

# Why Church Matters: The Political Theology of Stanley Hauerwas

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Theologian Stanley Hauerwas is a prolific writer. While his pace has slowed in the last decade (he turned eighty in 2020), even still it remains remarkable. To date he is the author of forty-five books, and there are more in the pipeline. While Hauerwas, a voracious and eclectic reader, reads political theorists, it would be a mistake to give him that label. Also, despite his work now being widely used in Europe and beyond, Hauerwas is through and through an American thinker; his articulation of the political relevance of Christian theology begins in this context.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, his thinking over the last fifty years about theology and politics can be well accessed at this point: where America and Christianity meet. A good start is “A Christian Critique of Christian America,” where he says the following:

If there is to be a genuine Christian critique of Christian America, I am convinced that [the] habit of thought, which [John Howard] Yoder calls Constantinianism, must be given up. Otherwise, we Christians remain caught in the same habits of thought and behavior that implicitly or explicitly assume that insofar as America is a democracy she is Christian. As a result Christians lose exactly the skills necessary to see how deeply they have been compromised by the assumption that their task is to rule, if not the government, at least the ethos of America.<sup>2</sup>

Constantinianism in John Howard Yoder's lexicon is the merging of the political power of nations (or, in Constantine's case, empires) with the agenda of the Christian church. Following Yoder, Hauerwas believes it is imperative that the church distinguish itself from America. But what does this mean for the relation between Christianity and politics? As Hauerwas asks, "Am I therefore suggesting that Christians must 'withdraw' from the social, political, and legal life of America? I am certainly not arguing that; rather I am trying to suggest that in order to answer questions of 'why' and 'how' Christians participate in the life of this country we do not need a theory about the Christian character of democracy."<sup>3</sup>

From these texts we can derive five points for further exploration in this essay: (1) that Christian theology should, even must, produce a critique of political entities that it invariably engages with, most prominently nation-states like America; (2) that politically, this is not about "ruling"; (3) that Christians do not need a theory about political systems to do this; (4) that if Christianity throws in with the ruling political agenda of nation states, it will lose the skills (or virtues) it needs to see how much it may have been co-opted by these political entities; and—or but—(5) that none of this implies that Christians should withdraw from the political life of nation-states or other political entities with which they engage. These five points guide this essay in its subsequent sections. But to begin, it is necessary to say a little more about the context into which Hauerwas's work has largely been received.

### **Positioning the Work of Stanley Hauerwas**

When Stanley Hauerwas graduated from Yale with a PhD in Religious Studies with a specialization in ethics in 1968, this field was actually quite new. He had received a Bachelor of Divinity (BD) three years earlier from Yale Divinity School, but he did not want to be a pastor, what people have been doing with their BDs from Yale since 1832. In the 1960s the field of "Christian Ethics," where Hauerwas's work has primarily been received, was just being born. Increasingly, universities needed courses taught in "ethics."

While many factors influenced the rise of “ethics,” any full account must note the professionalization of so many fields, combined with a weakening or diversification of the moral assumptions that guided them. Bereft of coherent traditions that could guide its thinking about what to think and do in daily work and practice, the culture looked to professionally trained ethicists to fill in.

In his seminal *After Virtue* Alasdair MacIntyre argues that today’s Westernized cultures live among chards of former moralities, with bits and pieces of moral notions that survive from the former cultures into which they once fit and made sense. MacIntyre connects this picture to what he calls the Enlightenment project to “justify morality”; MacIntyre believes it “had to fail.” Architects of the project, Immanuel Kant especially, attempted to found morality on “reason alone,” supposing they needed to detach morality from any imbedding teleology of the human person, a teleology that was largely supplied in the eighteenth century by religious assumptions that yet permeated culture. Proposals of “rationally justified” principles, such as Kant’s categorical imperative, were necessarily thin, lacking in substantive moral content; the only reason they could be thought to guide morally in the eighteenth century was that there remained a sufficient substrate of religious-cultural assumptions about the goods and aims of human life to hold it steady. As MacIntyre says, “[M]orality did in the eighteenth century, as a matter of historical fact, presuppose something very like the teleological scheme of God, freedom and happiness as the final crown of virtue which Kant propounds. Detach morality from that framework and you will no longer have morality; or, at the very least, you will have radically transformed its character.”<sup>4</sup>

While MacIntyre’s critique in *After Virtue* was not published until 1981, when Hauerwas began his teaching career roughly a decade earlier he had already begun to anticipate it. (Hauerwas and MacIntyre would go on to become friends and collaborators, working together on the “Revisions”<sup>5</sup> series that reached out for provocative papers and books on literature, philosophy, theology, ethics, and politics outside of the mainstream flowing from liberal Enlightenment assumptions.) Looking back, Hauerwas

characterizes himself and his fellow Yale graduates with PhDs in religious ethics as follows: “[W]e were like the gun fighter portrayed on television who handed out cards embossed with the slogan: ‘Have gun. Will travel.’ Our card would read, ‘Have conceptual tools. Will travel.’”<sup>6</sup>

The implication here is that the role of the new “ethicists” was to conceptually clarify, Enlightenment style, as if doing so would somehow solve the various moral disputes in the communities where the ethicists happened to land. Yet, oddly, they had also just received graduate degrees in Christian theology. And Christianity is not what anyone and everyone believes. So how were these newborn theological ethicists to proceed?

