Redeeming Critique: Resignations to the Cultural Turn in Christian Theology and Ethics

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IN THIS ESSAY I BEGIN BY NAMING A "TURN TO CULTURE" THAT MARKS A wide range of works in contemporary theology and ethics. I describe how the turn plays out in books by Stanley Hauerwas and Delores S. Williams and argue that their idealist versions of the turn uncritically replicate core features of the dominant cultures they try to criticize. I explain how their idealism in conceiving the oppositional cultures to which they turn constructs those cultures as "others" to the culture being criticized, wholes unto themselves, and symbols that directly participate in some ultimate good or truth. I then gesture toward a more critical, self-conscious performance of the turn to culture. I argue that turns to culture should not obscure but rather thematize the role of the critic in making the turn. I use the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Walter Benjamin to argue that self-conscious critique will involve a set of resignations to reflexivity rather than otherness, to a hodgepodge of highly mobile practices rather than a single, unified tradition, and to regarding cultural artifacts as mixed allegories rather than pure symbols.

A turn to culture marks many contemporary works in theology and ethics. By turning to culture I mean, most broadly, taking the practices, beliefs, narratives, or traditions of a particular community as starting points for normative or theological reflection. Christian thinkers have taken cultural turns in a variety of directions with a variety of not necessarily compatible motives. Loss of confidence in a reason transcending every culture has led to rationalities based on the traditions or experiences of particular groups of people. Concern about individualism has brought new or renewed emphasis on communities of various forms. Recognition of long-marginalized people and groups has urged new attention to voices defined in part by membership in those groups. Repentance of excessive attention to the ideas of textual elites has given impetus to interpretation of material and oral cultures. Weariness with impoverished rituals and symbols has driven renewed consideration of liturgical practices with the confidence that they manifest knowledge of God. Arising from a wide variety of

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concerns and taking an even wider variety of forms, the cultural turn is a sign of the times—a time signature bringing a shared sensibility to many beats and tunes.

Turns to culture have not been limited to the guilds of Christian theologians. "Culture wars" have swollen in political importance, often displacing all other issues. Culture industries have risen to play increasingly important roles in the global economy. In intellectual life, anthropology and sociology have shown growing power to legitimate other kinds of discourse. These disciplines seem to fit the times, and other disciplines borrow from them more and more. Christian thinkers across many spectrums join in that borrowing. Postliberal, womanist, pragmatist, feminist, liberationist, *mujerista*, and radically orthodox thinkers may rarely attend the same sessions at conferences, but they share in a broad and contentious turn to some kind of culture as a starting point for theology and ethics. It has become a commonplace that there is no "view from nowhere" and that the somewhere from which all views look is, in some important sense, "cultural."[1]

One of the greatest attractions of cultural turns has been their ability to swerve around the roadblocks of modernist epistemology. Christian speech about God and God's hope for the world became problematic for many theologians and ethicists who became convinced that all speech about God, even scripture, was culturally or historically conditioned. When this concession joined convictions that God stood genuinely apart from any particular human culture, theologians and ethicists found themselves able to say less and less about God's ways with the world. At their best, as in the ascetic theology of James M. Gustafson, they could trace with precision what they could and could not say. They tended to make more constructive claims only with elaborate hesitation and qualification, however—perhaps finally smuggling a norm in through a side door, just out of sight of the gates of method.

Cultural turns have promised to evade the epistemological block on moral and theological claims by making claims first about publicly accessible cultural forms: The church has believed these doctrines; the community of enslaved women and their descendents is engaged in these practices of resistance and survival; and the American polity has displayed these democratic virtues and habits. Such claims can be verified easily enough—or at least verified to meet the standards of guilds of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. The price of verifiability, however, has been the question of normativity. How can one move from claims about what people do in fact believe to claims about what is true? How can one move from descriptive claims about the practices of a community to claims about what anyone—even people in that community—*ought* to do? How can one move from fact to norm, from *is* to *ought*? These questions are familiar for academic theologians and ethicists, and I rely on their familiarity to supply the wider context of this essay.[2]

I also rely on that familiarity to suggest just how many of "us"—contemporary theologians and religious ethicists, more and less academically trained—already work from some kind of cultural turn. I do not argue that all theologians and ethicists must turn to culture, only that many already have. (After all, how could I argue that there could *never* be a "view from nowhere" except by taking up that very view from nowhere—the perspective outside of and above all historical and cultural particularity?) In naming the present turn to culture, therefore, I am not trying to start from scratch, even in saying we must not start from scratch. I make the more limited empirical point that claims to direct access to revelation or reason above any particularity have become unpersuasive or unattractive for a variety of reasons. If not every theologian has agreed to make a cultural turn, the burden of proof clearly has shifted to those making claims to start with something beyond every particular culture. I take the turn for granted as a powerful element of contemporary cultures of theology and ethics. In this essay I try to reflect critically on that turn without claiming a location above or outside of it. That is, I try to make a cultural turn to the cultural turn.

Turning to the cultural turn means starting with it but does not mean accepting it as it presents itself. The cultural turn of this essay starts from some methodological commitments and practices of contemporary theologians but then looks for fissures within them—places where their broken edges point to something beyond themselves.

Turns to Invisible Church Cultures

No one has done more to turn theologians to church cultures in recent years than Stanley Hauerwas. In his 2001 Gifford Lectures, Hauerwas praised Karl Barth's insistence on the radical difference between God and the created world but criticized Barth for suggesting an ecclesiology that was too barren to allow the Word of God to be comprehensible.[3] Hauerwas argued that Barth's insistence on otherness did not undo the need for some kind of *analogia fidei*, some at least analogical connection to God that could serve as the bridge across which faith and grace might travel. Although God and creatures could not be identical, they also could not be "utterly lacking in resemblance." A total lack of resemblance would make impossible human recognition of and hence relationship to God. Moreover, because the Word of God was love incarnate, most itself when it was most for creation, its own nature required that it be comprehensible and so bear some at least analogous relationship to something in creation. To be the Word of God, the Word of God had to appear, had to be spoken, even if only analogically. And where that Word was spoken was, by definition, church.[4]

Hauerwas acknowledged that this imperative for the church went beyond Barth's explicit intentions: "Barth says that the knowledge of God 'can' be realized in the church; I would say that it 'must' be so realized." Hauerwas described his move from *can* to *must* as merely the intensification of Barth's argument—a helping hand to lift Barth over his theological "hesitancy" to the courage of his practical convictions.[5] Hauerwas performed a much more fundamental reversal of Barth's thought, however. For Hauerwas, the Word had to be spoken in the church to be intelligible and, hence, to be the Word. Church was logically prior to the Word, necessary for it to be the Word at all. The church made the Word the Word through its witness. This was a perfect inversion of Barth, for whom the Word made the church every time there was the event of church. For Barth there could be no stable, prior body that satisfied what Hauerwas called the "material conditions" of witness. The sole condition, material and otherwise, was God's decision to be known. Hauerwas named the contrast most clearly: "Barth, of course, did not deny that the church is constituted by the proclamation of the gospel. What he cannot acknowledge is that the community called the church is *constitutive of the gospel proclamation.*"[6] For Barth church was constituted *by* the gospel; for Hauerwas church was constitutive *of* the gospel. With this distinction Hauerwas crystallized a turn to culture in one of its strongest forms: The culture of church was not only necessary for knowledge of the Word but therefore and also the very substance of the Word.

