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## *Being ‘Other Cheeky’: Moral Hazard and the Thought of Stanley Hauerwas*

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In the fall of 1899 itinerant preacher and faith-healer John Alexander Dowie purchased 6,600 acres of land along the shores of Lake Michigan just north of Chicago. Placing the church at the center of a city configured to look like the Union Jack, Dowie established a community based upon the rule of God through His representative leader. Dowie wanted to create a community that would guarantee employment and “health-care” (usually administered via Dowie’s healing touch) to all its citizens so long as those citizens were born-again Christians, a requirement also for everyone with whom they did business. Because of his elect status and thaumaturgic powers, Dowie’s rule over the city included dictating to all citizens everything from how they should vote in presidential elections to whom they should marry. Rather than granting clear titles to purchasers of land in the city, Dowie provided 1,100 year leases (100 years to the return of Christ, plus another 1,000 for the subsequent millennium) that Dowie could revoke at any time if he saw fit to do so. Dowie had believed the kingdom of God was now present, but began to succumb to the temptations frequently attendant to the belief that one has ushered in a new age, including a laying-on-of-hands that became increasingly amorous. By 1903, in part because of Dowie’s refusal to have business dealings with anyone who was not a member of the elect, the economy of the community began to deteriorate. After two to three years of

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initial prosperity many residents of Dowie's city, having donated all of their resources to Dowie's church, became dependent on state-administered charity. By 1906 the theocracy of Zion, Illinois, had crumbled.<sup>1</sup>

The city of Zion plays a powerful metaphorical role in Judeo-Christian history, for it is the realm of perfection (Psalm 50:2) and the place where all live in perfect obedience to the perfect law, where "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). Zion operates as a metaphor of the relationship between God's chosen people and the surrounding world. It can be the place to which all nations come, or it can be the city that, though separate from the world, radiates its law. In the former instance, Zion keeps to itself while waiting for the world to see the wisdom of its ways. In the latter case, Zion seeks to expand its law of perfection to the surrounding world. At its core, the emphasis on communal perfection seeks to quell the religious anxiety generated by a faith that is demanding, uncertain, and absolutist in its claims.

This intimate mutual penetration of theological reflection with political order constitutes a type of political theology that can operate theocratically. Since the publication of Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* in 1922 the concept of political theology has held bad connotations for political scientists. Schmitt largely used the concept to undergird a particular conception of legitimacy that was critical of liberal institutions, but arguably would lead to the totalitarianism of the Nazi state. In Schmitt's rendering, political theology was about authority, and the modern state was a secularization of Christian theology.<sup>2</sup> Schmitt believed politically liberal states to be especially problematic, for they undermined any metaphysics of truth. He wrote: "Just as liberalism discusses and negotiates every political detail, so it also wants to dissolve metaphysical truth in a discussion. The essence of liberalism is negotiation, a cautious half measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended forever in an everlasting discussion."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the City of Zion's website <http://www.zionhs.com/history.htm>. See also "Marching to Zion: Religion in a Modern Utopian Community" Grant Wacker *Church History*, Vol. 54, No. 4. (Dec. 1985), 496-511.

<sup>2</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of the Political* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

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Some contemporary American theologians, neither familiar with Schmitt nor, one assumes, particularly hospitable to his arguments, have nonetheless engaged in analogous theological criticisms of the liberal project, while at the same time developing a concept of the Church as a separate polity (Zion) that is perfectionist in intent and effect. Foremost among these is Stanley Hauerwas, who just prior to the events of 9/11 was hailed by *Time* magazine in a series of articles featuring "America's Best" in various fields as America's top theologian and one of its most influential ethical thinkers. In this article I will outline some of the basic contours of Hauerwas's theology, develop their political significance, and respond to the challenge Hauerwas presents. What I hope to establish is that in his emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification, to the exclusion of other doctrines, Hauerwas's ethics fail on one basic Christian principle: loving one's neighbor. In this article I want to focus on his ethical thinking, and particularly his arguments concerning the church as an alternate polity, the uses of violence, and his notion of authority.

*Hauerwas's criticism of liberalism based on the Church as a separate, perfectionist polity.*

Hauerwas developed his theological inclinations in an American context where, as he might say, the object of theological reflection is America itself. The Social Gospel writers of the early part of the twentieth century turned the biblical idea of the Kingdom of God into progressivist politics. Reinhold Niebuhr chastened progressivist optimism with reflections on the tragic and ironic character of American politics, grounded as it is in the ever-present reality of human sinfulness. Many contemporary Christians either identify America as a Christian nation or use Christian morality to support a democratic ethos. All these, Hauerwas believes, make the primary mistake of subordinating Christianity to politics and taking their citizenship in the nation to be more fundamental than their citizenship in the Kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> He is especially dismissive of contemporary Christians who all-too-easily engage politics seeing no conflict between their beliefs and such engagement. Any such interrelation between the political realm and the church

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<sup>4</sup> ". . . theological convictions . . . have lost their power to train us in skills of truthfulness, partly because accounts of the Christian moral life have too long been accommodated to the needs of the nation-state. . . . As a result the ever present power of God's kingdom to form our imagination has been subordinated to the interest of furthering liberal ideas through the mechanism of the state." *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 6; hereinafter cited as "PK."

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Hauerwas rejects as “Constantinianism.”<sup>5</sup> According to Hauerwas, Constantinianism involves the efforts of the church to sanctify state-based politics, which by definition are violent, and thus contrary to the very nature of the church. It also involves efforts by the state to enlist the church into its projects, often as a tool of legitimization. Hauerwas believes one cannot honor both God and Caesar.<sup>6</sup> Any Christian endorsement of state-based politics must necessarily lead to an endorsement of politics at its worst.<sup>7</sup> Hauerwas hedges this position by arguing that Christians ought to be “discriminating about this or that state or society,”<sup>8</sup> but he gives no rationale for why Christians ought to so discriminate and provides no criteria by which they can discriminate. The only thing that can be said for sure of Hauerwas’s thinking is that he regards liberal democracy as a particularly bad form of government.<sup>9</sup>

Hauerwas’s analysis may or may not stand on the historical accuracy of his idea of Constantinianism, but it is in any case a remarkably blunt instrument of analysis, and a tendentious one at that. Hauerwas requires a narrative of church history that sees the early church as insular and directed toward its internal perfection, resulting ultimately in its persecution. Hauerwas frequently champions the virtues of martyrdom. For him, the pristine purity of the early church was disrupted by the rise to power of Constantine, which resulted in individuals joining the church not out of faith but out of expediency. Furthermore, faith lost its critical edge, since being a Christian no longer required sacrifice, which is the essence

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<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas sees any identification of the church’s mission with state purposes as being guilty of “Constantinianism.” This would include any attempt by the church to take responsibility for the moral life of the surrounding political community. This criticism occurs frequently in Hauerwas. See, for example, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 231; hereinafter cited as “GC.” Or *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, with William Willimon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); hereinafter cited as “RA.” The latter book became something of a religious best seller.