The presumption of many scholars at the time was that the task of theology was to make the language of faith amenable to standards set by the world. This could be done by subtraction: “Of course you do not have to believe X or Y”; or, by translation, “When we say X or Y we really mean . . .” I was simply not interested in that project. From my perspective, if the language was not true, then you ought to give it up. I thought the crucial question was not whether Christianity could be made amenable to the world, but could the world be made amenable to what Christians believe? I had not come to the study of theology to play around.<sup>7</sup>

So, the dominant answer to the question of what the new Christian ethicists were to do was that they needed to fit in, making sure not to talk too much about those concepts or convictions peculiar to the Christianity they now knew so much about. Yet Hauerwas’s posture was simply to reject this wide path and travel a narrower one. He has remained on this path throughout his long career: he has been unabashedly Christian in almost everything he has written, accommodating not at all to the strategy of subtraction or translation. This has infuriated some in the academy, where most have taken the broader way; and, truth be told, Hauerwas himself

has sometimes played up his adversarial role. "I am a polemicist," he has said.<sup>8</sup> Yet Hauerwas has consistently also held strongly to the view, the passion, that Christian convictions are not only immensely interesting but also true. Moreover, if one does theology with the seriousness and thoughtfulness it deserves, it should not surprise us if others besides Christians get interested. In fact, Christian theologians need these others continually to call them to task about what is true, which the church has no corner on. Hauerwas in this way does his theology entirely in the open, listening to virtually anyone who has something serious to say to him about it. And since Christian theology is essentially political (as we shall see), as a theologian he is bound to speak politically, both about the politics of Jesus and about the politics involved as the followers of Jesus, the church, engage with the world.

Hauerwas's eclecticism and his broad reading patterns, in other words, arise not so much from a wandering eye but from his conviction that others besides Christians have truthful things to say. Of particular importance in his early writing is what one might call an alternative secular vision, expressed by writers like Iris Murdoch, Stewart Hampshire, and Bernard Williams, who had grown tired of the modern propensity to conceive of "ethics" entirely in terms of obligation,<sup>9</sup> which walled it off from considerations of moral psychology and therefore of character and its formation within community. In his dissertation, Hauerwas had argued for the significance of character, leaning heavily on Aristotle and Aquinas;<sup>10</sup> in thinkers such as Murdoch and the Wittgensteinian philosopher Julius Kovesi, Hauerwas began to see the moral significance of "seeing" or "describing" the world—and of the importance of developing habits that school us in how rightly to attend to it. As he says in consort with Murdoch, "[M]odern moral philosophers have failed to understand that moral behavior is an affair not primarily of choice but of vision."<sup>11</sup>

Christian vision arises and is sustained as a community forms around the memory and worship of Jesus. In all his writing Hauerwas is committed to retaining and exploring the moral descriptions that this community has lived by. There is a kind of

“historicism” in this. For Hauerwas, all truth claims arise historically and within traditions; there is no view from nowhere. But engagement with different others in the pursuit of the truth, including political truths, is a required habit. So, for instance, Hauerwas has remained in constructive conversation with the work of Martha Nussbaum, a former student of Bernard Williams and a well-known defender of democratic practices. He appreciates Nussbaum’s accent on the fragility of the moral life and its openness to tragedy; she is engaged, Hauerwas thinks, “in a profoundly moral project to assemble reminders capable of directing our attention to poetry that can enrich our lives.” Nonetheless, the nagging question for Nussbaum as she looks for sufficiently subtle, candid, and richer vision of our moral lives on which we can agree is “who is the ‘we’?” It cannot but turn out to be “a fairly small group who live lives untouched by the economic deprivation of advanced capitalistic societies”<sup>12</sup>—which should make us wonder about the “reach” of Nussbaum’s ruminations. As explored later in this essay, Hauerwas’s “we” is the church,<sup>13</sup> to which and for which he consistently speaks—although we must quickly add (and as his engagement with thinkers like Nussbaum indicates) that the church does not stand isolated but in fact discovers itself as it engages with the world it is called to serve.

In this context, it is important to note that, despite his critical assessment of the Yale graduate who “has conceptual tools and will travel,” Hauerwas has consistently also engaged the moral issues of our day—always very much as a Christian theologian, but in a way that is interesting, imaginative, and broadly engaging. Indeed, a significant number of Hauerwas’s forty-five books, only a few of which can receive focused attention in this essay, address such matters. He has written often on medical ethics, consistently on the ethics of war, and occasionally on sexual ethics. Medical ethics as a specialized field, arguably, had its beginnings in the writing of Paul Ramsey, perhaps Hauerwas’s most important personal mentor. Like Hauerwas, Ramsey was not inclined to leave his Christian theology at the door when entering the fray of discussion about what should be said about medical treatment.<sup>14</sup> Hauerwas, himself

a leading contributor in the early days of the burgeoning field, felt compelled in his own writing to pay specially attention to the mentally handicapped and the disabled, publishing two important books with large sections devoted to them.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more than any other source, these writings gave rise to what we today call “disability ethics.” This suggests it may be because of, rather than despite, deeply held theological convictions and the insights they engender that we find a way forward morally and, one might even add, politically, since, as Aristotle saw, the end of any ethic is always a politics.<sup>16</sup>

### **America, Democracy, and “Christian” Politics**

Trained in the United States primarily in the relatively small field of Christian Ethics,<sup>17</sup> from the beginning of his academic career Hauerwas was obliged to interact with two towering figures on whose work in the field he depended. These also happened to be brothers: Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr. Reinhold was the more famous and forceful of the two, and his name better known. (At the beginning of his presidency Barak Obama named Reinhold as his “favorite philosopher.”<sup>18</sup>) Responses to Reinhold dot Hauerwas’s writings, a sign of his enduring influence. Arguably, however, H. Richard has exerted as much or more influence on how Hauerwas thinks. While Reinhold taught at Union Theological Seminary, H. Richard taught at Yale. Although H. Richard died in 1962, the year Hauerwas arrived at Yale, his influence there remained strong. While neither brother has the theological significance for Hauerwas of their rough contemporary, Karl Barth, they were American theologians, and Hauerwas’s thinking about politics cannot be understood without recognizing how he thinks about America.

