off so that the writing surface could be used again. Much like on a chalkboard, the medium is “erased” and overwritten with a different text. This practice was fairly common especially in places where physical writing resources were sparse and when the copy of the original text was no longer needed. Unlike a chalkboard, however, which is harder than the chalk, a papyri or animal skin was embossed by the stylus. Palimpsest scholars concern themselves with the recovery of the “original” or erased script. Fragments of the original texts are discernible in the margins and in the
spaces between the lettering of the over-written script. Early recovery efforts relied upon
harsh chemicals to wash off the existent inks, but too often destroyed the parchments as
well. Careful not to repeat these mistakes, recent scholars have enhanced their
techniques using ultraviolet light and other non-invasive methods and are having success
recovering texts believed to be lost.

Connections between the study of palimpsests and the task of reading history are
plain to see. Nineteenth century historians wrote their grand histories over the top of the
larger experienced realities of the past. Much like the scribe who scrapes the parchment,
these historians wrote their continuous, objective and universal histories over the top of a
diversity of narratives and interpretations. Their method was aimed at clarifying and
providing an overarching unity to history. And similar to the early palimpsest scholars,
the methods of high modern historians all but destroyed the living cultural memories of
communities on the margins. Modern histories continue to play into the larger colonial
enterprises of the West.\textsuperscript{32} However, their grand narratives do not totally obliterate the
larger experienced realities of the past for the over-written texts continue to exist in the
margins and spaces in between the grand narratives. As such, the methods used to read
history should be commensurate to the diversities of a wider historical spectrum. We
must attend to the margins and spaces in-between the dominant histories, rejecting the
master narratives that impose unity to the detriment of alternative constructions of reality,
and derive new historical understandings that better meet the demands of equality and
justice.

\textsuperscript{32} In Laura E. Donaldson and Pui-lan Kwok, \textit{Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious
Discourse} (New York: Routledge, 2002), Kwok, Donaldson and the other contributors outline the many
ways dominant colonial narratives over-write the narratives of colonized individuals and communities.
Discontinuity is a major theme in postmodern post-structuralist theory. Derrida's concern for discontinuity turns the subject around on itself by revealing that which is concealed at the start of an inquiry. Contextualized in the present discussion, the historian examines her object/subject and through the (deconstructive) act of analysis, discovers herself in her interpretation of history. From another angle, the object/subject of a text largely remains disguised until the process of reconstruction or reconstitution of the object/subject by the author reveals the “rules” upon which it was originally constituted. This self-reflexivity and blurring of boundaries between subject and object brings the historian face-to-face with the text's gaps, silences and aporias that would otherwise go unnoticed had the act of deconstruction not forced her into its processes. The resulting insights succeed in revealing the interpreter and the subject in new ways. In the end, discontinuity provides a significant critical advantage over continuity. While continuity marches along fairly seamlessly through time, discontinuity arrests interpretation from the rules governing continuity and require that we wrestle with the breaks in the larger understandings of the past.

It is under this concept of discontinuity that Clark stresses the importance for historians to identify and interrogate master narratives. Master narratives present a continuous account of history. By reading for discontinuity, we come to see how they

33. Along with discontinuity, postmodernism emphasizes dislocation and disruption as well. These are deconstructive techniques employed under the assertion, as Foucault claims, that “things are no longer perceived, described, expressed, characterised, classified, and known in the same way.” Michel Foucault and Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970). For a concise essay describing continuity and discontinuity in postmodernism as it relates to modern business practices, see Richard W. VrMeer, "Postmodernism: A Polemic Commentary on Continuity and Discontinuity in Contemporary Thought," Administration Theory and Praxis 16, no. 1 (1994), 85-91.