For the church to be constitutive of the gospel proclamation, it had to be holy. Its ability to witness—and hence the Word's ability to be intelligible, and hence the Word's ability to be the Word—depended on the holiness of the church. That holiness, the church's analogical similarity to God, became in Hauerwas's arguments absolutely necessary for the work of God in the world. That holiness, by definition, set the church apart as radically distinct from "the world." Thus, Hauerwas effectively *relocated* Barth's notion of the otherness of God. No longer was the Word of God wholly other to all creation because it found its necessary analogue in the church. Now an inseparable church and Word stood as completely other to the world. Because otherness was relocated and not redefined, however, the problem of knowledge Hauerwas sought to solve through appeal to the *analogia fidei* remained. If the church was so holy, so other, how could the world recognize it? And if the world could not recognize it, how could the church live out its vocation for the world? Hauerwas worried over the material conditions necessary for the recognition of the Word, but he created the problem of the material conditions necessary for recognition of the church.[7]

Hauerwas's insistence on the necessity of a holy church that was radically distinct from the world also created the problem of saying just where and when that church existed. To be the church, the material condition of the gospel, it had to be in this world; to be holy, it had to be perfect and other. Where was it?

At the end of *With the Grain of the Universe*, Hauerwas pointed to the holy, visible, necessary church in the persons of John Howard Yoder and Pope John Paul II. These two individuals demonstrated the virtues necessary for witness, Hauerwas said. Let us grant that contentious point, but then notice the irony that they represent the virtues necessary for witness *as individuals*. No earthly institution encompassed these two men. They were the saints of no single visible community. The holiness of the two therefore argued less for one holy catholic and apostolic church in this world than for many visible churches marked by institutional pluralism, a variety of charismata, and unity only in an invisible or eschatological sense. Hauerwas's church came into earthly, visible, positive existence—the kind of existence necessary for it to ground a turn to culture or satisfy the material conditions necessary for recognition of the Word—only as he called it into being. Hauerwas made a cultural turn to a church of his own creation. It is not too much to say that Hauerwas performed Christian ethics as a *Sittlichkeit* of an invisible church, a derivation of *ought* from conjured *is*.

In *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1993), Delores S. Williams turned to a very different church from the one that Hauerwas crafted, but she made the turn in remarkably similar ways. Williams argued against any pretense of neutral theological vantage point as mere cover for the replication of sexist and Eurocentric categories. Instead, she wrote, she wanted to consider "what it means to take seriously (as a primary theological source) the faith, thought and life-struggle of African American women." Like Hauerwas, Williams rejected any word or Word, reason or doctrine, that claimed to hover above cultural particularity; instead, she embraced as "primary theological source" a community she saw as a distinct alternative to the dominant culture. African American churches need doctrinal systems, Williams wrote, "but they need doctrine that emerges from African American people's experience with God, not doctrine 'inherited' from oppressive Eurocentric forms of Christianity, not female-exclusive doctrine formulated centuries ago by male potentates." The critical leverage against racist doctrine would not come from reason or revelation to some abstract individual but from the particular culture of African American women. The distinct otherness of African American women's culture let Williams turn to it as a critical resource for a theology that would be able to bear witness against racism, sexism, and economic injustice.[8]

Williams made her turn through a focal point that added both complexity and memorable clarity to her argument. She took up the story of Hagar—the woman who saw and named God, provided for her child in the face of murderous oppression, and found ways to be faithful while living as slave and concubine (see Genesis 16:1–16 and 21:9–21). Hagar's story made sense as a means for excavating the culture of African American women because it "had been appropriated so extensively and for such a long time by the African American community" and because of the remarkable "congruence" between Hagar's

story and the lives of African American women. For centuries African American women had found in the Hagar story a place to think about the "poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, domestic violence, homelessness, rape, motherhood, single-parenting, ethnicity, and meetings with God" that marked their own lives. Hagar's story therefore began to offer a way to condense and draw together many themes of the culture of African American women.[9]

Although Williams used the Hagar story as a focal point, she made clear that the story did not have critical power over the culture of African American women. She rejected interpretations of the story that supported slavery and surrogacy, whether they came from slave master preachers or Paul's letter to the Galatians (or both). Instead, she wrote, the story of Hagar must be read through the "*survival and quality-of-life tradition of African-American biblical appropriation.*"[10] For Williams the story of Hagar did not stand over, above, or against the community of African American women but with and within their interpretive traditions. Thus, Williams and Hauerwas made parallel moves, each blocking appeal to something beyond the culture to which they turned by capturing all other sources of authority within it.

Although Williams took up the experience of African American women as the primary source for her theology, she resisted easy temptations to romanticize black women's Christian faith. She argued that any turn to the faith of African American women had to acknowledge the "colonization of female mind and culture" and the sexism that lingered in the African American denominational churches.[11] Thus, she wrote,

> The womanist theology in this book makes a distinction between the black church as invisible and rooted in the soul of community memory and the African American denominational churches as visible. Contrary to the nomenclature in current black theological, historical and sociological works, in this book the *black church* is not used to name *both* the invisible black church and the African American denominational churches.[12]

Using the language of the Reformed traditions to which she is heir, Williams distinguished the visible African American denominational churches and the invisible black church "rooted in the soul of community memory." "The black church is invisible," she wrote, "but we know it when we see oppressed people rising up to freedom." It appeared in the lives and deeds of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Rosa Parks. It appeared in the Universal Hagar's Spiritual Church, part of the black spiritualist tradition, which offered a heterodox and syncretist glimpse of the true black church. Yet even the Universal Hagar's Church required sifting and sorting by principles of liberation. Williams's invisible black church was both ideal and real, but it was not limited by the boundaries of any earthly community: "It has neither hands

nor feet nor form, but we know when we feel it in our communities as neither Christianity, nor Islam, nor Judaism, nor Buddhism, nor Confucianism, nor any human-made religion." Williams turned not to some predefined, preexisting culture but to one she delimited and created even as she turned to it as resource.[13]

At just this point the homologies between Williams and Hauerwas begin to become visible. Both theologians gained critical leverage by appealing to some culture as an "other" to a presumed dominant modern culture. Hauerwas and Williams called different rolls of saints and highlighted different incarnations of the true church: John Howard Yoder, Pope John Paul II, and the Mennonite Church on one hand, and Sojourner Truth, Mary McLeod Bethune, and the Universal Hagar's Spiritual Church on the other. The critical leverage of each counterculture depended on the presumed otherness of these people and institutions. Because Williams and Hauerwas drew the boundaries of those "other" cultures through their own critical selections, however, they reproduced, in the deepest form of their works, a crucial part of the culture they both tried to resist. Both Hauerwas and Williams adopted the position of a modern individual, standing at a critical distance from traditions and communities and sorting through those cultures to elect participation in them according to affinities of value, doctrine, or style. Although both Williams and Hauerwas appealed to persons, practices, and communities that seemed to stand apart from a modernity that alienated individuals from cultures, their means of appropriating those cultures transformed the cultures into "resources" that they, as critics, could sort and deploy at will. Made into resources, even things that once were *other* became familiar. Like King Midas, Hauerwas and Williams turned everything they touched into what they already had in superabundance.[14]

