

**‘The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas as a Distinctively
Christian Theology of Liberation (1970-2000)’**

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Abstract

Of all the concepts that informed what is often called the Enlightenment Project, liberation is arguably central. Nevertheless the experience of the past 200 years has raised serious questions about the character of this liberation and its pathology. In particular, the place of Christian theology in sustaining concepts of freedom appears to have been marginalised in much post-Enlightenment thought, a challenge of particular significance to theologians and ethicists. Stanley Hauerwas represents one response to the manifestation of the Enlightenment Project in the United States, a response which, I believe, can be described as a distinctive theology of liberation chiefly from the Enlightenment legacy. This approach involves the integration of theology and ethics in the practices of a people whose identity is correlative to the particular narrative which they embody as that diachronic and synchronic, international community called Church. It also reflects an ambivalence about metaphysics and idealism and a preference for demonstrative, ecclesially mediated, truthful living. Yet the credibility of Hauerwas' ecclesiology as a genuinely Christian politics of liberation depends upon whether Hauerwas can not only identify the limitations of post-Enlightenment liberalism, but transcend them in a way that demonstrates the truthful character of the Christian narrative he believes to be embodied in this community called church.

In order to determine whether Hauerwas' Project is a genuinely Christian theology of liberation from the Enlightenment legacy, we shall need to gauge

the architecture of that project in chapter 1. Then, in chapter 2, we shall locate him in the wider post-Enlightenment debate, before doing the same in terms of the theological debate in chapter 3. This will bring us into conversation with his use of narrative and story as heuristic tools to resource the character of this ecclesiology in chapter 4, before our attempt, in chapter 5, to explore whether his ecclesial politics represent a distinctively Christian expression of liberty.

Chapter 1

An Introduction: Delineating an Architecture of Stanley

Hauerwas' Project

Section I: Recovering Christian Liberty

1:1 Introduction

'Linear exposition of a system has not to date been Hauerwas' greatest contribution'.¹ Indeed the variety, extent and occasional nature of his work makes any distillation of his thought a major challenge. Hauerwas is a writer of essays and sermons rather than books. His thought appears as that of a maverick rather than a systematic thinker, a preacher as much as an academic, yet the very provocative nature of his ideas and their colourful expression renders his work as engaging as it can be enigmatic. Nevertheless his considerable output over the past three decades reveals a coherent project rooted in his earliest writings and which achieves its distinctive shape with the publication of *The Peaceable Kingdom* in 1983. This first chapter will therefore seek to delineate an architecture of this emerging project with particular attention to its emancipatory suggestiveness. This will enable us thereafter to consider whether his ecclesiology offers a distinctively Christian theology of liberation from the Enlightenment legacy.

¹ Robert W. Jenson, 'The Hauerwas Project', *Modern Theology*, (July 1992), 285-95 (p285).

1:2 Questing for a Distinctively Christian Ethic: Agency, Character.

Virtue and Narrative

Hauerwas' earliest thought is expressed in the distillation of his doctoral thesis first published in 1975 as *Character and the Christian Life*.² In this work Hauerwas seeks to reintroduce concepts of virtue and character into Christian ethics in order to avoid an understanding of the self as passive and atomistic, implied by the occasionalistic nature of Protestant command ethics.³ In so doing Hauerwas sought to reanimate a discussion on sanctification, which in Barthian thought had been subsumed within justification, and thereby to introduce the notions of character and the virtues as a means of restoring the pivotal role of the agent in ethics. This also challenged a misplaced concentration upon acts and decisions in contemporary ethical theory by asserting that the formation of the agent's character over time informed the nature and status of ethical decisions.⁴

Sanctification, according to Hauerwas, must be distinguished from justification, not in order to legitimate a soft form of Pelagianism, but in order to enable a theological rationale for the display of Christian believing and therefore distinctive Christian ethics. Hence his reconsideration of the insights of Calvin, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards whose respective doctrines of sanctification suggested an approach that escaped both the intense historicism

² *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). The core of this thesis is also expressed in the essay 'Towards An Ethics of Character' in *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp. 43-67.

³ *Character and the Christian Life*, pp. 3, 129-77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p8.

of Barth and Bultmann and the anarchy of situation ethics. the unexpected offspring of their command ethics.⁵ In Hauerwas' discussion, command ethics' concern to root everything in grace and its preoccupation with the moment of decision is qualified by seeing sanctification, or the formation of character, as about living *out* of the establishment of the kingdom by Jesus Christ and as witness to this reign, rather than being an attempt to realise it.⁶ Character, he argues is 'the qualification of man's self agency through his beliefs, intentions, and actions, by which a man acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being'.⁷ Having a character is not about being a character in the popular sense, but is about living in a particular way in which it is asserted that 'man is more than that which simply happens to him'.⁸ It implies notions of integrity, consistency, responsibility, habit, and accountable willing. It also involves a particularity and sense of integration that distinguishes one agent from another more explicitly than the concept of virtues alone. Character, most pertinently from an ecclesiological perspective, also presumes a context and a

⁵ By 'the intense historicism of Barth and Bultmann', Hauerwas means the emphasis upon immediacy and historical particularity intrinsic to their rejection of rule-determined ethics, which engendered the emotivist subjectivity of situation ethics. In 'The Demands of a Truthful Story: Ethics and the Pastoral Task', *Chicago Studies*, 21/19 (Spring 1982), 59-71 (p.64), Hauerwas argues that Christian discipleship is like a journey where 'grace is not an eternal moment that makes history irrelevant, but rather is a notion that reminds us that God chooses to be the Lord whose kingdom consists in our concrete obedience through which we acquire a history befitting our nature as God's good creatures'. Hence for Hauerwas identity includes notions of duration, stability, action and agency. As we shall see in chapter 2. this protects him from more radical expressions of 'post-modernism' and keeps him sympathetic at least to modernism's quest for coherence. For a further example of this understanding of sanctification as a journey with the saints as exemplars see Stanley Hauerwas. 'Characterising Perfection: Second Thoughts on Character and Sanctification', in Theodore Runyon, ed. *Wesleyan Theology Today*, (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House. 1983), pp. 251-63 (p.253).

⁶ We shall address Hauerwas' eschatology in more detail in chapter 5.

⁷ *Character and the Christian Life*, p.1. In the introduction to the second edition of 1985, p.xx Hauerwas corrects what he sees as his earlier liberal notion of character by asserting that character is not the qualification of agency but its form, since the former implies an 'agent' antecedent to character, and the notion of actions per se being more fundamental than intelligible actions.

community from which moral norms, values and direction are drawn, yet has at its heart the notion of self-agency.⁹ Hence it includes a sense of tradition and history, whilst rejecting any hard determinism. Character above all is the agent's point of view, rather than that of the detached and abstract spectator so beloved of post enlightenment ethical theory.¹⁰ Yet equally 'the self that gives rise to agency is fundamentally a social self not separable from its social and cultural environment'.¹¹ Hence the agent is always engaged and a subject within a greater narrative than his/her own and thereby gains intelligibility from this anterior narrative world.¹²

Such a conception of the place of character in the moral life leads Hauerwas to retrieve the legacy of Aristotle and Aquinas, both of whom recognise that it is virtue rather than law which makes a good man. To have character, according to Aristotle, involves being able to give reasons for one's actions rather than specifying causes.¹³ It involves the development of practical reason or phronesis, an approach that does not simply judge an issue, but includes a description of it in the process. It is about having intentions, rather than simply being purposive, for intentions can only be articulated by the agent rather than

⁸ Ibid., p.15.

⁹ We shall explore the relationship between character, narrative and story in chapter 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.29.

¹¹ Ibid., p.33.

¹² The social formation and linguisticity of character protect Hauerwas from the charge of solipsist introspectivity. See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*. (London: Hutchinsons, 1949), pp. 15,16, 161-71. See also Anthony C. Thiselton on Wittgenstein in *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. (London: Harper Collins, 1992), especially pp. 21, 400, 501, 541, where the overlappings and consistencies of language use allow for a sedimentary stability of meaning to emerge. This will occupy us further in chapter 4.

¹³ *Character and the Christian Life*, p.42.

by the spectator.¹⁴ In addition the communicability of these explained intentions reveals the ‘social nature of action’ which is ‘but a reflection of the essential sociality of man’s nature’.¹⁵ Character is therefore something disclosed and is understood through attention rather than by empiricism. Equally it is character that indicates choice, rather than vice-versa for ‘by acting under one description rather than another the agent not only determines what he will do but also the kind of person he will be’.¹⁶ Hence consistency rather than definitive predictability is a by-product of character, for character, as a timeful reality, is open to development.

For Hauerwas this depiction of character questions which beliefs and resources inform the generation of a person’s identity, given its distinctiveness and particularity. For the Christian ‘to have Christian character is to have one’s attention directed by the description of the world that claims it has been redeemed by the work of Christ’.¹⁷ The intrinsically ecclesial nature of this is clear when he asserts that we are formed through the church and sanctification to see the world as redeemed in Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Yet this is not by abstract rules but by stories and metaphors which provide us with narrative accounts that suggest how we should see, since ‘the significance of stories is the significance of character for the moral life as our experience, itself, if it is to be coherent, is

¹⁴ Once again, Hauerwas is principally concerned to protect ethics from the reductionist tendencies of positivism and to recover responsibility as a moral possibility.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.96.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.113. For a parallel discussion of this notion of understanding as reciprocity see Anthony Thiselton’s discussion of Dilthey and Betti in Thiselton (1992). pp. 247-53.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.203. This approach invites a narrative approach to character as we shall explore further in chapter 4.

¹⁸ This connection is made in ‘Toward an Ethics of Character’ in *Vision and Virtue*, p.67. Hauerwas refers to his doctoral work on Calvin and Wesley to corroborate this point.

but an incipient story'.¹⁹ Although all are shaped by a variety of stories present in their cultural and biographical situation for the Christian the priority must be to attend to the substantive stories of the faith.

Whilst *Character and the Christian Life* reflects the generation of Hauerwas particular ethical trajectory, it is in the essays of these early years that we see the way his project develops. Although his first collection of essays, *Vision and Virtue, Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*, was published in 1974, there are several others from the same period which reflect Hauerwas' determination that the 'central intention and unifying focus of these essays is the attempt to do responsible and constructive ethical reflection'.²⁰ This is articulated in the face of those who decry the possibility of a distinctive Christian ethic, given the dislocation of religion and morality in much post-Enlightenment ethics, the apparent sectarianism of past Christian ethical endeavour and the pluralist culture of academic departments. At this early stage of his career, Hauerwas expresses concern at the 'narrow conception of the moral experience accepted by many philosophers and religious ethicists',²¹ and asserts that ethics is not simply about the justification for particular actions and practices. As a confessedly Christian ethicist, Hauerwas maintains that the Gospel is about

the nature of the self and how it is formed for our life
project [and that] once ethics is focused on the nature and

¹⁹Cf 'The Self as Story: A Reconsideration of the Relation of Religion and Morality From the Agent's Perspective', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 68-89 (p.74). In chapter 4 we will discuss to what extent at this stage Hauerwas is rooting narrative in a foundationalist anthropology akin to Stephen Crites.

²⁰ *Vision and Virtue*, p.1.

²¹ Ibid. Hauerwas is referring to the preoccupation with decisions at the expense of any deeper attention to character and its attendant implications.

moral determination of the self, vision and virtue again become morally significant categories. We are as we come to see and as that seeing becomes enduring in our intentionality. We do not come to see, however, just by looking but by training our vision through the metaphors and symbols that constitute our central convictions. How we come to see therefore is a function of how we come to be since our seeing necessarily is determined by how our basic images are embodied by the self, i.e. our character.²²

For Hauerwas as a Christian thinker these basic images are to be tested against the conviction that 'the world has been redeemed by the work and person of Christ'.²³

Such a pregnant introduction reveals much of Hauerwas' distinctive project present at the outset of his academic career. The priority of vision and formation in ethics, an appreciation of the centrality in ethics of notions of virtue and character and the sense that a distinctive reservoir of formative convictions has to be identified are quite explicit. Similarly Hauerwas is beginning to grasp the relationship between ethics and church through his exposition of Yoder's theological ethics, although it is still clear that most of his attention at this stage remains focused upon the self as the principal agent in

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p.2. For a more extensive discussion of Hauerwas' soteriology and its relationship to Barth see below chapter 3.

displaying Christian character.²⁴ This he later qualifies as the role of the community supplants that of the singular 'liberal' self.²⁵

Hauerwas' concern with impoverished Christian ethics emerges particularly in his engagement with Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics and the 'new morality' emerging in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Whilst acknowledging a greater appreciation of the contingency and historicity of ethical decision in Fletcher, the latter's concentration on the centrality of the decision is too simplistic, since it assumes that the situation is an uncontested given. This continues the positivist myth of spectator neutrality and posits an abstract agent, whose own contingency and historicity is ignored. For Hauerwas a better metaphor of the moral life is 'like an artist engaged in his work rather than a critic making a judgement about a finished product'.²⁶ The moral life is not about fixed entities confronting each other as situation and decision maker arbitrated by an ambiguous concept called 'love'. Rather both the situation and the agent are in formation, a process that does not lead to anarchic subjectivism, since the agent is not isolated but part of a substantial community, whose language embodies moral convictions. As such it is not the decision that creates value, for values anticipate decision making, embedded as they are in the linguistic community of the agent. Indeed it is the formation of the agent that bridges this apparent divide, since such formation frames and names the 'situation' in terms of the agent's own linguistically mediated convictions. 'To

²⁴ 'The Non-Resistant Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 197-240.

²⁵ See above, footnote 7.

²⁶ Cf 'Situation Ethics, Moral Notions and Moral Theology', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 11-29 (p.14).

learn moral notions is in effect to act upon the world as it trains our vision about the world' and 'the moral life is a struggle and training in how to see'.²⁷ For Hauerwas this priority of sight before decision indicates that moral judgements are never abstract or deductive but emerge from within a particular moral way of life. Against Barth, he sees the ethical 'good' not as determined solely by God's immediate, transcendent and contemporarily revealed command, but as rooted in 'reflection on our received human experience as to what is good, bad, right and wrong'.²⁸

The substance of this vision of the moral life is derived from Iris Murdoch's critique of modern 'ageric' man; man as independent, self-made and self confident acting through the use of the will and ever the prisoner of self deception.²⁹ Murdoch argues that the moral life is a way of seeing the world, which requires difficult training and a notion of the 'Good' that is to be attended to. In short ethics is primarily about aesthetics and involves respect for the otherness and particularity of reality, which Murdoch calls 'love'. Attention rather than will is at the heart of the moral life and hence

moral goodness is not automatically open to all, but is an
esoteric achievement that requires discipline and training
[...] moral progress is won through meditation and morality

²⁷ Ibid., p.19.

²⁸ Ibid., p.28. A discussion on Hauerwas' relationship to Barth follows in chapter 3.

²⁹ Cf 'The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 30-47 (pp. 30-36), for Hauerwas' discussion of Murdoch's concept of 'ageric man'. Murdoch's influence on Hauerwas will become evident in the discussion to follow on Hauerwas' disenchantment with liberal philosophy and ethics mediated by his interaction with the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr. We shall delineate this relationship more explicitly in chapter 3.

is more a matter of purity of heart than of external choices.³⁰

Such a perspective enables Hauerwas to recover the distinctiveness of both the vision and language of Christian living since being a Christian is learning 'to see the world under the mode of the divine'.³¹ Hence, following Barth, it is important not to try to translate Christian concepts into secular terms, but rather than trying to fit this language into the world, the important challenge is to transform the self to fit the language for 'the problem is to become as we see'.³²

The subsequent essays in *Vision and Virtue* seek an outworking of the above in terms of the specific challenges of the 'new morality', whose ethical criterion of love Hauerwas identifies as a sentimental abstraction rather than a concept governed by the Gospel. Indeed Hauerwas sees in this capitulation to sentimentality a false apologetic strategy to make relevant Christian ethics for the wider world, thereby becoming enslaved to the latter. This makes contemporary convention the arbiter of Christian believing and again fails to see that the credibility of an ethic is not in its relevance, but in its faithfulness to a community's inherited wisdom present in its language, practices and institutions. Given that Jesus didn't die for promoting an ethic of sentimentality, the church must expect 'the possibility that the apologetics of a true and faithful conception of the Christian life may create not more, but fewer

³⁰ Ibid., p.42. In this Hauerwas echoes the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament.

³¹ Ibid., p.46.

³² Ibid.

men who will walk in the way'.³³ Indeed Hauerwas' vision of a more delineated church, self consciously separated from the world (understood as those who do not yet believe), is already evident in this comment, for it is precisely the character of life engendered by following the sort of love that the cross speaks of which acts as the falsifiable criterion needed to underwrite the truth claims of the faith.³⁴ Hence for Hauerwas tangible and trained character rather than theoretical belief is the sign of the church, for it is the story of the love of God in Christ crucified that we must be trained in.³⁵ Such a vigorous love attends to moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia and the retarded from within the perspective suggested by this character formation. Discipleship is determined by descriptions. Indeed as we allow these descriptions to shape us we become aware of the particularity of the practices of the Christian community. These include the importance of listening, given our grasp of agency and character and attending to the wise or saints in our community in consequence of our appreciation of the apprenticed nature of learning. We are also able to care for the weak with patience and hope and without fear of death and our treatment of the retarded and dying is without an eye to the harvest of organs for utilitarian purposes. In addition awareness of character and agency correlative with Christian believing implies a vision of medicine as an art dependent upon the story of the patient and the community's recognition of this distinctive relationship.³⁶ Hauerwas' vision of church as a community that can sustain such

³³ Cf 'Aslan and the New Morality', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 96-110 (p.102).

³⁴ For a more extensive engagement with Hauerwas' understanding of truth and truthfulness see chapter 4. Chapter 5 expounds how Christian politics provides the context for the emergence of truth.

³⁵ Cf 'Love's Not All You Need', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 112-26 (p.117).

³⁶ The particular way Hauerwas relates medicine and suffering will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

an ethic and witness to this is already evident in the particular attention the church should have for the care of the retarded in contrast to a utilitarian abstract compassion that would destroy the weak in the name of reducing suffering.

The distinctive place of ecclesial pacifism or peaceableness, as Hauerwas increasingly prefers to call it, is also evident in his earliest work.³⁷ In 1972 whilst discussing Troeltsch's work in 'The Future of Christian Social Ethics', Hauerwas identifies the issue of violence as central, commenting that 'the consistent difficulty of the Church type, the call for Christians to be responsible, is that being such we become the world. At this point I suspect the question of violence is the question of Christian ethics'.³⁸ In the essays 'The Non-resistant Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder' and 'Messianic Pacifism', Hauerwas' debt to Yoder is made explicit.³⁹ As mentioned above, it is the latter's intensely Christological focus which impresses Hauerwas. For this is not an abstract doctrinal Christology but a view that the pattern of the life of Jesus exhibits the pattern of the Kingdom whose heart is self-giving non-resistant love. Thus, 'pacifism is not an independent norm that determines the meaning of Christ, but Christ and discipleship to him requires a stance of non-

³⁷ Hauerwas comes to see that pacifism names an abstract position, whereas peaceableness is a way of being rather than a position. This will become particularly significant when we discuss the character of Hauerwas peaceable community in chapter 5.

³⁸ 'The Future of Christian Social Ethics' in George Divine, ed., *That They May Live: Theological Reflections on the Quality of Life* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1972), pp. 123-130 (p.130). In chapter 5 we shall explore Hauerwas' particular understanding of Christian responsibility.

³⁹ *Vision and Virtue*, pp.197-221 and 'Messianic Pacifism', *Worldview*, 16/6 (1973), 29-33. A fuller discussion of Yoder's influence upon Hauerwas will also appear in chapter 5.

resistance to evil',⁴⁰ and God does not achieve his victory by coercion but by creating a non resistant church. Hence the key to such pacifism is a Messianic community with a distinctive social ethic. Yoder's rejection of Constantinianism, which he sees as a confusing conflation of the world, that is the state or society, with church, entails a consequent loss of peaceful Christian love in the face of the intrinsic violence of the world.⁴¹ Hence Yoder's critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's pragmatic social ethic with its assumption of a Christian stake in the preservation of the status quo and its effective justification of violence, all inform Hauerwas' ecclesiology. Thus Hauerwas asserts,

Jesus did not bring an admonition to be concerned with the political; rather Jesus brought a definite form of politics by calling men to participation in a non-resistant community.⁴²

Yoder's contention that the church cannot withdraw from the world because it is in the midst of it and that the Gospel is not a welfare agenda or the blueprint for an ideal society but rather the proclamation that the Kingdom is among us, are also themes that re-emerge time and again in Hauerwas' later work as we shall see. For Hauerwas what is attractive about Yoder's social, (understood as ecclesial), ethics, is that they are based upon the redemption achieved by Christ. They are inconceivable unless Christ's work has been accomplished, in contrast to most Christian ethics which appears to function as if Christ does

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.202.

⁴¹ Constantinianism for Yoder and Hauerwas represents an attempt by the Christian community to rule the world through a coercive imposition of its agenda upon those whose freedom to believe is thereby compromised. In chapter 5 we shall explore the plausibility of this understanding of the world, state, society and church.

⁴² *Vision and Virtue*, p.30.

not reign. It is Yoder who reveals to Hauerwas that the fundamental question distinguishing them from Niebuhr and other Christian 'realists' is the meaning of history.⁴³ The Christian story locates that meaning in the way of the cross, understood not as a symbol of undeserved suffering, or political abuse, but as the inevitable consequence of a peaceable way of living in a violent world. However, the identity of the one on the cross, which is also displayed in the story of his life when combined with the vindication of the resurrection, indicates that this pattern of being in the world is the way of witnessing to the reign of God. The implications of such dualism, though, are more subtle. Whilst the church and the world, share the same space, they no longer exist in the same time or indeed in the same history. This, though, is not a metaphysical dualism but one reflecting posture, for the world is 'all of that in creation that has not yet taken the freedom to believe',⁴⁴ and 'the Christian ethic presupposes a duality of response without implying a duality of orders'.⁴⁵

Thus Hauerwas finds in Yoder's Christological pacifism a key resource to develop the implications of his work on character, for character also implies a particular community of formation. From Yoder Hauerwas came to see that Christian believing as an anticipation of the full disclosure of this Kingdom intrinsically requires a distinctive pacific community called church and that therefore 'the first duty of the church for society is to be the church'.⁴⁶ It is as a witness that the church fulfils its calling rather than being the underwriter of

⁴³ For a discussion on this see chapter 3.

⁴⁴ *Vision and Virtue*, p.32.

⁴⁵ *Vision and Virtue*, p.206.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.211.

social convention, for only as witness will what is distinctive about it be apparent for 'in a sense the church is most relevant to society when it is self regarding', that is loyal to Christ.⁴⁷ Hauerwas' criticisms of Yoder at this stage focus upon his quasi Barthian positivist understanding of revelation, which is in danger of being historicist, and the apparent intensity of Yoder's dualism between church and world, since for Hauerwas Christ has redeemed both.⁴⁸ This enables Hauerwas to suggest that analogies such as that between fellowship and society can be employed and that notions of justice in the world are not wholly devoid of God's presence. Yoder, for Hauerwas, does not adequately indicate how Christians should be responsible for participating in the concerns of wider society. Equally his approach to the state is too negative and a-contextual.

Even though Yoder's theological position is clear, he has not yet developed explicitly enough its socio-political co-ordinates. He is right to argue that we have taken too seriously the perspective of the powerful or those wishing to attain power in our social ethics, but surely some positive legitimate authority must be assumed if our ethical reflection is not to take place in a vacuum.⁴⁹

Hauerwas is concerned that non resistance serve the weak and innocent rather than capitulating to the powerful and hence he explicitly identifies the need for the state. This is an important affirmation to note since Hauerwas later attracts

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.216.

⁴⁸ It is questionable whether Hauerwas' reading of Yoder is fair at this point as we shall see in chapter 5.

⁴⁹ *Vision and Virtue*, p.33.

the criticism that his project, like Yoder's approach, implies an inherent ambivalence about the state as such.⁵⁰

Hauerwas's early work on character and its political implications inform his approach to liberal democratic theory and its pathology. As he notes 'our problem is not that democracy has not worked in America, but that it has, and the will of the people has turned out to be less than admirable'.⁵¹ In one of his earliest essays, 'Politics, Vision and the Common Good' Hauerwas notes the pervasiveness of the liberal agenda in even the 'new politics' of the counter culture movement and especially in interest group politics, each of which has no substantial understanding of community or the common good.⁵² This contrasts, with the church as a distinctively theologically determined community.⁵³ Such a people should not be seduced by the demands to be relevant to contemporary society, but instead should be directed by a vision formed by an imagination rooted in the language, traditions and practices of the ecclesial community. This is further reinforced as he engages with the 'theologians of revolution', such as Paul Lehmann, whose rejection of Niebuhrian realism and the notion of the balance of power posits, naïvely, the political realm as a realm of truth and thereby intensifies the Niebuhrian underwriting of violence as central to the possibility of politics. For Hauerwas

⁵⁰ In this Hauerwas is closer to Jacques Ellul, although he finds Ellul's equation of necessity with violence problematic, since it seems to imply that finitude is intrinsically violent as well. See Hauerwas' 'Review of Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*', *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 18 (1973), 206-215.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² 'Politics, Vision and the Common Good' in *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 222-240

⁵³ *Vision and Virtue*, p.239.

all these approaches are not radical but philosophically conservative, dependent as they are upon the presuppositions of liberalism.

In contrast

the story found in the Gospels is more radical than either revolutions or the established powers can contain [...] the relevance of the Gospel does not depend on Christians being able to locate epiphanies of God's kingdom, whether in revolution, or elsewhere. All we know is that God makes his Kingdom a reality - our task is to be obedient to the form of silence and submission we find in the cross of Christ.⁵⁴

In all of this Hauerwas is beginning to challenge an uncritical alliance between the Christian community and American democracy, which he detects in much American Christianity.⁵⁵ He does, though, recognise the pedigree of American democracy in the ecclesiology of the Puritan fellowship of equals, finding here a resource for engaging with the political structures in the contemporary world.⁵⁶

Hauerwas' earliest publications expose the foundations of his theological ethics and especially their ecclesiological and emancipatory implications. His work on character has raised questions about the plausibility of liberal thought,

⁵⁴ 'Review' of Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics: The Presence and Power of Jesus of Nazareth in and over Human Affairs*, *Worldview*, 18/12 (1975), 45-48 (p.48). This early ambivalence about theologies of revolution informs Hauerwas' criticism's of much Liberation Theology as we shall see in chapter 5. For a particularly aggressive attack on Lehmann and the anthropocentric politics he represents see 'The Ethicist as Theologian', *Christian Century*, 92/15 (23 April 1975), 408-12 (p.412).

⁵⁵ 'Theology and the New American Culture', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 241-60 (p.241).

⁵⁶ In chapter 5 we shall look at the way Oliver O'Donovan's political theology seeks to demonstrate that western politics are parasitic upon Christian believing.

refocussed attention upon the church and illustrated the pathology of liberal ethics in its outworkings. From the mid 70s his work is a development and refining of these initial expositions. Certainly his second book of essays *Truthfulness and Tragedy* underlines the theses outlined above, particularly his use of character as a means of avoiding both the simplifications of what he calls the standard ethical account as well as the superficial attractions of relativism and subjectivism.⁵⁷ Equally his approach challenges the minimalist, or ‘thin’, ethics which identify the public or spectator point of view as the moral one.

For Hauerwas a good society needs a more substantial ethic to survive and one which respects the complexity of the self and the presence of the tragic in life, rather than regarding the latter as the result of inadequate moral reflection. It is precisely the tragic which disturbs the tendencies to self deception he discerns in liberal thought, especially the view that human cognition can ultimately comprehend and control everything.⁵⁸ Similarly the tragic speaks about the reality of finitude, which liberal thought, he believes, seeks always to transcend or remove in its quest for freedom and happiness.⁵⁹ Indeed it is this very timeful character which requires a narrative construal. Hence ‘the need to have a sense of self that gives a critical perspective to our roles is correlative to the self being formed by a truthful narrative’,⁶⁰ that is one that seeks not to avoid the

⁵⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, with Richard Bondi and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1977).

⁵⁸ This insight comes from Murdoch and is reiterated in ‘The Theologian as Ethicist’, p.410.

⁵⁹ The relationship between the tragic and liberal thought will be explored in chapter 3, whilst the way the tragic forces questions of the character of truth and truthfulness to the fore will be discussed in chapter 4. Hauerwas’ contention is that Christian freedom can include the tragic given the hope intrinsic to its story. Liberal thought is fundamentally ambivalent about dissonance and finitude.

⁶⁰ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p.5.

tragic but to story it within a hopeful narrative. Such a narrative is community dependent, traditioned, necessarily timeful and embodied and is, for Christians, called the church. Hence whilst

the people of the church so have a responsibility to the societies in which they dwell [...] their first responsibility is to embody their story in a manner that witnesses to the necessity that all men face the limits of this world with joy, good humour and enthusiasm.⁶¹

The truthfulness of this story therefore is not established metaphysically, but in terms of the way it forms and displays practical living and, given the community dependency of ethical discourse, there is a necessary relationship between truthfulness and community.⁶² Since we all inhabit a variety of communities, the key is to identify our primary community with its stories and consequent ethics and to allow this to form our characters most explicitly. Only by so doing can the church properly serve wider society. Nevertheless since ‘universal community exists only as eschatological hope. All we know is the particular and limited communities that have formed us and that we have chosen’.⁶³ Hence there will always be a measure of pluralism inherent in the way the Christian story is displayed. Therefore whilst ‘the church does have a

⁶¹ Ibid., p.6.

⁶² This inevitably raises the question of the emplotment of the story. Through attention to Paul Ricoeur’s work, discussed in chapter 2 and especially in the discussion of Hauerwas’ use of narrative in chapter 4 we will seek to suggest the distinctive way Hauerwas emplots the Christian story through Christ in the church.

⁶³ Ibid., p.10. We shall engage at greater length with pluralism in chapters 3 and 4. On question at this stage, though, is how Hauerwas’ thought squares with the call of St Paul to unity in 1 Corinthians. The one body of Christ is used to contrast with the pluralist sectarianism of the Corinthian Christians. I am indebted to Professor Thiselton for this insight.

social, ethical responsibility toward wider society [...] it is a task that she must fulfil on her own terms' and, by implication, in context.⁶⁴

The importance of this shift from abstract rationality to storied living is evident in the critique Hauerwas makes upon both deontologists and utilitarians in the essay 'From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics'.⁶⁵ In this he underwrites his ethical assertions with a critical exposition of the self as traditioned and hence storied, implying that the abstract universalising Enlightenment goal of a singular and universal ethic, ignores both the place of character and the individual as a narrative construct instead promoting an ethic based upon the an abstract individual in an attempt 'to free moral behaviour from the arbitrary and contingent nature of the agent's beliefs, dispositions and character'.⁶⁶ Formation is therefore ignored and the presumption is that community specific moral training is inessential in order to live well. In contrast Hauerwas believes that it is the steady training through a narrative which seeks to see truthfully that properly directs us to what is good for 'ethical objectivity cannot be secured by retreating from narrative, but only by being anchored in those narratives that best direct us toward the good'.⁶⁷ Hence 'the test of each story is the sort of person it shapes'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.11.

⁶⁵ Stanley Hauerwas and David D. Burrell, 'From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics', *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 15-39.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.16.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.35. Truth understood as praxis echoes liberation theology as we shall see in chapter 4.

As we shall discuss further in chapter 4, narrative provides Hauerwas with a way of presenting the Christian story as truly liberative from the Enlightenment legacy. At this stage we simply note how narrative, character and community are correlative and expose the inadequacies of alternative ethical suggestions, for ecclesially mediated and tradition informed character intrinsically shapes vision and names situations. This provokes a distinctive treatment of ethical issues such as suicide, euthanasia, population control, abortion, retarded children and charity, as seen in a particular way and through a distinctive language. Indeed Hauerwas seeks to expose not only the terrible human cost that the utilitarian consequentialist ethics of the strong has imposed upon the marginal and weak of society, but also displays how the Christian story re-narrates the significance of those whom the liberal account regards as expendable.

Such a repositioning of the marginal and weak as key to the way the Christian story is displayed brings Hauerwas very close to the intentions of many Liberation Theologians as we shall see in chapter 5. It also displays the homogenising and imperialistic tendencies intrinsic to liberalism as it seeks to eradicate the 'other' represented in the unwanted child or aged, as it seeks to reduce the variety of population challenges around the world to a single problem and in its preoccupation with abstract efficiency at the expense of the particularity represented by the likes of Hauerwas' Uncle Charlie.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For Hauerwas' early discussions on these themes see Stanley Hauerwas and L. John Roos, 'Ethics and Population Policy' in Virginia Gray and Elihu Bergmen, eds, *Political Issues in U.S. Population Policy* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1975), pp. 198-205; 'Selecting Children to Live or Die: An Ethical Analysis of the Debate between Dr Lorber and Dr Freeman on the Treatment of Meningomyelocele' in Denis Horon and David Mall, eds.

Thus Hauerwas is ambivalent about slogans such as 'right to life', which can appear as abstract unstoried universals disassociated from correlative duties. Indeed it is not clear that doctors have a duty to keep us alive at all costs.⁷⁰ In the Christian community a good death is one that leaves a good memory which will sustain the church's ongoing life, whilst awareness of being a historical community indicates why descendants matter to the church. In contrast,

suicide and euthanasia contribute to the erosion of community [...] suicide does horrible damage to memory, for it eradicates a history that is the same as the self [...] whilst [...] there is nothing wrong with being a burden! The care of the elderly is a crucial act for witnessing our celebration of their lives and ours.⁷¹

Likewise abortion and the retarded question the purpose, place and reproduction of children in a liberal society. Christians demonstrate, in their willingness to have such folk in their midst, a particular witness to the Lordship of Christ. This is because, like the Jews, their tradition is quite unlike liberalism's narcissistic teleology of self-fulfilment which renders the nurturing of children problematic. Children and especially retarded children, belong

Death, Dying and Euthanasia (Washington D.C: University Publications of America, 1977), pp. 228-49; 'Must a Patient be Born a Person to be a Person? Or My Uncle Charlie Is Not Much of a Person But He is Still My Uncle Charlie', *Connecticut Medicine*, 39/12 (December 1975), 815-817; 'Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children', *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 147-57 and 'The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human' in *Linacre Quarterly*, 40/4 (November 1973), 217-22.

⁷⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and Richard Bondi, 'Memory, Community and the Reasons for Living: Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia', *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 44/3 (September 1976), 439-52.

⁷¹ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 112-14.

within a community whose story is orientated to welcoming the stranger and the apparently tragic into its midst with hope, since the story it carries is rooted in the character of the God they worship.

Section II: Recovering Ecclesial Liberty

1:3 Unfolding the Church's Character; A Community Freely Embodying the Emancipatory Story of God

Hauerwas' work in the 1970s displays the foundations upon which his ecclesiological project is based, foundations that increasingly lead him to attend to the existence of church, rather than building upon the more contentious existents of post-Enlightenment reason or metaphysics. As he comments in 'The Ethicist as Theologian', this journey is one in which theology is seen not as an ideology for, 'ethics is at the heart of theology because the grammar of Christian discourse is fundamentally practical'.⁷² Consequently, drawing upon the insights of James Gustafson's *Christ and the Moral Life*, the theological task is to equip Christians with the skills they needs to live out their distinctive story-formed character, free from the corruption introduced by liberal assumptions.⁷³ Hence Hauerwas' particular interests in bio-medical ethics and democratic theory. In generating this project Hauerwas also notes his debt to John Austin's work on illocutionary acts in order to 'remind us that religious discourse has the characteristics of performance'.⁷⁴ Thus for Hauerwas training is essential since getting our language or speaking right is the key to the moral life. In consequence, as we have seen, this leads Hauerwas, through his attention to the work of Hans Frei, to appropriate narrative and story for his project so long as they are seen as no more than heuristic tools for exposing the

⁷² 'The Ethicist as Theologian', p.408.

⁷³ For Hauerwas criticism of Gustafson's later work as metaphysical and idealistic and thereby a retreat into liberal theology see 'God the Measurer: A Review of Gustafson's *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*', *Journal of Religion*, 62/ 4 (December 1982), 402-411.

⁷⁴ 'The Ethicist as Theologian', p.409. This is an important debt whose implications we shall return to in chapter 4.

character of theology.⁷⁵ Similarly story also underwrites Hauerwas' ambivalence about the dominance of theology by 'great theologians' and 'positions' since these locate theology in minds rather than practices and play down contingency and historicity.⁷⁶

What characterises the development of Hauerwas' thought towards the end of the 70s is his increasing awareness of the intrinsic nature of the church as the community without which his work on character, virtue and distinctiveness, and all that he has imbibed from Yoder, are unsustainable. It is this recognition that informs his seminal collection of essays, published in 1981, *A Community of Character*, in which he sought

to reassert the social significance of the church as a distinctive society with an integrity peculiar to itself [...] the truth of whose convictions cannot be divorced from the sort of community the church is and should be.⁷⁷

He thereby attempted to generate a specific politics of the church in a way that suggested a particular sort of separateness from the world which would free the church to live out that identity truthfully. Hauerwas intensified his understanding of the place of the church in Christian living by arguing that, since all communities and polities embody a correlative and particular narrative, character formation is at the heart of ethical living. Hence the question he is attempting to answer is 'what kind of community the church

⁷⁵ The work of Hans Frei and other Yale theologians in his tradition will be discussed further in chapters 3 and 4.

⁷⁶ 'The Ethicist as Theologian', p.410.

⁷⁷ *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, 4th edn, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p.1.

must be to rightly tell the stories of God?'.⁷⁸ In short Hauerwas has come to see that the key issue is not simply abstract narrative guiding a community, but the embodiment of that narrative in a community's ongoing life. In the course of this debate some of the fiercest arguments against liberalism are articulated to explain why this story so subverts the possibility not only of the moral life but, by infecting the Christian community, corrupts its freedoms and ultimate loyalties.

A Community of Character begins with 10 Theses which Hauerwas uses to articulate the architecture of his theology to date and which he regards as an agenda for the development of his project. Immediately evident in each thesis is a concentration upon the social character of Christian ethics consequent upon its fundamentally ecclesial nature, a development which rectifies the individualism evident in *Character and the Christian Life*. Similarly the pivotal place of narrative in identifying and sustaining a community is much more emphatically asserted. Hauerwas had begun to appreciate the connection between vision, character and story in *Vision and Virtue*.⁷⁹ and had underlined this in several of the essays in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*.⁸⁰ However it is this explicit connection that underwrites all that he now articulates for 'the social significance of the Gospel requires the recognition of the narrative structure of

⁷⁸ Ibid., p4. Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis engage with this insight more fully, especially the relationship between the notions of the Story of God and the stories of God, the notions of integrity and of plurality.

⁷⁹ 'The Self as Story', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 68-89.

⁸⁰ See especially in *Truthfulness and Tragedy* the essays, 'From System to Story', 'Story and Theology' and 'Self Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*', pp.15-39, 71-81, 82-98.

Christian convictions for the life of the church'⁸¹ and 'every social ethic involves a narrative'.⁸² Indeed the truthfulness of a narrative is substantially established by the capacity of its protagonists to live it consistently and as agents.⁸³ Hence the church's primary social task is to live its story as a people on a journey convinced of the lordship of God in the world and serving the world on the terms implied by this cross informed story. Attempts to be relevant to the dominant liberal agenda capitulate to an alien narrative and thereby subvert the integrity of the church.⁸⁴ This, as we shall see, undermines the conviction that the freedom of the church is an epistemological prerequisite for understanding the salvation of God.

As we shall see in chapter 4 at the heart of his ecclesiology is the conviction that Jesus is only known through the church for his life is a social ethic in so far as 'the truthfulness of Jesus creates and is known by the kind of community his story should form'.⁸⁵ This furthermore situates the Scriptures within the politics of the church as we shall later discuss, for the canon of Scripture represents those stories which express the forgiving life of God experienced by God's

⁸¹ *A Community of Character*, p.9.

⁸² Ibid. For a more substantial articulation of narrative and story that emerges from this insight see 'The Demands of a Truthful Story: Ethics and the Pastoral Task', *Chicago Studies*, 21/1 (Spring 1982), 59-71 (p.62). Here Hauerwas cautions against the narcissistic appeal of story in liberal thought evident in the contemporary quest for ancestral roots as the means of locating individual's real identity. The insights from this essay will fuel our discussion of narrative in Hauerwas in chapter 4.

⁸³ This capacity to own one's history as a criterion of a truthful lifestory will be looked at in more detail in chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Hauerwas' engagement with liberalism is multifaceted as we shall discuss in chapter 3. However here he defines liberalism as the belief that 'society can be organised without any narrative that is commonly held to be true', *ibid.*, p.11

⁸⁵ 'Jesus the Story of the Kingdom', *A Community of Character*, pp. 36-52 (p.37). A fuller discussion of Hauerwas' understanding of truth and truthfulness will take place in chapter 4. In particular his preference for a pragmatic approach in which truth and truthfulness are about credibility more than about ontology will be discussed.

people and the tradition called church is an ongoing argument about the way these should be interpreted.⁸⁶ Appealing to Scripture for Hauerwas is appealing not to texts but to a narrative community called church.⁸⁷

This concentration upon the distinctive and political role of the church provides Hauerwas with his most evident contrast with the dominant liberal position that he is reacting against, for the latter's atomistic individualism, acidic assault upon tradition and community, its confusion of authority with authoritarianism, freedom with licence, and the internal contradictions of both neo-conservatism and the political left contrast sharply with his vision of the church. For Hauerwas a church is a school of virtue rooted in an apprentice model of education, whose authorities, the saints, are those who have more fully appropriated and displayed the faith and, in particular are able to educate other disciples in living and dying in ways appropriate to the story. Only a community with a narrative that can embrace its history and tradition and speak of unity in diversity can escape the implosion of deontological and utilitarian ethics. These presume both a universal ethic and yet an individualism which subverts it, since the latter generates an anarchy of fragmented 'goods' rather than any notion of an agreed common good.

⁸⁶ On the importance of forgiveness for the possibility of any community's ongoing existence see 'Forgiveness and Political Community', *Worldview*, 23/1-2 (January - February 1980), 15-16.

⁸⁷ This informs how Hauerwas distinguishes himself from Barth and indeed the 'Yale theologians' such as Lindbeck, Thiemann etc. See chapter 3 and also Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) p.9, 20 footnote 4.

The absence of any 'foundational' account of ethics therefore requires a disposition which can evaluate the truthfulness of a tradition through an examination of its history, through attention to its contemporary presence in a visible community and through its capacity to sustain hope and patience in the face of the tragic.⁸⁸ Modernity has no such story and therefore cannot be a resource for this challenge. In contrast 'the story of God does not offer a resolution of life's difficulties but it offers us something better - an adventure and struggle' as together we live 'faithful to the reality that he is Lord of this world'.⁸⁹

With his intensification of the particularity of the church as a distinctive political community, Hauerwas develops his criticism of American Protestantism's uncritical identification of its destiny with American liberal democracy which he regards as capitulating to liberal ideology to the detriment of the church as a political community.⁹⁰

It is my contention [...] that Christian enthusiasm for the political involvement offered by our secular polity has made us forget the church's more profound political task. In the

⁸⁸ 'The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering', *A Community of Character*, pp.53-71 (p.60). See also 'The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story', *A Community of Character*, pp. 89-110 (p.91). See also Hauerwas' sermon 'The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord' in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancy Murphy and Mark Nation, eds, *Theology without Foundations, Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 143-62. On anti-foundationalism Hauerwas writes 'I do not wish to be associated with those who call themselves anti-foundationalists, even though I am quite sympathetic to their critique of foundationalism, because anti-foundationalism but reinforces the presumption that a theory of knowledge is necessary to know what we know'. *In Good Company*, p.5 footnote 9.

⁸⁹ 'Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life', *A Community of Character*, pp.129-51 (p.149).

⁹⁰ A fuller discussion on these related movements follows in a chapter 3.

interests of securing more equitable forms of justice possible
in our society, Christians have failed to challenge the moral
presuppositions of our polity and society.⁹¹

For Hauerwas this also fails to recognise the pivotal role that formation, character and the virtues entail for ethics and consequently assumes, mistakenly, that a just society can exist without just people. The church instead should recover its distinctive role of forming Christians who are Christians first and then citizens second, rather than assuming that the two are unquestionably identical. Only by such prior formation will Christians be able to recognise the world, both within and without, for

the church is always the primary polity through which we
gain the experience to negotiate and make positive
contributions to whatever society in which we may find
ourselves.⁹²

In particular this will enable Christians in America to recognise that liberalism actually forms them to see the world in a manner that conflicts with the Christian story which they represent, particularly regarding the right to life and happiness, the assumption of the atomistic individual as the basic political unit and beliefs about privatised morality, freedom and self-interest. Indeed ‘the story that liberalism teaches us is that we have no story and as a result we fail to notice how deeply that story determines our lives’.⁹³ Further still, formation

⁹¹ ‘The Church and Liberal Democracy’, *A Community of Character*, p.73. As will become apparent in chapter 5, Hauerwas is particularly addressing North American Christians, although his questions have pertinency for European Christians, whose relationship to the state, though historically different, shares something of the pathology Hauerwas perceives.

⁹² Ibid., p.74.

⁹³ Ibid., p.84.

within the Christian community discloses the acidic effect of this occult liberal formation upon the discipline and cohesion of the Christian and especially Protestant community, for it prevents the display of a visible, contrast politics, called church. Thus, as we shall argue in chapter 3, liberalism incarcerates the church in the name of the spurious doctrines of the freedom of the individual and the freedom of religion.

The church therefore serves the world by contrasting with it and thereby supplies the world with a truthful narrative about its own identity and potential liberation. Without the church, the world would be unstoried, invisible and captive to false narratives about its identity and destiny. The expression of church, though, will vary according to social and temporal context since ‘the church, the whole body of believers [...] cannot be limited to any one historical paradigm or contained by any one institutional form’.⁹⁴ What maintains the church’s integrity, as we shall discuss in chapter 4, is ‘whether it can provide a polity sufficient to sustain the differences necessary for discussion’.⁹⁵ In contrast to the world which, split into nation states, is fragmented, tribal and agonistic.⁹⁶ Only thus can it witness to God’s cosmic peace and reflect a community that speaks of the diversity and yet oneness of God.⁹⁷ Indeed the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.92. For Hauerwas virtues are correlative to the communities which sustain them. See ‘The Virtues and Our Communities: Human Nature as History’, *A Community of Character*, pp. 111-29 (p.114).

⁹⁵ *A Community of Character*, p.96. As we noted above, the relationship between the one and the many in ecclesiology haunts Hauerwas’ project.

⁹⁶ It is clear that the insights of Alasdair MacIntyre are making themselves felt in this discussion. Further discussion of their relationship appears in chapters 2 and 5. See Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Review of Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*’, *Thomist*, 46/2 (April 1982), 313-21.

⁹⁷ In ‘Disciplined Seeing: Imagination and the Moral Life’, *New Catholic World*, 225/1350 (November/December 1982), 250-53. Hauerwas and his co-author, Philip Foubert, lament the lack of imagination in the church represented in its inability to generate a lively discussion about the eating of animals. In his later work, *In Good Company*, Hauerwas

challenge is not to escape community and the corollary of distinctive narrative, but to be part of a truthful one that can cope with the tragic hopefully and enable us to grow through life without loss of identity.⁹⁸ For Hauerwas the

Christian story offers the best context for nurture and integration of the self, for

the unity of the self is [...] more like the unity that is expressed in a good novel - namely with many subplots and characters that we at times do not relate to the primary dramatic action of the novel. But ironically without the subplots we cannot achieve the kind of unity necessary to claim our actions as our own.⁹⁹

1:4 Characterising the Church's Character: Peaceableness as the Freedom of the Church

Many of the essays in *The Peaceable Kingdom*¹⁰⁰ on the nature of ethics, narrative, agency and character reiterate his previous thought. However the distinctive feature of this collection of essays is Hauerwas' attempt to argue for peaceableness as the central virtue of the church and as the means of establishing an ecclesial hermeneutic with critical capacity. This has particular pertinency for his attempt to understand the position of the church within American society for, as noted above, Hauerwas is a disciple of Yoder in

includes an essay with John Berkman, 'A Trinitarian Theology of 'The Chief End of All Flesh'', pp.185-97, which includes in this peaceableness a commitment to vegetarianism. In this way he is seeking to include the non-linguistic world in his project. Again this will require further attention in chapter 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 127-29.