often cloak ideological assumptions and issues of power that “inform the interpretation of the past.” As a concept and reading practice, discontinuity assumes that interpretation is never neutral, pure or natural, but always embedded in the ideological language structures that give it rise. To the extent that our language informs and is formed by social relationships, interpretation inherently carries with it an ethical component. We must, therefore, “decode and 'deconstruct’” language in order to expose the hidden elements of interpretation that present the illusion of naturalness. Meaning does not remain static throughout time or circumstances, but changes to suit the interpretive needs of a given audience. Deconstruction is useful because it explores the various excess meanings that exist within a linguistic utterance. Since a plurality of meanings for any given utterance already exist, a historical method which incorporates deconstruction can challenge the stability of normative meanings by highlighting contradictions, gaps and aporias. Then, the shattered presumptions of universality prepare the soil for more fruitful historical understandings capable of integrating difference into larger historical-ethical discourses.

These elements of discontinuity rely on, highlight and draw from difference and are thus better positioned to offer a multifarious approach to interpretation. Clark's postmodern post-structuralist historiography holds together a wide array of voices, even when those voices contradict one another. This approach then feeds back into deconstructive readings to identify more cracks and fissures in historical documents and so engage the dialogical demands of historical texts. Never fixed, the resulting history is


a history in process. In its refusal of “domestication” it blocks the historian's attempt to finalize the understanding of a historical story according to the parameters of his constructed grand narratological schemes. It also leaves itself open for future deconstruction and reconstitution by those who can better see the blind spots in its construction of reality.

Hauerwas comes close to adopting a decent historical method. He acknowledges some of the basic tenants of the “Linguistic Turn,” which is partly why he rests his historical approach on narrative rather than on the objective recovery of facts. For Hauerwas, there is no “real” connection between the present and the past that is not already mediated through the interpretive tradition of the church. He recognizes that narrative is a form of interpretation whose power resides in producing a “community of interpretation for the growth of future narratives.” He also employs power analysis as a polemic against liberalism, granting along with Reinhold Niebuhr that the “world” operates in a spirit of power mongering and self-interest. Hauerwas also acknowledges that there is no “story of stories” capable of capturing the entire essence of human history, and that modern liberalism operates under the universal assumptions of human freedom that “distort our history.” He is clearly aware of the nefarious effects of modern master narratives. However, he never turns around far enough to face the implications of a postmodern/post-structural position of


38. Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 92.

39. Hauerwas chides the church for seeking power as an end unto itself without asking the question, “to what end?” See, After Christendom?, 60-61.

40. Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 149, 78, respectively.
Clark. Already stated in various ways, his turn to narrative falters on account of his failure to recognize the extent to which his socially located ethic complies with oppressive power structures produced by modern liberalism. This failure is conditioned by his uncritical adoption of a Constantinian approach to the Christian story. Further, he cannot complete his turn towards deconstruction or discontinuity because he believes that the church is not subject to the same power analyses that describe the world. “Our language,” he claims, “works quite differently than the world's language” because it requires self-transformation to understand and relies on a set of practices rather than just on the collections of words.\(^4\)

Historical approaches by Christian ethicists like Hauerwas fail when they cordon off the continuous historical narratives from the discontinuous elements raised by postmodernism and post-structuralism. Constantinianism unifies all interpretations of the church’s history into a single story based upon the absolute binary between church and world. What it means “to be the church,” for Hauerwas requires little elaboration since its meaning is always already established in his own construction and interpretation of the narrative. Under this framework, the church has no need for a critical self-reflexivity because the meaning of the story never changes. Such a position rests in his inability to recognize that his narratives also are constructions conditioned by socio-linguistic structures of power, privilege and self-interest, and that these structures apply as equally within the world as they do within the church. In short, Hauerwas' historical groundings

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lack a critical self-reflexivity capable of holding together the diversities existent within
the church.