Critical Resignations

Hauerwas and Williams turned to different cultures, from different locations, and with different critical agendas. Those differences mattered morally and theologically. Yet the formal similarities of the arguments—the roles, practices, moods, and perspectives they shared—also had moral and theological significance. Both Hauerwas and Williams could be described as performing what Jeffrey Stout called "moral *bricolage*"—a kind of criticism that begins "with bits and pieces of received linguistic material, arranges some of them into a structured whole, leaves others to the side, and ends up with a moral language one proposes to use." As Stout argued, a *bricoleur* can construct criticism on many kinds of topics and for many different purposes. But the *bricoleur* also enacts one of the central roles in the dominant cultures of our time: The *bricoleur* acts as a modern, critical individual who evaluates cultural artifacts and cobbles them

together as resources for action toward ends of his or her own choosing. When Hauerwas and Williams engaged in *bricolage*, they ended up reproducing without critique that role of *bricoleur*, and hence a crucial part of the cultures in which it finds a home.[15]

How *could* one critique the deepest presumptions of contemporary cultures that make cultural critique their hallmark? The very idea seems self-defeating—a kind of logical trap. And why would a body want to criticize cultures of critique? One could argue that practices of critical *bricolage* emerged through long processes of social learning and hence represent the best wisdom of humankind.[16] But the power of a critical culture to co-opt its critics begins to suggest the need for further critique. When the perspective of a person who stands at some distance from every particular culture has become practically inescapable, often invisible, and very difficult to question, it has become a kind of new mythology. It has its own fatalism, unconscious rituals, and ceremonial roles. A person who valued the social achievement of such a perspective would have to insist on turning it back upon itself now that it has become almost uncritically accepted because without some critical self-awareness it does not fulfill its promise.[17]

The potentially hegemonic, even mythological qualities of the practices of *bricolage* begin to suggest some means for making this move to turn cultural criticism back upon itself. It makes little sense to try to go "outside" the practices of *bricolage*—not because there are or were no cultural practices apart from cultures of critical appropriation but because as soon as we pick them up and consciously deploy them with critical intent we and they end up melting back into familiar roles within the practice of *bricolage*. Instead, criticism at this particular moment should proceed by seeking out rifts and crevices within the practice of *bricolage* itself. This is not a turn to some carefully selected "other" culture as resource, like the moves of Hauerwas and Williams, but a kind of resignation to a dominant culture in which we already stand, like it or not. Curiously, the way to be not of *this* world will be to immerse ourselves in it.

A critical reimmersion in the practice of *bricolage* begins by making visible the work of the *bricoleur*. Hauerwas and Williams uncritically replicated a culture of modern, critical individuals in part because they obscured the role of prior ideals in constructing the cultures to which they turned. Hauerwas started with ideals of pacifism, authority, and community and then made the culture that included John Howard Yoder and Pope John Paul II in the image of those ideals, and so of his own position as critic. Williams started with ideals of survival and quality of life and then sifted and sorted through empirical African American churches to find pieces from which she could construct the invisible black church. In each case the critic's initial ideals, "realized" in the culture of the critic's making, disappeared and then reappeared with new authority.

The use of prior ideals to define cultures for critique has tended to produce cultures with three distinctive qualities in common. Like the church cultures

created by Williams and Hauerwas, cultures defined by ideals have tended to be *other* to the culture being criticized, wholes unto themselves, and ideal in the sense of realizing some ultimate good or truth. Each of those qualities comes about because of the role of the prior ideal in defining the culture that would provide critical leverage. When critics have conceived an ideal such as "liberation," "tradition," or "democracy" as counter to a dominant culture and then composed a culture from bits and pieces that seemed to embody that ideal, the critical culture has emerged as *other* to the dominant culture in exactly the ways the original principle was *other* to that dominant culture. When critics have selected cultural materials that embodied the same ideal or produced the same end, they have composed cultures that are unified to the precise degree of the unity internal to the concept and the skill of its application. And when critics have composed cultures by selecting disjointed "enclaves" that embodied some ideal, of course those fragments have become ideal—both in the sense of turning into ideas, breaking their ties to the material flow of history, and in the sense of becoming idyllic or perfect. Avoiding idealism that becomes less than critical, then, would involve giving up these three attractive features, or at least acknowledging the critic's role in producing them. It would mean resignation to a culture that is neither entirely other, nor whole, nor ideal.[18]

A Resignation to Reflexivity

Giving up the otherness promised by uncritical idealism begins with a resignation to reflexivity. Critical leverage on a culture of *bricolage* will come not from absolute difference but from similarity made visible. The critical potential of the *bricolage* of Hauerwas and Williams depended on the apparent otherness of certain persons, beliefs, or practices to the order the critic wanted to engage. Hauerwas, for instance, could mobilize John Howard Yoder and the Mennonite community he stood in for in Hauerwas's thought to critique a society drunk on violent effectiveness and therefore too comfortable with its own dirty hands. The otherness of Yoder as a person, however, obscured the sameness of Yoder as a resource for *bricolage*. As that sameness disappeared from sight, it—and the practice of *bricolage* with it—became exempt from critique. Ironically, just the otherness that seemed to offer critical potential became a blind spot of uncritical participation. Resigning oneself to reflexivity requires forgoing temptations to appeal to the otherness of "other" cultures and turning instead to persons and practices that could help bring the critic's actual cultural locations into sharper focus.[19]

A resignation to reflexivity might involve turning to stories, persons, and practices closer in time and space to the critic making the turn. Instead of evoking the pristine wonders of a long-lost Latin mass, for instance, the critic might

turn to the messy compromise being celebrated just around the corner. Spatial and temporal proximities do not necessarily bring reflexivity, however, just as spatial and temporal distances do not necessarily generate otherness. How a critic makes the cultural turn matters more than the location of the culture to which a critic turns. The angle of vision matters more than the distance of the line of sight. The self-reflexive *bricoleur* would turn to a culture that the *bricoleur* understands as in some ways connected to his or her own location—and specifically to his or her own location as a *bricoleur*, the location the *bricoleur* inhabits as a critic. A self-reflexive *bricoleur* might still turn to a medieval version of the mass, for instance, but the mass would not function in his or her criticism as a locus of pure and transcendent difference. It would function instead as a site of both similarity and difference—already itself a kind of *bricolage* whose distinct form might bring the *bricoleur*'s own practice and role into critical perspective.

Christians might think of resignations to reflexivity as acknowledgments of our created, temporal, and limited existence. A resignation to reflexivity confesses that we cannot—despite the promises of neocolonial consumerism—give ourselves any cultural location we wish. We can turn to "other" cultures for a variety of ideas, practices, signs, and symbols, but precisely the possibility of making that turn defines and limits our location. A resignation to reflexivity begins with an acknowledgment of this givenness of our location and then attempts to understand and improve it rather than leap outside it. Such a resignation is a kind of choice, but it is a choice in the limited sense of choosing to acknowledge the constraints on choice. The *bricoleur* experiences himself or herself at a distance from a bazaar full of cultural bits and bobs and therefore free to choose between all of them. The self-reflexive *bricoleur*, however, sees the culture of the bazaar itself as the location that the *bricoleur* did not choose and from which he or she cannot escape simply through some combination of wish, denial, and obfuscation. For the Christian social critic, a resignation to reflexivity means accepting this curious combination of freedom and constraint as the place from which one is called and to which one is called to bear witness.