<sup>6</sup> See *RA*, 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> *GC*, 163.

<sup>9</sup> This is in no small part due to the fact that he equates liberal democracy with the very worst of its offenses: Hiroshima, abortion practices, Vietnam (which Hauerwas admits had a decisive influence on shaping his thinking), the firebombing of Dresden, etc. See, for example, *RA*, 43. Hauerwas believes that liberal democracies are especially dependent on the need to make war to sustain themselves, even though from his perspective dying for America “is like dying for the phone company.”

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of Christianity, and also because the faith began to contaminate itself with the virus of political violence. I doubt, however, that such a telling of history—an attempt to rescue the pre-Nicene church from the corruption of Constantinianism—can stand up to critical scrutiny.<sup>10</sup> Already by A.D. 250 the church had become more practical and more political.<sup>11</sup> The increase in the number of Christians in the early fourth century made the promotion of Christianity under Constantine almost inevitable.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Fox argues there emerged within late third century church leadership a profound wariness of the perfectionist strain, particularly as manifested in the actions of the desert fathers. As a result, many Christian writers in the larger urban areas began to reflect more on the practical use of authority, given that, *inter alia*, the behaviors and teachings of the perfectionists tended to make the lives of average believers untenable and the ordering of communal life impossible. Combined with the problems besetting Roman civilization—plague, economic instability, raids, and problems in the imperial household—Christianity began to offer a significant alternative to Roman cultic practices.<sup>13</sup> In other words, as Christianity became more successful, the pressure to structure itself along authoritarian lines and to cooperate with the state increased as well. When Constantine came to power, therefore, he did not impose Christianity as an official state religion but, rather, offered to Christians certain legal privileges they had not previously enjoyed, such as the resto-

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<sup>10</sup> As does Oliver O'Donovan, who writes: "No historical justification is offered for this claim, and I'm afraid I think it is simply wrong. That is not what Christians were trying to do [further the kingdom through political power]. Their own account of what happened was that those who held power became subject to the power of Christ." *The Desire of the Nations: Recovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 216. I think this is exactly right.

<sup>11</sup> See Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976); hereinafter cited as "*History*." See also Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); hereinafter cited as "*Pagans and Christians*."

<sup>12</sup> See Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 93.

<sup>13</sup> "The church survived, and steadily penetrated all ranks of society over a huge area, by avoiding or absorbing extremes, by compromise, by developing an urbane temperament and erecting secular-type structures to improve its unity and conduct its business." Johnson, *History*, 63. What the church began to lose in spiritual intensity it made up for in stability and collective strength. Johnson further notes that, given these shifts, we cannot definitively say whether "the empire surrender[ed] itself to Christianity, or [whether] Christianity prostitute[d] itself to the empire."

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ration of property lost through the Diocletian persecutions,<sup>14</sup> and created greater and more stable church unity through the defining of orthodoxy.

*"The church does not have a social ethic; it is a social ethic."*

Hauerwas's reading of history allows him to posit the reality of a perfectionist church which offers itself as an alternative polity to the world. "The church," Hauerwas repeatedly enjoins, "does not have a social ethic; it is a social ethic." "The world" is a culture of unbelief, hatred, and violence. The church is a gathering of people constituted by the death and resurrection of Christ in such a way that they lead lives so altered by the sanctifying power of the cross that they live by the law of forgiveness and the perfection of virtue. They are ruled by the Sermon on the Mount, and, since the church is the embodiment of the eschaton in time, it achieves the perfection there required of it. It is a "Messianic community" where the kingdom of God "takes visible, practical form."<sup>15</sup> Theology reflects the actual practices of the church and so must presume the perfection of ecclesiastical communities. Hauerwas notes that he "is a theologian with the theological position that makes no sense unless a church actually exists that is capable of embodying the practices of perfection."<sup>16</sup>

If we are properly embedded in these ecclesiastical practices we will fully flourish as individuals and thus have no need for politics.<sup>17</sup> Such a position develops in part as a reaction to the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose so-called "Christian realism" attempted to relate itself positively to the reality of human sinfulness. Niebuhr presented a difficult and substantive challenge for Hauerwas, and a good deal of his writing engages Niebuhr's "realism." As a young Lutheran minister in Detroit Niebuhr was scandalized by the deprivation and grinding poverty he witnessed around him.<sup>18</sup> Social Gospel thinkers, when faced with the same problems,

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the definitive judgment on this issue may be Fox's, who wrote: "Constantine's actions may still upset Christian consciences, but they have to be accepted as those of a sincere and convinced adherent of the faith, the man whose massive gifts and legislation first promoted it against all expectations, whose reluctance to coerce pagans was only too seldom shared, and whose simple fears for God's anger at heresy made him the most tireless worker for Christian unity since St. Paul." *Pagans and Christians*, 658.

<sup>15</sup> *RA*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> *GC*, 67.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> See Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

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combined theological reflection with the emergent social sciences to claim that human effort and rationality were sufficient to solve such problems, and in the process could make real the kingdom of God. Niebuhr rejected this position, however, reacting against the idea that society could be so readily transformed or that sin was systemic. Instead, he insisted that society was immoral because individuals were immoral, placing an ever-stronger emphasis on the inherent corruption of human beings.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, the *imago dei* is retained as a basis for human responsibility to the extent that we can transcend the particularities of our finitude. Man's transcendence of himself in freedom was thus a concomitant of his sinful nature, and this opened up the door for Niebuhr to see political liberalism as especially aligned with Christianity. The loss of optimism was accompanied by a realistic liberalism that emphasized the inviolability of each individual as an image bearer of God while emphasizing the need for liberal institutions that would restrain the effects of sin. A free society thus requires some confidence in the ability of persons to adjust their interests as well as to tolerate the interests of others, thus arriving at a limited conception of justice which will transcend partial interests. As Niebuhr famously remarked: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."<sup>20</sup> Democracy became for Niebuhr a preferred form of political organization because it made no claim concerning the perfect implementation of a universal law. Indeed, democracy is predicated on the contingency of life, recognizing that any principle is always historical and relative in its implementation, while also recognizing that this inquiry into first principles will provide for vitality and creativity in history.

*Niebuhr saw the need for liberal institutions that would restrain the effects of sin.*

Our situation becomes tragic when the children of light learn that they must on occasion adopt the means and tools of the children of darkness in order to further relative goods. We must engage in morally hazardous actions in order to preserve civilization, while at the same time remaining aware of the dangers inherent in such activity. More than tragic, our situation is ironic, for in reality our dreams become nightmares, our intentions twisted, and

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<sup>19</sup> See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I (New York: Scribner's, 1946), 179.

<sup>20</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defense* (New York: Scribners, 1944), xiii.