⁹⁹ *A Community of Character*, p.144.

¹⁰⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 3rd edn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

contrast to Reinhold Niebuhr, whose approach Hauerwas believes, sought to use Christian theology to underwrite and improve contemporary democracies and in the process rendered the church redundant. In contrast to the moral poverty of fragmented liberal societies and their attempt to privatise religions in the name of pluralism, Hauerwas believes that the core story of the church, namely 'that the world is the creation of a good God who is known through the people of Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ'¹⁰¹ is a truth needing no violence to sustain it and exhibits its truthfulness by being embodied in 'a community that lives faithful to the one true God of the universe'.¹⁰² This leads Hauerwas to a more detailed interrogation of the community-specific and contextual character of ethical values, such as the Decalogue, which cannot be understood apart from the story of God's covenant with Israel. Rather than abstracting them and setting them up as a transcendent universal, such stories supply the church with a tradition and history through which to see how the same God works at different times and in different places and thereby suggests how the church might rightly envision God's ways with the world in the present context. Freedom for Christians is therefore not simply about untrammelled choice, but about claiming our lives as our own, a social notion of agency which includes the history and community of church stitched into the formation of our character, for 'our freedom is literally carried by a community that sustains us in the habit of self possession'.¹⁰³ Obviously there are a plurality of stories informing people's lives, yet none are so otherwise determined that they

¹⁰¹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.15.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.42. The distinctive character of Christian freedom advocated by Hauerwas will be discussed in chapter 5.

cannot be embraced in God's story exhibited in the church. Indeed part of the character formation process of being church is to hear the 'otherness' of these stories with respect and attentiveness.¹⁰⁴

Theological ethics therefore has no foundation outside the existence of the church and hence is always about seeking to follow narratively Jesus' life.¹⁰⁵ Inevitably this is a distinctive rather than a universal ethic and such following emerges from the midst of an ongoing narrative rather than presuming an abstract spectator perspective. It is this awareness of the significance of the history of Jesus for Christology that Hauerwas believes to be at the core of a recovery of a church of integrity. This is in contrast to other accounts which in concentration upon the teaching of the Kingdom, lost sight of the whole of Jesus' life as a resource for imitation, not by the isolated individual but by the whole church. For Hauerwas Jesus' life was a recapitulation of God's way with Israel, which discloses the sort of God Christians and Jews worship. For Christians the cross is the supreme illustration of this peaceful trust in the ways of God, whose virtues are renunciation, humility and service. Hence his ecclesiology is intrinsically eschatological, since eschatologically, the victory of Christ witnessed to in the resurrection gives the church the confidence to risk this way of being in a world as yet uncommitted to peaceful living. This is what living the kingdom means for it reflects what Jesus showed, namely that this sort of peaceable life is possible now if there is belief that God is sovereign.

¹⁰⁴ This is evidence, as we shall see in chapters 4 and 5 of the distinctively Christian character of Hauerwas' emancipatory project.

¹⁰⁵ The plausibility of Hauerwas' peaceableness when compared with the evident lack of ecclesial faithfulness in all but minority churches, such as the Mennonites, will be something we will need to face in chapters 4 and 5.

Friendship of the outcast, peaceful resistance to the evil one, forgiveness all illustrate kingdom living informed by this eschatology.

Hauerwas though does not equate the church with the kingdom. Instead

the life of the kingdom is broader than even that of the church. For the church does not possess Christ; his presence is not confined to the church. Rather it is in the church that we learn to recognise Christ's presence outside the church.¹⁰⁶

The church is therefore a foretaste of this kingdom, a community whose training enables it to identify the presence of the kingdom beyond itself, whose presence also identifies the world as that community that as yet does not believe.¹⁰⁷ Here Hauerwas is not identifying the church as the redeemed in contrast to the world. Following Barth and Yoder, he believes both church and world to be redeemed. The distinction is a noetic rather than an ontological one. The church therefore does not withdraw in its quest for distinctiveness but 'tries to develop the resources to stand within the world witnessing to the peaceable kingdom and thus rightly understanding the world'.¹⁰⁸ The virtues required for this involve trust, hope and love and as an empirical reality, the

¹⁰⁶ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.97. See chapter 5 for further discussion on Hauerwas' eschatology. Of course there is a significant debate about the meaning of the phrase 'The Kingdom of God' in the teaching of Jesus., classically articulated in Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God and the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963).

¹⁰⁷ Robert Jenson believes that this is too passive a view of the world since he believes that the world has a distinctive argument with God and that God's response to this argument is judgement. This judgement the church's story must speak of as well. See 'The Hauerwas Project', p.293.

¹⁰⁸ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.102. As we shall note in chapter 5, there is some uncertainty about the givenness of redemption in Hauerwas. Does the church contribute to or simply witness to the redemption of the world?

marks of this church, which represent the social witness of this church, are the resources of its sacraments, preaching and distinctive living. This is because Hauerwas sees the church not as a reformer of general society but fundamentally as a witness to the existing peaceable reign of God known through the story it carries. Obviously this does not imply a rule led approach to Christian witness, but rather a community situated phronetic approach in which casuistry is the imaginative testing of the commitments which emerge through the daily living of the embodied narrative of the church using the examples of the saints of the past to clarify this process. In terms of being peaceable, Hauerwas finds himself sympathetic to Richard H. Niebuhr's refusal to try to save the world through activism, especially that which resorts to violence, since at its heart this reflects a story presuming that our destiny is of our own making in contrast to the church's story of God's peaceable kingdom. 'A spirituality which acknowledges the tragic is one that is schooled in patience'¹⁰⁹ and one which rejoices in letting go of the desire to control enables a form of peacemaking rooted in the small scale to emerge. Such peacemaking is not resignation but joy since it is rooted in a people who have grasped the ontological reality of the world.

Hauerwas has therefore moved a stage further in his ecclesiology for now it is not simply a general embodiment of the Christian story in church, with consequent development of character and virtuous living that preoccupies him.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.145. H. Richard Niebuhr's influence upon Hauerwas will be discussed in chapter 3. Being on such a journey assumes presuppositions of promise and covenant rooted in the security of God's character and its recognition that patience and community are intrinsic characteristics of such pilgrimage.

He is now prepared to delineate a hierarchy of virtues, of which peaceableness is the most important. This further distinguishes the world from the church, for such peaceableness makes it impossible, in Hauerwas' mind, for the church and arguably Christians to take part in coercive practices, practices which attend especially to the state's rule. Following Yoder, Hauerwas regards such pretensions by the church to rule as examples of the Constantinian experiment which should be discarded. However such a rigorous approach raises profound questions about the place of the state in Christian theology. Hauerwas at this stage appears to place the 'security' aspects of the state beyond the active participation of the church. Equally he now appears vulnerable to the charge that he has developed an abstract quasi-metaphysical concept of peaceableness which conflicts with the historicist and contextual approach to ethics that he seems to have been articulating

1:5 Summary

In this section we have sought to expose the formative features of Hauerwas' project as he sought to escape the limitations of occasionalist and liberal ethics through a critical re-appropriation of Aristotle and Aquinas along with Wittgenstein and Austin. We have endeavoured to display the way his early work sought to emancipate the church from its captivity to liberal thought and thereby empower its mission as the embodiment of the eschatological peaceableness of the reign of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ. This has introduced us to the question at the heart of the thesis, which is whether Hauerwas' project can be represented as a distinctively Christian theology of

liberation chiefly from the Enlightenment legacy. To determine whether this is a plausible characterisation of his work, we need next to locate Hauerwas in terms of the wider debate about the liberal tradition emerging from the Enlightenment.

Chapter 2

Hauerwas, Liberalism and the Enlightenment Project

Section I: Hauerwas and the Enlightenment Project

2:1 Confronting the Enlightenment Project

Hauerwas' writing reflects his wide and eclectic interests embracing law, philosophy, literature and history, as well as theology. His own ecclesial journey is similarly eclectic, since although raised as a United Methodist in Texas, his teaching career has included two years at the Lutheran Augustana College, 14 years at the Catholic University of Notre Dame and since 1988, a return to the United Methodists at Duke University. He described himself in *A Community of Character* as a 'high church Mennonite'¹ and in *Dispatches from the Front* as a 'Mennonite camp follower'.² Furthermore his anecdotal style betrays the influence of Broadway Methodist Church, in which he was ironically challenged to situate himself after speaking about the importance of church, whilst at the time belonging to no ecclesial community. From the above it is clear that the Mennonites and Catholics have contributed to Hauerwas' distinctive understanding of the place of the community of the church, whilst his Methodist roots have underpinned his commitment to a practical, embodied notion of sanctification. Yet it is his engagement with the liberalism emerging from the Enlightenment Project that provoked and continues to sustain the development of his distinctive ecclesiology. Indeed those to whom Hauerwas expresses particular indebtedness, such as Leslie Newbiggin, George Lindbeck,

¹*A Community of Character*, p.6.

²*Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 21-22.

Will Campbell, William Stringfellow, John Milbank, Karl Barth and Alasdair MacIntyre, are all in one way or another hostile to the liberal project,³ and even his more popularist works, written in association with William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*⁴ and *Where Resident Aliens Live*⁵ are expressly critical in this regard.

In *Dispatches from the Front*⁶ Hauerwas traces the roots of his intellectual journey to the legacy of Yale with its Enlightenment epistemology.⁷ Yale, in his opinion, sought to make him into a theologian acceptable to the conventions of the modern university and his initial intention was to continue under this liberal flag.⁸ However the Holocaust disturbed his confidence in the Enlightenment Project and his engagement with liberalism's arch-critic, Karl Barth, led him to reconsider the liberal project aided by his studies on Thomas Aquinas and his principal mentor Aristotle. This would contrast with approaches that worked within a liberal paradigm which appeared to undermine the distinctiveness and integrity of church in the process.⁹ In addition his interest in ethics was

³ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practices* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p.11.

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

⁵ Op. cit.

⁶ *Dispatches*, pp. 19-28.

⁷ For a discussion of Hauerwas' understanding of liberalism as a political and philosophical theory see 'The Church and Liberal Democracy: The Limits of a Secular Polity', op.cit. In this essay Hauerwas sees liberalism as promoting in the name of 'freedom' an abstract individualism, dislocated from for tradition and destructive of community, an anthropology which the United States of America has sought most effectively and indeed uniquely to embody.

⁸ Interestingly the so called 'Yale School' with the exception of Wolterstorff, has moved its theological centre from the Protestant 'once-for-all' givenness of revelation to a reactualisation of the latter in the ecclesial community more akin to traditional Roman Catholic thinking. I am indebted to Professor Anthony C. Thiselton for this insight.

⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Failure of Communication or A Case of Uncomprehending Feminism', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50/2 (1997), 228-39 (p.234).

generated by a frustration with the legacy of Feuerbach and Nietzsche which challenged any possibility of speaking meaningfully of Christian ethics and further underwrote the consequent emotivism of much contemporary ethical theory, despite the latter's deontological or utilitarian rhetoric.¹⁰ The abstract individual capable of making objective decisions without the encumbrance of tradition or history not only induced a sterile debate about ethical quandaries, but also failed to recognise the poverty of its anthropology.¹¹ From Iris Murdoch, Hauerwas realised that sight is antecedent to action and that formation through language was what equipped one to see.¹² To be human is to be a person in formation indebted to the legacy of wisdom embedded in a language which frames the world for us. Hence in his introduction to *Christian Existence Today*, Hauerwas modestly asserts that he began his writing 'wanting to do no more than recapture the significance of the virtues for understanding the Christian life'¹³ and to understand how Christian convictions can be said to be true or false. In so doing Hauerwas returned to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and the work of Thomas Aquinas, finding also a fellow traveller in the moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre.

Hauerwas' challenge to what is commonly known as the liberal or Enlightenment Project is therefore fundamental to the development and plausibility of his theology and ecclesiology. As a means of illustrating the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.223.

¹¹ Hauerwas' concern is to ensure that embodiment is ontologically prior to ideas, in contrast to liberal anthropology. As we shall see in chapter 5, this means that ecclesiology is the pre-requisite for theology.

¹² *Vision and Virtue*, p.34.

¹³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living In Between* (North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1988), p.1.

pathological and contradictory character of liberalism we shall first explore Hauerwas' treatment of medicine in liberal societies.¹⁴ Thereafter we shall place Hauerwas' perspective within the wider post-Enlightenment debate to determine whether his own agenda escapes the former's limitations, inadequacies and carceral qualities.¹⁵

2:2 Modern Medicine: Exposing the Pathology of Liberalism

Hauerwas' treatment of medical themes runs throughout his work, but is most explicitly expressed in *Suffering Presence* and *Naming the Silences*.¹⁶ In *Suffering Presence* Hauerwas gives his most expansive rationale for the rise and fall of medical ethics, which he sees to be rooted in the tension between the increased technological power of medicine and an increasingly morally confused and pluralistic world, certainly in the west. Autonomous individualism works against the very foundations of medical practice and increasingly makes demands upon the medical profession which subvert its integrity.¹⁷ Similarly the market forces encouraged by economic liberalism, subvert the character and

¹⁴ For an analysis of the philosophical, economic, political, ethical, social and theological expressions of liberalism see Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 252-72.

¹⁵ Hauerwas sees similar parallels with the legal profession. See for example 'On Being Professionally a Friend', *Christian Legal Society Quarterly*, 9/2 (Summer 1988), 24-26.

¹⁶ *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) and *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). Hauerwas' intention here is to indicate how professions, especially the medical profession intrinsically depend upon the politics of traditioned communities to inform their practices. Liberalism's anthropology corrodes such communities and thereby undermines the integrity of medicine and enslaves it to contemporary conventions and perceptions of relevance. This, as we shall see, is a particular problem for the church, but is also one for all professions in liberal societies.

¹⁷ See the discussion in the previous footnote.

rationale of medicine by construing it in terms of its instrumental and utilitarian value.¹⁸ For Hauerwas, medicine is intrinsically a faith shaped set of practices, a conviction disclosed in the basic role of the medical practitioner which is to represent the care and presence of the wider community with the sick. In this way the medic symbolises the refusal of the community to exclude the sick from its concerns and society. Equally medicine challenges the docetic tendencies of liberal society since it deals with our embodied and finite life. Hence in both of these it echoes and reinforces the insights and convictions of Christian religion, which refuses to alienate the stranger and regards embodiment as pivotal to faith.

Hauerwas is therefore asserting that western medicine emerged from within a society which respected the community specific character of caring and hence of medicine. However this is precisely where liberalism's stress on individualism and tradition-free autonomy make it very difficult for such medicine to survive with the internal moral goods that generated it. Doctors therefore become another state department of bureaucrats who act as non directional consultants for patients who are given a notional capacity to choose but without the directed wisdom or the trustworthy care of traditional medicine. In addition medicine becomes idolised as something that has the capacity to eliminate human suffering, given its technological power, rather than to 'be the way we care for each other in our suffering'.¹⁹ This has

¹⁸ 'Medical Care for the Poor: Finite Resources, Infinite Need', *Health Progress*, 66/10 (December 1985), 32-35.

¹⁹ *Suffering Presence*, p.17.

particular implications for how society deals with those, such as the disabled, the unborn and the aged who conflict with liberal ideals of human life. In the name of compassion and freedom, therefore, medicine becomes a tyrannical and destructive art promoting abstract notions of human normality which effectively become the licence to destroy human life. Hauerwas is therefore seeking an alternative story of life which can embrace the stranger represented in these liberal aliens, a story which he finds embodied in the church, for 'a humane medicine is impossible to sustain in a society which lacks the moral capacity to care for the mentally handicapped'.²⁰

Such a position requires that Hauerwas interrogate notions of suffering, health, and the authority of medicine. In particular he is concerned to challenge the view that suffering is inherently bad and equally that suffering is a univocal experience. For Hauerwas the nature of suffering is an inevitable concomitant of a moral vision of life since such a vision implies limitations. It is thus an interpretative category relative to the moral community-story embodied in the sufferer. Liberalism's story seeks happiness and untrammelled freedom as its goals and therefore finds any concept of suffering abhorrent. Hence the irony that 'in the name of eliminating suffering we eliminate the sufferer'.²¹ Christian suffering is also distinctive since it is situated within the Christian narrative which sees in particular forms of suffering the possibility of moral formation and thereby gives value to such sorts of suffering. Discerning this means drawing upon the interpretative resources of our moral communities, rather

²⁰ Ibid., p.18.

²¹ Ibid., p.24.

than allowing a spurious universal claim by liberalism to incite the medical profession to denude all suffering of any moral value. Similarly the medical profession itself embodies its convictions about its authority and agenda since it represents notions of authority and finitude that challenge the liberal story. 'Medicine [...] represents a transcultural practice of learning to live with finitude'²² and hence respects the wisdom of the body in a way that a docetic liberalism ignores. Medicine also works against the social fragmentation generated by the liberal quest for individual autonomy since medicine keeps alive the bond between the sick and the healthy in a manner that reminds us that we are one community.

However Hauerwas' constant concern is the question of what kind of community can sustain such a medicine in the acidic context of modernity?

To learn how to be present in such a way we need examples
 - that is a people who have so learned to embody such a presence in their lives that it has become the marrow of their habits. The church at least claims to be such a community, as it is a group of people called out by a God who, we believe, is always present to us, both in our sin and in our faithfulness.²³

Christians therefore have distinctive resources for medicine and interpretations of ethical issues which they should gain confidence in articulating. In part this includes a deconstruction of a liberal notion of medicine, particularly in so far

²² Ibid., p.48.

²³ Ibid., p.80.

as it presumes a universally intelligible and abstract concept of suffering²⁴ and theodicy, rather than community-tradition informed visions.²⁵ These actually contribute to the loss of human freedom as particular choices by hegemonic elites masquerade as objective decisions for ‘the people’s’ good. Instead a traditioned and community dependent medicine that is able to care for us in a world of tragedy and limitation, reinforces the significance of the church in liberal societies, since this vision of medical practice most closely supports the insights of his ecclesiology.²⁶ The arguments for the latter are found necessary both to preserve medicine as an art and the doctor an office bearer, attentive to the stories of the patient as person and exercising phronetic wisdom within a death-boundaried existence.²⁷ Such a vision and wisdom finds it difficult to survive in a society frightened of death, and driven by atomistic individualism,²⁸ but equally the paranoia surrounding death confuses the doctor’s role as society’s representative carer rather than curer. For Hauerwas the emancipation of medicine therefore requires a community embodied narrative of the sort conveyed by Christians and Jews. In this medicine acts as an analogy for the church as it displays the acidic effects of liberal ideology and its consumerist legacy whose destructiveness and subversiveness are evident in the church.

In *Naming the Silences* Hauerwas engages more deeply still with the question of suffering and the way this question illuminates both the problematic ideology

²⁴ Ibid., p.28.

²⁵ *Naming the Silences*, p.2.

²⁶ *Suffering Presence*, pp. 63-86.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 39-52.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 2-5.

of liberalism and the ambiguous role medicine is being forced to take as a consequence. His approach marries the narrative insights already employed to develop an ecclesiology which requires the existence of a particular sort of community if a proper respect for suffering and a true grasp of the limits and possibilities of a humane medicine are to be had. The attention to narrative displayed in his use of Peter DeVries' *The Blood of the Lamb* is not simply to engage the reader but is to emphasise that people are agents whose story must be heard if a proper grasp of their experience of suffering and the way they situate it within the wider story of their convictions is to be had. This also removes the 'problem of suffering' from the level of abstract and apparently universal forms of understanding and recognises the contingent and historical character of the person and the particularity of each person's suffering, insights that reflect the initial conclusions of his earliest work. It also invites the reader to consider what sort of story can sustain sufferers with hope rather than despair and whether liberal confidence in medicine has raised the latter to a sacred order, which it cannot of itself sustain.

Such questions direct Hauerwas to note the way in which theodicy has come to play such a major part in matters of suffering, for, in part, the rise of medicine as a sacred art can be correlated with the demise of confidence in organised religion. Hauerwas argues that contemporary theodicy is in fact parasitic upon other convictions, particularly atheism, since it is possible to chart the intensity and character of the debate about the problem of evil with the rise of atheism. Indeed 'the creation of the 'problem of evil' is a correlative of the creation of a

god that, it was presumed, could be known separate from a community of people at worship',²⁹ reflecting the separation of God's existence from His character.³⁰ This process Hauerwas believes took root in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Enlightenment, which sought to express the problem in timeless and unstoried concepts.³¹ Such an approach posited abstract qualities of God which conflicted both with experience and the autonomy of individuals stressed by liberal thought. Hence this all powerful god not only failed to explain suffering but appeared to leave no space for human endeavour. In reaction atheism replaced this god with human agency and hence theodicy mutated into anthropodicy, legitimating the Enlightenment's quest for human control.³² Paradoxically this has subsequently legitimated the justification of suffering for human ideals as the eschatology of divine purposes has been replaced by the eschatology of human ones. However after 200 years it is clear that such a view of theodicy leaves much unaccounted for, such as the continuing presence of sickness and natural disasters. 'Medicine becomes the mirror image of theoretical theodicies sponsored by the Enlightenment, because it attempts to save our profoundest hopes that sickness should and can be

²⁹ *Naming the Silences*, p.41.

³⁰ According to Milbank the roots of this lie in the nominalism of Scotus and Ockham, whose attempt to secure divine freedom opened up a space for the autonomous will, evident in the libertarian voluntarism and will to power characteristic of western societies, especially the United States of America. See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 14-23.

³¹ In 'The Christian Difference: Surviving Postmodernism', *Cultural Values*, 3/2 (April 1999), 164-80 (pp. 167-68). Hauerwas, following Milbank, traces the pedigree of this view back to the fourteenth century nominalists, Scotus and Occam, whose notion of univocal being elevated Being over God, and divorced the identity of God from His character. Thus God becomes an unstoried concept and the church inessential to exhibit that story.

³² *Naming the Silences*, pp. 59-61. See also 'God, Medicine and the Problems of Evil', *Reformed Journal*, 38/4 (April 1988), 16-22. For the implications of liberalism's cruel compassion for the 'abnormal' see 'Preface' to Hazel Morgan, *Through Peter's Eyes* (London: Arthur James, 1990), p.7. The contradictions present in liberalism's quest for control are explored in chapter 5.

eliminated'³³ and in consequence the patient is pacified into a constituent of this project rather than being a particular person whose distinctive suffering needs to be cared and responded to within the horizon of respect and hope. In this regard it is the suffering of children that renders the Enlightenment agenda mute, for according to its account this can have no point at all. Hence the dilemma of Carol Wanderhope suffering from leukaemia.

Hauerwas sees in these silences the opportunity to tell another story, whose plausibility is displayed by the people it forms and by the way it enables them to go on in life with hope. This story refuses to assent to the standard account of the problem of suffering, for

the problem with evil is not about rectifying our suffering with some general notion of God's nature as all-powerful and good; rather it is about what we mean by God's goodness itself, which for Christians must be construed in terms of God as Creator who has called into existence a people called Israel so that the world might know that God has not abandoned us. There is no problem of suffering in general; rather the question of suffering can be raised only in the context of a God who creates to redeem.³⁴

Once again Hauerwas challenges Christians not to seek an apology that can answer the liberal challenge because to do so is to accept the terms in which the challenge is framed and thereby to accept a vision of God and humankind

³³ *Naming the Silences*, p.62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

which is not derived from the experience of their story. Instead Christians should use the resources present in this tradition to interpret and situate our experiences of suffering in a manner consonant with the character of the community we are a part of. Hence he commends Walter Brueggemann's attention to the psalms of lament with their argumentative engagement with the God of our tradition, an engagement which both seeks communion with this God in the experience of suffering and equally sees in suffering occasion for growth and maturity of faith.³⁵ In the process Hauerwas sees the Christian story as one that can offer a way through the aporias of modern medicine, namely that with an ever growing aged population needing care confronted by a individualistic philosophy that finds such sacrificial care constraining, the need is for medicine to return to a more modest agenda than either modernity or technology desires. Such a modest medicine would see its principal task as caring for people in their finitude and suffering and such a medicine would find sustenance for this project in a narrative that carries such a vision within it. Without seeking to offer an explicit apology for the Christian faith in this regard, Hauerwas identifies its story embodied in the tradition of church as one such meta-narrative.

Through attention to the way liberalism has corrupted medicine and its relationship to sufferers, we can see why Hauerwas regards liberal thought as at the root of the problems of his society and indeed of the church. As mentioned above, in order to establish the credibility of his critique we need to

³⁵ See Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

bring Hauerwas explicitly into dialogue with the Enlightenment Project as it has been called, particularly as it has sought to sustain its transcendental emancipatory claims. Such an engagement cannot pretend to be exhaustive to such a complex and multifaceted movement. However through a sufficiently substantial delineation of the philosophical, sociological and ethical constituents of the project as it has developed particularly since the 18th century we hope to provide an adequate basis upon which to proceed. Whilst many of the thinkers mentioned in the first section are not explicitly referred to in Hauerwas' writing, the debate they represent forms the broad context within which Hauerwas seeks to position his ecclesiology as a theology of Christian freedom. Without such a horizon the particular intensity of Hauerwas' thought and its ecclesiological shape lose the radical challenge that they present.

Section II: Emancipation as the Enlightenment Agenda

2:3 Equivocating about the Enlightenment

Writing immediately after the First World War two German thinkers, Max Hornkeimer and Theodor Adorno declared ‘The Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster!’.³⁶ In the wake of the horrors of European slaughter and destruction made possible by the industrial and bureaucratic developments of the nineteenth century, what had seemed to offer a secure basis for objective understanding and action in the world, had instead turned out far more ambivalently than ever conceived. Indeed for Hornkeimer and Adorno, the project itself was suspect.

Hornkeimer and Adorno focus the contemporary struggle to evaluate what has become known as the Enlightenment Project, yet that very phrase begs the question. Not only is it unclear whether the project can be regarded as enlightened, but the very univocal term ‘project’ is contentious. Alasdair MacIntyre and James Byrne both contrast the variety of approaches easily elided into one project, ranging from that informing the American Independence movement and the Scottish ‘common sense’ philosophy of Hume to the French Revolutionary thinkers and the German Aufklärung focused on Kant.³⁷ Further to this is the identification of the term ‘modernity’ with the

³⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), p.3 quoted in Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.35.

³⁷ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985) and *Whose Justice, Whose Rationality* (London, Duckworth, 1988) and James Byrne, *Glory, Jest and Riddle* (London: SCM, 1996), pp. 3-12.

post-enlightenment era and the presence of the even more ambiguous term 'postmodernity'. Jean-François Lyotard's definition of modernity as 'any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse [...] grandnarrative'³⁸ and postmodernity as that which treats the latter with incredulity, clarifies the debate somewhat. However it is not clear whether modernity, if seen as a tradition in the MacIntyre sense, is itself 'post-modern' in reality and hence the offspring of what it purports to anticipate, or whether modernity can still seek out some sort of universal address.

To get beyond a sterile argument about definitions, it may be necessary to accept a more flexible notion of Enlightenment which initially recognises a significant shift in thinking in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which for all its variables and tributaries, shared a number of common concerns. These concerns emerged from within the context of frustration and fatigue with the legacy of the past, and excitement at the innovative possibilities of intellectual and socio-economic developments. The frustration and fatigue related to the failure of religious debate and argument, most bloodily expressed in the 'Wars of Religion', to resolve questions of belief and hence raised questions about the value of theology as a secure basis for human knowledge. The excitement related to the development of the empirical method of the natural sciences and also to the increasing social change evident in the rise of urban bourgeois culture. The combination of these factors encouraged

³⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.xxiii, quoted in *The New Constellation*, p.200.

questioning of the past and a belief that the future would be characterised by increasing human freedom understood as individual autonomy. It loosened deference to traditional ways, at least among the literati, and provided tentative space to investigate alternative approaches to the human situation. Above all, save in France, where anticlericalism was most aggressive, much of the initial thrust of what is termed 'enlightenment thinking' sought not to destroy theistic conviction, but to establish it upon a more credible footing.³⁹ Hence even Descartes' methodological scepticism implied the finitude and fallibility of human reasoning to the point where only God could offer ontological security. Richard Bernstein quotes from the 'Equisse' of the Marquis de Condorcet to illustrate the mood of the era. 'Such is the aim of the work I have undertaken, and its result will be to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties'.⁴⁰

Given the contrast between the confidence of its initial protagonists in the emancipatory possibilities of this agenda and the ambivalent mood of many contemporary thinkers, it will be necessary to trace the pathology of the Enlightenment Project in order to expose Hauerwas' concerns and response. Inevitably the history of the last 200 years, and especially of the twentieth century, forms the backdrop to this transformation as major wars, ambiguous ideologies of left and right, the increasing colonisation of life by the bureaucratic state and by technology and the acidic effects of the latter upon

³⁹ Cf Garrett Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 26-46.

⁴⁰ Quoted in *The New Constellation*, p.34.

intermediate institutions of identity, such as family and neighbourhood have generated what Richard Bernstein calls the ‘Stimmung’ or ambivalent mood to the legacy of enlightenment ideals.⁴¹ This ‘Stimmung’ is characterised by a rejection of commonality, universal address and notions of normality, instead focusing upon the particular, fragmented, distinctive and eccentric. Involved in this confrontation is the question of whether the enlightenment ideals can be rearticulated, albeit in a chastened form, or whether the whole project is beyond redemption. Our approach will be one which first delineates what could loosely be called the initial Enlightenment Project and then, having identified the core elements, will investigate, diachronically, the way these ideals have been and continue to be interrogated. Since the intention is to situate Hauerwas within the present state of the debate, the treatment of intervening thinkers will be somewhat limited. This is not to imply that the latter are less pertinent, but simply to enable the contemporary state of the discussion to emerge more clearly.

2:4 Epistemological Certainty as the Premise for Human Freedom

In his first and second Meditations, René Descartes expresses the motivation that underlies the Enlightenment Project. In the first he describes his doubting of all pre-reflective convictions and the superstructures built upon them and of his need ‘to rid myself of all the opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm

⁴¹ *The New Constellation*, p.11. For a discussion of the impact of the enlightenment legacy upon western society see Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), as well as in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Eng. trans., 2 vols (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984-87), I. (henceforth CA).

and permanent structure in the sciences'.⁴² In the second he speaks of the need to discover some Archimedian point 'to discover one thing only which is certain and indubitable'.⁴³ Descartes sought to root this certainty in the immediacy of self-consciousness expressed in the phrase: 'cogito ergo sum'. Albeit echoing Augustine of Hippo's phrase 'fallor ergo sum', it provided the basis for an apparent break with and emancipation from the prejudices of tradition, scholastic method and speculative theology, suggesting a foundation from which knowledge could be securely discerned. Whilst Descartes' idealism swiftly came under criticism from Hume and Locke's empiricism, the notion of the detached subject optically surveying and evaluating all from the security of an Archimedian point rooted in consciousness, survived and was given further support by Kant's notion of the 'transcendental subject'. Rejecting Hume's simplistic understanding of the self as nothing other than a bundle of perceptions served by instrumental reason, Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* sought to show that the structures of consciousness require investigation, not simply the contents of consciousness. In the process, Kant further atomised and rendered abstract, the subject, which was presumed to be transcendental in order to be able to generalise the process of human knowing and to allow critical reasoning to supply proper knowledge for the whole human community. The integrity and autonomy of the subject also required that values be rooted in the subject, rather than being imposed heteronomously. The

⁴² René Decartes, *A Discourse on Method* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1946), p.79. That Descartes excluded morality from his rationalistic foundationalism represents the limitations of his project as Gadamer notes. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Eng. trans., 2nd edn (London: Sheed and Ward, 1993), p.279, (henceforth TM).

⁴³ Descartes, p.85. See also Roger Lundin 'Interpreting Orphans: Hermeneutics in the Cartesian Tradition', in Roger Lundin, Clarence Walhout and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 3-14.

famous refusal to gain an 'ought' from an 'is' further underlined the dualist tendencies of emerging 'enlightenment' thought, as the turn to the subject dislocated identity from context, subject from object, mind from body and present from past, all in the name of freedom as autonomy.

A methodology of doubt and critique, the search for an Archimedian foundational point, confidence in the faculties of human reasoning, the epistemological priority of the transcendental, yet monological subject, a tendency to treat the mathematical and empirical sciences as offering secure knowledge and the view that the multiplicity of particulars can be subsumed under universal norms, form the core of what has become known as 'Cartesianism', the dominant shaper of Enlightenment thought. In addition a sense of liberation from the shackles of the past, the tyranny of what were labelled as 'opinions', 'dogma' or 'prejudices' and a confidence in the progressive possibilities of a future developed by the insights of unshackled reason, set the above in an optimistic teleological framework. A term such as 'modern' which in earlier times had been a suspicious concept, became increasingly seen as a positive word.

2:5 The Disturbance of the Particular: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences

Despite the dominance of the positivist epistemologies of the early Enlightenment era, modelled on the methodologies of the emerging natural sciences, it was the increasing awareness of historicity and the peculiarity of the

human that generated disturbance. Hegel, in particular addressed the first of these two concerns as he struggled to synthesise the multiplicity of particulars and the dynamics of history into a coherent whole using dialectics and reconciliation as his key ideas. For Hegel, the structures of consciousness are both historical and social and hence suggest an intersubjective and teleological journey, rather than a monological positivist one. Furthermore he regarded the goal of History as the realisation of the One Absolute Spirit, dialectically disclosed in the interactions of history, in which the particulars and contingencies of existence find their emancipation in the triumph of coherence and unity expressed in the Absolute Spirit.⁴⁴

The second of these two concerns was addressed by emerging hermeneutical studies. Rooted in the German romantic tradition, with its concern to locate human identity in a pre-existing context of tradition, its foremost proponent, Schleiermacher, developed a notion of intersubjective, relational understanding that drew its inspiration from Biblical hermeneutics and the peculiarities of texts, their generation and their communicative capacities.⁴⁵ Dilthey explored this further, reacting against the absorption of *Geschichteswissenschaften* by *Naturwissenschaften* and asserting that: 'no real blood runs in the veins of the knowing subject that Locke, Hume and Kant constructed'.⁴⁶ For Dilthey, understanding (*Verstehen*) characterised the particular agenda of the human sciences, rather than explanation and in consequence of the intersubjective

⁴⁴ For a discussion of Hegel's approach see *The New Constellation*, pp. 292-96.

⁴⁵ For a fuller evaluation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics see TM, pp. 184-97.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.47.

nature of the process, whether textually or in contemporary encounter, empathy (*Erlebnis*) and grammatical skill were the twin means of gaining this *Verstehen*. Indeed 'It is not just that sources are texts, but historical reality itself is a text that has to be understood'.⁴⁷ Involved in this distinctive approach came a stress on the particular rather than the abstract generalisation and the appreciation of the open and teleological character of human existence, reflected in its historicity.⁴⁸ Hence he developed the notion of 'Leben' or 'life' as a way of suggesting the ordering of and connectedness between events in the past and the present.⁴⁹ In Dilthey's view, empiricism and its cousin, positivism, reduced the distinctiveness of the human in their conflation of all epistemology to that of the natural sciences. Similarly Hegel's focus upon 'Geist' reduced the narrative significance of the historic and consequently the significance of human agency. 'Leben' allowed for attention to the particulars as well as the whole, giving depth to the former and reflecting the real significance of temporality. In this way Dilthey rescued the historic from Hegel's idealistic reductionism and opened the way for hermeneutics to move beyond abstract dialectics to respect for the particularity and sociality of inter-subjective encounter either in inter-human dialogue or through reliving ('*Nacherleben*') the narrative of the texts.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Quoted in TM, p.198.

⁴⁸ Gadamer commenting on Dilthey concludes 'the ontological structure of history itself, then, is teleological although without a telos', p.208.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.225.

⁵⁰ Thiselton, (1992), pp. 247-50.

Subsequent to Hegel's grand dialectical synthesis and the critical comments of the early hermeneuticians, three key 'masters of suspicion'.⁵¹ Marx, Freud and Nietzsche raised questions about the foundational security of the simple, singular subject. For Marx, Hegel's failure lay in his prioritising the realm of ideas over the material and for failing to recognise that the economic dynamic of capitalism generated a variety of conflicting interest groups, whose values and aspirations reflected their relationship to the means of production. Thus public values and notions of the individual were simply reflections of temporary bourgeois predominance, rather than universal values able to secure general assent. Critical social theory was needed to expose the deceptions of ideology manifested in human consciousness. Consciousness itself was therefore suspect rather than a trustworthy indicator of the truth of the situation.

Freud's research into the unconscious also raised doubts about the stability of the knowing subject, central to the early Enlightenment project. Distinguishing within the subject the id, the ego and the super ego, Freud's findings seemed not only to reinforce Hume's understanding of the self as driven primarily by desires, rather than by reason itself, but like Marx also suggested that immediate consciousness was an inadequate indicator of the truth about the subject, albeit this time for psychological rather than sociological reasons. In Ricoeur's words, there had to be an archaeology of the subject, whereby immediate consciousness is displaced, rendered suspect and the subject

⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur uses this phrase on many occasions. Garrett Green sees Feuerbach as the primordial 'master of suspicion', viewing religion as imagination in conflict with reality. G. Green, pp. 84-131.

becomes a project to be constituted rather than an existent simply to be recognised.

The latter is raised acutely by Nietzsche in his demythologising and deconstruction of the Enlightenment vision. Rejecting notions of the inherent coherence and unity of the philosophical quest and aware of the masking of the will to power immanent in the most 'innocent' of activities, Nietzsche rejected all metaphysical transcendental notions emphasising the irreducible plurality of everything and the emotivism of all ethics. The particular is all, interpretation is all, rationality a mask for interests and the atomistic subject achieves emancipation by rejecting all heteronomous claims, seeking pure and independent autonomy and exorcising the infection of the outside world.⁵²

These 'masters of suspicion' between them disturbed the confidence of philosophers in the foundational value of the transcendental subject as a trajectory from which to generate secure and trustworthy knowledge. Various attempts were made to retain a transcendent possibility for the Enlightenment Project. For example the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl sought 'to elucidate the essential meaning of objects of experience through an investigation of the modes of their appearance',⁵³ thereby indicating that

⁵² For a discussion on Nietzsche see John Milbank 'Problematizing the Secular' in Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, eds, *Shadow of Spirit* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 30-44.

⁵³ John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.38.

consciousness is not an object but an essential co-ordination, implying intentionality and being orientated to a whole or life-world.⁵⁴

Structuralism sought a related possibility in its emphasis upon the ontic priority of language over subjectivity, 'langue' over 'parole'⁵⁵ though critics, such as Paul Ricoeur, would question the notion of language as a closed deterministic system rather than that which accords a role to human agency and the speaking subject. 'Language is no more a foundation than it is an object; it is the medium, the 'milieu', in which and through which the subject posits himself and the world shows itself'.⁵⁶ Similarly Wittgenstein argued that it was not the theory of language that mattered but the practice and conceptual currency of language. Hence attention must be given to the particularity, flexibility and contextuality of different languages aswell as the possibility of inter-subjective understanding through second language learning.⁵⁷

In addition the work of Austin, Evans, Searle and Daniel Vanderveken, on 'Speech-Act' theory gave further substance to this transcendental hope since speech-acts, such as a will, or the articulation of forgiveness or baptism are dependent upon the role of human agents in a non-linguistic world. Reflection upon locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of speaking all reveal that none are simply intralinguistic. Promises imply a background network of intention and project occasions of realisation. They shape the world in terms of

⁵⁴ TM, p.247.

⁵⁵ Thiselton (1992), p.487.

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed., D. Ihde (Evanstone: North Western University Press, 1974), p.256.

⁵⁷ Thiselton (1992), pp. 324-25.

their word. Added to this, all such speech acts are self-involving, thereby integrating the self in the act and displaying the formation of the self in the process.⁵⁸

Furthermore the anti-transcendental historicist thought of Heidegger provided an even deeper challenge. For Heidegger, there was no transcendental cogito, given the reality of human historicity. 'What being is was to be determined from within the horizon of time'.⁵⁹ Thus as inextricably embedded interpreting subjects shaped by our contexts, the freedom for transcendence is very limited. In this way Heidegger questioned the emancipatory possibilities of the Enlightenment Project through his attention to human situatedness.

2:6 Rescuing the Enlightenment Project

Heidegger's challenge gave fresh impetus to the legacy of Dilthey and the hermeneutical character of the human sciences. It also raised the question of tradition, which Descartes had sought to escape in his quest for free thinking as Hans-Georg Gadamer recognised. In *Truth and Method*, he contrasted the hermeneutics of the re-constructive sciences, with the positivist method of the natural sciences. The former focused upon the implications of historicity and particularity for understanding⁶⁰ and recognised that understanding has to be

⁵⁸ For a fuller discussion on Speech-Act Theory see Thiselton (1992), pp. 283-300. See also Thiselton's comments in 'Communicative Action and Promise in Interdisciplinary Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics' in *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, pp. 144-51.

⁵⁹ TM p.257.

⁶⁰ TM p.299. For a general introduction to Gadamer see Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987). For autobiographical reflections see Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Gadamer on Gadamer' in Hugh J. Silverman, *Gadamer and Hermeneutics* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 13-

linguistic, since it is in and through language and especially speech, that a subject is constituted and disclosed.⁶¹ Consequent upon this came a reappropriation of the notions of 'prejudice', 'tradition' and 'authorities', since all reasoning takes place within an inherited tradition.⁶² The latter remains at the level of 'prejudice' or 'pre-understanding' until we have critically interpreted it, and it is transmitted to us initially by 'authorities', that is those who have appropriated it already. Indeed in the historical sciences, it is only as we appreciate that 'temporal distance [...] is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us'⁶³ that we can begin to conceive of a relationship with those who have gone before and who in some sense are part of us now. For Gadamer 'effective historical consciousness', is fundamental to understanding the human condition and its possibilities. 'Understanding is, essentially, a 'historically effected event' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)',⁶⁴ in which the horizons of the reader/interpreter and that of the other subject, directly or mediated through a text, are fused. Indeed 'understanding is to be thought less as a subjective act than as a participating in an event of tradition',⁶⁵ for 'our usual relationship to the past is not characterised by distancing and freeing

18, and 'Reflections on My Philosophical Journey' in Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago & La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1997), pp. 3-56.

⁶¹ For Gadamer speaking rather than translation discloses the understanding of another language and intrinically includes the place of listening in understanding. See TM, p.385. However Gadamer may well be imprisoning agency in context.

⁶² For Gadamer prejudice properly implies an anterior tradition whose predisposition anticipates any categorical judgment. 'The fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power', TM, p.270.

⁶³ Ibid., p.292.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.300.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.290.

ourselves from tradition. Rather we are always situated in traditions [...] they are always part of us'.⁶⁶

Gadamer is careful to distinguish between tradition and traditionalism and between authorities and authoritarianism, arguing that the openness of tradition and the credibility of authorities should not be confused with the closed historicism of traditionalism and the arbitrary dogmatism of authoritarianism.⁶⁷

Truth is a process which is never complete since 'to be historical means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete'.⁶⁸ The re-constructive sciences are compared by Gadamer to the creation of a work of art. Each generation contributes to what Gadamer calls the 'Bildung' (culture) or traditioned picture of its identity from its dialogue with what has gone before and what is present.⁶⁹ Similarly Gadamer's use of the analogy of a play to speak of the givenness and relative openness of his hermeneutical approach allows for such an organic and historically effected development to take place.⁷⁰ In both analogies claims to truth are asserted (horizons), which presupposes a antecedent tradition, a social and dialogical context and require an audience to enable this truth claim to be interrogated and a fusion of horizons achieved.⁷¹ Language therefore is again crucial in understanding since 'to reach an understanding in dialogue [...] involves being transformed into a communion in

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.282.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 273-84 for Gadamer's criticisms of romantic idealising of the past and the rejection of tradition by Enlightenment thinkers, especially p.275.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.300.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.110.

⁷¹ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1983), p.123. See also TM, p.304.

which we do not remain what we were'.⁷² The achievement of this fusion of horizons, or understanding, cannot be deductive or inductive, but requires a reappropriation of the Aristotelian notion of 'phronesis' or practical wisdom, akin to a master craftsman evaluating a pupil's work.⁷³

Language therefore is the medium of the hermeneutical task, since languages constitute the world,⁷⁴ mediate the tradition and take it on. Narrativity is therefore crucial to the Gadamer project and although Gadamer recognises the distinctiveness of languages, he is still of the conviction that the logos immanent in all languages is capable of being understood in and through translation,⁷⁵ since each verbal world-view potentially contains every other one within in. In contrast therefore to the optical epistemology of Cartesian thought, Gadamer emphasises the aural, for 'hearing is an avenue for the whole, because it is able to listen to the logos'.⁷⁶ Language consequently displays the possibility of a public world.

Gadamer's approach has been criticised, particularly by Habermas, as too uncritical about the constitution of the tradition and by Bernstein, as too hopeful about the conditions for 'phronesis' to flourish, given the assault upon coherent communities in modern life.⁷⁷ In addition Paul Ricoeur has questioned

⁷² TM, p.379.

⁷³ TM, pp. 20-22, 312-23.

⁷⁴ Gadamer distinguishes between 'world' as the linguistically mediated human experience and 'environment', as the context of every living creature. In this he follows Dilthey's notion of life and Husserl's lifeworld. Ibid., p.444.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.402.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.463.

⁷⁷ *Beyond Relativism*, p.225.

whether Gadamer's concern to establish the embeddedness of reading texts and the refusal to allow for any privileged a-historical, a-tradition-constituted epistemology fails to do justice to the nature of reading texts. For according to Ricoeur, the delineation of a text allows for a 'distancing' that gives the text a certain objectivity and liberates it from the control of the tradition. In reading such a text we are invited to transcend the present by discovering the 'world that the text opens up or makes possible', a reading in front of the text. This also frees us from constriction within the hermeneutical circle for it enables us to 'go on' for 'the sense of the work is its internal organisation, whereas the reference is the mode of being unfolded in front of the text'.⁷⁸ It also reunites the divorce between explanation and understanding, since 'the task of understanding is to bring to discourse what is initially given as structure'.⁷⁹ Truth and method are therefore in a dialectical relationship and in the process the text exposes and constitutes the reader, since the appropriation of the possible worlds opened up by the text enlarge the self.⁸⁰ False consciousness, in the Freudian sense, is thereby disclosed as the reader responds to the challenges presented by the text to his/her consciousness. Indeed 'appropriation ceases to appear as a kind of possession [...] it implies instead a moment of dispossession of the narcissistic ego'.⁸¹ For Ricoeur hermeneutics is about discovering the identity of the subject as the last moment in interpretation rather than the premise of it.⁸²

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Eng. trans., John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). p.93.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.93.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.94.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.192.

⁸² *Conflicts of Interpretation*, p.266.

2:7 Time, Narrative, Text and Hermeneutics

Ricoeur's dialogue with Gadamer and indeed with the hermeneutical and linguistic traditions seeks to root the Enlightenment quest for emancipation through universal understanding and explanation in a theory of texts that have sufficient 'objectivity' and universal availability to generate plausible knowledge, and through which the de-centred self is critically constituted as an ongoing project.⁸³ In the process he seeks to undermine the methodological divorce of the natural and human sciences and also to escape the incarceration of historicism and a naïve understanding of tradition. Tradition is what shows us critical theory in action for 'eschatology is nothing without the recitation of acts of deliverance from the past'.⁸⁴ Thus time and narrative are pivotal for Ricoeur, since it is only through time and within the framework of an emplotted narrative that the self can be discerned and pathological tendencies discerned.⁸⁵ Nevertheless it is debatable whether divorcing texts from their initial contexts can be sustained without letting loose an anarchy of interpretations and occluding their reflection of a social reality infused with the will to power.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p.90. Ricoeur uses the metaphor of a text to give provisional shape to human life, in order that it may be narrated, emplotted and contingently understood. Without such a temporary closure and distancing within life, it would be impossible to understand the fluidity of human experience.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.100.

⁸⁵ For a summary of Ricoeur's thoughts on narrative see 'Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties', in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 236-48. This will be discussed further in chapter 4.

⁸⁶ *Critical Hermeneutics*, p.127.

