

Concordia Theological Quarterly



Volume 76:1-2

January/April 2012

Table of Contents

What Would Bach Do Today? Paul J. Grime	3
Standing on the Brink of the Jordan: Eschatological Intention in Deuteronomy Geoffrey R. Boyle.....	19
Christ's Coming and the Church's Mission in 1 Thessalonians Charles A. Gieschen	37
Luke and the Foundations of the Church Peter J. Scaer	57
The Reformation and the Invention of History Korey D. Maas	73
The Divine Game: Faith and the Reconciliation of Opposites in Luther's <i>Lectures on Genesis</i> S.J. Munson.....	89
<i>Fides Heroica?</i> Luther's Prayer for Melanchthon's Recovery from Illness in 1540 Albert B. Collver III.....	117
The Quest for Lutheran Identity in the Russian Empire Darius Petkūnas.....	129
The Theology of Stanley Hauerwas Joel D. Lehenbauer	157

Theological Observer175
 Faithful Lutheran Pastor Defrocked: Active Persecution
 by the Church of Sweden
 A Whole New Can of Worms: A Statement of the Faculty of
 Concordia Theological Seminary on Religious Liberty
Book Reviews182

The Theology of Stanley Hauerwas

Joel D. Lehenbauer

In 2001, *Time* magazine took on the task of selecting “America’s Best” contributors in the areas of science and medicine, arts and entertainment, and society and culture, including—in the last category—“America’s Best Theologian.” The recipient of this honor was Stanley Hauerwas, a United Methodist professor who earned his Ph.D. at Yale, taught for two years at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, then joined the faculty of the University of Notre Dame, where he taught until 1984. Since then, Hauerwas has taught theology and ethics at Duke Divinity School.¹

Interestingly, *Time* chose a Lutheran scholar, Jean Bethke Elshtain, to write the profile of Hauerwas that appeared in its September 17, 2001 issue. She wrote as follows:

Hauerwas is contemporary theology’s foremost intellectual provocateur. . . . [He] has been a thorn in the side of what he takes to be Christian complacency for more than 30 years. For him, the message of Jesus was a radical one to which Christians, for the most part, have never been fully faithful. Christians, he believes, are called to be a pilgrim people who will always find themselves in one political community or another but who are never defined completely by it. Thus, as the body of Christ on earth, Christians must be a “sign of contradiction,” to borrow a term from Pope John Paul II, a moral theologian much admired by the very Anabaptist Methodist Hauerwas.²

Without necessarily seeking to deny the accolade conferred on Hauerwas in this way, some wondered aloud “how the editors of *Time* would know” who “America’s Best Theologian” might be.³ Yet even those (like Richard John Neuhaus) who dared to question the theological competence of *Time*’s editors were also quick to acknowledge Hauerwas’s status and influence in contemporary theology, thus (in effect) confirming

¹ This article is adapted from a presentation titled “God in Public Discourse: Reflections on the Theology of Stanley Hauerwas” given by the author at the 2010 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

² *Time* (September 17, 2001): 76.

³ Richard John Neuhaus, “In a Time of War,” *First Things* 120 (February 2002): 14 (hereafter *FT*).

Time's assessment. Wrote Neuhaus at the time: "[Hauerwas] is the author of dozens of books, and articles beyond numbering; interviews with him and discussions about him appear in numerous academic and popular publications, making him probably the most prominent theologian in the country."⁴

Those who have read even a sampling of Hauerwas's essays, books, or interviews have almost certainly encountered his passionately-held views on Christian pacifism and its place in the theology and life of the church.⁵ Elshtain's brief article in *Time* calls attention to this pacifist concern that surfaces in one way or another in nearly all of Hauerwas's writings.

Hauerwas is a volatile, complex person with an explosive personality and high-energy style. For many, he is an unlikely pacifist. He insists that Christians should exemplify a radical message of peace. Hauerwas learned this lesson from the Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder. Hauerwas has respect for a position known as the just-war perspective, a mode of reflection on war's occasional tragic necessity, either for self-defense or to protect those who might otherwise be slaughtered. But he insists that most Christians who claim that position are not really serious about it, or they would oppose many more wars than they do. His radical pacifism leads him to condemn any and all forms of patriotism, nationalism and state worship. (And he disdains most distinctions between these positions.)⁶

Ironically, the issue of *Time* dubbing this radical pacifist "America's Best Theologian" went to press almost simultaneously with one of the most peace-shattering days in recent American history: September 11, 2001. The events of that day thrust our nation and others—as well as many Christians, theologians and church bodies—into yet another complex and passionate debate about the nature and necessity of war and the best means for securing and maintaining national and global justice, freedom, and peace.