**Risks and Fears of a New Approach**

Emphasizing discontinuity is an important first step needed to destabilize
normative and hegemonic constructions of history. Yet methodologically applying the
themes of discontinuity and destabilization likely will prove unsettling to historians and
 ethicists from the center for several reasons. If we understand the past according to
natural or universal principles, these principles become true in all situations. Adopting
this truth as our own brings a general sense of order and control. The extent to which we
draw from this truth impacts and conforms my identity towards it.\(^{42}\) Thus, there exists a
reciprocal relationship between my reading of the past and my identity in the present.
Since identity and memory go hand-in-hand, the socio-political stakes of history are
always high.

Destabilizing normative and hegemonic constructions of history may conjure
visions of fragmentation and uncertainty that toe the line with chaos and the total loss of
social identity and control. Certainly the loss of a perceived sense of social order may
cause some in the center to construct new master narratives with increased subtlety and
more nuanced justifications. It is not our goal to simply trump existing master narratives
with better ones. Instead, we must rely on those histories and memories that have been
silenced by our dominant master narratives and that attest to the existence and on-going

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\(^{42}\) Use of the first person pronouns are meant to refer to those who espouse “normative and
hegemonic” histories. In context with the arguments in this chapter and dissertation, any history based
upon grand narratives that rejects deconstruction is normative and hegemonic. This designation applies
most often to those who argue from the discursive “center” and who neglect or reject the knowledge from
the “margins.”
struggle for liberation from oppressive societal structures that deny and/or reject them. A more appropriate historical approach for Christian social ethics is one that validates these subverted histories and memories and incorporates them into our collective social memory. And rather than incorporate them by making them fit into our preconceived categories, this new approach must undergo an identification and transformation of its “political unconsciousness” so that the new visions of the past better reflect the diversities, discontinuities and tensions of human existence.

The sorts of rhetoric that link discontinuity to social and individual mayhem are the same that defend the status quo from any change that hints at alternative social constructions. Take for example the current heightened anti-Democrat sentiment among Republicans in the United States. When President Obama took office and the Democratic Party gained a majority in the House of Representatives in 2008, Republican politicians and media pundits decried the total loss of “American values.” From a discursive vantage, “American values” represent the stability, control, and handle-on-truth that Republicans had enjoyed during their eight years in the majority under President George Bush. Similar anti-incumbent rhetoric flared up among Democrats immediately after President Bush took the seat of Democrat President Bill Clinton. This overgeneralization of the two-party system in the United States functions to accentuate an important point. The continuity of the status quo of this or that political ideology is what is at stake in this two-party system. The changing-of-the-guard simply elevates the anxieties of one party over and against the other. This brief example illustrates what may be viewed as a significant risk of adopting a new ethical-historical approach. Myopic historical
interpretations supply the present guard with meaning and this meaning is used to explain, categorize and corroborate certain stabilities of identity. Since these characteristics inevitably carry political consequences, changing the historical landscape threatens our social-political climates by destabilizing the status quo.

Talk of destabilization brings us not only to the question of what is at stake, but demands that we ask: for whom is something at stake? These questions bring us to a point where postmodern and post-structural theories can be most helpful. Many branches of postmodernism capitalize on discontinuities existent in historical texts and contexts. Derrida abandons all quests for origins, emphasizing instead the traces or fragmentary hints at knowledge that perpetually inform all first-causes. When strung together with unifying reading methods, these traces give the illusion of continuity to the contemporary reader of history. Reality then is adorned with meaning constructed from a contemporary and particularized vantage. Under the theory of differance, Derrida further explores the creation of meaning and identity as it relates to negative self-articulation—our identity or knowledge is meaningful because it is not \( x \) or \( y \) or \( z \). By shaking-up normative ways of reading history, we problematize the grounds upon which “the center is the center because it is not the margin.” In other words, identity boundaries are no longer stable when they are established upon the certainty of an origin and ratified by its otherness from competing origins. And when the boundaries begin to fall, this historical methodology will require those in the center to re-asses their own identity and configurations within society. Such a process is unsettling, especially for those in
positions of unmerited privilege who stand to lose those social symbols that currently provide meaning and stability for understanding reality.