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our aims distorted. Our religious visions create expectations that become disillusionment when transformed into policy. For this reason, Niebuhr believed, our Calvinist forefathers built inherent safeguards into the democratic project that would protect us against the excesses of human willfulness and the selfish abuse of power.<sup>21</sup> The use of power which is required of us as human beings is always accompanied by no small amount of guilt; and if guilt then repentance; and if repentance the means of redemption.<sup>22</sup> So one might readily seek redemption within the political realm itself—paradigmatically in the sacrifice of a Messiah figure. Not surprisingly, Abraham Lincoln plays a central role in Niebuhr’s musings on American freedom, for Lincoln demonstrated the gulf that exists between those who believe justice can be planned and those who trust that freedom will order justice properly. Lincoln saw the ironic and tragic elements of American liberalism, that there is no straight and easy path toward freedom and happiness, that wisdom and idealism do not always triumph, that violence may be necessary, and that good and evil are in the actions of all individuals. Lincoln’s response was to demonstrate that a sense of charity, a modest sense of one’s own limits, and a “decent respect for the opinions of mankind” alone could form the basis of a just and lasting polity.<sup>23</sup>

The regnant theologies of Lincoln’s day—pacifistic and theologically liberal—had difficulty making sense of the violence of slavery when set up against the non-violence of God. The reality of slavery, many theologians believed, could only be overcome by an

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<sup>21</sup> See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribners, 1952), 22; *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 188: “There is a pride of power in which the human ego assumes its self-sufficiency and self-mastery and imagines itself secure against all vicissitudes. It does not recognize the contingent and dependent character of its life and believes itself to be the author of its own existence, the judge of its own values and the master of its own destiny. This proud pretension is present in an inchoate form in all human life but it rises to greater heights among those individuals and classes who have a more than ordinary degree of social power.”

<sup>22</sup> “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.” Niebuhr, *Irony*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.



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apocalyptic war or by providential intervention.<sup>24</sup> Once it became evident that slavery would not be ended peaceably through human efforts at reform, the liberal view of progressive pacifism came to an end. Instead, Lincoln came to embody a confluence of providential intervention and apocalyptic war, thus setting American liberalism on a new theological footing, with himself as the Christ figure.<sup>25</sup>

*Lincoln set American liberalism on a new theological footing, with himself as Christ figure.*

This essentially religious formation, or put another way, the formation of a civil theology, is a doubly pernicious “Constantinian” development according to Hauerwas. First, it legitimizes the otherwise illegitimate actions of the nation-state; and, second, it robs Christianity of its critical and distinctive powers.<sup>26</sup> Whatever else Niebuhr may have accomplished, Hauerwas believes, is undermined by these two effects. Hauerwas believes that state-based politics is an inherently corrupt form of human activity for it is based on the equation that politics = power = violence.

Liberal theology as it emerged in the American context thus either gutted Christianity of its essential meaning or became little more than a supportive tool of secular politics. Part of Hauerwas’s interest, then, is to discredit this form of theological reflection. This project seizes upon the possibility that Christian theological reflection will be utterly distinctive from any other type of thinking occurring in the surrounding culture, a tendency exacerbated in Christianity with its exclusivist claims to truth and its tendency

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<sup>24</sup> I believe that Lincoln himself had already developed such a view as early as his Lyceum speech in 1838.

<sup>25</sup> See Allen Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); see also Dan McKanan, “Is God Violent?” in Chase and Jacobs, eds. *Must Christianity Be Violent: Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 68: “Lincoln’s sacrificial death, in short, saved the nation from the ambiguities of liberal theology. But it also destroyed the dream of a genuinely non-violent theology.” Niebuhr, *Irony*, 172: Lincoln’s “combination of moral resoluteness about the immediate issues with a religious awareness of another dimension of meaning and judgment must be regarded as almost a perfect model of the difficult but not impossible task of remaining loyal and responsible toward the moral treasures of a free civilization on the one hand while yet having some religious vantage point over the struggle.” According to Niebuhr, this made Lincoln’s vision of “true charity” possible.

<sup>26</sup> Theology may be thought of as having three functions: descriptive, critical, apologetic. Hauerwas makes it clear he believes that theology has no apologetic function, a very strong and predominantly critical function, and an internally descriptive function in terms of the formation of its own language game. The combination of a limited descriptive function and an eliminated apologetic function robs Christianity of any pretense to universality.

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to see itself as separated from “the world.” This trajectory of Hauerwas’s thinking found a powerful theoretical formulation in George Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age*.<sup>27</sup> In the liberal age, marked by the rise of science and the decline of Christendom, doctrine and its development become especially problematic, and the nature of doctrine becomes a point of division within Christianity itself. Lindbeck divides theology into those who see doctrine as a set of Informative Propositions, the tradition emerging from the Enlightenment and Kant which predicates itself on the presence of universals and the capacity of reason to articulate and assent to the same, and the tradition of Experiential Expressivism, which focuses on the experiential element of religion, such as Schleiermacher’s claim that all “doctrines are accounts of Christian religious affections set forth in speech.”<sup>28</sup> Such psychological states are both ineffable and universal, thus allowing a basis for inter-religious understanding.<sup>29</sup> The former position would make the formation of doctrine difficult to achieve, while the latter position would make it largely unnecessary. Instead, Lindbeck would like to see doctrine understood as a way of regulating a community’s discourse and serving the immediate interests of a people formed together. Both Lindbeck and Hauerwas, not surprisingly, find their theological interests well-served by Wittgenstein, for the church is constructed as a veritable language-game. Recall that for Wittgenstein there is little to be said about language as a whole, and no notion of a universal language, but rather particular language games are incommensurate and designed to serve the needs of a particular community.<sup>30</sup> In short, Hauerwas came to believe that Christian doctrine and Christian teachings were incommensurate with the teachings of other faith communities, and were designed exclusively to serve the needs of the Christian community.<sup>31</sup> Doctrine does not and should not serve

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<sup>27</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Westminster: John Knox Press), 1984.

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. by Mackintosh and Stewart (New York: Continuum, 1999), 76.

<sup>29</sup> The subtitle of Schleiermacher’s *Reden*, after all, is “to religion’s cultured despisers.” It is hard to see exactly what, in Hauerwas’s thinking, would allow for inter-religious understanding.

<sup>30</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> *PK*, xxi, where he writes that Wittgenstein taught him that the object of theology is located in the grammar of the language used by believers. Hauerwas also notes that he spent a year carefully studying the *Investigations*. See *GC*, 86.

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the needs of “the world” outside the church, and certainly not the needs of a liberal democracy.