A Resignation to Hodgepodge

The idealism of uncritical *bricolage* tends to construct its source cultures not only as others but also as wholes. Delores Williams, for instance, distilled from the contentious, vibrant conversation of African American religious traditions a single, univocal "invisible black church." Williams used many sources to construct the culture that authorized her critique, but she constructed it in the singular. The singularity of Williams's invisible black church depended on one unifying idea. Everything within the invisible black church supported the survival and sustained the quality of life of African American women. The power of

that single idea allowed Williams to bind together practices and persons from very different religious communities. It also provided a boundary that distinguished the invisible black church from any other culture. Williams's idealism constructed a singular, unified, and bounded culture to which she could turn.

The cultural whole of the invisible black church came into existence only in and through Williams's ideal construction of it. Williams made visible but did not critically consider her active role in conjuring a unified alternative culture. Especially in her consideration of the Universal Hagar's Spiritual Church, Williams began to suggest (and even celebrate) the complexity, diversity, and hybridity that marked the cultural fragments from which she abstracted the invisible black church. Apart from the idealism of uncritical *bricolage*, source cultures appear not as singular, unified, and bounded but as plural, contentious, and differentiated by fuzzy, permeable borders. A self-critical bricolage will involve a willingness to turn to this cultural hodgepodge behind the constructed whole.[20]

A resignation to hodgepodge and hybridity makes a difference in the way a *bricoleur* conceives of the basic elements of cultures. "Practices," for example, have returned to a rightful place of prominence in Anglo-American moral and theological discourse in large part thanks to the efforts of Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre's influential version of the cultural turn moved practices to the center but defined practices in a way that implicitly encouraged the idealism of an uncritical *bricoleur*. A practice, MacIntyre wrote, "is never just a set of technical skills." What made a practice a practice, in MacIntyre's sense, was the presence of some end that the actor consciously sought in performing the practice. The end of a practice could change over time, but participating in the practice at any particular moment meant pursuing the end given by the history of the practice to date. The ideal end—not the characteristic way a person moved his or her body, not the habituated form in which he or she spoke—defined the practice. The ideal end defined the practice in a way that secured its singularity, internal unity, and clear boundaries.[21]

MacIntyre's idealist definition of practice obscured both similarities and differences between human practices. Unifying under a single practice everything Christians have ever described as "preaching," for instance, can set up some heuristically useful comparisons. Considering such a wide practice of preaching as having some kind of existence over and apart from the ideal construction of it, however, suggests some continuities that are tenuous and hides other continuities that are much stronger. A second-century preacher in Alexandria and a late-twentieth-century preacher in a gentrifying American neighborhood can be juxtaposed in illuminating ways, but the idea that they share in a single, continuous practice hides as much as it reveals. Uniting them as participants in a single practice papers over the deep ruptures and discontinuities between the two. It also renders invisible the important strategies, actions, personas, and

techniques that they shared with contemporaries who did not share their conscious ends. If similarities between preachers and those engaged in poetry, politics, and sales do appear in a MacIntyrean account of practice, they appear only as the corruption of one practice or another. A more material, embodied sense of practice can help bring the complex hurly-burly of continuities and discontinuities to light.[22]

Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, defined a practice not by the *telos* an actor sought but by the *habitus* he or she enacted. Bourdieu described *habitus* as a "durable transposable disposition" that could migrate between and across social spheres. A practice of telling stories to illustrate points, for instance, moved between religious, legal, and entertainment spheres in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Even when actors in each sphere pursued different conscious ends, they shared a *habitus* that defined the practice.[23] In one of his richest passages, Bourdieu explained this mobile, flexible quality of the *habitus*:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g., the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.[24]

Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* enabled him to conceive of cultural practices as "regulated improvisations" that did not require conscious obedience to rules or conscious pursuit of particular ends. The practice itself carried what Bourdieu called an "objective intention"—an end embedded in the characteristic form of the action that actors performed with or without conscious agreement. Practices could retain their objective intentions, and thus some identity as a practice, even as people adapted them across many different social settings and with many different ends in mind.[25]

Bourdieu's more strongly performative sense of practice begins to hint at a very different picture of the "culture" to which a *bricoleur* might turn: not to a singular, unified, bounded whole, defined by a conscious intention, but to spheres, traditions, and institutions criss-crossed by multiple practices embodying a variety of objective and subjective intentions. Without the unifying power of a prior ideal, the cultures to which a critic turns could be marked by strong internal tensions and even outright contradictions. Tensions might arise between practices or even within practices—between objective and subjective

intentions, for instance. The possibility of tensions within a culture complements the possibility of agreements with persons, actions, and institutions beyond its very porous boundaries. When *habitus*, not conscious intention, defines a practice, extensive traffic across cultures can become visible as something other than a fall from idealist purity.

For Christians this more materialist and performative understanding of culture might suggest an ecclesiology in which churches encompass competing ideals within themselves and stand endlessly intertwined with a wide array of other institutions beyond themselves. Without the idealist's drive to bounded wholes, internal pluralism and external connection need not be regarded as flaws. Multiple ends within a church allow it to speak and enact a gospel as complex as the Word to which the church bears witness. Moreover, shared practices enable a church to enact a kind of public witness that can be undertaken in explicitly, particularly theological language. As practices move across social spheres they retain objective intentions, roles, rules, moods, and motives. Even without agreement about conscious intentions or ultimate purposes, reform in one sphere tends to migrate into others. Thus, a critic might treat the migration of practices between churches and other social spheres not as a rash of impurities that must be washed or wished away but as a series of opportunities for critical engagement that do not require a church to abandon its first, explicitly theological language. Through the transmigration of practices critical, theological reflection on church practices becomes critical, theological—and potentially transformative—reflection on crucial elements of social spheres such as law, politics, economics, and entertainment. Practical theology becomes social ethics.[26]

A Resignation to Allegory

Self-critical *bricolage* requires starting, as Bertolt Brecht said, not from the good old things but from the bad new ones.[27] Brecht's negative evaluation of his starting point jars a reader into recognition of a third resignation necessary for more fully critical *bricolage*: resignation to the moral and theological ambiguity of the cultural artifacts to which a critic turns. Wheat and tares grow together, even in the plots of a cultural field selected for use in *bricolage*. Hauerwas and Williams acknowledged (explicitly or implicitly) the mixed qualities of the cultural piles from which they picked out their chosen artifacts, but they did not acknowledge the deep ambiguities of the chosen artifacts themselves. Williams, for instance, denounced the patriarchy mixed in with liberative elements in the visible African American denominations. The names on her roll call of saints appeared, however, as holy and without blemish. Moreover, to put a sharper point on the argument, she presented the practices of liberation and survival as

not only realizing their ideals but also as realizing *ultimate* ideals. Such practices become places where hope and history fused to become practically identical with one another.[28] Precisely this union of historical fact with theological hope charged the pieces with the aura that gave Williams's critique such power. Critique of the culture of *bricolage* must forgo such magic, however. A critic who made the first two resignations I describe, to reflexivity and plurality, without making a third, to the mixed moral quality of the materials to which the critic turned, would end up uncritically endorsing the culture of *bricolage*. Such a critic would simply celebrate the status quo of a massive cultural sphere offering an array of goods to savvy shoppers. Such a cultural turn would be self-conscious, even reflexive, but insufficiently critical. (It would be a turn in the style of Madonna or Beck, or some of their admirers in cultural studies.) Critique from within a culture of *bricolage* requires resignation not only to that cultural location but also to its moral mixedness. It requires renouncing the easy reunion of theological truth and cultural artifact, whether that reunion is decreed in the imagined past, the marginalized present, or the practice of *bricolage* itself.