Hauerwas styled his 2001 Gifford Lectures as a response to three previous Gifford lecturers, William James, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Barth. He characterizes Niebuhr’s work as follows:

In spite of Niebuhr’s early identification as a “neo-orthodox” theologian, he always worked within the “givens” of

Protestant liberalism, which means, at the very least, that Niebuhr, like James, assumed that Christianity must be tested by standards generally accepted by the intellectual elites of the day. . . . The animating center of Niebuhr's life and work was the crafting of an account of liberal Christianity acceptable to a liberal culture and politics.<sup>19</sup>

To speak in this way reminds us how times have changed in America since the era of the Niebuhrs: evidently Protestant liberalism has lost most of its force. Indeed, that is part of Hauerwas's point. American culture was formed in great part by Protestantism, and the culture presumed by the elites who governed it, especially in the early part of the twentieth century, was dominated by Protestant liberalism. In this context, there was a place for a "public theologian" like Reinhold who could invoke "original sin" as an animating principle in his (and the country's) embrace of "democracy."<sup>20</sup> As Hauerwas argues, what we most need to see, the essential framework that makes Niebuhr make sense and undergirds his influence, is that "Niebuhr always regarded himself first and foremost a preacher, but a preacher whose congregation was constituted by a church called America."<sup>21</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr's long career can be understood as an extended rejection of the thinking of another famous and (in his day) influential Protestant American preacher named Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch was the chief spokesperson for the Social Gospel, a movement beginning within the Christian churches to "Christianize the social order" (as one of Rauschenbusch's book titles tells it<sup>22</sup>), inspired primarily by the understanding and vision that Jesus's ministry was not primarily about personal salvation but rather about bringing the Kingdom of God on earth. For the Social Gospelers of the early twentieth century,<sup>23</sup> this meant structural change in the institutions of America.

A significant difference between Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr is in their treatment of Jesus, who, according to Niebuhr, offers an ethics that should inform our political lives only as the "impossible possibility."<sup>24</sup> This is the way Reinhold is sometimes



interpreted as “neo-Orthodox”: his critique of starry-eyed liberalism is based on a “moral realism” that takes sin seriously. But for Hauerwas the essential continuity between the two men is the point to notice. As he holds, for Rauschenbusch and his fellow Social Gospellers, “what had made them what they were, namely the church, became increasingly irrelevant for the project of changing America. Reinhold Niebuhr, also a product of church culture not unlike that of Rauschenbusch, represents the development of Christian ethics that no longer needs to understand itself as a movement sponsored by the church.”<sup>25</sup>

More than either his brother or Rauschenbusch, who were, each in his own way, crusaders, H. Richard Niebuhr was aware of the church as something of a society itself.<sup>26</sup> While in the long run H. Richard’s ecclesiology was hardly adequate for Hauerwas, his awareness of how the church shaped its members mattered as Hauerwas grew in his accent on the church as essential to any sort of political understanding of Christian faith. In *The Peaceable Kingdom*, one of his most important books, Hauerwas recapitulates an extraordinary debate held in the pages of *Christian Century* between the two Niebuhrs in the face of the 1932 invasion of Manchuria by an increasingly imperialistic Japan. Reinhold argued for an active, coercive American response. H. Richard, however, argued that the proper response from Christian Americans was “the grace of doing nothing”—which was to say, not that they should seek refuge in isolationism, but that “doing nothing” was a grace rooted in American Christians’ awareness that, as Hauerwas puts it, “their inactivity is but a reminder of their own [American Christians’] faults, which are actually so like those of the aggressor [Japan].” It was also a grace entailing “a very particular faith in a definite kind of God. The patience to sustain such an inactivity is possible only if the world is in fact bounded and storied by a God who has the power to use our faithfulness and unfaithfulness that the kingdom of peace might be present among us. The kind of peaceableness required of Christians is inherently tied to their acquiring the habits of peace—that is, that they are formed by a definite kind of spirituality.”<sup>27</sup>

I have suggested that at least five considerations or commitments guide the political thought of Stanley Hauerwas: (1) that Christian theology will engage critically with nation-states, (2) that politically it is not about “ruling,” (3) that it does not need a theory about politics to do this, (4) that it must develop and sustain skills (or virtues) it needs to maintain its unique political posture, and (5) that this posture is decidedly not one of withdrawal. We have perhaps arrived at a place where the logic of these commitments can begin to become clearer. The key for Hauerwas as an American theologian was to recognize how much “Christian” political thought in America was guided by the presumption that Christians must do their political thinking about America, which means that the church must make its political proposals or its visions of common life applicable to the nation-state where it could assist in ruling the world.

But as Hauerwas came to see, this severely limited what the church could say and do as well as the degree to which its contributions could rest on its distinctive view of God. In contrast to his brother's, H. Richard Niebuhr's proposal depended not only on a distinctively Christian understanding of God but also on a pattern of formation, a set of habits, necessary to en flesh this understanding in the context of a world that thinks otherwise. As H. Richard said about his recommendation that we “do nothing,” “[I]f there is no God, or if God is up in heaven and not in time itself, it is a very foolish inactivity.”<sup>28</sup>

The debate between the Niebuhrs occupies the last chapter of *The Peaceable Kingdom*.<sup>29</sup> What Hauerwas does otherwise in the book leads up to this chapter, not because the foregoing material is less important, nor because Hauerwas thinks H. Richard, and not Reinhold, got it right—his disagreements with H. Richard Niebuhr number almost as many as with Reinhold—but because the book helps us understand how Christians might live by a “spirituality” that sustains the habits of peace and also resists the quick identification of their politics with America (or any nation-state). And this is also to speak and live in a manner that makes sense only if the Christian God exists.

If we cast back one chapter earlier, we find Hauerwas discussing “casuistry as a narrative art,” which he commences with the statement that “the question ‘What ought I to be?’ precedes the question ‘What ought I to do?’ . . . [T]he question ‘What ought I to do?’ tempts us to assume that moral situations are abstracted from the kind of people and history we have come to be.”<sup>30</sup> “Casuistry” in the context of this chapter is practical wisdom, or the virtue of prudence, making its way through human life, filled as it is with one decision after the next. Understood as such, casuistry does not simply proceed from settled and unquestionable moral principles; rather, it “requires the imaginative testing of our habits of life against the well-lived and virtuous lives of others.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, casuistry (or practical wisdom) is not simply what I do; it is what *we* do, since, after all, the question “what ought I to be?” is really unaskable apart from communities and “living traditions,” as Hauerwas borrows that phrase from Alasdair MacIntyre.