In December of 2001, the editors of *First Things*—the editorial board of which Stanley Hauerwas had long been a member—published an editorial called "In a Time of War," offering their view that the terrorist attack on September 11 constituted a bona fide "act of war" that placed America into

⁴ Neuhaus, "In a Time of War," 14.

⁵ This was the subject of my Ph.D. dissertation "The Christological and Ecclesial Pacifism of Stanley Hauerwas: A Lutheran Analysis and Appraisal" [see p. 1, parag. 1] (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2004).

⁶ *Time*, 76.

the regrettable but necessary role of defender of fundamental national and even international human rights, justice, security, and freedom. The editorial goes on to offer a defense of the "war against terrorism" proposed by the Bush administration on the basis of historic "just war" principles. It voices respect, even admiration, for authentic pacifist views, with one significant caveat:

One matter that has been morally muddled in recent decades should now be clarified: those who in principle oppose the use of military force have no legitimate part in the discussion about how military force should be used. They only make themselves and their cause appear frivolous by claiming that military force is immoral and futile, and, at the same time, wanting to have a political say in how such force is to be employed. The morally serious choice is between pacifism and just war. Here, too, sides must be taken.⁷

Hauerwas was not a consensual participant in the writing of this editorial: his passionate dissent was published in the February 2002 issue of *First Things*. While this is not the place to discuss the details of that response, it illustrates well Hauerwas's own view of the significance of his pacifist convictions for his theology and ethics as a whole:

The editorial makes clear that the Editors regard the Christian nonviolence I represent as at best "a reminder" to those who are about "being responsible." I may be tolerated because of my theological commitments, but my pacifism can only be regarded as an aberration that is best ignored. The arguments "John Howard" Yoder and I have made in an attempt to show how Christian orthodoxy and non-violence are constitutive of one another are quite simply not taken seriously by the Editors. Or at least they are not taken seriously if "In a Time of War" indicates the best thinking of the Editors of *First Things*. I did not expect nor do I expect the Editors to take a pacifist stance, but I confess that their lack of sadness that should accompany the use of violence fills me with sadness.⁸

Hauerwas wonders aloud how "my life may be changed" by the publication of this editorialized "dismissal" of his conscience-bound pacifist convictions:

Should I, for example, continue to be identified as a member of the Editorial Board of *First Things*? If "In a Time of War" constitutes the perspective of this magazine, should the Editors continue to list me as

⁷ The Editors of *First Things*, "In a Time of War," *FT* 118 (Dec 2001): 14.

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, "In a Time of War: An Exchange," *FT* 120 (Feb 2002): 13.

a member of the board? Surely the position taken in “In a Time of War” comes close to implying that the pacifist refusal to respond violently to injustice makes us complicit with evil and injustice and, therefore, immoral.⁹

A response from the editors followed in the same issue, and additional articles, responses and “exchanges” ensued in subsequent months. In May 2002, Hauerwas did resign from the editorial board of *First Things* because of his profound disagreement with the position taken by the editorial board and their construal of the role of pacifism and pacifists in war and peace debates. In an article published in the June 21, 2002 *National Catholic Reporter*, Neuhaus—editor in chief of *First Things*—expressed his sympathetic regret at Hauerwas’s decision.

His leaving the editorial board was entirely amicable, and I urged him not to, but understood why he did. Our essential disagreement is that for my friend Stan, pacifism is...the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, and I think that’s not only not true, I think it’s dangerously schismatic, and about that we have been arguing in a friendly manner I suppose going on 30 years.¹⁰

Still, says Neuhaus, Hauerwas is “provocative, energetic and a very, very useful person to have on the theological scene”—a well-intended comment, no doubt, but one that might be interpreted as implying the very sort of patronizing “dismissal” of his pacifism that Hauerwas finds so outrageous and offensive.¹¹

Hauerwas’s “project” for reforming Christian ethics—with its emphasis on the virtues, character, narrative, the particularity and exclusivity of Christian ethics, and (above all) the central and indispensable role of the church, the Christian community, as a “sign of Christ-like contradiction” in and to the world—has received considerable scholarly attention in recent decades in America and beyond. Far less attention, however, has been given to Hauerwas’s pacifist convictions and the central role that these convictions play in his “public theology” as a whole. That was the focus of my (as yet unpublished) dissertation work at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and that will also be my focus on here.

⁹ Hauerwas, “In a Time of War: An Exchange,” 13.

¹⁰ Patrick O’Neill, “Theologian’s Feisty Faith Challenges Status Quo,” *National Catholic Reporter* (June 21, 2002), 3 (hereafter *NCR*). See also *FT* 125 (Aug.-Sept., 2002): 106-107.