To borrow language from literary criticism, critique from within a culture of *bricolage* requires renouncing the ideology of symbolism for the fractured power of allegory. Symbol and allegory have been contrasted in many ways, but in this essay I rely on the distinctions Walter Benjamin made between symbol and allegory in his 1925 study of the "sorrow plays" (*Trauerspiele*) from the Baroque period in Germany. In a symbolic construct, Benjamin wrote, "the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole." Allegory, on the other hand, made reference not from wholes but from fragments and ruins disconnected from that to which they were supposed to make reference. Allegory separated signifier and signified. The crucial difference came in allegory's willingness to take temporality into itself, to give up any pretension of being a fixed, eternal order. Symbols presented themselves as unchanging—akin to the silent, unchanging natural world of plants and mountains. Allegories, however, took time into the very act of signification. They presented themselves as human fabrications with limited life spans. An allegory always stood at some level of decay—a ruin on its way to further ruin, wearing out with time and use. As a ruin, it disrupted any pretension that its appearance was identical with what it signified. An allegory made appearance (*Schein*) visible as appearance. Thus shattering the totality of *Schein*, allegory enabled reference from a ruin more thoroughly temporal to a reality more genuinely transcendental.[29]

Symbolic fusions of hope and history become uncritical in one way, but cynical denials of any relationship between hope and history slip into a different yet equally uncritical combination. A total separation of hope and history reverts to the modernist crisis I sketched briefly at the beginning of this essay, in which a deep divide separates God and culture and leaves humans stranded in culture. Such a division allows empiricist history and idealist theology to collude to

divide the world between them. Both lose critical power. This radical separation of norm and fact grants an autonomy to the existing array of facts that makes them harder to change. Facts become unchangeable givens, and norms become irrelevant for historical realities. Critique that discards as ideological every notion of moral or theological depth to historical realities becomes itself a kind of ideology.[30]

Theological hope and historical fact can neither be blended seamlessly together nor torn permanently apart. Instead, as Benjamin wrote, theology should function as a kind of "commentary" on historical reality. Hope and history should be held together but without loss of the distinctions between them. Critique must give up attempts to construct symbols that fuse heavenly hopes with cultural realities even as it renounces work that makes the two irrelevant for one another. Critique should turn instead to making allegories that juxtapose the actual and the ideal in ways that accent both their connection and their difference.[31]

In the Baroque period allegorical juxtaposition without fusion depended on devices such as the caption. A visual allegorist such as Albrecht Dürer—a kissing cousin of the *Trauerspiel* dramatists—used captions to place claims about moral or theological meanings next to pictures of empirical or historical entities. Dürer's technique of caption and picture held truth-claim and representation next to one another without dissolving them into a single, unified symbol. Because Dürer's pictures put representations together in ways that interrupted the usual, easy, seemingly natural patterns of reference to some meaning behind them, he blocked any chance for the representations to function as "natural symbols." The representations would require the addition of a caption to become meaningful. Yet just as the pictures required captions, the captions required pictures. The picture in an allegory did not simply "illustrate" an idea already complete in itself; it played off the idea in ways that gave it new depth and substance. As the lavish details of Dürer's woodcuts suggested, a caption made attention to material reality more important, not less. The truth of an allegorical woodcut lay neither in the caption nor the picture, neither in the signified nor the signifier. Instead, truth came pouring out of the spaces between the two.[32]

So: good for woodcuts. But what would a resignation to allegory look like in cultural criticism? The timbre of Benjamin's terms already suggests connections. Benjamin asked how the critic could move from what he called *historische Sachgehalt* to what he called *philosophische Wahrheitsgehalt*: from historical thing-content to philosophical truth-content. Benjamin's terms offer useful tools for asking the question raised by the cultural turn: How might a moral theologian move from cultural *is* to theological *ought*, from the historical thing-content of cultural artifacts to the theological truth-content of claims about ways to cooperate with God's presence and activity in the world?[33]

Benjamin did not try to resolve these questions by pining for a return to innocence or some other kind of dissolution of the gap that a critical perspective opened up between historical thing-content and philosophical truth-content. Instead, he insisted that the critic should open the gap wider still. The world of historical thing-content—the present order of powers and principalities—presented itself as a complete account of reality and aspired to the status of a "second nature." The critic, Benjamin wrote, needed to *mortify* historical content to reveal it as the false totality it was. If historical thing-content pretended to totality, however, how could a critic find a place outside it from which to criticize it before the critique had been done? Benjamin cultivated a set of strategies for mortification as immanent critique, working entirely from felt contact with historical content to reveal the rifts and crevices in its pretense of wholeness. Benjamin especially mortified historical content by moving to the center that which second nature had consigned to the gutter—stamp collectors, outmoded forms of architecture, even material objects themselves. Different historical contents required different strategies, however. Rifts and crevices could appear in the logic internal to a cultural practice, in the tension between what it said and what it did, or in the bodies that lay hidden behind the cloak of claims to be eternally given, a church not made with hands.[34] Whatever strategy the critic used, mortification took the form of alchemy: It turned historical thing-content into its opposite—revealing, for instance, freedom as fate, culture as nature, and self-denying "agapic" love as the desire to turn the beloved into a corpse guaranteed to give no pleasure in return. Such mortification was not accomplished primarily by critics. The passage of time wore down and wore out the forms of life that animated cultural practices, leaving them standing as ruins. In Hegel's language, forms of life grew old. Humans lived among the always already mortified. The critic, as Nietzsche wrote, merely gave a push to what was already tottering.[35]

Although Benjamin called the critic to see symbolic structures as mortified, he did not suggest that the critic should then simply write off the ruins as irrelevant. Unlike Georg Lukács, who coined the term "second nature," Benjamin did not regard the false totality of historical content as something to be broken up and then discarded:

> The object of philosophical criticism is to show that the function of artistic form is as follows: to make historical content [*historische Sachgehalte*], such as provides the basis of every important work of art, into a philosophical truth [*philosophischen Wahrheitsgehalten*]. This transformation of material content into truth content makes the decrease in effectiveness, whereby the attraction of the earlier charms diminishes decade by decade, into the basis for a rebirth [*Neugeburt*], in which all ephemeral beauty is completely stripped off, and the work stands as ruin.[36]

Benjamin did not suggest that the critic could or should strip off mere appearances to reveal something "real" underneath. Instead, as Jürgen Habermas rightly noted, Benjamin's style of critique sought both to expose the pretensions of historical thing-content and to re-present them in ways that witnessed to the fulfillment of their promises in spite of themselves. Habermas dubbed this style *Rettendekritik*, a critique set on redeeming. Benjamin, he wrote, mortified appearance only to "transpose" it "from the medium of the beautiful into that of the true and thereby to redeem it."[37] Benjamin's goal was not to do away with historical content but, in seeing it for what it was, to redeem it in a higher state.