2:8 Emancipation Through Critical Theory

Gadamer represents a humanist and philosophical challenge to the limitations of the initial Enlightenment Project, without losing its quest for a form of understanding with emancipatory resources. A further attempt which seeks also to challenge perceived inadequacies in Gadamer's notion of tradition is represented in the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. Approaching the issues from within a sociological tradition informed by Marxist thought, Habermas seeks both to redeem the transcendental and emancipatory agendas of modernity without simplifying the ambiguity of the human condition as explored by the three major 'masters of suspicion'. In particular Habermas is concerned to do justice to the social pathology of the Enlightenment Project as expressed by Hegel, Weber, Hornkeimer, Adorno and Heidegger, whose summary of the legacy of the Enlightenment was that the triumph of instrumental reason (*Zweckrationalität*), expressed in technology and the bureaucratic state, had disenchanted the world of its former religious worldview leading to the demise of freedom and any credible ethical checks on emotivism. Heidegger in particular spoke of the enframing of life (*Gestell*) in consequence of the dynamics of this rationality, which intentionally sought to master and control in the process of understanding, thereby captivating humanity in an inescapably nihilistic project.

For Habermas the darkness implied by Weber's 'iron cage' of modernity, by Hornkeimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*,⁸⁷ and Heidegger's

⁸⁷ Habermas situates their negative views in a perception of a threefold legacy of the Enlightenment Project, namely facism, American consumer capitalism and Stalinist

‘*Gestell*’, seemed to denigrate the totality of the Enlightenment Project, rendering meaningless its promises of freedom, solidarity and emancipation, values that at least in some ways had inspired much that seemed progressive in earlier years. Indeed, for Habermas, Weber is the first social theorist whose analysis explicated the apparent irony of the Enlightenment Project evident even in Marx as he challenged the ubiquity of instrumental rationality present in Marx’s optimistic social theory.⁸⁸ Hence it is Weber who acts as Habermas’ principal interlocutor in the latter’s attempt to redeem the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment project. For Weber the roots of this lay at the heart of the Enlightenment Project namely the generation of a utopia through instrumental rationality infusing all dimensions of society. As noted earlier, such confidence has been subsequently disturbed by post empiricist science, historical contingency, contextual notions of rationality, distinctions between theoretical and practical rationality and the subversion of philosophies of consciousness. Nevertheless it was this utopian vision uncritically infused with the legacy of Darwinian evolutionary theory, that shaped much of the social character of what Weber saw to be western modernity. However underlying this Weber recognised the way the modernisation/rationalisation of society involved the differentiation of what was, at other times and in other places, integrated, namely the differentiation of the capitalist economy, the state and the law.⁸⁹ Inherent in this rationalising was the methodology of the emerging

communism and the way each subverts the emancipatory promise critical theory had suggested. See CA, I, pp. 366-86.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.144.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 158, 217.

natural sciences,⁹⁰ and a prioritising of tradition free, calculative reasoning summarised in the phrase ‘a methodical-rational conduct of life’.⁹¹

The legacy of this process in Weber’s estimation was an increasing sense of alienation as the rationalisation of society removes the framework of meaning supplied by the major religious traditions with the consequence of a new polytheism or irreducible pluralism within the iron cage of capitalism.⁹² For Habermas the pluralism inherent in the differentiation intrinsic to the rationalisation process need not lead either to fragmentation, inescapable conflict or the premature subsuming of these pluralities within one dominant rationality. The capacity to defend reasons for convictions suggested an immanent yet transcendental coherence which has emancipatory possibility. For Habermas this entailed delineating a theory of procedural rationality that had universal pretensions, a theory of society that explained the contradictions of late capitalism and a critical theory that could deal with the latter’s ambiguity in a more plausible way than Marxism had managed. Only by so doing could he escape Weber’s conflation of all rationality within purposive or instrumental reasoning and equally provide a context of tolerance within which truth could be argued for rather than presumed.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.159.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.173.

⁹² Ibid., p.249.

⁹³ See Habermas’ response to his critics in Richard J. Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p.194. Commenting on the pacifism inherent in Habermas’ approach to communicative rationality Ricoeur states ‘an eschatology of non violence thus forms the ultimate philosophical horizon of a critique of ideology [...] this eschatology [...] takes the place of the ontology of lingual understanding in a hermeneutics of tradition’ in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p.87. We shall explore the relationship between eschatology and pacifism in chapter 5.

In setting forth this theory of rationality, Habermas initially distinguished three cognitive interests, the technical/scientific, the ethical/practical and the evaluative/emancipatory, assigning to each a distinctive rationality; instrumental empirical reason for the natural sciences, communicative hermeneutical reason for the ethical-practical domain and self-critical reasoning for the evaluative-emancipatory, using the insights of both Marx and Freud in the latter.⁹⁴ In each case, though, Habermas discerned that communicative rationality is involved, since 'the rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based in the end on reasons'.⁹⁵ Such an approach in the domain of evaluative rationality, with its concerns for norms and traditions, allowed for both to be retried in the present through communicative argument, rather than simply being received without interrogation from the past.⁹⁶ Justification is thus at the core of such rationality, as instanced in law and morality, rather than a simple assertion of legal or ethical positivism or indeed the imposition of a powerful will.⁹⁷

Using the insights of the speech-act theories of Austin and Wittgenstein⁹⁸ and George Mead's practical social psychology Habermas developed a theory of language that was both performative and hermeneutical within human interaction.⁹⁹ This enabled him to distinguish between two predominant worlds

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.20.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 17, 340.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.255.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.266.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 277-78, 289-337.

⁹⁹ Thiselton (1992), p.388.

and their respective forms of rationality, the world of the 'system', in which technological and bureaucratic structures are informed by instrumental or purposive reason and the 'life-world' of inter-personal relationships, informed by communicative or dialogical reasoning. The pathological analysis of the Enlightenment legacy, articulated by its critics, relates to the uncoupling of the 'system' and the 'life-world' in modernity and the emergence of autonomous institutions in the former. These become detached from accountability to the 'life-world' and reflect the interests of particular groups within society. Hence instead of communication and language being the basis of achieving understanding within the life-world, instrumental values such as money and power replace the former and corrupt the latter.¹⁰⁰ The emancipatory challenge, therefore, is to de-colonise the 'lifeworld' of its 'system' invaders and to reopen the intersubjective dialogical potential of communicative rationality whose 'claim to universality (is) implicitly built into the ideas of truth and rightness as pointing to the validity basis of speech'.¹⁰¹ Thus Habermas seeks

a new 'Dialectic of Enlightenment', one that does full justice to the dark side of the Enlightenment legacy, explains its causes, but nevertheless redeems and justifies the hope of freedom, justice and happiness which still stubbornly speaks to us.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ CA, I, p.342.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁰² *Habermas and Modernity*, p.31.

Habermas' attempt to redeem the emancipatory possibilities of the Enlightenment Project depends on the plausibility of his notion of the ideal speech situation, his analogy between the insights of psychoanalysis and the generalisation of this involved in his discussion on ideology, and in his assumptions of sociality and dialectics immanent in speech and language.¹⁰³

Whilst it is certainly the case that languages hope for communicability, this cannot be guaranteed simply in the hope. In addition the insights of Freud and other 'masters of suspicion' question whether it is possible to achieve unanimity regarding the contours of such an ideal situation, even as an eschatological hope. Both the psychoanalysis of Freud and the critical theory of Habermas are themselves part of the complexity that their respective approaches seek to illuminate and are themselves unable to expose all that constitutes their own identity and that of the social context of which they are a part. In short can Habermas' ideal situation be envisaged or escape the corrupting infection of vested interests? Habermas' procedural ethic offers no rationale for why the logical shape of moral discourse creates an obligation on each citizen to respect the principle of universalisability.¹⁰⁴

Habermas' anthropology continues the modernist problem of concentrating all on finitude rather than in the perversity of the will. Even if we believe that his project has potential, there still remains the problem outlined by Bernstein in his discussion on Gadamer and Thomas McCarthy on Habermas himself. Are there

¹⁰³ CA, I, p.390. See also the critical comments of Thompson in *Critical Hermeneutics*, p.139 and also Anthony Giddens, 'Reason Without Revolution: Habermas' Theory of Communicative Reason' in *Habermas and Modernity*, pp. 95-124 (p.115).

¹⁰⁴ David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.146.

sufficiently cohesive communities in modernity that can begin to realise this programme?¹⁰⁵ This is particularly pertinent given Habermas' decision to locate religious world-views and art as a subset of aesthetic rationality and thereby to compromise their respective claims to be truth disclosures. In the case of art Martin Jay asserts

communicative rationality is not enough to insure true emancipation; the experimental memories still contained, however faintly, in art are necessary to give humankind a motivational stimulus to search for happiness.¹⁰⁶

Similar sentiments are expressed by the theologians David Tracy and Helmut Peukert, who see in religious traditions prophetic and eschatological symbols and symbols of subversive memories that offer occasion for the disclosure of a more emancipated future.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately Habermas' evolutionary model sees traditional religions as transcended by communicative reasoning, surviving in the present only because philosophy has not yet managed to embrace the formers' semantic contents in its own terms. However Habermas believes that this will ultimately happen.¹⁰⁸ Finally Habermas remains committed to a linguistically constituted community. This raises questions about the

¹⁰⁵ For Bernstein see *Beyond Relativism*, p.225 and for McCarthy see *Habermas and Modernity*, p.180. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza asks a similar question from a theologian's perspective, arguing that 'churches as communities of the interpretation of the substantial narrative potential of their religious traditions can provide such institutional locus'. See 'The Church as a Community of Interpretation: Political Theology between Discourse Ethics and Hermeneutical Reconstruction', in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds, *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 66-91 (p.79). We shall attend to this further in chapter 4.

¹⁰⁶ Martin Jay, 'Habermas and Modernity' in *Habermas and Modernity*, pp. 125-139 (p.131).

¹⁰⁷ David Tracy, 'Theology, Critical Theory and the Public Realm', and Helmut Peukert, 'Enlightenment and Theology as Unfinished Projects' in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, pp. 19-42 (pp. 37-38), and pp. 43-65 (55-58).

¹⁰⁸ 'Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World', in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, pp.227-248 (p.237).

emancipatory agenda of his project for the non-lingual world. Does Habermas' project suffer from an anthropocentric preoccupation which ironically reflects the very pathology of the post enlightenment legacy reflected in the dominance of instrumental and utilitarian forms of rationality present in much industrialisation?

2:9 Iris Murdoch and Recovering the Transcendent Through Art

A final figure in the attempt to recover the initial hopes of the Enlightenment agenda and one to whom Hauerwas is explicitly indebted for his earliest thought, as we have seen, is Iris Murdoch. For her, the failure of Kantian philosophy to escape its intrinsically narcissistic preoccupations means that freedom, philosophy and ethics require the possibility of engagement with the transcendent within the confines of the finite, the irreducibility of the otherness of reality pressing upon human consciousness, and the particularity of all things. She finds this possibility in the love evoked by art.¹⁰⁹ Paradoxically this is why tragedy is such a vital indicator of the reality of the other, since the tragic both displays the finitude and the particularity of the subject. Art, for Murdoch, protects us against the totalitarian and reductionist tendencies of modernity, whether manifested in a Hegelian absorption of particulars within a whole, the isolated and anxious subject of Sartre's existentialism, the scientific desire for precision represented in the linguistic empiricism of Moore and the early Wittgenstein or indeed in the deconstructionist approach of Derrida et

¹⁰⁹ 'The Sublime and the Good' in P. Conradi, ed., *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings in Philosophy and Literature: I. Murdoch*, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp. 215-220 (p. 215) (henceforth EM). For a more detailed discussion of art see Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 1-25.

al.¹¹⁰ All are enemies of love, since they either render the subject introspective, neurotically self-preoccupied and threatened by the 'other' or they abstract or dissolve the particularity of the person. Only art and especially literature, can respect and convey the contingency, particularity and transcendence of reality, without losing that intuition of the wholeness or integration of all things.¹¹¹ In short it is concerned with the real, grasped through imagination but without the consolations of fantasy and premature closures, so beloved of modernity's other offspring, romanticism.¹¹² Hence

virtue is not essentially or immediately concerned with choosing between actions or rules or reasons, nor with stripping the personality for a leap. It is concerned with really apprehending that other people exist [...] freedom is not choosing; that is merely the move we make when all is already lost. Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves.¹¹³

This is what she calls her 'post Kantian unromantic liberalism',¹¹⁴ which involves the 'need to return from the self-centred concept of sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth',¹¹⁵ through attention¹¹⁶ to 'the sheer alien, pointless, independent existence of animals, birds, stones and trees' as other.¹¹⁷ This will enable us to be drawn out of ourselves, rather than into ourselves as

¹¹⁰ 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', EM, pp. 261-85 (pp. 264-68), and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, pp. 202-03.

¹¹¹ 'Art is the Imitation of History', EM, pp. 243-55 (p.247).

¹¹² 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited, op.cit., pp. 278-79.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.284. See also 'On God and Good', EM, 337-62 (p.354).

¹¹⁴ 'Against Dryness', EM, pp. 287-336 (p.293).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ 'On God and Good' op.cit., p.354.

¹¹⁷ 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', EM, pp. 364-83 (p.370).

Kant suggested. Like learning a language, this process is a hard recognition that we are confronted by something that demands our respect and humility. In this way we learn that values are not created by arbitrary human choice, but are intuited by attention to the Good, understood to be a vision of the depths of reality mediated by love.¹¹⁸ Thus ‘as moral beings we are immersed in a reality which transcends us and [...] moral progress consists in awareness of this reality and submission to its purposes’.¹¹⁹ The self is therefore a recipient of transcendent values, truths and wisdom.¹²⁰

2:10 Freedom from the Enlightenment: Immanentism and the Rejection of Modernity

Gadamer, Ricoeur, Habermas and Murdoch represent attempts to maintain a chastened version of the Enlightenment Project involving the plausibility of transcendental epistemology, coherence, communicability, emancipation and the respectful resolution of difference without the problematic legacy of philosophies of consciousness. In contrast there have emerged voices critical of the whole project itself. Focused upon the presumption that modernity implies a totalising agenda, which ignores the contingent, the particular, the eccentric, the irreducible plurality of life and the fluidity of identity, this critique has taken two principal directions. The one, often labelled ‘post-modern’, has sought to deconstruct the Enlightenment ideal of universal reason, secure noetic foundations either in the subject or in language, and the triumph of the one

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 378-80.

¹¹⁹ ‘Vision and Choice in Morality’ in Ian T. Ramsey, ed., *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, 2nd edn (London: SCM 1973), pp. 195-218 (p.216).

¹²⁰ *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p.507.

over the many. The other, characterised by the thesis of the moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, calls the whole Enlightenment Project into question, suggesting that it has exhausted its potential as a creative tradition and that a return to an Aristotelian-Thomist understanding of reasoning is required.

The 'post-moderns' including Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Rorty among their number are particularly hostile to any sense that the 'Other's' particularity and consequent irreducibility should be compromised by any subsuming metacritique or metanarrative. Disruptions rather than continuities characterise their concerns, a conviction rooted, according to Bernstein, in ethical rather than in purely philosophical concerns.

We can read Derrida as showing us over and over again that the devious tactics and strategies designed to exclude, outcast, silence and exile the contaminating 'Other' have never quite been successful.¹²¹

Michel Foucault is especially hostile to the coercive force of the Enlightenment, with its demand that we take a position and norms, rather than allowing ourselves to be swept along by the fluid, mutable dynamic of existence. The present is all. Notions of teleology and humanism are deceptive. The subject is an invention of the moment.¹²² Derrida likewise seeks to show that when we are most secure, most 'at home' in the Heideggerian sense of *ethos*, the

¹²¹ *The New Constellation*, p.180.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 143-45.

unexpected, the strange, the dark is at hand: ‘heimlich’ and ‘unheimlich’ cannot be segregated.¹²³ There is no possibility of a final synthesis.

Richard Rorty, drawing upon the insights of the Deweyan American pragmatic tradition with its historicist convictions, seeks to expose any attempts to reinvent what he calls ‘foundationalism’, even claiming that Habermas is constrained by a fixed and presentist view of language that has no space for the novel and unexpected.¹²⁴ Indeed rather than trying to resurrect the ideals of the Enlightenment agenda a humbler more pragmatic approach that ‘works’ in this or that situation is more authentic. Attempts even to generalise from the insights of the ‘masters of suspicion’, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud all fall foul of the historicist challenge.¹²⁵ Feminist critics, such as Valerie Saiving have also challenged the universal and emancipatory pretensions of the Enlightenment Project, arguing that ‘the modern era can be called masculine “par excellence” in the sense that it emphasised, encouraged and set free precisely those aspects of human nature which are particularly significant to men’.¹²⁶ However, whilst these ‘post-modern’ critics arguably act as a corrective to the pretensions of modernity, Bernstein is right to note the contradiction inherent in any totalising critique. A critique is always a critique in the name of something, for otherwise the critical impulse is itself consumed.¹²⁷ Without some provisional basis for critical analysis everything dissolves into rhetoric. Hence Gerald Loughlin is

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 173-74.

¹²⁴ *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, p.198.

¹²⁵ Richard Rorty, ‘Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity’ in *Habermas and Modernity*, pp. 161-191 (p.161).

¹²⁶ Quoted in Susan F. Parsons, *Feminism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.49.

¹²⁷ *The New Constellation*, p.317.

correct when he refuses to allow the ‘post-modernists’ to claim freedom from any metanarrative, given the contradiction intrinsic to their transcendental claim that no metanarratives exist.¹²⁸

2:11 Freedom through Traditions: Rehabilitating Pre-Enlightenment Thought

The need to account for the variety of conflicting discourses, intelligible to their protagonists and yet unintelligible to their antagonists is precisely what motivated Alasdair MacIntyre’s project. Working within moral philosophy he became increasingly aware that the legacy of the Enlightenment, radicalised by Nietzsche, had led to noisy emotivism, rather than rationally resolvable debate.¹²⁹ Such emotivism is generated both by the incapacity for opposing positions to resolve their differences through rational debate and by the utilitarianism inherent in the bureaucratisation of society consequent upon the triumph of instrumental reason as elucidated by Weber and Nietzsche.¹³⁰ With the emphasis upon means and ends rather than upon the generation of roles and character, together with the legacy of Kant’s divorce of value from fact, the capacity to agree upon moral truth had been subverted.¹³¹ Indeed it had contributed to the intense subjectivism of Sartre and the existentialists with their loss of any sense of an extraneous telos for life.¹³² MacIntyre’s response to this ironic legacy of the Kantian attempt to situate ethical rationality in his

¹²⁸ Gerald Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.10.

¹²⁹ *After Virtue*, p.6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹³¹ *Whose Justice, Whose Rationality*, p.357.

¹³² *After Virtue*, p.33.

categorical imperative was to expose the social specificity of the Enlightenment Project through an historicist critique and thereby to show that in contemporary life ‘moral judgements are linguistic survivals from the practices of classical theism which have lost the context provided by these practices’.¹³³ Hence their articulation appears simply as an assertion of arbitrary will and in society, unjustifiable rules arbitrate a pattern of living without any notion of agreed ends.

For MacIntyre the rejection of an Aristotelian virtue ethic in favour of that which led to Nietzsche is itself something that needs questioning and both *After Virtue* and its successor, *Whose Justice, Whose Rationality*, are attempts to express a neo-Aristotelian agenda in contrast to the ethical legacy of the Enlightenment. Such a critique recognises the tradition bearing quality and particularity of all moral language.¹³⁴ It also implies a substantial and storied vision of moral formation.¹³⁵ For MacIntyre therefore a reappraisal of Aristotle involved restating a conviction in the unity of a human life, within which virtues could be situated and understood through socially engendered character and attendant practices. This entailed attention to narrative, and history in order to allow for the latter’s tangible display.¹³⁶ Indeed the characteristics of Aristotle’s vision of the ‘polis’, reworked by Thomas Aquinas, furnished MacIntyre with the sort of context within which such practical rationality could exhibit itself through the expression of its attendant virtues.¹³⁷

¹³³ Ibid., p.60.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.126.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.174.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.258.

¹³⁷ *Whose Justice*, p.141.

Hence MacIntyre argued that the liberal hope of emancipation using a universal language with a singular vision of morality was a myth itself needing deconstruction. Instead language and all forms of human rationality, represented distinctive traditions each demonstrating their rationality and truth claims through their intrasystematic coherence and their capacity to transcend themselves by dealing meaningfully with the new questions of the age rather than collapsing in an 'epistemological crisis'.¹³⁸ In *After Virtue* MacIntyre described 'a living tradition [...] as an historically extended, socially embodied argument, an argument precisely about the goods which constitute that tradition.'¹³⁹ Such traditions are incommensurable, although, like learning a second language, attempts can be made by inhabitants of an alien tradition approximately to grasp the insights of another. However what is not possible is a detached and neutral critical vantage point. There is no common foundation for rational debate.¹⁴⁰

MacIntyre labelled the liberal or Enlightenment Project as one of a number of major traditions operative in the western world.¹⁴¹ In fact it possesses its own internal standards of rational justification, its own authoritative texts and disputes over their interpretation, save that it is now the lawyers rather than the philosophers who are its clergy.¹⁴² However its pretensions to objectivity, universal claim and subsequent rejection of the notion of teleology had been

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.327.

¹³⁹ *After Virtue*, p.222.

¹⁴⁰ *Whose Justice*, p.334.

¹⁴¹ For his reflections on the liberal project see *ibid.*, p.335.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.345.

dealt a blow by Nietzsche to the point where its resources to sustain itself have come to an end. All that is left of this tradition, in the area of moral discourse at least is emotivist rhetoric and the power to bargain.¹⁴³ This both questions the credibility of the project given that its ambitions have so utterly failed and therefore suggests a need to reconnect with a more creative tradition that can substantiate moral endeavour and human identity, which in *After Virtue* was predominantly an Aristotelian tradition and in *Whose Justice, Whose Rationality* its offspring Thomism. Only here, argued MacIntyre, was there an acknowledgement of the community delineated contexts necessary for intelligible rationality to exercise itself and in which substantial notions of virtue, character and practical judgement could be developed to rescue the post-Enlightenment west from 'the new dark ages which are already upon us!'.¹⁴⁴

MacIntyre's thesis has generated considerable debate, particularly regarding his understanding of traditions, his use of Aristotle and Aquinas, his radical incommensurability thesis, the credibility of his conception of liberalism¹⁴⁵ and the potential authoritarianism of his suggestions, which is in danger of losing a central Enlightenment insight namely toleration.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless his direct

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.336.

¹⁴⁴ *After Virtue*, p.263.

¹⁴⁵ For this debate see the essays in John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds. *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). See also Ian Markham, 'Faith and Reason: Reflections on MacIntyre's Tradition-Constituted Enquiry', *Religious Studies*, 27 (1991), 263-276 and Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, p.126.

¹⁴⁶ See Robert Wokler, 'Projecting the Enlightenment' in *After MacIntyre*, pp. 108-126 (p.125).

challenge to the pretensions of the Enlightenment Project remains formidable and particularly influential upon Hauerwas as we shall see below.

2:12 Human Freedom and The Legacy of the Enlightenment Project

From the above it is clear that the Enlightenment Project and with it the liberal tradition have failed to achieve the emancipation they promised. Indeed through its own pathology and deconstruction the project looks decidedly vulnerable. Much promised light has turned into tragic darkness and suffering, the rhetoric of liberation into the experience of incarceration. The homogenising and reductionist tendencies of technological and bureaucratic rationality have eroded the distinctiveness and particularity of life. Indeed it is questionable whether there exist communities of sufficient commitment, extent and coherence to embark upon the only hopeful project of the Enlightenment legacy suggested by Habermas. As Bernstein points out, often such communities turn out to be sectarian, white, male and educated, a false 'we',¹⁴⁷ which suffocates rather than liberates debate. Further still the Enlightenment Project, even in its chastened Habermasian form, has failed to transcend the linguistic community and engage with the non-linguistic world. As Thomas McCarthy argues, since nature has generated us as a linguistic and moral order we should regard ourselves as in nature not outside of it, and seek a creative engagement in the light of this.¹⁴⁸ It is against this ambivalent background that Hauerwas' ecclesiology, as a truly Christian theology of liberation has to be viewed.

¹⁴⁷ *The New Constellation*, p.51.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas McCarthy in *Habermas and Modernity*, p.190.

Section III: Liberation as the Ecclesiology Project rather than the Enlightenment Project

2:13 Hauerwas' Critique of the Enlightenment Project

As we noted earlier in this chapter Hauerwas' project, from the outset, represents a confrontation with liberalism understood as freedom meaning autonomy. Philosophically this entails Hauerwas rejecting the post-enlightenment attempt to secure human emancipation through human autonomy, rationality and choice independent of theological resource.¹⁴⁹ His ambivalence about both Kantian deontological and utilitarian ethics¹⁵⁰ and their 'ageric man' remains central to his criticisms of the initial liberal agenda.¹⁵¹ As an introspective narcissistic vision of being human in which the human will is central, self creation is the primary agenda and individual freedom the goal, the political implications of this ideology generate a deceptive vision of the state as ethically neutral, a 'thin' procedural notion of justice, the noisy, mutually unintelligible arguments of interest groups and the loss of any sense of human community which Hauerwas sees most explicitly displayed in modern North America.¹⁵² Paradoxically the rhetoric of human freedom, tolerance and choice

¹⁴⁹ For Hauerwas' summaries of his understanding of liberalism, philosophically, ethically, and in socio-economic terms see *Vision and Virtue*, p.229; *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 10, 16-37; *A Community of Character*, pp. 11,78,107; *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 7-8; *Against the Nations*, p.18; 'Will the Real Sectarian Stand Up!', *Theology Today*, 44/1 (April 1987), 87-94 (p.93); *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p.35; *Dispatches from the Front*, pp. 6-13.

¹⁵⁰ *Character and the Christian Life*, p.182 and *Vision and Virtue*, p.24 etc. A more exhaustive critique of liberalism informing Hauerwas' project is in Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds, *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

¹⁵¹ For Hauerwas' dependency here on Murdoch see Iris Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of the Good' in EM, p.366.

¹⁵² See 'Politics, Vision and the Common Good', *Vision and Virtue*, op.cit. Here Hauerwas accepts Reinhold Niebuhr's analysis of North American democracy. The difference lies in their ecclesial response to this pathology as we shall see in chapter 3.

have produced a society captive to technology, bureaucracy and the fetishes of consumerism with consequent evidence of social disenchantment, alienation and anxiety.¹⁵³ Above all this 'liberalism' has muted the Christian community, which has been driven from the 'public' domain into that labelled 'private'. Yet given the rejection, since Hume, of the so called 'naturalistic fallacy' a critique of this legacy is nigh on impossible without a deconstruction of these 'liberal' presuppositions. As we have seen, it is precisely this that drives Hauerwas not only to challenge the perceived incarcerating implications of the liberal project in a way that echoes the work of Weber, Habermas and MacIntyre, but also leads him to question its fundamental epistemological claims to universality, objectivity and truthfulness.

Liberalism, according to Hauerwas, fails to recognise the narrative and traditioned quality of human existence and hence that 'our rationality is always context-dependent on the kind of men we are or ought to be!'.¹⁵⁴ Without such teleologically suggestive and substantial narratives, people become equivalents to Albert Speer, the archetypal liberal man, paradoxically prisoner to the powers that rule his world, but which remain unmasked behind the emancipatory rhetoric of liberalism.¹⁵⁵ Hence, in concert with MacIntyre, and echoing Gadamer, Hauerwas pursues a critique of liberalism which seeks not so much to be rid of it or assert that everything about it is misguided, but rather to

¹⁵³ See 'Theology and the New American Culture', *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 241-60. See also *Resident Aliens*, p.64.

¹⁵⁴ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p.51. The narrative resources Hauerwas turns to will be explored in chapter 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.79.

reposition it as a competing, but contingent, tradition alongside other truth-claiming traditions of which the Christian tradition is one. In his debate with Michael J. Quirk Hauerwas comments,

the primary concern in my work has not been to critique liberal society; it has been to offer a vision for the church (in particular the integrity of the church) so that Christians might help negotiate the challenges of a liberal society [...] my position certainly does not entail a wholesale rejection of 'secular civilization', or even of liberalism. Indeed I think liberalism has done much good and has results from which no-one would wish to back away. In particular liberalism has been inventive in creating limitations on state power in order to encourage public co-operation for the maintenance of good community. Part of the difficulty is that the terms of justification for the limitations that liberalism builds within itself (such as limited government in the name of freedom of the individual) often become destructive policy for the individual, since individuals as such lose the means to know how to say 'no' to the state.¹⁵⁶

In consequence Hauerwas' ecclesiology assumes a pivotal role, since it is the very embodiment of a storied tradition that gives plausibility to its truth claims. 'Liberalism, in its many forms and versions, presupposes that society can be

¹⁵⁶ 'Will the Real Sectarian Stand Up!', p.93. He later writes 'I am not trying to save the liberal project, I am trying to save the church from the liberal project', *In Good Company*, p.16.

organised without any narrative that is commonly held to be true',¹⁵⁷ and yet once notions of character have been resurrected, it is impossible to accept that this is anything other than a story that fails to declare itself and is especially pernicious in this regard.¹⁵⁸ Indeed the nature of liberalism's hidden story, with its accompanying, procedural virtues of tolerance, sincerity and fairness means that

the liberal often fails to see that they are training people to be virtuous, which, in their own terms, is coercive since they claim to be creating a social order that respects the 'right' of everyone to be virtuous in their own way.¹⁵⁹

Liberalism is therefore self-contradictory since the ideals it promotes subvert any possibility of forming people with the virtues it needs to survive. An individualistic understanding of freedom and emotivist ethics shatter the coherence of community and render notions of tolerance increasingly difficult to promote. Initially Hauerwas is drawn to Iris Murdoch's notion of 'attention' through love to the transcendent other as a way of counter acting this pathology. However, this presents a non-storied and hence non-community generated freedom, which robs it of any substance. Given Hauerwas' desire to discern truth through character, an approach which demands a narrative and

¹⁵⁷ *Character and the Christian Life*, p.11.

¹⁵⁸ See *Christian Existence Today*, p.35, where he writes that the legacy of liberalism is folk 'lost in a world where the story is that we should have no story'. The legacy of Wittgenstein is evident here in Hauerwas' grasp of the need for training in the formation of identity and consequently understanding.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.191.

community to constitute and convey it, Murdoch's response to the limitations of the liberal project is itself limited.¹⁶⁰

2:14 Moving Beyond Deconstruction

In the course of his engagement with liberalism, as we noted in chapter 1, Hauerwas develops his critique from an initial exposure of the limitations of liberal ethics in *Character and the Christian Life*, further discussed in *Vision and Virtue* and more substantially debated in his contrasts between the liberal 'standard account' and Christian believing in the essays included in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, to his espousal, in *A Community of Character*, of the embodied community of church as the agency intrinsically necessary for the displaying of Christian truth claims to the world. In the process Hauerwas is forced to confront some of the questions that underlie the Enlightenment or liberal project, namely how to substantiate a truthful portrayal of reality, without collapsing into the anarchy of relativism implied by some of those antagonists to the project whom we noted above. The question of truth, the resolution of conflicting truth claims, avoidance of sectarianism and fideism all demand that his challenges to the liberal project are not simply about deconstruction and retreat.

In the earlier part of his career, Hauerwas attended primarily to the restoration of the church as the distinctively Christian epistemological agency, an agency

¹⁶⁰ The theological limitations of Murdoch's project also contribute to their parting of the ways. See 'Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get Through Them If God Does Not Exist?' in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth Century Theology and Philosophy*. (Colorado & Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 155-70.

which he believed liberalism has subverted in its neglect of character, story and community. Hence, at this stage, Hauerwas was more concerned to expose the limitations and inadequacies of liberal thinking than to offer a substantial alternative. However with the publication of *A Community of Character*, attention to some of the uncertainties of his own project becomes apparent and it is here that he most explicitly posits the church as the community through which truth and Christian freedom can be known. Indeed it is precisely the reality of the church as a community of character, storied, embodied and in ongoing formation that enables Hauerwas to speak not of abstract or a-temporal notions of truth, but instead to articulate a procedural notion of truthfulness or practical truth for

the truthfulness of Christian convictions resides in their power to form a people sufficient to acknowledge the divided character of the world and thus necessarily be ready to offer hospitality to the stranger. They must be what they are.¹⁶¹

For Hauerwas, therefore, truth cannot be generated abstractly or simply in ideological terms. It cannot be reduced to grammar and rhetorical argument. Indeed he prefers to speak of truthfulness, rather than truth, since the former is an embodied notion which has an organic quality to it. It also recognises the historicity of human existence and implies a critical narrativity for 'the church is nothing less than that community where we continue to test and are tested by

¹⁶¹ *A Community of Character*, p.93.

the particular way these stories live through us'.¹⁶² Hence truthfulness emerges, or is seen, because there exists a community whose life exhibits the truth about the way reality is. Such truth is historically mediated and is a complexity such that at any one time it is not always clear whether any one particular tradition is truthful. Truthful living is a pilgrimage and requires formative participation in a truth bearing community.¹⁶³ It can only be known as it proves itself in the tangibility of human lives in ever new situations. However, as we shall note in chapters 4 and 5, the fullness of truth remains an eschatological reality for Hauerwas, which though proleptically anticipated in the ecclesial community, is only ambiguously and limitedly so displayed. Hence his Christian liberalism, or Christian freedom, in contrast to the purported freedom of the post-enlightenment project, is not a final freedom, but a freedom of life still in formation. This introduces an element of reserve about his ecclesiological liberalism which again contrasts with the optimism of many protagonists of the Enlightenment agenda.

If Enlightenment liberalism sought to achieve a universal human emancipation, deconstruction of the latter through an exposure of its insubstantial premises leads to the demise of the human altogether. With this Hauerwas agrees commenting more recently that 'the anti-humanism associated with Nietzsche

¹⁶² Ibid., p.96.

¹⁶³ See Hauerwas' discussion in 'Gay Friendship: A Thought Experiment in Catholic Moral Theology', *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp.105-19 (pp 113-15). In chapter 5 Hauerwas understanding of Christian friendship will emerge as evidence of his distinctively Christian ecclesiology of emancipation. See also 'Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped', *Sanctify Them*, pp. 143-53 (p.145), for 'no group exposes the pretensions of the humanism that shapes the practices of modernity more thoroughly than the mentally handicapped' and 'The Testament of Friends', *Christian Century*, 107/7, (28 February 1990), 212-16.

and Foucault is the only kind of atheism possible in modernity'. This is in contrast to the liberal humanism's attempt to replace God with the human as we saw earlier in this chapter. 'Postmodernism names the vulnerabilities built into this view of the self and knowledge that were present from its inception', which Marx and Freud could not transcend, wedded as they were to modernity's humanism. Hence

postmodernism represents a more radical questioning than that propounded by either Marx or Freud just to the extent it denies subjectivity and correlative notions of agency altogether [...] the 'self', like language itself, is but a sign that gets its meaning from other signs that get their meaning through their relationships of similarity and difference with other signs. The 'self' names our attempt at agency to name the play of languages that speak through us.¹⁶⁴

For Hauerwas, the question facing these post-moderns is whether their rejection of any sense of narrative continuity renders them not only insubstantial but also thereby leaves people powerless in the face of the carceral system that engulfs them.¹⁶⁵ In this way the society of postmodernism simply intensifies what is latent in modernism. For Hauerwas only a community which can escape and transcend the assumptions of liberalism can offer the resources for truly human freedom. In telling the story of the church and

¹⁶⁴ 'Going Forward by Looking Back: Agency Reconsidered'. *Sanctify Them*, pp. 93-103 (pp. 96-99).

¹⁶⁵ For a detailed engagement with 'post-modernism' see 'The Christian Difference' op.cit. There Hauerwas argues that 'post-modernism' can be construed as the ideology of the disempowered intellectual elites of the university, now overthrown by a globalisation which is destroying the nation-state upon which the modern university belongs for its rationale.

especially its saints, he finds a storied community of decentred people whose identity is not rooted in some theologically independent sense of consciousness, but in what ‘God, through the church, tells them’ of themselves.¹⁶⁶ Hence Christians should welcome the insights of those seeking to deconstruct the Enlightenment Project, since ‘it is as if we Christians have forgotten that we also have a stake in atheism. Christians do not believe in the “human”, we believe in God - a God’. Nevertheless they should also expose the nihilistic implications of such deconstruction and regain confidence in what the church as a tradition and presence represents.¹⁶⁷

Thus, as is evident in *A Community of Character*, Hauerwas’ rejection of liberalism, constructive or deconstructive, does not lead him to espouse an anarchic relativism. Traditions, as we have noted above, display a narrative available for critical scrutiny, albeit in terms of their own canons and the way they survive the challenges they have confronted. It is further possible to argue that the conviction of the truthfulness of one’s own tradition does not prevent the quest to respect and understand another tradition.¹⁶⁸ Such an approach, which accords with MacIntyre’s argument, is a piecemeal step-by-step approach to understanding rather than an a priori one. Different traditions converse with one another to discover areas of mutual overlap or understanding, without implying that such agreement can claim universal assent. Hauerwas’ belief that the Enlightenment Project cannot deal with the

¹⁶⁶ ‘Going Forward, Looking Back’, op.cit.

¹⁶⁷ ‘No Enemy, No Christianity: Preaching between Worlds’, *Sanctify Them*, pp. 191-92. See ‘The Christian Difference’, p.164.

¹⁶⁸ *A Community of Character*, p.104.

tragic, because it believes in a possible resolution of all antitheses, whether in idealist, empiricist or linguistic terms, still leaves unanswered the problem of how the tragic is managed not only beyond the church but also within the church and we must return to this in chapter 4. Truly Christian freedom has to be able to respect finitude as well as resolve the problem of sin. Similarly this suggests the necessity of a soft form of deontology with rules functioning as narrative summaries of sedimentary character, credible because of their ongoing illuminating role rather than representing idealistic and abstract truths.¹⁶⁹

For Hauerwas, the integrity of this ecclesially mediated freedom lies in the Christological peaceableness he derived from Yoder.¹⁷⁰ The plausibility of this will occupy us in chapter 5. At this point we note the way such peaceableness is rooted in an eschatological horizon which supplies Hauerwas with the notion of an End necessary to situate a truthful way of life in the present.¹⁷¹ The peaceableness of Christ carried by the contemporary church in its memory and life, is the proleptic hallmark of the world's destiny and best respects its freedom and integrity in a manner impossible for Enlightenment liberalism. As such this peaceableness engenders a satirical church, a communal irony to liberalism's pretensions and one whose marginal social status, relatively

¹⁶⁹ The relationship between sin, finitude, church, society and eschatology informs Hauerwas' disagreement with R. Niebuhr. See chapters 3 and 5.

¹⁷⁰ 'The Christian Difference', p.165.

¹⁷¹ For the failure of liberalism to offer any substantive notion of an End see *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.20.

powerless constituents and yet diachronic and synchronic diversity suggests ways of escaping the problems intrinsic to interest groups.¹⁷²

However Hauerwas' critical engagement with the Enlightenment Project requires a response to the apparent loss of universal address inherent in his rejection of its assumptions. Hence he faces the charge of sectarianism, that is the construction an epistemology whose intelligibility is restricted to one section of the human community rather than to the whole. Hauerwas' strategy to subvert this challenge is first to deny liberalism's universalistic claims, rather than simply being one tradition among many and, second, to point out that liberal societies/states demographically represent a localised minority of the human race in contrast to the transglobal diachronic society called church. In this way Hauerwas is again using the embodied community of church rather than a rhetorical ideal as the basis for suggesting the universal potential of the truth displayed in the church. It is this more Aristotelian understanding of the immanence of the universal within the particular that Hauerwas prefers to a more metaphysical Platonic approach and this may partly explain his reduced attention to Murdoch's project.¹⁷³ It also allows him to criticise the docetic tendencies of liberal thinking revealed, as we saw earlier, in his discussion on medicine in *Suffering Presence* as well as exposing liberalism's difficulty dealing with the Other, represented in Hauerwas' terms especially by the

¹⁷² See Gloria Albrecht, 'In Good Company: The Church as Polis: Article Review', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50/2 (1997), 218-27. In chapter 4 we shall note how he responds to this. Nevertheless in his introduction to *Christian Existence Today* he asserts 'I certainly do not believe, nor did Wittgenstein, that religious convictions are or should be treated as an internally consistent language game that is self-validating', pp. 9-10.

¹⁷³ In 'Murdochian Muddles', op.cit., Hauerwas explains how his worries about Murdoch's platonic mysticism were increasingly re-inforced by her atheism.

retarded and handicapped. Liberalism has a tradition of destroying the other, and modern medicine, as we have seen, displays this in its presumptions about what constitutes normality and the consequent destruction of those such as the unborn retarded. In addition he identifies the church as God's new language, the congregation as a theological agency and the role of the clergy as bearers of theological wisdom together enabling the formation of Christian people able to negotiate and discriminate God's call within the variety of contexts they inhabit.¹⁷⁴ It is the very tangibility of the church and its story that enables this engagement to escape the destructive and docetic tendencies of liberalism and offer a truly embodied liberty.

The church as a hermeneutical community therefore represents an example of the sort of ontological hermeneutics initiated by Heidegger and developed by Gadamer. It avoids the pitfalls of philosophies of consciousness because its primary task is to be itself, to understand itself in its context and to 'go on' through an engagement that derives from this attention to its character. In part this involves identifying where alien patterns of thought, such as post-Enlightenment liberalism have colonised its identity. *Unleashing the Scriptures* identifies this in terms of reading the Bible and rejects

the fictive agent of the Enlightenment - namely the rational
individual who believes that truth in general and particularly

¹⁷⁴ See the essays in *Christian Existence Today*, 'The Church as God's New Language', pp. 47-65, 'The Ministry of a Congregation: Rethinking Christian Ethics for a Church-Centred Seminary', pp. 111-36, 'Clerical Character: Reflections on Ministerial Morality', pp. 133-43, and 'The Pastor as Prophet: Ethical Reflections on an Improbable Mission', pp. 149-64. The essay 'Hope faces Power', pp. 199-220, on Thomas More reflects how such Christian formation enables truthful discrimination to take place even at the cost of life. This notion of martyrdom as the highest example of Christian freedom will be developed in chapter 5.

the truth of the Christian faith can be known without initiation into a community that requires transformation of the self.¹⁷⁵

Equally the problem can be seen in ethics and philosophy as well. As we saw earlier in *Naming the Silences*, Hauerwas notes how post-Enlightenment thought usurped Christian rhetoric in an attempt to supply a univocal explanation for suffering. In so doing a theodicy was generated which divorced God's existence from his character, his will from his identity, implying an absolutist deity incredible given the continuing suffering of the world. In consequence, as we noted, the reaction led to the replacement of this theodicy with anthropodicy, a classic liberal move, which Hauerwas believes Christians can resist only by subverting the former's ideology and re-appropriating the Christian narrative tradition embodied in the church.

2:15 Summary

Hauerwas is therefore unconvinced by the emancipatory promises of the Enlightenment Project. Nevertheless, whilst sympathetic to its critics, he is distinguished from them by his conviction that the distinctive community or polis of church uniquely offers a truth disclosing context, rather than the human community in general, in the case of Gadamer and Habermas, or a social tradition, in the case of MacIntyre. Neither of these is sufficiently cohesive or extensive enough to allow for the generation of truthful living. It is this which places him in a unique position relative to the ongoing debate over the

¹⁷⁵ *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p.35.

Enlightenment Project, for it is precisely the abstract nature of their quest for rationality and the unembodied character of their notions of truth and plausibility, that Hauerwas is challenging. In contrast to Gadamer, Hauerwas believes that it is not simply the reconstructive memory of the tradition that will supply the resources to discover a truth bearing freedom, even though Hauerwas shares the orientation of the ontological hermeneutics initiated by Heidegger and developed by Gadamer. In contrast to Ricoeur, Hauerwas sees not the objectivising of a text as the principal hermeneutical action, but the participation in an existing community which is the primary text within which and through which other texts are situated and interpreted. As a result a text such as Scripture is neither objectified nor foundational, but rather functions through the existence of a community which recognises that text as constitutive of its identity and thereby demanding of its attention. We shall explore the character of this community in chapter 5. Suffice it to say that its plausibility rests not upon an autonomous anthropocentric epistemology but upon the kind of liberty displayed in the peaceableness of the contemporary historic church which celebrates the integrity of the many and yet rejoices in particularity. The Texan is not lost in the Christian, but is repositioned and refocussed.¹⁷⁶

Further to this, Hauerwas' peaceable-community hermeneutic fulfils something of Habermas' demand for an intrasystematic critical dialogue with the past. Peaceableness, whilst it will manifest itself in various ways, has sufficient form to enable a critical appraisal of the tradition without falling prey to deceptive

¹⁷⁶ See 'A Tale of Two Stories: On Being a Christian and a Texan', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 25-46 (p.26).

post Enlightenment ideals of the kind Hauerwas criticises theologians of revolution for promoting, as we saw in chapter 1. Casuistry is therefore creative precisely because it offers positive models from the past, particularly in the lives of the saints, but equally discloses failures in that history. It enables the questions critical theory raises to test the tradition, as Ricoeur asserts. In addition the recognition across contexts of belonging to a common tradition reduces the sectarian perspectives ironically engendered by liberalism. For it is the very blindness of liberalism to its own provinciality that Hauerwas is most critical of. War is the hallmark of the latter because it cannot see in the otherness of cultures and communities a commonality that can celebrate these variables.¹⁷⁷ Instead in order to intensify its own internal coherence it must identify an enemy. Ironically liberalism now represents a war that has turned in on itself as the pluralism inherent within liberalism and exposed by the collapse of foundationalism, now clashes with the residue of liberalism's initial totalitarian ethos. Instead of nation state against nation state, interest or culture group fight one another for supremacy.

Hauerwas sees in the twilight of this battle new hope for a locally manifested yet international, transcultural diachronic community, to offer a truthful way forward that can go beyond the aporias inherent in liberalism. As we shall argue in chapter 4, this is truthfulness in narrative form. It is truthfulness that entails pledge, promise and reliability, faithful covenantal living which can reach beyond a particular context and offer the hope of a transcontextual community.

¹⁷⁷ The role of war as an attempt to secure social cohesion in liberal societies and its carceral implications will be addressed in chapter 5.

Yet whilst narrative is the key, this narrative must be dialectically related to community if it is to be realised. Hence embodiment is pivotal for rendering narrative credible. Such embodiment is most explicit doxologically for here is the context in which the truth about God's redemption for peaceableness is proclaimed.¹⁷⁸

In this way Hauerwas is part of that attempt to redeem the possibility of truthful living from those who, in their rejection of the initial Enlightenment agenda, have nothing save deconstruction and anarchic play to offer as a way to go on. Hauerwas believes that tangible communities of character, reflecting the coherence envisaged in Aristotle's polis, yet taking account of the historicity of existence and hence being more of a pilgrim community than a static one, practise a rationality and generate a truthfulness or theology that can counter the limitations of the post-Enlightenment liberal dream. In MacIntyre's terms the plausibility of this claim can only be discerned as the tradition displays its capacity to respond creatively to new questions emerging through time and across the variables of place and culture in a way that satisfies its own constituents and the questions evoked by other traditions. In contrast to liberalism's attempt to secure tranquillity by the destruction of particulars, Hauerwas' vision refuses to equate peaceableness with tranquillity, but instead recognises that truth can only emerge as the distinctiveness of traditions is respected. It is not liberalism's quest for tolerance that Hauerwas rejects. It is the confusion of tolerance with the marginalisation of all other truth claiming

¹⁷⁸ I am indebted to Professor Anthony C. Thiselton for these insights.

traditions save liberalism itself that he cannot countenance. In this sense Habermas' restriction of religion to the aesthetic is at odds with Hauerwas. Yet since Kantian liberalism has been deconstructed, the plurality of traditions requires a different approach for dealing with difference, finitude and conviction. From within the Christian tradition, peaceableness offers guarantees that the articulation of Christian conviction, should not involve crushing other 'rivals'. Instead the eschatological security of this peaceableness, should enable the church to respect other communities of conviction without needing to coerce them into submission to its claims.¹⁷⁹

Hauerwas is well aware of the historical relationship between the Enlightenment and Christianity. However in his estimation that relationship has now been broken by the nihilism inherent in the Enlightenment Project.¹⁸⁰ In particular he rejects the attempt of that project to root all in an anterior notion of human existence which then becomes the critique of all other convictions. He is suspicious of labels, such as 'foundationalism' and 'anti-foundationalism', since these carry epistemological assumptions which he does not share for 'anti-foundationalism but reinforces the presumption that a theory of knowledge is necessary to know what we know'.¹⁸¹ He is also sceptical about concepts such as 'post modern' since

I am just post-modern enough not to trust post-modern as a
description of our times. The very description 'post-

¹⁷⁹ This again will be apparent as we engage, in chapter 4, with Hauerwas' use of narrative to display the Christian story as an 'open' narrative.

