

Preface

The essays in this issue were presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics in Portland, Oregon, in January 2018. The theme of this meeting was “Christian Ethics: Retrospect and Prospect.” Each of the essays in this issue addresses in some way this double-sided coin. Each deals in a distinct way with the continuing influence of the history of Christian ethics on the present, looks to the future of the field, or combines both views to develop a constructive vision of what Christian ethics may become.

David Gushee’s presidential address, “Christian Ethics: Retrospect and Prospect,” offers an overview of the theme, rehearsing the development of Christian social ethics as a field over the past century and a half as well as reflecting on the changes that have taken place as the field has moved from its ecclesial-formational roots, to the development of the social ethics model, through the Hauerwasian critique, and moving toward a liberationist vision of the future of the field. Drawing on his own experiences, Gushee offers a reflection on the possibilities and limitations of each of these types of Christian ethics, and how they have affected him as a scholar and as a Christian.

In a departure from the usual way that plenary addresses are assigned at the annual meeting, Gushee invited the three working groups of the society to each offer a reflection on how the field of Christian ethics has evolved from the perspective of their own communities. We have published here the corresponding essays that represent the state of the field as interpreted by the African American, Asian American, and Latino/a working groups.

The contribution by the African/African American Working Group surveys the progenitors and major themes that have emerged within the African American tradition within Christian ethics. It addresses the problems of hostility and marginalization that this tradition has faced within the field of Christian ethics, and within the Society of Christian ethics specifically, and poses some trenchant questions to the society about the future of the place of an African American hermeneutic within Christian ethics.

The Asian American Working Group’s contribution similarly offers a retrospective survey of the development of a distinctly Asian American approach to

the practice of Christian ethics. It then addresses the dual issues of what precisely a distinctive Asian American ethical perspective is and how this perspective is grounded in the marginalization of Asian Americans, a marginalization that is often obscured beneath the image of Asian Americans as “model minorities.”

The Latino/a Working Group also seeks to identify key themes that mark its distinctive contributions to the field of Christian ethics, rooted in a historical survey of the development of the field and an articulation of key themes within the tradition. Among the issues this essay addresses are those of migration and the immigrant experience, the role of Afro-Latinx scholarship in the field, and the question of where queer Latinx voices fit within the tradition.

Collectively, these working group reflections offer a striking portrait of where the Society of Christian Ethics has been and where it may go in the future. They also serve as a reminder that the society has often failed, despite its rhetoric and good intentions, to fully embrace the voices of minority scholars in the field. Prospectively, the question of whether this will be remedied remains to be seen.

The remainder of the essays in this volume represent concurrent session papers that were presented during the conference. Brett McCarty’s “Medicine as Just War?” looks at the legacy of James Childress within the field of Christian ethics, examining how his approach to bioethics was informed by his work in the area of just war theory, while Nathaniel Van Yperen’s “Nature Elicits Piety” examines the continuing relevance of James Gustafson’s theocentric ethics for the development of ecological ethics. Van Yperen connects this to the question of wildlife conservation in the American West.

Matthew Elia’s “Ethics in the Afterlife of Slavery” takes on the task of examining what Saint Augustine’s rhetoric of “mastery” in the context of Roman society has to say about the way in which his theology can be received in a postslavery world. M. Therese Lysaught and Michael McCarthy, in “A Social Praxis for US Health Care,” look at the relevance that the development of new approaches to Catholic bioethics for Catholic social teaching, particularly in those areas in which issues of justice and social marginalization connect to the US health care system.

In “Aesthetics and Ethics,” Susan A. Ross examines the contributions of communities of women religious in the moral formation of students through development of an aesthetic sensibility, which allowed them to understand their responsibility to create a world that was both good and beautiful. Janna Hunter-Bowman offers a critical assessment of practices of nonviolent peace-making in “Constructive Agents Under Duress.” Through an analysis of the multiple eschatological theories present in the work of John Howard Yoder, she argues that a careful distinction between messianic and gradualist conceptions of eschatology can allow for a more effective conception of the relationship of church and state for the purposes of nonviolent peacebuilding. Finally, David

Lantigua's "Liberal Domination, Individual Rights, and the Preferential Option for the Poor in History" considers the ongoing legacy of liberal individualism in the dispossession of the poor in Latin America, and considers the continuing importance of the turn toward the poor in theology for stripping liberalism of its mythological power over political and economic life.

Each of these essays engages in a distinct way with the conference theme, yet together they offer a portrait of a discipline with a rich history and a live, though contentious, future. By considering both the retrospective and prospective dimensions of Christian ethics, they allow us to consider the continuing contributions of this history, and how this future should be shaped.