

Stanley Hauerwas  
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*A Refutation and Resolution  
of the Current Catholic Crisis*

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*O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life [...].*<sup>1</sup>

This was the prayer of the childless Hannah, who later gave birth to the prophet Samuel. This was the prayer repeated by Joanna Hauerwas, who also prayed for a son who would dedicate his life in service to god. That son was told of his mother's prayer at age six, and because of it<sup>2</sup> he dedicated his life to Christian ministry, and was "saved" in the Pleasant Mound Methodist Church – about three miles east of Dallas, one of the first churches in Dallas county.<sup>3</sup> That son was Stanley Hauerwas, who in the week of the September 11, 2001 attack would receive popular canonization as "America's Best Theologian" by *Time* magazine.<sup>4</sup>



The week before Stanley Hauerwas was born on July 24, 1940, his parents saw the 1939 movie *Stanley and Livingstone*, about the Scottish missionary presumed to be lost in Africa and the intrepid Welsh reporter Henry M. Stanley sent to find him. The reporter's story inspired them to give his name to their only son.<sup>5</sup>

Like most working-class Texans, young Stanley's acquaintance with hard work came early. By age four or five he was hoeing the family garden; by age six he was delivering beans in his wagon for sale;<sup>6</sup> by age seven, apprenticing with his bricklayer father, Coffee Hauerwas.<sup>7</sup> Hauerwas reflects on this lesson learned from his parents as follows:

The word used for lives that just get on with it is "work." I cannot remember any time in my life that I did not have work to do. I never felt oppressed, even as a child, by the fact that I was expected to work, because I assumed, given the example set by my parents, that work was what everyone did.<sup>8</sup>

Even today he gets up at five in the morning and works until six in the evening.<sup>9</sup> He learned another habit from his parents, and possibly from the Texas heritage that he is very proud to display: The habit of straight talking, even with unabashed swearing:

I assumed that my parents would never want me to be anything other than straightforward. Bullshit was not allowed. Plain speech and plain thinking was the hallmark of their life, and I took it to be the hallmark of my life.<sup>10</sup>

But for his mother's prayer Stanley Hauerwas might have lived and died a bricklayer. He had reading disabilities<sup>11</sup> in elementary school, and even today admits:

I cannot spell and [...] I have a penchant for getting word order wrong.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, he realized early on that books were the way to the fulfillment of his mother's prayer. He earned a New Testament reading pin<sup>13</sup> from Linz Jewelers,<sup>a</sup> which, in the days when America was unashamedly Christian, the jeweler offered to students in association with the public school system. He found in the Methodist church's library *A Faith for Tough Times*, a book of sermons by Harry Emerson Fosdick.<sup>14</sup> At Southwestern University in Georgetown, just north of Austin, he found a true friend in the life of the mind, the celibate John Score, who introduced him to Plato, Nietzsche, and other philosophers.<sup>15</sup> He also discovered the Cokesbury bookstore in downtown Dallas.<sup>b</sup> He joined the "notorious Faith and Life Community in Austin"<sup>16</sup> – notorious for its blend of psychotherapy and radical theology, and for its appeal to Tom Hayden.<sup>c</sup> During all his time at Texas schools, he would return home in summer to lay brick with his father.

In 1962, at age 22, Hauerwas went to the divinity school at Yale.<sup>17</sup> And although he just missed a legendary generation of theologians associated with Yale – H. Richard Niebuhr, Roland Bainton, Robert Calhoun, George Lindbeck, and Hans Frei, from whom he took just one course – he stated that "I am not sure if I became a Christian at Yale, but I certainly began to be a theologian because of what I learned there."<sup>18</sup> What he did learn from one Yale theologian is telling:

[I]f anyone cares enough to try to understand the way I do theology they will discover that I am a pale imitation of [Julian N.] Hartt.<sup>19</sup>

Hartt's best-known work begins as follows:

As a form of criticism of culture the Social Gospel was lively, productive, and pertinacious. Reactions to it were remarkably diverse; and even its memory is execrated by people whose unyielding devotion to the King James Version is an integral part of a version of Christianity dedicated to the sanctity of private property, free enterprise, white supremacy, the segregation of the races, the gold standard, and the open shop.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed the entire period at Yale was as much a schooling in political action as it was in theology. While working summers at G&O Manufacturing at New Haven, he became convinced of the need for labor unions;<sup>21</sup> he was "drawn into

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<sup>a</sup> Joseph Linz came to Texas in 1877, to sell diamonds not exactly door-to-door but ranch-to-ranch; his Dallas store opened in 1891. See Hollandsworth, Skip, "The Carat and the Shtick," *D Magazine* (published December, 1986) <<https://www.dmagazine.com/publications/d-magazine/1986/december/the-carat-and-the-shtick/>> accessed November 21, 2018.

<sup>b</sup> Founded originally as the United Methodist Publishing House in 1789, it carried secular titles as well. The store that opened in downtown Dallas in the 1920s has long been closed, although a storefront still exists at 5905 Bishop Boulevard in north Dallas.

<sup>c</sup> Tom Hayden was one of the best known of the student radicals of the 1960s. He was one of the founders of the Students for a Democratic Society, author of the Port Huron Statement, and one of the defendants in the Chicago Seven trial in 1969.

New Haven democratic politics,” especially under the influence of Robert A. Dahl’s study of power structures in that city in his 1961 book *Who Governs*;<sup>22</sup> and he was a defender of Black Power.<sup>23</sup> Looking back nostalgically on those days, Hauerwas says:

Of course, it would be a mistake to romanticize [the Sixties]. The liberations heralded destroyed many. But for me the sheer energy, the willingness of many to put their lives on the line, and the challenge to imagine a different world remain gifts.<sup>24</sup>

He has never felt the need to modify his statement that “[s]ometime between 1960 and 1980, an old, inadequately conceived world ended, and a fresh, new world began.”<sup>25</sup> Although Hauerwas protests that he is neither a liberal nor a feminist, he somehow manages to say that he prefers “the more radical feminists like Shulamith Firestone”.<sup>26</sup>

In 1970, Hauerwas went to study at Catholic Notre Dame, although it was no longer dominated by the Holy Cross order: Jesuits, Protestants, and laity by that time were teaching there.<sup>27</sup> The interdenominational medley suited him. Then, as now, he is untroubled by any need to identify himself with a particular faith – for which mutability he has been accused of “promiscuous pew-hopping.”<sup>28</sup> As he said, “At the time, I did not think I was either Protestant or Catholic,”<sup>29</sup> and “I have never had a home in a particular ecclesial tradition.”<sup>30</sup> He admits that his “position” – which he protests is not a “position” at all, but theology proper<sup>31,32</sup> – is “a strange brew of Catholic and Anabaptist resources”.<sup>33</sup> Despite being received into Broadway United Methodist Church in a poor part of South Bend, Indiana during Easter, 1980,<sup>34</sup> and moving to the Methodist Duke University later in the decade, he nonetheless has called himself an Episcopalian,<sup>35</sup> a “high church Mennonite,”<sup>36</sup> a “Mennonite camp follower,”<sup>37</sup> and a “neo-Anabaptist.”<sup>38</sup>