This is not to diminish the significance of what we do; it is, rather, to place action in the context of a self and therefore of a community and the stories that sustain it. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre makes the case that “intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action as such.” We simply cannot know what someone is doing without placing it, the action, in the contexts that give it meaning, which include the essentially human context by means of which we are able to know about human actions like dining, or writing poetry, or playing sports, but also in terms of the story the actor herself is living out and how this provides meaning to what she is doing. As MacIntyre says, “[N]arrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human action.”<sup>32</sup>

MacIntyre’s point about intelligible action clears the way for us to see why Hauerwas, who from a very early stage in his writing career has accented the significance of narrative for the moral life,<sup>33</sup> believes Christian ethics can never detach itself from the Christian story. We are, all of us, storied selves, and the Christian church is a “story-formed community.” So the ongoing task for the Christian community, the church, as it engages in its life in the

world is not simply to decide on a set of acts it recommends or prohibits but rather to develop and employ descriptive—and therefore narrative—skills, along with habits of action related to them, that are “provided by a truthful narrative to see the ‘situation’ [whatever it happens to be] in a new light.”<sup>34</sup>

In this light, we can see all the more clearly why Hauerwas works so thoroughly and sometimes so aggressively to separate Christian ethics in America from America. Even a mind as roving and fertile as Reinhold Niebuhr’s, in many ways a genuinely Christian mind, was nonetheless held fast by the assumption that America was his church. Or, better put, that American Christians speaking from the church into the “political arena” were bound always to see the principal actors in that arena to be the United States and its nation-state associates, friend or foe.

What is the alternative? Here Hauerwas is guided by “the politics of Jesus,” the title of a book by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder,<sup>35</sup> and by a phrase, initially rather cryptic, that he has repeated many times throughout his long career: the church doesn’t *have* a social ethic; it *is* a social ethic. “I am in fact challenging the very idea that Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable and just. Put starkly, the first social task of the church is to be the church—the servant community. Such a claim may well sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic.”<sup>36</sup>

The social ethic that is the church is also the “ethics” (and politics) of Jesus. Hauerwas does not fuss over the difference between the “Christ of faith” and “Jesus of history,” since he thinks that the Jesus in scripture is the Jesus of the early church. As the early Christians came to believe in Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection, they “found a continuation of Israel’s vocation to imitate God and thus in a decisive way to depict God’s kingdom for the world.”<sup>37</sup> For Christians, in Jesus the kingdom had dawned; it was and is alive on the earth. Following Jesus means to embody this in the world today, and in so doing to live into a story that is eschatological, a

continuing drama that is moving toward a decisive end. In this way, the kingdom preached by and enacted in Christ is about God, most specifically “about *how* God rules.” The stories we find in the Gospels “portray Jesus not only offering the possibility of achieving what were heretofore thought to be impossible ethical ideals. He actually proclaims and embodies a way of life that God has made possible here and now.”<sup>38</sup>

In his passion Jesus refuses to respond with violence to the violence visited upon him. Instead, he suffers and forgives, not acquiescent to the powers that heap violence upon him but in a spirit of “non-violent resistance.” For Hauerwas (following Yoder), this is a politics. Moreover, it is not for Jesus only. The Gospels direct the story of Jesus to those who later become his followers, making sure to retain continuity in the story between the Jesus who preaches and teaches and the Jesus who suffers and dies. Throughout, precisely on these points are numerous hints and reminders about what following Jesus entails. In the Synoptic Gospels, as he travels with his disciples on the way to Jerusalem and his death, Jesus finds that his disciples frequently misunderstand what following him actually means. On one occasion, two disciples, James and John, ask to be made the second and third in command in the new kingdom they assume Messiah Jesus will bring. When they hear what James and John had asked, the other disciples respond with anger and disgust. Jesus replies to them all: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”<sup>39</sup>

There is little debate that the New Testament contains numerous passages that point to a pattern of life implied by these words. But for someone like Reinhold Niebuhr, a number of qualifications are in order, particularly when thinking politically. One might, like Rauschenbusch, give it one’s best try, attempting to “Christianize the social order” of the nation-state. But as Reinhold Niebuhr

reacts to Rauschenbusch, within any realist description of the politics of nations, clearly such teachings are impracticable. If one has power (as, for instance, America might be thought to have in the world of nation-states), it should be used to accomplish relatively more good. The best we can do as we use power—sometimes violently—is to hold Jesus out “beyond history,” as the “impossible possibility” that continually reminds us of what we wish for but cannot accomplish.

Hauerwas’s response to all this is to break the stranglehold nation-state politics has on our political thinking and imagination. The Christian church is a political entity, a corporate body in the world, persisting through time. Christians must begin their thinking about politics with it. The politics of the church cannot simply be about wielding power within or beyond it. Rather, political questions for the church begin with what it means to be this body, this particular people called to follow the God of Israel and of Jesus. It is a political act to remember this, indeed, to tell and enact the story of Christ’s death and resurrection as Christians do when they gather for worship. This includes not only what Christians do daily but also how they understand who they are, what they feel, how they understand the world, and where it is all headed. For instance, since Christians in the church understand they are a forgiven people, then this “makes us lose control. To be forgiven means that I must face the fact that my life actually lies in the hands of others.” It also enables Christians to tell truthful stories: “When we exist as a forgiven people we are able to be at peace with our histories. . . . We no longer need to deny our past, or tell false stories, as now we can accept what we have been without the knowledge of our sin destroying us.”<sup>40</sup>

This direction in Hauerwas’s work opens a broad theological territory to think in: what does it really mean to belong to the body of Christ? Moreover, it sets a pattern for moral formation: Christians need to be trained in the church to embody the virtues that are required to be this body. Of course, one might reply that this is not political territory. Yet, again, such a response narrows political thinking to a small slice of questions and perpetuates

assumptions such as those presupposed by Reinhold Niebuhr. Politics involves, surely, the sort of people we are, and this involves what stories we tell, how we tell them, what we fear and hope for, how we are formed morally, and how we live together. And, again, it matters who the “we” is. In this regard, Hauerwas has asked Christians to begin with affirming that they are Christians, meaning that they belong to the church. “[T]he first task of the church is not to supply theories of governmental legitimacy or even to suggest strategies for social betterment. The first task of the church is to exhibit in our common life the kind of community possible when trust, and not fear, rules our lives.”<sup>41</sup>

No doubt the apparent limitation of this “we” will give many pause. While it might be apparent what sort of difference Hauerwas’s arguments make for those who see themselves as members of the Christian church, what of those who do not?