Ultimately, I do not propose that Christian ethicists scrape off the scripts of dominant historical narratives, even when those scripts plainly contribute to the suffering and marginalization of less-represented peoples. These histories are important to the process of deconstructing the socio-linguistic power structures. We must, however, deconstruct dominant historical narratives to identify the oppressive structures that inflict suffering and marginalization. If we gloss over them or try to replace them with “better” historical accounts we will fail to face the oppressive linguistic conditions that reify them, risking cycles of repetition. Contrary to revisionist histories, our historical approach should seek ways to rewrite our histories in fuller-view of our ideological commitments that better integrate discontinuities and marginalized scripts. We still end with constructed stories of the past, but ones that arise from the gaps and margins of normative and universal histories, and ones that exist side by side with the “subverted” ones as a testimony (living memory) of who we are and where we have been. These histories remain open to the criticisms from which they come and invite an open process of rewriting to meet the justice-based challenges of future generations.

**Concluding Remarks on Justice and the Constructions of History**

There is no politically innocent historiography. All narratives are housed within particular linguistic structures which, through the process of interpretation, enable the production of meaning. And where there is meaning, there is power. A critical self-reflexive ethical-historical analysis will clear a path necessary for identifying the
ideological commitments of our social locations and our alliances within local and trans-local power structures. It also assists in the dismantling the master narratives which normalize some conceptions of reality and not others and codify structures of oppression via a self-legitimated silencing of alternative interpretations. As such, this analysis illuminates the stratifications of our social relationships that require a resolute engagement with issues of justice and injustice. If Christian ethicists are so attuned, it will lead to the reconfiguration of our stories to accord better with justice. This final section links a critical self-reflexive historiography to liberative ethics by calling for a dialogue across differences. This dialogue must resist the silencing effects of hidden ideological assumptions and counter the suppression of difference that is generated by universalized and historically continuous master narratives. This dissertation concludes by returning one last time to the Clark. The final section explores what it means to dialogue across differences and then parses out Clark's call for the “systematic unsettling of meaning.” But instead of referring back to the historian, I turn Clark's phrase towards the attention of other Christian social ethicists and ask them to discover the relationships between our histories and the struggles for justice in our present contexts.

**Dialogues Across Difference**

Let us return for a moment to the differences of opinion between Albrecht and Hauerwas. Writing from a liberationist perspective, Albrecht contends that Hauerwas' ethic is birthed out of his particular location as a white, heterosexual male. His inability to dialogue outside of his social location stems from his unwillingness to see it as a determining factor to his thinking. “We need to learn,” she postulates, “to dialogue
across differences within our communities.” 43 This dialogue requires a recognition of the issues of access to power within these communities and to learn how and where violence lies within the structural issues of “access.” The dialogue also requires that we recognize whose voices are neglected and work to listen to and learn from their locations as recipients of structural injustices. Again Albrecht states that “subjugated knowledges reveal the political struggles that underlie what we who are part of the dominant call knowledge or reality or truth.” 44 She continues, giving examples of how the homeless possess viable knowledge concerning social safety nets, how gays and lesbians have knowledge about loving relationships and how people of color possess knowledge concerning matters of racism. These examples combine to constitute knowledges that “we, who are part of the dominant, literally cannot 'see’” since we have not experienced these issues from their perspectives. 45 Unfortunately, Hauerwas does not allow these voices to penetrate his ethic because, as he honestly admits, he does not know them. 46 By implication, his interpretation of the Christian story omits the knowledges offered by the poor and marginalized segments of his community of character.