In spite of his equivocation of faith, sometime during his Notre Dame years he hardened unequivocal views in politics, stating that “I combine what I hope is a profound commitment to fundamental Christian convictions with a socially radical ethic”, and that “worship of Jesus is itself a politics [...and... b]asic to such politics is the refusal of [...] violence”.<sup>39</sup> He bluntly affirms his embrace of pacifism, names its inspiration for him, and seals it off from any theoretical questioning by making it an article of faith:

I am not a pacifist because of a theory. I am a pacifist because John Howard Yoder convinced me that nonviolence and Christianity are inseparable.<sup>40</sup>

Hauerwas considers his own 1991 pacifist manifesto for Christianity, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, to be the most comprehensive of all his work.<sup>41</sup> Beyond this fixed star of pacifism, however, Christianity can offer few answers:

When Christianity is assumed to be an ‘answer’ that makes the world intelligible, it reflects an accommodated church committed to assuring

Christians that the way things are is the way things have to be. Such 'answers' cannot help but turn Christianity into an explanation. For me, learning to be a Christian has meant learning to live without answers. Indeed, to learn to live in this way is what makes being a Christian so wonderful. Faith is but a name for learning how to go on without knowing the answers.<sup>42</sup>

This key book in the Hauerwas corpus was made possible, he states, by his momentous encounter with Alasdair MacIntyre's groundbreaking book, *After Virtue*, published in 1981.<sup>43</sup> Yet the pacifism in *The Peaceable Kingdom* was not from MacIntyre, but from the second great philosophical influence on his thinking, the aforementioned John Yoder, whose most important book was his 1972 *The Politics of Jesus*.

It was from John Yoder that Hauerwas drew another line of thought: The critique of – as Yoder called it – America's "Constantinianism." This latter concept is the belief that Christians are an exceptional people whose beliefs anoint them with the ability, indeed the duty, to guide the nation-state, without necessarily merging the functions of church and state. Hauerwas would deny Christians the use of the political process to enact Christian legislation or pursue Christian social goals.<sup>44</sup> Naturally this exposes him to the criticism that he advocates a political quietism that withdraws Christians from political life entirely. Hauerwas responds not with a clarification, but with a pivot to the term "narrative":

Yoder understood well, therefore, that you do not free yourself of Constantinianism by becoming anti-Constantinian. For him the alternative to Constantinianism was not anti-Constantinianism, but locality and place. According to Yoder, locality and place are the forms of communal life necessary to express the particularity of Jesus through the visibility of the church. Only at the local level is the church able to engage in the discernment necessary to be prophetic.<sup>45</sup>

The notions of locality, place, and communal life form the heart of "narrative," meaning the local traditions represented as a story that provides context not only for personal identity but for the local community's sanctioned moral values. "Narrative" thus defined is a concept central to his interpretation of "virtue ethics."<sup>46</sup> Naturally this exposes Hauerwas to the charge of sectarianism and relativism, since the term allows every sect and community to establish very unlike moral standards – something quite different from one morally absolute "rock of ages." To the charge of relativism, at least, Hauerwas concedes.<sup>47</sup> Contradictory or not, the term allows him to deny not only any church with a universal narrative, but also any church with a national narrative. His use of the term allows him to boast that he has "made a career criticizing the accommodated character of the church to the American project."<sup>48</sup>

His persistence in that criticism, to the point of denying that patriotism is a natural loyalty at all – especially in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attack, led to his dismissal from the board of the ecumenical, conservative magazine *First Things* – a prominent journal with 27,000 subscribers, founded by theologian Richard John Neuhaus.<sup>49</sup> In response to anti-terrorist measures 15 years later, Hauerwas stated: “If the Trump administration should follow its brinksmanship logic and begin forcibly to register Muslims, Christians might identify as Muslims” to subvert such registrations.<sup>50</sup> How then should a pacifist respond to terrorist attacks, especially on Christians? A few months after the European Union declared the ISIS attacks on Christians in northern Iraq to be genocide, Hauerwas recommended the suicidal mission of sending “missionaries to be present in Iraq” during those attacks because “love to our persecuted brothers and sisters must mean facing the same dangers that they are undergoing.”<sup>51</sup>

Closely related to the political criticism of the “American project” is his contempt for its economic system, of which he says:

[E]conomic liberalism is antithetical to the formation of communities capable of caring for one another in the name of the common good.<sup>52</sup>

Whether because of these views or in spite of them, Hauerwas received one of theology’s highest recognitions by being asked to give the Gifford Lectures for 2001. These lectures provided the material for his book *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology*.<sup>53</sup> In that same year *Time* magazine named him “America’s Best Theologian.” The year before, his book *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* was listed among the 100 books that had a significant effect on Christians this century, according to the magazine *Christianity Today*.<sup>54</sup> His tremendously popular *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (co-written with William Willimon), a restatement of his themes from the point of view of a sharp distinction between the church and the world, still enjoys multiple reprintings, even after some 30 years.



“Well, my friend, I guess you know that 3:00am comes mighty early.”

“Ugh, I have no intention of getting up at 3:00am. Are you?”

“Oh, heavens no. Are you kidding? I was merely pointing out that 3:00am comes mighty early. Now *should* one be rising at 3:00am? I don’t know. Is your narrative, your story, that of the early-rising fisherman? Some would then say yes. I just don’t know. But this I will assert before the world: We *must* get out of bed.”

The reader of Hauerwas’ prolific output must repeatedly experience something like the foregoing dialog: It begins with the alarming claim, which upon clarification turns out not to be a claim at all, but just a flamboyant red dash. This is followed by his idiosyncratic, copiously hedged statement of the

issue, an equivocal argument, and last, a stentorian affirmation of the obvious. Taken in all, the flamboyant red dash turns out to be a muddy skid mark. The following examples will illustrate.

*For example*, in *Hannah's Child* we see the device compressed into a few sentences: "I am not interested in what I believe. I am not even sure what I believe. I am much more interested in what the church believes."<sup>55</sup> The reader asks himself: What, you're a theologian and you don't know or care to know your own belief? And of course the fireworks fizzle into meaning that he's going to focus on his subject and not on his personal convictions – which would be a commonplace but for his subsequent remarks that make it dubious. In that same book he makes the startling assertion that "Thomas [Aquinas] was not a Roman Catholic theologian" but adds: "because that identification only made sense after the Reformation."<sup>56</sup> Well obviously Aquinas wrote BPE – Before the Protestant Era, so he was by definition Catholic, as was the entire Church before Luther. One might just as well complain that Julius Caesar didn't write his dates followed by "BCE."