¹⁸⁰ *Dispatches*, p.18.

¹⁸¹ *In Good Company*, p.5, footnote 9. On the problems regarding terms such as 'foundationalism' see Thiselton in *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, pp. 211-13.

modern' cannot help but privilege the practices and intellectual formations of modernity.

This is evident since it not only consigns the 'Medieval Period' to a disposable past but presumes we know where we are on a journey simply by attending to spurious a-theistical bearings, a very modernist pretension.¹⁸² Hence Hauerwas asserts that 'post-modern' people are not even necessarily 'post-liberal'. They may simply be another form of liberalism.¹⁸³ Instead for Hauerwas where we are is correlative to our position within the story of God, as we shall discuss in chapter 4, rather than in anthropocentric periodisation.

Hauerwas' response to the initial Enlightenment Project, therefore, is to re-appropriate the church as a truth bearing and truth discerning community living in the freedom of Christ, a truthful freedom evident in its eschatological peaceableness. Here uniquely is true liberalism. Such a community is contextually varied without fragmentation and reflects the wide variety of humanity. It also reflects the priority of practical theology over contemplative and re-sites the principal theological and hence epistemological agency as the worshipping discipling church. This explains, in part, Hauerwas' hostility to theology which has sought to be relevant to the Enlightenment agenda and thereby has favoured the abstracted theologian and a theology bereft of any ecclesiological roots or practice. To this we now turn.

¹⁸² 'No Enemy, No Christianity', *Sanctify Them*, p.191.

¹⁸³ 'I am not convinced that postmodernism, either as an intellectual position or as a cultural style, is 'post-anything''. See 'The Christian Difference', p.166.

Chapter 3

Theological Liberalism and the Loss of Christian Freedom

Section I :Theological Liberalism

Introduction

Whilst Hauerwas and Willimon ‘make no grand claims of representing a coherent theological position. Rather we share more of a mood than a position, since we are anything but clear on our common methodology or assumptions’ there is no doubt that Hauerwas’ project is particularly shaped by the way he responds to the post-Enlightenment legacy.¹ In this chapter we shall seek to explore how Hauerwas engages with a number of theologians whose work displays a variety of reactions to this legacy. In the process we hope to indicate whether Hauerwas’ project transcends their limitations and if he is able to suggest a properly Christian theological liberalism which is not enslaved to assumptions rooted in the Enlightenment Project.

In the first section we shall bring Hauerwas into conversation with Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr who, in differing but related ways, sought a symphonic relationship with the Enlightenment Project in the United States context. In the second section we shall engage with Karl Barth and the Yale ‘post-liberal’ school, who together attempt to reject the assumptions of that project. Finally we shall use the work of Daniel Hardy as a way of

¹ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, ‘Embarrassed by God’s Presence’, *Christian Century*, 102/ 4 (30 January 1985), 98-100 (p.98).

questioning whether the sort of theological liberalism which takes seriously criticisms of the Enlightenment Project's anthropocentricity, can nevertheless retain a proper theological transcendence which is able to sustain a genuinely Christian political freedom without collapsing into an ecclesial expression of immanentism. In the process we shall raise questions about the adequacy of Hauerwas' response.

3:1 The Social Gospel of Love: Walter Rauschenbusch

Walter Rauschenbusch is the key figure in the American Social Gospel Movement initiated in the late nineteenth century. Disenchanted with the pietistic traditions of North American Protestantism, which he believed spoke salvation to abstract individuals but left them socially inept, his early experience as a Lutheran minister in urban America drew him to a socialist analysis of society and to the view that capitalism lay at the heart of the pathology of working class life. Such a pathology spoke to him of the judgement of God on American society and led him to reflect upon the relationship of the kingdom of God to contemporary society. This relationship, he believed, could not be consigned simply to the eschaton, but was rooted in the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament and of Jesus himself for 'the essential purpose of Christianity was to transform human society into the kingdom of God by regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God'.² Thus the church is to attend prophetically to what is going on in society at large for it is not the community liturgically

² Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, ed. by Robert D. Cross (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p.xxiii.

gathered that is the true focus of God's agenda, but the church actively engaged in promoting the social righteousness of God within wider society and in the service of the poor, that truly displays this.³ Hence, in contrast to the postponement of the redemption of society in apocalyptic thought, or pietistic quietism, 'the prophets [...] cherished a large ideal of the ultimate perfection of their people', an ideal focused upon the Day of the Lord. 'This Day of Jehovah was to the prophets what the social revolution is to modern radical reformers',⁴ a reality to be expected within history rather than beyond it. Rauschenbusch's optimism about the explicit victory of God emanates through his reading of these classical prophets.

Jesus, therefore, 'embodied the prophetic stream of faith and hope'⁵ rather than standing in the apocalyptic tradition. Religion was a social event for Jesus whose characteristic was a kingdom ethic which was non violent, evolutionary rather than catastrophic and for all, rather than simply for the Jews.⁶ However, like the prophets 'Jesus believed that God was the real creator of the kingdom; it was not to be set up by man made evolution'.⁷ Nevertheless this kingdom is present wherever truth and love are found. Indeed the fundamental virtue of Christ was love since this is what enabled society to exist at all.⁸ Thus the Church is properly church when it is living the Kingdom of God in social action. Unless doxology delivers diaconal energy it is redundant.

³ Ibid., pp. 4-22.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 32,34.

⁵ Ibid., p.54.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁷ Ibid., p.63.

⁸ Ibid., p.70.

Such a reading of the prophetic and Jesus traditions should have revolutionary consequences for a Christian society such as North America. Nevertheless theology must travel hand in hand with modern progressive social theory, since both lay claim to a truthful analysis of society.⁹ The church of the past had failed to take on the prophetic legacy displayed by Jesus opting instead for a sacramentalist, clericalist ecclesiasticism and with the advent of Constantine, the abandonment of its millennial hope by church leaders. Ironically it was the Roman Emperor Constantine himself who believed that his Christianising of the empire was about realising the social dream of Jesus.¹⁰ Indeed the contemporary church should emulate Constantine and give a Christian soul to socialism, drawing upon earlier ecclesial practice in which the churches ‘were not communities for the performance of a common worship, so much as communities with a common life [...] with a religious basis [...] they were democratic organisations of plain people’.¹¹ For these communities of social disturbance Christianity was not about an eschatological future society. Rather they ‘immediately began to build a society within which the new ideals of moral and social life were to be realised at once, so far as the limitations of an evil environment permitted’.¹²

This symphonic view of the relationship of church and state, displays the creative relationship Rauschenbusch believed potentially existed between the

⁹ Ibid., p.91.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.115.

¹¹ Ibid., p.119.

¹² Ibid., p.141.

church institutions and communities and American society at large.¹³ Since the state was now attending to traditionally ecclesiastically driven welfare programmes and with an greater social awareness of issues of justice and peace, church people would be better reducing their liturgical time together in favour of assisting in social progress through education and the power of its moral influence. The American church in particular, has the opportunity for this vanguard role, since unlike its European counterparts, it has escaped being twinned with the establishment, has good democratic credentials and has a tradition of public engagement in its ordained ministry.¹⁴ Christians therefore would be most effective serving society through groups such as the YMCA, YWCA, the Salvation Army etc. rather than through formal ecclesial communities.¹⁵

Whilst the catastrophe of the First World War forced Rauschenbusch to deal more rigorously with notions of sin, redemption and the place of the institutional church in the realisation of the kingdom, nevertheless, for him, sin was fundamentally social and structural. He feared that pessimistic anthropologies emasculated Christian resistance to change rather than liberating energy for service.¹⁶ Christian freedom, for Rauschenbusch, therefore involves a social redemption rather than simply an individual one,¹⁷ and is achieved

¹³ *Theology and the Social Crisis*, pp. 202-05 indicates why a 'kairos' era had arrived in American society. For a discussion of a symphonic view of the relationship between church and state chapter 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.339.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 357, 371.

¹⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 39-42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.95.

through the increasingly pervasive influence of the kingdom of God, evident in democratic and socialist institutions.¹⁸ Sanctification is therefore about serving the kingdom of God through the latter rather than about introspective mysticism and narcissistic spirituality.¹⁹ Nevertheless, as he later comments, there is a role for the church as an institution for

the Church is the social factor in salvation. It brings social forces to bear on evil. It offers Christ not only many bodies and minds to serve Christ as ministers of his salvation, but its own composite personality, with a collective memory stored with great hymns and Bible stories and deeds of heroism, with trained aesthetic and moral feelings and with a collective will set on righteousness.²⁰

Hence although Rauschenbusch is primarily concerned with the salvation of society, this requires the tangible presence of an embodied community carrying the Christological memory of its kingdom agenda, perhaps reflecting the impotence of church rhetoric upon society in the light of World War 1.²¹ A disembodied spirit could not impact upon society. A totally eccentric community would lose its identity and hence alertness to the kingdom of God. Indeed the local church emerges as particularly influential in this regard for

within the field it has chosen to cultivate, the local church under good leadership, is really a power of salvation [...]

¹⁸ Ibid., p.102.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 112-13.

²⁰ Ibid., p.119.

²¹ See the introduction by Robert Cross to *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. xix-xx.

We are so accustomed to the churches that we hardly realise what a social force they exert over the minds they do influence.²²

Following Ritschl, Rauschenbusch sees the church rather than the individual as the object of justification, asserting that ‘the individual is saved, if at all, by membership in a community which has salvation’.²³ Nevertheless the church has to realise that the salvific power within her is solely due to the immanent presence of the kingdom of God. The church is not the kingdom. However if the church recognises its identity as the servant of the kingdom, a kingdom which is ‘the energy of God realising itself in human life with [...] its future lying among the mysteries of God’,²⁴ then, in co-operation with this reign, which is ‘for each of us the supreme task and the supreme gift of God’,²⁵ a social order derived from the Sermon on the Mount and which enables all to flourish is a possible reality in the present.²⁶

3:2 Hauerwas’ Critique: Displaying the Captivity of the Social Gospel

Hauerwas’ criticisms of the Social Gospel pivot around a number of key issues. The first is the charge that the Social Gospel uncritically accepts post-Enlightenment epistemology. Theology simply connects the traditions of faith

²² Ibid., pp. 120-01.

²³ Ibid., p.125.

²⁴ Ibid., p.140.

²⁵ Ibid., p.141.

²⁶ Ibid., p.164.

to this pre-existing and independent account of reality.²⁷ It thereby becomes a second order reflection, a matter of aesthetics rather than a truthful purchase on reality, offering nothing essential to the account provided by liberal sociology.²⁸ Such liberal theology becomes captive to the agenda of an alien discourse and prisoner to the conventions of the age. It has accepted the legitimacy of modernity and sees its agenda as responsive and relevant to the former's challenges.

The second charge, is that the Social Gospel erases the distinctive politics of the church. Assuming a positivist rather than a contingent and pluralistic view of societies, it undermines the position of the church as a society alongside other social constellations. In consequence, the Social Gospel renders the society of church redundant, since the real focus of divine activity is presumed to be society at large.²⁹ The kingdom, active in the wider community, gives the latter theological priority over the church. The church's task is merely to provide good socialists who will transform the world in terms of socialist ideology since there is no necessary ecclesial contribution beyond giving religious legitimisation to that ideology.³⁰

²⁷ See Hauerwas' comments in *Against the Nations*, pp. 5-7. Sociology in particular acts as foundation for the Social Gospel, see 'On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological', *Against the Nations*, pp. 23-50 (pp. 23, 27). See also 'The Democratic Policing of Christianity', *Dispatches*, pp.91-106 (p.95).

²⁸ In *Suffering Presence*, p.12, Hauerwas notes that liberal theologies use Occam's razor on themselves. For similar criticisms see *Resident Aliens*, p.50 and *Dispatches*, p.11.

²⁹ See Hauerwas comments in 'The Reality of the Kingdom: An Ecclesial Space for Peace', *Against the Nations*, pp. 109-20 (p.109). In *Resident Aliens*, p.44, Hauerwas exposes the limitations of this 'Activist' model of church.

³⁰ In contrast Hauerwas argues that the key is not to try to transform the world using un-agreed and abstract universals such as justice, but to form a community which reflects the story of God in life. See *A Community of Character*, p.92. Similar sentiments can be found in *Against the Nations*, p.42.

Hence, according to Hauerwas, what the Social Gospel calls prophecy is not resourced by the biblical-ecclesial tradition represented in church but by the conclusions of an alien pattern of thought onto which this latter is grafted. Hauerwas, in contrast, sees the prophetic tradition as one that explicitly directs its attention to the recognised people of God, whose prophetic sign, Jesus, is now embodied in the church. Thus prophecy is properly about keeping the ecclesial community true to its calling, rather than seeking to speak in universalistic terms to the wider community. For Hauerwas therefore the pastor is the prophet, since the pastoral task is to order the church to its true end. As will be discussed below, the key question is whether Rauschenbusch and his supporters were legitimately able to construe American society in their day as sufficiently co-extensive with church to suggest that prophetic challenge was appropriate.³¹

Hauerwas' third charge against the Social Gospel is that it does not recognise its own historicity and thereby fails to appreciate the place of tradition in its ecclesiology.³² Without attention to tradition and the place of the church in the reading of the Bible and in the transmission of Christian believing, theology becomes unconsciously captive to the abstract, contemporary and

³¹ For Hauerwas' discussion on prophecy see 'The Pastor as Prophet', *Christian Existence Today*, pp.149-160. See also see Hauerwas' debate with Reinhold Niebuhr below and later reflections in chapter 5.

³² See Hauerwas' endorsement of MacIntyre's delineation of the liberal self, its ambivalence to other traditions and its blindness to its own impossible demands of any tradition including itself, in *Dispatches*, p.6 footnote 4. Hauerwas writes in 'Reconciling the Practice of Reason: Casuistry in Context', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 67-85 (p.71), 'it is my contention that there is not nor can there be any tradition-free account of practical reason'.

conventional.³³ The correlation between community formation and distinctive vision is occluded.

Hauerwas' fourth charge is that the Social Gospel's captivity to post-Enlightenment liberalism is reflected in its equation of success with effectiveness and its remarkable optimism in the capacity of Christian influence to engender this success. The Social Gospel believes that the kingdom can be realised in society at large and that Christians can contribute to this by identifying with its progressive ideals, such as democracy. Ironically the Social Gospel's uncritical advocacy of American democratic ideals and the attempt to locate these in Protestant heritage, finds itself struggling to offer a rationale for that undemocratic community, the biological family, which it also wants to support.³⁴ Indeed unless the church is engaged amongst the 'socially progressive' movements actively shaping society, it is a redundant or regressive institution. In contrast Hauerwas asserts that 'the church must learn time and again that its task is not to make the world the kingdom but to be faithful to God by showing to the world what it means to be a community of peace'.³⁵

Hauerwas' fifth charge concerns the absence of ecclesial accountability or authorisation among liberal theologians, such as Rauschenbusch. With

³³ This point is taken up particularly in *Unleashing the Scriptures*, pp. 9, 25 etc.

³⁴ See *Dispatches*, p.95. Hauerwas points to a similar conflict within universities, which embody the notion of honour and yet articulate the rhetoric of liberalism which has no place for such a concept. See 'Truth and Honor: The University and the Church in a Democratic Age', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 221-50.

³⁵ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.103.

confidence in human rationality they locate truth in ideas rather than through the explication of ecclesial practice. They therefore fail to appreciate their relationship to the church and tend to present their analyses as the fruit of a single mind in conversation with other abstract minds.³⁶ The models of spectator rather than practitioner, of academic rather than pastor are seen as generative of theological truth. As has already been noted this explains Hauerwas' increasing attraction to the genre of the sermon as a means of articulating his theology, since this represents an embodied, dialogical and authorised medium. It also poses questions of authorisation which he himself recognises place him in a difficult position.³⁷

Finally Hauerwas' sixth charge against the theological liberalism exhibited in the Social Gospel tradition is that for all its talk of freedom and peace, such theology is trapped in the violence inherent within the liberal/positivist epistemology itself. If definitive and universal truth is noetically available then difference must ultimately be denied and excised. Hence, as we saw in chapter 2, such liberalism has no place for the tragic, for ultimately it believes all antitheses can be resolved.³⁸ Since, for Hauerwas, liberalism's pretensions to represent universal truth have been deconstructed, the peace of liberalism is therefore the peace of conquest and dominance, a false peace which

³⁶ For Hauerwas' challenge to liberal theology's captivation to the cult of the ecclesially independent great mind see 'Why resident Aliens Struck a Chord', *In Good Company*, pp. 51-64 (p.53).

³⁷ See sermons such as 'God's New Language', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 47-65. 'The Church's One Foundation', *Theology without Foundations*, pp. 143-62 and those in *Unleashing the Scriptures*. Further discussion on this will take place in chapter 4.

³⁸ See *After Christendom*, p.53 and on theodicy and anthropodicy see *Naming the Silences*, pp. 41-59. See also the discussion in chapter 2.

illegitimately subjugates the Other and thereby achieves tranquillity through the destruction of its opponents. Hauerwas puts this case very strongly in his discussion of the Holocaust. Liberal theology, like liberalism is ‘an ideology for theological and social imperialism’ since it universalises and abstracts the particular.³⁹

3:3 Counter Critique

However having noted where Rauschenbusch attracts Hauerwas’ critique, it is important that this critique avoid appearing historicist itself. At the turn of the nineteenth century in North America, the continuity of church and society was considerably more evident than in the early 70s when Hauerwas began his own project. Indeed Hauerwas and Willimon admit that ‘sometime between 1960 and 1980, an old inadequately conceived world ended, and a fresh, new world began’ and they saw this birth symbolised in the opening of Fox Theatre on a Sunday evening in 1963 in Greenville, South Carolina.⁴⁰ The chasm between the liberal agenda and the ecclesial community took time to rise to consciousness, even if the roots of it lay deep in their respective narratives. For Rauschenbusch the majority of Americans still listened to Christian reflection. Mass media did not exist as a major rival to pulpits and Sunday schools. The churches, even within the American constitutional limitations, were a significant force and, although Hauerwas is correct to criticise Rauschenbusch for swallowing an

³⁹ ‘Remembering as a Moral Task: The Challenge of the Holocaust’, *Against the Nations*. pp. 62-108. See also his comments in *Dispatches*, p.17.

⁴⁰ See *Resident Aliens*, p.15. Oliver O’Donovan argues that this new world began with the adoption of the American constitution. See Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.244.

extrinsic and positivist ideology, he is indebted to the Social Gospel movement for its awareness of the significance role the church could and should play in American society. The difference lay in terms of the basis upon which such engagement should take place. Hauerwas' reading of the place of the church in the America of the 1970s and 80s led him to see the church as a tactical and intrinsically driven community, no longer seeking to shape society as a whole in terms of a universal vision accessible to all.

Yet perhaps Rauschenbusch did indeed represent the possibility of explicit Christian influence upon the shape of American society. Such a symphonic relationship between the political and liturgical agencies within the one people of God is pertinent if the majority of those in that society explicitly accept the Christian faith in terms respectful of their society's ethical consensus. It should not be assumed that such an influence is necessarily coercive or violent. In addition one question we shall need to ask of Hauerwas in chapter 5 is whether this attempt to divorce Enlightenment thought from its Christian heritage is defensible. Certainly Hauerwas criticises the Social Gospel in terms of the limitations of its grasp of liberalism's agenda and in particular for its naïve confidence in socialist ideology. In short Hauerwas believes that the constitution of American society from its outset implied a set of assumptions incompatible with ecclesial integrity. Hence even at the time of Rauschenbusch, America was too corrupted by liberalism for the Social Gospel project to be possible. Rauschenbusch's theology of society and of the state is regarded by Hauerwas as inadequate to the challenges facing contemporary American

Christians. In chapter 5 we will see whether Hauerwas' own proposals merit greater credibility.

Nevertheless a significant amount of Hauerwas' thought remains indebted to the questions evoked by the Social Gospel movement as he himself admits. Both he and they share a view of Christianity which is about social practice rather than about individualistic pietism. Both refuse to accept liberalism's divorce of public from private, with religion confined to the latter sphere. Christianity is therefore about the tangible present rather than the abstract ideal or the beyond. Both hold to the view that the kingdom of God is fundamentally a peaceable kingdom, whose realisation cannot emerge through coercion. In this sense they share an ambivalence to the Constantinian Project, either through state or revolutionary media. Hauerwas differs in regarding this peaceableness as a distinctive ecclesial practice rather than one that can be recommended to society at large. He no longer believes in a singular 'Christian' society. Nevertheless the characteristics of church as a community of subversive memory and formation are shared by both, albeit with significantly different implications. In addition the importance of the local congregation is also stressed by both, although for Rauschenbusch this is more as a human resource and propaganda context for the socialist crusade, whereas for Hauerwas the local Christian community as a theological agency is a fertile resource for distinctive contextual theological explication. Certainly Hauerwas recognises that Christian communities do form people to serve within the dominant liberal order. The difference is that their service is to be evoked by

the resources intrinsic to the Christian narrative practised by their ecclesial community, rather than being determined by an extrinsic ideology claiming to represent a universal discourse of truth. For Hauerwas relevance must not be to the highest ideals of any given society but to the Christian meta-narrative embodied in the church. In Hauerwas' estimation Rauschenbusch's quest to be relevant is always enslaved to the fluctuating powers that rule.

3:4 Christian Realism and Responsibility: Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr represents a distinct yet related interlocutor of the liberal tradition.⁴¹ Like Rauschenbusch he was the son of an immigrant Lutheran pastor, who himself was ordained in 1915 and served in Detroit, before joining the Union Theological Seminary in 1928 where he was Professor of Applied Theology until 1960. Similarly disenchanted by modern urban and industrial society, he nevertheless found the agenda of the Social Gospel naïve, particularly in its grasp of the extent and depths of sin. Hence his prolific writings were an attempt better to address the same questions as that movement but taking greater cognisance of the extent of sin. Nevertheless, as we shall see, his criticisms of the liberal theology of his day did not segregate him from this tradition, since they both sought to respond to the challenges posed by modernity in terms which that modernity could recognise.⁴² As

⁴¹ Hauerwas acknowledges this in the introduction to *Christian Existence Today*, p.2.

⁴² In *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), Niebuhr's liberal credentials remain undenied since the book is an attempt to show 'the relevance of Christian faith to contemporary problems' p.11. See also his suggestion that globalisation demands the generation of a global justice and the confidence that this is possible for human agency to achieve in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, in L. Rasmussen: *Reinhold*

Hauerwas notes, Niebuhr 'never doubted that the church should work for social justice and democracy in America' and he was at one with those who believe that 'the crisis in modern Christianity can be resolved if Christianity can be translated into a sufficiently compelling social vision'.⁴³

Niebuhr recognised the force of the neo-orthodox challenge to liberal thinking, and in his rejection of its path, identified himself with the latter's acceptance of the modernist enterprise.⁴⁴ Positivist revelation was no more plausible than positivist science for 'every revelation of the divine is relativised by the finite mind which comprehends it'.⁴⁵ Nevertheless he was no Thomist, preferring what would later be called 'integralism' at Vatican II, rather than the notion that grace perfects nature, which implied that some of nature is bereft of grace. Grace within a sinful world enabled Niebuhr to respect the insights of modernity without uncritically baptising them.⁴⁶ To see why Hauerwas believed that Niebuhr's project of relevance, realism and responsibility failed to articulate a proper expression of Christian freedom requires some explication of

Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life. The Making of Modern Theology: Selected Writings (London: Collins, 1989) p.191.

⁴³ 'Review of Gary. Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity, Modern Theology*, 13/3 (July 1997), 418-21 (pp. 419-20). See also 'Christian Ethics in America (and the J.R.E.). A Report on a Book I Will Not Write', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 25/3 (1998), 57-76 (p.59 footnote 2), 'I am acutely aware that 'Protestant Liberalism' names a many-splendored thing. Some might dispute [...] the presumption that the Niebuhrs were Protestant liberals, though I think they clearly understood themselves as such'.

⁴⁴ Niebuhr's rejection of neo-orthodoxy reflected his perception of its pessimism regarding intermediate human structures, such as society and politics. See *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I, in L. Rasmussen, p.154.

⁴⁵ From *Beyond Tragedy*, in L. Rasmussen, p.86.

⁴⁶ *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, in L. Rasmussen, p.169. On integralism see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.206. See also chapter 5 below.

the Niebuhr thesis. Thereafter we shall explore whether Niebuhr's project retains a serious challenge to Hauerwas' ecclesiology.

'Protestant Christianity in America is unfortunately unduly dependent upon the very culture of modernity the disintegration of which would offer a more independent religion of unique opportunity'.⁴⁷ So begins Niebuhr's challenge to the liberalism of his day. With Rauschenbusch, he believed that mainstream American Christianity had rendered itself irrelevant. Such churches promoted an antiquated, individualistic and increasingly disengaged worldview, which conflicted with the implications of the resurrection.⁴⁸ However against the contemporary liberal tradition, Niebuhr pressed the charge of conformism. In an attempt to be relevant, the liberal church had simply invested 'the relative moral standards of a commercial age with ultimate sanctity'.⁴⁹ Liberal culture was simply secularised Christianity refracted through positivist science, thereby denuding the former of its transcendental depth. Without this depth, contemporary convention is everything and Christian theology devoted to its affirmation loses any critical capacity it might otherwise have had.

The rejection of the category 'myth' in an attempt to emancipate Christianity from its dogmatic and literalistic past, reflected this pathology. For Niebuhr, 'myth' is a 'trans-scientific' intuition of the whole reality narratively displayed.

⁴⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 3rd edn (London: SCM, 1941), p.13.

⁴⁸ *Beyond Tragedy*, in L. Rasmussen, pp. 115-16. See also *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1932), pp. 66-70.

⁴⁹ In *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.20. See also *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p.78.

The 'Fall' represents such a myth. It disassociates finitude and fallenness and also achieves what science, limited by the incompleteness of its hypotheses and evidence, cannot indicate.⁵⁰ 'Myth' is a pointer to transcendence and it is here that religious faith must resist the temptation to reduce itself to the finite perspective of modernity, a temptation Niebuhr was convinced that the liberal theology of his day failed to resist. In consequence 'failure to recognise the heights led modern Christianity to an equal blindness toward the darker side of sin',⁵¹ an accusation particularly addressed to the Social Gospel movement. Even those attracted to the rigours of Marxist hermeneutics tended to be swallowed up by its naturalistic idealism and utopianism even as they were escaping from the simplistic evolutionary beliefs of the Social Gospellers.⁵²

In an attempt to avoid losing Christian distinctiveness, Niebuhr, like Rauschenbusch, advocates a reappropriation of the prophetic tradition with its 'ethico-religious passion rather than a rational urge for consistency'.⁵³ However in contrast to Rauschenbusch, it is the myth of the Fall that positions this prophetic tradition, especially as it relates to the ministry of Jesus. The Fall speaks both of the reality of sin and yet refuses to give it ontological status. Nevertheless it does warn against expecting any utopias in this world. 'The religion of Jesus is prophetic religion in which the moral ideal of love and vicarious suffering [...] achieves such a purity that the possibility of its

⁵⁰ See also *Beyond Tragedy*, in L. Rasmussen, p.93.

⁵¹ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.26.

⁵² *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, pp. 142-67, especially p.162 on proletarian blindness. For Niebuhr's relationship to later Liberation Theology see *Beyond Tragedy* in L. Rasmussen, pp. 96-97 and *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I, in L. Rasmussen, pp. 154-55.

⁵³ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.37.

realisation in history becomes remote [...] always beyond every human achievement'.⁵⁴

The kingdom of God therefore cannot be identified with any human construction and the fullness of this always transcends mundane existence. Jesus' role in this prophetic tradition was not to provide a political or social agenda for life, but to present a unique example of absolute love which acts as a horizon of challenge to all self interest and egoism.⁵⁵ His teaching is there to expose the sinfulness of humanity rather than to offer a paradigm for life.⁵⁶ Hence the pacifism of the Social Gospel and Radical Reformation tradition represented a category mistake, an attempt to live ideally without recognising the impossibility of so doing in consequence of sin and the historicist ethics of the early church.⁵⁷ Indeed, whereas Rauschenbusch ridiculed apocalyptic, Niebuhr saw 'the apocalypse as a mythical expression of the impossible possibility under which all human life stands'.⁵⁸

This impossibility of living the Kingdom of God in pacific or utopian terms is reflected, for Niebuhr, in the intrinsically conflictual and corruptibility of all collectives and communities, including the church. For Niebuhr, the wills to power and to life generate a conflict of interests which politics could at best

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.41. See also *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p.81.

⁵⁵ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.49.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.127.

⁵⁷ For a recognition by Niebuhr of Jesus pacifism and yet its impossibility see *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, pp. 253-77, and also the discussion on pacifism and violence in *Christianity and Power Politics*, in L. Rasmussen, pp. 237-50. We shall look further at this issue in chapter 5.

⁵⁸ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.68.

only balance. Nations, given their quasi-religious character, are especially prone to absolutise their self-interests. Indeed nations require wars to engender their own cohesiveness. In consequence notions of altruism and sacrifice are prone to the problems of self-deception, particularly in communities attracted to ideals, such as the church.⁵⁹

Niebuhr therefore believed that his realism maintained a pragmatic marriage of love and power within the horizon of the future eschatological hope of a perfect society.⁶⁰ Against the Social Gospel tradition, and ironically in formal alliance with the pietists whom Rauschenbusch criticised, Niebuhr refused to countenance the possibility of this being represented in any form within the sinful *saeculum*.⁶¹ Where Niebuhr believed his account had greater depth than that of modernity lay in its identification of the problem not with finitude but with sin. Modernity ironically celebrated the finitude of humanity and yet believed in the perfectibility of human rationality. Niebuhr saw a contradiction here even within Marx, who regarded all other sociologies as representing vested interests and yet simplistically believed that his own approach transcended this.⁶² Niebuhr also held that his account subverted the naïve confidence of the Social Gospellers in their capacity to persuade American society to adopt the agenda of the kingdom of God through evolutionary and

⁵⁹ *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, pp.1-26, 83-110.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.61. See Hauerwas' comment to this effect in 'The Politics of Charity', *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 132-46.

⁶¹ *Faith and History*, in L.Rasmussen, p.214. See also *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, p.81.

⁶² *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.134 and *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, p.xx, p.155.

peaceful change mediated by the nation-state.⁶³ Nevertheless, Niebuhr, like them, believed that the ideals of the political left were closer to the sort of society that was both realist and also approximate to Christian ideals, without implying the possibility of utopia. However he rejected what he saw as orthodox pessimism when faced with the presence of sin, since he believed this simply engendered a conservative complacency, reflected in the history of Christian conformity to hegemonic elites.⁶⁴

Politics and social agendas, therefore were not simply a matter of following the story of the kingdom of God either in church or wider society. Contingent politics demanded pragmatic, provisional, phronetic and approximate decisions albeit in the light of a realist anthropology, a critical espousal of the best of modernity and the ideal horizon of life provided by Jesus. Such a position remained at the core of Niebuhr's thought throughout his career.⁶⁵ Yet it is also clear that the horrors of Stalinist Russia had intensified his hostility to the pretensions of modernist utopian ideologies.⁶⁶ The notion that society was constituted of immoral humanity rendering it itself immoral remained.⁶⁷ Nevertheless he believed the democracy he knew was still the best form of government available to date, not simply as a safeguard for the individual but as

⁶³ Ibid., p.116. For Niebuhr's suspicions about the modern nation-state see *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I, in L. Rasmussen, p.152. See also *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, pp. 83-110. In *Children of Light, Children of Darkness*, in *Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society*, ed. by Gibson Winter (London: SCM, 1968), p.151, Niebuhr calls these liberals 'naïve children of light'. Hauerwas evidently stands within this tradition of suspicion.

⁶⁴ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, pp. 168-70 and *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, pp. 67-70.

⁶⁵ *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, p.11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.14.

⁶⁷ Yet Niebuhr was willing to accept that explicitly Christian virtues could impinge directly upon political and social life. See *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*, in L. Rasmussen, pp. 133-34 and *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, pp. 81, 248.

a check on the pretensions of those lusting after absolute power for ‘man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary’.⁶⁸ However his pragmatic approach effectively occluded his theological premises.⁶⁹ Only when speaking to overtly Christian groups, such as the World Council of Churches’ inaugural conference in 1948, was any explicitly theological rhetoric and analysis employed. Niebuhr assumed a common universe of discourse with the liberalism he purported to critique, whilst challenging the moral evolutionism of the Social Gospel for ignoring the cross and the tragic, and Barth’s church for being a socially impotent eschatological sign, akin to a catacomb religion.⁷⁰ His ‘Christian realism’ sought to listen to the grace of God present even in the claims of sinful modernity as well as in the biblical traditions in order to discern a contingent engaged ethic.⁷¹

3:5 Hauerwas’ Critique: Displaying the Gnosticism of Reinhold Niebuhr

Whilst Hauerwas recognises the force of Niebuhr’s attention to sin and its subversion of the simplistic optimism of the Social Gospel’s kingdom theology, he still detects the same epistemological assumptions undergirding the Niebuhr project, namely that his liberal sociology needed no explicit theological

⁶⁸ *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*, in L. Rasmussen, p.254. See also *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, p.23, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, in L. Rasmussen, p.178 and *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, pp. 143-44.

⁶⁹ See L. Rasmussen, p.3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.184 and *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, pp. 67-68. As O’Donovan mentions and indeed Hauerwas recognises, a catacomb religion or church can be a catholic and appropriate one given particular contexts and challenges. See *The Desire of Nations*, p.216. The way the particular conveys the universal will engage us particularly in chapter 4.

⁷¹ *Christian Realism*, pp. 185-89.

contribution and in his uncritical affirmation of the United States.⁷² Hence Hauerwas labels Niebuhr a theological atheist, whose confidence in reason and experience contrasts radically with his theological caution.⁷³ For Hauerwas Niebuhr's theology therefore dissolves into anthropology in much the same way as the Social Gospel's theology dissolved into sociology.⁷⁴ In consequence the distinctive role of the church as a reality distinguished from American society is lost. At best it is an institution and ideological resource to act as a check upon the state and a proponent of pragmatic liberalism. As Hauerwas comments 'in spite of all the trenchant criticism he directed at America, America was in fact his church'.⁷⁵

Such a loss of the distinctive church represents for Hauerwas a classic indicator of post-Enlightenment liberalism since it represents religion as a set of beliefs which the abstract individual can hold independent of an embodied tradition.⁷⁶ While Niebuhr attends seriously to issues of epistemology Hauerwas questions whether his account of ecclesiology is fully adequate. As Hays notes 'Niebuhr has little concern for the church as a distinctive institution. In fact it would not be inaccurate to say that his theology lacks an ecclesiology'.⁷⁷ Such an approach actually de-politicises salvation in the name of entering the political

⁷² See Hauerwas' comments in *Dispatches*, p.98. Hauerwas consequently labels Niebuhr a conservative for accepting the status quo of his America as ideal. See *A Community of Character*, p. 73.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.23. See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), p.223..

⁷⁴ *Against the Nations*, p.27.

⁷⁵ 'On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological', *Revisions*, p.39 footnote 22.

⁷⁶ See the criticisms of the Social Gospel's liberalism in this regard above.

⁷⁷ Hays, p.224.

fray and attracts the consequent charge of gnosticism.⁷⁸ In contrast, Hauerwas' ecclesiology positions the church in contrast to society at large, (which he calls the world), and speaks of the church as a social ethic with a separate politics and correlative distinctive epistemology.⁷⁹

For Hauerwas much of this pathology can be traced to Niebuhr's docetic treatment of the life and ministry of Jesus and his conviction that Jesus proffered no social ethic. With no exemplary or practical illustrative value Jesus' life and ministry can only offer an unattainable vision of the sublime. Jesus is thereby effectively separated from the church.⁸⁰ Hence the way is open for pragmatism and convention to control the church. Indeed Niebuhr seems to leave sin the effective victor, since all human beings can do is to build the least destructive ethos for themselves. Yet without any tangible exemplar or telos, this simply attracts the deconstructive energy of nihilism and opens the door to Nietzsche's affirmation of the will-to-power. Ironically Niebuhr's pragmatic acceptance of violence legitimates killing thereby pushing society closer to the Nietzschean dream.⁸¹ Once again, liberal theology parades its commitment to notions of justice, peace, equality and freedom, but is exposed as a violating creed in consequence of the fundamental antipathy, towards difference, ironically rooted at the heart of its epistemology.

⁷⁸ *Dispatches*, pp. 23, 93.

⁷⁹ See theses 2.5, 9 in *A Community of Character*, pp. 9, 11.

⁸⁰ *Dispatches*, p. 121.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The carceral implications of this are further reinforced by Niebuhr's philosophy of history. Hauerwas agrees with Karl Löwith's assessment that Niebuhr's anthropology was in fact a conduit for the underwriting of a view of history devoid of any Christian eschatological horizon. According to Löwith modern history reflects an attempt to render life meaningful without any sense of Providence. It introduces notions of direction, indeed, progress and a sense of beginning and end, but without the sense that Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end. From Löwith and Hauerwas' perspective, Niebuhr represents this hubristic view of history. Hence history rather than Jesus Christ, becomes the key to understanding the human condition. Hauerwas comments

Niebuhr was never interested in a doctrine of man *as such*, but in how anthropological reflection provided the resources for an extensive commentary on history and our contemporary situation. History, for Niebuhr, is the playground of ideas.⁸²

Paradoxically in the process the historical was lost as history became the stage for the display of eternal truths and ideas. Where Hauerwas takes particular exception to Niebuhr is in the latter's failure to see that the key to anthropology is not history, but the eschatological character of cross and resurrection. History determined by human actions generates a false eschatology. Hence

the contrast is not, as Niebuhr would have it, between the provisional and the ultimate, but between those who have

⁸² See 'History as Fate: How Justification by Faith Became Anthropology (and History) in America', *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 32-47 (p.36).

and those who have not become citizens of God's kingdom
through Jesus of Nazareth.⁸³

Once again for Hauerwas this explains why Niebuhr never developed a positive role for the church as such and why his project is ultimately gnostic as it seeks divine meaning abstracted from the actual life and death of Jesus. Likewise Niebuhr's understanding of sin renders it intelligible to any and this subsumes it within a liberal concept of natural law. In 'Salvation even in Sin: Learning to Speak Truthfully about Ourselves', Hauerwas comments upon the way this approach, characteristic also of fundamentalism, conflates sins into sin and thereby reduces the possibility for attending to holiness as a substantial experience. He writes

the substitution of sin for sins reproduced the same structure of the revival. In fact the accounts of sin developed by liberal Protestant theologians, ironically mirrored the Protestant revival just to the extent that they accepted the presumption that we can have a surer knowledge of sin, that we can speak more truthfully about our sin, that we can speak of God.⁸⁴

There is therefore no requirement that Niebuhr's anthropology be determined by his theology or that the practices of the church are necessary for the understanding of sinful human existence. Sin does not require a particular politics to name it.

⁸³ Ibid., p.41.

⁸⁴ In *Sanctify Them*, pp. 61-76 (p.62).

For Hauerwas this effectively rendered Niebuhr's project an underwriting of a history correlative to a liberal-technological society and political order which sought domination to ensure survival. 'He had accepted the liberal account of history as the imposition of human will on an accidental world'.⁸⁵ Hence Niebuhr's realism was actually structurally conservative, not only remaining wedded to liberalism's philosophical dualism's and pretensions, but effectively underwriting the hegemonic position of America's elite. In this Niebuhr was guilty of ideological blindness, a blindness intrinsic to liberalism's perception of itself as epistemologically innocent.⁸⁶

Such a critique of Niebuhr becomes especially pertinent when attending to his support of American democracy insofar as such democracies, even more insidiously than explicit tyrannies, command citizens' loyalty by using their presumed moral value.⁸⁷ Hauerwas recognises that Niebuhr advances the discussion beyond the simplistic position of the Social Gospel, since he regards democracy not as a universal ideal, but as the class interest of the bourgeois, whose notion of peaceful freedom is order.⁸⁸ However this redefines democracy as a procedural politics which is about the balance of power

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.45.

⁸⁶ 'The Irony of Reinhold Niebuhr: The Ideological Character of 'Christian Realism'', *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 48-62 (pp. 49-50). See also Hauerwas' comment that after Niebuhr rejected Marxist analysis, his conflation of Christian political ethics with American democracy was complete. He was therefore left with no critical resources with which to engage with the latter's ambiguities. See 'The Search for the Historical Niebuhr: Review of Merkle's *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Political Account*', *Review of Politics*, 38 (July 1976), pp. 452-54.

⁸⁷ 'The Reality of the Church: Even a Democratic State is not the Kingdom', *Against the Nations*, pp. 122-130), p.122.

⁸⁸ 'Whose 'Just War', Which Peace', *Dispatches*, pp.136-153 (p.142).

between competing interest groups who share no vision of a common good. Hence, in contrast to the Social Gospel, Niebuhr sees politics not as democratising economic relations but about qualifying abuses of power.⁸⁹ What Hauerwas criticised Niebuhr for is a failure to see how this makes bourgeois secularism a covert religion and makes 'secular defences of democracy [...] but a less vicious version of the Nazi creed'.⁹⁰ Despite his interaction with Marx and Nietzsche, Niebuhr seems not to recognise the inevitably religious and indeed carceral character of the liberal metanarrative. Hence again 'in the name of democracy the church wills its death'⁹¹ for the church is positioned by this metanarrative and is thereby policed by it.

3:6 Counter Critique

Hauerwas' deconstruction of Niebuhr's responsible realism is rigorous and acidic. Indeed in terms of ecclesiology, he believes that Niebuhr's ethics were more compromised and captivated by post-Enlightenment liberalism than the Social Gospel did.

In some ways the social gospellers were less accommodationist than Niebuhr in this respect. Rauschenbusch in particular, assumed the necessity of the church to stand as critic against American society.⁹²

In contrast he believed Niebuhr to be more firmly wedded to capitalism, accepting its public:private dualism and regarding Christian doctrines as at best myths illuminating the human condition.⁹³ Yet attention to Niebuhr's rhetoric

⁸⁹For Hauerwas' discussion see *Dispatches*, pp. 98-106.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.103.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.104.

⁹² *Revisions*, p.39.

⁹³ 'Review of Gary Dorrien, *Soul and Society*' (July 1997). p.419.

about the church does question the categorical assertions of Hauerwas.

Niebuhr writes that the church is that

community of hopeful believers, who are not afraid of life or death, of present or future history, being persuaded that the whole of life and all historical vicissitudes stand under the sovereignty of a holy, yet merciful, God, whose will was supremely revealed in Christ.⁹⁴

He is not suggesting that the church disappear, but rather that it should avoid any premature perfectionism or be tempted to escapism as the Lutherans had done in Germany. Niebuhr is trying to engage the church with the world rather than appearing to disassociate from it.

Equally Niebuhr is asking the church to take seriously the ambiguity and sinfulness of its tradition and constituency and of the impact of scholarship upon its earlier self-confidence as a vehicle of divine truth. *Moral Man, Immoral Society* in particular represents this agenda. Such attention subverts a simple apologetic use of saints, since to those outside the church, such claims for sainthood often attracted charges of ambiguity. Sin must be recognised as a reality within as well as beyond the church. This also led him to reject pacifism.⁹⁵ Thus Christianity is not about a distinctive politics but about an insight into the sinful nature of all reality, which includes the church. However the church is necessary to carry this memory and to trust in the grace of God for forgiveness and an ultimate eschatological future redemption beyond the

⁹⁴ *Faith and History*, in L. Rasmussen, p.230.

⁹⁵ *Christianity and Power Politics*, in L. Rasmussen, p.237.

finitude and corruption of this world. The church therefore is important as a community of memory and hope, but not as an alternative politics.⁹⁶

Hence although Niebuhr's liberalism may well be suspect, his awareness of the place of church should not be so swiftly dismissed. His commitment to keeping an eschatological horizon within wider political life, displayed his unwillingness uncritically to baptise the autonomy of the political powers. This was his charge against the Byzantine arrangement. Perhaps, like Rauschenbusch, he over-identified the contours of church and state, especially from a post 1960s perspective. Nevertheless he did believe that the tangible community was here to *be* something as well as to *do* something. His liberalism, though, did not blind him to the ambiguity of modernity as well. In *Children of Light, Children of Darkness*, for example, he exposes the ambiguity of American democracy as a mask for bourgeois self-interest, even though he remains committed to the ideal of democracy as an aspiration and as a critical resource.⁹⁷ However his Augustinian attention to the ubiquity of sin challenges any attempt to suggest that the church as a community can sufficiently display the kingdom of God as we have seen. The Social Gospel may naïvely have believed that the kingdom of God could be realised in society through evolutionary change. Hauerwas appears to relocate such a realisation within the politics of the church. Niebuhr acts as a disturbing challenge as much to the latter as to the former, since sin is

⁹⁶ *Faith and History*, in L. Rasmussen, p.227.

⁹⁷ *Children of Light*, pp. 143-46. Interestingly such commitment to the *ideals* of democratic politics contrasts sharply with Niebuhr's hostility to idealism and the Kingdom of God.

not absent from the church. Indeed realising this should temper too audacious a claim for the character of the church.

Thus the critical question Niebuhr's project asks of Hauerwas is whether the polity of the church can ever be more than a provisional and ambiguous sign pointing beyond itself to an eschatological utopia rather than representing in itself the presence or substance of the kingdom of God. In this way, Niebuhr is less emphatic ecclesologically than Barth and his challenge centres around the empirical shortcomings of the church, present and past. Paradoxically Niebuhr may be construed as representing the view that sin intensifies the implications of finitude regarding the possibility of realising the Kingdom of God in this aeon, an impossibility evident in the execution of Jesus and the failure then, and subsequently, to generate a community empirically representative of such rule. The politics of God can therefore never be equated with the ecclesiastical politics. For Hauerwas, this, as we have noted, provokes the charges of docetism and pragmatism. Nevertheless such a position does not imply a capitulation to unaccountable power. For Niebuhr, the eschatological horizon is precisely there to remind humankind of its essential provisionality and destiny beyond this world. He is therefore positing that a pessimistic anthropology actually engenders a theocentric vision of human destiny.

In the interim Niebuhr's project asks of Hauerwas a more developed relationship between his notion of church and the wider society within which or through which this church exists as a community whose identity, even in

Hauerwas' terms, must take account of its context. The politics of society will not simply disappear. Is occasionalistic engagement sufficient? Do ecclesial communities possess sufficient agreement on matters of concern to society to act as an alternative Christian politic within this wider polis, given the finitude and sin which Niebuhr emphasises? Niebuhr always counselled against Christian parties for this reason. Finitude suggests a variety of means. Thus he asks whether Hauerwas' church can display the ontology of peace he advocates to given the presence of sin within the ecclesial community and its tradition?

Section II : Liberation from Liberalism: Karl Barth and Yale?

3:7 Escaping from Anthropocentricity: Karl Barth and the Transcendent Freedom of God as the Basis for Ecclesial Liberty

Since Hauerwas believes that the liberal theologies of the Social Gospel and Reinhold Niebuhr remain enthralled to the anthropocentricity of the Enlightenment, his own project must itself escape such a limitation if it is to offer a genuine account of ecclesial freedom. Two key theological agendas purporting to transcend the carceral implications of this liberal theology are those of Karl Barth and the so called ‘Post-Liberals’ or ‘Yale School’. Hauerwas’ ecclesiology emerges through a critical engagement with these two and the next section will seek to show how Hauerwas attempts to go beyond limitations he discerns in their own rejection of post-Enlightenment liberalism. In chapter 4 we shall look in more detail at the way Hauerwas distinguishes his understanding of narrative from theirs.

Hauerwas’ indebtedness to Karl Barth is evident from the outset of his career and cannot possibly be done justice to in the following section.⁹⁸ However in identifying key aspects of Barth’s attack on his liberal heritage we shall discern the distinctiveness of Hauerwas’ emancipatory ecclesiology. Since the story of the young Barth’s rejection of his liberal heritage is well known our predominant focus will be upon his mature thought as it exposes his

⁹⁸ See *Character and the Christian Life*, op.cit.

fundamental quarrel with the liberalism of his day and the way he seeks to recover the integrity not only of God but also, thereby, of the church.⁹⁹

3:8 *The Church Dogmatics*: Narrating Christian Liberty

Having rejected the liberalism of his teachers, Barth's agenda in his mature years, was to work out a dogmatics that would be a theology of contingent response or 'Nachdenken' to the transcendence of God, which could test the integrity of the church's distinctive language about God.¹⁰⁰ Dogmatics would therefore involve standing under Scripture in accord with Anselm's 'fides quaerens intellectum', respecting the distinctive character of theological rationality and using the analogy of grace rather than of being.¹⁰¹ Properly to understand God, therefore, is to be mastered by the transcendental object of faith, which is God, rather than to presume to conceive of this God through unaided human reason.¹⁰² Hence Barth began his *Dogmatics* with the Trinity, in sharp contrast to the liberal legacy of Schleiermacher, which tended to relegate

⁹⁹ Incisive accounts of Barth's earlier years and thought can be found in the following: David F. Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the "Church Dogmatics"* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981), pp. 16-25; Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, trans. G. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), pp. 23-41, 54-96; Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), pp. 1-24 and John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-16.