¹¹ O’Neill, “Theologian’s Feisty Faith,” 3.

The relative neglect of what is arguably the over-riding theme in Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics seems to confirm his perception, noted in his classic work *The Peaceable Kingdom*, that "many have viewed my pacifism with a good deal of suspicion, seeing it as just one of my peculiarities."¹² Whether or not Hauerwas would agree with Neuhaus's assertion that for him pacifism is "the doctrine by which the church stands or falls," there is ample evidence to demonstrate that Hauerwas does not regard pacifism, properly understood, as a tangential or secondary moral issue, a mere "quirk" in an otherwise sound and lucid theological system. Statements like the following confirm the utter seriousness of his claim that "Christian orthodoxy and nonviolence are constitutive of one another" (cited above):

Indeed, nonviolence is not just one implication among others that can be drawn from our Christian beliefs; it is at the very heart of our understanding of God. . . . such a stance is not just an option for a few, but incumbent on all Christians who seek to live faithfully in the kingdom made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Nonviolence is not one among other behavioral implications that can be drawn from the Gospel but is integral to the shape of Christian convictions.¹³

For Hauerwas, the phrase "a Christian pacifist" is either redundant or misleading since it seems to suggest that "pacifism" is simply one moral choice among many for Christians. "I believe the narrative into which Christians are inscribed means we cannot be anything other than non-violent . . . nonviolence is simply one of the essential practices that is intrinsic to the story of being a Christian."¹⁴

Pacifism is "the form of life incumbent on those who would worship Jesus as the Son of God."¹⁵ Hauerwas goes on to state that "for a Christian to be nonviolent is not just another political position, but rather at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian."¹⁶ True, biblical pacifism is "not just another 'moral' issue, but constitutes the heart of our worship of a crucified messiah."¹⁷

¹² *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, 1981), xvii (hereafter PK).

¹³ PK, xvii; xvi.

¹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, "Whose 'Just' War, Which Peace?" in *Dispatches from the Front* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994), 137.

¹⁵ Hauerwas, *Dispatches*, 134.

¹⁶ "Faith Fires Back: A Conversation with Stanley Hauerwas," *Duke Magazine* (Jan.-Feb., 2002), 12.

¹⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, "Remembering John Howard Yoder," *FT* 82 (April 1998), 15-16.

My first and primary goal, therefore, is to summarize as concisely yet helpfully as possible "The Christological and Ecclesial Pacifism of Stanley Hauerwas." Second, I will offer a few thoughts about what we as Lutherans might learn from Hauerwas's insights on this topic, despite inevitable disagreements about some rather fundamental theological issues along the way.

The still-classic text on *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* was written by Roland Bainton in 1960. Bainton also wrote (in 1950) the classic popular Luther biography, *Here I Stand*. The first time I read *Here I Stand* years ago, I assumed (perhaps like many others) that Bainton was a Lutheran. Actually, he was ordained (but never served) as a Congregationalist pastor and was married to a Quaker. Bainton's father, like his wife, was a committed pacifist, and it is clear from his writings that Bainton also considered himself a pacifist.

In the introduction to *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, Bainton provides a nutshell summary of these "attitudes" throughout Christian history:

The early Church was pacifist to the time of Constantine. Then, partly as a result of the close association of Church and state under this emperor and partly by reason of the threat of barbarian invasions, Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries took over from the classical world the doctrine of the just war, whose object should be to vindicate justice and restore peace. The just war had to be fought under the authority of the state and must observe a code of good faith and humanity. The Christian elements added by Augustine were that the motive must be love and that monks and priests were to be exempted. The crusade arose in the high Middle Ages, a holy war fought under the auspices of the Church or of some inspired religious leader, not on behalf of justice conceived in terms of life and property, but on behalf of an ideal, the Christian faith. Since the enemy was without the pale, the code tended to break down.¹⁸

Even though Bainton explicitly identifies himself as a pacifist at the end of this book, Hauerwas is far from pleased with Bainton's approach, for a number of reasons.¹⁹ First, Hauerwas is disturbed by the very use of

¹⁸ Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 14.

¹⁹ The following summary of Hauerwas's (and Yoder's) critique of Bainton is based primarily on chapter 6 ("Can a Pacifist Think about War?") of Hauerwas's book *Dispatches from the Front*, the arguments laid out in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, and John Howard Yoder's books *Christian Attitudes To War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to*

these categories, as if pacifism, just war, and the crusade are three clearly definable and equally acceptable (or at least understandable) "Christian attitudes" toward war and peace that have manifested themselves throughout history. Each of these terms is capable of a wide variety of definitions, says Hauerwas, many of which can hardly be characterized as "Christian" in nature. In fact, Hauerwas often vigorously denies that he himself is a pacifist if this term is understood in any number of the ways that it is typically understood (e.g., as just another pragmatic political strategy for ridding the world of war).