The universalism of master narratives restricts effective dialogue across differences. Hauerwas refuses to accept any of Albrecht's criticisms because she writes


44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

from a theoretical baseline he has determined already to be Constantinian. Contrary to William Cavanaugh's claim that the two ethicists will not easily resolve their differences, no dialogue actually has taken place between them. But contrary to Hauerwas' claims, Albrecht seriously engages him from his point of view. She outlines his theoretical and theological commitments from Wittgenstein to Linbeck to MacIntyre and compliments him for his steadfast commitment to dismantling liberalism. These sections as well as the entire book is backed-up with thorough lists of references. However, while she made the effort to enter the conversation on his terms, he does not reciprocate. Communication breaks down when the responsibility of communication is not met by both parties. This example illustrates the larger point that those in positions of privilege and power will have a harder time suspending that power for the benefit of equitable communication. Through the suspension of our categories, which requires the dismantling of all master narratives, the “other” is allowed to break into our preconceptions. This in-breaking, to use a violent image, is necessary because it exposes the limitations and errors of our categories and expands our conceptual boundaries. To the extent that we fail to dismantle the master narratives that categorize the world according to our own limiting ideological commitments, we condone the present power structures that grant us privilege. Unfortunately, so long as Hauerwas clings to his master narrative, his ethic will remain impotent in the face of the broader structural evils that plague the church.

47. William Cavanaugh, Stan the Man, 27.

48. In The Character of our Communities particular, but in other essays as well, Albrecht reads, quotes and thoroughly discusses the various influential authors and conversation partners of Hauerwas and demonstrates a thorough engagement with his work on its own terms. In the end, she derives different conclusions not on account of “a failure of communication,” but because she cannot abide Hauerwas' uncritical socially-located and ideological commitments. For her it is an issue of justice and equality for the larger, or more broadly defined church.
A dialogue across differences must also resist the sorts of reductionism that accompany master narratives. Talk of justice among ethicists, according to Hauerwas, is too often indistinguishable from the language of universal human rights. Human rights language is the secular version of Constantinian Christianity, which “pridefully” presumes to know “what is wrong with the world.”

Why would Christian ethicists care about justice? Hauerwas proclaims that they yearn to remain a relevant “social actor” in the power structures of the State—they just want “power.” Since contemporary discourses on justice relate and appeal to the “worldly” presumptions of human rights, justice must never be a central concern for Christians. Hauerwas rejects liberation theologies for the same reductionistic reasons. However, he commits two errors in arguing his point. First, even as late as 1991 when he published *After Christendom*, Hauerwas funnels all liberation theologies through the 1970s writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez. He criticizes Gutiérrez for buying into the modern dream of individual freedom and for over-emphasizing it to the exclusion of the gospel message of “freely suffering.” For Hauerwas all language that resists the virtue of suffering reflects a “self-absorption” that leads to the affirmation of the question, “Why rely on the church when you've got courageous individuals?”

Because Hauerwas cannot perceive of alternate expressions of the Christian faith that lie outside the purview of his socially-located church-world binary, he lacks the ability to dialogue effectively with ethicists from the


51. Ibid., 53.

52. Ibid., 54.
margins. And by requiring all Christians to funnel their knowledge through Constantinianism, he maintains control over how the Christian faith should be understood and applied.

**Systematic Unsettling of “Natural”**

In order to counter the universalizing, reductionistic and ideologically naïve obstacles facing diverse dialogues, we must adopt a historical methodology appropriate to this task. Clark's methodology calls for the “systematic unsettling of the stability of meaning” that is assumed to be natural.\(^53\) It can provide an essential component to the ethical struggle against structures of violence and oppression. Accordingly, a conscientious historical methodology must be systematic, unsettling, and must challenge the presumed stability of natural meanings. Taking each element here in turn, this new methodology must be systematic, or intentional. The present conditions of injustice, marginality and suffering demand an intentionally comprehensive challenge to the varieties of dominant histories propitiating unjust social stratifications. *Ad hoc* historical approaches that unwittingly draw from the larger historical *Geists* simply will not suffice. Understanding the importance of having a well defined historical method, Emilie Townes argues that history and memory be interrogated and deconstructed to reveal how they impact knowledge, identity, and justice.\(^54\) All ethicists, not just ethicists from the


\(^{54}\) She calls for a recognition of the subjective element of history and memory so that these two categories can be properly expanded “to represent the diversities that shape us.” This concern for diversities will “guide us down theoethical pathways that can eradicate systematic, structural evil by providing us with even more articulate resources and strategies to tackle such a large task.” Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 16.
margins, must systematically read history for gaps and silences in texts by consciously focusing on the discontinuities in language and linguistic representations of reality. It is in these gaps that we find the wellsprings of diverse knowledges necessary for understanding the effects and reaches of historically conditioned and sustained injustices.