¹⁰⁰ Clifford Green, ed., *The Making of Modern Theology: Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom: Selected Writings* (London: Collins 1989), p.22. This explains the change in title from *Christian* to *Church Dogmatics*. For the ontological assumptions underlying this approach see John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.2, where he speaks of Barth asserting that theology is contending for the proper description of reality and thus of moral space. Colin Gunton agrees thus in Nigel Biggar, ed., *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth* (London & Oxford: Mowbray, 1988), pp. 61-78.

¹⁰¹ Green, pp. 28, 148, 154.

¹⁰² Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: SPCK, 1984), p.198. Torrance argues that Barth thereby implies correspondence the epistemologies of the natural sciences and of theology. Torrance, pp. 41-50. See also Biggar (1988), op cit., pp. 3-5.

this to the end thereby defining God in terms of humanity. However this theocentricity included the notion of covenant; God's self-binding to creation. It therefore did not imply a divorce of God from creation or of eternity from time. Rather covenant implies notions of promise, temporality and action. In this way Barth is further distinguished from liberal theology and indeed, as we shall see, from the post-liberalism of Yale, given his linkage between ethics and creation rather than ethics and language. Consequently Barth, by the time of *The Dogmatics*, is more open to a 'public' domain and the possibility of conversation across languages.¹⁰³

Thus, as we shall see, all ethics was included within dogmatics rather than being an implication of the latter. Moral problems are properly resolved by being seen and placed by theology.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless Barth had no pretensions about what his dogmatics could achieve. The event of the Word of God could not be assumed in the reading of a dogmatics. Human language and sign are always ambiguous. Dogmatics as the explicating of the narrative life of God can only aid the process, it cannot guarantee it. The Word of God can only come at God's behest and in a way inaccessible to extrinsic evaluation before the Eschaton. In consequence for Sykes, Barth ironically represents the apotheosis of the interior tradition of Descartes.¹⁰⁵ However Biggar rejects this intuitionism, noting that Barth always asserts that the Word is always heard in

¹⁰³ This relationality of God and creation is evident in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), I/1, henceforth CD.

¹⁰⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, 'On Doctrine and Ethics', in Colin Gunton, *The Cambridge Companion to Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 21-40 (p33).

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Sykes, p.193.

the church and through proper exegesis of the Scriptures. Such hearing is therefore not individualistic, though it is always specific and personal.¹⁰⁶

i) Freedom for Theology

At the heart of *The Dogmatics* is a reiteration of Barth's rejection of any 'axiom of human reason or a datum of experience',¹⁰⁷ as a foundation for theology, a foundation liable to Feuerbach's reduction of religion to projected self-consciousness. Barth asserts that it is the reality disclosed in the speech of God attested to in Holy Scripture, voiced in Jesus Christ and known in the church that is the source of our vision of God.¹⁰⁸ God's being is therefore in his action¹⁰⁹ and it is this which confronts us as a claim to the truth about God and the creation.¹¹⁰ Indeed Barth held liberal theology responsible for the capitulation of the German Christians to Hitler, since the former's attempt to translate theology into ideologies, such as eighteenth century stoicism, nineteenth century idealism, romanticism, positivism and even socialism, had enabled Nazism to present itself as a legitimate expression of natural theology.¹¹¹ For Barth, apologetics in this sense not only reduces theology to

¹⁰⁶ Biggar (1988), pp. 107-09 and Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 14, 123.

¹⁰⁷ CD II/2, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ CDII/1, in Green, p.181. Cf Jüngel, p.42, Webster (1995), pp. 30-42 and Hans Frei, 'Karl Barth: Theologian', in Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. by George Hunsinger and Willam C. Placher) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 168-76 (p.168). Whilst the early Barth saw the apotheosis of this in Schleiermacher, he later became aware that Schleiermacher's 'experience of dependency' was a Christian experience given his location in the church. See Hans Frei, 'Barth and Schleiermacher: Divergence and Convergence', *ibid.*, pp. 177-99.

¹⁰⁹ Cf B.L. McCormack, 'Review of W.S. Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology*', *Theology Today* (October 1998), 458-60 (p.458).

¹¹⁰ CD II/2, p.526. See Torrance, pp. 46-51, pp. 145-49 regarding Barth's theological 'a posteriori' theological approach.

¹¹¹ Cf CD II/I, in Green, p. 173. This insight explains Barth's hostility to Brunner at this time. In Barth's comparison between the Nazis and Communists, he argues that the Nazis

idolatry but also subverts the distinctive representational role of the language of revelation.¹¹²

ii) Freedom for Humanity: Election, Christology and A Distinctive Epistemology

Barth sees the salvation of humanity as rooted in the election of the particular man Jesus Christ.¹¹³ Hence the world is elected in Christ for salvation as the outer circle whose core is the church community.¹¹⁴ Ethics is therefore embraced by dogmatics, since

the grace of God *is* the answer to the ethical problem. For it sanctifies man. It claims him for God. It puts him under God's command. It gives predetermination to his self-determination so that he obeys God's command.¹¹⁵

The cardinal sin for Barth is to conceive of ethics as a distinct human activity of self justification, or as a secondary feature of salvation in which human beings, once justified, can substantially transform their moral condition. Instead the image of God, tarnished by sin in Adam, is the very image that Jesus Christ rescues since 'the man Jesus who fulfils the commandment of God does not give the answer, but by God's grace, He is the answer to the ethical question put by God's grace.'¹¹⁶ In this election the good is done and the whole human

went beyond the Communists in seeking to take the place of the church rather than simply opposing it. See Green *ibid.*, pp. 297-301.

¹¹² CD II/2, pp. 521-22.

¹¹³ CD II/2, p.43. For Barth's Chalcedonian Christology and its implications for theology and anthropology see Ford (1981), pp. 126-30, Webster (1995), pp. 3-7. For the notions of 'The-anthropology' and the "Royal Man" see Jüngel, pp. 128-36.

¹¹⁴ CD II/2, p.196. On Barth and Judas see Ford (1981) pp. 72-91.

¹¹⁵ CD II/2, p.516. See Jüngel, pp. 105-24.

¹¹⁶ CD II/2, p.517.

race, elected in Him, is therefore included in His good.¹¹⁷ Such a soteriology situates human response at the level of acknowledgement rather than in the establishment of salvation and subsumes all ethical response within it.¹¹⁸

Theological ethics is therefore God's particular and historic salvific action in Christ, within which all are representatively included.¹¹⁹ It indicates that, for Barth, justification and sanctification are not two distinct events but one reality in which being put right with God entails our being sanctified.¹²⁰ It is about testifying to God's incarnation and act of atonement in Christ, which thereby respects the contextual and time-bound nature of existence. 'The Word did not simply become any flesh, any man humbled and suffering. It became Jewish flesh' in history, and this election, including Israel, cannot be subverted by Israel's apparent faithlessness at present.¹²¹ The Covenant of Grace therefore is primary and sin though breaking it, cannot destroy it.¹²²

In Barth, therefore, Christian freedom is fundamentally rooted in Christology.¹²³ Christology determines soteriology, in contrast to a liberalism which Barth believed sought to derive Christology from a soteriology wedded to an anterior anthropology.¹²⁴ Faith is therefore not the means of justifying the self, but

¹¹⁷ For Barth's thoughts on anthropology see CD III/2, especially pp. 40-48.

¹¹⁸ CD II/2, p.522.

¹¹⁹ CD II/2, p.535.

¹²⁰ CD IV/1, p.101.

¹²¹ CD IV/1, p.166. For Barth and later Hauerwas, this is very important in enabling them to situate Israel within their theologies. Barth asserts that 'what is elected in Jesus Christ (his body) is the community which has the twofold form of Israel and the Church' CD II/2, p.199.

¹²² CD III/2, pp. 33-34.

¹²³ CD IV/1, p.192.

¹²⁴ CD II/2, p.558.

rather the humility of surrender.¹²⁵ Hence God's command, although not a heteronomous or oppressive demand, meeting us as it does through the representative man Jesus Christ, is nevertheless one we cannot avoid, for we live in this command moment by moment. However equally important for Barth is the recognition that our historicity implies that ethics is not about seeking for abstract universals and deducing appropriate behaviour from them, or extricating ethical truths from contextually embedded stories, such as the 10 Commandments.¹²⁶ Rather each moment of time is new and 'we must ask what the command of God is and what we are to do without having an answer ready and being able to furnish it ourselves'.¹²⁷ Barth, therefore, though respecting tradition, is suspicious of the romanticist tendency to see tradition as a self authenticating seamless web of wisdom requiring no explicit divine illumination. For Barth, tradition is not a repository of determinative insight, but a recognition that we come from somewhere. In consequence today is a new day and we must ask the question of obedience as if for the first time.¹²⁸ It is God's particular command for this particular person in this particular situation that is the key for Barth.¹²⁹

Thus in order to escape any human attempt to anticipate the divine command or remove its immediacy and purity, Barth argues that this command is and

¹²⁵ CD IV/1, p.618.

¹²⁶ CD II/2, p.571.

¹²⁷ CD II/2, p.645.

¹²⁸ CD II/2, p.648. Biggar notes Barth's contradictory approach to casuistry. Rhetorically he is hostile, given his intense concern to preserve the freedom of God from human control. Actually, in his 'special ethics' he engages in casuistry. Cf. Biggar (1988), pp. 111-16 and (1993), pp. 26-7, 123-25 and especially p.167.

¹²⁹ CD II/2, p.663. See Biggar (1993), p.21.

always has been specific, direct and ‘to the last and smallest detail it is self-interpreted’.¹³⁰ Hence ecclesial ethics cannot be deontological or casuistical since ‘casuistry is a violation of the divine mystery in the ethical event’.¹³¹ Casuistry in particular fails to recognise that freedom is found not in human choice but in obedience to God’s particular command.¹³² Consequently the church’s freedom involves responding to the new command of God in the ever changing dynamic of life, a freedom located in God’s command, since no human agency can determine that command in advance.

iii) Freedom from the Future: Eschatology, Ethics and the Role of the Church

All of this is further rooted in Barth’s eschatology, which envisages the End, proleptically advanced in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, indicating that obedience to the command of God is a possibility given the unassailable atonement and reign of Christ.¹³³ The End has arrived and both the old and new aeons are fulfilled in Christ.¹³⁴ The church is called simply to live in the fullness of life already granted to it.¹³⁵ and it is grace that determines what is natural rather than the reverse. Nevertheless the Bible is not a reservoir of texts or examples, but a story to orientate ourselves by, since it illuminates the manner in which the dynamic divine word was encountered in the particularity of the experience of distinctive individuals and communities in the past. The church is

¹³⁰ CD III/4, p.10. See also CD II/2, p.669 and CD III/4, p.12.

¹³¹ CD III/4, p.10.

¹³² CD III/4, p.14.

¹³³ CD II/2, p.778.

¹³⁴ CD II/2, p.688.

¹³⁵ CD II/2, p.695. See J. Buckley, ‘Christian Community, Baptism and Lord’s Supper’, in Webster (2000), p. 195.

part of this story, but not as a mimic. Rather the church's task is to live from within the same horizon.¹³⁶ As Webster comments, for Barth texts are not things but fields of action within a field of vision. Texts do not speak to us. God does.¹³⁷ Thus Christian living is an obligation 'to a life which because it is binding upon all men, must at all costs be lived out among all men as a token of its universal obligatoriness'.¹³⁸

Thus the role of the church is as herald of the kingdom.¹³⁹ The church displays the universal salvation of God as a shell hole left after the divine redemptive explosion. It is therefore not an agent for the transformation of the world, but rather a witness to the Word of God which has redeemed it and who will not be apart from it.¹⁴⁰ Hence the church acts as a parable of death to all human achievements, by indicating their provisional rather than ultimate significance.¹⁴¹ Such a role, as Webster has argued, does not imply a quietist agenda but rather restores to the church an appropriate agency, appropriate to its status as a community whose ethics as a co-operative venture with God are exhibited explicitly within the limits of the salvic grace of God.¹⁴² It also

¹³⁶ CD II/2, p.699.

¹³⁷ John Webster, 'Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 51/3 (1998), 307-41 (p.331).

¹³⁸ CD II/2, p.715. See also Webster (1995), pp. 4-6.

¹³⁹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1974), pp. 70-80.

¹⁴⁰ On this relationship between Christ and his church see Demson's exploration of apostolicity in Barth in David E. Demson, *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 49-66. On the importance of corporality in Barth which contrasts with liberalism's docetism see Torrance (1990), pp. 25-26.

¹⁴¹ For a construal of Barth's theology as one of liberation see Jane A. Barter, 'A Theology of Liberation in Barth's Church Dogmatics IV/3', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53/2 (2000), pp. 154-76. Hauerwas' project offers a similar, though not identical expression of liberation as we shall argue in chapter 5.

¹⁴² Webster (1995), pp. 70-75 and *Barth's Moral Theology: Action in Barth's Thought*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 168-78, esp. p.177. See also Biggar (1988), pp. 111-16 and (1993), pp. 123-45, where Biggar challenges Hauerwas' critique of Barth's ethics as

indicates the integral place of church for Barth in hearing the word of God as we noted above.

The church is therefore an event, an action of God, rather than an institution, since it witnesses to the community of the Trinity which has generated it.¹⁴³

What prevents fragmentation of the Christian community, is the singular source of the particular commands and hence, although the life of Christian people will be infinitely variable, there will be a unity among them that reflects the oneness of their Lord and his peace.¹⁴⁴ Consequently the church does not withdraw from the world. Instead the church is present to bless the world through its service and witness to the universal salvation of God in Christ.¹⁴⁵ Barth believes that this serving of the world will always direct Christians to the 'little things', the poor, the retarded, the stranger and indeed the enemy, since humility and peacemaking are characteristic of Christian living within the security of this salvation. Thus the freedom of the church is expressed in the rationale for this service. The church serves the world in terms of this vision of divine salvation, rather than on the terms of the world that does not yet know this redemption. It represents the excess of grace, whose rationale, as Buckley asserts, must be the presence of divine event or nothing at all. Yet equally this church is a

occasionalistic, not least because of the attention given to 'special ethics'. Barth's preference for character as an unfinished and eschatologically focussed project rather than a retrospectively grasped sense of identity, reflects his concern that anthropocentricity lurks in much conversation about character.

¹⁴³ H. Zahrnt, *The Question of God* (London: Collins, 1969), p.33.

¹⁴⁴ CD II/2, p.717.

¹⁴⁵ CD II/2, p.720.

pilgrim people, always open to the novelty of the future and aware of its present defects.¹⁴⁶

Given his theology of election and salvation, Barth regards the state as a part of the order of redemption, whose responsibility is to provide a just society within which the church can freely fulfil its mission.¹⁴⁷ He thus interprets the state through his dogmatics, rather than seeking to justify the state on independent grounds. Indeed for Barth, the state is a sign of the grace and patience of God, an imperfect and provisional parable of the kingdom, present to take account of those who have not yet acknowledged that grace. Hence it is appropriate for Christians to serve it.¹⁴⁸ Such service will entail a patience that reflects the patience of God with the world and a recognition that the Christian 'views the non-Christian world, not outside the Kingdom of Christ, but within it in the form of the state'.¹⁴⁹ It will also involve patience within the Christian community, as the weak are welcomed and diversity affirmed in the oneness of the peace making of fellowship, for the church itself, as an institution or tangible community, cannot guarantee that it is the true church, compromised as it is by sin.¹⁵⁰ Neither the church nor any ideology can never definitively

¹⁴⁶ Buckley, pp. 205-07. Again parallels exist here with Hauerwas demand that sanctification makes a substantial and evident difference to the church.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.129. See also CD II/2, p.722 and *Against the Stream*, in Green, p.281. See also Rowan Williams, 'Barth, War and the State', in Biggar (1988), pp. 170 -87.

¹⁴⁸ CD II/2, p.721.

¹⁴⁹ CD II/2, p.724. On Barth and eavesdropping or listening to a graced world and for the notion that his concept of solidarity implies openness to the world see Biggar (1988), pp. 109-11 and (1993), pp. 146-59.

¹⁵⁰ CD IV/2, quoted in Green, p.245.

identify the locus of God's truth with itself. For Barth the freedom of the Word is absolute.¹⁵¹

iv) Freedom for the Church: General Ethics and Special Ethics

In order to relate the two fold ethical dynamic that embraces humanity, namely inclusion in the good of the man Jesus Christ and yet the particular and contingent commanding of God in ongoing life, Barth distinguishes between general ethics and special ethics. Both are good only in so far as they are 'sanctified by the Word of God, which as such is also the command of God',¹⁵² yet special ethical behaviour is about allowing dogmatics to illuminate life as it is lived by bringing reality into focus through the command of God whose character as creator, reconciler and liberator/redeemer, is evident in the stories of the Scriptures and tradition and especially, for Barth, in the Chalcedonian understanding of the identity of Christ.¹⁵³ This threefold character of the command of God exhibits itself in every challenge Christians face and provides the matrix within which Christian freedom is manifested in all its particularity.¹⁵⁴ This contrasts with the carceral character of the instrumental rationality of liberal thought seen, for example in the pretensions of the medical profession.¹⁵⁵ Barth believes that the church should never seek to control society. It is rather to be the city set on a hill, a sign and witness to the presence and nature of the grace that holds all the rest of reality in its care.

¹⁵¹ Zahrnt, p.27.

¹⁵² CD III/4, p.4.

¹⁵³ Webster (1995), pp. 100-15.

¹⁵⁴ Thus Barth engages with specific ethical areas under the headings 'Freedom before God', CD III/4, pp. 53-115, 'Freedom in Fellowship', CD III/4, pp. 116-323, and 'Freedom for Life', CD III/4, pp. 324-684.

¹⁵⁵ CD III/4, p.361.

This, for Barth requires a particular and distinctive church not ‘of the people but only the church for the people’ in contrast to the ambiguous Christendom model of the West.¹⁵⁶ It must be a catholic people, embracing all peoples in its witness the extensive grace of God. It must be a gathered community to act as a herald of the grace of God to the world.¹⁵⁷ It must have a distinctively theological vision, since ‘there is a great difference between the same secular matters as seen from the standpoint of the kingdom of God and as seen from a supposedly inherent logic, metaphysics and ethics’.¹⁵⁸

Barth’s project therefore emerges as one concerned to reiterate divine freedom with its correlative freedom for the church. Certainly, his apparent hostility to human culture, is modified as God’s togetherness with humanity, seen in the communion of the divine and the human in Jesus, is stressed, and the extent of the grace of election affirms every culture as a location for the presence of God.¹⁵⁹ Likewise Barth’s universalism suggests that there can be no true ‘outsiders’ in God’s kingdom, thereby reducing his anxiety about apologetics. Since all are in God’s kingdom, language can communicate to those who are ignorant of their salvific state but it is the Word of God, not human language that conveys this knowledge.¹⁶⁰ The church can therefore be more affirming of human wisdom since

¹⁵⁶ CD III/4, p.488.

¹⁵⁷ CD III/4, p.507.

¹⁵⁸ CD III/4, p.511.

¹⁵⁹ Karl Barth *The Humanity of God* (1956), in C. Green, pp. 52-58. Thus the mature Barth’s understanding of natural theology is not the anthropocentric conception he was operating with in his confrontation both with his liberal antecedents and with Brunner.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.62.

it is no task of ours to tear open again the abyss which Jesus Christ closed. God's 'No!' has been taken by Christ [...] what takes place in God's humanity is, in including that No in itself, the affirmation of humanity.¹⁶¹

3:9 Hauerwas' Critique: The Limited Liberty of Barth

i) From Consciousness to Community

One of the aspects of Barth's theology that has always attracted me is the unfinished character of the *Church Dogmatics*. By 'unfinished' I do not mean that he did not live to complete volume four. But even if he had been able to accomplish that task, everything would have yet remained to be done [...] The massiveness of the *Dogmatics* witnesses to Barth's confidence that the Christian faith does not depend upon theologians 'getting it right'.¹⁶²

Thus Hauerwas expresses his affinity with Barth's refusal to allow human cognition to capture the divine event. 'Nachdenken' is a pilgrimage rather than a systematic treatise. Hence, with Barth, Hauerwas challenges the liberal claim to offer universal explanation grounded in human capacities. Like Barth, Hauerwas deconstructs the premises for such a claim, by pointing to the finitude and sinful character of human knowledge. Hence for both, provisionality is at the heart of the theological enterprise. Revelation is God's

¹⁶¹ Ibid., and p.65. See also Frei, 'Karl Barth: Theologian', p.172.

¹⁶² *Sanctify Them*, pp. 2-3.

work, not that of the theologian.¹⁶³ Beginning with and living within the historic story of God, rather than seeking to append God to some anterior anthropology is a common thread in their respective accounts.¹⁶⁴ Commencing with humanity will always fail to escape Feuerbach's critique.

Theology's task is not to make God intelligible to 'modern man', whoever that may be, but rather to make ourselves intelligible to God. The appropriately phrased theological question is never 'Does God exist?', but 'Do we exist?'¹⁶⁵

For both Hauerwas and Barth, theological liberalism's anthropocentric character renders God an unnecessary hypothesis.¹⁶⁶ Apologetics of this kind can only lose its object in its articulation.¹⁶⁷ Instead, as we have seen, theology should reject such a fragile and limited starting point and instead attend to its divine object by explicating the story of God carried in the Christian community. For both this entails situating ethics within dogmatics¹⁶⁸ and both believe that 'to be saved is to be sanctified', that is to see the world in the truth of Christ.¹⁶⁹ Hauerwas actually defends Barth's construal of liberal understandings of natural theology since there is no separate ungraced reality called nature.¹⁷⁰ As we saw in chapter 1, like Barth, Hauerwas asserts a

¹⁶³ Hauerwas writes in *Christian Existence Today*, 'Theology and theologians do not make the world better. Rather our craft involves slow painful steps of trying to understand better what it means to be a people formed by the story of God', p.110.

¹⁶⁴ For example see his rejection of such foundationalism as a basis for ethics in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.35.

¹⁶⁵ *Sanctify Them*, p.38.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁶⁷ See *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 100-01 and *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.56.

¹⁶⁸ 'The relationship between doctrine and ethics is not just a 'conceptual matter' but an institutional [...] an ecclesial issue', in *On Doctrine and Ethics*, p.23.

¹⁶⁹ *Sanctify Them*, p.6 footnote 8, and p.11.

¹⁷⁰ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 57-58.

universal salvation, cosmic gracing and hence potential knowledge of God. What the Gospel does is to illuminate or bring into focus that truth, through the lens of the Scriptures and the working of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷¹ For both, truth is complex. It cannot be reduced to the simplicities and singularities of liberal thought. Where Hauerwas goes beyond Barth, is in his conviction that this fundamentally involves attention to the embodied church and its traditions.¹⁷² These are the contemporary bearers of this story, a church within which the Scriptures are present and communally read. He comments, 'I teach ethics through the liturgy'.¹⁷³

Nevertheless for Hauerwas, Barth's concern to maintain the transcendent freedom of God's Word, segregates the Word from the church.¹⁷⁴ They are accidentally rather than intrinsically related. This, in turn, entails a structural separation of the story of God from the contemporary community, whose task is not to display so much as to point to the historical event of the incarnation and to direct the world to await the contemporary revelation of the Word in their midst. Barth, therefore, deals in intuitive consciousness rather than in the politics of a community. His attention is to literary exposition of a narrative which will open people to the revelation of God rather than explicating that revelation through attention to the politics of the church. Barth's emphasis falls upon dogmatics more than upon the Church. As a theological servant of the

¹⁷¹ *Sanctify Them*, p.39 footnote 9.

¹⁷² *A Community of Character*, p.100. See also *On Doctrine and Ethics*, p.23.

¹⁷³ *Sanctify Them*, p.11. See also Hauerwas' comment that revelation is not the epistemic status of a kind of knowledge but what directly speaks of God and bears the stamp of God's saving intention. For Hauerwas this is the tangible church. See further *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.66.

¹⁷⁴ As noted above, this is contradicted by Demson's study of Barth's concept of apostolicity.

latter, he sees his task as thinking through the Scriptural narrative for the church, rather than regarding the Church as a continuation of that afterthought. Hence Hauerwas' contention is that Barth is still enthralled by the liberal conviction that the Scriptures, properly expounded, can give a sufficiently compelling account of the Word of God to facilitate an encounter with that Word without intrinsically involving the church.¹⁷⁵ Hauerwas, in contrast, asserts that the church rather than disembodied texts of Scripture is pivotal in this regard. As he comments, 'I try to do theology in a manner that exposes the politics and material conditions of Christian speech'.¹⁷⁶

Hauerwas is therefore concerned that for all Barth's stress upon liberating theology and the church from the shackles of liberal thought, his own approach remains enthralled to that tradition. Whilst attending to the transcendence of the divine Word, the engagement with that Word continues to be structurally distinct from the practices of the church. Barth's attempt to defend the freedom of God engenders an idealistic theology whose credibility can only appear rhetorical rather than substantial. For Hauerwas, this keeps Barth within the Kantian fold. In contrast Hauerwas seeks to escape the idealistic problematic by integrating the divine presence with the embodied story of God's people, presently focused in the church. As he comments 'what was lost at the Reformation was exactly this understanding of the church as the indispensable

¹⁷⁵ *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.20.

¹⁷⁶ *Sanctify Them*, p.5. Indeed in *On Doctrine and Ethics* Hauerwas commends James McClendon and Rowan Williams for showing, respectively, that 'theology gains its intelligibility through the practices of the church' and that 'doctrine is speech that does work', p.34. Hauerwas' concern is that Barth effectively underwrites a disembodied church. See *In Good Company*, p.9.

context in which order might be given to the Christian life'.¹⁷⁷ In short Barth emphasises epistemology. Hauerwas focuses upon practices for 'we follow Jesus before we know him'.¹⁷⁸ Such a concentration upon the significance of the sociology of the church led Nigel Biggar, to question Hauerwas about the apparent absence of God in his writings.¹⁷⁹ We shall look at Hauerwas' response to this challenge in section III of this chapter. At this point we note Hauerwas' claim that his intention is not 'to reproduce Durkheim, albeit with an ecclesiological twist',¹⁸⁰ but to encourage a tangible community life which cannot make sense unless the God of Jesus Christ exists. Without this community, Hauerwas believes, dogmatics and theologies are no more than creative rhetoric.

ii) Christ's Ecclesial Freedom

As we have seen, Hauerwas and Barth also share a similar Christocentricity although the relationship of the church to Christology differs significantly. Hauerwas argues that there is no Jesus, except the Jesus carried in the church.¹⁸¹ He therefore shares with Barth an ambivalence about the value of quests for the historical Jesus, since these render the Scriptures mere resources whereby historians reconstruct further derivative and idealistic narratives whose authority resides in the historian's credibility rather than in the church's way of life. Yet again, for Hauerwas, a related danger attends Barth's project, since his

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.23. Subsequently Protestants knew what it meant to be a Christian. However they had lost the capacity to determine what to do as a Christian. Ibid., p.29.

¹⁷⁸ *Resident Aliens*, p.55.

¹⁷⁹ *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, p.37.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 72-74.

Christ can also appear as the product of a singular mind credible at a rhetorical level, rather than a political one. Thus Christ, ironically, is segregated from the church. Hauerwas, in contrast, frequently begins his engagement with Scripture by asking what sort of community should the church be properly to grasp the story being told.¹⁸² This implies that unless the people are ecclesially formed they cannot understand the Scriptures and recognise Christ. Similarly the sermon emerges as perhaps the key didactic medium, since it is a corporal activity impossible without the tangible gathering of the church. In short, Hauerwas believes that the Scriptures are effectively silent unless there exists a community formed to hear them. Thus whereas Barth is bringing the Scriptures alive to the community, Hauerwas is seeking a community alive to the Scriptures. Therefore whilst, Hauerwas, like Barth, refuses to distinguish between the person and the work of Christ, he differs from the latter in his expectation of substantive sanctification in the church. 'I believe that in Christ's resurrection the very character of the universe was changed, but I assume that that change changes us'.¹⁸³ For Barth, thus read, the church can only be a pointer to Christ the focal point of the story. Hauerwas, in contrast, asserts that it is the explicit change of lives that displays the transformation of the universe and the active Lordship of Christ in the world.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² *Unleashing the Scriptures* in particular advocates this political reading of the Scriptures.

¹⁸³ *Sanctify Them*, p.5.

¹⁸⁴ *Vision and Virtue*, p.221 and *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.97.

iii) Escaping Docetism: Church, Ethics and the World

This means that, for Hauerwas, the church as a socio-political ethic has much greater significance than he believes it has for Barth, even though Barth's rejection of liberalism demanded a pluralist and narrative approach, which needed both local communities of faith and the international dimension of Christian community to sustain it.¹⁸⁵ It also enables Hauerwas to escape the charge of docetism which Barth's supralapsarianism and Christocentric understanding of election has attracted. Since, for Hauerwas, ecclesial character is a means by which the display of God's reign happens within history, it cannot have been wholly determined in a pre-creation covenant. For Hauerwas sanctification must evidently change the church, as we noted above. Consequently he believes his project is better able to recognise the reality and contribution of the tragic to Christian character.¹⁸⁶ It furthermore indicates why Hauerwas remains more ambivalent about the state, since it is only as the church becomes more distinctive that the story carried in its sanctification can be seen.¹⁸⁷ It also means that whilst both share the conviction that the kingdom of God is co-extensive with reality and hence greater in extent than the church, Hauerwas' ecclesiology is the more porous. Given the significance of sanctification as a substantial witness to the presence of Christ in the church, the wisdom of God mediated through graced, if often salvifically ignorant

¹⁸⁵ See Hauerwas' comments to this effect in *Resident Aliens*, p.22, as well as in *A Community of Character*, p.74 and *Dispatches*, p.58.

¹⁸⁶ The relationship between tragedy, character and narrative will be discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁸⁷ A longer discussion on the politics of peaceableness in Barth and Hauerwas will emerge in chapter 5. Barth regards the state as a dimension of God's kingdom, his servant. Hauerwas seems less certain about the American liberal body politic. See *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 140-43 and 'On Learning Simplicity in an Ambiguous Age', *Katallagete*, 10/1-3 (Fall 1987), pp. 43-46.

epistemological disciplines, emerges as of considerable import to the church's display of the universal reign of God. Clarifying this relationship however means keeping the church's grammar pure.¹⁸⁸

From the start of his career, as we have noted in chapter 1, Hauerwas believed Barth's ethics to be too occasionalistic and to legitimate an anarchic and sentimental situation ethics. This is also why Hauerwas distinguishes between justification as 'Christ for us' and sanctification as 'Christ in us' in order to offer space and value to sanctification and thus Christian ethics.¹⁸⁹ Hence casuistry has a place in Christian ethics and tradition is illuminating thereby displaying ecclesiality.¹⁹⁰ For Hauerwas therefore, 'the church is the organised form of Jesus' story',¹⁹¹ so whilst accepting that salvation and sanctification are integrated, he rejects Barth's notion that the ethical good is solely determined by God's immediate command. Rather it is rooted in 'reflection on our received human experience as to what is good, bad, right and wrong'.¹⁹² Indeed it is through the substantive presence of the church that 'the world is given a history'¹⁹³ for 'worship makes the world'.¹⁹⁴ Unlike Barth, the rhetoric of the

¹⁸⁸ See *Vision and Virtue*, p.7; *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.101-02; *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 7-8, 102 and the discussion with Miscamble and Quirk in *Theology Today*, pp. 70-95. See also section III of this chapter.

¹⁸⁹ See *Character and the Christian Life*, pp.,3,137-42, 169-72, 180 for a fuller discussion here. However, like Barth, Hauerwas does not see sanctification as human achievement *coram deo* and recognises that grace is at the heart of everything.

¹⁹⁰ See 'Casuistry as a Narrative Art', *Interpretation* (1983), p.380. This approach is adequate so long as Barth's point about respecting context e.g. of the Decalogue is maintained. Hauerwas notes in *Sanctify Them*, p.40 that in context the Decalogue represents the integration of politics and nature. It is this reading which illuminates its value to the contemporary church rather than in deontological terms.

¹⁹¹ *A Community of Character*, p.50.

¹⁹² *Vision and Virtue*, p.28.

¹⁹³ *A Community of Character*, p.91.

¹⁹⁴ 'The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life', *Essentials of Christian Community*, p.39.

story is not sufficient to indicate the presence of the kingdom and the church's epistemic function. Hauerwas' sanctificationist ethics, for all their contingency, intend to avoid docetism of any kind.

iv) Eschatology and the Freedom of Peace

The above also explains why Hauerwas is so concerned with peaceableness as the key sign of this God among us.¹⁹⁵ Whilst both adhere to the eschatologically proleptic role of Christ, Barth believes that complete peaceableness remains an eschatological hope, valuable though its approximations may be in the present where possible. Hauerwas holds that without this evident eschatological peaceableness, tangibly expressed in the contemporary and historical church, God's reign cannot be known. The new age is here as a reality to be lived, even though the completion of the eschatological age, when the present apparent dualism of the world and the church will be shown to be an ontological unity in God's kingdom, remains in the future.¹⁹⁶

3:10 Counter Critique

Hauerwas is therefore convinced that Barth does not achieve the freedom he intends in his rejection of liberal theology. His concentration upon the transcendence and freedom of the Word of God appears to Hauerwas as another form of docetism. His exposition of Scripture seems to render the Christian story an ideological narrative, accidentally related to the church and

¹⁹⁵ Once again detailed discussion of Hauerwas' peaceable politics and his eschatology must await chapter 5.

¹⁹⁶ See his disagreement with Milbank in 'On Being 'Placed' by John Milbank', p. 200.

therefore prey to the critique of Feuerbach and the masters of suspicion. His ethics are so unsubstantial and fluid, that no ecclesial identity or theological insight can be gained from ecclesial practices. The church collapses into apparent anarchy wholly captured by the contingencies of the moment. Whilst there are a number of questions attendant upon Hauerwas' criticisms to which we shall return, it is clear at this point, that Hauerwas' determination to rescue the integrity of the church requires that even these relics of liberal thought must be expelled and Barth's limitations themselves transcended. In the next section we shall see why Hauerwas believes that the 'post-liberalism' of the Yale theologians is also inadequate to the challenge.

Yet, as we have noted, Hauerwas' reading of Barth may need some qualification. First, he needs to attend to the subtlety of Barth's understanding of Chalcedonian Christology and especially to Christ's involvement in the apostolicity of the corporeal church. Secondly, Barth's special ethics, with its casuistical character, implies the necessity of an embodied church. Third, Barth's concern to preserve the freedom of God from sinful human control represents the same sort of challenge as Reinhold Niebuhr to Hauerwas' peaceable community. Fourthly, Barth's suspicion of natural theology questions all attempts to begin with an existing human community, ecclesial or otherwise. Hauerwas' beginning in the middle, with the existing church, may well be a disguised form of anthropocentricity. Finally, Barth's incarnational Christology implies that the Lordship of Christ is experienced in everyday life, rather than

being found only in the open community of the church. Is Barth more open to the grace of God beyond the church than Hauerwas?

3:11 The Immanentist Theology of Yale: Textuality as the Basis for Ecclesial Liberty

Yale, as Hauerwas' 'alma mater', is pivotal to the formation of his project. It was here that H. Richard Niebuhr articulated concern about his liberal heritage¹⁹⁷ advocating a more contextual and particularist theological approach¹⁹⁸ relative to worldview, faith, history, geography and social context.¹⁹⁹ For Niebuhr the revelation of God is always mediated as ecclesial pluralism displays.²⁰⁰ Thus even the attempt to defend a propositional positivist view of Christian truth is deconstructed from within. Culture and identity are socially constructed and experienced, rather than being the sum of individual choice.²⁰¹ Hence, like the later Wittgenstein, Niebuhr regards language and narrative as delineators of a community, whose identity is articulated in a living tradition through the telling of a common story.²⁰²

Such attention to particularity, historicity, social identity, pluralism, narrative and hermeneutics, was developed by the projects of Hans Frei and George

¹⁹⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p.1.

¹⁹⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p.45.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.93. This is why Hauerwas recognises his debt to H. Richard Niebuhr, who, like Iris Murdoch, helped him to recognise that how we see is more primary than what we do. See *Against the Nations*, p.31. Nevertheless Hauerwas remains convinced that H. Richard Niebuhr was always a liberal. See 'Christian Ethics in America (and the JRE)', pp. 59-60 footnote 2.

²⁰⁰ See the introduction by James Gustafson to *The Responsible Self*, pp. 34-36.

²⁰¹ See *Christ and Culture*, p.32, and *The Responsible Self*, pp. 71-73.

²⁰² *The Responsible Self*, pp. 150-04.

Lindbeck.²⁰³ Like Barth, Frei reiterates the importance of enfolding the self into the biblical narrative, rather than trying to squeeze the latter into an anterior liberal anthropology or to reconstruct it into a story acceptable to contemporary canons of historical criticism.²⁰⁴ The narrative shape of the biblical account was what constructed the Christian story and hence the literary or 'history-like'²⁰⁵ character of the narrative is of fundamental significance.²⁰⁶ Translation into other media corrupts the truthfulness of the account.²⁰⁷ The Scriptures are a novel or a play, rather than a quarry for historians with agendas alien to their form and character. Interpretation and truth must therefore work within the text rather than in terms accountable to external criteria. Thus, for Frei, the identity of Jesus as disclosed by the story is the primary question rather than the question of his existence. It is as the story discloses this identity that implications about his existence can be drawn.²⁰⁸ The nature of this existence is not to be read through a set of alien philosophical or anthropological assumptions or enthralled to literary theory. These presume the possibilities of existence and thought independent of the character and implications of the story as interpreted by the contemporary Christian community.

²⁰³ Further attention will be given to the narrative dimensions of Hans Frei's project in chapter 4.

²⁰⁴ Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974), p.135. See also 'Karl Barth: Theologian', p.168.

²⁰⁵ Frei (1974), p.148.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.280.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.10.

²⁰⁸ Placher notes Frei's use of the resurrection to imply that the identity disclosed in this story implies the contemporary existence of Jesus in much the same way as Anselm's ontological proof is about inferring existence from the identity of the subject so delineated. William C. Placher in Ford (1997), p.346.

George Lindbeck's seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine* gave this approach more systematic form. Delineating three existing theological theories of religion, the cognitive-propositional, the experiential-expressive and the cultural linguistic,²⁰⁹ Lindbeck argued that only the latter offers a way forward ecumenically and in terms of a proper understanding of religion since it alone respects the real incommensurability between religions which function like languages and cultures whose doctrines are analogous to grammar.²¹⁰

Religions are seen as comprehensive interpretative schemes,
usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily
ritualised, which structure human experience and
understanding of self and world.²¹¹

In consequence religious experience is formed through an anterior tradition and religions are empirical phenomena rather intuitions or feelings. Belief emerges out of belonging and formation within a religious community is essential.²¹²

Lindbeck's approach therefore rejects the cognitive-propositional and experiential-expressive approach to religion and embraces instead a community-carried, narratively delineated, and contextually sensitive model of

²⁰⁹ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion in a Post Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 16-19. It is paradoxical that Lindbeck, who seeks to expose the particularity of the Christian religion as a distinctive language game, does so using abstract and general categories. Properly he should work from the distinctive speech of Christianity rather than relying upon a conceptual model within which to illuminate religion and thereby, Christianity. In fact, as Patterson comments, Lindbeck is actually generalising from the Christian communal vision to embrace all other 'religions', thereby attempting to segregate the code and what is encoded. Susan Patterson, *Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 37-41.

²¹⁰ *The Nature of Doctrine*, p.18.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.36.

religion, which invites the initiate to participate in order to understand, much as Frei spoke of the need to be enveloped in the biblical story in order to understand it. Truth, therefore is established by justification or warranty rather than correspondence, intrasystemic coherence rather than ontological truth.²¹³ The approach is 'post-liberal' in the sense of rejecting the liberal assumptions of the experiential-expressive model.

Thus Lindbeck's truth is a risk and a journey rather than a concept. Meaning is therefore to be found within rather than beyond the religion and is discovered through faithful living rather than through attention to metaphysical concepts of divine transcendence or mysteries of consciousness. God is part of the story of a religion. Hence the relevance of a religion is intrasystemically evaluated, since there is no universal court of appeal beyond the particular religious traditions.²¹⁴ Indeed, for Lindbeck, it is precisely as the Christian community attends to its own integrity that it can properly serve God in the world, for only thus will it be formed by this story of faith, rather than by some alien alternative.²¹⁵ However this introspection will generate a missionary impetus given the character of the Christian narrative freeing an attractive evangelism from corrupting apologetics.²¹⁶ Oddly this programme, by challenging liberalism's anthropocentricity, itself seems more anthropocentric than Barth. Transcendental address within the dynamics of the covenant is lost in Yale's

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 114-20.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.127.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.128.

linguistic immanentism. Similarly Frei's ascriptive exposition of Jesus fails to include in his unique identity, his commitment to be always with his disciples.²¹⁷

3:12 Hauerwas' Critique: The Linguistic Captivity of Yale

The 'Yale School' agenda²¹⁸ has deeply influenced Hauerwas' own project.²¹⁹

Nevertheless, the key difference between Yale and Hauerwas is an ecclesiological one. Yale is primarily about textuality. Hauerwas is about ecclesiality. 'All theology must begin and end with ecclesiology'.²²⁰ Lindbeck's analogy of doctrine as grammar ignores the priority of ecclesial practices as the embodiment of Christ.²²¹ Furthermore Lindbeck, like fundamentalists and other liberals, fails to see that church training is essential to read the Bible properly.²²² Texts are silent without practices and people.²²³

For Hauerwas, Lindbeck's cultural linguistic approach encourages a distinctive, self-conscious narratively traditioned Christianity, and for this Hauerwas is indebted. However the truthfulness of Lindbeck's theology rests not in the sort of people carrying the story, but in the intrasystemic coherence of the story told

²¹⁷ Demson, pp. 9, 25, 49, 62-66, 103.

²¹⁸ Ronald F. Thiemann represents one 'Yale theologian' who seeks to underwrite the alethic claims of the Christian narrative in a way unresolved in Lindbeck. His attempt to establish the truth about God through retrospective justification and promise keeping can be seen in Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 8, 81, 148.

²¹⁹ *Against the Nations*, pp. 1-4.

²²⁰ *In Good Company*, p. 58. Parallels with the thesis of John Milbank are evident here.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²²² *Unleashing the Scriptures*, p. 26.

²²³ This recalls his earlier comment that 'the people of the church's [...] first responsibility is to embody their story' in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p. 6. The influence of Fish, with whom we shall engage in chapter 4, is explicit here see *Unleashing the Scriptures*, pp. 19-28. It also explains why Hauerwas speaks of the Scriptures as an icon of truth, rather than being the truth in themselves. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

through reading the texts and which the church liturgically remembers.²²⁴ In contrast, for Hauerwas, it is the character of the contemporary church rather than abstract texts which is revelatory, a character corroborated by the Scriptures as the church situates the story its present life displays within the ongoing story of God. Hence

the authority of Scripture derives its intelligibility from the
existence of a community that knows its life depends on
faithful remembering of God's care of his creation through
the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus.²²⁵

Indeed it is liturgy which makes the texts Scripture, for without such worship texts remain simply texts.²²⁶

For Hauerwas, therefore, Yale regards truthfulness as intratextual warranty rather than ecclesial life, textual coherence as more important than embodied ethic, rhetoric as more significant than practice, literature than people, and the detached mind as of greater importance than the body. Epistemology remains the foundation for ecclesiology, rather than the reverse and meaning is established theoretically rather than through the communal reflection upon ecclesial practices.²²⁷ As a result Lindbeck's evangelism involves attraction to

²²⁴ Thiemann's notion of a narrative of fulfilled promises seeks to escape this problem as we noted above.

²²⁵ *A Community of Character*, p.53. Whilst this particular piece anticipates Lindbeck's book it is subsequently a consistent theme in Hauerwas.

²²⁶ 'God's New Language', *Christian Existence Today*, p.58 footnote 11.

²²⁷ See Hauerwas' footnote to the effect that this intratextually rather than ecclesiology rooted account of Christian doctrine renders this version of neo-orthodoxy a variant of liberal Protestantism. *In Good Company*, p.20 footnote 4. A similar point is made in *Where Resident Aliens Live*, pp. 18-19.

an ideology rather than attraction to a pilgrim community-embodied story.²²⁸ In contrast Hauerwas asserts, 'one of the tests of the truthfulness of Christian convictions cannot help being the faithfulness of the church'.²²⁹

Similarly, as we have seen, Hauerwas' increasing appreciation of the sermon as a theological vehicle, serves to situate the reflective within the ecclesial. Indeed 'the sermon is a churchly event' for only a Spirit filled community can truly hear the Word of God.²³⁰ Doctrine may be the grammar of the church, but this grammar emerges through practices as worship forms a listening people into a community who can recognise these 'rules' as their own.²³¹ It is the community which is the language,²³² rather than an abstract language or notions of narrative constituting a community.²³³ In this way Hauerwas avoids the implicit structuralism of Lindbeck and keeps the language of the church within the category of contemporary conversation or speech. This ongoing conversation develops and refines itself as the community attends to its identity in context. Thus the church is a community of many dialects as well as sharing a common tongue.

²²⁸ *Against the Nations*, p.8.

²²⁹ *Christian Existence Today*, p.11. For a similar exposition of truth in I John where 'anti-Christ' concerns a false life-style rather than false doctrine see Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of I John* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). pp. 60,136.

²³⁰ 'The Church as God's New Language', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 63-65.

²³¹ *In Good Company*, p.9.

²³² 'The Church as God's New Language', op.cit. As we shall see in chapter 4, this essay is a critical rejection of narrative theology that has emerged through Frei, Kelsey, Lindbeck, Thiemann and McClendon.

²³³ As we shall see in chapter 4 the sermon avoids the danger of confessional rather than ecclesial uses of narrative.

From the above Hauerwas is further distinguished from Yale in a number of ways. His understanding of rationality is essentially practical, rooted not in the mind, but in intelligible practices which must be learned. Neither is it an invariant property of human beings but the communal process of discerning the good life.²³⁴ He writes 'I have therefore tried to develop an account of rationality that does justice to the practical, historical and social nature of moral reason',²³⁵ and 'I certainly do not believe, nor did Wittgenstein, that religious convictions are or should be treated as an internally consistent language game that is self-validating.'²³⁶ Rationality is consequently relative to practices. Thus Hauerwas uses Olin Teague's refusal to sue a defaulting business partner, as an example of this practical rationality.²³⁷ Teague acts not because he first thinks out what he should do, but his reasoning emerges out of the character formed in him through his participation in the Mennonite community. His rationality is expressed as a subset of his habits. 'Rationality in a Christian context, therefore, both shapes and is shaped by the fundamental commitment of that community to be a community of the reconciled as well as reconciling'.²³⁸ It is in this way that Hauerwas believes that peaceableness is necessarily rational for Christians and that he himself is a rationalist 'just to the extent I have tried to show that Christian convictions in fact provide the skills necessary to help us see the world as it is'.²³⁹

²³⁴ *Sanctify Them*, p.55 footnote 40.

²³⁵ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p.9. See also *Against the Nations*, p.6.

²³⁶ *Christian Existence Today*, p.10.

²³⁷ 'Reconciling the Practice of Reason: Casuistry in Context', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 74-85. See also Hauerwas affirmation of Frei in this regard in 'The Church as God's New Language', *Christian Existence Today*, p.65.

²³⁸ *Christian Existence Today*, p.82.

²³⁹ 'Failure of Communication', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, (1997), p.232.