*For example*, in an interview Hauerwas dramatically states:

I often enjoy making liberal friends, particularly American liberal friends, nervous by acknowledging that I am of course a theocrat.<sup>57</sup>

His interviewer strings along, explaining:

That "of course" is the kicker. For Hauerwas, it's obvious that a Christian must be a theocrat. He's right. "Theocracy" means "rule of God," and the Christian gospel is, in a literal sense, a theocratic message: Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God.<sup>58</sup>

However the statement and its "explanation" are true only idiosyncratically: Common usage of the term "theocracy" designates "rule of god" in a temporal government that fuses church and state.

*For example*, in *A Better Hope* we read that Hauerwas "will not write a book on Christian ethics in America."<sup>59</sup> But after several paragraphs it becomes clear that his refusal applies only to Christian ethics *in America*, and our startled alarm gives way to a chuckle: Right, you made me look; your outpouring on Christian ethics will continue, albeit without any noxious branding as "American."

*On capitalism*

*For example*, again in *A Better Hope*, Hauerwas declares: "[T]he only institution more destructive of the family than capitalism is Christianity." Wise to the flamboyant dash, we know that of course he means "Christianity in its current 'Constantinian' form" – but the swipe against capitalism is univocal. Indeed he declares that the common "enemy" of all Christians is capitalism:<sup>60</sup>

Capitalism thrives on short-term commitments. The ceaseless drive for innovation is but the way to undercut labor's power by making the skills of

the past irrelevant for tomorrow. Indeed, capitalism is the ultimate form of deconstruction, because how better to keep labor under control than through the scarcity produced through innovation? All the better that human relationships are ephemeral, because lasting commitments prove to be inefficient in ever-expanding markets. Against such a background the church's commitment to maintain marriage as lifelong monogamous fidelity may well prove to be one of the most powerful tactics we have to resist capitalism. [...T]he conservative side too often wants to have marriage and capitalism as well. I am suggesting you cannot have them both.<sup>61</sup>

The foregoing statement is frankly breathtaking in its ignorance of basic economics. The "ceaseless drive for innovation" is the drive to accumulate the capital that does not "undercut labor's power," but instead makes it more powerful. This is easily demonstrated by comparing the value of an hour of the commonest unskilled labor between countries that are heavily capitalized and those that are not. Comparing two equally skilled bricklayers, one from America and the other from Bangladesh, the one from America is paid more because of the nation's greater capitalization. His charge of "scarcity produced through innovation" is false: Capitalized innovation produces abundance, as do all labor-saving machines and roundabout methods of production. And the assertion that capitalism thrives on the failure of the institution of marriage is laughable: Intact families are demonstrably more successful in capitalist terms, and more prosperous by any measure in comparison with those that are not.

According to Hauerwas, capitalism is driven by a "law of tooth and nail" that "puts workers and owners at odds, since the interest of the workers revolve around their jobs and interests of the owners revolve around their profits." And: "Our economic life cannot help but be a reign of fear that makes children lie and adults cheat." And: "[C]apitalism perverts competition [...and...] corrupts the significance of leadership" to make the "game of competition [...] murderous." "[N]ow rich men, through the liquor trade, poison the poor because it pays. [...L]ying and dishonesty [...] are now accepted as integral to business practice."<sup>62</sup>

And how does Hauerwas propose to remedy this "murderous" state of affairs that is said to spawn class warfare, mass poisonings, lying, and cheating? One suggestion is to encourage "a movement toward industrial democracy"<sup>63</sup> and a more socialist Democratic Party, since "there is now [in 2015] no left wing of the Democratic Party left."<sup>64</sup> Another is to force all church members to disclose their income. When the associate dean of a business school objected to this latter proposal, saying "Well, we couldn't do that. That's private," Hauerwas responded:

Where did all this privacy stuff come from? So when it comes to money, maybe we should begin by telling one another what we make. [...]For

instance, at my church the rector knows approximately what I make, which as a full-time professor at Duke is about \$100,000 per year.<sup>65</sup>

Aside from its preposterousness, this is frankly a disingenuous statement. That \$100,000 figure excludes university benefits, royalties from some 50 published books, honoraria, and other income. But is this yet another instance of capitalism contributing to dishonesty?

*On individual rights*

As his scoffing of privacy rights suggests, the condemnation of capitalism from Hauerwas extends to its political system as well, for its interference in dissolving the individual into the collective, which is the true seat of moral agency, not the self.<sup>66</sup>

Capitalism thrives in a climate where ‘rights’ are the main political agenda. The church becomes one more consumer-oriented organization, existing to encourage individual fulfillment rather than being a crucible to engender individual conversion into the Body.<sup>67</sup>

For Hauerwas, the Constitution and its Bill of Rights were a colossal mistake:

America is the only country that has the misfortune of being founded on a philosophical mistake – namely, the notion of inalienable rights. We Christians do not believe that we have inalienable rights. That is the false presumption of Enlightenment individualism, and it opposes everything that Christians believe about what it means to be a creature.<sup>68</sup>

Hauerwas does not shrink from the revolutionary nature of his suggestions to topple the system. He says that “Christian ethics, as a cultivation of those virtues needed to keep us on the journey, are *the ethics of revolution* [his italics]”<sup>69</sup> and that “Having no use for such bourgeois virtues as tolerance, open-mindedness, and inclusiveness [...] revolutionaries value honesty and confrontation – painful though they may be.”<sup>70</sup>

*On homosexuality*

For example, in *Dispatches from the Front* the Methodist reader who accepts the judgment of his church<sup>71</sup> that homosexuality is a grave sin is initially shocked to read “Why Gays (as a Group) Are Morally Superior to Christians (as a Group)”<sup>72</sup> After a gasp, he is about to breathe a sigh of relief, only to read a kind of Russian Easter egg of flamboyances within flamboyances, that homosexuals are morally superior for having gotten themselves banned from the military<sup>d</sup> – all military service being a bad thing according to Hauerwas, though not to the Methodist church for which he is a divine. So what then is his position on homosexuality? He answers:

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<sup>d</sup> Written in 1995, this is no longer true – thanks in part to advocacy among Christian clergy.