This critique of protestant liberalism found its greatest voice in the theology of Karl Barth, who bypassed the anthropological foundations of Schleiermacher’s theology by emphasizing the Word-event as constitutive of Christianity and the Christian community. Barth rejected the universalism of natural theology (in large part because he observed it in a deviated form in the development of Nazism) as well as the humanism of liberalism. Barth understood the relationship between the earthly city and the heavenly one as altered by the event of the Word in Jesus Christ. Barth probes the connection between the justification available to sinful humans through Jesus Christ and the justice of human society and law, or the relationship between divine justification and human justice.<sup>32</sup> Barth believed the Reformers had lost the connection between the advent of Christ and political authority. To grant authority to the political sphere without a Christological foundation is to leave power without sufficient justification. Christ provides the connection between the church and the state, as Paul argues in Romans 13. Speaking of the state “. . . puts us in the Christological sphere.”<sup>33</sup> Church and state are concentric spheres that share Christ as their authoritative center, and Christians live in both spheres.<sup>34</sup> Although both the church and the state are under Christ’s authority, the former should concern itself with sacraments and proclamation while the latter with “a provisional order of law, defended by superior authority and force.”<sup>35</sup> These ideas manifested themselves in the Barmen Declaration wherein Barth rejected the idea that the state could become the sole orderer of

*For Barth, church and state are concentric spheres that share Christ as their authoritative center.*

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<sup>32</sup> Karl Barth, “Church and State,” in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968). For a further discussion of this issue, see Kristen Deede Johnson *Theology, Political Theory and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Barth, “Church and State,” 122.

<sup>34</sup> In a very important book, Oliver O’Donovan describes Barth’s work as “incomplete” in describing this relationship. O’Donovan argues that the only political action that is capable of using authority properly is that which is under the rule of God. Since all persons long for authority used to the good, the reign of Christ in the secular sphere is truly “the desire of the nations.” The fact is that Christ continues to rule over political life. See O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Barth, “Church and State,” 154.

human life. This Declaration explicitly rejected the subordination of the church to the state, as well as the adaptation of Christian theology to Nazi ideas, while at the same time defending the necessary coercive authority of the state.<sup>36</sup> Barth did not see the Christ-event as separating Christians out from the world, nor as a moment which undoes our other loyalties. In other words, the disjunction between the two kingdoms was not complete in Barth.

Such was the criticism offered by John Howard Yoder, an Anabaptist theologian who is the single most important influence on Hauerwas's thinking. Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*<sup>37</sup> is, according to Hauerwas, a paradigm-shifting book, for it brings the Christian community face-to-face with a savior who insists on complete and exclusive loyalty and will allow for no compromising of his message. We are called to imitate Christ, which includes being counter-cultural in all that we do. This includes loving our enemies, committing ourselves to lives devoid of any form of violence or coercion, and living lives of Christian perfection. We are to become powerless, for powerlessness is the only authentic way to live a life of love and service. Jesus came to challenge and change the social order, and to call out a new people who share a life that culminates in the cross. The cross, Yoder claims, *is* the kingdom made real and present in time. Such a kingdom lays down its arms, it redistributes all its goods to the poor and lowly, it cancels debts and frees slaves, it is a reestablishment of all things—a new age and a new order.<sup>38</sup> The state can also be an instrument of grace. While the state is outside the church, it's not outside "Christ's dominion." Without such recognition the state tends to set itself as an ultimate authority by deifying itself. Rather, a just state can only be sustained by the power of Christ's word, of the word made flesh.

Yoder rejects the claim that the ethic of the New Testament is directed to the individual; rather, it is directed to a community in both its substantive and formative functions, calling the church to be a restored community which acts as a beacon for all other communities, even if it shares no ethic with them. Yoder believed neither in a universal ethic nor in the attempt of Christians to translate their beliefs into palatable secular terms. Non-Christian communities are inherently corrupt and Christians are called not to

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<sup>36</sup> Barmen Declaration, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/barmen.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> See *Politics of Jesus*, chapter 3.

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be a part of them. In the cross, Christ has ended our slavery to the world, setting us free to be holy. Hauerwas frequently reiterates the point that Christians have been freed from the fear of death, and thus should not be afraid to die for the peculiarity of their beliefs. Such a contention is a necessary condition for any pacifist, since taking up of arms even in self-defense is impermissible. In Christ's death and resurrection God has revealed that his kingdom triumphs over any use of violence, whose purpose is essentially coercive. Christians eschew coercion and punishment in favor of forgiveness and acceptance of the stranger.<sup>39</sup> The ethic of Jesus has transmuted into an ethic of a servant church within society, as a household which cares for the weak and welcomes the stranger and prays for those who persecute it.<sup>40</sup> In other words, it takes the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount as an imperative for the way it organizes its communal life. This ethic of the gospels is thus primarily political, according to Hauerwas, for it is a "politics of the kingdom" that demonstrates the "insufficiency of all politics based on coercion and falsehood" (which is to say everything else outside the church) and grounds politics instead in "servanthood rather than dominion."<sup>41</sup>

*Hauerwas posits the "insufficiency of all politics based on coercion and falsehood."*

This emphasis on the ethics of a particular community as self-regulating and self-justifying found further support in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.<sup>42</sup> MacIntyre argues that all moral theories operate on the principle of a given sociology, and any particular tradition or community defines for itself the propriety of its own practices. In other words, it provides a comprehensive narrative, or set of stories, by which any action is understood and evaluated. This narrative is teleological in nature, fits parts of a story into a larger whole, unifies particular actions, provides accountability, and defines the self as a role-playing character in a story not of its own making.<sup>43</sup> Thus tradition creates the practices that count as virtuous acts, and the proper ends of human action are determined

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<sup>39</sup> See *PK*, 47. Ralph Wood has argued that in the Christian ethic hospitality must replace toleration as a virtue, but his argument perhaps overlooks the virtues of prudence and fortitude that accompany the commonsense mandate to preserve a household. See "Hospitality as the Gift Greater than Tolerance: G. K. Chesterton's *The Ball and the Cross*," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 12:4 (Fall 2009): 158-185.

<sup>40</sup> See *Politics of Jesus*, chapter 9.

<sup>41</sup> *PK*, 102.

<sup>42</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

<sup>43</sup> See *After Virtue*, 211 ff.

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within the nature of the practice itself. Such a claim has an obvious appeal for Hauerwas who uses this reasoning to buttress his belief that the practices of the Christian community are exclusively defined by the Christian tradition as constituted in the teachings and person of Jesus Christ. This narrative defines us as a people, gives us a vision, entrenches us in truth, disciplines us as a community, and helps us to see the world rightly.<sup>44</sup>

The church is thus an ethically formed imaginative community that structures human actions and purposes according to a perfectionist ethic. It does not direct its energies toward those in the world who hold power, but rather faces the demand to live peaceably. "The World" for Hauerwas is everything that exists outside the church. The church is instead ". . . a body of people who stand apart from 'the world' because of the peculiar task of worshipping a God whom the world knows not."<sup>45</sup> By definition then, Christians have to be radically against the world,<sup>46</sup> for the world is based on violence, institutions that promote fear that force Christians to choose sides in their conflicts and to kill for the social orders in which Christians find themselves. "Thus, within a world of violence and injustice Christians can take the risk of being forgiven and forgiving. They are able to break the circle of violence as they refuse to become part of those institutions of fear that promise safety by the destruction of others."<sup>47</sup> The church is distinctive not because of its beliefs, but because of its imaginative ability to create a particular kind of community. The church does not offer an alternative to war; it is an alternative to war. In short, Hauerwas's ethical thinking can be thought of as Aristotelian if the *spoudaiois* were the Jesus Christ of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>48</sup>

The church, according to Hauerwas, engages in languages and practices the world does not share, for the world is organized exclusively around violence. The mark of the true church is that it is not at home in the world, particularly in a liberal ethos. Indeed, liberal democracies are especially pernicious because they hide be-

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<sup>44</sup> PK, 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Against the Nations: War and Survival in Liberal Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 42; hereinafter cited as *ATN*.