To illustrate the complexity of this issue, in his book *Nevertheless* John Howard Yoder has catalogued and described no less than 24 distinct types of religious pacifism. The last chapter is devoted to his own brand of pacifism which he calls the "Pacifism of the Messianic Community," and which he claims is radically distinct from the others. Yoder has also written a huge tome (highly regarded by Hauerwas) called *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton*, which tries to supplement and correct what he regards as Bainton's rather sloppy and simplistic treatment of this complex issue.²⁰

In "Can a Pacifist Think About War?" Hauerwas writes:

Equally problematic from this perspective are typologies—crusade, pacifism and just war—developed by Roland Bainton in *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*. The heuristic value of such typologies hides from us the complexity of Christian nonviolence (as well as the multivalence of violence). This concealment is not only because Bainton held to the kind of Constantinian liberal pacifism that I think is so doubtful, but more significantly such typologies result in a peculiarly ahistorical reading of Christian nonviolence. For the typology makes it appear that the three types are simply "there." Each, it seems, necessarily exemplifies how Christians can, have, or should think about war and/or violence. Yet that very assumption relies on the notion that we have a clear idea of what war and/or nonviolence may be, apart from the practices of a community of nonviolence.²¹

This leads to a second reason that Hauerwas rejects Bainton's approach: it falls woefully short of exploring adequately the reasons why the early church turned away from pacifism at the time of Constantine.

Bainton (Elkhart, Indiana: Distributed by Co-op Bookstore, 1983), *Nevertheless: The Varieties of Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1971), and *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972).

²⁰ See footnote 19 for reference information on these two books.

²¹ Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 118-119.

Bainton mentions the barbarian invasions and the “close association of church and state,” as if the pacifism of the early church was rooted primarily in cultural, sociological, or political considerations. According to Hauerwas and Yoder, however, the stalwart pacifism of the early church was rooted primarily—even exclusively—in theological convictions. These early Christians were determined to be faithful to the clear words of Jesus in the Gospels about turning the other cheek, not resisting those who do evil, and loving one’s enemies just as Jesus loved his enemies. They understood, say Yoder and Hauerwas, that one simply cannot be faithful to the words and example of Jesus—especially his climactic act of non-violence and non-resistance on the cross—and at the same time willingly and knowingly engage in obvious acts of violence.

And so what happened at the time of Constantine, they contend, was not simply an inevitable and theologically acceptable shift in the Christian attitude toward participation in various forms of state-sponsored violence. Rather, what happened was nothing less than apostasy, a great and terrible fall of the church into a way of thinking that mixed and mingled in a kind of syncretistic heresy two radically different kinds of loyalty: loyalty to the state and its desires and demands and loyalty to Christ and his desires and demands. This is what Yoder and Hauerwas refer to as “Constantinianism,” the tragic tendency of the church ever since the time of Constantine to think that its primary job is to try to “control history” and “police or improve society” through control of or cooperation with the state. This understanding of the relationship between church and state, they insist, always involves some degree (and usually a profound degree) of compromise. Also, it almost always involves Christian participation in or support for various forms of violence in clear contradiction to the words and example of Christ. “Put the sword away,” said Jesus to Peter. “That’s not how my kingdom works; that’s not how my people are to conduct themselves in this world over which I am Lord” (see Matthew 26:52–56).

The greatest temptation Jesus himself ever faced, argue Yoder and Hauerwas, was to use force for what he knew better than anyone else was a “good and godly” cause. The agony in Gethsemane was rooted in a demonic temptation to call on his followers to take up the sword or to call on the legions of angels at his disposal to defend the just cause of his kingdom or to cooperate with the “powers that be” of his own day as a way of consolidating his own power, all for the very praiseworthy purpose of establishing God’s kingdom. Christ’s victory consisted in his ability as both God and man to resist that temptation, which meant, of course, refusing to resist the evildoers who nailed him to the cross. It is this same cross

that Jesus calls all of his followers to bear in his name and for the sake of his Gospel, which (as Peter clearly says—see 1 Peter 2:18–24; 3:8–18; 4:1–19; 5:1–11) may well involve suffering violence at the hands of evildoers. But this same Gospel never calls us to engage in violent behavior, even—and especially—at the behest of some self-seeking, power-hungry government which has no vested interest in the cause of Christ’s kingdom.