The locus of truthfulness also distinguishes Hauerwas from Yale. The truthfulness of theological convictions 'is most appropriately raised by asking how through our language and character they form and display our practical affairs', that is the practical affairs of the community of faith.²⁴⁰ Truthfulness is therefore about embodiment and expressed through the practices of a community. Hence 'the biggest problem facing Christian theology is not translation but enactment',²⁴¹ ecclesial life rather than a contemporary exercise in literary hermeneutics. It is as the lives of those within the tradition are narrated that the way the story works is exemplified.²⁴² Such an approach thereby enables Hauerwas to maintain Frei's ambivalence towards the historico-critical method, without becoming prisoner to an a-critical reading of texts, for 'there is no real Jesus except as he is known through the kind of life he demanded of his disciples'.²⁴³ To know the truth of Jesus is never simply an intellectual or historical affair. Rather the truth of Jesus and, through Jesus, of the world, is mediated through the formative, social experience of discipleship.²⁴⁴ It is the contemporary ecclesial community which provokes a particular reading of the texts, rather than the texts providing an ideal church against which the contemporary community is evaluated.²⁴⁵ As Fergusson notes, this renders the church an extension of the incarnation, rather than the witness to an unrepeatable act and raises questions about the character of

²⁴⁰ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p.9.

²⁴¹ *Resident Aliens*, p.171.

²⁴² *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 80-81.

²⁴³ For examples of a repeated use of this phrase see *A Community of Character*, p.41 and *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.72.

²⁴⁴ See also *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.96, *Resident Aliens*, p.55 and *Christian Existence Today*, p.103.

²⁴⁵ This is why Hauerwas can assert that the plain sense of Scripture is determined through the corporate life of the Christian community.

redemption.²⁴⁶ There are also questions about the integrity and diversity of the ecclesial tradition which we shall need to address in chapter 4. Nevertheless Hauerwas believes truth is inevitably historically and communally mediated.²⁴⁷ To know truth requires participation in a truthful community. Freedom, therefore, ‘consists not in having no story, but rather comes only through being trained and acquiring the skills of a truthful community’, in an apprenticeship model of learning.²⁴⁸

Truthfulness must therefore include a degree of pluralism, given contextuality and finitude for

how the gospel ‘engulfs’ the world is not by denying the reality of our diverse narratives, but by providing an invitation to be part of a new people. The imperial character of the story that the church embodies requires witness, not coercion. Precisely because the content of the story requires us to recognise our fallibility, we cannot anticipate how God will use our witness relative to the diverse stories of the world. Indeed the story we believe to be entrusted to the church does not displace all other stories, for it does not pretend to tell us all that is worth knowing about our

²⁴⁶ David Fergusson, ‘Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50/2 (1997), 242-49 (pp. 245-46). Hauerwas’ response is in the introduction to *Sanctify Them*, pp. 5-6 footnote 8.

²⁴⁷ *A Community of Character*, p.100.

²⁴⁸ *Christian Existence Today*, p.103.

existence: it tells us only what we need to know about
 God's saving work.²⁴⁹

Christian freedom therefore welcomes such diversity and rejects singular models of truthful living. However it is the capacity of this variable community to hold together amidst all this diversity that substantiates its claim to be a truthful politic.²⁵⁰ Once again, for Hauerwas peaceableness is the name for this truthfulness as his comment on interpreting St Paul makes clear.

Our failure to understand what St Paul 'really meant' is not the problem. Our problem is that we live in churches that have no practice of non-violence, of reconciliation, no sense of the significance of singleness; so we lack the resources to faithfully preach and hear God's Word.²⁵¹

Given such views on rationality and truthfulness, Hauerwas nevertheless rejects, as we have seen, the charge of relativism presumed to follow any rejection of the liberal project. Although, Hauerwas feels no need to answer a charge framed within the spurious presumptions of liberalism, he does accept, that his approach, like Lindbeck's, implies that rationality and truth are co-relative to religions. Such an approach, with its implied incommensurability, does allow for a degree of understanding across 'language groups' in a way not inimical to Tilley's expression of 'dirty intratextuality', for the church is

²⁴⁹ 'The Church as God's New Language', *Christian Existence Today*, p.64 footnote 17.

²⁵⁰ *A Community of Character*, p.96.

²⁵¹ *Unleashing the Scriptures*, pp. 8, 153, 'You cannot read the Sermon on the Mount unless you are a pacifist'. Cf also 'A Tale of Two Stories', *Christian Existence Today*, p.41, where he argues that faithful lives, i.e. the saints, not simply hermeneutics, generate meaning. It is this insistence that prompts Robert Jenson to ask whether peaceableness is actually the prerequisite of all truthful insight? Cf 'The Hauerwas Project', p.291.

equipped to read with discrimination the workings of God beyond its boundaries through the formation of the character it represents.²⁵² This also allows for respectful pluralism since traditions recognise each other's reality in a way alien to liberalism given its commitment to singularity.²⁵³

Hence Hauerwas asserts that the tribalism of which he is accused, is only a problem if liberal premises are held. For Hauerwas, pluralism means all traditions are tribal. All are in colonies.²⁵⁴ However it does not mean that all tribal constellations are truthful. Indeed his conviction is that the character of the church he envisages inherently poses a universal truth claim. What distinguishes him from Yale is that the embodiment of this universal truth is the church, diachronically and from all nations living in God's peace. This sign, rather than the rhetorical capacity of the Christian story to out-narrate its rivals, is the key to the truthfulness and freedom of the Gospel which the church represents, for here is the tribe of all tribes whose contemporary relativism, is relative to its destiny rather than to the claims of other contingent colonies. This is once again why peaceableness is so important, since it is this which most displays the salvific destiny of God for the whole creation.

3:13 Counter Critique

In his attempt to escape from the incarcerating implications of liberal theology, Hauerwas nevertheless finds himself unsatisfied with the possibilities offered by

²⁵² *Against the Nations*, p.5 and Terrence W. Tilley, 'Incommensurability, Intratextuality and Fideism', *Modern Theology*, 5/2 (January 1989), 87-111 (p.108).

²⁵³ *A Community of Character*, pp. 101-03.

²⁵⁴ *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.36.

Barth and those associated with the Yale 'post-liberal' tradition. Neither of these approaches, Hauerwas believes, provides a sufficiently tangible epistemology. According to Hauerwas Barth's transcendentalism generates an insubstantial church which he finds too docetic. The Yale tradition reduces faith to a language game whose coherence and plausibility depends primarily upon its intrasystemic integrity and only secondarily upon its ecclesial identity. Language rather than the church, therefore becomes the foundation of its theology. Hence to escape from immanentism of either consciousness or language and yet to avoid the perils of docetism or gnosticism, Hauerwas needs to demonstrate that his project can provide a response to the limitations which are apparent in his criticisms. In addition Hauerwas needs to clarify how truthful narrative emerges from the practices of the church without becoming a prisoner of the church and thereby losing its capacity to address those beyond the church. Some of these questions will be addressed in chapters 4 and 5. However a possible ally in this regard might be Daniel Hardy, whose understanding of doing liberal theology rejects post-Enlightenment anthropocentricity, instead finding the transcendent and generous presence of the divine immanent in the graced structures of creation.

Section III: Theocentric Liberalism or Theology in a Third Way

3:14 Mediated Transcendence

As we have noted above, Hauerwas' engagement with liberal theology and its critics positions the church as a pivotal epistemological agency whose contemporary embodiment(s) carries both the memory of its identity and the resources from which to live out its mission of exemplifying the reign of God. However such concentration upon the intrinsic character of the ecclesial community may indicate that this ecclesiology is simply a refinement of the very anthropocentricity which Hauerwas critiques. Unless he can articulate a theology of transcendence his project may indeed collapse into ecclesial immanentism, as Biggar indicated, and his capacity to represent Christian freedom will suffer the same problems that have beset liberalism and many of its critics. In short, whilst Hauerwas believes that the church is all that he has got, that church must be more than simply a sectarian internally resourced sociology constrained by the finitude of human existence. In the very practices and nourishment of the church must be the transcendent vitality of God. Barth's transcendentalism, for all the limitations Hauerwas' discerns, at least recognised that theology could not claim its title if it was simply a variant of anthropology. God cannot simply be the product of, or constrained within, the limitations of human cognition. Faith is always about response to that which is beyond and if faith involves practices rather than simply ideas, ecclesial 'faith' must be responsive to rather than generative of divine presence. One theologian

who seeks to respect particularity and transcendence and with whom Hauerwas briefly engages is Daniel Hardy.²⁵⁵

3:15 Daniel Hardy and Christian Freedom as Liberality

Daniel Hardy's project is one which actively seeks to recognise in the otherness of reality, scientifically, historically or socially mediated, the Trinitarian God of Christianity. Relationality is therefore intrinsic to his project.²⁵⁶ In this he seeks to retain the liberal tradition's commitment to the intelligible and integrated character of reality without becoming ensnared in the problems attendant on philosophies of consciousness, language or textuality. Reflected in the title of the essay 'A Magnificent Complexity: Letting God be God in Church, Society and Creation',²⁵⁷ his theology attempts to display the generous grace of God present in these three intersecting spheres. Fundamental to this project has been an attempt to rescue theology from its intellectual captivity to the limitations of the human mind or ancient texts, and instead, to locate the resources of theology within the underlying structures and dynamics immanent within Church, Society and Creation. In particular, Hardy's engagement with the thought of Michael Polanyi, displays his commitment to the integrity and alethic character of the object of knowledge through his appropriation of

²⁵⁵ *Essentials of Christian Community*, pp. 35-47. For discussions of Hardy's 'theology in a third way' see David F. Ford in his introduction to *Essentials of Christian Community*, pp. 6-8; Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. vii-viii, and Daniel W. Hardy, 'Reshaping Faculties of Theology in Europe', *God's Ways With the World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp 311-26 (pp. 318-326).

²⁵⁶ See Patterson's construal of Hardy's 'realism' as perichoretic; God known in relation to human contextuality. This implies the underdeterminedness of both creation and the church. Patterson, pp. 101-06, 141.

²⁵⁷ *Essentials of Christian Community*, pp. 307-55.

Polanyi's notion of the personal as

a responsible activity claiming for its comprehension a universal validity - an outward-directed movement toward what is to be known, and an appraisal of it which meets a commitment to universal standards - not an activity of self development.²⁵⁸

This epistemology rejects the subjectivism of post-Kantian philosophies and theologies since the personal 'refers to the use of skilled intuition which is open to, and under the control of reality'.²⁵⁹ The universe therefore is not our construction. Nevertheless the dynamic of knowing involves an imaginative participation or indwelling of fiduciary frameworks or focal theories by the knower, akin to participating in the narrating of a story whose character entails openness to others and a refusal to seek premature closure when faced by ambiguity and diversity.²⁶⁰ This engaged rather than spectator epistemology seeks, through the grasping of ever higher focal awareness, a deepening enriching of our grasp of the reality we seek to know. There is therefore an intrinsic relationship with the 'other', a relationship conditioned by that 'other' rather than being the project of human aspiration. In addition, the dynamic and

²⁵⁸ 'Christian Affirmation of the Structure of Personal Life', Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *Belief in Science and in Christian Life: The Relevance of Michael Polanyi's Thought for Christian Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980), pp. 71-90 (p.72).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ This concurs with Hauerwas' grasp of the value of narrative as we shall see in chapter 4

dialectical nature of this process points towards a mystery whose contours Hardy sees in Christianity's Trinitarian view of God.²⁶¹

Given this interactionist and dynamic understanding of knowledge, Hardy's theology attends to both poles of the epistemological process without loss of either. Influenced by the work of Gerhard Ebeling, Thomas Torrance and Donald MacKinnon Hardy regards theology as self-involving and historical whose subject is mediated through wrestling with the complexity of life.²⁶² Hence attention not only to the character of the cosmos, but also to the character of history, especially in so far as this relates us to Christ, becomes essential, for God, faith and existence are inextricably interwoven in history and in the history of a specific life.²⁶³ 'We must allow the divine realities to declare themselves to us',²⁶⁴ through a correlating of the Christian story with the story of science or history. Each assumes the givenness of their object and approaches it 'a posteriori', recognising that God is to be discerned in and through the process of depth investigation.²⁶⁵

Similarly in sociological terms Hardy sees in Hooker's appeal to 'the things that are established', that is the common Christian practice of England, the roots of the approach he is seeking to recover.²⁶⁶ Such common practice is not

²⁶¹ Ibid., p.88.

²⁶² 'Today's Word for Today: Gerhard Ebeling', *Expository Times*, 93 (Dec 1981), 68-72 (p.68).

²⁶³ Ibid., p.70.

²⁶⁴ Hardy quoting Torrance in 'Thomas F. Torrance' in Ford (1989), I, pp. 71-91 (p.71).

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.73.

²⁶⁶ 'Theology through Philosophy' in Ford (1989), II, pp. 30-71. Cf also 'English Crypto Atheism and Its Causes', *God's Ways*, pp. 279-91.

detached from traditional authorities, such as Scripture and Tradition, but mediates them, thereby allowing practice to be scrutinised as it is reflected upon. Consequently such theology is necessarily public, since common experience is the experience of the whole, rather than of an ecclesial sect. It includes all that modernity has fragmented and segregated through specialisation, such as science, history, the arts, etc., and remains a challenge to much contemporary English theology which has become detached from this common practice, preferring instead abstraction, ecclesial concentration and academic specialisation to engagement across the whole field of human endeavour.

Hence Hardy finds in MacKinnon, one who discerns the presence of God in the way ordinary people live, think and pray together. It is in this 'sensitivity to the vitalities of current thought and life'²⁶⁷ that Hardy sees the future for theological research, since commerce with the world inevitably is commerce with the transcendent, the ontological mystery of 'God with us'.²⁶⁸ It is therefore the givenness of common practice which mediates the divine and thereby disciplines the speculative temptations of some theologians.

Given Hardy's affinities with the approaches indicated above it is not surprising that his understanding of religion and religious truth challenges constructivist and projectionist models, which reduce religion to a subset of human thought

²⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 42-45.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.46.

or culture.²⁶⁹ Indeed religious and non-religious traditions should be respected as, in principle, ongoing responses to transcendent truth.²⁷⁰ Such a process, for Hardy, is most explicitly and profoundly active in Christian worship. *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* is a doxological symphony explicating ‘praise as [...] an attempt to cope with the abundance of God’s love’²⁷¹ and seeing in it the creative logic of overflow, freedom and generosity which perfects perfection.²⁷² Worship is about acknowledging God as most fundamental to the community and is about ‘taking up the whole of reality into praise of God.’²⁷³ Praise is the intrinsic logic of the Christian community and entails both thinking God as adequately as possible and affirming the essential interaction of God with the world. In all ‘the core of astonishment around which it all spirals is that God is free to be involved with His creation from the ‘inside’ as well as from the ‘outside’’.²⁷⁴

Hardy’s commitment to the transcendently sustained character of reality, its theological pregnancy, the illumination of this through worship and thus the presence of redeemed sociality are at the heart of his major collection of essays *God’s Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith*. In particular his sense of the divine as that which is always reaching beyond itself relates Hardy’s thoughts on creation with his thoughts on society and the

²⁶⁹ John Hull, ed., *New Directions in Religious Education* (Lewes: The Falmer Press, 1982), p.111.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.115.

²⁷¹ Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), p1.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.48.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.81.

relationship of society to the church. For Hardy, the political role of the church is to ‘provide a more concrete manifestation of what this (social life) might mean for human affairs in general’.²⁷⁵ Thus his challenge to the church, and through it to society, is to attend to the goal of true social coherence, which is the presumption of all social life. This suggests a profound co-ordination of purpose between what Hardy calls ‘ecclesial’ and ‘enclesial’ society, since both share a common goal. Equally both have to be on guard against the reductionist simplifications of modernity, represented in collectives or individualism. The transcendental ‘sociality’, immanent in all social projects, is what Hardy seeks to extricate ‘a posteriori’ from his reflection upon the variety of societies.²⁷⁶ A ‘generic semi-interpreted theory’ such as ‘sociality’ will have varied expression according to context,²⁷⁷ but at least it integrates broader societal hopes with ecclesial ones. This extricating of the transcendental ‘sociality’ displays its capacity to speak beyond the church since it is rooted in creation rather than redemption. The social dynamic is not located in the apostolicity of the church but in how God is active and present in creation, a presence which expresses itself in ever richer unfoldings of society. Redeemed sociality therefore is not segregated from unredeemed sociality but is a qualitatively richer expression of the inherent sociality present in creation, a drawing out of the truth intrinsic to creation.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ ‘God and the Form of Society’, *God’s Ways*, pp. 173-87.

²⁷⁶ ‘Created and Redeemed Sociality’, *God’s Ways*, pp. 188-205.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.206.

The church in England, historically embedded in the formation of English society, should therefore continue to be 'immersed in the devices and means by which the public sustains itself',²⁷⁹ rather than being tempted to follow the American tradition of withdrawal. What the church gathered does is to point society at large to its proper identity, destiny and source. The mission of the church is to show communities, nations and international life their own true life, since 'the social life of people is actually a direct manifestation of God's work amongst them and their response to it'.²⁸⁰ This has particular pertinency within the Church of England, since its theology is reflected in its ecclesiology for its very form as a dynamic social community of word and sacrament is the dynamic form of its faith.

Thus theology is the recognition of the dynamic presence of God in the world and its history, a recognition implying a doxographic approach to history, which locates the truth of history within the particularity of the past, the 'knots of history' rather than in the mind of the historian, favoured by the humanistic tradition.²⁸¹ It also rejects the cultural reduction of religion as human experience rather than as reflecting the dynamic structures of reality beyond the human mind. Theology must therefore rediscover the pivotal place of ecclesial worship in order that the 'transcendental notes of being', unity, truth, goodness and beauty, may be raised to their zenith in the vitality of God.²⁸² Theology's task, therefore is the

²⁷⁹ 'The Public Nature of Theology', *God's Ways*, pp. 206-16 (p.209).

²⁸⁰ 'The Future of the Church: An Exploration', *God's Ways*, pp 217-28 (p.217).

²⁸¹ 'Faith Embedded in the Particularities of History', *God's Ways*, pp. 261-78 (pp. 275-77).

²⁸² 'The Cultural Reduction of Religion and the Agenda for Theology', *God's Ways*, pp.292-310 (p.308).

attempt to know the character, configuration and dynamics of the vitality itself and to configure thought and practice - whatever their object - to follow this order and dynamics [...] (it) is the thinking of the dynamic architecture of the constancy of the reality of the living God as the vital and moral source of the ordered energies of the world and human life in all the rich variety with which cosmology, ontology, sociality, human character, cultures, symbols and religions exemplify.²⁸³

3:16 Hauerwas and a Liberated Liberalism

Hauerwas' only explicit engagement with Hardy occurs in the essay 'The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship' contributed by Hauerwas to the Festschrift *Essentials of Christian Community*. Hauerwas' intention in this paper is to explicate Christian ethics from liturgical practice, thereby displaying his affinity with the centrality of worship and praise that he reads in Hardy, especially from *Jubilate*. 'We Christians insist it is hard to distinguish between what we think and what we do - particularly as both what we think and what we do are constituted by God's praise'.²⁸⁴ There is therefore no 'and' between theology and worship, there is no distinction between politics and ethics. Through worship in the Christian community God's holiness is shared and through this experience 'we discover the truth

²⁸³ 'Reshaping Faculties of Theology in Europe', *God's Ways*, pp. 311-26 (p.317).

²⁸⁴ 'The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship', *Essentials of Christian Community*, p.37.

about our lives'²⁸⁵ and are transformed in the process. This, according to Hauerwas, discloses the primary task of the church, which is not to make the world more just, but to make the world the world, to show to the world that it is the world because it does not worship as the church does. Worship also displays theology as a tradition-determined craft, whose rationality and historicity are intrinsic to the character of worship, whilst the action of gathering Christians together parabolically indicates the eschatological hope carried by the church and rooted not in an abstract rationality, but in the eucharist. Similarly baptism is a political act, engendering a new society. For Hauerwas

insofar as ethics has a task peculiar to itself it is to assemble reminders from the training we receive in worship that enable us to rightly see the world as well as how we continue to be possessed by the world.²⁸⁶

Nevertheless the necessity of being gathered for worship indicates the particularity of Christian ethics. They are not ethics for anyone, in contrast to liberal presumptions, not because they have no universal pretensions, but because it is only through worship, that such ethical tasks can be seen. Similarly worship, which involves properly naming God in the world, is not an intuitive human experience, but must be learned through apprenticeship in worship. Thus Hauerwas agrees with Hardy and Ford, that safe liberalism is liberalism situated within the praise of God. Whilst Hauerwas draws out further ethical

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p.39.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p.40.

implications from the liturgy as we shall discuss in chapter 5, his exposition of the 'Dismissal' indicates his understanding of the character of Christian engagement with the world beyond the church.

'For Christians, it is never a question of whether to serve the world, but how they are to be of service in the world.

We can never forget that worship is the way God has given us to serve the world'.²⁸⁷

Worship, therefore, equips Christians with the skills that enable them to serve the world with critical discrimination.

Hardy's comments on Hauerwas' piece however indicate the distinctiveness of their respective theological approaches. Pivotal to Hardy's case is the relationship of God with the world. For Hardy it is the movement of the transcendent yet immanent reality of God which is the primary determinant of everything. 'The proper content of worship, of community and of ethics is established by the One who is worshipped, who is remembered through the tradition and anticipated in our midst'.²⁸⁸ Hence the value of traditions, for Hardy, is not as a defence against 'ahistorical accounts of truth and morality so characteristic of modernity, but their nourishment in the worship of God'.²⁸⁹

Tradition is not itself authenticating. Rather

it is not their connection with tradition which authenticates particular kinds of moral behaviour, but the fact that they

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p.46.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p.313.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p.312.

are drawn to be what they are by the elevating holiness of God which we find in worship.²⁹⁰

Hence Hardy believes that

I differ from Hauerwas in my view of the relation of the church to the world [...] True, as he says, we are gathered through our worship, because worship puts all that we do before God; and that establishes a contrast with the world. But it is also true that the first thing that one discovers in worship is that we are human beings *in* the world and - even while being drawn to the holiness of God - not in ourselves holy.²⁹¹

3:17 Hauerwas' Project: A Genuine Theology?

Hardy's 'theology in a third way' has the merit of exposing the transcendence of God within the fabric and texture of reality, cosmologically, historically and socially. Whilst attending less intensively to the character of the church, his project seeks to avoid reducing the resources for theology to the ecclesial community or to human consciousness. Ontologically the truth is in that which is being understood and in the very process of understanding. Truth is mediated through a variety of epistemologies appropriate to their objects. It is not determined in its truthfulness by the character of those seeking understanding, although transcendental truth achieves its fullest possible revelation through worship. In this sense the church therefore remains essential to Hardy's

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 312-13. Hauerwas' discussion on holiness can predominantly be found in *Sanctify Them* op.cit.

thought, since worship forms a community to recognise the truth that is pressing upon it. However, in contrast to Hauerwas and with greater affinity to Barth, Hardy seems to give priority to the grace of God in creation rather than simply in the apostolicity of the church. The church, through worship, brings into focus the dynamic presence of grace in the abundance of life.

Hardy's liberalism, understood as liberality and openness to transcendent truth in the cosmos, therefore avoids the anthropocentricity of the liberalism Hauerwas so abhors, without appearing to capitulate on questions of universality and truthfulness. Yet although, as Biggar charged, Hauerwas' project can appear as ecclesiomonism, a more sensitive reading of his work actually displays affinity with Hardy. Indeed, despite being labelled an ethicist, Hauerwas consistently asserts that he is doing theology rather than applying theology or repackaging anthropology.²⁹² Furthermore, as we noted earlier, Hauerwas does not dispute the structures of Barth's theology so much as its mediation. For Hauerwas, Barth remains wedded to notions of individual consciousness rather than ecclesiality. However Hauerwas never dissents from Barth's notion of theology as response rather than construction. Theology is about the way things are.²⁹³ He simply wishes to avoid the occasionalistic character of that response when it excludes the intrinsic place of the church in theology. Similarly Hauerwas and Barth hold to a view of integralism which refuses to interpret Aquinas as implying a segregation between nature and grace. Indeed Aquinas' five proofs for the existence of God are not about

²⁹² *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 1,4.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.2.

locating God within the material order but forcing a disclosure of his transcendence.²⁹⁴ Grace infuses and yet also transcends nature understood as tangible creation. Hence whilst Christian worship illuminates God as the deepest truth, this integralist theology expects non-Christians to encounter truth in nature whilst remaining unaware of its ontology. The transcendence of God is immanent in the cosmos because the kingdom of grace is wider than the church.²⁹⁵ In this Hauerwas is arguably in concert with Hardy.

Another common theme is found in their advocacy of a theology of the ordinary through their concern for particularity and embodiment.²⁹⁶ Where Hardy differs from Hauerwas is in his regard for the distinctive character of English theology as a reading of common social practice in contrast to Hauerwas's attention to the practices of the explicitly Christian community. This may well reflect their respective contexts. For Hauerwas, as we have seen, the United States represents a unique sociological experiment to generate a society rooted in the anthropological assumptions of the Enlightenment. It is thus an ideologically sustained liberalism. In contrast, Hardy, though a fellow American, finds in England a more organic sociology in which it is impossible to separate religion from society and hence to see one representing anthropocentricity and the other theocentricity. This enables Hardy to feel more confident about the theological resources immanent within extra-ecclesial

²⁹⁴ *Sanctify Them*, pp. 41-42.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.45.

²⁹⁶ We shall look more closely at Hauerwas' 'Theology of the Ordinary' in chapter 5. For a discussion on the rise of a 'Theology of the Ordinary' see Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 211-33.

society, which intensify his convictions concerning the graced character of creation. However, given Hauerwas' soteriology, non ecclesial practice is still redeemed practice, albeit ignorant of that status. Hence it can be discriminatingly read as displaying the ways of God in the world. In addition they are both ambivalent about abstract academic approaches to theology and both assert the importance of theologians being involved in the worship of the Christian community.

Certainly Hauerwas' sanctificationist concerns mean that receiving truth requires a particular kind of doxological, liturgical and political formation.²⁹⁷ Yet this formation explicitly implies the transcendence of that truth, since, without such formation, the notion of truth is always corrupted by constructivist or apologetic strategies, wedded to anthropocentric epistemologies.²⁹⁸ Similarly the effects of such formation indicate whether the transcendent God is being worshipped, since anthropocentric attention would not generate an extrovert, open community inexplicable unless the resurrection has happened. Thus for Hauerwas, as for Barth, it is the human community to whom questions of existence and identity are put rather than to God.²⁹⁹ Hence Hauerwas' reiteration of the significance of death, finitude, pluralism and the notion of an End. Each, understood through the Christian story, as we shall see further in chapter 4, suggest that anthropocentric liberalism is a lie, since its

²⁹⁷ The explicit articulation of this perspective in response to Biggar's challenge is 'The Truth About God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech', *Sanctify Them*, pp. 37-60. See also the Introduction especially pp. 5, 6. For liturgy as indicative of transcendence see Hauerwas' comments on Baptism, the Eucharist, Confession etc. in *Dispatches*, p.112 and *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.100.

²⁹⁸ *Sanctify Them*, p.11.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

immanentism cannot make sense of such realities. Likewise the fragility and priorities of the church regarding the marginal, the oppressed, the ordinary and trivial, the single life, the retarded, martyrdom and the whole agenda of peaceableness necessitate a transcendent vision of God to be possibilities in this life. Eschatology is intrinsic to the peaceableness of the church and necessitates the transcendence of God to vindicate it.³⁰⁰ Likewise, as he frequently reiterates, the life of the church underwrites the truth claims of its story yet that very story speaks of the otherness of God as well as the immanence of God.³⁰¹ It is in the forgiving, the friendship, the refusal to lie, the acceptance of creatureliness and the openness to the stranger that the reality of transcendence understood as otherness is affirmed. Yet for Hauerwas it is the character of that transcendence which is vital. Hence his increasing ambivalence about Murdoch's 'muddles', which offer a narrative of ultimate transcendence alien to the Christian story.³⁰²

3:18 Summary

Hardy's doxologically informed liberalism and Hauerwas' theology are therefore closer to one another than superficial readings might indicate. Both respect the transcendence of God, though Hardy more explicitly so. Both accept the possibility of knowing about God's vitalities beyond the church even if worship alone gives that wisdom its true focus. Again Hardy is more explicit here. Both recognise the importance of ecclesial sanctification as forming a

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p.103. See also chapter 5.

³⁰¹ Ibid. See also *Dispatches*, p. 20.

³⁰² 'Murdochian Muddles', op.cit.

community which can respond to the truth of God. Both represent the sort of Christian freedom which reject anthropocentric apologetics. That they differ in their grasp of how grace is socially mediated beyond the gathered worshipping community, reflects their distinctive social locations. As will become apparent in our discussion of O'Donovan's political theology in chapter 5, the United States and England represent very different sociologies. Though both Hauerwas and Hardy are Americans, Hauerwas has no confidence in the enclesial as distinct from the ecclesial. For him the former elides the world and the church too swiftly in an era when they need segregating. Hardy therefore raises questions about whether Hauerwas' ecclesiology is sufficient for the subtleties of the English context. In chapter 5 we shall seek to explore this further. Furthermore Hardy's exposition of the contextual as the webbed, together with his confidence in the graced character of creation, implies a greater commitment to coherence than Hauerwas superficially appears to offer. How Hauerwas 'contains' the potential anarchy of 'post-modern' pluralism will require attention in chapter 4. However Hardy's project provides more secure and explicit theological resources to sustain an epistemology adequate to the challenges of ecclesial existence without capitulating to liberalism or to 'post-liberal' textuality. Hauerwas, we have argued, is actually not far from Hardy and might strengthen his theological security by appropriating some of Hardy's insights, particularly his epistemology of response. Since both accept the necessarily mediated reception of such response, even in worship, Hauerwas' concerns about the loss of church in Barth, given the latter's commitment to God's transcendent freedom, need not disturb him here .

Chapter 4

Christian Freedom as Embodied Narrative

Section I : Hauerwas and Narrative

4:1 Introduction

In chapters 2 and 3 we have sought to place Hauerwas' project within the wider philosophical and theological discussion evoked by the Enlightenment Project. In particular we have argued that Hauerwas exposes the carceral character of this 'liberalism' and, in contrast, offers a vision of Christian freedom which attempts to transcend these limitations through attention to the sort of character correlative to theological convictions embodied by the church. *Liberalism, according to Hauerwas, is therefore not simply a deceptive philosophy but is in fact a narrative and tradition which refuses to recognise itself as such.* It therefore presumes universality when it represents a particular tradition whose claim to attention lies in its capacity to exhibit the convictions it claims to embody more convincingly than its rivals. Given the emancipatory proclamation of this tradition and its consequent narrative form, Hauerwas' ecclesial ethics must not only escape the shackles of liberal anthropocentricity, but offer a quality of narrative which displays the truthfulness of Christian freedom in the community of pilgrims called church. Without an adequate apology for the truthfulness of the Christian story, Hauerwas cannot present it as a genuinely liberating narrative.

As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, truth and truthfulness are complex categories, increasingly seen less in correspondence terms and more in terms of justifiability or warranty, illuminating capacity, intrasystemic coherence synchronically and diachronically, and in hermeneutical or explanatory powers.¹ Hence in order to offer a convincing claim for the integrity and correlative freedom of the church, Hauerwas' use of narrative and its attendant category, story, must speak of the universal without sacrificing the particular; must have narrative space for the ordinary and the marginal as well as a clear sense of emplotment; must be able to offer a convincing explication of identity, respectful of formation, historicity, memory and destiny; must be able to include the tragic without denial; must be able to escape the aporias of anthropocentrism through a narrative which can speak truthfully of divine transcendence and of the integrity of an extra-linguistic world.

Hauerwas says of his own project

providing [...] alternatives has been the focus of much of my own work. To expose the moral practices intrinsic to theological convictions requires the display of conceptual resources that, at least until recently, were largely ignored in ethical theory. Much of my work has involved the attempt to recover the importance of practical rationality, the role of narratives and practices for the display of morally worthy

¹ For an extensive discussion on theories of truth in biblical and extrabiblical accounts see Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Truth' in Colin Brown, ed., *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), III (1978), pp. 874-901. See also the earlier discussion in chapter 3 of Barth by Torrance and Hardy's position, both offering a form of critical realism as a way of escaping Kantian introspectivity.

lives and what kinds of communities are necessary to sustain such lives.²

The following chapter will seek to show how Hauerwas attempts to offer his own distinctive grasp of narrative as a resource for the expression of Christian freedom. In the process we shall argue that, *contrary to the perceptions of his critics, his apparent occasionalism is intrinsic to the character of a narratively displayed tradition since such a tradition, as MacIntyre argued, is necessarily historicist and therefore timeful.*³ Likewise, superficial contradictions are better seen as provisional and contingent reflections on a journey which change according to where the writer is on that journey, rather than being regarded as part of a timeless system. Thus we will disagree with one of Hauerwas' critics, a graduate student who claimed

Hauerwas will never be able to establish a school because after he is gone it will never hold together. The only reason the contradictions in his position are not more apparent than they are is because they are part of the same body.⁴

Instead our argument will be that *Hauerwas' theological project emerges as substantially coherent one, appropriately not systematic in the traditional sense, but clearly faithful to the character of the journey that he believes himself to be part of as a theological officer of the church.* In order to give shape to this journey of Christian freedom Hauerwas' writings will be divided, diachronically, into two sections reflecting distinctive developments in the way

² *Sanctify Them*, pp. 215-16.

³ Cf chapter 2.

⁴ *Sanctify Them*, p.12.

narrative is employed within his thinking. The first section looks at his writings before 1980 and the second those after from 1981. Whilst, as Hauerwas himself would argue, such an imposition of a chronological framework reflects the danger of arbitrarily closing off what is a continuity, much akin to debates about historical periodisation, nevertheless it will become apparent that Hauerwas' thought does appear to evolve in such a way that these dates cease to be chronicle and actually reflect the dynamic of his narrative.

4:2 From Vision to Narrative

Whilst *Character and the Christian Life* sets up the problematic that points Hauerwas towards narrative as a way of displaying character, his early appropriation of narrative can be seen in the essays that anticipate the collection *A Community of Character*. As we noted in chapter 1, his key concern was to move from a preoccupation in ethics from decision to vision and, as Kung indicates, such a move required Hauerwas to provide a depth resource for vision which could transcend the vulnerability of Murdoch's individualistic approach and also suggest how such a vision could be conceived of as truthful rather than simply constructivist.⁵ For Hauerwas 'learning to see the world under the mode of the divine'⁶ necessarily entailed a recovery of the particularity of religious language and concepts easily lost in decision or quandary ethics, whilst escaping from post-Kantian constructivism. Similarly such learning was not about making religious language fit the world,

⁵ Lap Yan Kung, 'Christian Discipleship Today, The Ethics of the Kingdom in the Theologies of Stanley Hauerwas and Jon Sobrino' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1994), p.26. Kung notes that vision describes how we see whereas narrative describes how we are formed and therefore strengthens and gives depth to sight.

⁶ *Vision and Virtue*, p.45.

but about transforming the self to fit the language. Whilst deontological and utilitarian theorists presumed a given anthropology and epistemology, Hauerwas recognised that these are correlative to how we are formed to see, a correlation which demanded a deconstruction of liberal individualism, for all formation begins somewhere and among others to which and to whom we must attend.

Character, therefore, is constructed over time in context and in terms of the moral journey one is on. However what is clear in Hauerwas' early writings is that the self so formed is still conceived of as in possession of itself, rather than being intrinsically related to a traditioned community. The key text which indicates the future direction of his project is 'The Self as Story: A Reconsideration to the Relation of Religion and Morality from the Agent's Perspective', initially published in 1973.⁷ Whilst the focus remains the individuated self as agent Hauerwas begins by rejecting the notion of the singular concept of the moral life and the fact-value dualism of Kantian ethics which lends itself to the generation of abstract rules and principles or concepts of the good and separates the moral from religion. Attending to character, Hauerwas notes that we are formed not by rules but by stories and metaphors, for it is *narratives that give our lives coherence*.⁸ Principles do not exist independently of stories, but are parasitic upon them, acting as shorthand summaries of the more complex narrative. Their moral significance is therefore intrinsically bound up with the character and plausibility of the story. In

⁷ *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 30-47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.71.

addition such stories seek not simply to describe reality, but also to open up a world in front of the story, for they indicate what we ought to see as well. Hence for Hauerwas it is imperative to attend to the core stories that form our identity so that they can give expression to the normative commitments needed for living in a morally appropriate way. Human lives are scored like music or emplotted like a novel, for 'the significance of stories is the significance of character for the moral life as our experience itself, if it is to be coherent, is but an incipient story'.⁹

At this stage, though, what is emerging is *an awareness of the traditioned nature of a story*, since stories are inherited from our cultures and backgrounds rather than being our own autonomous constructions. Similarly Hauerwas recognises that attention to story and its tradition inevitably re-introduces *particularity as more fundamental than universality*. Distinctiveness therefore becomes characteristic of the moral life, a distinctiveness correlated with the stories that inform the identity of those formed through these stories. The observer's point of view therefore is an inadequate one, since it spuriously deals in abstract and immediate identities, which, given the storied nature of human existence, is bound to misread what is going on. Hauerwas is not arguing for a form of intuitionism. Indeed at this point he is willing to allow for a 'thin' minimalist human ethic that offers some universalisability that enables a basic moral community to happen. However it is the elevation of this to a

⁹ Ibid., p.74. We shall discuss how far Hauerwas echoes Stephen Crites narrative foundationalism later in this chapter. See Stephen Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39/3 (September 1971), pp. 291-311.

sufficient rather than simply a necessary condition for morality that Hauerwas is challenging with his storied understanding of identity. Such an elevation forgets that the principles of universalised morality derive from what is embodied in particular communities and their social practices. The danger of abstraction is that it deceptively universalises the particular social setting from which moral actions gain their meaning.

Hauerwas therefore finds in the characteristics of story and narrative a way of representing distinctive Christian ethics. The question though, is whether this story is an account of reality whose truthfulness offers space for genuine Christian freedom, or simply an aesthetic survival story for a beleaguered religious community.¹⁰ In 'Love's Not All You Need' Hauerwas notes that the Gospel is not about abstract notions of love, but about the story of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Hence it is this story which controls Christian ethics, rather than a subjectivist interpretation of love and it is the way this story deals with the tragic that he believes gives the clue to its truthfulness.

The cross is at the centre of Christian ethics because Christ beckons us to face the reality of the world that is in revolt against itself [...] A Christian ethic is ultimately an ethic of truth or it is neither Christian nor substantive enough to deal with the human condition.¹²

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of theories of truth and Hauerwas' relationship to them see the later sections of this chapter.

¹¹ *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 111-26.

¹² *Vision and Virtue*, p.117.

The truthfulness of the Christian story is relative to its capacity to enable those who attend to it *to face the agony of the world rather than simply seeking consolation from it*. Echoing Murdoch but now resourced by a substantive story rather than simply a singular determination to accept the otherness of reality, Hauerwas at this stage sees in the drama of the Christian story, resources to enable such a truthful vision of life to be identified. This also explains his close attention to questions of suffering and disability, for they display the tragic story of lives which demand a truthful story to give meaning and hope to them.¹³ Suffering and disability force us to attend to the *irreducible particularity of life* as well and ask of us a story which, as Johann Metz noted, can subvert their anti-historical appearance.¹⁴

Paradoxically Kantian ethics, whilst purporting to provide a realistic account of the world, actually generates an abstract and thereby more fantastic vision prone by its introspective preoccupation to seek conformity to a way of life that consoles the strong. Thus compassion becomes another word for killing since it seeks, in the name of love, to evacuate the world of those it believes affront its abstract vision of the good. For Hauerwas the Christian story enables a narrative embrace of the tragic without premature closure, for whilst the story indicates its hopeful end, it also accepts that *whilst on the journey pilgrims can get hurt*. Thus Christian love is specific in its commitment to stay with the particular sufferer. Similarly in his early encounter with John Yoder's

¹³ Two thirds of the essays in *Suffering Presence*, (1986) are from the later 70s reflecting Hauerwas's concerns with liberalism as we noted in chapter 2.

¹⁴ See Johannes B. Metz, 'A Short Apology of Narrative', *Concilium*, 85 (1973), 84-96.

thought in *The Non-Resistant Church*,¹⁵ Hauerwas shared the view that the eschatology inherent in the Christian story refracted through a reading of the living, dying and rising of Christ advocates a pacifism that does not require violence to remedy the problems of the world. This relationship of church to society comes not through Kantian ethics, but by the church attending to its own identity as a community formed through the sharing in doctrine, liturgy and moral concern. It is this communal introspection which exposes the narrative whose *centrifugal character induces mission* and enables the church properly to be a gift to the world not by trying to reform the world into God's kingdom, but by witnessing to the presence of that kingdom in their lives.

During the second half of this decade, Hauerwas' articulation of the relationship between character, narrative, truth and community becomes clearer. In 'From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics',¹⁶ Hauerwas seeks to deconstruct the view that ethics is founded upon rationality as such and to promote a narratively generated rationality for ethics which is intrinsically related to the heritage of the particular story or stories which inform our character. Such an approach which builds on the insights noted above, enables Hauerwas to go beyond the apparent arbitrariness of much deontological and utilitarian ethical theory with its tendency to spawn subjectivist emotivism, by identifying the subject as a social construction rather than a singular given or project. Hence narrative provides a discipline on subjectivism, by displaying the way the subject is provided with a formative

¹⁵ *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 197-221.

¹⁶ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 15-39.

context and by situating the subject intrinsically in a community of interlocutors who share a common linguistic world. Such a positioning reminds us that 'all our notions are narrative-dependent, including the notion of rationality'.¹⁷

Equally the implication of this story-shaped seeing is that *reality is always mediated through a particular story* as arguments about the ethics of abortion reveal. The positivist myth of an accessible objective world is repudiated in this narrative understanding of identity. Thus *a degree of narrative pluralism is inherent in Christian interpretations of the world*, since narrative can tolerate variances in a way that liberalism seeks to remove. Similarly a narrative approach affirms the inherent historicity of life with its concomitant attention to the particular, ordinary and marginal since narrative preserves the integrity of all characters in a story, whereas the 'standard account' loses their distinctiveness by seeing them as types or abstract examples.

Such a deconstruction of much moral philosophy renders Hauerwas vulnerable to the charge of relativism which the Enlightenment project sought to escape. However, even at this stage, Hauerwas is not arguing that every and any story is plausible, for, as we have seen, stories can only be candidates for credibility if their narrative can deal with the ambiguities of life without denial or escapism.

As he comments

it is only when we admit this (viz. the tragedy that honesty
and faithfulness don't necessarily generate good results) and

¹⁷ *Truthfulness & Tragedy*, p.21.

learn to embody it in our lives that we can begin to understand why Christian ethics is not basically an ethics of principle, but rather the story of a God who is found most vividly in the past and continuing history of Israel and in the form of the cross.¹⁸

Tragedy is impossible to respect in liberal thought, given its presumption of resolution and its introspectivity, since *tragedy forces a 'beyond' upon us*. Hauerwas' use of Augustine of Hippo's conversion from Manichaeism to Christianity is exemplary in this regard.¹⁹ Nevertheless he is not implying that the varieties of Kantian ethics have no place in the pantheon of ethical approaches. What the 'standard account' needs to recognise is that it is but one story among many and that facts are not narrative free but are relative to the plot of a story. Identity is therefore not rooted in rationality as an abstraction, but requires 'a narrative to give our life coherence', a 'truth' reinforced by the intentional and teleological pattern of human living.²⁰ Character therefore is not a theoretical notion but the name given to the cumulative source of human actions.

Character is neither explanatory in origin nor in use, for it cannot be formulated prior to nor independently of the narrative which develops it. Yet it can play an illuminating or analytic role by calling attention to what is going on in a narrative as the plot unfolds [...] character cannot be

¹⁸ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p.70. Hauerwas also makes the point that practical truth is not conformity to what is but is conformity to the rectified appetite. *Ibid.*, p.64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27.

presented independently of the story or stories that develop it.²¹

What narrative thereby does is enable us *to enter imaginatively into moral questions without the same degree of ontological risk incumbent upon an action*. It also provides analogical guidance in a way that transcends the apparently intense historicism of the early Barth and Bultmann which Hauerwas sought to escape in *Character and the Christian Life*. Of course hearing or reading a story is a form of participation which shapes us, but the process of imaginatively indwelling a story shapes us in a softer way than actual action. We can therefore, through stories, anticipate life's possibilities in an imaginative yet substantive way.²²

Hauerwas' reflections on the role of story and narrative are developed still further in the essay 'Story and Theology'.²³ Here Hauerwas seeks to pursue more rigorously the question of the truthfulness of the Christian story by attending to the way story manifests itself as a form of life. Whilst remaining undecided about the contention that narrative is the basic quality of human experience as advocated by Sallie TeSalle and Stephen Crites, he is concerned to maintain the alethic as against the simply aesthetic character of stories such as the Christian narrative. Echoing Barth and Frei, he reiterates that the literary structures of the sort of narrative represented in the story of Jesus are

²¹ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²² On the importance of narrative and analogical guidance see Rufus Black, 'Towards an Ecumenical Ethic: Reconciling the Work of Germain Grisez, Stanley Hauerwas and Oliver O'Donovan', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1996), p.184. As we argued in chapter 3, Barth's 'special ethics' actually accepts analogical guidance so long as it is rooted in faith *not* in being.

²³ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 71-96.

unintelligible unless their alethic claims are seen as intrinsic to them. Yet this assertion of the truth of Jesus is not to be found by bringing the tale of Jesus before the bar of some fictitious universal history but by asking 'how the affirmations of God's existence and Jesus' resurrection fit into the story of the kind of God we have come to know in the story of Israel and Jesus'.²⁴ Thus it is the story as a tradition which suggests the facts for

the question of truth must be commensurate with the form and kind of claims that are being made [...] Christian convictions are not meant to picture the world (i.e. provide a metaphysics of the world). Rather the gospel is a story that gives you a way of being in the world.²⁵

Truth is a practical rather than an metaphysical notion. It emerges as a traditioned story of life displays itself as one that enables life to go on because it genuinely reflects the reality and dynamics of life. Truth is not something that can be determined in the abstract.

Given that 'a story, thus, is a narrative account that binds events and agents together in intelligible pattern'²⁶ and therefore is able uniquely to articulate the richness of intentional activity and its particularity, for Hauerwas it is important not to misunderstand the purpose of narrative. It is not about illustrating meaning as if the latter were an independent reality beyond the story. Hauerwas regards meaning as embodied in the story. Hence *narrative is a heuristic tool*.

²⁴ Ibid., p.73.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p.76.

Similarly since there is no 'story of stories' but instead our identity is correlative to the story or stories we enact, the truth of stories cannot be ascertained by comparing them with a conceptual truth that transcends all of them. This even includes theological claims, for *God is not a concept but a name*, whose identity is likewise displayed in narrative terms.²⁷ Metaphysical concepts such as 'necessary being' introduce misleading categories into a story, by purporting to interpret it, rather than themselves being dependent upon the latter for their substantive meaning. God, as Barth realised, can only be described, not explained. Hence the truth of a story is also relative to its capacity to describe God and life most completely, which includes the acceptance of what impinges upon us from without in a way that enables us to go on. Truth is therefore not simply revealed through an archaeological approach to tradition but also eschatologically, for it is the character of the world which the story presents to us which indicates whether the narrative is truthful. *A truthful story must also be one which can embrace the unknown and alien as well as the familiar*. It must free us to welcome the stranger. Certainly tradition is important in suggesting the plausibility of the story revealed through its capacity in the past to fulfil this criterion. Tradition also witnesses to the stories that are central to being a people called by God. Hence Hauerwas supports James McClendon's view that theology must at least be biography. It is through the story of God with his people that a truthful way of being in the

²⁷ This is also the substance of Hauerwas' criticism of Paul Ramsey's use of the concept of person to sustain the integrity of the patient in modern medicine made in the essay 'Must a Patient be Born a Person to be a Person? Or My Uncle Charlie is Not Much of a Person But He is Still My Uncle Charlie', *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 127-32. The concept of person is too abstract and unstoried to sustain a rich grasp and respect for the character identified by a name.

world is displayed for 'the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one which begins by attending to the lived lives'.²⁸

Hence a truthful story seeks not to provide us with truth in the abstract, but intends to make us true to the demands it presents so that we can *see the world without deception* and be able to act in a way that exhibits the properly freedom of agents. 'Self Deception and Autobiography' on Albert Speer illustrates the deceptive, carceral and hence untruthful character of the liberal narrative which claims not to be a story and thereby leaves folk unconsciously open to manipulative and destructive stories that present themselves as true disguised as 'the facts'.²⁹

In contrast 'Hope Faces Power: Thomas More and Henry VIII' describes the way More was able to navigate the attractive, but ultimately corrupting narrative of power offered to him, to see through its inadequacies and to retain his integrity and freedom by living within the truthful narrative of Christian hope, even through this cost him his life.³⁰ Indeed his death represented the ultimate expression of this freedom, since in so dying he refused to allow his life or his death to be controlled by any other narrative than the one he believed to be true. For Hauerwas the narrative of Christian freedom is not fundamentally about controlling individual or social or indeed ecological destiny, but rather is about the *freedom to trust God in a manner consonant with the trust of the crucified Jesus*. As indicated in this essay, such trust can

²⁸ Ibid., p.81.