<sup>46</sup> PK, 59.

<sup>47</sup> *ATN*, 117. I have to confess I have little idea what such refusal might concretely entail.

<sup>48</sup> See Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), chapter 1.

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hind lies about their own limits and peacefulness, while their aims are always imperial and violent.<sup>49</sup> Christians wander in this world, citizens of no state, at home in no nation, desiring only to become poor and powerless.<sup>50</sup> The function of the church within the state, Hauerwas writes, is to offer a resounding “no!” to whatever claim to our loyalties it makes, for only the rejection of the church—not constitutions, not ideology, not democratic initiatives—is sufficient to limit a state. The church operates as a separate and inviolable polity exercising critical theology against state-based politics.

Hauerwas predicates everything on the truthfulness of Christianity, but the radical separation between the church and the world means that the truth of Christianity is accessible only to those who have previously accepted its claims, and have been inwardly transformed to see Christianity’s truth. So, while Hauerwas’s central concern is whether “Christianity’s claims are true or false,” adjudication of such claims can only occur within the context of the church. Christian claims are true because Christians are truthful people.<sup>51</sup> This circular position leaves Hauerwas open to charges of “tribalism” or sectarianism. He responds to those charges in multiple fashions. First, the truthfulness of the story is found in the kind of lives it produces. Since the Christian life is manifestly superior to the life of a Nazi or a Moonie, the charges of tribalism hold no water. However, he provides no criteria by which we might evaluate the superiority of the Christian life that are not themselves the product of the Christian life, such that it is not clear how any genuinely comparative assessment could be made. Nazis and Moonies are likely to think their form of social organization superior; this tends to be a characteristic of any person who chooses to be part of a particular community. All communities believe they produce good persons. Hauerwas rejects not only moral universality, but apparently any attempt to strive toward it. He responds further to charges of tribalism by suggesting

*Hauerwas  
rejects moral  
universality.*

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<sup>49</sup> “There is no state we should fear more than one that claims to be ‘limited.’” *ATN*, 126. In no small part Hauerwas is deciding the argument through definition. The state is by nature a coercive and violent entity with unlimited appetites, so the claiming of limits is necessarily a ruse. Since he defines democracy thusly, liberal democracy is willy nilly the worst of all forms of government.

<sup>50</sup> An interesting claim to be made by a tenured professor at Duke University. In *Christian Existence Today* Hauerwas defends writing yet another book by claiming he needs the money. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988); hereinafter cited as “CE.”

<sup>51</sup> *CE*, 10.

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that the problems associated with it are preferable to the problems attendant to any attempt to generate a universal moral code, which necessarily end in violence and war. Again, he believes political liberalism is the most pernicious form of moral universalism.

Hauerwas has a special hostility to the “ruse” of political liberalism. That this is so is due in no small part to the fact that liberalism is the dominant civilizational mode within which he finds himself. If the essence of Christianity is that it is an oppositional community, then logically liberalism would be the reality he would oppose. He must then bring whatever tools of critical analysis he has at his disposal to bear against liberalism. Sadly, these critical tools do not seem to include any reliance on primary texts, for his understanding of liberalism is based on his reading of C. B. MacPherson’s *Possessive Individualism* and a smattering of Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of Rousseau.

His critique of liberalism falls along two lines: first of all, liberalism is a preeminent form of modernity, and modernity itself is a form of oblivion and an illusion of mastery. Secondly, liberalism offers a view of the self and society that produces weak, marginal, feckless, cowardly individuals whose hedonism is matched only by their addled sensibilities. Liberalism privatizes religion on the one hand, while insisting that religion provide legitimacy to underwrite its ambitions on the other. Its notion of freedom is abstract in that it values choice but places no value on that which is chosen. Its emphasis on universal values necessarily leads to violence, for there will be a conflict of interpretation over those values, or a conflict over the values themselves. Any exercise of authority by the liberal state, Hauerwas argues, can only be illegitimate. Even the claim that the state has an obligation to protect its citizens is itself a lie, for the state only believes that it needs to protect itself.<sup>52</sup> While all social orders are built on lies and illusions, those of liberalism are especially so. Thus the church’s social ethic “is first and foremost found in its ability to sustain a people who are not at home in the liberal presumption of our civilization and society.”<sup>53</sup>

The church, as we have seen, is the present reality of the kingdom of God. We are, Hauerwas claims, the people of the new age, and the kingdom is present in us. The eschatology of the New Testament reveals not that the kingdom will come, but that it has

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<sup>52</sup> *ATN*, 178.

<sup>53</sup> *ATN*, 12.



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come. We thus live in a time where two ages overlap, and the reality of the new age is one of nonviolence and peace, the ethic of the church. This kingdom is a radical overthrowing of our conventional ways of thinking, “that security can be achieved only through violence, that our relations with others should be determined by fear, and that our history is finally a tale of despair.”<sup>54</sup> Christ is thus both the herald of a new age and the first citizen of a kingdom of which Christians are called to be citizens, to be imitators of Christ, to become perfect as he himself was perfect.<sup>55</sup> Living in this community has a sanctifying effect, for once we take up residency in the perfect city we too will become perfected through the alteration of our desires. Misplaced desires are what cause the violence of the world around us, be they the desire for status, belonging, property, power, or even justice. Justice is simply part of a desire for order, and this desire, Hauerwas claims, is fundamentally grounded in hate, fear, and resentment. Christianity instead offers a vision where we are not given what we are due (which is the mystery of grace), and thus we must dispossess ourselves, “for our possessions are the source of our violence.”<sup>56</sup>

*Hauerwas believes desire for order grounded in hate, fear, and resentment.*

The essence of Christianity is nonviolence. Resorting to violence is always a failure of imagination, even in (or especially in) cases where we might be tempted to use it. Violence, however, can be transformed sacramentally.<sup>57</sup> Hauerwas has no illusions that

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<sup>54</sup> *ATN*, 57. I believe Hauerwas consistently distorts through overstatement. Surely politics is not exclusively this litany of woes.

<sup>55</sup> “We are called to be like God: to be perfect as God is perfect. It is a perfection that comes from learning to follow and be like this man whom God has sent to be our forerunner in the kingdom. That is why Christian ethics is not first of all an ethics of principles, laws, or values, but an ethic that demands we attend to the life of one particular individual—Jesus of Nazareth.” *PK*, 76.