The ethics of sex [should] not be considered primarily in terms of what is or is not fulfilling for an individual, but rather in terms of what kinds of discipline are necessary to sustain a community distrusted by the wider society.<sup>73</sup>

Not quite edified, the persistent reader might plow through more verbiage in search of pastoral guidance, trusting the Hauerwas confidence in “theology’s inherently practical character, its unmistakable status as a pastoral discipline”,<sup>74</sup> but will find none:

I confess my own bewilderment about what can or should be said [about homosexuality] as a policy. In the meantime I know my life and my church’s life are enriched by members of the church who tell me they are gay.<sup>75</sup>

Well, then what about the unmistakable word of god in Leviticus 20:13 – *If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination* – where the practice receives Scripture’s strongest term of condemnation, that it is an *abomination*? Hauerwas answers:

Suffice it to say that while there is no question that some scriptural passages condemn *something like* [italics added] same-sex relations, I am not convinced that the church’s position on these matters can turn on those passages.<sup>76</sup>

And while Hauerwas says, “I remain unsure if we can call the relationship between gay people ‘marriage,’” nevertheless he maintains that “we can welcome gay relationships”.<sup>77</sup> Indeed he does: He attends Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, which is a “reconciling congregation,” which means, without stating which party is being “reconciled,” that it welcomes homosexuals.<sup>78</sup>

When one compares Hauerwas with a minister who takes the plain reading of Scripture to heart from a sincere pastoral concern, it is difficult not to see his failure of moral leadership on this issue. The issue is not homosexuality in general, which secularists after all may defend from that perspective. The issue is how the ministry should counsel young people. The late rabbi and professional psychiatrist Nathaniel S. Lehrman<sup>79</sup> points out that adolescents, especially those of college age, have fluid sexual feelings that can confuse homosexual arousal, which may be common enough, with a homosexual “orientation,” which is not inborn and which is made common only by counselors and clergy who accept the judgment of the prevailing culture and of political promoters of that view. He contends that homosexual “orientation” is overwhelmingly a disguise for promiscuity plain and simple, as demonstrated by the indiscriminate partnering among many of them,<sup>80</sup> and by the unreasoned invective against any statement of the dangers of the practice.<sup>81,82</sup> While Hauerwas does mention promiscuity, it is not to name it as the essence of homosexuality, but to shield it in generic criticism of concupiscence, where

heterosexuals are condemned as well.<sup>83</sup> But Christian ministers do not enjoy the luxury of moral hand-wringing in their pastoral duties: The church must speak authoritatively. Failing to speak does not leave moral choices in the narrative community, or story or habit or practice or whatever equivocal shunt is in vogue; it leaves parishioners, especially the young, at the mercy of the prevailing moral fads of the day.

*On abortion*

For example, Hauerwas states his opposition to abortion:

Christians, to be more specific, do not believe that we have a right to do with our bodies whatever we want. We do not believe that we have a right to our bodies because when we are baptized we become members of one another; then we can tell one another what it is that we should, and should not, do with our bodies. [...] In the church we tell you what you can and cannot do with your genitals.<sup>e</sup> They are not your own. They are not private. That means that you cannot commit adultery. If you do, you are no longer a member of 'us.'<sup>84</sup>

However, this opposition is attached to the obligation of the community to raise the child if the mother would otherwise have aborted:

[O]ne of the things that I think that we ought to be ready to say to a woman considering an abortion is, 'Will you come home and live with me until you have your child? And, if you want me to raise the child, I will.'<sup>85</sup>

One might think this would make Hauerwas an ally of Jerry Falwell, or at least his voluntary adoption program, Save a Baby Homes, but no. Falwell's Save a Baby Homes program describes a church

underestimating the *peculiarity* of Christian ethics. Christian ethics, like any ethics, are 'tradition dependent.' That is, they make sense, not because the principles they espouse make sense in the abstract, as perfectly rational behavior, which ought to sound reasonable to any intelligent person. Christian ethics only make sense from the point of view of what we believe has happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, Hauerwas opposes Falwell's adoption program because it is *voluntary* and *national*. The *right* program is the Hauerwas program that is *involuntary* and *local*. The absurdity of such a recommendation to anyone other than Hauerwas should be obvious: Is the local church really supposed assume the financial burden of 18 years of childrearing from any pregnant mother in the community? If these parishioners simply cannot do it, is her abortion condoned? – Or is she to be pushed off as an obligation to some other local church, since any non-local support is otherwise tainted as less Christlike?

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<sup>e</sup> Curiously, for Hauerwas this vocal church authority over sexual matters falls silent in the case of homosexuality.

### *On relativism*

*For example*, the peculiarity and local nature of each church that is a requirement of the Hauerwas sense of “narrative” cannot escape the charge of relativism, since one community may uphold very different traditions and very different interpretations of Scripture from another one. Hauerwas accepts this. He says however that it is “a certain kind of relativism” – but “it is not a vicious relativism” – “it is a mistake to assume that there is any one version of relativism that must be accepted.”<sup>87</sup> He then goes on to say that there are at least two meanings for relativism: “a form of thought not relativized to our own existing system of beliefs” and another that will “recognize that there can be many systems of beliefs”.<sup>88</sup> Not satisfied, he adds that this is not the same as “vulgar relativism, the view that combines a relativistic account of ethical terms with a non-relativistic principle of toleration”.<sup>89</sup>

It is frankly embarrassing to see an honest Texas bricklayer logically squirming like a worm in hot ashes, trying to equivocate the plain meaning of a word. Hauerwas will appreciate a fellow Texan for calling a yaller dog a yaller dog: “Relativism” in this context means one thing only, and aside from its pacifism, his ethics is relativist.

### *The great project of mankind*

Happiness is not given to men living alone. All that is good in life comes from cooperation with others: Friendship, love, children, leisure, respect, achievement, and productivity beyond that of a brute. To realize these benefits, some guide for cooperation is necessary. Ethics, or morality, is that guide. The guide that sustains a solitary man living alone is not ethics, but merely hygiene; a “private morality” is a contradiction in terms. The great project of mankind has been to define that public guide. That guide must provide not general blandishments to “be good” or to “be happy,” but instead provide some definite prescription for action to achieve the good or happiness. Yet the conditions of human life are so varied that offering a catalog of every possible occasion for action, or offering any prescription for action that applies universally and unconditionally (deontology), or offering a prescription for any action that has a beneficial result (consequentialism or utilitarianism) all have shortcomings. Very few universally and unconditionally true prescriptions can be offered: No one will obey a universal prescription to never tell a lie when a murderer asks you where you have hidden his victim. Savage means cannot justify beneficial ends: No one will obey a prescription to kill a grandmother even if her family will be somehow better off consequently.

The morality guiding the vast majority of those living in the West for the past two millennia has been Christianity. Its two universal and unconditional prescriptions define the good as obedience to god and happiness as the happiness of others.<sup>90</sup> In both these prescriptions the ethical standard is completely

outside oneself. These prescriptions are the deontological ethical code named altruism.

The practical meaning of an ethical standard “completely outside oneself” is that it is completely outside evaluation by reason. For if one’s own reason can establish values as true or false, what’s the need of a supernatural, god-given ethical standard? At this impasse the philosopher Immanuel Kant stepped forward with the self-conscious goal of saving religion, particularly Christianity, from reason. True, he conceded, we can have no knowledge (“cognition,” *Erkenntnis*) of anything outside of experience, meaning that we can’t prove the existence of god, or verify miracles: They are outside the phenomenal world. But though the fact of religious doctrines – their truth or falsity – cannot possibly be known, we can still think about supersensible objects so long as they are not self-contradictory. If we could not think about supersensible objects we could not conceive of values, for according to Kant, pure reason, looking at the phenomenal world, can only establish facts, not normative (value) claims. The “needs of practical reason” do that, and they do so by faith, which is a mode of holding-to-be-true (*Fürwahrhalten*) that is just as legitimate as pure reason, when confined to the realm of values.<sup>91</sup>

Kant’s fact/value distinction thus provided sanctuary for Christianity’s ethical prescriptions, but at a price: It cornered them in the logical dead-end of fideism:<sup>92</sup> Prescriptions defended from that sanctuary were certain by faith and thus unassailable by reason, yes, but at the same time were utterly nonrational, subjective, and no more valid than any other normative pronouncement, no matter how destructive or barbaric: A prescription to fire bomb a city was just as valid as a prescription to feed the hungry.