²⁹ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 82-98.

³⁰ *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 199-220.

only emerge as someone lives within this narrative and discovers the truth it represents as the challenges of life are engaged with. Formation therefore is even more significant than information, since information is always mediated, representing some claim, truthful or otherwise and therefore requiring a hermeneutical capacity whose own integrity is correlative to the character of the narrative within which the interpreter is living.

Such discernment is not easy, since both Henry and More believed that their convictions were consonant with the story of God. *The only way that their respective narrations of that story could be falsified was in the risk of death and its Christian sequel of resurrection and judgement, in short, eschatologically.* The freedom to die, though indicative of a profound trust in the latter, remains a risk which cannot of itself define the truth of what the martyr stands for. Only God can finally vindicate the diverse narratives employing Christian rhetoric. Nevertheless, as we shall see below, Hauerwas came to believe that communal discernment offered a more secure provisionality than singular insight and wisdom. Hence *Christian freedom is better sought within rather than beyond the ecclesial community* in all its variety of manifestations. This again contrasts with the individualism endemic in much liberal hermeneutics.

4:3 Liberating Narrative: Truthfulness, Narratives and Ecclesial Practices

With the publication in 1981 of what has become his most well known work, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, the implications of a narrative approach to character and truth become explicit as the intrinsic social dimension of identity emerges as more primary than that of the individual. Hence the title of the opening chapter 'A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on Watership Down'³¹ and the articulation of the ten theses commented upon in chapter 1. The self begins to disappear as an independent and antecedent reality and is anticipated by the community whose 'form and structure is [...] narrative dependent'.³² Similarly the social significance of the Gospel, that is its generation of a community, requires a narrative display, whose alethic characteristic is again expressed principally in its openness to the unknown in the form of strangers. Again the latter reflects a shift from the self to the community since *the primary agency here is a community* whose particular Christian character resources it with the capabilities to *escape the destructive fear of difference deeply rooted in the liberal project*. In particular this happens by welcoming rather than being threatened by the presence of the stranger or alien within its story.³³

This latter insight raises a further criterion of the truthful and thereby liberating character of a narrative, namely that the story it tells *exposes those powers*

³¹ *A Community of Character*, pp. 9-35.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³ See once again the work of Samuel Wells *op.cit.*

which seek to rule our lives in a way that prevents our recognising, in the presence of the stranger, the advent of truth as a gift, rather than something we or anyone else control, possess or create. A truthful and liberating narrative is one which equips us with the skills to receive the alien in a way that can integrate the 'other' or transcendent into the story we live without threat or fear.³⁴ This is in part why truthfulness also requires a community with the freedom to speak the truth to one another. *Freedom requires friendship for it is the otherness of friends, often presenting itself to us as something strange, which Hauerwas believes emancipates us from the narcissistic tendencies intrinsic to liberalism.* It is no accident, as Hauerwas tells the stories of the church and of his liberal opponents, that the latter's story leads to an estranged and isolated individualism, threatened by the alien, whereas the Christian story frees him to share in a society whose narrative requires that he cannot but be open to the stranger, whether as the unborn child or the retarded.

Equally his increasing conviction of the intrinsic relationship between the Church's story and its social embodiment, means that the hermeneutical direction of Christian formation is reversed. Instead of seeking to establish an ideal Christian community-ethic through an abstract reading of the resources of Scripture, tradition and experience, Hauerwas incites an explication of the

³⁴ This view of truthfulness and its correlative of freedom is reinforced in the essay, 'Character Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life', *A Community of Character*, pp. 129-52 (pp. 149-50). Here Hauerwas identifies three criteria for the truthfulness of a story. First that it forces us to take responsibility for our actions (agency). Second that it deconstructs the modernist myth of a universal and singular vantage point instead offering an illuminating path by which to travel onwards. Third, that it be a narrative that is able to remain open to new challenges from new experiences. Thus it is friendly to the alien.

narrative incarnated in the common practices of human intercourse, such as family life, marriage, acts of kindness and friendship present in the church.

4:4 Narrating Christological Freedom

Having wrestled with the way narrative and story expose questions of truthfulness and consequently the integrity of the church, Hauerwas is faced with how the core story of the Christian community reflects and informs these insights. In 'Jesus: The Story of the Kingdom',³⁵ Hauerwas develops his understanding of embodied narrative by refusing to locate truth in abstract texts but instead pointing once again to the social reality of a church identified with this Jesus whose contemporary identity harbours the narrative of its Lord. Thus 'what it means for Jesus to be worthy of our worship is explicable only in terms of his social significance'.³⁶ *To find Jesus will involve explicating the social significance of this community*, which must include appropriate attention to the memory embodied in its Scriptures and practices, but not in a way abstracted from the practices of that community. In addition, asserting that 'Jesus did not have a social ethic [...] his story is a social ethic'³⁷ not only asks that the pattern of Jesus' life be legible in the character of the Christian community, but that a reading of the Gospels can only truthfully be done through being part of a community which forms us into a people who can rightly interpret the texts. Hauerwas' impatience with the theological energy expended in questing for the historical Jesus is precisely because those so questing are starting in the wrong

³⁵ *A Community of Character*, pp. 36-52.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

place, that is as abstract thinkers with a set of abstract texts. The only historical or 'real' Jesus is the Jesus known in the sociality and politics of the people called by His name. Otherwise Jesus simply becomes a cipher for ideology, as Hauerwas' footnote on Segundo makes clear.³⁸

Hauerwas' Christology is therefore a political Christology, in the sense of being a Christological politics, that is one whose contours correlate with the ecclesial politics through which Jesus' life is displayed. It is particularly in the presence of the church through time and across the nations that Jesus' universal significance is explicated, rather than through metaphysical or anthropological theories. The cosmic Christ is a narrative expression rooted in the reality of a world-wide and diachronical church for 'the universality of the church is based in the particularity of Jesus' story and on the fact that his story *trains us to see one another as God's people*'.³⁹ For Hauerwas *God has made us part of his story*. The challenge is not simply to realise this ourselves, but to accept others as part of God's people for it is God who has made this possible. Hence the church exists as a people who recognise each other across the frontiers of place and time and in so doing reveal the universalism of the Gospel.

4:5 Scripture and the Narrative of the Church

This approach, however, does not mean abandoning the Gospels as texts, but rather recognising their relative place in the great story of God which Christians believe Jesus identified and which is carried in the community of the church.

³⁸ Ibid., p.40, footnote 16.

³⁹ Ibid., p.51, (my italics).

Hence the narrative and plural character of the Gospels is intrinsic to how they should be appreciated, both to avoid their being a quarry for abstract ethical notions, and to correlate them with the inherent pluralism of the contemporary church. The Gospels and the contemporary church mutually inform the interpretation of each other in such a way that the polity of the church is kept faithful to its calling and the reading of the story is truthfully done. Part of this faithfulness is the recognition that the plurality of ecclesial communities is not intrinsically problematic, for not all variance is a result of disagreement. Proper variety reflects the reality that in being formed into the church 'our stories become part of the story of the kingdom' making 'Jesus' story a many-sided tale'.⁴⁰ *There is space for difference as the story is lived in diverse contexts and times.* Thus discipleship displays the story of the kingdom which Jesus embodied and which is embodied amongst his followers. In so being church, 'the organised form of Jesus' story'⁴¹ a contrast story is narrated which offers both a challenge and gives an identity to those who are not part of this community. Ironically this provides the possibility for the liberation of the world from its own false narratives as we shall see.

Such a focus on the Gospel stories of Jesus and their place in the wider story of the church also raises the place of Scripture as a whole. In 'The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering',⁴² Hauerwas

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 51-52.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.50.

⁴² *A Community of Character*, pp. 53-71.

takes further his insights concerning the relationship between textual narrative and community narrative and again positions the former within the latter.

The authority of Scripture derives its intelligibility from the existence of a community that knows its life depends on faithful remembering of God's care of his creation through the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus.⁴³

Such a political reading of Scripture, Hauerwas believes, has been occluded in liberal hermeneutics with the consequence that Scripture has lost its authority and revelatory power. Theologians, Hauerwas notes, *rarely learn their texts in a liturgical context* which properly contextualises them, so there is no connection made between the politics of the community which identifies these texts as their Scriptures and the work of most theologians.⁴⁴ This leaves the Scriptures prey to deconstruction by those who seek to understand them principally by fitting them into alien patterns of thought. For Hauerwas, following the early work of Erich Auerbach,⁴⁵ such a failure to 'fit our world into it (the Scriptures)'⁴⁶ that is the world the Scriptures open up, rather than a historicist entrenching of the past, is correlative to an apolitical reading of these Scriptures. Similarly 'the main relation of revelation to the Bible is not that of an antecedent revelation which generates the Bible as a response, but that of a revelation which *follows upon* the existent tradition'.⁴⁷ Indeed the community with its tradition is the politics which enables the variety of intra-ecclesial

⁴³ Ibid., p.53.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.56, footnote 9.

⁴⁵ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

⁴⁶ *A Community of Character*, p.55.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.58.

interpretations to argue their case and thereby to reveal truth as a communal struggle rather than a metaphysical entity.

4:6 Narrating Ecclesial Freedom as Liberation for the World

The Scriptures as a narrative construal of God's ways with his people in the past therefore function as 'one loosely structured non-fictional novel that has subplots, that at some points appear minor but later turn out to be central'.⁴⁸ Thus *the canon is not a finished product* but a task indicating the sort of people the church must become to be a people consonant with the story of these Scriptures. As he comments in 'The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story',⁴⁹ this implies that doctrines are intelligible only as they are narratively displayed. This is how their truthfulness is established for Christian convictions are 'true and ethical in that they force us to a true understanding of ourselves and our existence'.⁵⁰ *Truth is therefore historically mediated and complex.* Thus the truthfulness of these narratives requires the existence of a community within which such ethics can happen and which can truthfully tell the story of the world, the constituency which is not yet consciously under the Lordship of Christ. It is in fact 'through the church (that the world) is given a history',⁵¹ that is a story, for without a community which narrates God's destiny for all, the world has no history, only chronicle and no hopeful teleology. As Hauerwas notes, such a dialectical disclosure reveals a plurality of stories within the world and, indeed, within the church.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.67.

⁴⁹ *A Community of Character*, pp. 89-110.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.90.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.91.

Harmonising or conflating these stories is not appropriate. Rather *the church's narrative role is a missiological one*. It is to help the world to see itself as inadequate without participation in the great story of God to which the church bears witness.

An example of this is Hauerwas' rebuttal of the charges of tribalism and relativism by showing, through an explication of the Christian community's storied identity, that it alone can claim to be an anticipation of universal community.⁵² In contrast the world is fragmented into a variety of sects such as the nation state and, in liberal societies, employs a mistaken epistemology. The Christian tradition, by recognising its storied and particular character, is therefore better positioned to respect other traditioned accounts of reality which liberalism believes must ultimately bow before its singular account.⁵³ This great story of God is itself a rich variety of secondary tales which reflect the contextual variables of time, place, heritage etc. As Hauerwas comments

the kind of alternative the church provides will differ from society to society, system of belief to system of belief, from culture to culture, state to state. Indeed the church will often learn from different cultures what is and is not essential to its own life [...] Christians must always remember the God they serve is found among all people.⁵⁴

⁵² Hauerwas notes 'universal community exists only as eschatological hope. All we know is the particular and limited communities that have formed us and that we have chosen'. *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p.10.

⁵³ This question of the pluralism inherent in the telling of the Christian story will engage us later in this chapter.

⁵⁴ *A Community of Character*, pp. 105-06.

Thus in 'A Tale of Two Stories',⁵⁵ Hauerwas discusses the relationship between his Texan identity and his Christian one. The upshot of this discussion is to show how *the Christian story overaccepts the Texan one without destroying the latter*.⁵⁶ The Christian story is a story that relishes particular expressions, which, like interpretations of Scripture, are required to give warrants for their distinctive tellings, rather than being reduced to a univocal narrative. As Hauerwas comments in 'The Church in a Divided World', 'the church, the whole body of believers, therefore, cannot be limited to any one historical paradigm or contained in any one institutional form'⁵⁷ for the narrative keeps producing a community of interpretation sufficient for the growth of further narratives.

Ecclesial narrative therefore offers a fertile resource for the display of Christian living and hence distinctive ethics. However Hauerwas recognises the criticisms it attracts. In 'The Demands of a Truthful Story: Ethics and the Pastoral Task',⁵⁸ he addresses a number of these. First he now clearly distances himself from those who see story in itself as the most significant constituent of narrative ethics, commenting,

⁵⁵ *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 21-45.

⁵⁶ The term overaccepting is taken from Samuel Wells thesis 'Turning Fate into Destiny', pp. 206-09. In 'Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life' Hauerwas reinforces this point by asserting that 'our character is not the result of any one narrative; the self is constituted by many different roles and stories. Moral growth requires a constant conversation between our stories that allows us to live appropriate to the character of our existence'. See *A Community of Character*, pp. 132-33. This he likens again to the subplots of a novel without which the whole would not be properly intelligible.

⁵⁷ *A Community of Character*, p.92.

⁵⁸ 'The Demands of a Truthful Story: Ethics and the Pastoral Task', *op.cit.*, pp. 59-71. This refutes Sharon Welch's criticism that Hauerwas has no space for pluralism within his narrative. See Sharon Welch, 'Communitarian Ethics After Hauerwas', *Christian Ethics*, 10/1 (1997), 82-95 (p.87).

we are encouraged to learn to tell stories as if stories in and of themselves are saving. Even though the Gospel clearly takes the form of a story, it is not the story qua story that saves, but the person and his work that the story recounts, is whence our salvation comes. What we need and affirm that we recognise in the cross and resurrection of Christ, is a true story.⁵⁹

For Hauerwas it is what the story is about that matters, a story which among other things tells us, most crucially, that we are not its creators, but simply characters within it. This also exposes the webbed and dynamic character of this story as it emerges for

there is no one 'story of God'. Certainly the story we tell of God as our creator and redeemer sets the broad outline of the plot, but how creator and redeemer are to be understood involves a many sided tale. That the 'story of God' is constituted by many 'stories' however, is not a cause for embarrassment, but rather an indication that we only come to know God through the struggles of our forebears with him. Their stories, both their successes and sins, are crucial for our attempt to live faithfully to God's calling. That is why the Christian life can never be thought of as a set piece, but rather as an invitation to take part in the lively argument of a people across time who seek to witness to the world

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.62.

the kind of community possible with God acknowledged as
our true Lord.⁶⁰

In addition these tributaries within the overall story of God are ones that are tested both by the way they truthfully describe us, that is as sinful creatures of God easily prey to the self-deception that we are controllers of our destiny, and by the way their language ‘gives us the critical skills to let the world challenge the boundaries of that language’.⁶¹ For Hauerwas *the truth of the Christian story is displayed by its capacity to survive such extrinsic interrogation*.

In the later essay ‘The Church as God’s New Language’ Hauerwas therefore recognises the provisionality of all ecclesial narratives. He comments

how the Gospel ‘engulfs’ the world is not by denying the reality of our diverse narratives, but by providing an invitation to be part of a new people. The imperial character of the story that the church embodies requires witness, not coercion. Precisely because the content of the story requires us to recognise our fallibility, we cannot anticipate how God will use our witness relative to the diverse stories of the world, Indeed the story we believe to be entrusted to the church does not displace all other stories, for it does not pretend to tell us all that is worth knowing about our

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.65.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.66.

existence; it tells us only what we need to know about
God's saving work.⁶²

Thus the Christian narrative is intrinsically 'responsive to the best science of the day',⁶³ for the kingdom is broader than the church. Nevertheless though Christ is not confined to the church it is participation in church which enables Christians to learn to recognise 'Christ's presence outside the church'.⁶⁴

4.7 Narrating Ecclesial Freedom as Universal Integration

In *The Peaceable Kingdom* Hauerwas identifies peaceableness as the cardinal characteristic of the church's narrative. It is this which becomes pivotal for a genuine ecclesial hermeneutic for it is this, as we have seen in chapter 1, which Hauerwas believes to be the evidence of the church's Christological correlation, embodiment and representation. Hauerwas' ecclesiology though does not involve an imitation of Christ in historicist terms, but rather is about being like Him in the sense of *walking in the way of the Lord as Jesus and Israel did*.⁶⁵ For Israel that meant living and acting in the present on the basis of the relationship revealed in the Exodus. For Christians it means living now on the basis of the relationship revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which Hauerwas understands as 'nothing less than the embodiment of God's sabbath as a reality for all people'.⁶⁶

⁶² 'God's New Language' in Garrett Green, ed., *Scripture, Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 179-98 (p.191 footnote 17). Also in *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 47-65.

⁶³ *Wilderness Wanderings*, p.3 footnote 4.

⁶⁴ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.97.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.77.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.87.

The narrative displayed by the church's life is therefore one that reflects through peaceableness its confidence in God's saving reign inaugurated by Christ. This story will include Israel's story for

the existence of Israel and the church are not accidentally related to the story, but are necessary for our knowledge of God. You cannot tell the story of God without including within it the story of Israel and the church.⁶⁷

It will also require a casuistic approach in order to test the contemporary expression of church against the wisdom of its tradition so that its peaceableness is indeed a genuine one.⁶⁸ This again will necessarily be narratively expressed in order to show the way the tradition has emerged across time as he illustrates using the life and work of John Wesley and William Law to expose the way the Christian story is to be embodied in all its particularity, detail and contingency.⁶⁹

4:8 Narrating Ecclesial Freedom as Performance

Such peaceableness suggests distinctive ways of performing the Christian story, examples of which Hauerwas includes in *Against the Nations*. With regard to the Holocaust the question is how does the church hear the story of this 'experience' mediated through Jewish narrative and embrace it as part of its history rather than seeking to marginalise it? For Hauerwas this will not simply be about listening to the 'other', but will also include discerning how the

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.98.

⁶⁸ For a discussion on this see 'Casuistry as a Narrative Art', *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp.114-37. Also in *Interpretation*, 47/1 (January 1993), 377-88.

⁶⁹ 'Characterising Perfection', pp 251-63.

modernist myth of the universal at the expense of the particular is at the root of the Holocaust. Furthermore underlying this liberal myth Hauerwas perceives the ideology of Constantinianism, which he believes conflates the eschatological hope of a universal community with a contemporary and agonistically imposed politics.⁷⁰ Such an approach provides a test case for the casuistical approach noted above and for the truthfulness of the Christian story in terms of being able to receive the strange and tragic within its story, to take retrospective responsibility for its past life, to illuminate more enrichingly what is being reflected upon and to be able to go on with hope rather than to retreat into self-deception.

In advocating such narrative performance, Hauerwas is *not suggesting that the Christian community has adequately lived out its narrative*. Rather as a theologian his task is to indicate to the ecclesial community the implications of the narrative it embodies. Similarly, as Samuel Wells has shown, the way the Christian story illuminates the tragedy of Jonestown, helps both to expose the way moral labels are parasitic upon community narratives and that the alethic character of those narratives is correlative to their capacity truthfully to describe what is going on. For Hauerwas the contrast between a narrative of martyrdom and one of suicide illustrates this, both in terms of the memory each leaves in its wake, but also the way suicide prematurely closes the narrative of a life in a way that subverts the conviction Christians are called to embody that Jesus is Lord. Hence *the dying of Christians has to be a dying that bears*

⁷⁰ Hauerwas' understanding of Constantinianism will be discussed in chapter 5.

witness to this reality, a witness denied by the anthropocentric act of suicide.⁷¹

Jonestown is also indicative of the legacy of the liberal assumption that our lives need no stories through which to be lived. Consequently the myth that there are no core stories, as we noted earlier, leaves people prey to all sorts of false stories which masquerade as authentic and which destroy them in a manner that displays no sense that Jesus is Lord.⁷²

If *Against the Nations* sought to indicate the way Hauerwas uses narrative to understand Christian social ethics, the collection *Christian Existence Today* demonstrates how the church embodies this narrative in the shape of its life. Underlying this collection and other essays from this period, is a gradual shift from the notion of story as articulated rhetoric to the notion of *narrative displayed through the communal performance of practices*. For Hauerwas practice is inclusive of narrative but focuses attention upon intelligible actions rather than upon rhetoric. It provokes an interpretation of what these practices are 'saying'. Attendant upon this is an increasing use of sermons as a medium for articulating Christian convictions, no doubt because *Hauerwas sees in the sermon a narrative interpretation of a particular community's practices reflective of its particular context and time*. By publishing his sermons, though, Hauerwas is not suggesting that his readers receive his sermons as if they were part of the specific community to which it was addressed. Rather his intention is that readers consider his sermons as examples of how this church practice

⁷¹ Wells, pp. 78-81.

⁷² The two articles are 'Remembering as a Moral Task: The Challenge of the Holocaust and 'On Taking Religion Seriously: The Challenge of Jonestown', *Against the Nations*, pp. 62-90, 91-108. The other issues re the state and war will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 5.

illuminates the way the Christian story is best ‘spoken’. As will be apparent in chapter 5, it is this attention to the particular, reflected in the increasing use of sermons as a theological tool, that indicates the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the local ecclesial community as a theologically fruitful resource.⁷³ As Hauerwas notes when introducing his sermon, ‘The Church as God’s New Language’, ‘the emphasis on narrative for theological reflection is unintelligible when abstracted from an ecclesial context’.⁷⁴ Whilst essays and lectures have contexts which arguably intend to include readers as well as listeners, the danger of these media is that they become de-contextualised, abstract narratives or at best second-stage theological reflection, occultly parasitic upon the more fundamental practices of the church such as its liturgy and preaching. The problem, as we have noted for Hauerwas, is how far practices portray their practitioners.

Hauerwas’ own use of the sermon, though, indicates how he is distinguished from some protagonists of narrative theology. In particular he challenges his Yale heritage with failing to see the need for the church in order to prevent a narcissistic concentration upon texts.⁷⁵ Discussing the thought of Hans Frei, Hauerwas argues that ‘realistic narrative’ must reflect the authority of a community’s tradition rather than being seen simply in terms of literary intelligibility. This is why liturgy is so important to Hauerwas, since without it the biblical text is just a text. It is the community which indicates what is

⁷³ Other sermons can be found in *Unleashing the Scriptures, Theology Without Foundations*, and in *Sanctify Them*.

⁷⁴ In Garrett Green, p.174.

⁷⁵ Garrett Green, p.187.

Scripture, for the early church worshipped Jesus before the generation of the New Testament and identified as Scripture those stories which conveyed the story intrinsic to that worship.⁷⁶ Similarly the 'plain sense' of the story for Hauerwas has to be determined through the corporate life of the Christian community.⁷⁷ 'Narrative as a category does not precede the context of the Christian witness. Jesus is prior to the story, though Jesus' life and resurrection can be displayed only narratively'.⁷⁸ For Hauerwas this is important in order to avoid the impression which Frei's approach might give, that everything pivots on the reading of the Scriptural text, a particularly ambiguous approach if phrases such as 'being engulfed in the narrative' are taken to mean giving ourselves up uncritically to the literary expression of the Scriptural story.⁷⁹ Whilst Hauerwas recognises that Frei believes the Scriptural narrative to be unintelligible apart from the church, he wants to take this further by asserting that the church itself is both the subject and agent of the narrative and hence that it is the people, rather than the words or sentences that exhibit these narratives.⁸⁰ *Speakers, not words in themselves refer* and hence 'the notion of membership in a linguistic community becomes pivotal'.⁸¹ Thus the corporate experience of this community, including its memory and embodied most dramatically in its saints, becomes essential for the proper reading of Scripture and the sermon, in particular, becomes the 'communal action whereby

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.189 footnote 11.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Whether Hauerwas has been faithful to Frei will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.190.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.191 footnote 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.192.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Christians are formed to use their language rightly making the sermon 'a churchly event' rather than the work of the preacher alone.⁸²

Thus it is not the form of the biblical material but how its contents are displayed that determines whether it is a realistic reading of the Christian story in life. *The church therefore becomes the ontological premise for Hauerwas' epistemology* for it is the narrative character of God's people which also enables the world to be itself narratively construed as God's world. However narrative in this case is not, for Hauerwas, a form of anthropological foundationalism, but rather

an attempt to draw our attention to where the story is told, namely in the church; how the story is told, namely in faithfulness to Scripture; and who tells the story, namely the whole church through the office of the preacher.⁸³

Such a use of narrative is given illustration in 'The Ministry of a Congregation: Rethinking Ethics for a Church-Centred Seminary'.⁸⁴ Here Hauerwas argues that *abstract notions of church have to give way in order that particular churches*, such as Broadway Methodist Church of which he is a member, may supply *the tangible practices from which to read the particular narratives*

⁸² Ibid., p.193. In the essay 'Reconciling the Practice of Reason: Casuistry in a Christian Context', in Baruch Brody, ed., *Moral Theory and Moral Judgement* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986), pp. 135-56, Hauerwas uses the examples of the Mennonites, John Yoder and Olin Teague, the first a prominent theologian, the second a businessman with no formal theological qualifications to demonstrate the ecclesially informed hermeneutic he is promoting and to show the importance of exemplars for casuistry.

⁸³ Garrett Green, p.193.

⁸⁴ *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 111-31.

which comprise the ecclesial story. The details of this reading will be explored more fully in chapter 5. Suffice it to say, this attention to the local takes up the theme of Hauerwas' earlier essay 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story',⁸⁵ which asserts that the peaceableness of the church, impotent though it can appear in a violent world, acts as a gesture pointing to the character of the story embodied in this people. Similarly the ecclesial gestures, such as kneeling for prayer, confessing the creed liturgically, celebrating baptism and the eucharist emerge in a new light when seen as indicative of God's story. For 'liturgy is social action. Through liturgy we are shaped to live rightly the story of God, to become part of that story, and are thus able to recognise and respond to the saints in our midst'.⁸⁶ This also indicates the integrative and respectful character of Christian knowledge, for such recognition includes the retarded who *display the fundamentally practical rather than cerebral nature of this knowledge.*

4:9 Ecclesial Politics and Biblical Hermeneutics

Emerging from this attention to the narrative significance of ecclesial practices is the question of the relative weighting to be given to the community and the texts in this hermeneutical enterprise. In particular *Unleashing the Scripture* is an attempt to display the role of church in the interpretation of core Christian texts in contrast to liberal methods, evident both in the academy and in the church at large, which presume that an unformed and abstract reader can

⁸⁵ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story: The Church and 'Religious Education'', *Encounter*, 43:4 (Autumn 1982), 319-29. Also in *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 101-10.

⁸⁶ *Christian Existence Today*, p.107.

properly grasp the Bible as Scripture. Liberal methodology has 'allowed Scripture to be separated from Church-centred practice' and in consequence American Christians of all hues have become unconsciously prisoners of this liberal reading of the Bible, by being formed more fundamentally in the tradition and the politics of the liberal state than in those of the church.⁸⁷ However given that the church names the Scriptures, it is pivotal that the church rather than the abstract citizen recover a proper reading of those Scriptures which will free Christians from captivity to the contemporary conventions of liberalism. Thus

the Bible is not and should not be accessible to merely anyone, but rather it should only be made available to those who have undergone the hard discipline of existing as part of God's people.⁸⁸

Paradoxically both academic liberals and fundamentalists share the same pathology in this regard and are equally prisoners of the Enlightenment legacy despite their rhetorical differences, for they are

in the service of the fictive agent of the Enlightenment - namely the rational individual - who believes that truth in general (and particularly the truth of the Christian faith) can

⁸⁷ *Unleashing the Scripture*, p.15. The extent to which Hauerwas follows Stanley Fish's claim that 'there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only ways of reading that are extensions of community perspective' in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.16 will be discussed later in this chapter. Furthermore as Arne Rasmussen notes, the relationship between Hauerwas' 'hermeneutic of peoplehood' and a notion of a magisterium remains unclear. In short who as the church is the interpreting community? See Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1995), p.210.

⁸⁸ *Unleashing the Scripture*, p.9.

be known without initiation into a community that requires transformation of the self.⁸⁹

For Hauerwas they clothe Constantinian Christianity in Enlightenment rationality without realising that it is the practices of the church that give meaning to the Scriptures. Hence Hauerwas argues for a doctrine of the insufficiency of Scripture in order to situate a proper reading of Scripture within the church and to show that preaching is not about exposition but about inscribing folk into the story through re-narrating it. The sermon preached by an authorised speaker therefore is where the specificity of theology is distinctively articulated.⁹⁰

During this discussion, Hauerwas develops his hermeneutical agenda through an engagement with Stanley Fish. As we noted in chapter 1, Fish argues that a text needs an interpreting community to be made sense of, thereby appearing to render the community more determinative of meaning than the text itself, much akin to the way Roman Catholic tradition positions Scripture. Fish, though, does not see this as releasing an anarchic subjectivism, since the community remembering and interpreting the texts is informed by the interpretations that it already embodies from the past.⁹¹ There is therefore no ‘real meaning’ either in

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.35.

⁹⁰ Hauerwas displays his increasing commitment to the sermon in his final comment in ‘The Church’s One Foundation’ in *Theology Without Foundations*, p.162. Arne Rasmussen notes that the sermon is explicitly contextual and inherently community embedded theology. See *The Church as Polis*, p.178.

⁹¹ In ‘Interpreting the Bible as a Political Act’, *Religion and Intellectual Life*, 6/3-4 (Spring/Summer 1989), 134-142, (pp.137-38) Hauerwas displays this understanding of Fish. He writes ‘sharing in an interpretative community produces a common life making Scripture intelligible. Scripture is not intelligible on its own. Nor is it capable of producing common life’. Hauerwas is not thereby rejecting critical approaches to the Bible. As he emphasises he is concerned with descriptions which ‘arise out of the linguistic resources available to the interpreter [...] resources (which) are always already inscribed’.

the terms hoped for by fundamentalists or liberal biblical scholars, since the contingency of a community existing through time entails frequent redescriptions in diverse contexts. Hermeneutics is therefore fundamentally a political and temporal process and has linguistic and social dimensions that distinguish the church from the world. Hence Hauerwas applauds the strangeness evident in William Stringfellow's determination to practise the language of apocalyptic rather than feeling obliged to translate this into the deceptive language of liberalism.⁹² Through keeping Christian language pure a truthful reading of life can be had. Similarly Hauerwas advocates distinctive Christian schools both to sustain the Christian story and to preserve Christians from the closet liberal story of the USA occultly taught in the public schools.⁹³ As we shall note later in this chapter, the question of the fluidity of the text and its consequent narrative needs further address if Hauerwas's project is not to be equated with socio-pragmatic approaches.

4:10 Ecclesial Narratives and Ecumenical Hope

Ecclesial integrity is also about ecumenical awareness. In *In Good Company*, Hauerwas carefully displays the diversity and yet interdependence of the stories told by Protestant and Catholic companies. These companies are interdependent, not because they agree, but because they cannot tell their stories without including each other in their narratives. Hauerwas is critical of certain features of both companies, when he believes they succumb to the

⁹² Stanley Hauerwas and Jefferson Powell, 'Creation as Apocalyptic: A Homage to William Stringfellow', *Dispatches*, pp.107-13.

⁹³ Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff, *Schooling Christians: Holy Experiments in American Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

corruption of liberal thought. Hence liberal Protestant ‘theology constitutes ‘thought’, which then must seek embodiment. Once theology becomes ‘thought’ the church has already accepted modernity’s disembodiment of the Gospel’.⁹⁴ For Hauerwas it is the body of the church displayed at the eucharist which is where theology happens. Likewise Catholic theology is corrupted when it seeks to render apology to liberal agendas. This Hauerwas sees evident in the Papal Encyclical ‘Laborem Exercens’ in contrast to ‘Centesimus Annus’ and ‘Veritatis Splendor’.⁹⁵

Similarly in the ‘Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship’, published in 1995, it is the practices of the church’s liturgy which supply the story of the Christian faith, rather than themselves being the consequence of, or justified by, an anterior theoretical account.⁹⁶ More popularistly the chapter in *Where Resident Aliens Live*, entitled ‘Practice Discipleship’ undertakes to explicate the character of embodiment by asserting that ‘a Christian community is [...] a sociological order; its beliefs and practices arise out of a way of life together’.⁹⁷ Hence simply going to church tells a story since it speaks of the desire for a different sort of world from the one presently endured, in the confidence that God reigns. This awareness of the significance of embodiment is further underlined in ‘The Sanctified Body: Why Perfection Does not Require a Self’.⁹⁸ There Hauerwas draws upon the work of Dale Martin, to reverse the tendency to interpret the church through the body and

⁹⁴ *In Good Company*, p.21.

⁹⁵ For the discussion see *In Good Company*, pp. 93-94, 100, 125-42, 143-49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-68. Also in *Essentials of Christian Community* op.cit.

⁹⁷ *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.72.

⁹⁸ *Sanctify Them*, pp. 77-91.

instead shows how it is the character of the church which interprets the significance of the body. It is because the practices of the church affirm the value of the weak and embarrassing, such as the retarded, that those parts of the body which appear similarly are accorded such respect, not the other way round.⁹⁹ Hence the church's narrative cannot be complete without ecumenical inclusion.

4:11 Christian Narrative as Liberation from Agonistic Ancient Virtues

John Milbank's work has exposed the agonistic presuppositions of ancient virtue rhetoric,¹⁰⁰ which is acknowledged in *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*.¹⁰¹ There Hauerwas qualifies some of his earlier enthusiasm for Aristotle by recognising that virtues are the vanguard of a story whose roots are in communities with differing convictions about life. Ancient Greek virtues emerge from the agonistic practices of the ancient city states with their adulation of the magnanimous male. Christian virtues, therefore, whilst noting analogies with the ancients' insights, derive their virtues from practices, which Hauerwas believes, display a very different story.¹⁰² This is a further example of the way the Christian community has to be alert to the importance of retaining the integrity of its own narrative. Similarly in 'Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p82.

¹⁰⁰ This is at the heart of Milbank's ambivalence about the secular as well. See his *Theology and Social Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1990). We shall engage in more detail with the implications of this in chapter 5, particularly with regard to much Liberation Theology.

¹⁰¹ Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997).

¹⁰² 'Pagan Virtues and Christian Prudence', *Christians Among the Virtues*, pp. 89-112

Through Them if God does not Exist?', he notes that his understanding of the pivotal stories we belong to means that his divorce from Murdoch is now not only due to her Platonism and his preference for Aristotelianism, nor simply, as we suggested earlier, because of the need to root vision in narrative and hence community.¹⁰³ Instead this divorce takes place because what Murdoch calls 'muddles' about the place of God in the world are actually constitutive of Christian believing. This understanding therefore can only come through participating in ordinary Christian practices such as sharing in worship.¹⁰⁴

4:12 The Christian Story as Liberating Power

Where a narrative resourcing of ecclesial integrity has to be cautious, though, is in the manner of its relationship to other traditioned communities. Hauerwas, whilst supporting the John Milbank's insights, worries that *talk of the Christian narrative out-narrating its rivals, includes a violence which contradicts the peaceableness intrinsic to this narrative* thereby falling prey to the very problems that Milbank's approach to liberalism seeks to deconstruct.¹⁰⁵ A similar concern attends Hauerwas' disagreement with Oliver O'Donovan's renewed Christendom narrative, which will be discussed, along with Milbank's narrative, in chapter 5. For Hauerwas Martin Luther King provides an

¹⁰³ *Wilderness Wanderings*, op.cit.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-66. This is at the root of Hauerwas conversion to forms of cultural Christianity which he might earlier have rejected wholesale as Constantinian. The essay, 'In Defence of Cultural Christianity: Reflections on Going to Church', makes this point using the experience of Aldersgate Methodist church. As he comments 'theology can too easily begin to appear as 'ideas' rather than the kind of discourse that must, if it is to be truthful, be embedded in the practices of actually lived communities [...] I am less interested in what people, including myself, 'think'. I am much more interested in what is shaping our desires or, if you prefer, our bodies'. See *Sanctify Them*, pp. 157-58.

¹⁰⁵ 'Creation, Contingency and Truthful Non-violence: Reflections on John Milbank's Theology and Social Theory', *Faith and Freedom*, 4/2 (Coogee: New South Wales, June 1995), pp. 12-17. Also in *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 188-98.

exemplary model of what he understands discipleship to be, for Luther King, though often co-opted by liberals as among their number, in fact generated his reaction to racial abuse through the practices of the black church and the story of God embodied in these.¹⁰⁶ Hence rather than ideology, memory was crucial for King for King knew that the truth as an abstract ideal in itself could not prevail. This reality according to Hauerwas, was evident because Jefferson owned slaves and thereby was part of practices that subverted the possibility of his seeing the truth.¹⁰⁷

4:13 Summary

‘I do not have a finished theological system nor do I believe in such a thing [...] my suspicion is that the desire to have such a system may indicate the theologians lack of faith in the church’.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, as we have seen from the above exposition, Hauerwas’ believes that he has found in narrative and story resources with which to sustain the integrity and hence freedom of the church. Beginning with the insight that lives can be patterned through story structures, and therefore communities are also story-shaped identities, Hauerwas has seen that the richness of such stories is correlative to the details available for the story to be told and its capacity to include without reduction. Hence the local is recovered from its marginalisation by liberal thought, preoccupied as it is with singularity and uniformity as criteria for universal claims to truthfulness. For Hauerwas this denudes the church of some of the

¹⁰⁶ ‘Remembering Martin Luther King Jr: A Response to Christopher Beem’, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 23/1 (Spring 1995), 135-48. Also in *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 225-37

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.233.

¹⁰⁸ *Wilderness Wanderings*, p.5.

most important resources for its story, resources particularly carried in the bodies of the marginalised, such as the retarded, and in the practices of specific churches gathered for liturgical worship. Nevertheless by following this course, Hauerwas' project attracts a number of challenges. It is these to which we now turn in the remainder of this chapter.

Section II: An Emancipatory Narrative?

4:14 A Sustainable Narrative of Christian Freedom?

i) Captivity to Closet Foundationalism?

Hauerwas' use of narrative to sustain his project inevitably demands that he face the challenges and questions that this approach has evoked. Among the first of these is whether he is guilty of suggesting a new 'foundationalism' which sees in narrative the fundamental structure of human identity upon which all else stands.¹⁰⁹ Such an approach, popularised by Crites and possibly Ricoeur sees in the narratability of human identity the ontological character of story. As Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones comment

Stephen Crites's essay 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' moves in a direction strikingly different from Frei and is closer to Ricoeur. Crites turns to the tradition of phenomenology to argue that human existence and human experience are fundamentally narrative in form.¹¹⁰

Epistemology is therefore grounded in narrative form and hermeneutics is a storied art rather than about divining human consciousness. In the case of the stories of Jesus, this tends to see them as examples of a general theory of narrativity rather than, following Frei's ascriptive approach, a way of displaying a unique and unrepeatable identity without suggesting that the form has metaphysical implications.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ For a critique of the term 'foundationalism' and a preference for 'basicity' see Thiselton in *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, pp. 211-13.

¹¹⁰ *Why Narrative*, pp. 6-8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* See also Hans Frei, 'Identity and Discipline and Jesus Christ' John Webster and G.P.Schner, eds, *Theology After Liberalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 65 - 85. It should be noted that Hauerwas and Jones refuse to see a simple polarity of narrative approaches through a comparison of Frei with Ricoeur (with Crites behind Ricoeur), for 'the

Whilst it may be true that some of the early uses of narrative by Hauerwas indicate an initial attraction to narrative foundationalism, Loughlin is correct to see in Hauerwas' more mature work, the use of narrative in a verbal sense rather than as a noun.¹¹² It is a way of displaying character rather than being a metaphysical category or universal as such, since Hauerwas accepts that raw human experience is inaccessible to the mind, mediated as it is through language.¹¹³ This also explains why Hauerwas' use of character is also not a closet metaphysical strategy. Character, as parasitic upon narrative, is similarly a heuristic device. The only foundationalism that Hauerwas is prepared to countenance is the existence of the church, for 'all theology must begin and end with ecclesiology'.¹¹⁴ To say that narrative implies a community can imply that narrative, as a category or as rhetoric, has ontological and epistemological priority over the community. However the reverse is actually the case. *It is the presence of a community which evokes a narrative*, a narrative which that community embodies and displays through its character and performance, for 'a Christian community is also a sociological order; its beliefs and practices arise

ways of understanding narrative's relation to theology and ethics are multiple', as the essays in *Why Narrative* display.

¹¹² Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, p.139.

¹¹³ See Martha Nussbaum, 'Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love', *Ethics*, 98/2 (January 1988), 225-54, included in *Why Narrative*, pp. 216-50. Nussbaum argues that emotions are social constructions correlative to the stories and languages that have formed their society. Hauerwas and Gregory Jones note how Nussbaum's position accords with their emphasis upon practical rationality developed through their reappropriation of Aristotelian ethics. See *Why Narrative*, p.13.

¹¹⁴ *In Good Company*, p.58. See also 'The Church's One Foundation' op.cit. Linda Woodhead reinforces this insight in her 'Review of *In Good Company*', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, p.114, where she writes that it 'has always struck me as a curious feature of Hauerwas' theological approach (that) [...] he says his creed backwards, beginning with the church and only finally ending up with God'.

out of a way of life together'.¹¹⁵ As Hauerwas develops his understanding of the role of narrative, he therefore moves away from the narrative foundationalism of Ricoeur and Crites which is a 'narrative from below', through Barth and Frei's 'narrative from above' to a view of narrative in the contemporary church.¹¹⁶ In this way he shares with Edward Farley the sense that the only theologically proper foundationalism is of communities who claim to have been found, that is to have experienced a redemption whose character is illuminated in the story which that community tells through its identity as a universal fellowship.¹¹⁷

ii) Captivity to Language?

A second question regarding the sustainability of Hauerwas' project concerns the relationship between narrative and language. If all is linguistically mediated, is God imprisoned within the horizons of human language and thereby a construction of that language? Could Hauerwas be called a 'textualist' or ecclesial sociologist, explicating the contours of a 'text' or 'society' called church, but without any confidence that this entailed any ontological or theological assertions. Is God more than simply a word in a story and hence subject to the Feuerbach critique? Is it true that 'Hauerwas so embodies God in the church and its practices that the two become completely identified' with a consequent 'ecclesiastical capture of God'?¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.72.

¹¹⁶ I am indebted for this distinction to Samuel Wells, p.43.

¹¹⁷ Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.152.

¹¹⁸ Woodhead, pp. 114 -15.

We have noted Hauerwas' awareness of the force of Nigel Biggar's challenge.¹¹⁹ Yet has he done enough to respect the transcendent freedom of God and the integrity of the non-linguistic creation? For example, as Thiselton has indicated, Austin's work on speech acts indicates that such illocutionary expressions presuppose an extra linguistic world, in which promises, for example, can be fulfilled.¹²⁰ Hauerwas might strengthen the ontological security of his theology if he attended more explicitly to the significance of speech-acts and made more explicit his rejection of a representational-expressivist use of language.¹²¹

Furthermore, according to Kallenberg, Wittgenstein's comment that language is simply a tool to navigate the social world, offers space for God within that world, not because God is imprisoned and therefore created by human language, but because God is part of the social world itself, which generates language rather than being the product of language.¹²² Employing the mereological hierarchy analogy Kallenberg argues that whilst language is co-extensive with the social world, it is derivative of it and hence not determinative of it.¹²³ Such a perichoretic understanding of God's presence in

¹¹⁹ *Sanctify Them*, p.37.

¹²⁰ Thiselton (1992), p.290.

¹²¹ Brad J. Kallenberg, 'Unstuck From Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50/2 (1997), 191-218 (p.201). Kallenberg's challenge is intended for Lindbeck, but might equally be made of Hauerwas. Hauerwas, though, mentions his debt to Austin in 'The Theologian as Ethicist', op.cit., p.409. He writes 'I have been influenced by those philosophical theologians (Donald Evans and James William McClendon Jnr) who have used the work of John Austin to remind us that religious discourse has the characteristics of performative rather than constative utterance.' However beyond noting the way this led him to focus upon character formation through language rather than upon decisions, Hauerwas does not explicitly go further than this in his project.

¹²² Kallenberg, pp. 204, 214.

¹²³ To substantiate this point Kallenberg draws upon the concept of 'mereological hierarchy', that is the notion that 'the world is organised according to a hierarchy of systems each of

life accords with Hauerwas' emphasis upon the primacy of sociality, especially that of the church. Indeed for Kallenberg 'it is the reality of God's presence that shapes the communal form of life'.¹²⁴ This gives especial place for the saints and biographical readings of the church, much akin to the emphasis of Hauerwas.

Kallenberg, though, accuses Lindbeck and other Yale advocates of his cultural-linguistic approach of reducing God to silence, given their commitment language as the locus of truth. Even Thiemann's 'promise-fulfilment' approach in *Revelation and Theology*, remains trapped in the linguistic.¹²⁵ To escape this, Hauerwas might wish to display how the promises of God continue to be fulfilled in the church, particularly through its capacity to embrace all nations, to embrace the marginal or alien, and perhaps even to offer an anticipation of eschatological peaceableness for the non-linguistic world through engagement with ecological issues.

iii) Captivity to Corruption?

This understanding of church has further implications when considering challenges to the integrity of the narrative embodied in the church. We noted

which is constituted by an arrangement of entities from the next rung lower in complexity' to show both how language emerges and how God is part of that linguistic world without everything being reduced to language. Hence 'the mode of God's existence [...] (is) roughly analogous to the property of relationality that emerges at the level of the Christian community as a social entity'. Ibid., pp. 209-10, 216.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.216.

¹²⁵ For a critical challenge to Thiemann from a Jewish thinker see Michael Goldberg, 'God, Action and Narrative: Which Narrative? Which Action?', *Why Narrative*, pp. 348-63. There he argues that Thiemann ignores Jewish readings of what Christians call the Old Testament and assumes, in a manner akin to fundamentalism, that the texts are self evident rather than being communally correlative.

Tilley's arguments concerning 'dirty narratives' in chapter 3, a position further argued for by James Barr, whose challenges to the Biblical Theology movement have taken the form of displaying the porous and parasitic nature of Israelite tradition.¹²⁶ Pannenberg also adds substance to this critical challenge by indicating the pivotal importance of Greek philosophy in providing the apologetic categories for displaying that the Hebrew God revealed in Jesus Christ was Lord of all reality.¹²⁷ Habermas, Albrecht, Schüssler-Fiorenza and others are also swift to point to oppressive practices within the Christian narratives, which undermine emancipatory rhetoric and corrupt the story.

Nevertheless it is possible to argue that Hauerwas' mature position can accommodate these insights. Hauerwas is not suggesting that the Christian tradition is purely self-generating. His affection for Aquinas' employment of Aristotle is evidence of this. *What Hauerwas is keen, like Barth, to undermine is any notion of any a-theistic grasp of reality, often mis-labelled natural theology.* Perhaps Pannenberg's recovery of the more ancient understanding of natural theology as that uncorrupted by human interests with particular relevance to the universal lordship of God, would aid his project.¹²⁸ Indeed just as Pannenberg sees in the use of Greek philosophy by early Christian theologians a vehicle to articulate this 'natural theology' to a wider world, an approach which is compatible with the narrative tradition of the Christian faith, so Hauerwas' mature project has the capacity to embrace insights from beyond

¹²⁶ Cf Tilley op. cit., p.104 and James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 150, 205.

¹²⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, Eng. trans. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-98), I, pp. 79-80.

¹²⁸ Pannenberg (1991), p.76.

its tradition precisely because, as we have noted, his project indicates that he will find them there.¹²⁹ Nevertheless it is because of the character of the narrative embodied in the church that this openness is present, not because another tradition or system is self-evidently superior to it, or that purportedly universal truths can be established from within liberal thought. The latter is never independent of the workings of God and is truth bearing for that reason and no other. The church can be interrogated and enriched from without because it recognises that the kingdom it bears witness to is both within it and beyond it. It is this continuity which provides a conduit for critical challenge and the possibility of liberation from self-deception.