<sup>56</sup> *PK*, 86. Hauerwas frequently notes that property ownership, which is the touchstone of liberal politics, is *the* source of violence. One would think, then, that as a member of a church which rejects all violence and, one would presume, the things that cause violence, Hauerwas would not own any property. But a search of the records in Orange County, North Carolina, where Hauerwas lives, indicates that he owns a nice sized piece of land with a large house (3357 sq. ft.) on it, with an assessed value (2009) of \$533,647. A search on google maps indicates it is a large secluded house in the woods—far away from any spatially located community.

<sup>57</sup> An interesting example of this is found in Hauerwas’s student and like-minded thinker William Cavanaugh, who in his *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (London: Blackwell, 1998) argues that the Eucharist is the church’s response to the state’s use of torture as a mode of social discipline. The Eucharist refocuses the energies and thoughts of believers on the suffering of others. The state *needs* victims in order to maintain itself, so those who die at the

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this will make the world a better or safer place. Quite the contrary. He is inclined to believe it will make the world more violent and unsafe.<sup>58</sup> Given the anarchic tendency of the kingdom, we must respond by helping those who are hurt by the increased violence.<sup>59</sup> But more than that, we must maintain hope in the face of violence, for hope is the proper expression of the Christian life. If Christians are called to live nonviolent lives, and such nonviolence by definition has no place in the world, then Christians must indulge the imaginative possibility of a miraculous intervention.<sup>60</sup> Assume, for example, that the safety of your spouse and children is being threatened. To resort to any means of physical restraint or violence to protect them would be unethical, for it demonstrates both a lack of faith and a failure of imagination. Beyond that, even the idea of protecting them is based on a faulty analysis of the situation itself, for in thinking of them as *your* spouse and *your* children you are assuming a possessive relationship, and Christians view skeptically the specific connection between possessiveness and violence. Instead Christianity reframes the situation in such a way that violence no longer remains an option, for moving the focus of ethics away from the self and its relations and toward the enemy means that the defense of the (potential) victim is no longer the overriding concern.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the “enemy” and no longer the friend or loved one becomes the main focus of moral energy.

In this attitude Hauerwas seems to be highlighting an interpretation of one strain of the gospels: that Christ’s presence disrupts families and alters our moral commitments. This emphasis in the gospels, however, is offset by other passages, as well as Pauline

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hand of the state become themselves Eucharistic, martyrs who offer their bodies in anticipation of the heavenly feast and thus become the sacrament of the counterpolitics of the kingdom. Likewise the photos of Abu Ghraib were imaginative offerings that transformed the victims into the terrorists the state wanted them to be so that it could maintain a state of fear that would make the exceptional routine and the unthinkable thinkable. The liberal state thus by necessity engages in the ritualistic enactment of power over the bodies of others so that America can claim the exclusivity of its messianic role. Cavanaugh, “Taking Exception: When Torture Becomes Thinkable,” in *The Christian Century*, January 25, 2005. This is an argument not without merit.

<sup>58</sup> PK, 142.

<sup>59</sup> Isn’t an ounce of prevention worth a pound of cure?

<sup>60</sup> PK, 106: “. . . Christian social witness can never take place in a manner that excludes the possibility of miracles, of surprises, of the unexpected.”

<sup>61</sup> Hauerwas argues that Christians never face ethical dilemmas, for these dilemmas result from disordered souls in disordered situations.

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teachings, that stress the moral requirements of charity associated with our immediate obligations in the household. Any sensible interpretation of scripture would require taking account of these often unresolved tensions, manifested most fully in the difficult distinctions between the things of God and the things of Caesar.<sup>62</sup> Yet Hauerwas makes no attempt to do so, preferring instead to focus on the passages which stress radical alteration of social relations.

*Distinction  
between  
things of God  
and things of  
Caesar ignored.*

There are a number of ways in which we might respond to Hauerwas's challenge. First, we might question whether it is better to do evil or suffer evil. Socrates clearly and forcefully argues for the moral superiority of the latter position, as does Christianity. Additionally, however, if it is better for you to suffer evil than to do evil, then it would be better for your neighbor or enemy to do likewise. Therefore, you would be fulfilling an ethical duty in preventing others from doing the evil they seek to do, and such prevention can only be accomplished through forms of coercion (although such means should always seek to be as limited as possible). If prevention is impossible, then punishment should be part of forgiveness.<sup>63</sup> Such punishment cannot logically exist without some form of coercion and its implied violence. But Hauerwas has no coherent theory of punishment. Indeed, he has no apparent theory of authority whatsoever.<sup>64</sup> In short, it may be a genuine act

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<sup>62</sup> For an elaboration of the distinction between the things of God and the things of Caesar, which emphasizes how they are different rather than similar, see Claes Ryn, "The Things of Caesar: Toward the Delimitation of Politics," *Essays on Christianity and Politics*, eds. George W. Carey and James Schall (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1984). Thomas Aquinas is only one of many Christian thinkers who discern two distinct, though closely related, ways to salvation: living religiously in the world or aspiring to the special perfection of monasticism. Without confining himself to Christian sources, Irving Babbitt refers to a humanistic path and path of otherworldliness. See, in particular, his essay "Buddha and the Occident," in his edition and translation of *The Dhammapada*, the Buddhist holy text (New York: New Directions, 1965; first published in 1936).

<sup>63</sup> Aquinas argues that using the instruments of civil power is an act of love both in protecting our loved ones from harm and also in preventing our enemies from corrupting themselves by doing more evil (*Summa Theologica*, II.2 Q 25, Art. vi). Aquinas argues that we aren't commanded to love our enemies *qua* enemy, but instead as a general indiscriminate well-wishing.

<sup>64</sup> For that reason a much more intelligent rendering of these issues is provided by O'Donovan in his *The Desire of the Nations*, 18, where he acknowledges the fact that "political existence depends on structures of command and obedience" and that these structures necessarily have elements of coercion. Interestingly, for all his talk about the church, Hauerwas has very little to say about how it actually operates. For

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of charity toward one's enemies to prevent them from doing an evil they are planning to do.

*The kingdom  
seen as already  
present,  
humans as  
perfected.*

Along those lines, I am at a loss to explain how Hauerwas might maintain the integrity of the ecclesiastical community unless he has some sort of mechanism in place to deal with behavior that might range from heterodoxy, to defiance of church teachings, to actual acts of violence within the church. At some point any community of the moral nature Hauerwas describes has to have the capacity to exclude individuals from participation, or to discipline wayward congregants. Perhaps Hauerwas's emphasis on sanctification obviates such problems, but this would be so only in an imaginary community, not any real ones we might encounter.<sup>65</sup> Churches still deal with problems of disorder, and at the center of any discipline with regards to the order stands an element of coercion, and in coercion violence. It is in this sense that Augustine and Niebuhr see life in this world as ultimately tragic, for we cannot avoid questions about the proper use of violence. This is why everything hinges, in the end, on Hauerwas's eschatological claim that the kingdom is already present, humans are perfected, and thus the means of violence are no longer required. But this would no longer be taking seriously Christ's claim that the things of Caesar still have a command on our attentions.