There are a few quick things to say in response that may seem flippant, but perhaps less so on further reflection. To begin, no one can think for everyone and anyone; indeed, it is presumptuous to try. Further, whenever and however they join the church, all Christians say in some form that they believe “Jesus is Lord.” To ask and consider what this claim might mean is an important exercise in truth telling. And, it is worth adding that the Christian church in its various forms spans the globe and comprises roughly two billion people. Were these many members to think and act as Hauerwas’s writings suggest Christians do, or should, it would be a different world. (Perhaps no less violent, but surely different.)

But a more interesting answer involves further working through the theological claims Hauerwas makes, echoing as he does long-standing Christian thinking. There is and always has been a church/world distinction built into Christian theology. Thus the Gospel of John introduces Christ “the Word”: “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.”<sup>42</sup> As the church comes to be, as it sees God now revealed in Christ, it knows itself as *not* the world—although, John makes plain, the world is God’s, since God made it. The distinction is necessary but also necessarily complicated. Hauerwas favorably

quotes H. Richard Niebuhr, “World, rather, is a companion of the Church, a community something like itself with which it lives before God. The world is sometimes enemy, sometimes partner of the Church, often antagonist, always one to be befriended; now it is the co-knower, now the one that does not know what the Church knows, now the knower of what the Church does not know.”<sup>43</sup> A key claim for Hauerwas is that through the church “the world is given a history. Indeed, the term ‘world’ derives its intelligibility from there being a people who can supply a history for the world.”<sup>44</sup> Again, this history or story is eschatological. To see it as such “requires that we learn to see the life of Jesus as decisive for the world’s status as part of the kingdom of God.”<sup>45</sup> In this way, the church does not flee from the world; it does not abandon it, as God did not. Rather, it stands to the world as consistent witness, reminding it that it remains the “world”: what is not yet but will be gathered into the coming kingdom. Christians are called, Hauerwas thinks, to be a “transformed people capable of living peaceably in a violent world,”<sup>46</sup> sustained daily by the presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The church needs to learn to be not the world, while recognizing all the more that the God Christians worship loves the world, and this means that the church should not set about to antagonize it. Indeed, it “befriends” the world, offering “hospitality to the stranger”; it does not seek to “demonstrate that all other positions are false” but rather serves as a “witness to the God [Christians] believe embraces all truth.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Political Engagement**

Hauerwas, who has been known to describe himself as “a violent son-of-a-bitch,” is an incongruent Christian pacifist—although the incongruity is to him a sign all the more of the power of the Christian story. Yet it is a mistake, Hauerwas believes, to think that “pacifists are passive.” In any case, the combination of his personality, his positions, and his frankness has sparked reaction. As he notes, he has frequently been labeled “sectarian, fideistic, tribalist” by his theological colleagues.



They do so because I (allegedly) defend a theology and ethic that requires Christians to withdraw from the responsibility to create more nearly just societies. While I do not share their general enthusiasm for liberal democratic practices defended in the name of being “responsible,” that does not mean I am calling for Christians to withdraw from social engagements. I just want them to be engaged as Christians.

The image of withdrawal or retreat is all wrong. The problem is not that Christians, to be faithful, must withdraw. The problem is that Christians, particularly in liberal social orders like that of the United States, have so identified with those orders that they no longer are able to see what difference being Christian makes.<sup>48</sup>

For Princeton philosopher Jeffery Stout, the engagement that Hauerwas calls for in this passage is well and good, but he worries that in actual fact Hauerwas’s stance is significantly eroding practices in civil society that everyone must care about. Of particular concern for Stout is that in his rhetorical excess, Hauerwas turns Christians from working for justice. Stout points especially to a chapter in Hauerwas’s book *After Christendom?*<sup>2</sup>, which is directed to a popular audience, subtitled “Why Justice Is a Bad Idea for Christians.”<sup>49</sup>

Stout is concerned not only about what Hauerwas is doing but also about Alasdair MacIntyre and John Milbank; these three are for him the representatives of a “new traditionalism,” which derives much of its force from a critique of “liberalism.” MacIntyre is for Stout the originator of this critique, and Hauerwas the super-spreader. The critique itself has its roots in MacIntyre’s account of traditions in *After Virtue* and subsequent books.<sup>50</sup> As MacIntyre argues, we think in traditions, which provide the language and narrative context that makes human action intelligible. “Liberalism” (that of Kant and others, as noted earlier) ignored this and in its press to liberate the individual and instrumentalize rationality set the stage for the relativizing or privatizing of those traditions in

which genuine moral (and political) formation occurs. Stout summarizes MacIntyre's and Hauerwas's views: "Liberalism, then is a tradition, but one whose necessarily frustrated project is to cease being what it is. This line of reasoning has often been used, by Hauerwas as well as MacIntyre, to dispense with liberal society as the embodiment of an obviously incoherent project."<sup>51</sup>

While Stout and Hauerwas may appear to be well dug in on opposite sides of this argument, in fact there is considerable agreement between them. Stout's book otherwise is a robust defense of liberal democracy *as a tradition*. So Hauerwas can write on *Democracy and Tradition's* dust jacket that "Stout inaugurates a fresh conversation between advocates of democracy and those who hold substantive Christian convictions. . . . [He has] given new life, helping Americans envision what a vital politics contains." In a fuller response to the book Hauerwas is more explicit in how he thinks Stout can help. "Put bluntly, this is a position with which we Christians not only can, but should want to, do business. Stout does try to give an account of democratic life that is not in the first place state theory. I am extremely sympathetic with that project. Stout's understanding of practical reason, the centrality of the virtues, as well as the democratic tradition not only makes it possible for us to have a conversation, but makes such a conversation imperative."<sup>52</sup>