What Christians need to understand, say Yoder and Hauerwas, is that it is not those who bear arms but rather those who bear crosses for the sake of Christ who are truly working with “the grain of the universe.”²² We Christians are the ones (despite all appearances) who are promised final victory and vindication by God’s power, not by our own power or by our cooperation in un-Christ-like violence on the basis of the interests of some self-seeking state. When we compromise our convictions in order to cooperate with the state, we are showing that we do not really trust God to do what he has promised to do—and what he has already done by raising up Jesus in glory after he faithfully refused to use violence against his enemies and instead willingly surrendered himself up to death, even death on a cross.

This brief summary may help to explain why most critics of Hauerwas and Yoder tend to characterize their pacifism as potentially—or even essentially—sectarian in nature (i.e., as necessarily involving some sort of withdrawal ethic on the part of the church). If “the powers that be” are all basically corrupt and self-seeking, if Christians are not called to support the state or cooperate with the state in any of the various ways that it uses violence to maintain or expand or consolidate its power, then what other choice is left but for the church to retreat into its own little “ghetto” and try as best it can to remain separate from and unstained by the world? In his book *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, Bainton himself acknowledges this as a historical reality.

Pacifism has commonly despaired of the world and dissociated itself either from society altogether, or from political life, and especially from war. The advocates of the just war theory have taken the position that evil can be restrained by the coercive power of the state. The Church should support the state in this endeavor and individual Christians as citizens should fight under the auspices of the state. The crusade belongs to a theocratic view that the Church, even though it be a minority, should impose its will upon a recalcitrant world. Pacifism is thus

²² See the final chapter (“The War of the Lamb”) of Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* and Hauerwas’s *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001).

often associated with withdrawal, the just war with qualified participation, and the crusade with dominance of the Church over the world.²³

That brings us to a third and crucial reason that Hauerwas rejects the (highly influential) approach of Bainton. Both Yoder and Hauerwas completely reject the notion that the pacifism they espouse involves any kind of “withdrawal ethic.” In fact, just the opposite is true, they say. Christians are not called by God to withdraw from society, they are called to be God’s witnesses in and to a sinful world. But they are to do this not by becoming a part of the world, or being co-opted by worldly causes and governments, or by imitating the politics of the world rooted in a craving for control and the exercise of violence. Rather, they are to bear witness to the world concerning the peaceable kingdom of Jesus Christ by committing themselves wholeheartedly and unreservedly to what Yoder famously called the “politics of Jesus” (“politics” as in polis, city, community). The “politics of Jesus,” according to Yoder and Hauerwas, is really just another name for the church: God’s set-apart people who live as “resident aliens”²⁴ in this world as they bear witness boldly and faithfully and joyfully to the non-violent life and death of Jesus Christ.

The church is to exist in the world as a radically different kind of community, with a radically different set of values and practices. By virtue of its character as a community²⁵ of holy, peaceable, loving, forgiving people, the church bears witness to the world by serving as a contrasting model to the world’s way of “doing politics” on the basis of power and pressure, preference and violence. There is simply no way, according to Hauerwas, that the church can bear witness authentically and meaningfully to the world and at the same time make use of aspects of the politics of the world that compromise that clear words and example of Christ—especially that climactic example of non-violence that lies at the heart of Christianity itself: Christ’s passive and non-resistant submission to death on the cross.

Ultimately, therefore, what makes Hauerwas’s pacifism “tick,” and what makes it unique, is its inseparable connection with the unique person and work of Jesus Christ (as he understands it) and with the peaceable kingdom of Christ as it is exemplified in the body of Christ, the church. And that brings us back full-circle to Hauerwas’s project for reforming

²³ Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 15.

²⁴ See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

²⁵ See Hauerwas’s early work, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

Christian ethics. Almost 30 years ago, in Luther-like fashion, Hauerwas proposed ten theses for reforming Christian social ethics. These theses were meant as a challenge to the way mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics in the United States understood and practiced "social ethics" at that time, and they continue to stand as a challenge to most "liberal" and "conservative" Christian approaches to "social ethics" today. The theses are sometimes summarized by means of two pithy Hauerwasian assertions, namely: "The church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic," and "The first political task of the church is to be the church." The theses have been further developed by Hauerwas (and others) in various ways and forms over the years, but are presented below as they were set forth in his 1981 book *A Community of Character*.

1. The social significance of the Gospel requires the recognition of the narrative structure of Christian convictions for the life of the church.

Christian social ethics too often takes the form of principles and policies that are not clearly based on or warranted by the central convictions of the faith. Yet the basis of any Christian social ethic should be the affirmation that God has decisively called and formed a people to serve him through Israel and the work of Christ. The appropriation of the critical significance of the latter depends on the recognition of narrative as a basic category for social ethics.