Benjamin took the utmost care to distinguish his allegorical "redemption" from every kind of arbitrary transformation by the critical subject. He rejected, for instance, the purely subjective reconstruction of meaning performed by the *Trauerspiel* allegorists. Seeing the world full of ruined signs severed from what they formerly signified, German allegorists in the post-Reformation period reinfused the world with meaning of their own choosing and dared to call this "resurrection." They acted as if they could make the meaning of their choice and so broke faith with the body. Benjamin rebuked such solutions for assuming that the world had become *nothing but* ruins, as if the original gift of meaning could be totally destroyed. Such a view—seemingly enlightened to every gap between truth and history—simply replicated the dominant new "second nature," the appearance that human beings were the source of all value. In presuming that human beings could make meaning *ex nihilo*, the arbitrary allegorists forgot the dependence of meaning on a gift already given. Their "spiritualized" resurrection broke faith with the world of things, not redeeming them at all but leaving them behind. Such false redemption, Benjamin wrote, was *treulos*. It was faithless, breaking the covenant of truth with history. It was not "true" in either sense of the English word: neither faithful nor truthful. Instead of claiming to make whatever meaning there was, Benjamin proposed a *true* redemptive critique that mortified semblances with the confidence that one simply released an original gift always already in them. Meaning was not the critic's to make. Benjamin's restraint from making new meaning could seem like nihilism, but it was nothing of the sort. It was a critique of the merely subjective invention of meaning that was the real nihilism, the real source of the melancholy that stalked the *Trauerspiele*.

Benjamin's insistence on fidelity to the body, to the world of appearances, depended on his sense that even ruins held some inalienable gift of life and meaning. He wrote elusively and allusively about that inalienable gift throughout his career. Perhaps his clearest—and certainly his most materialist—exposition came very late in his life, in the great unfinished bundles of notes, quotes, clippings, and theory that came to be called *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*). In a 1935 exposé of the project Benjamin described the

inalienable presence of the primordial gift as dwelling in a "collective unconsciousness." The phrase carried unfortunate baggage from C. G. Jung and Ludwig Klages, and Benjamin's friends urged him not to use it. Theodor Adorno wrote Benjamin to argue that reliance on collective unconsciousness robbed critique of its "crucial and objective liberating potential." When the gift to be released became part of the content of consciousness, Adorno argued, its critical power over and against prevailing social consciousness waned. Adorno's prescription was strong and surprising. He demanded the reintroduction of the theological content that had marked the earlier exposés. Adorno clearly did not call for a *Parisian Dogmatics*, but it is not entirely clear what he did want: "A restoration of theology, or better still, a radicalization of dialectic introduced into the glowing heart of theology, would simultaneously require the utmost intensification of the social-dialectical, and indeed economic, motifs. Above all, these must be grasped historically."[38] By any means necessary, Adorno wanted Benjamin's dialectical images to transcend collective consciousness to retain the power to critique collective consciousness. Adorno called for something more, something beyond even collective subjectivity.

Perhaps in response to Adorno, or perhaps simply making visible ideas that already were latent within his work, Benjamin took care to reject Ernst Bloch's great faith in "the consciousness of the collective"—a phrase Williams would echo in calling on "the soul of community memory"—the ability of a society or community to dream its way into a really new future, to pull itself up by the bootstraps of its own visions. The consciousness of the collective could only reproduce itself and thus endlessly extend the semblance of second nature. Benjamin described instead a collective unconscious infused with memories of a past it did not make. Because it held memories shot through with primordial gift, it could add a genuinely critical, genuinely utopian, dimension to dialectical images of every kind, from buildings to fashions to sermons.

The most helpful device for Benjamin in describing this recollection of primordial gift was Marcel Proust's notion of "involuntary memory." Memory could be truly critical when it remained independent of will and even consciousness in important ways. At the same time it remained historical—really present in people, practices, and even objects—even if it was not subject to the will of any of them. This present presence made it "historical" even if it was not a memory of some historical set of events, even if it was a "memory" of time before time. Involuntary memory allowed Benjamin to speak about a critical power present in empirical practices yet distinct from every conscious plan or action, past or present, individual or collective. It was a memory of time before second nature, a dream deeper than any intention.

There is, as Adorno wrote, something irreducibly *theological* here. A Christian cultural critic might think of this primordial gift as something like the *imago Dei*. It is a gift: received, not made. It is a gift that cannot be exchanged. It

can be scarred and effaced but never completely lost. It is both forsaken promise and forgotten foretaste of redemption. It is the deep to which deep calls. Transposing these themes into the key of ecclesiology, we might think of the gift as the presence of Christ in the church. Breathed out in an act of self-sharing, that presence dwells in the church in spite of the church. It lingers, forgotten and effaced but nonetheless present, in practices, stories, beliefs, and saints. It lives in all the cultural artifacts of visible churches. Its release depends not so much on the completion of those cultural artifacts—a teasing out of their potential, a little topping up of a good start—as on their mortification and redemption. The practices of the visible church bear the gospel gift not in their approximations of excellence, not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (I Cor. 2:4), a power made visible precisely at the breaking points. Such an ecclesiology resists reduction to caricatures both of a Roman Catholic "sacramental" perspective and of a Protestant "critical" perspective. Critique that has learned from Benjamin would reject both the fusion of history and theology and their radical separation. It would reject both the ideology of the symbol and the ideology that allows empiricist history and idealist theology to divide the world between them. It would insist on the gift of presence in and in spite of, through and against, the practices of visible churches.

Confession as a Caption

In this essay I attempt to perform what I attempt to describe: a cultural turn resigned to reflexivity, hodgepodge, and allegory. The resignation to reflexivity—to the bad, *new* things—came in my turn to the cultural turn, specifically to the practice of *bricolage*. I have tried to think through the possibilities for theological criticism not by starting from a blank methodological slate but by turning to a practice shared by Delores Williams and Stanley Hauerwas. Although I have criticized their work as *bricoleurs*, I do not mean to suggest that I am doing anything but a kind of *bricolage*. I simply want to call *bricoleurs* to acknowledge their role and its deep entanglement with some dominant forces that cut across many contemporary societies. The best *bricolage* will include some self-conscious interrogation of the role of the *bricoleur*.

The resignation to hodgepodge—the willingness to turn to the bad, new *things* (in the plural)—came in my turn to the particular practice of *bricolage*. I have not tried to turn to some unified modern, postmodern, or critical culture. Instead, I have considered a single practice as two virtuosic practitioners have enacted it. Hauerwas and Williams performed *bricolage* with different ends in mind, like two people improvising on the same theme. That common practice shaped but did not exhaustively define their larger projects or the cultural locations from which they wrote. They also shared the practice of *bricolage* with

people working in other social spheres. The term itself already bears the stamps of many border crossings: It comes to theology and ethics from the social sciences, and variations of the term show up across academic discourses and in places such as hip-hop, contemporary visual art, and popular advertisements. A critical consideration of methodological issues in Christian theology and ethics therefore gestures toward broader cultural criticism.