We can return here to where we began in this essay: among five points we hoped to explore, perhaps fittingly located in the middle, we recall that it is Hauerwas's long view that Christianity does not need a theory about political systems to do its work—that is, to offer its critique and also fully engage with others in work toward common goods. Perhaps the clearest sign of this is Hauerwas's book with political scientist, non-Christian, and self-identified "radical democrat" Romand Coles entitled *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*.<sup>53</sup> The authors take pains to say how the book begins and ends in friendship. This came to be partly through working with shared graduate students at Duke University but also, as Coles tells the story, of his working side by side with Christians in Durham, North Carolina, or listening to "black (and white)

pastors channeling Christ and Moses,” speaking profoundly to “questions of race in Durham.”<sup>54</sup>

This description helps us see the sort of “engagement” Hauerwas has long held as necessary for the church. The difficulty Hauerwas sees with thinking about politics as “state theory” (and on this he and Coles are in rough agreement) is that it is insufficiently political and as such tricks Christians (and others) into thinking that their options for political engagement are limited to nation-state forms of political participation like voting in presidential elections or fighting over Supreme Court justices. For Christians especially this tempts them to become forgetful of the politics they already have or, as church, *are*. For his part, Coles was much influenced by the writings of Sheldon Wolin, whose work Hauerwas had read sympathetically and carefully, sharing it with his graduate students who were taking Coles’s classes. For Coles, Wolin offers a “radical democratic theory” that extends to the questions of what virtues and practices we need “to receive, gather and carefully engage each other.”<sup>55</sup> Hauerwas’s aversion to political theory (and Coles’s too) is that it blinds us to particulars, becoming an excuse not to exercise practical wisdom or prudence. Moreover, it carries along, justifies, and institutionalizes violence with a shrug—perhaps most apparent in Hobbesian political theory.

A point of agreement as Coles and Hauerwas begin their discussion is that a “politics of fear characterizes current American life.”<sup>56</sup> In America, this includes the “originating violence” by which it, and any nation-state, came to be. But, further, the violence running throughout political regimes such as that in the United States lies in a universal affirmation that our redemption comes in our authorization of the state, as in our “right of self-defense,” to kill others so that we can live as we like.<sup>57</sup> Such threat of violence, what Coles and Hauerwas call a “politics of death,” can breed only fear. By contrast, Hauerwas and Coles hope their discussion points toward a politics of hope, which will necessarily be complicated, fine-grained, practical, and “radically ordinary.” “We think that it is most vitally in and through concrete practices of tending to one another that people find the sources of renewal

and sustenance for a life-affirming politics—one that provides the most hopeful wellspring for defeating the politics of death.”<sup>58</sup>

Such a politics, Coles and Hauerwas together note, requires listening, patient listening, not only to one another but to those who have gone before. Moreover, the political activity they have in mind involves more directly the kind of congregating, organizing, and peaceful cooperation to bring benefits to people at a local level—what the church has been at work on throughout its existence. Many of the book’s chapters take up those who have thought and written outside the mainstream of political thought, such as Ella Baker or Michel Foucault (especially for Coles) and Will Campbell or Dorothy Day (for Hauerwas). The discussion is not limited to the relatively recent past but extends back as far as the fourth century to hear St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s oration “For the Love of the Poor.” Hauerwas is especially interested in Gregory’s descriptions of the poor, which, he tells us, are “unintelligible” under current assumptions “that science promises to give the power to be freed from the limits of the body . . . to save us from illness and death.”<sup>59</sup> By contrast, Gregory’s “descriptions of the afflicted seek to make them unavoidable citizens of the new politics coming to birth, called Christian . . . to make the poor seen, to make the poor part of the community, because unless they are seen as integral to the community, we will fail to see Christ.”<sup>60</sup>

This is what Hauerwas carries into the discussion with Coles and into any political encounter: Christian descriptions that are worked out in a long history nurtured by saints like Gregory, servants like Dorothy Day, or in the ordinary discourse of the church through time. This is the church’s language; if it is given up, traded in for something like “freedom of the individual” or “social justice,”<sup>61</sup> we will lose what we need to say truthfully who we are and who God is. And this cannot but affect how we are equipped to live well together in the world, which is of course at the heart of any politics. For Hauerwas, to act rightly in the world, morally and politically, we must see the world rightly, truthfully. The church bears crucial descriptions, stories, and practices that are vital for seeing truthfully, and so acting rightly. But the church learns what

its language really means, or what it has failed to say, or how it has betrayed its own voice, only as it listens to others who speak to it, like Coles to Hauerwas. As it listens and interacts, the church must continue to recognize that its key political task is to learn to speak its language better, train others in it, and enact it in its corporate life and its witness to the world.

Responding to Robert Wilken's description of Christianity as a culture-forming religion, and culture as a "pattern of inherited meanings and sensibilities embedded in rituals, institutions, laws, practices, images, and the stories of people," Hauerwas says, "Wilken's description of the conceptual revolution that was Christianity rightly directs attention to the significance of language at the heart of politics. That is why I resist any attempt to suggest that the church is one thing and politics something else."<sup>62</sup> He goes on, this time in agreement with Luke Bretherton,

[D]oing church and doing politics are both about the formation of shared speech and action that form a common world. . . . I take it that one of the characteristics of the current culture described as democratic is its loss of elegant speech. It is not simply the loss of elegance, but the fact that the language used in politics is intended to obscure rather than illumine. If, as Bretherton suggests, ecclesiology is politics by another name, the church can serve the world in which we find ourselves by attending to our speech. Well-formed sermons may turn out to be the most important contribution Christians can make to a politics that has some ambition to be truthful.<sup>63</sup>

If Hauerwas's assessment of political speech in our time is accurate—and it seems all the more so in 2022 than in 2015 when he wrote this—we can perhaps see why he has so accented the importance of distinctively Christian language and practices, rooted in a tradition that rests ultimately on the claim that a man who was executed in a spray of false charges, under the remarkably organized and efficient Roman political regime, was God

incarnate. The ongoing relevance of the politics Hauerwas represents draws us consistently back to this claim and to the necessity of a persistent and imaginative patience in the political lives of those who believe it.