2. Every social ethic involves a narrative, whether it is concerned with the formulation of basic principles of social organization and/or with concrete policy alternatives.

The loss of narrative as a central category for social ethics has resulted in a failure to see that the ways the issues of social ethics are identified—that is, the relation of personal and social ethics, the meaning and status of the individual in relation to the community, freedom versus equality, the interrelation of love and justice—are more a reflection of a political philosophy than they are crucial categories for the analysis of a community's social ethics. The form and substance of a community is narrative-dependent, and therefore what counts as "social ethics" is a correlative of the content of that narrative.

3. The ability to provide an adequate account of our existence is the primary test of the truthfulness of a social ethic.

No society can be just or good that is built on falsehood. The first task of Christian social ethics, therefore, is not to make the "world" better or more just, but to help Christian people form their community consistent with their conviction that the story of Christ is a truthful account of our existence. For as H. R. Niebuhr argued, only when we

know “what is going on,” do we know “what we should do,” and Christians believe that we learn most decisively “what is going on” in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

4. Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills to transform fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as gift.

We live in a world of powers that are not our creation and we become determined by them when we lack the ability to recognize and name them. The Christian story teaches us to regard truthfulness more as a gift than a possession and thus requires that we be willing to face both the possibilities and threats a stranger represents. Such a commitment is the necessary condition for preventing our history from becoming our fate.

5. The primary social task of the church is to be itself—that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the danger of this existence, trusting in God’s promise of redemption.

The church is a people on a journey who insist on living consistent with the conviction that God is the lord of history. They thus refuse to resort to violence in order to secure their survival. The fact that the first task of the church is to be itself is not a rejection of the world (or a withdrawal ethic) but a reminder that Christians must serve the world on their own terms; otherwise the world would have no means to know itself as the world.

6. Christian social ethics can only be done from the perspective of those who do not seek to control national or world history but who are content to live “out of control.”

To do ethics from the perspective of those “out of control” means Christians must find the means to make clear to both the oppressed and the oppressor that the cross determines the meaning of history. Christians should thus provide imaginative alternatives for social policy as they are released from the “necessities” of those that would control the world in the name of security. For to be out of control means Christians can risk trusting in gifts so they have no reason to deny the contingent character of our existence.

7. Christian social ethics depends on the development of leadership in the church that can trust and depend on the diversity of gifts in the community.

The authority necessary for leadership in the church should derive from the willingness of Christians to risk speaking the truth to and hearing the truth from those in charge. In societies that fear the truth,

leadership depends on the ability to provide security rather than the ability to let the diversity of the community serve as the means to live truthfully. Only the latter form of community can afford to have their leaders' mistakes acknowledged without their ceasing to exercise authority.

8. For the church to be, rather than to have, a social ethic means we must recapture the social significance of common behavior, such as acts of kindness, friendship, and the formation of families.

Trust is impossible in communities that always regard the other as a challenge and threat to their existence. One of the most profound commitments of a community, therefore, is providing a context that encourages us to trust and depend on one another. Particularly significant is a community's determination to be open to new life that is destined to challenge as well as carry on the story.

9. In our attempt to control our society Christians in America have too readily accepted liberalism as a social strategy appropriate to the Christian story.

Liberalism, in its many forms and versions, presupposes that society can be organized without any narrative that is commonly held to be true. As a result it tempts us to believe that freedom and rationality are independent of narrative—that is, we are free to the extent that we have no story. Liberalism is, therefore, particularly pernicious to the extent it prevents us from understanding how deeply we are captured by its account of existence.

10. The church does not exist to provide an ethos for democracy or any other form of social organization, but stands as a political alternative to every nation, witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those that have been formed by the story of Christ.

The church's first task is to help us gain a critical perspective on those narratives that have captivated our vision and lives. By doing so, the church may well help provide a paradigm of social relations otherwise thought impossible.²⁶

Obviously, there are many aspects of these theses and of Hauerwas's theology as a whole with which confessional Lutherans will inevitably disagree, some of them rather fundamental—even presuppositional—in nature. Since Hauerwas is not a Lutheran, that should not surprise us. In

²⁶ These are reprinted with a helpful introduction in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 111-115.

my dissertation, I developed a series of ten “Yoderian/Hauerwasian Christological and Ecclesial Presuppositions” and tried to show how those presuppositions differ from Lutheran presuppositions on such central issues as the person and work of Christ, the relationship between justification and sanctification, the nature of the church, the distinction between the two realms, and so on. A discussion of those presuppositions, however, is not the focus of this study.