Thus the impasse remained, not just for Christian apologetics, but for the greater project that engaged even non-Christians: How to provide an ethical code free of the dilemma of deontology and consequentialism. A way out was provided by Alasdair MacIntyre, in his remarkable 1981 book entitled *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*.<sup>93</sup> MacIntyre reached back before the Christian era to revive Aristotle’s understanding of ethics in terms of virtue. For MacIntyre ethics is not a set of universal rules to equip an isolated conscience in confronting abstract moral obstacles with the goal of gaining an afterlife – the goal, or *telos*, for Christians in any case. Instead he revives Aristotle’s view that we should set as our goal *eudaimonia* – happiness born of habits according to our reasoned nature, in the context of a lifetime and in the context of a community that shares the same narrative about what constitutes human excellence – excellence, and not Redemption, being the true *telos*. This is virtue ethics: *Eudaimonia* offered as the alternative to the dead end of the deontology/consequentialism dilemma.

MacIntyre was like a thunderbolt striking Hauerwas, who said of his book:

[*After Virtue*] changed the agenda of contemporary philosophers and theologians by an almost violent redirection of their attention.<sup>94</sup>

And:

I like to think that this book [*After Virtue*] changed the world.<sup>95</sup>

And:

I often observe that I have known two really ‘big brain’ people: [John Howard] Yoder and Alasdair MacIntyre.<sup>96</sup>

*MacIntyre in the bricklayer’s hands*

However, the Christian Hauerwas had to contort the ideas of the atheist MacIntyre<sup>f</sup> into a very different sense from the original. For MacIntyre, ethics drives religion and not the other way around,<sup>97</sup> and philosophy drives theology and not the other way around.<sup>g</sup><sup>98</sup> More importantly for the Hauerwas adaptation, “narrative” must be Christianized, and virtue ethics must be forced onto a Christian deontology of altruism, with a *telos* of Redemption instead of excellence. And its use by Hauerwas in a Christian context gives rise to a number of other problems in addition to narrative and altruism, notably regarding Christendom, the magisterium, sectarianism, and the body of Christ. The following discussion will detail each of these problems.

*Narrative.* “Narrative” as a concept in philosophy is a way of understanding that focuses not on abstract proofs or systems, but on linguistic and historical context; it is a way of treating ethics that focuses not on moral codes, but on a larger society’s tradition as represented by stories. The concept “narrative” has a varied ancestry, and a swarming progeny. For Hauerwas, Ludwig Wittgenstein is the strongest antecedent influence besides MacIntyre, though this concept finds issue elsewhere in sociology (Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein), in political science (Mark Bevir, R.A.W. Rhodes), in communication (Walter R. Fisher), and – most prolifically – in theology.

It should be obvious that to claim that “narrative” provides understanding equal to closely reasoned proofs presents a great danger. The danger is that it provides a cover for sloppy thinking and for moral relativism. The danger is that “narrative” becomes the apotheosis of the anecdotal.

Hauerwas “found that narrative proved to be an extraordinarily fruitful concept,”<sup>99</sup> and he uses the term copiously. In a basic sense it is associated with tradition:

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<sup>f</sup> Note, however, that MacIntyre has modified his early view of the uselessness of theology and has endorsed Hauerwas’ application of his work to that field; and he has taken a more conciliatory view in *Three Rival Versions* (1990).

<sup>g</sup> The latter statement should be obvious, since Aristotle indebted Aquinas, just as Sartre did Paul Tillich, Martin Heidegger did Rudolf Bultmann, William James did Reinhold Niebuhr, and – most obviously – Alasdair MacIntyre did Stanley Hauerwas.

Theology itself does not tell stories; rather it is critical reflection on a story; or perhaps better, it is a tradition embodied by a living community that reaches back into the past, is present, and looks to the future.<sup>100</sup>

In another more important sense

Narrative is theologically central because it (1) “formally displays our existence and that of the world as creatures – as contingent beings.” (2) We are self-aware only as historical beings, and “every ethic requires a [narrative] qualifier.” (3) “God has revealed himself narratively in the history of Israel and in the life of Jesus.”<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, though Hauerwas concedes that “[e]thics is a function of the *telos*, the end”,<sup>102</sup> he cannot, like the atheist MacIntyre, embrace a *telos* or goal culminating in worldly excellence. He is forced to define ethics in terms of a narrated journey to the eschaton – the divinely ordained climax of history.<sup>103</sup> Having done that, as he must, he is shackled to Christianity’s claim that there is no human excellence of any kind that merits god’s “free gift” of salvation,<sup>h</sup> just as he is shackled to current Christianity’s two deontological prescriptions. Any “virtue ethics” proposed to exist in these fetters is peculiar indeed.

*Altruism.* Christianity under its current theology is meaningless without altruism. To repeat as previously mentioned: Its two universal and unconditional commandments, or prescriptions, define the good as obedience to god and happiness as the happiness of others.<sup>104</sup> These prescriptions are the deontological ethical code designated as altruism. However, while altruism tries to secure objectivity by placing the standard of right and wrong outside of man (in god and in others respectively), it fails as an ethical system. It fails because *both sides of any moral issue can claim altruistic motives*. And thus both sides can legitimately claim to represent the “authentic” virtue “narrative” based in altruism.

For example, the pro-life opponents of abortion can demand altruistic sacrifice for the baby from the mother and from the community that “should” support mother and child; while the pro-choice advocates of abortion can demand the altruistic sacrifice for the mother and the community from the baby. Another example: Those who oppose the U.S. war on Middle East countries in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks can demand altruistic sacrifice for the sake of world peace (and greater felicific calculus) from American citizens in terms of their forbearance; while the war’s advocates can demand altruistic sacrifice for the sake of world peace (and greater felicific calculus) from American citizens in terms of expenditure of their blood and treasure. Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian calculus of course is abhorred by Christian theologians, but it cannot be rejected on the basis of any altruistic objection. Altruism is empty of ethical content; it only specifies the beneficiary

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<sup>h</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:23; Romans 5:1; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

of a moral act; it offers no moral system and no prescriptive action but one: An act acquires universal ethical value only if it is performed for the benefit of some notion or some person other than the self. Altruism thus offers its deontological prescription, not to guide individual action, but to empower those who can make the most authoritarian claims using its sanction. The danger posed by that quandary should be obvious.