Our systemic approach must also be unsettling, that is, it must challenge natural meanings of history so as to produce an alternative effect. This factor points to the necessity of a discontinuous and deconstructive approach to historical interpretation. Reading for discontinuity interrupts the status quo of continuous readings which are so often dependent upon modern master narratives. From a liberative ethics point of view, disrupting the status quo is one of the few means available for steering discourses and praxis in alternative directions.55

Furthermore, an ethic remains impotent if it fails to address the lived material world of people. From its roots in the Social Gospel movement, Christian social ethics should be more concerned with social change than it is with mere discursive exchange, although the two are not mutually exclusive. Hauerwas calls Christians to a passive ethic claiming that remaining faithful to the church's story sufficiently fulfills their primary ethical responsibilities. He does so by making patience an essential virtue of the church and by interpreting it for the Christian as a cessation of social action. Remaining faithful

55. Miguel De La Torre calls for an ethics para joder, which requires a full reliance upon critical power analysis and is often the only means available to marginalized communities lacking in the privileges of empire for disrupting its oppressive structures. De La Torre, Latino Social Ethics, 157. In a forthcoming work, he and Albert Hernández explore the myths surrounding the concept of Satan as an image of a trickster. As it exists apart from a Christian radical monotheism, this image destabilizes the categories of good and evil and allows us to come to terms with the relative degrees of goodness and evilness inherent within humanity. This realization better allows us to see the trickster image as an agent of change rather than as the embodiment of pure evil. See Miguel A. De La Torre and Albert Hernández, The Quest for the Historical Satan (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Forthcoming 2011).
to the Christian story may be a political act, in that Christian fellowship testifies to a
cosmological narrative different from those offered by liberalism, as Hauerwas claims.
But taking part in the sacraments and cultivating the other virtues of patience, obedience
and suffering is an ethic that discounts the existence and pervasiveness of structural evil
fueling our many social inequities. Furthermore, it resides in a truncated memory of the
narratives of Christian expressions and actions through the past two millennia. Thus, in
its silence, neglect or rejection of structural evils, it sustains those very conditions of
violence that Hauerwas hopes his pacifistic ethic can avoid. We need instead an ethical-
historical approach capable of producing and facilitating a dialogue of diversity that
disrupt and dismantles the social and linguistic structures perpetuating unqualified
privilege and wanton power.

Our systemic approach to historical analysis must also challenge the language of
“natural.” This language has become deeply imbedded into the ideological assumptions
flowing out of the modern rise of the “natural” sciences. Claiming the naturalness of
some thing becomes another way of universally legitimating its authority. Hauerwas'
Constantinianism and his church/world binary reinforce his naturalized naturalized view
of the church's story. For Hauerwas, the definitions of church and world are self-evident
because they are consistent with the teachings of the church's story. So too is the “fall” of
Christianity into the corrupting power of the State. The naturalization of these categories
creates tidy and clearly distinguishable boundaries and separate important historical
information from what is not. Knowledges assumed to be natural yield to
universalization and to the irrevocable rigidity of boundaries. They continue to silence, neglect and reject knowledges different from their own.