The resignation to allegory—the willingness to begin with the *bad*, new things—began with a moment of mortification. Turns to culture (including my own) stood exposed as ruins, unable to keep the promise of critique because they replicated what most needed critique: the position of an individual selecting and arranging cultural artifacts. Therefore I have not even hoped to enact a version of *bricolage* that is complete in itself. Instead I have performed *bricolage* as something like a broken signifier, a ruin waiting for redemption. What kind of caption might testify to its redemption? How might the cultural turns made by Hauerwas, Williams, me, and many others be redeemed, in and in spite of themselves?

Perhaps redemption might become visible through a caption of *confession*. That caption would need to borrow from two common senses of the word: It would need to suggest both a confession of sin and a confession of faith. Confession of sin—of our entanglement in and even support for the orders, powers, and practices we try to criticize—enacts a kind of mortification. Such thorough mortification only makes sense—only becomes possible, imaginable, worthwhile—with confidence in the presence of an abiding gift. Thus, these cultural turns also take the form of confessions of faith. They confess a faith that God abides in and works for the redemption of *this* world, the world of seeker churches and flags in sanctuaries; of class pride disguised as fidelity to tradition; of racism, sexism, and tender hatred of gay and lesbian people; of megamalls and hipster coffee shops and churches that look like both of them; of academic journals in Christian ethics and, people who, like it or not, do theological criticism through turns to culture.

Notes

1. The phrase a "view from nowhere"—and an elegant statement of the problem—appeared in Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

   I borrow the language of a "cultural turn" from Fredric Jameson. I believe Jameson's clear articulation of the swollen importance of the cultural sphere (or, better, cultural spheres) amounted to a significant breakthrough. His structuralist assumptions, however, forced that realization into a singular, monolithic account of "postmodernity" that could not account for the tension, variety, and vitality that close empirical studies suggest. Cf. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), esp. ix–xxii.

Kathryn Tanner neatly parsed and problematized what I am calling the cultural turn in theology in *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Another good general discussion of the cultural turn in theology appears in Sheila Greve Davaney, "Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis," in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–16. Like Davaney, I am trying to point to "common themes with broad credence," not some "spurious consensus."

George Lindbeck remains the *locus classicus* of the postliberal version of the cultural turn. Lindbeck used the work of Clifford Geertz to put an anthropological spin on the linguistic turn associated with Ludwig Wittgenstein, arriving at the idea of religion as a "cultural-linguistic system" that grounded human knowledge of God and the world. Church culture as a form of life became primary, doctrine a kind of secondary grammar. See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004) shows how a cultural turn could sustain liberalism as well as postliberalism. Stout offered a breakthrough defense of democracy by turning not to something like the ontology of individual consciousness but to the complex cultural traditions of the United States.

Womanist theologians Joan M. Martin, in *More Than Chains and Toil: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), and Traci C. West, in *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), also made the cultural turn in directions that could sustain liberal politics. Both Martin and West added substantial empirical dimensions to their cultural turns. Although there are important differences between womanist and *mujerista* theologies, they share at least this renewed attention to the lives of particular communities. A good example is Ada María Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Liberation theologians from Africa and Latin America were among the first to make the turn I am trying to describe. See, for instance, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986).

Radically orthodox theologian John Milbank made what I am calling a turn to church culture—and made explicit the Hegelian affinities of this turn—when he called for theology as a kind of *Sittlichkeit* of the church. See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 381 and *passim*. Catherine Pickstock sought to ground meaning in the particular cultural practice of the Roman Mass in *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998).

2. For a precise statement of this line of questioning, see Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 281*ff*.

3. Self-consciously turning to culture leads me to write about contemporary figures in the simple past tense. This choice of tenses rejects the convention of writing about history in the past while writing theology and philosophy in the eternal literary present. It also rejects the distinctions that convention reifies: between word and deed, idea and event, writing and speaking, and thinker and mere mortal. Bridging the gulf between theology and history begins with speaking about them in a common language. This approach borrows the tense convention of a newspaper: It reports as past events the words and deeds of people who may still live in the today of this text and who may speak or write these or very similar words again.

4. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001), 184*ff*.

5. Ibid., 191 n. 38; 192 n. 40.

6. Ibid., 145; emphasis added.
7. It is worth noting that if the visible church is holy, it stands above critique. It certainly could not be critiqued from "outside," by the world whose ways are not its ways. Moreover, because of Hauerwas's conception of the church as a "tradition" in Alasdair MacIntyre's sense, it also could not be critiqued from "below." A tradition has resources proper to it that could be used for internal critique, but those resources could not be invoked without interpretation—and the "masters of the guild," the visible hierarchy of the visible church, offer definitive interpretation. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985), 204–25. Hauerwas had just such a picture in mind when he rejected appeals to scripture against church practices. Before scripture can be rightly read—before the Word can be heard—the reader must be inducted into a community of right readership. The Word cannot be known apart from the church. This point is the center of Stanley Hauerwas's argument in *Unleashing the Scriptures: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1993). I argue below that Delores S. Williams made the story of Hagar secondary to the community's interpretive power in the same way.
8. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), xi, 202.
9. Ibid., 1–15.
10. Ibid., 6; emphasis in original.
11. Ibid., xii.
12. Ibid., 206; emphasis in original.
13. Ibid., 205–6. On the Universal Hagar's Spiritual Church, see pp. 219–39.
14. Note that I am not arguing that the critical strategy of Hauerwas and Williams had problems because it was circular, with a critical ideal defining a culture that then was supposed to justify the ideal. That circle was present, and others may criticize it, but I think the drive to foundations is more vicious than such circles. The problem was not circular reasoning but the loss of ability to critique the practice of *bricolage* and the social and cultural conditions in which it thrives.

    My line of critique makes more obviously internal criticisms of the work of Hauerwas than of that of Williams. Hauerwas explicitly insisted on the authority of a community over the critical individualism necessary for *bricolage* and explicitly acknowledged the need for some positive, empirical existence, over and against individual selection, for the church to which he appealed. I think my line of argument also amounts to an internal critique of Williams, though her talk of a split between churches visible and invisible suggests that it might be more of a friendly amendment. If Williams's visible–invisible church distinction comes from Eurocentric Reformed traditions, then Williams's womanist theology emerges as something of a hybrid. If Williams claims that such distinctions arise within the community of African American women, however, then that community may not be so completely different from Eurocentric traditions on this crucial issue. In either case, womanist theology, as *critical* theology, ceases to be wholly other, "the outsider position par excellence."
15. For a pithy definition of moral *bricolage*, see Stout, *Ethics after Babel*, 294. Stout surely was right that contemporary criticism tends to become *bricolage* in spite of its own self-understandings, and in describing Hauerwas and Williams as *bricoleurs* I am following Stout's example of defining the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, James Gustafson, and Alan Donagan as *bricolage*. That so much contemporary criticism appears, on closer inspection, as *bricolage* suggests not that cultures of *bricolage* should be above critique but that they must be inhabited with especially critical self-consciousness. For Stout's revelation of different thinkers as *bricoleurs*, see *Ethics After Babel*, 126 (Donagan), 173 (Gustafson), and 211 (MacIntyre).