The task of theologians who begin with altruism and with any altruistically-based “narrative” therefore is to make an authoritarian claim of knowing the “proper” beneficiary. For theologians who affirm the priority of submission to god over happiness, as Hauerwas emphatically does,<sup>105,106</sup> this presumptive knowledge is sealed off from any second-guessing from rational considerations about happiness: The theologians somehow know god’s anointed beneficiary, and the faithful must obey. If this were not so, then any Christian going the road would be left to pick the beneficiary himself, throwing the decision into a debate – interminable, open to any offered supernatural caprice, and violent for removing the standard of happiness from any sublunary reasoned discussion.

Hauerwas does not reject altruism and its implicit deontology, but on the contrary and without stating as much, doubles down, adding pacifism as another deontological absolute,<sup>107</sup> which is claimed to be central to the practice of Christianity:

Nonviolence is not one among other behavioral implications that can be drawn from the gospel but is integral to the shape of Christian convictions.<sup>108</sup>

One might think that he makes this claim with more subtlety when he does so in terms of ‘right reading’:

[Y]ou cannot rightly read the Sermon on the Mount unless you are a pacifist.<sup>109</sup>

But the claim is made elsewhere, with the insistence that pacifism is not a matter of policy or politics, but a matter of doctrine bound up with the crucifixion<sup>110</sup> – a claim he makes with categorical bluntness:

[N]onviolence is not a recommendation, an ideal, that Jesus suggested we might try to live up to. Rather, nonviolence is constitutive of God’s refusal to redeem coercively. The crucifixion is “the politics of Jesus.”<sup>111</sup>

*Christendom.* The interminable and violent disputes over who is to be the anointed beneficiary is not resolved by simply saying it is *everyone except the self*, as altruism and pacifism suggest. When there is no recognition of a single authority in Christendom that decides such matters in its encyclicals, *ex cathedra* pronouncements, and other teachings, and when there is scant reference to the traditional Catholic respect for reason, the dispute becomes even more interminable and violently unbounded.

Yet Hauerwas celebrates the loss of Christendom and its “monolithic culture”<sup>112</sup> while at the same time professing puzzlement at the charge of “sectarianism” against him.<sup>113,114</sup> This charge should not puzzle someone who has asserted the following on behalf of every Christian denomination or sect:

[M]ethodologically, ethics and theology can only be carried out relative to a particular community’s convictions.<sup>115</sup>

Obviously without a single, universal Christendom, every sect in all its local instances will declare itself the true seat of apostolic authority – the very definition of sectarianism. Therefore you *cannot* celebrate the loss of Christendom and not be sectarian.

*The magisterium.* With no Christendom, only three possibilities remain: One must relocate the seat of apostolic authority outside Rome, deny apostolic authority entirely, or redefine apostolic authority in some idiosyncratic way to preserve its magisterium (teaching authority).<sup>116</sup>

Hauerwas cannot relocate the seat of apostolic authority outside Rome without infinite sectarian schism that comes to question even the very meaning of Christ. Nontrinitarianism, Arianism, Unitarianism, Mormonism, Rastafarianism, Carpocratianism, and all the creatures of purely human invention can lay claim to that authority with equal validity once Rome is unseated.

Historically, denial of apostolic succession from Rome replaced apostolic authority with some appeal to or invocation of the Holy Spirit. Methodists rely first on 1 Timothy 4:14,<sup>117</sup> Presbyterians on 1 Corinthians 5:4-5,<sup>118</sup> although they and other sects also reference Hebrews 6:2, 1 Timothy 5:22, and 2 Timothy 1:6. As this relocation of apostolic authority to the Holy Spirit can be defined in countless ways, it amounts to, if not a denial of it entirely, then an equivocation that undermines the authority of all such contending assertions.

Whatever the foundation of sectarian claims for its authority, traditionally the Bible has been the sole rule of faith<sup>119</sup> for Protestantism:

The Protestant principle is: The Bible and nothing but the Bible; the Bible, according to them, is the sole theological source; there are no revealed truths save the truths contained in the Bible; according to them the Bible is the sole rule of faith: by it and by it alone should all dogmatic questions be solved; it is the only binding authority.<sup>120</sup>

But instead of an exclusively Scriptural narrative and tradition, Hauerwas adds local narratives with the stipulation that they be subordinate to one necessary property universal to all Christian narratives: That they be guided by the authority of pacifism, a doctrine which for Hauerwas is somehow not a doctrine, since it is supposedly more ‘Christ-centered’<sup>121,122</sup> than other doctrines. His reasoning for the doctrine of pacifism is never rigorously explained.<sup>123</sup>

All other ethical questions are relative,<sup>124</sup> to be decided by the local narrative.<sup>125</sup> This super-doctrinal pacifism thus becomes a new magisterium that will force the fissiparous sects under its single rule.<sup>126</sup> Thus Rome is

replaced not with a virtue ethic, but with a third deontological precept more incoherent than the first two, since it is not biblical for the more than 97% of Christians who are not pacifists,<sup>i</sup> since it implies the extinction of the state,<sup>127</sup> and since its claim rests not on any apostolic authority, not on Scripture,<sup>128</sup> but on group emotional conviction. Hauerwas hopes to escape from a private emotional conviction and subjectivity implied by a “personal relation with Jesus” by emphasizing community, narrative, and story. But this does no more than replace private emotional conviction with a public emotional conviction, to be commandeered by the community spiritual honcho, by the most autocratic shaper of a nebulous local narrative, and by the exhortations of whatever theologian is in fashion with the locals.

The Christian soul who had been told to sacrifice himself on the altar of altruism is now, by the Hauerwas theology, further stripped of his defense of his faith and family by pacifism, and still further stripped of his sanctuary in the universal magisterium of Christendom by abandonment to the emotional conviction of whatever community he happens to find himself.

*Sectarianism.* It was Luther who set this dissolution of Christian authority in motion:

The doctrine (Lutheran) of justification by faith was an egregious example of putting absolute trust in the assumptions of emotionalism, indeed was the first step towards transferring the basis of faith from the preaching of the word to the so-called testimony of experience.<sup>129</sup>

The Hauerwas doctrine further exacerbates this Protestant tendency toward emotional justification, and it accelerates the centrifugal breakup of Christendom into a myriad of bickering sects.

*The body of Christ.* Christendom’s corollary of the body of Christ as a manifestation of the universal church must be somehow redefined. Hauerwas first explicitly rejects St. Augustine’s personal Savior who transforms the “subjective attitude”<sup>130</sup> of the individual sinner. He rejects “heroic, individual courses of action”<sup>131</sup> altogether and attempts to redefine the body of Christ, not as a metaphorical body of living and dead believers in one church, but rather as a local community which provides not simply the context for the individual sense of virtue, but is one in which the individual sense of virtue is sacrificially dissolved.