*For Niebuhr,  
guilt is a  
constant of  
human  
experience.*

Likewise, Hauerwas's claim that we must keep ourselves pure and let others do the killing in the world seems fundamentally shortsighted, both practically and theologically. On the former score it ignores the ways we might benefit, even if indirectly, from others doing the killing, thus making ourselves complicit in it. Does Hauerwas think we can genuinely live guilt free? It seems so, but here I have to agree with Niebuhr that a full explanation of the reality of human action means that guilt is a constant in human

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example, how might a church handle problems of internal discipline?

<sup>65</sup> This problem is addressed in a book for which Hauerwas has articulated tremendous enthusiasm, John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990). Milbank attempts to read Augustine as providing an alternative narrative to the classical tradition, one which predicates social order on relations of peace rather than any use of violence. Milbank does recognize, however, that Augustine was unable completely to sever Christian history from the use of violence inasmuch as he clung to a theory of punishment, which "is always a tragic risk" that carries with it "the taint of sin" (420). Milbank treats this as a mistake on Augustine's part, for Christianity offers a "counter-ontology," where the goal of peace requires everywhere and always the means of non-violence. In this sense we create an *altera civitas* (432).

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experience, and this means that Niebuhr has not only a more thorough view of sin, but also a richer view of redemption.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, I believe Hauerwas's thinking partakes of a serious reduction. All claims of the state to protect its citizens are necessarily disingenuous. All claims of a husband to protect his wife are necessarily examples of possessivism. But this seems to me fundamentally mistaken. People are genuinely capable of loving one another, and such love can express itself through care, solicitude, and a desire to preserve, even if such care and preservation requires morally dangerous actions (few people would relish the opportunity to fend off a potential rapist). Furthermore, the development of virtue within children requires not only praise, but also discipline (it is, after all, the scriptures that remind us that sparing the rod means spoiling the child<sup>67</sup>). Human communities require mechanisms of restraint as well as mechanisms of expression, but the former are decidedly lacking in Hauerwas's church communities, in no small part because his belief that we have been made a new creation negates the need for such restraints. In contrast, however, we might say that just as the fall did not totally undo the human capacity to do good, so also salvation doesn't eliminate the human capacity to do harm.<sup>68</sup> This seems implicit in the argument St. Paul makes in Romans 13.

Instead of being purely a manifestation of violence, order and its virtue of justice can be instantiations of love, and can be balanced by prudential concerns. One cannot focus on ends alone, but must understand the means by which those ends can be best attained, even if those means are occasionally violent. Thus Augustine argued that the law ought to allow people to do lesser evils so

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<sup>66</sup> The feebleness of Hauerwas's view of sin, on those rare occasions when he actually discusses it, so thorough is his emphasis on sanctification, can be found in his claim that sin is (merely) "the form our character takes as a result of our fear that we will be 'nobody' if we lose control of our lives," for this need for control "is the basis for violence in our lives." It is interesting how many different reasons he posits as the basis of violence.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Prov. 13:24, Prov. 29:15, and Hebrews 12:6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Augustine argued that man's original capacities included both the power not to sin and the power to sin, as well as choosing life or death. In Adam's original sin, man lost the power not to sin and had only death. Following grace in Christ, man retained the power to sin, but regained the power not to sin and the promise of life. In the fulfillment of grace, after death and resurrection, man will have the power to sin taken away and receive the highest gift of all, the power not to be able to sin. See *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*.

as to avoid greater ones. He also saw the rule of punishment as violent coercion designed to accomplish the goods of virtuous living and spiritual regeneration. Indeed, it can be “mercy to punish . . . and cruelty to pardon.” A severe ruler can produce many benefits, and a lenient one great harms.<sup>69</sup> One has to understand the implicit connection between means and ends, and recognize that creating social structures may involve choosing among lesser evils and that refusing to do so implies faulty ends. As Paul Ramsey said, “If pacifism as an analysis of the right Christian conduct is wrong, it is wrong because it has mistaken the principles of right political conduct and of justifiable war in which Christian love should take form, today as in the past.”<sup>70</sup> As Augustine claimed, the four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, courage, temperance—are themselves forms of love and conducive of human perfection. These virtues are connected by Augustine to specifically Christian love, for no man can truly be given his due unless God is given his. The reality of God’s kingdom does not end our ability to analyze relative goods. We still can discern moral limits and compare the relative and overall justice of different nations. Such discernment seems insignificant for Hauerwas. He believes, on the one hand, that moral theories are little more than reifications of the actual practices of a given community and, on the other hand, that they are reflections of divine action. Hauerwas claims the issue is “not how our moral theory makes a difference for moral judgments but how God might make a difference.”<sup>71</sup> The two claims are held together, in part, by the apparent incorruptibility of ecclesiastical communities. These communities maintain their integrity through isolation. Like Dowie’s Zion, they have little to do with the world, avoiding business and legal dealings with institutions or persons outside the church.<sup>72</sup> Their difference stems from the assessment of the world as formed by religious belief: “We know that as God’s

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<sup>69</sup> See his “Letter to Macedonius” in *Augustine: Political Writings*, edited by E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 77ff.

<sup>70</sup> Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1961), 9. I agree with Hauerwas that the Just War Theory and pacifism are mutually exclusive. It is patronizing to view pacifism as conscience, or a moral reminder. It is either definitively right or tragically wrong.

<sup>71</sup> *CE*, 68.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

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creatures we are not naturally violent nor are our institutions unavoidably violent.”<sup>73</sup> Given the differences in the quality of our imagination, the attempt by Christians to create a philosophy of social existence can only serve to corrupt the church.

In fact, the problem is not that Hauerwas takes the Sermon on the Mount and the gospel accounts too seriously, it is that he does not take them seriously enough. Christ preaches peace, but He also claims “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:32). Christ admonishes the disciples to preach the Kingdom of Heaven, but also to take no money for doing so. I suspect that Hauerwas cashes his checks; as mentioned earlier, he has said that he writes for money. In Matthew 19 and in Mark 10, the rich young ruler is told that to lead a life of righteousness he must obey the commandments. To lead a life of holiness, he should “sell all that you have.” The desert fathers were earnest about these commands and took on vows of chastity and poverty, and removed themselves from human communities. Still, it is well to remember that, in the Mark account, we are told that Christ loved the young man who could not give up his wealth. The epistles of Paul are replete with admonishments toward order which require restraint as well as solicitude. Christianity does not *require* a rejection of the things of Caesar in favor of the things of God; it gives each its due and, in doing so, recognizes that the complexity of communal life requires some people to do unsavory jobs and that caring for one another involves restraint and protection.