**Liberationist Turn**

The call for the systematic unsettling of meaning assumed to be natural is entirely in order, since as this dissertation has shown there is no pure history existing as an objectified reality “out there.” Instead, past events and the texts that represent them converge in histories rooted in particular linguistic structures. These histories help us understand the significance of the past in relationship with the contextualities of the present. For those historians and ethicists writing from privileged social locations, our histories often house the concepts of order and continuity that reinforce our power and positions of privilege and keep our existential angst at bay. However, attempts at taming that which we cannot control or easily reduce into universal categories sustains the social and linguistic scaffolding of oppression in the lived material existences of marginalized communities. In the words of Gloria Albrecht, “when we ignore social difference, we all run the risk of universalizing our own particularity and defending our truth at the expense of justice.”

56.

Significant numbers of liberationist ethicists already have begun to incorporate similar intentional methodologies in their work. Because so many liberation ethicists work from marginalized social and intellectual perspectives, they are already in a better place to appropriate a critical self-reflexive historical methodology. Why? What makes their social location an easier conduit for postmodern and post-structural insights? In materialist terms, they are the traces whose absence from the dominant discourses and

social privileges signifies their presence somewhere else, *vis.* on the margins. Their voices and memories are the ones neglected, discounted and rejected by the center. Their voices are the ones calling forth from the silent spaces in between the loud words of society's dominant “texts.” Their knowledges and experiences do not easily conform to the dominant master narratives as they defy objectification and universalization. Similar to Clark in their commitments to the “Linguistic Turn,” the liberationist ethicists whose historical methodologies focus on themes of discontinuity are already paying close attention to the voices silenced by the louder historical narratives.

Expanding the horizons of ethical-historical discourse to include the “history of suffering” spoken by marginalized communities may eventually lead to the production of alternate histories. To those in the center who benefit from the current master narratives, alternative histories will be labeled as revisionist or perceived as a threat to the natural-ness or truth of presiding historical constructions. However, instead of proposing better or more nuanced master narratives, I am calling for an expansion of our historical awareness to include the histories and memories of people excluded from the dominant ones. I do not wish to overturn current hegemonic histories simply for the sake of a regime change, for it is in these histories that the truth of oppression and subjugation are fully known. By reading historical texts with an eye for what is missing, namely for (mis)representations, un-representation or rejected representations of marginalized peoples, we gain a more diverse historical awareness and more deeply understand the connections between history and its personal and political significance for contemporary society. A critical self-reflexive methodology offers us the chance, not to revise and so

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57. ibid., 17.
improve upon universal history, but to write expanded dialogical histories capable of
dissolving structures of oppression, while remaining open to alteration when the current
ones prove inadequate to future standards of justice.

Ultimately, the adoption of this historical methodology will illuminate for those of
us in the center the depths of our historical social constructions, legitimations and power
without losing sight of the significance that actual historical events can have on our lives.
We must learn to let go of our monopoly on narrative mastery by realizing that meaning
is never fixed, but always subject to the changing social, political and epistemic contexts
that give it rise. However, the giving-up of stability supplied by narrative mastery is not
an easy task. Our ability to make-sense out of the discontinuity and perceived chaos of
the past supplies us with tremendous stability and identity. Asking ethicists from the
center to step into the realm of uncertainty is a bit like asking them to enter a war zone or
pestilence-ridden region. The pay-off would have to be worthy of the risk. Yet this is
precisely the point: significant groups of people already live in this realm of uncertainty
where their lives bear the wounds of misery inflicted on them by our society's
propitiation of unjust structures. For us in the center, our narratives shield us from this
awareness and perpetuate these structures. In the words of Emilie Townes, “If we refuse
to engage in dismantling systemic and intentional structural evil, we only leave a parched
and desolate land for generations to come.”58 Just as African-American struggles for civil
rights in the U.S. taught us that a segregated society is an unjust society, so too does a
universalized and compartmentalized history produce and perpetuate an unjust society.

By deconstructing our universal narratives and by learning from the particular stories of

58. Townes, Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil, 6.
the very people who suffer in consequence of our narratives, we may enter the destabilized space and approach a solidarity capable of expanding our historical consciousness. In order to hold justice in our line of sight, we must adopt a historiography that resists the cultural production of evil and cultivates the democratic demands of justice.
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