At the same time, I am convinced that much of what Hauerwas has to say, especially when it comes to questions and challenges pertaining to the life and witness of the church in the world, can be very helpful to us as confessional Lutherans. Hopefully, we can muster the courage and humility to admit that we still have some serious work to do when it comes to fleshing out the practical, ethical, and societal implications of what has been described as a somewhat “impoverished” ecclesiology.²⁷ What follows, then, are a few brief thoughts and words of encouragement in that regard.

First, I think we Lutherans need to take seriously Hauerwas’s valid (if at times overstated) concerns about the dangers of “Constantinianism” and the temptation of competing loyalties, misplaced priorities, and false views of the church’s responsibility for society, even as we guard against dangers on the opposite extreme. Despite The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s generally quietist history as a church body when it comes to social and political ethics and involvement—or perhaps as an overreaction to that quietist history—I fear that even many Lutherans today sometimes succumb to approaches toward social and political ethics that are rooted primarily in Reformed or evangelical perspectives, whether “liberal” or “conservative” in nature. As we navigate through these various tricky and treacherous waters, I think Hauerwas’s warnings against wrong or unhelpful kinds of “political activism” on the part of the church are sometimes very well-placed, even if and when they need to be qualified by Lutheran non-negotiables.

Second, I think we need to take seriously what Hauerwas has to say about the nature of the church’s witness *as church* in and to society as a way of responding to the very real challenge of presenting to the world a radical and peaceable alternative to the world’s violence and chaos, discord and disunity. I think Hauerwas is exactly right when he says that “the first political task of the church is to be the church.” Here Hauerwas’s emphasis on character, community, the virtues, Christian *practices* (not just

²⁷ See, e.g., the various thought-provoking articles in *Concordia Journal* July 2008 and Winter 2009.

beliefs), and the normative (not only salvific) significance of the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ can also be very helpful.²⁸ I think this question is worth asking by congregations, church bodies, and ecclesial institutions: How effectively, as an ecclesial community, are we at demonstrating to the world, by the very character of our community, the peace that the world lacks and that is available only in and through Christ and the church?

In his book *Resident Aliens* Hauerwas identifies three types of churches:

The activist church is more concerned with the building of a better society than with the reformation of the church. Through the humanization of social structures, the activist church glorifies God. It calls on its members to see God at work behind the movements for social change so that Christians will join in movements for justice wherever they find them. It hopes to be on the right side of history, believing that it has the key for reading the direction of history or underwriting the progressive forces of history. The difficulty . . . is that the activist church appears to lack the theological insight to judge history for itself. Its politics becomes a sort of religiously glorified liberalism.

On the other hand we have the conversionist church. This church argues that no amount of tinkering with the structures of society will counter the effects of human sin. The promises of secular optimism are therefore false because they attempt to bypass the biblical call to admit personal guilt and to experience reconciliation to God and neighbor. The sphere of political action is shifted by the conversionist church from without to within, from society to the individual soul. Because this church works only for inward change, it has no alternative social ethic or social structure of its own to offer the world. Alas, the political claims of Jesus are sacrificed for politics that inevitably seems to degenerate into a religiously glorified conservatism.

The confessing church is not a synthesis of the other two approaches, a helpful middle ground. Rather, it is a radical alternative. Rejecting both the individualism of the conversionists and the secularism of the activists and their common equation of what works with what is faithful, the confessing church finds its main political task to lie, not in the personal transformation of individual hearts or the modification of society, but rather in the congregation's determination to worship

²⁸ See, e.g., my review of the book *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines*, ed. David Feller and David Bland (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007) in *CTQ* 72:3 (July 2008): 282-284. This book contains a sermon by Hauerwas called "The Way of the Church" and other thought-provoking essays and sermons that reflect many of Hauerwas's themes and concerns.

Christ in all things. . . The confessing church, like the conversionist church, also calls people to conversion, but it depicts that conversion as a long process of being baptismally engrafted into a new people, an alternative polis, a countercultural social structure called the church. It seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith and vision, which is ours in Christ. The confessing church seeks the visible church, a place, clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness, and thereby testify to the amazing community—creating power of God. The confessing church has no interest in withdrawing from the world, but it is not surprised when its witness evokes hostility from the world. . . .

This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most “effective” thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith. . . . The overriding political task of the church is to be the community of the cross.²⁹

Again, Lutherans will not likely be able to accept everything Hauerwas has to say about what this “confessing church” will look like. But I think there is much here that we can affirm as Lutherans who also take seriously what our own Confessions have to say about the church as God’s holy, set-apart community in the world, about the necessary relationship between the doctrines of justification and sanctification, and about how the two kinds of righteousness go hand in hand, both in our lives as individual Christians and in our life together as a church.