Hauerwas is not wrong in seeing the connection between politics and violence. He is wrong in his assessment of how and whether we can extract ourselves from such difficulties. This is one of the major themes of Max Weber’s famous essay “The Profession and Vocation of Politics.”<sup>74</sup> Weber argues that the modern state predicates itself upon monopolizing the legitimate use of violence and that anyone who seeks a life in politics must come to grips with its use. “No ethics in the world,” he writes,

can get around the fact that the achievement of “good” ends is in many cases tied to the necessity of employing morally suspect or at least morally dangerous means, and that one must reckon with the possibility or even likelihood of evil side-effects. Nor can any ethic in the world determine when and to what extent the ethically good

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>74</sup> In *Max Weber: Political Writings*, ed. Lassman and Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); hereinafter cited as “Weber.”

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end 'sanctifies' the ethically dangerous means and side-effects.<sup>75</sup>

Within any religious tradition, ethical reflection must take into account our inclusion in various types of communities and think through the relationships between the codes of conduct constitutive for each. The code of conduct relative to my role as father, for example, differs from that in my role of professor. I have an obligation to protect my children from harm. Such protection is in the nature of the gift of children.

Anyone involved in politics, which even Mennonites claim has a legitimate function in preserving order, must take into account how violence factors into such preservation, and how such factoring can create moral danger. Involvement with these "diabolical powers" ought not to be taken lightly, precisely because of their character-transforming tendencies, but nonetheless they are required in this disenchanting world. While the "great virtuosi" of faith may eschew the means of politics, their teachings are ultimately "otherworldly." They have no real concern for the consequences of their ethical teachings, and thus are not troubled by evil outcomes.

*An "ethic of responsibility" requires considering the effects of our actions and inactions.*

For Weber, that is the decisive point. Any person operating by the usual means of ethical deliberation has to take into account the consequences of acting or not acting. Jesus Himself said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits,"<sup>76</sup> i.e., by the effects of their actions. Yet for Hauerwas, following Yoder, concern about "effectiveness" skews all moral deliberation. There is only truthfulness. Obedience to the command to live Christ-like lives negates all concerns about being effective; to have these concerns is to be guilty of Constantinianism. For Weber, those who operate out of the "ethic of absolute conviction" are concerned only about the purity of their actions; they take no account of the results of their beliefs. Indeed, they would let evil reign before they would do something against which they propose absolute prohibitions. Contrariwise, those who seek to act based on an "ethic of responsibility" have "no right to presuppose goodness and perfection in human beings," for such presupposing is a "shuffling off" of responsibility. They won't reject out of hand the employment of morally hazardous means, and will often satisfy themselves with more modest goals. They recognize that good and evil are inextricably bound with one another in this world, and achieving good may require doing evil. Weber maintained that

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<sup>75</sup> Weber., 360.

<sup>76</sup> Matt. 7:16.



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anyone who believed that only good could come of good and only evil of evil was little more than “a child in political matters.”<sup>77</sup>

Thus, according to Weber, anyone who considers the gospel should either “accept it in its entirety or leave it entirely alone.” Were one to take Christ’s teaching fully at face value, the starting point would be to “sell all that you have” and to take on the life of a saint. But the person who plays at half measures, who dabbles in the Sermon on the Mount, is the worst kind of fool, and the most irresponsible sort of thinker. This thinker regards the world as “stupid and base,” but never himself, thus ignoring the doctrines of creation and sin both. The thinker of the half-measure ultimately lacks religious seriousness. Weber wanted to know “how much inner weight” was genuinely carried by the ethics of conviction, and believed that “in nine cases out of ten, I am dealing with windbags, people who are intoxicated with romantic sensations but who do not truly feel what they are taking upon themselves. Such conduct holds little human interest for me. . . .”<sup>78</sup>

*To dabble in the Sermon on the Mount is dangerous.*

Far more morally interesting are those who feel the burdens of the consequences inherent in both their doing and their not doing, the persons who at some point realize they are required to do things they don’t want to do in order to achieve purposes that are genuinely humane, so long as we have an understanding of what genuinely human aspirations are. Perhaps there is a role for saints, but not all are called to pursue that very special kind of life. Should most humans take upon themselves vows of chastity and poverty, the species would not last long. Disavowing power may have the same effect. Weber believed the great problem for our age was not that we engaged in morally hazardous actions, but that we had lost our way and no longer had any guides for our actions, no clarity about what we were trying to achieve. We had entered “a polar night of icy darkness and hardness” that made all our partisan distinctions insignificant. Perhaps Hauerwas is right that we have reached the dark depths of secularism, and are left only with the retreat into faith. Even such a faith, however, must consider how to employ politics deliberately and patiently towards life in this world, with the hope of making civilization. A person capable of such hope is the true hero of faith, and the world needs heroes more than saints.

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<sup>77</sup> Weber, 362.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

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I believe the failure of Hauerwas to appreciate the limited gains that can be achieved by secular processes can be seen most clearly in his reflections on the Nazi holocaust, which have a general tone of diffidence, ignorance, and helplessness. Even when faced with this monstrosity, Hauerwas continues to reflect on the self-contained particularity of Christian commitments. Any attempt to speak to secular politics can only end as a justification of the state itself, and that is the very thing that led to the holocaust in the first place. The issue here for Hauerwas is that the holocaust ought to force Christians to reflect on how they will relate to the world, with the correlative ethical implication that Christians must maintain themselves as a people set apart. This means that the essence of the gospel is that it separates Christians from the politics of the world to such a degree that not only are they unable to promise that it will never happen again, but they do not want to be engaged in the formation of a culture in which it couldn't happen again. Particularly, Christians ought to resist the temptations of liberalism which seek to bypass the seductions of genocide through the promise of mutual toleration.<sup>79</sup> There is no universal identity of humanity we can appeal to that would protect the Jews, nor are there values which would undergird a political system that would make holocausts, at the very least, unlikely. Indeed, even the desire to find such things reveals one to be guilty of the need for control and mastery that itself leads to all violence.

*A perfectionist ethic creates less perfection in the world, not more.*

But surely there are some things within our control, and not all attempts at mastery and discipline are bad. Hauerwas would have us believe this is not the case, and such claims can provide little comfort to Jews—or, for that matter, to his own wife and children. Were Christianity this distinct, this self-referential, this concerned about its own purity, this determined to remain above “the usual ordinary” means of Christian living (to use John Winthrop’s phrase), it would be hard to know exactly what its appeal would be except for those who seek to quell all religious anxiety. The positing of a perfectionist church with a perfectionist ethic turns the world of ethical action upside down, for it creates less perfection in the world, not more. Human beings must often be satisfied with incremental gains. Sanctification is not a one-time event, but a “slow, strong drilling through hard boards” that concludes only in our death. Until then, the usual and ordinary means must suffice.

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<sup>79</sup> See *ATN*, 66-69.