On November 1, 2013, many of Hauerwas's friends and associates assembled at Duke Divinity School for his retirement party, which involved a full day of academic papers arguing one way or the other about what Hauerwas had gotten wrong or right. In the Christian calendar November 1 is All Saints Day, when Christians celebrate the gifts of the lives of dead saints. Hauerwas preached the sermon at the Eucharistic service many attended. He made something of the point that the day is for *all* saints, the "holy ones," and not only for those famous ones whose names we remember. He continued, "[S]etting apart a day for remembering the 'holy ones' is itself a political exercise." The holiness of these saints comes from their having "learned to live as citizens of the kingdom wrought by Christ," which is to live into a politics different from "the politics of the world—that is, those whose ambition is aimed at assuring they will not be forgotten."<sup>64</sup> Yet the church remembers the saints, without knowing all their names, and so keeps sharp a language and story they lived by, marking them as yet part of the communion, citizens in a political body that perdures.

### Conclusion

The sheer number of words Stanley Hauerwas has posted in the public domain is astonishing. One wonders how he continues to have more to say—although, of course, as a believing theologian he finds the riches of the Christian Gospel inexhaustible, and there is no end to the need for practical wisdom's exploration of our daily lives. Some of the sharp criticism he has aimed at the status quo in theology, ethics, or politics, meant to shock and provoke, may have occasionally gone too far, sometimes giving credence to the "sectarian" label that has led many in the theological world to react to his work, or dismiss it. Yet throughout his long career he has consistently pressed points that are fresh and new, points that help us rethink so many of our standardized assumptions.

It is always the responsibility, Hauerwas thinks, of Christian theologians to engage in the political thinking and dialogue of their time; today doing this especially requires critical thinking about nation-states. Since before the days of Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Rauschenbusch, nation-states remain the presumed primary unit of political discourse. So it was that Niebuhr assumed the Christian ethics could be relevant in America only if it spoke to America as such. Theologically, as Hauerwas has pointed out, there is slippage in this, for although it may sometimes have seemed otherwise in their wandering history, Christians who follow a crucified Lord cannot assume that triumphant ruling is what their politics is for. In fact, they must consistently be aware of the temptation to throw in with the political agendas of their day, agendas of power and control, rather than attending carefully to their own convictional language and story, which they say they believe is truthful about God and the world. To do this faithfully they do not need a political theory; rather, they need to sustain, develop, and pass on the skills and virtues that equip them to know how to speak and act from these convictions, resisting the tempting battle cries of their time that undercut them, while also imaginatively engaging with other insightful voices that will help them go on, thoughtfully and innovatively. None of this is about withdrawal; it is, rather, about faithful engagement, “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way.”<sup>65</sup>

This last quotation is, of course, from Aristotle. It is meant to remind us that the subtlety of the moral life (Aristotle is discussing virtue) and the demands of truthfulness in public spaces require a practical wisdom that is not simply our own but is upheld by traditions of thought and judgment in which we must participate if we are to sustain a common life and language that allows us to identify and pursue genuinely common goods through time. Hauerwas has attempted to do this throughout, especially mindful of the wisdom the Christian tradition has to offer, as it preserves the political distinctiveness of the Christian church and flows from it to irrigate the world.

### Notes

1. In truth we must add that Hauerwas sometimes replaces the term “American” with “Texan,” as in the subtitle of one of his many provocatively titled essays: “A Tale of Two Stories: On Being a Christian and a Texan,” *Perkins Journal* 34, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 1–15.
2. Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 182–83 (hereafter cited as *CET*). The title of the book is meant to echo Karl Barth’s *Theological Existence To-Day!* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), written in 1933, one year before the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which rejected Hitler’s takeover of the German Churches. Recently Hauerwas has called for “something like the Barmen Declaration” in response to President Donald Trump, especially his treatment of churches, synagogues, and mosques during the Covid 19 pandemic. See his “Apocalyptic Christianity, Democracy, and the Pandemic,” in *Democracy in Times of Pandemic: Different Futures Imagined*, ed. Paul Kahn and Miguel Maduro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 77–84. A fuller treatment of Hauerwas’s political theology would need to spend more time on Barth, for whom the church was also central to doing theology. Like Hauerwas, Barth discovered that the Protestant liberalism he inherited was insufficient to resist nationalism—that of Hitler. Barth reclaimed and revived the language of scripture and the church in his massive four-volume, multipart *Church Dogmatics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).
3. Hauerwas, *CET*, 183.
4. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 53.
5. See Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre’s jointly edited book *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). This book initiated the series.
6. Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 74 (hereafter cited as *HC*).
7. Hauerwas, *HC*, 59.
8. Stanley Hauerwas, “Remembering, Retractions and Revisions: A Bibliography of Books,” unpublished paper.
9. See Hauerwas’s “Obligation and Virtue Once More,” in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 3, no. 1 (1975): 27–44, part of an exchange with moral philosopher William Frankena.
10. Published as *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1975).



11. "The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic," in *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides/Claretian, 1974), 34.
12. "Martha Nussbaum on Luck," in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 89–90.
13. Importantly, Hauerwas speaks to the church not only as it connects to the academy but also as it assembles to worship. He has published a number of books of sermons and prayers. See, e.g., *Disrupting Time: Sermons, Prayers and Sundries* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2004). For a commentary on the significance of this part of Hauerwas's corpus, see Charles Pinches, "Considering Stanley Hauerwas," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 2 (2012): 193–201. Pinches's paper appears in a *Journal of Religious Ethics* symposium on Hauerwas's work that includes contributions from David Novak, Michael Northcott, Gilbert Meilaender, William Werpehowski, and Jennifer Herdt, with a response from Hauerwas himself.
14. Ramsey's classic treatment of medical ethics, originally published in 1972, is *The Patient as Person* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). Ramsey and Hauerwas collaborated on *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).
15. Hauerwas dedicates about a third of his medically focused *Suffering Presence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) to matters concerning the care of the mentally handicapped. His earlier *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) spends five of its twelve chapters considering medical care for children, especially the mentally handicapped.
16. As Aristotle holds, all other arts have their end in some highest art, and "politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state. . . . [N]ow, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man," which is, for Aristotle, the subject of ethics. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1, trans. W. D. Ross, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html> (hereafter cited as *NE*).
17. The Society of Christian Ethics, originally chartered in 1959, today has grown to roughly 850 members. Hauerwas served as president of the Society in 2011. See "History of the SCE," <https://www.scethics.org/history>.