Despite his emphasis on the church as the primary venue for Christian social ethics, there is also something very “vocational” about Hauerwas’s theology that I think most Lutherans will find attractive. In my view, the closest Hauerwas comes to explaining what he actually means by “nonviolence” is an essay called “Explaining Christian Nonviolence” in his 2004 book, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*. At the end of the essay Hauerwas writes:

Advocates of Christian nonviolence betray the very activity about which we care when we direct attention primarily to what we are against. Such a strategy cannot help but give the impression that most of our life is gripped by violence, from which we must try to rescue some small shards of peace. But I believe that our existence is one constituted by peace, God’s peace, and that violence is the exception. That is why it is so important for those of us committed to Christian

²⁹ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 44–47.

nonviolence to work to name for ourselves and our neighbors the peace, the friendships, without which we cannot live. I believe the best essay I have written on peace is called "Taking Time for Peace: The Moral Significance of the Trivial." It is a modest little essay in which I tried to counter the survivalism associated with the work of Jonathan Schell and Gordon Kaufman by calling attention to peaceable activities such as raising lemurs, sustaining universities, having children, and, of course, playing baseball. To be sure, in the face of alleged nuclear destruction these appear trivial or inconsequential activities; but I believe that without them and many other such activities we have no hold on what it means to be nonviolent. If we are as Christians to survive the violent societies that threaten to engulf us, we will do so just to the extent that we discover such worthwhile activities through which we learn not just to be at peace but that we love peace. That is why, contrary to the title of this essay, nonviolence cannot be explained. It can only be shown by the attractiveness of the friendships that constitute our lives.³⁰

I have not said much here about the role of theology in public discourse, Hauerwas does not have much to say about that topic either, at least not as it is typically defined or understood. There is little or no room in Hauerwas's radically Christ-centered, church-centered theology for "public" (i.e., not directly rooted in the church as church) "discourse" (discussion separated from the actual life and practices of the church) about "God" (understood in some generic sense apart from the only true revelation of God in Jesus Christ). He comes closest to addressing this issue directly in his contribution to the Gifford Lectures in 2001, which has been published by Brazos (Grand Rapids) under the title *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*. In the January 2002 issue of *First Things*, R.R. Reno has a very helpful review of this book, and perhaps the best way to bring this essay to a close is by sharing the closing paragraphs of that review:

Sacred politics has always been Hauerwas's preoccupation. His indifferent and inconclusive closing remarks on the role of Christianity in the contemporary university show how much more concerned Hauerwas is with *tikkum olam* (healing the world) than with contemplation. The real emphasis of his conclusion falls on two witnesses to the task of faithful "natural theology": John Howard Yoder and John Paul II. Of course, both no more advance propositions in the discipline of natural theology than does Hauerwas. Instead, both pro-

³⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 183.

vide clarity about how to take responsibility, not *for* the world (that is God's job), but *in* the world. Yoder teaches us that Christianity does not need the world in order to have a body. We are given a body in Jesus Christ. To dwell in him, Yoder insists that we must resist the detaching, distancing, and spiritualizing strategies of worldly accommodation. Thus, one of Hauerwas's great themes is struck. Christianity is at its best when standing in stark contrast to the world. Nothing better hardens and solidifies the faith than galvanizing conflicts with worldly powers. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. . . . The credibility of Christianity depends on the visibility of Christian holiness, not juggling the ever-changing prejudices of intellectual responsibility. In Hauerwas's view, John Paul II teaches the same lesson, but with a twist. For John Paul II, the blood of the martyrs is also the seed of a true humanism. The world, especially our world, needs a weighty and forceful witness of faith. Thus, as John Paul II reminds us, the Church does not need the world in order to have a body, but the world certainly needs the body of the Church in order to be humane.

[In Hauerwas's view] . . . No arguments of natural theology can give stability to modernity. Rather, we need ballast amidst the roiling conflicts of worldly powers. We all feel the need to stand somewhere. This is now evident in the resurgent patriotism that has followed in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. We cannot overcome evil by adopting critical detachment, the stance of anywhere and nowhere. And yet, Jesus did not promise the Holy Spirit to the nations. Only the Church, Hauerwas insists, can secure a fully and finally responsible place to stand. One can be a citizen, just as one can be a critical thinker, or a scientific inquirer. But we can only assume these roles responsibly if we do so in the service of the truth. And as Hauerwas never tires of reminding us, only in the Church can we reliably find the teachings and habits to guide us toward such service.³¹

³¹ R.R. Reno, "Taking Responsibility," *FT* (January 2002): 60-62.