He elaborates a “cloned” communal body that is somehow mystically real. Citing 1 Corinthians 4:15-17, he says that the apostle Paul’s use of the word “body” is *not* “a ‘mere’ metaphor for what Paul understood to be occurring in the ‘spiritual’ realm – the realm of ‘belief.’”<sup>132</sup> He says that “Paul’s faith that his body had been transformed by his baptism in so profound and so mysterious a

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<sup>i</sup> There are about 7 million pacifist Christians other than Seventh-day Adventists, who add another 20 million. Their combined percentage among 1.2 billion total Christians in the world is thus under 3%.

way [meant] that he could not speak of that transformation except paradoxically”.<sup>133</sup> And: “Paul knew that the body being reproduced in those he baptized and taught was not his own, but Christ’s.”<sup>134</sup> And finally:

As Christians, we find our bodies taken up – ‘cloned,’ if you will – through baptism and discipleship into the one body whose presence the world cannot do without, a presence that affords the possibility of finally bringing order to chaos and giving rest from our striving in God’s new creation.<sup>135</sup>

*Prolegomena to any future Christian virtue ethics*

MacIntyre’s non-deontological virtue ethics is incompatible with current Christianity’s two deontological prescriptions and with the Hauerwas third commandment of pacifism; MacIntyre’s *telos* of worldly excellence is incompatible with its replacement in Christianity’s end-of-history eschaton that culminates in god’s “free gift” of salvation that cannot be earned by any human excellence.

In spite of the failure of Hauerwas to rework it into the Christian context, virtue ethics nevertheless remains a worthwhile model for escaping the deontology/consequentialism dilemma. This reworking can be accomplished through a “revolution” in ecclesiology/theology and in Christology – a revolution not in the sense of something new, but in the sense of escaping the fetishes of the age to return to the true meaning of the faith. It requires explicit rejection of the entire deontological altruistic moral code in the following way:

First commandment, properly understood: God never enjoins a duty contrary to one’s ultimate happiness, which is knowable by reason.

Second commandment, properly understood: Knowledge of the beneficiary can never substitute for knowledge of the benefit.

The clearest practical lesson to demonstrate that the commandments never mandated altruism is to forcefully distinguish laudable personal charity from “social justice,” a term often used erroneously to validate the use of state force (which makes any desired end unethical except in purely utilitarian terms<sup>j</sup>) and to validate economic ignorance. In this regard the church should remove its recognition of the World Movement of Christian Workers and distance itself from the Catholic Worker Movement, International League of Religious Socialists, Christians on the Left, and kindred movements that sanction state violence in obedience to a state-compromised religiosity that is Christian only in name.

Regarding the incorporation of the *telos* of excellence in virtue ethics, there should be an even stronger emphasis on the lay apostolate, but restating its

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<sup>j</sup> A personal action to help a starving neighbor has ethical value because it comes into being by one’s own willed choice. That same action compelled by the state through its laws, taxation, and police power removes all ethical value because the end was realized by means of state compulsion of others who did not personally will that action. As the Gospel points out (Luke 10:29–37), the Good Samaritan helps the beaten and robbed stranger with his own goods, not those of others, not those of the state.

mission less as proselytizing and more as providing models of Christian virtue, and formally recognizing extraordinary living models of the same, giving them real influence within the church. The lay apostolate has grown enormously in both membership and responsibilities since its encouragement by Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965, in the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and by Pope John Paul II on December 30, 1988, in his decree *Christifideles laici*. Let this continue, but with recognitions from the highest levels elevating exemplars from local communities.

Synodality<sup>136</sup> should be suppressed, as it only encourages teaching pronouncements outside the Roman magisterium.

A new Christology requires a reconstruction of the true narrative of Christ. It should abolish once and for all the sentimental Jesus: A tall, whey-faced, laconic Northern European, meekly submitting to the indignities of unbelievers, with his head perpetually, anoptically cocked to the Great Kibitzer on high, with a nondescript, common bearing. It should instead forcefully present the real Jesus: A short, dark-skinned, *baredevdik* Jew, pugnaciously kvetching left and right about the ungrateful goyim who refuse to take his bargain offer for eternal life, whose self-confidence projects an air of imposing royalty.

This image of the real Jesus has after all been drawn in Isaiah 53:2:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant,[1] and as a root out of a dry ground:[2] he hath no form nor comeliness:[3] and when we shall see him, there is no beauty[4] that we should desire him.<sup>137</sup>

However visualized, the church must in any case dispose of the image of Jesus the lower-class victim – a tendentious image that is all too easily transposed to statist political ends – and portray the Scripturally true image of Jesus of the upper-class elite who made a willing sacrifice, as Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihin iconoclastically points out:

As for the ‘Son of the carpenter,’ *tekton* in Greek means carpenter but also house-builder, architect, contractor. Joseph, moreover, was not an ‘ordinary Jew,’ but as a descendant of David he was of royal blood and, therefore, in the eyes of his compatriots, a potential heir to the Throne of Judea. The angel characteristically addressed him as ‘son of David.’ (Christ too was addressed as ‘Son of David’).<sup>138</sup>

The current Christology of Jesus the lower-class victim is probably the reason that an ethically sanctioned anti-market, anti-property bias still has popular warrant, despite the repeated demonstration in economics that such a bias inflicts the greatest suffering on the great mass of people who are not rich. While the Church has never endorsed laissez-faire capitalism, it does affirm that free markets help ensure both material well-being and human liberty, while on the other hand “no Catholic could subscribe even to moderate Socialism.”<sup>139</sup> It has consistently held these principles in its three main encyclicals on eco-

nomics: *Rerum Novarum* (1891), *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991).<sup>140</sup>

A new book by Robert Grözinger confronts the Christology of Jesus the lower-class victim head-on by making the case that Jesus was a capitalist. He clarifies many parables to demonstrate a capitalistic Christ. He cites the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) as the only time Jesus spoke about interest, and did so not only in its favor, but also to recommend both the “from each” and the “to each” as belonging to the one of superior ability.<sup>141</sup> In the parable of the rich young man (Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30) Christ counsels the morally confused youth to give everything to the poor and follow him, since it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of god. Here Grözinger points out that Christ is advising a young ruler who doesn’t know what to do with his wealth; he is not providing a universal rule for all rich people.<sup>142</sup> Regarding Matthew 21:12–13, which gives the story of Jesus driving “moneychangers” from the Temple in Jerusalem – the only time Jesus physically chastised someone – he points out that “moneychangers” more aptly fits today’s central bankers, not capitalists, and that in any case those who wanted branch banking in a church deserved chastisement.<sup>143</sup> Most importantly of all, Christ is steadfastly against the scourge of civilized life, envy. In the parable of the vineyard workers (Matthew 20:1–16) the “lord of the vineyard” pays laborers at different rates. When one complains that he should get as much as another, the vineyard master fires him on the spot and delivers the following rebuke to the envious in verse 15:

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?<sup>144</sup>

Another rebuke to the envious is given in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–15) who wants Christ to force his brother to include him in his inheritance. One can almost see Christ snapping his reply:

Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.<sup>145</sup>

This new narrative is not a capitalist reaction. It is not even a “new” narrative at all. It is a return to the true narrative that denies Christ’s sufferings as the warrant for victimhood, and instead portrays his sufferings as the *nazar*<sup>k</sup> against envy. It is an aristocratic Christ whose willing sacrifice becomes an icon of proof that to enviously gloat over the crucifixion of the superior being, of the perfect man, is an intolerable blasphemy. It is an aristocratic Christ who, by way of that profound and undying fascination with royalty, sublimates envy,<sup>146</sup> the perennial threat to all civilized society.