18. See David Brooks's *New York Times* editorial "Obama, Gospel and Verse," <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/opinion/26brooks.html>.
19. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 87–88 (hereafter cited as *WGU*).
20. Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures, published as *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), especially volume 1, on human nature, display his view of original sin. Combined with his advocacy of democracy, the view leads to one of Niebuhr's most quoted phrases: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." *Children of Light and Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), xiii.
21. Hauerwas, *WGU*, 92.
22. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1913).
23. Walter Rauschenbusch's best-known work, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), was initially published in 1917.
24. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 72–73.
25. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 107. In the first two sections of this book, "The Church in the Time Called America" and "Christian Ethics in American Time," Hauerwas traces the history of Christian ethics in America that we have briefly summarized here. For Hauerwas the crucial theological mistake of Protestant liberalism (which yields many other mistakes) is the "assumption that Christianity is intelligible without a church" (256n168).
26. H. Richard Niebuhr learned this from his teacher Ernst Troeltsch. Troeltsch's *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), continues to be an oft-cited classic text in Hauerwas writing. See, e.g., Hauerwas's *Sanctify Them in the Truth* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1998), 22.
27. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 137–38 (hereafter cited as *PK*).
28. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Grace of Doing Nothing," *Christian Century* 49 (March 23, 1932): 380. Quoted in Hauerwas, *PK*, 138.
29. More often than not, Hauerwas's books are relatively loosely coupled collections of essays. While their ordering is always intentional, it might

have been otherwise. *The Peaceable Kingdom*, however, is meant, and written, as a systematic treatment whose chapters build upon one another.

30. Hauerwas, *PK*, 116.
31. Hauerwas, *PK*, 121.
32. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 208–9.
33. Of particular help in seeing how “story” functions for Hauerwas is “From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics” (with David Burrell), in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 15–39, and “The Narrative Character of Christian Social Ethics,” pt. 1 of *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 15–98.
34. Hauerwas, *PK*, 125.
35. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972). When Hauerwas came to teach at Notre Dame in Indiana, he discovered the work of Yoder, who taught a few miles away at the Mennonite seminary in Elkhart. Yoder’s theological work affected him deeply as it gave him a way to see how the Bible and the history of the church might be read more faithfully from the perspective of Christian pacifism. Near the end of his life, Yoder, who died in 1997, was revealed to have engaged in sexually abusive behavior toward women. Hauerwas has responded more than once to these troubling revelations. See his “In Defence of ‘Our Respectable Culture’: Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/in-defence-of-our-respectable-culture-trying-to-make-sense-of-jo/10095302>.
36. Hauerwas, *PK*, 99.
37. Hauerwas, *PK*, 78.
38. Hauerwas, *PK*, 83.
39. Mark 10:42–45. This passage is quoted and commented on in Yoder’s *Politics of Jesus*, 123.
40. Hauerwas, *PK*, 89.
41. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 85 (hereafter cited as *CC*).
42. John 1:10
43. Hauerwas, *CC*, 91.
44. Hauerwas, *CC*, 91.
45. Hauerwas, *PK*, 83.
46. Hauerwas, *PK*, 83.
47. Hauerwas, *CC*, 93–94.

48. Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 18.
49. Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 45–68.
50. See esp. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). The former is generally understood to be a sequel to *After Virtue*; the latter is MacIntyre's Gifford Lectures.
51. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 129.
52. Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 219. For a fuller account of the issues involved in this important exchange between Hauerwas and Stout, see William Cavanaugh, "A Politics of Vulnerability," in *Unsettling Arguments: A Festschrift on the Occasion of Stanley Hauerwas's 70th Birthday*, ed. Charles Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson, and Charles M. Collier (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 89–111, and Charles Pinches, "Stout, Hauerwas and the Body of America," *Political Theology* 8, no. 1 (January 2007): 9–31.
53. Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008) (hereafter cited as *CDRO*). Perhaps casting light on their earlier engagements, Jeffrey Stout writes on the dust jacket of this book: "This book gives me hope. It takes the conversation over Christianity and democracy in a most welcome direction: away from ism-mongering and abstractions, down to earth, where instructive and inspiring examples can be found."
54. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 11.
55. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 115. Coles is the primary writer of a full chapter on Wolin, 113–73. What Hauerwas has long seen—and here is a key way Hauerwas, Wolin, Coles, and Stout are all on the same page—is that a society cannot be just, cannot live together well, if it lacks a shared vision of the common good, some sense of what the virtues are, and practices and patterns of formation that can train its people in these virtues. Of course in America, despite all our talk about "democracy," the main way we are trained is by consumerist capitalism, which will bring us little else than competition, selfishness, and empty souls. The church, if it is to be the church, must train its members otherwise. Beyond that, the church also firmly believes that as human creatures made in the image

of God, they long to live together in peace and share in the common good. While not quite a political theory, this affirmation makes room for an ongoing investigation and articulation of these various shared goods and how communities need to sustain them. The social encyclicals of the Catholic church, beginning with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), [http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html), and continuing through Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html), are the clearest way in which the church has made this investigation and articulation its business. While not himself a Roman Catholic, Hauerwas has written often about these various encyclicals.

56. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 5.
57. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 7.
58. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 8.
59. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 243.
60. Hauerwas and Coles, *CDRO*, 234.
61. This is not to imply that Christians cannot work with those who carry other languages such as these phrases convey. For much of the work is good and should be joined. But it cannot be constitutive of the church's witness. And the other languages also must be critically examined. For instance, Hauerwas notes that *all* justice is social justice—and we should be concerned with all of it.
62. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 185–86 (hereafter cited as *WT*). The quotation from Wilken is from Robert Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.
63. Hauerwas, *WT*, 186. Hauerwas is responding to Luke Bretherton, “Coming to Judgment: Methodological Reflections on the Relationship between Ecclesiology, Ethnography, and Political Theory,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 2 (April 2012): 167–96.
64. Stanley Hauerwas, “A Homily on All Saints,” in *The Difference Christ Makes: Celebrating the Life, Work, and Friendship of Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. Charles Collier (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 2–3.
65. The quotation is from Aristotle, *NE* 2.6.