16. Two important and distinct cases for critique as the product of collective learning and problem solving appear in Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1981); and Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel Der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt, Germany: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962), translated into English as Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Boston: MIT Press, 1989). I read both Habermas and Stout as trying to offer some kind of critique of the critical perspective. Both look for ways to keep the project of modernity (in Habermas's words) "unfinished." I am describing a project of modernity that is in fact unfinished, in spite of itself, and therefore still open to the possibility of redemption.

17. A wide variety of thinkers have identified something like this nearly hegemonic culture of critique, but I am especially indebted to two accounts: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik Der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1969), translated as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 2000); and John W. Meyer, "Self and Life Course: Institutionalization and Its Effects," in *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987).

18. Talk of "enclaves" comes from John Milbank, who, despite his strong accent on the visible, material church, slipped into defining his ideal counterculture in just this way. See John Milbank, "Enclaves, or Where Is the Church?" *New Blackfriars* 73, no. 861 (1992): 341–52.

    Both Hauerwas and Williams imagined certain special persons, events, and institutions as sites of the power and presence of the gospel in history. In the person of Mary McLeod Bethune or John Howard Yoder, heaven and earth seemed to come together. This observation might seem to grant historical, material reality new sacred status. Because Hauerwas and Williams sorted persons, events, and practices on the basis of principles determined in advance, however, historical realities attained transcendence only as they embodied those principles. Everything not related to the principle—whether an evil such as misogyny or an "incidental" feature such as the time an event happened, the color of a saint's hair, or the shape of a church sanctuary—would not be taken up. Even if we can imagine persons, practices, or communities purified from all evil, we cannot imagine any historical realities purified from all "incidentals." As a result, the cultural turns of Williams and Hauerwas could only reiterate the transcendence of their prior principles. Not quite in the world, their idealist critiques remained curiously of it.

19. The work of Jeffrey Stout has consistently displayed the kind of critical, reflexive *bricolage* I am calling for. *Democracy and Tradition*, for instance, turned not to some conjured "other" culture but to practices that helped form the critical voice Stout used throughout the book.

20. For a more thorough account of alternative ways of construing "culture," see Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

21. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 14, esp. 193–94. On the importance of intentions for defining actions, see also 206.

22. MacIntyre introduced a stronger dose of the self-consciousness I am calling for in his definition of "tradition." He acknowledged that the description of a tradition involved the construction (not merely the discovery) of a contentious, restrospective narrative joining several disparate elements. See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1988), 11.

23. On the rise of storytelling in American sermons, see David S. Reynolds, "From Doctrine to Narrative: The Rise of Pulpit Storytelling in America," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (1980): 479–98.

24. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72; emphasis in original.

25. Bourdieu aptly described the ways actors reproduced the "objective meaning" in practices even without or in spite of conscious intentions: "Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Because his actions and works are the product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery, they contain an 'objective intention,' as the Scholastics put it, which always outruns his conscious intentions. The schemes of thought and expression he has acquired are the basis for the *intentionless invention* of regulated improvisation." Ibid., 79; emphasis in original.

26. In highlighting the wide social range of critical reflection on church practices, I do not mean to devalue the importance of working for changes in public policies. I do mean to recognize the practical difficulty of making such changes without giving up explicitly theological language. I also mean to assert—with so-called cultural Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, and Raymond Williams—that cultural power plays an enormous role in sustaining injustice and that changes in the practices of culture can have wide implications. More contentiously: Mainline U.S. Protestants are far more likely to change the larger society by changing their practices of preaching than by issuing another round of denominational position papers.

27. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* [G.S.], ed. Theodor W. Adorno et al., 7 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Surhkamp, 1972), vol. 6, 539; for English translation, see Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1973), 121.

28. Compare Seamus Heaney's talk of a "rhyme" between hope and history: "History says, *Don't hope / On this side of the grave.* / But then, once in a lifetime / The longed-for tidal wave / of justice can rise up, / And hope and history rhyme." Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 77.

29. Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*, in Benjamin, *G.S.*, vol. 1:1, 203–430. In English: Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977). See especially *Ursprung*, 342; *Origin*, 165.

    Distinctions between allegory and symbol have been worked over in many different contexts, so the two terms have acquired a wide semantic range. I start with Benjamin's definitions and then transpose them into a key for Christian eschatological memory. Starting with Benjamin's definitions opens up a way of thinking that is closed off by discussions of allegory and symbol that carry forward Goethe's strong preference for symbol as the only truly poetic mode. Coleridge picked up on Goethe's evaluations, emphasizing that the difference between symbol and allegory was one of *participation*. The crucial work of this essay, however, may be to reverse Coleridge's evaluation of the theological adequacy of the two terms. Faithful allegory, for Benjamin, participated in *without becoming identical to* that which it represented. For a classic (if Anglocentric) survey of theories of allegory, see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), esp. 1–23. A helpful bridge between English traditions of criticism and Benjamin appears in the *Trauerspiel*; see especially 3–24.

30. Again, I follow Benjamin in borrowing language from Bertolt Brecht, who said, "There can't be any doubt about it any longer. The struggle against ideology has become itself a kind of ideology." Quoted in Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 119.

31. Benjamin, *G.S.*, vol. 5:1, 574. See also the English translation: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 460.

32. Benjamin argued for captions in a more materialist key in a late essay on photography. Photographs promise a perfect representation of the self-completing empirical fact, Benjamin wrote. By themselves, however, they say nothing (or they lie): "As Brecht says:

'The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality.' A photograph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G. tells us nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed." Benjamin, *G.S.*, vol. 2.1, 383–84. Translated as "A Small History of Photography" in Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), 254–55.

33. It is interesting to note that *Gehalt*, which I have translated here as "content," can also mean "wage" or "stipend." Benjamin's idiolect was resonant in many keys.

34. This mortification entirely from felt contact anticipated strategies such as Paul de Man's "analytic reading," in which the reader attended so closely to the text as to break up the holistic integrity by which the text seemed to acquire its meaning. See Paul de Man, "Forward," in *The Dissimulating Harmony: The Image of Interpretation in Nietzsche, Rilke, Artaud, and Benjamin*, ed. Carol Jacobs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

35. On ruins see the very helpful discussion in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 159*ff*. See also Charles Rosen, "The Ruins of Walter Benjamin," in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 129–75.

36. Benjamin, *G.S.*, vol. 1:1, 358. Benjamin, *German Tragic Drama*, 182.

37. Jürgen Habermas, "Bewußtmachende Oder Rettende Kritik—Die Aktualität Walter Benjamins," in *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamin: Aus Anlaß Des 80. Geburtstags Von Walter Benjamin*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1972), 186. The translation is mine. The essay appears in English as Jürgen Habermas, "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique," in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 90–128. I have opted for a fresh translation because the language of "rescue" is too weak to carry all the associations Benjamin loaded into the term. Benjamin's talk of forming constellations with the eternal practically requires the language of "salvation" and "redemption."

38. Adorno, letter of 2 August 1935, in Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (New York: Polity Press, 1999), 108. The definitive discussion of the Adorno–Benjamin debates remains Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977), chaps. 9–11.