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<sup>k</sup> A *nazar* is a glass amulet, usually round and blue with a black dot in the middle to resemble an eye, common in the Near East, said to ward off the evil eye. The term is used to emphasize the iconic function of the Cross, not to imply a graven image.

Hauerwas fails in trying to apply to the Christian context virtue ethics and its sense of “narrative,” and his insistence on pacifism only compounds Christianity’s deontology based in altruism. Many other clerics have incorporated virtue ethics but without rejecting “propositional and ethical religion”<sup>147</sup> and have incorporated “narrative,” but as a powerful “repertory of images and metaphors”<sup>148</sup> in the sense of Mircea Eliade. Setting aside the Hauerwas lust for exaggeration, virtue ethics promises a theology that can discard not only the anti-capitalist narrative but the entire altruist morality, to be repurposed in the service of a church militant against leveling egalitarianism, in the service of Christ the *nazar* against envy. The attempt by Hauerwas stamps it as a worthwhile project,<sup>1</sup> and his theology reinforces the beneficial logorrhea that is so vital to distract those obsessed with otherworldly themes from arriving at final conclusions in heresies seeking to “immanentize the eschaton”<sup>149</sup> (e.g. of Hong Xiuquan, Joachim of Fiore, Thomas Müntzer, and other “reabsorb-tionists”<sup>150</sup>).

His effort may have failed, but even in failure the icon-busting Texan has advertised a way forward.

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### **Bibliographical notes**

Stanley Hauerwas is a prolific writer. However, just several books offer a good outline for those who are not scholars. The most approachable book for the casual reader who wants a sense of his thinking in the context of his biography is *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Eerdmans, first edition, April 16, 2010, ISBN 978-0802864871, 308 pages). Hauerwas calls his account a memoir instead of autobiography, because “a memoir is not a sequenced account of a life but the telling of the stories that have given a life its internal shape” (page xi). For the casual reader who wants the briefest summary of his theology, the better choice is *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Abingdon Press, expanded 25th anniversary edition, April 15, 2014, ISBN 978-1426781902, 198 pages), co-authored with William H. Willimon. Any more serious plunge into the Hauerwas sea must begin with *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (University of Notre Dame Press, paperback, March 15, 2016, from 1991 first edition, ISBN 978-0268015541, 208 pages), of which he stated: “I suspect it is all ‘there’ in *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Most of what I have said since, I said there.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Another, more recent, engagement in the project to escape the deontology/utilitarian dilemma is offered by the American philosopher and neuroscientist Sam Harris, who seeks to give objective status to values. He does this by starting from the following premise: “Values reduce to facts about the wellbeing of conscious creatures.” See his 2010 book *The Moral Landscape*.

Nothing more indicates the way a man thinks than his writing style. The “Hauerwas style,” particularly its use of the flamboyant dash, as detailed above, is often remarked,<sup>152,153</sup> and admitted by Hauerwas himself, who says, “People who focus on my ‘exaggerations’ too often fail to see how they function to invite thought.”<sup>154</sup> Any extended reading of these “exaggerations” will exhaust their propaedeutic or heuristic value and lead to chronic wowser fatigue. Another of his devices is the *anguished query* pose. In *Hannah’s Child* he unleashes a catalog of these queried posturings: Is my being famous right?<sup>155</sup>; Am I right to be an “outsider”?<sup>156</sup>; Am I right to be a teacher?<sup>157</sup>; Am I a Christian?<sup>158</sup>; Is my modesty a form of pride?<sup>159</sup>; Is it wrong to be a creative thinker?<sup>160</sup>; Am I really a Catholic, or is my interest while a professor at a Catholic school a kind of power-seeking?<sup>161</sup>; Am I one of Yoder’s closest friends, or am I not?<sup>162</sup>; Is “ethics” a good idea?<sup>163</sup>; Is writing prideful?<sup>164</sup>; Is my need for friendship pathological?<sup>165</sup> Another device is the endless variation on “I don’t know” (“I have no idea”, “I am not sure”, “I’m not sure what that means”) and on the related trope of ‘I am X (theologian, Christian, adult(!))<sup>166</sup>, etc.), but I do not know what it means to be X.’ But as tiresome as these devices ultimately are, they do not compare with the irritation of reading someone who has complete immunity to cognitive dissonance. For all his acclamation of “no bullshit” straight talking, Hauerwas positively relishes contradicting himself, especially to throw the contradiction in the reader’s face as a profundity whose depths only he has sounded.

In spite of writing a book of prayers (*Prayers Plainly Spoken*), he claims: “Prayer never comes easy for me.”<sup>167</sup> In spite of being a Christian theologian, he claims: “I am such a beginner when it comes to knowing how to be a Christian”<sup>168</sup> and “I lost interest in whether I was or was not a Christian.”<sup>169</sup> In spite of his regular attendance at church and his enjoyment of church rites, he claims: “The worship of God does not come naturally to me, as it seems to for some. I live most of my life as if God does not exist.”<sup>170</sup>

Stanley Hauerwas is not a systematic thinker. This trait is not primarily due to his distrust of all system building, especially in ethics, but because his cast of mind favors the essay. As he admits, he does not write books but “put[s] essays together to make them look like books.”<sup>171</sup> Like most divines, he is abysmally ignorant of economics, and like most divines, it does not trouble his effusion of moral diktats notwithstanding. Hauerwas does not have a habit of carefulness, which can lead to serious mistakes. For example, writing in 2008 about end-of-life care in connection with Jean Vanier’s L’Arche program, he asserts that United States’ spending of 16% of GNP on “crisis-care medicine” reveals misplaced priorities.<sup>172</sup> First of all, GNP is not the right measure in this context,<sup>m</sup> but more importantly, the percentage is just wrong. As a scientific study of the

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<sup>m</sup> GDP measures a nation’s domestic production of goods and services; GNP measures its domestic and international production. Thus, GDP is the more useful measure for comparing national economies; economists generally abandoned the use of GNP in 1991.

matter concluded: "In 2005, critical care medicine costs represented 13.4% of hospital costs, 4.1% of national health expenditures, and 0.66% of the gross domestic product [GDP]." The difference between 16% and 0.66% vitiates any conclusions that begin with this gross error of fact.

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- My more literal crib of the same, itself dug out of a dry ground (with apologies to Father Placid):
- [1] ὡς παιδίον – as a child, extended to mean “a young sprout”
- [2] ὡς ῥίζα ἐν γῆ διψώσῃ – as a root of the thirsty ground
- [3] οὐκ ἔστι νεῖδος αὐτοῦ οὐδέ δόξα – his appearance is not at all glorious
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