Hence rather than speaking of 'dirty intertextuality' Hauerwas' ecclesiology would better be characterised as '*enriching intertextuality*'. Such engagement, though, necessarily requires a Christian community of integrity, sufficiently free to be able to engage critically with the norms and assumptions of other traditions precisely because *it can recognise the kingdom beyond its ecclesial contours*. Thus much of Hauerwas engagement with the 'secular' not only explicates its ambiguous implications but identifies its ontological inadequacies.¹³⁰ For example, in agreement with Milbank, Hauerwas believes it

¹²⁹ Hauerwas' comment in his debate with Miscamble and Quirk that 'my position certainly does not entail a wholesale rejection of 'secular civilisation' or even of liberalism'. Symposium (1987), p.93.

¹³⁰ This is actually what Hauerwas is doing in *Dispatches from the Front*. Whilst Rufus Black, in his review of this collection, criticises Hauerwas for actually disengaging from the secular, this is perhaps because the attention of these essays to questions of democratic theory and institutions, requires this tactic. However this does not suggest a strategy. For Hauerwas' use of Michel de Certeau's analogy see *After Christendom*, pp. 17-18. For Black's Review see Rufus Black, 'Review of *Dispatches from the Front*', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 9/1 (1996), 85-86.

imperative to deconstruct, through the presence of a peaceable people, the violence inherent in the narratives of ancient virtues and still present in the liberal state, not only in rhetorical terms but also in ontological ones.¹³¹

iv) Captivity to Localism and the Contemporary?

The issues raised above also require that Hauerwas delineate the narrative form of God's story, that is its plot and ending. As we have noted Hauerwas believes that the end of the story has already happened proleptically, though not exhaustively and hence that a new age has dawned, with the church as the community which consciously lives in this new time, though sharing the same space as the rest of the world.¹³² The Parousia or the Eschaton's finale is still to come and *it is this which qualifies the extent of his realised eschatology and which will raise questions about the capacity of the church to realise the peaceable kingdom whose public fullness is still a future project.* We shall have recourse to this in the next chapter, for the question of what has been called the Third Horizon, is of particular significance to the emplotting of the Church's narrative.¹³³

However a further question concerns the centre and location of the plot that shapes the divine story. At one level it seems clear that Hauerwas accepts the historicity of the cross and its attendant stories of resurrection and commissioning. At another level, his awareness of the implications of

¹³¹ The collections *Christians Among the Virtues* and *Wilderness Wanderings* reflect this agenda.

¹³² Cf Wells, p.13.

¹³³ Thiselton (1992), pp. 332-37. Thiselton makes the point that narratives are inherently eschatological since their structure necessarily involves anticipation.

historicism subverts any simplistic historical foundationalism particularly that offered by the 'historical Jesus' movement. Hauerwas, as we have seen, locates the real Jesus within the contemporary story of the church. 'There is 'no real Jesus' except as he is known through the kind of life he demanded of his disciples'¹³⁴ and 'the church is the organised form of Jesus' story'.¹³⁵ This, though, has implications for the emplotment of the story, since it suggests that the Christological plot of the story is no longer rooted in a noetically inaccessible past, but in the living encounter of the contemporary church with the ubiquitous risen Jesus, an encounter which will have contextual varieties of telling. In short, *the story's emplotment, whilst focused upon Christ, is essentially a traditioned plot augmented through time and across the nations by all who are transformed to display the richness of Christ to the world.* Christ, therefore, is not simply a name confined to Jesus of Nazareth, but includes what the tradition or 'effective history' offers the present, together with what is displayed in the church's character in the present.¹³⁶ The Story of Christ includes the church's diverse narratives whose resolution awaits the Parousia.

In this sense Hauerwas comes close to Sally McFague's notion of Jesus as the parable of God, yet in Hauerwas' ecclesiology, this becomes *the church as a plurality of parables of God*, given the kenotic Christology immanent in his ecclesiology.¹³⁷ The churches plural narratives offer contingent visions of the

¹³⁴ *A Community of Character*, p.41.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.50.

¹³⁶ On 'effective history' see the section on Gadamer in chapter 2.

¹³⁷ Sally McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM 1982), p.15.

Christ embodied in the practices of this people. Since Christ is hidden within these practices, the parabolic character of ecclesial performance will inevitably appear as riddle.¹³⁸ Narrative is consequently dynamic and plural in form, although destined for resolution at the finale of the Parousia. Whilst less abstract, this vision shares something of the character of Farley's notion of ecclesiality or universal redemption as the criterion for the work of Christ after Pentecost.¹³⁹ For both, the plot is one which moves with the times, although the substantive identity of Christ is something that Farley sees as less significant than the principle of ecclesiality.

v) Captivity to Confusion?

Such a dynamic emplotment of the story requires that Hauerwas face the problems involved in recognising the narrative and ecclesial pluralism present in the Christian story. As we have seen Hauerwas regards the story of Jesus as a many sided tale and such intrinsic pluralism, contextually and historically expressed, allows him to celebrate both the diversity of the canon, especially the presence of the four Gospels, and to recognise the inevitability of ecclesial pluralism in the period before the Parousia. This approach accords with the work of Gérard Genette. Loughlin notes Genette distinguishing between story time and narrative time, between duration under each sign and the inevitable pluralism implied here as stories are narrated by various constituencies at

¹³⁸ For an insight into the way parable and allegory differ and structure people's relationships to a narrative see Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 18-40.

¹³⁹ 'Ecclesiality refers to an actual historical community pervaded by a dominant story, the Adam-Gospel story, and having a distinctive sociality'. See Edward Farley (1982), p.186.

different times and never in a way that involves simplistic repetition.¹⁴⁰ Narratives are inevitably creative and tell the story in ways co-relative to how they emplot and characterise the story. Loughlin comments 'the story is not given apart from its telling in narrative, but the narrative is not the same as the story'.¹⁴¹ As we have noted, Hauerwas has a particular view of what constitutes the plot. However the very dynamism of this plot and the fact that others who form part of the church do not necessarily identify the plot in the same terms, means that *the story cannot be told univocally*. In this sense Hauerwas escapes Ricoeur's concern that the presence of a canon 'flattens' the narrative diversity of the texts without denying the reality that the canon influences the way the texts function as Barr asserts.¹⁴² In particular given his broader notion of the canon as the church's destiny rather than simply being the delineation of a series of ancient texts, this further explains why he will not write anything purporting to be an exhaustive account of theology. 'One of the reasons, moreover, why I resist those who urge me to 'pull it all together', is that attempts to do so impose a false unity on the wonderful anarchy of life called 'church''.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ see the discussions of this by Loughlin (1996), p.53, and Thiselton (1992), p.355.

¹⁴¹ Loughlin, *ibid.*, p.61.

¹⁴² Paul. Ricoeur, 'Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties', *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 237-38. See also James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority and Criticism* (Oxford; Oxford University Press 1985) pp. 49-74.

¹⁴³ *Sanctify Them*, p.4. For Hauerwas' views on the canon as a task for the church see *A Community of Character*, p.68.

vi) Captivity to Community?

Such pluralism and contextuality raises the question of whether Hauerwas' theology is simply reflective of a sociology derived from narrative structuralism, which, for the Christian community, happens to be called church, but which for other communities will carry another name? Given the apparent incommensurability of different linguistic and hence narrative worlds is Hauerwas committed to a socio-pragmatic or 'Reader-Response' approach to narrative, with its consequent resistance to critical challenge, its defence of sectional interest and its conservative pragmatism?¹⁴⁴

At first sight a collection such as *Unleashing the Scriptures*, appears to advocate the hermeneutical priority of the church rather than the Scriptures. Whilst Jesus historically anticipates the stories told of him, it was the church which determined the canon and which called these a number of these stories 'Scripture'. Thus for Hauerwas 'the authority of Scripture derives its intelligibility from the existence of a community that knows its life depends on faithful remembering of God's care of his creation through the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus'.¹⁴⁵ In this sense Hauerwas accepts that, for us, the real world is the narrated world and hence that the ecclesial community is pivotal in the proper articulation of the character of the story. There is no fixed meaning underlying the texts which historical story or literary criticism can disclose. Hauerwas, as we have seen, promotes a political rather than either a subjective or a technical reading of the texts.

¹⁴⁴ Thiselton (1992), p.7.

¹⁴⁵ *A Community of Character*, p.53.

For critics of his project, such as Richard Hays, this implies a freewheeling approach to the texts which subverts the respect due to them as realities distinct from the contemporary or historical community of church. In effect Hauerwas' hermeneutics reduces the texts to mere ciphers of contextual and contemporary concerns. Hays feels justified in his criticisms given his perception of the spartan use of the Scriptural texts by Hauerwas. Apart from attention to the synoptic Gospels and one or two of the epistles, Hays finds Hauerwas' work silent about many of the Biblical narratives. In particular he finds it ironic that Hauerwas makes no reference to the Acts of the Apostles, the most church-focused narrative of the New Testament.¹⁴⁶ For Hays this gives Hauerwas' work too casual and superficial a feel and his challenge is that Hauerwas engage more directly and in detail with the texts, rather than relying upon the results of other exegetes and leaving the impression that interpreting the Scriptural narratives is a simpler and more singular affair than most New Testament exegetes would allow.¹⁴⁷ Such a canon within the canon of Scripture questions how confident Hauerwas can be about the way he emplots the Christian Story around the contemporary peaceableness of the church. A similar criticism could be levelled at Hauerwas' approach to ecclesiastical history. As Black points out, there seems to be very little to be commended between Constantine and the Radical Reformation, despite Hauerwas' respect

¹⁴⁶ Commenting on Hauerwas' project Hays asserts: 'it is not easy to see how Hauerwas can hold these different elements together in a coherent hermeneutical position; indeed given his rather freewheeling approach to biblical interpretation, it is not at all clear that he has done so'. Hays p.254.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 258-65.

for Aquinas and latterly for the sort of peasant religion of medieval Catholicism.¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, having taken all this into account, it is debatable whether Hauerwas is wedded to a reader-response approach to the texts. *His universalist soteriology cautions us against assuming that he represents a socio-pragmatic approach.* As he comments 'Jesus is nothing less than the embodiment of God's sabbath as a reality for all people'.¹⁴⁹ Hence Hauerwas' mature project is not closed to critical challenge as we have noted above. The question is rather on what terms and through what media. This explains his hostility, as we have seen, to Gloria Albrecht and other liberation theologians such as Lehmann and Gutiérrez, whom he believes sacrifice the integrity and freedom of the church's narrative for the occluded narrative of hegemonic liberalism. Despite its pretensions to universality, the liberal narrative cannot provide a truthful story to resource critical theory. It is a located and western narrative.

Thus for Hauerwas *only the intersubjectivity across the generations and through time of the eschatological community called church can begin to generate the necessary conditions for such dialogical truth discernment.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ See Black 'Review of *Dispatches*', p.83. For Hauerwas' interest in the potential of the Constantinian legacy and especially in the peasant as exemplar of the Christian pilgrim see 'The Sanctified Body: Why Perfection Does Not Require a Self' and 'In Defence of Cultural Christianity: Reflections on Going to Church', *Sanctify Them*, pp. 77-91, 157-73. The implications of this will occupy us further in chapter 5.

¹⁴⁹ *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p.87.

¹⁵⁰ This is what Hauerwas means by saying 'ecclesiology is all I have' in response to Albrecht. Since there is no neutral vantage point, critical theory has to begin with existing traditions and their capacity to sustain themselves in the face of the alien and transcendent.

Since the universe is redeemed and hence the Kingdom has come, this church is necessarily orientated, as we have seen, to listening to extraneous as well as internal challenges to its integrity. The 'criss-crossing' of languages which Wittgenstein saw as indicative of an adequate capacity to achieve intersubjective agreement on truths, is more clearly exhibited in the catholicity of the church than in anything that liberal society and theory has been able to establish. Hauerwas' project does not imply that such criss-crossing is absent and that traditions are isolated from each other. His position simply assumes that such criss-crossings in the world are less substantial than those within the argumentative community of the church. As he notes in 'The Church in a Divided World', the world is a companion of the church and sometimes its enemy, but since the world has no story of itself, but comprises many stories which do not always recognise themselves as such, it is only the church, with its more explicit narrative structure, that can give the world a history.¹⁵¹ Thus only the language game of Christianity is sufficiently diverse within itself both to inhibit a socio-pragmatic approach and to remain open to external critical challenge, given its soteriology and intrinsically centrifugal character.¹⁵²

Consequently his enthusiasm for Fish relates more to a recognition of the significance of the community in interpretation when compared to liberal exegesis, than to the notion that the texts are simply pretexts for the communities aspirations. Hauerwas, though distinguishing himself from Barth

Cf 'A Failure of Communication', p.230. The implications of this for liberation theology will occupy us in chapter 5.

¹⁵¹ *A Community of Character*, p.91.

¹⁵² For discussion on Wittgenstein see Thiselton (1992), pp. 540-49.

and Frei by greater attention to the ecclesiological location of the Scriptures, is *respectful of their integrity as can be seen from his sermons*. Indeed like Fish, he recognises that the church is not able to enter into anarchic interpretation given the traditioned nature of its character and hence the particular formative influences that shape its way of reading.¹⁵³

Hauerwas, therefore is better construed as seeking what Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco call the 'competent reader'.¹⁵⁴ In hermeneutical thought, the reader does fill out the incompleteness of the text, which is itself presupposed in the invitation by the text to be read and hence interpreted as it is actualised. *The church, for Hauerwas, must be a competent reader of the Scriptures*, by which is not simply meant having within its community those versed in the critical skills, but those whose life formation equips them to read the stories competently and with integrity. *The theocentric character of these very Scriptures includes attention to the transcendent as part of the hermeneutical process*. Far from becoming self-serving and introspective, Hauerwas finds his sermons orientate him outwards both to the reality of God beyond his needs and to the demands of the world which these very Scriptures remind him, is God's good creation, rather than his possession.

Hauerwas is therefore denying the liberal premise that character has no bearing upon the understanding of texts or stories. He is not seeking to reduce those texts or stories into pretexts to serve anterior interests. However Hauerwas

¹⁵³ For a discussion of Fish see Thiselton (1992), pp. 25, 75, 598.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

might remove doubts about his respect for the integrity of the Scriptures if he was more explicit about the way *texts actually indicate reading strategies*, or as Loughlin comments, stories stage themselves.¹⁵⁵ For Hauerwas it is not therefore a question of being engulfed by the Scriptural world, since this is not the whole story of God, nor of the Scriptures being swallowed up by the interests of the contemporary church, since, though part of the church, they represent an integrity which cannot be identified with the contemporary church. Rather, the dialogue is more subtle, more akin to Loughlin's eucharistic understanding of consuming the Scriptures so that *their stories become part of the contemporary church and thereby forms that community better to read them and to engage with the kingdom*.¹⁵⁶ The importance of worship in the setting forth of the Biblical texts as Scripture is also significant here, for this context not only identifies the texts as Scripture but, as we noted in chapter 3, conforms the church to become more adequately the competent reader required by these texts as Scripture.¹⁵⁷ This further segregates Hauerwas' approach to Scripture from the liberal attempt to reduce these texts to the same status as all other texts.

viii) Captivity to a Pragmatic View of Truth?

Having sought to argue that Hauerwas is able to transcend the above criticisms of the employment of narrative in his project, the question of truthfulness continues to trouble Hauerwas' critics. Without advocating a pragmatic notion

¹⁵⁵ Loughlin (1996), p.21.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp 225-43.

¹⁵⁷ See Ricoeur's comments on sacred and mundane stories in *Figuring the Sacred*, p.244

of truth, Hauerwas appears to hold to one which rejects a substantive metaphysical understanding of truth in favour of one generated through the performance of life informed by a narrative whose truthful credentials are correlative to the character of the journey it has exhibited through its tradition. Like Lindbeck, this approach seems to defer judgement upon correspondence theories of truth, preferring instead to establish the necessary criteria for truth to emerge, such as intrasystemic coherence, character of life, memory through tradition, dialogical argument, openness to the alien or transcendent and a projected destiny which enables pilgrims to continue on in a manner that displays them as agents rather than minions of fate.

To what extent, therefore, is Hauerwas' narrative approach simply an aesthetic narrative of a particular religious society? Can he establish the truth of his approach once he has rejected correlational and verification models which depend upon the sort of rationalistic or positivist foundationalism that he rejects? Is Hauerwas guilty of resting content with readings which are 'on' and 'in front of' the text in his rebellion against modernity's preoccupation with singular historical truth behind the text? We have noted in chapter 3 the way Frei and Barth in particular believe that truthfulness is more about the story sense and what sort of world the Scriptures open up, rather than the attempt to ground Christian practice in a reconstructed historical tale, in which the character of the Scriptures is subverted through their reduction to resources for 'historical facts' rather than being respected for their proper nature.¹⁵⁸ Yet this

¹⁵⁸ In 'History as Fate: How Justification by Faith Became Anthropology (and History) in America', Hauerwas refuses to accept that history, understood in liberal thought, as a

approach simply appears to reverse the Enlightenment separation of literary meaning from truth. The latter equated truth with historical truth. The former sees in meaning and its illuminatory capacity the proper approach to the truthfulness of the stories. Their performative value, when combined with their intrasystematic coherence, the consistent way in which they have been read by the community whose identity is dialectically related to them and their unsurpassability in responding to challenges from outside their internally indicated script, are seen as indicative of the plausibility of these narratives. In short whilst liberal thought supposed truth to be behind the text, post-liberal thought has tended to doubt the security of this approach and therefore to concentrate reading on and in front of the text.¹⁵⁹

Yet, as Thiselton comments, in reaction to the arrogance of positivist historiography, a purely literary approach can lose touch with the lifeworld of the texts, or stories, rendering them vulnerable to contemporary co-option.¹⁶⁰ Indeed contemporary historiographical debates recognise that history is not the past ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen’ (von Ranke), but rather is distinguished from fiction not through being able to map its narrative onto the past, but *in its accountability to the documentary and archaeological evidence upon which its narrative draws*. Historical conclusions are disciplined by the evidence in a way not required by fiction. Certainly truth proves itself in relationships over time as

progressive anthropocentric epic, can be entertained by Christians committed to an eschatology which rejects such a sense of controlled destiny. This sort of history is hubris. Only ‘when our sense of history reflects our eschatology rather than history becoming the form our eschatological convictions take’ will an appropriate history be possible. In *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 32-47.

¹⁵⁹ Cf the discussion on Frei in chapter 3 especially *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, p 223

¹⁶⁰ Thiselton (1992), p.557.

Thiselton argues and Thiemann's *Revelation and Theology* seeks to display¹⁶¹ Hence tradition is essential in establishing truthfulness in the way Gadamer asserted.¹⁶² Indeed it is this sedimentation that allows communities to assert with confidence that the narratives they represent are truth bearing and able to withstand the deconstructionist critique of those who argue for perpetual deferment of meaning. Nevertheless it is this respect for the otherness of the tradition and the Scriptures embedded within it, that prevents the real Christ from becoming simply the imagined Christ of contemporary needs.

Whilst, as we have seen, Hauerwas accepts the place of the historical critical approach within the broad quest for discerning the truth of the Christian story, *his primary location of truthfulness is within the contemporary practices of the Christian community and its proleptic witness to the End*. These, whilst important, could be supplemented with more explanation about the way the provisional findings of the historical sciences inform the way the narrative is developed. Otherwise aesthetic readings swallow up everything and Habermas' constriction of religion under the category of the aesthetic cannot be escaped. Truthfulness can simply speak of consistency with the assumptions of a narrative. In this sense fiction can be spoken of as truthful in terms of the world it opens up relative to the story it tells, perhaps akin to the way the categories of myth and legend are used. However whilst the Bible, as Frei has made clear, cannot be expected to conform to anachronistic criteria of modern

¹⁶¹ Thiselton (1995), pp. 34-38. 'Truth proves itself in relationships and thus has personal character'.

¹⁶² See chapter 2.

historiography and the analogy of a loosely configured novel is a useful one, the sense that some stories in the Scriptures purport to reflect actual events, rather than simply being 'history-like', demands a respect for this dimension and a consequent quest for the historical truth.

viii) Captivity to Narrative Structuralism?

Further to the above, *the polyvalency of narrative* also cautions too swift a correlation between narrative as a descriptive category and the way God's story is told. It may indeed be true that it is the overall pattern of the story which has narrative form, but Thiselton is correct to criticise Frei in particular for too univocal a use of narrative in his studies of the Bible.¹⁶³ As Ricoeur points out law transforms stories into instruction, prophecy projects the new through reflection upon the old, liturgy repositions narrative in a new context and theology, through explicating meaning from embryonic and immanent thought of the narrative, then adds to the content and understanding of those very narratives.¹⁶⁴ That Hauerwas is aware of such insights can be seen in the variety of narrative styles he uses or advocates. In particular his use of sermons, essays, lectures and his advocacy of novels, recognises that different contexts demand that the narrative be used in different ways. The lifeworld context of the local church gathered in worship requires a contingent and contextual address which cannot properly be transferred into another context without loss. The essay or lecture form, with its more abstract and general approach allows the narrative to be developed in what Habermas' calls the

¹⁶³ Thiselton (1992), p.557.

¹⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 245-46.

system context, without losing a recognition of contingency and provisionality as intrinsic to the project in a way systematic tracts can seem to miss. As Wells points out, these narrative forms are inherently dialogical inviting debate and hence offering opportunity for friendship.¹⁶⁵ Similarly Hauerwas realises that narrative and theology are not identical and that theology, though parasitic upon the practices of the ecclesial community and its immanent narrative, does more than simply reiterate that narrative. As he himself has displayed, part of a theologians role is to liberate features of the narrative tradition that are easily lost sight of by a complacent church. In this way he not only seeks to aid the regulation of the tradition, but gives space for others within and without to raise questions about the character of the ecclesial story.

ix) Captivity to Totalitarianism?

It is with the question of power that this theological role has engaged Hauerwas most acutely and much of chapter 5 will endeavour to articulate the way Hauerwas understands the place of power in the politics of ecclesial living. As we have seen in his criticism of Millbank Hauerwas is committed to a peaceable narrative, especially given the totalitarian potential of meta-narratives and the powerful role not only of the historic author, but also of the contemporary articulator.¹⁶⁶ In particular his recognition that the Parousia has not yet arrived in full acts as a check on totalitarian pretensions of ecclesial narratives. Likewise, as we have already asserted, Hauerwas expects a diversity

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Wells, 'Review of *Wilderness Wanderings*', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 11-2 (1998), p.122.

¹⁶⁶ For a powerful critique of the way some postmodernist theologians employ occult meta-narratives to subvert their opponents see Thiselton (1995), pp. 111-17.

in the telling of the many sided tale of God's ways with the world which will be focalised in ways that are not always consistent with each other. Indeed the very intensity of Hauerwas' hostility to what he sees as liberalism's totalitarian and closed narrative indicates a resistance to replacing one kind with another. *The story of God is ultimately imperialistic, but this must await the Parousia rather than be premised of a contingent ecclesial narrative, particularly one premised on peaceableness.*

Hence the witness of gestures and tactics are more consistent with this understanding of the actions of a free church than violence and strategies. This also gives space for the integrity of the world as well as humility to the church and prevents his project from subverting the 'otherness' of the world. Respect for this 'otherness' is still required before the Parousia. It also gives hope to the world, for its destiny is displayed through the narrative embodied in the practices of an eschatologically focused church. In short the stories of the world become history through being included in God's story.¹⁶⁷

4:15 Summary

As we sought to demonstrate through our exposition of his writings, Hauerwas' project and the way it is expressed do display a consistency that some of his critics have not been prepared to recognise. Narrative enables Hauerwas to articulate his conviction that God's story is a timeful one and his lecture, essay and sermon forms reflect the contingent character of a thinker on

¹⁶⁷ Loughlin (1996), p.84.

a journey as yet unfinished. Whilst additional attention to certain aspects of his use of narrative would strengthen his proposals, the way he employs narrative does carry forward the project and many of the criticisms, such as his sectarianism, his aestheticism, his closet foundationalism, his socio-pragmatism, do not sufficiently respect the breadth of his endeavours. Certainly, as Rufus Black has noted, Hauerwas might additionally attend to the way the visual arts and especially icons, function within and beyond the ecclesial community as bearers of God's Story.¹⁶⁸ However that narrative is pivotal to the articulation and display of Christian freedom is clear. In particular Hauerwas' use of narrative repositions the local ecclesial community as a theological resource since its distinctive narrative is necessarily part of the great epic of God's Story. Hence theological reflection upon the narratives carried by local ecclesial communities is needed to complement the more generalising reflections that look at 'thinner' dimensions of being church. This will open up an interesting and novel way of describing Hauerwas' ecclesiology as a distinctively Christian expression of liberation theology as we shall see in chapter 5.

¹⁶⁸ 'Towards an Ecumenical Ethic' p.137.

Chapter 5

An Ecclesiology of Liberation: The Politics of Christian Freedom?

Section I: Theology, Politics and Liberation

Our engagement with Hauerwas has suggested a distinctively Christian theology of liberation from the Enlightenment Project as an architecture for his project. This is surprising since Hauerwas' explicit engagement with 'Liberation Theology' is generally critical.

To make the metaphor of liberation central or overriding as a description of the nature of Christian existence, as is done in much liberation theology, is a mistake, given the background of much of our recent intellectual and political history [...] the distinctive witness of the church can be unwittingly lost. Why rely on the church when you can depend on the courage of Kant?¹

However it will be our contention that Hauerwas has discerned in his critique of liberal theology and through his attention to the distinctively embodied narrative of the church, a more truthful understanding of Christian liberation, whose agenda is rooted not in the debates of eighteenth century Enlightenment anthropology, but in an understanding of Christian freedom which embodies Christological peaceableness.

¹ *After Christendom*, p.55.

This chapter will therefore seek to explore the way Hauerwas' ecclesiology develops and sustains this architecture. The first section will note how Hauerwas has explicitly responded to liberation theology as a subset of political theology and why he believes this tradition remains captive to the Enlightenment legacy. The second section will attempt to delineate the way Hauerwas' project offers an ecclesial politics of liberation whose character escapes such captivity and yet represents a distinctively Christian interpretation of themes addressed by the Liberation Theology he criticises, such as power, prophecy, the relationship of church and state, the epistemological privilege of the marginal, the significance of the ordinary, the place of base communities, ecological concerns, the materiality of faith and the contextual character of liberation. The third section will interrogate the plausibility of Hauerwas' ecclesiology of emancipation enabling us in the final section to assess whether we have adequately sustained our thesis.

5.1 Liberation Theology: A Theology of Incarceration?

Hauerwas' explicit engagement with Liberation Theology is relatively limited, though sufficient to expose the heart of his disagreement with this tradition. An early example, as we saw in chapter 1, is the essay 'The Non Resistant Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder'.² Here Hauerwas concurs with Yoder's assertion that Liberation Theology ironically remains wedded to the premises of Christendom, which include the convictions that the church should be part of the hegemonic elite and can legitimately employ violence to that end. The only difference between the old and new Christendom models is that this

² in *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 197-221.

new elite, in Marxist terms, is the proletariat, rather than the feudal or bourgeois classes. This need to rule contrasts with the peaceableness of Jesus that Yoder and Hauerwas, as his disciple, believe cannot countenance. In addition, Hauerwas criticises the simple positivist equation of the interests of the poor with the agenda of Christian ethics. Again, echoes of liberal theology's quest to be relevant to contemporary causes concerns Hauerwas.³

A similar challenge is made to Paul Lehmann as a North American theologian of revolution. For Hauerwas Lehmann displays a naïve optimism in the benevolent possibilities of revolutions, ignoring Niebuhr's insights about the ubiquity of sin and the totalitarian potential of violence. In contrast, Hauerwas believes that the Gospels locate the achievement of God's kingdom in His hands, thereby revealing a more radical hope than that offered by Lehmann's liberal anthropocentricity.⁴

In 'The Politics of Charity',⁵ as we also noted in chapter 1, Hauerwas challenges Liberation Theology's ambivalence about charity, an ambivalence rooted in its commitment to the social reality of the Gospel and structural social change, rather than simply mitigating the symptoms of the problematic status quo. Once again, Hauerwas argues that this actually legitimises violence and coercive power as part of the Christian agenda, not simply in the willingness of protagonists, such as Camillo Torres, to advocate violence, but

³ *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 214-21.

⁴ 'Review Essay of Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics: The Presence and Power of Jesus of Nazareth in and over Human Affairs*', *World View*, 18/12 (1975), pp. 45-48

⁵ *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 132-46.

also in its consequentialist and utilitarian use of effectiveness as a critical tool and in its understanding of rationality as fundamentally instrumental.⁶ Yet, Hauerwas argues, by this criterion, Christ himself would have been a failure. Similarly equating the suffering of the poor as a sociological reality with the particular suffering consequent upon discipleship is to confuse categories and to undermine the distinctiveness of the church yet further. Hauerwas' view is that the church is not intended to make right triumph, but to make the story of Israel and Jesus their story, a story which displays peaceableness without concern about effectiveness, since it knows that the destiny of the world is already determined. There is a fundamentally different understanding of the character, place and role of power exhibited in this interchange. For Hauerwas 'the church is that community that trusts the power of truth and charity and thus does not depend on any further power'.⁷

This contention that much Liberation Theology is but another expression of liberal theology is evident in Hauerwas' essay 'Some Theological Reflections on Gutiérrez's Use of 'Liberation' as a Theological Concept'.⁸ In particular Gutiérrez's discussion of the use of the term 'liberation' to replace the term 'salvation' receives severe challenge, given the heritage of the former in modernist thought. It carries with it notions of autonomy, self creation and freedom from suffering and servitude, which are rooted in Kant rather than the

⁶ Ibid., pp. 132-33.

⁷ Ibid., p.141.

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Some Theological Reflections on Gutiérrez's Use of 'Liberation' as a Theological Concept', *Modern Theology*, 3/1 (1986), pp. 67-76. Quotations from this paper appear in chapter 2 of *After Christendom*, pp. 45-68 where the liberal use of the universal justice is deconstructed.

Christian story. This is at odds with the Gospel for 'the salvation promised there is not a life free from suffering, free from servitude, but rather a life that freely suffers, that freely serves',⁹ and the sort of freedom promised is that freedom which challenges the self absorption precisely stimulated by Kantian notions of liberation. Further to this, Hauerwas contrasts Gutiérrez's *Theology of Liberation* with the work of R.H. Tawney, in order to expose the abstract nature of the former's use of the term liberation and the necessity for it to be disciplined by an account of the inherent relationship between liberation and power contextually discerned.¹⁰ Thus, in contrast to the abstract generalisations of Gutiérrez's approach, Hauerwas identifies with Tawney's insight that it is only as we gain a purchase on the particular forms of oppression present in a given situation, that any project of liberation can be suggested. Such a particular purchase cannot come by deduction from a presumed universal, but only by being part of a story that enables us to name injustices as we encounter them and imagine ways of particular liberating service not dominance. In short it requires that we be part of a formative community whose narrative informs how we see and freely serve.

Such an ambivalence about the possibility of employing abstract metaphysical universals, such as justice, truth, equality etc. to resource a theological critical theory, also separates Hauerwas from the feminist liberation theologian Gloria Albrecht. Albrecht's concern is that Hauerwas' church represents a magisterial and authoritarian mediation of truth, thereby failing to recognise the corrupted

⁹ Ibid., p.69.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

character of the tradition and ignoring the voices of those who have been marginalised by that very tradition. In her view Hauerwas fails to deconstruct the power-dynamics of his church, not least those presented in his own powerful social and intellectual position. For Albrecht, therefore, the very character of the ecclesial community is the problematic rather than the resource for constructive retrieval, and hence inter-communal conversation akin to that suggested by Habermas, is vital to expurgate such hidden power discrepancies.¹¹

Hauerwas, though, refuses to accept that the critical theory project can be sustained using the resources of liberal thought. Instead, he believes that the resources for such intra-ecclesial critical debate reside within the richness of the Christian tradition, which includes those voices which Albrecht fears his approach would silence. The very practices of the church, whilst they may on occasion have been oppressive, hold within themselves retrievable resources for the subversion of such abuse. As he comments 'such claims of injustice work against the background of a community that believes we are called to be holy'.¹² For Hauerwas it is the church as an arguing, storied community listening to its extensive constituency, that is the context for discovering the resources for a properly emancipatory destiny.

Thus Hauerwas finds these expressions of Liberation Theology, despite their critique of western theological approaches, still enthralled to assumptions

¹¹ Albrecht, 'In Good Company', pp. 218-27..

¹² 'Failure of Communication', p.235.

rooted in Enlightenment thought and in Constantinianism. They only partially break free from the liberal tradition. He and Willimon write 'for us much of liberation theology (particularly that of North American theologians) is the last gasp of the old liberal naïveté wedded to newer strategies of governmental coercion'.¹³ In contrast, when Hauerwas deals with the 'Black Theology' of Martin Luther King, he is able to disassociate the latter from liberal theology precisely because it was not the ideals of liberalism which directed King's agenda. Instead his

liberalism was always subservient to his embeddedness in the black church and the memory of his people that that church embodies. King could confidently appeal to liberal sentiment because he was a black Baptist preacher who could never be a liberal.¹⁴

The implication of this is to question the freedom of other forms of Black Theology from the assumptions of the Enlightenment Project.

Nevertheless, whilst Hauerwas is strongly critical of this unreflective captivity, he is not antagonistic to the creative insights that have emerged from the contexts of this tradition. In certain ways these insights challenge dimensions of the Enlightenment Project, even if they do not address the most radical problems in the way Hauerwas tries to do. Indeed he and Willimon comment 'like those who formulate liberation theology we find ourselves looking toward

¹³ 'Embarrassed by God's Presence', *The Christian Century*, 102/4 (Jan 30th 1985), 98-100 (p.100).

¹⁴ 'Remembering Martin Luther King Jr. Remembering', *Wilderness Wanderings*, p.229

the Third World',¹⁵ In contrast he notes how the absence of attention by Reinhold Niebuhr, Ramsey and Gustafson to the contexts informing their theology has led to their being ignored by contemporary Liberation Theologians. Hence, Hauerwas' own project has many affinities with the concerns of Liberation Theology.¹⁶ His concern with formation, though distinctive, echoes the critical attention to context as a way of challenging an uncritical universalism in liberal thought evident in Liberation Theology.¹⁷ Hauerwas' ambivalence about ideas taking priority over practices finds resonance with Segundo's work on ideology and Croatto's on events, as attempts to escape the post-Enlightenment pre-occupation with solitary consciousness.¹⁸ The role of praxis in epistemology, as Croatto and Boff indicate, has affinities with Hauerwas' emphasis upon practices and performance as exposers of truthful living rather than simply ideas.¹⁹ Release from oppression, though focused in different ways, is nevertheless central to

¹⁵ 'Embarrassed by God's Presence', p.100.

¹⁶ For a comparison between an exponent of Liberation Theology and Hauerwas see the unpublished doctoral thesis of Lap Yan Kung, 'Christian Discipleship Today', p.379, 414. Kung's conclusion is that Hauerwas concentrates upon the discipleship *of* the kingdom, whereas Sobrino, and, by implication, other Liberation Theologians, concentrate on discipleship *for* the kingdom. Hauerwas is therefore more concerned with redemption, whereas Sobrino focuses upon creation. Nevertheless both are united in their ambivalence about abstract theology of an academic or fundamentalist sort. They seek to articulate a "people's theology", albeit in quite different ways. For an introduction to Third World Theologies included in this category see Theo Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun. An Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World* (London: SCM, 1985). For a recent survey and introduction to Liberation Theology see Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and for a critical analysis of Liberation Theology see A.F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics. Towards an Assessment* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989).

¹⁷ See for example Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1974), p.91. See James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), p.60. See Juan L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976) pp. 7-8.

¹⁸ Segundo, pp. 102-20. J. Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), pp. 10-30.

¹⁹ Croatto, p.3. See Boff's criticism of Hans Küng in this regard in Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM, 1985), p.109.

their respective projects²⁰ as is the significance, theologically, of the local gathering of Christians, the congregations or the base communities of the church, reflecting the priority of sociality as opposed to the autonomous individual of liberal thought.²¹ The importance of attending to the marginal, expressed in the rhetoric of Liberation Theology as the epistemological privilege of the poor,²² also emerges as a common though distinctively worked theme, along with the importance of popular theology, or theology of the ordinary, consciousness raising and the primary accountability of the oppressed to their principal community.²³ These critique the notion of singular perspective articulated in post-Kantian ethics. Similarly the commitment to a more tangible expression of the Kingdom of God, albeit more ecclesially and pacifically focused in Hauerwas, is in contrast to the docetism they find themselves encountering in much liberal theology.²⁴

From this superficial comparison of themes we can see that another thesis could be written substantively comparing and contrasting the work of Liberation Theologians with Hauerwas' project. However, what we have sought to establish so far is that, for all their common concerns, what fundamentally separates them is their relationship to the anthropocentricity of the Enlightenment Project. The legacy of the 'integralist revolution' affirmed by Vatican II, with its commitment to the ubiquity of grace in all creation.

²⁰ See Moltmann's restriction of Liberation Theology to those dealing with oppression in Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 2000), pp. 183-88.

²¹ Boff, pp. 7, 60, 61, 108-30. Croatto, p. 6.

²² Gutiérrez, p. 114.

²³ Cone, pp. 7, 38.

²⁴ Gutiérrez, pp. 230-31 and Segundo, p. 143.

rendered Liberation Theologians complacent to the infection of post-Enlightenment a-theistic ways of construing reality without the formative and critical influence of Christian worship.²⁵ For Hauerwas' the latter is essential for 'we must take the risk of appearing prophetic just to the extent we learn to trust in the good life God has given us through worship and discipleship'.²⁶

5.2 Theological Politics Not Political Theology

Given Hauerwas' conviction that this Liberation Theology, for all its insights, fails to escape the shackles of this Enlightenment pathology, we need to see whether Hauerwas' project presents a form of politics which avoids this problem. Arne Rasmusson's comparison and contrasting of Moltmann and Hauerwas in *The Church as Polis* offers an occasion for this. 'Political Theology' initially represented the attempt by Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann to respond to the apparent victory of secularism and the marginalisation of religion in the 60s. The initial agenda of such political theology was to continue the dialogue with an explicitly dominant modernity but now with an apologetic agenda clearly present. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr scarcely discuss the need to reclaim what modernity had appropriated. To them the churches still appeared a powerful constituency within their society.²⁷ However for the political theologians, particularly in the European context, critical mediation aiming at keeping the church relevant to modern life seemed even more important given the historical relationship between church

²⁵ See Milbank (1990), pp. 206-45.

²⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Many Hands Working: A Response to Charles Mathewes', *The Anglican Theological Review*, 82/2 (2000), 361-64 (p.363).

²⁷ See Hauerwas' comments in 'Christian Ethics in America and the JRE', p.72

and society in Europe. As Arne Rasmusson notes, in their approach 'the modern project understood as a demystification of nature and a concomitant humanisation of the world, was (to be) interpreted in terms of Christian eschatology'.²⁸

Since the attention of this project was now the human community, rather than the cosmos, these theologians sought to argue that society could be changed in the light of God's future and their initial hope for change sought to benefit from the insights of Marxist sociology integrated with radical theology. Nevertheless the social location of these thinkers and their idealist approach provoked scepticism, especially from those theologians working in the Latin American context. Increasingly here attention was directed to the explication of the practices of base communities, in a way that has affinities with Hauerwas' articulation of ecclesial embodiment as the crucial display of Christian theology.²⁹

Arne Rasmusson contrasts Moltmann's political theology with the theological politics of Hauerwas, whose roots lie in the Radical Reformation tradition of the church as an alternative society rather than as one seeking to act in the vanguard of a society bereft of a common theological metanarrative. Whilst he notes that both emphasise the practical nature of Christian living, the social and

²⁸ A. Rasmusson, p.12.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 13-14. For a discussion of this 'second stage' development in South American Liberation Theology see the article by Juan L. Segundo, 'The Shift within Latin American Theology', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (1985) p.17.

political nature of salvation, a strong eschatological perspective including the pivotal nature of church peace, the Bible as a critical subversive memory, a critique of society and established churches and the need for a post-Constantinian church, visible in base communities as signs of the kingdom, their respective theologies are very different.³⁰ As we have already seen, Hauerwas rejects any accommodation with the liberal tradition. Moltmann, according to Rasmusson, begins with a greater confidence in such a conversation, although his later work appears to draw closer to the Radical Reformation tradition, particularly in his articulation of an alternative, embodied ecclesiology.³¹ For Rasmusson Moltmann's political theology has in fact, left the church further marginalised and represents the church of the left-wing activist, in sharp contrast to the majority of churchgoers. This loss of the bulk of the church further minimises the effectiveness of this political theology's call to redescribe society in theological terms, since its interlocutors represent such a tiny minority of even the churches.³² Mediating or correlational theology movements therefore suffer both at the hands of an increasingly sceptical society and at the hands of disenfranchised and perplexed churchgoers. In addition, Moltmann's use of categories such as 'the poor', 'democracy', 'freedom' and 'justice' whilst given theological rationale, remain attendant on

³⁰ In his later work, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM 1992), pp. 199-203, Moltmann draws closer to Hauerwas in recognising that activism as such is inadequate. Character is important if action is to be properly focused. This perhaps reflects Moltmann trying to come to terms with the dangers of escapist activism legitimised by his earlier work.

³¹ A. Rasmusson, p.27.

³² Ibid., p.150.

modernity for their fundamental intelligibility and universal acclaim.³³ Indeed 'Moltmann sees a deep historical and systematic continuity between the Christian faith and the Enlightenment',³⁴ even though he becomes increasingly critical of its negative dialectics in the 1980s.

Consequently Arne Rasmusson concludes that Moltmann's church cannot survive since it has no distinctive resources to protect its integrity from the acidic assault of secular reason, with its increasingly deconstructive orientation.³⁵ In contrast, faced in the present not with the responsibility to Christianise society, but rather to enable the church to witness to the kingdom, Hauerwas' political theology seems a more plausible option to Rasmusson than that of Moltmann.

A church with a strong sense of community, living with a tradition and practices that partly stand apart from the dominating stories, traditions and practices of modernity (as a contrast society), might have a larger ability (because of a different 'grid') and the social space to see modern society from other perspectives, and to form and sustain different ways of thinking and living.³⁶

³³ Ibid., pp. 117-20. For examples of this in Moltmann see Jürgen Moltmann, *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present* (London: SPCK, 1971), p.14 and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977), p.xvi.

³⁴ A. Rasmusson, p.96.

³⁵ This is even the case when Moltmann and Hauerwas share a recognition of the pivotal role of the local congregation and its role as a community of peace. See *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 291,94 and *The Spirit of Life*, pp. 236-40.

³⁶ A. Rasmusson, p.373.

Thus, according to Rasmusson, Hauerwas' ecclesiology offers a display of salvation that transcends the limitations of Moltmann's Political Theology. It escapes enthrallment to the dominant ideology of western society and thereby provides space for a distinctive expression of Christian freedom. Rasmusson's thesis anticipates Moltmann's more recent work, with its explicit endorsement of Liberation Theology and Moltmann's attempt to do theology in a way attendant to its challenges. However, even here, Moltmann remains committed to notions of the public relevance of theology which Hauerwas could claim assume too great a continuity between liberal thought and the Christian church.³⁷

5:3 Summary

In this section we have sought to show how Hauerwas' engagement and comparison with protagonists of Liberation Theology and Political Theology has raised questions about the latter's freedom from the legacy of the Enlightenment. In contrast, we have used Rasmusson's thesis to note how Hauerwas finds Christian freedom through the theological politics offered him by the Radical Reformation tradition. His distinctively Christian Theology of Liberation from the Enlightenment and for a peaceable display of the reign of God is parasitic upon this tradition as we shall note in the next section.

³⁷ See Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevant of Theology* (London: SCM 1997) and *Experiences in Theology*, op. cit.

Section II: Hauerwas' Project: An Ecclesial Politics of Liberation

5:3 Liberation of the Church from and for the World

Having seen how Hauerwas deconstructs the emancipatory claims of a number of liberation and political theologians we shall now seek to show how his ongoing reflections offer a distinctively Christian liberation from the Enlightenment through his theological politics which, as we have seen, develop Yoder's Anabaptist Theology.³⁸ This involves a two-fold dynamic which seeks first to liberate the church from its enslavement to agendas intrinsically alien to its character, and secondly, to restore the church to be a free agent of the kingdom appropriate to the salvation of the cosmos to which it witnesses.³⁹

Thus, for Hauerwas, liberation starts not with the liberation of humankind, or with the cosmos, but with the liberation of the church, since, as we have seen, it is only as the church recovers her distinctive identity and freedom that she can truthfully display the freedom of the Gospel. Such a recovery of the integrity of the church is arguably the possibility for the liberation of all that

³⁸ John H. Yoder's Christological politics appears in his earliest work and infuses his whole project, representing an exploration of the eschatology of the Radical Reformation tradition of which the Mennonites are a part. Key formative essays are 'The Political Axioms of the Sermon on the Mount' and 'If Christ is Truly Lord', in John H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution, Essays in Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971), pp. 34-52, 55-88, whilst the subtlety of his pacifism is clear in John H. Yoder, *Nevertheless, The Varieties of Religious Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971), his 'magnus opus', John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) and John H. Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution, A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart: Bentham, 1983). His ecclesiology is developed in John H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom, Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984) and in M.C. Cartwright, ed., *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). A sympathetic Festschrift from admirers is Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds, *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

comprises the world, for, as we noted in chapter 1, it is as the church acts as a contrast that the world becomes aware of its true identity and is then in a position to respond to the emancipation of God's grace, tangibly expressed in the practices of the church. Unless this missiological strategy takes place, the world remains incarcerated in false 'liberations' and the church likewise contributes to that enthralled state.

5:4 Liberation as the Peace of the Church

The principal way in which Hauerwas' emancipatory ecclesiology is displayed is through his espousal of Yoder's Christological peaceableness as the distinctive form of ecclesial pacifism.⁴⁰ This inevitably raises many questions about how such a peaceableness can address issues of conflict and war, the place, character and use of power, the state and its relationship to the church, the violent character of much in the Christian tradition and the sustainability of his reading of the eschatological tradition, particularly in terms of the era of the Spirit.

In *Against the Nations* Hauerwas therefore seeks to display how the church is to be liberated from its captivity to the liberal conception of the nation state especially as the latter uses the violence of war both to resource its hegemony and to dissolve the politics of the church. In selecting this title for the

⁴⁰ Hauerwas' principal exegetical resource for this position is the Sermon on the Mount. As he comments in 'Living the Proclaimed Reign of God: A Sermon on the Sermon on the Mount', *Interpretation*, 47/2 (April 1993), 152-57 (p.153), 'you cannot read the Sermon on the Mount unless you are a pacifist [...] the Sermon on the Mount constitutes and is constituted by a community that has learned that to live in this manner requires learning to trust in others to help me so live'.

compilation, Hauerwas is implying that before the church can be for the nations, it must unmask the hubris of the contemporary nation state, especially of America. This involves, as we saw in chapters 2 and 3, a refusal to accept the epistemological premises of liberal thought, which Hauerwas believes sustain the present expression of the nation state in liberal societies. Thus in the introduction to *Against the Nations*, Hauerwas has to subvert the confidence of his liberal critics when they accuse him of sectarianism, fideism, tribalism and social withdrawal. These fail to recognise that Hauerwas 'has no interest in legitimating and/or recommending a withdrawal of Christians or the church from social or political affairs. I simply want them to be there as Christians'.⁴¹ What he wishes to do is to break the Constantinian myth reiterated by liberal thought, that there is a strong continuity between church and society. Only thus can the proper context for the performance of Christian living take place.

Hence

to recover a sense of how Christian convictions may be true
(or false) requires a recovery of the independence of the
church from its subservience to liberal culture and its
corresponding agencies of the state. For without the
distinctive community we call the church, there is no place
for the imagination of Christians to flourish if we are to

⁴¹ *Against the Nations*, p.1. See also Stanley Hauerwas, 'On the Right to be Tribal', *Christian Scholars Review*, 16/3 (1987), 238-241 (p.241), where he asserts 'the church is open to the story of the tribe as part of and contributing to the ongoing story of the people who call themselves Christian for [...] God is there in the tribe helping us understand what it means to share our particularist stories as members of God's people'. In this way tribalism actually reflects liberty and truthfulness, whereas the homogenising ideals of liberal societies destroy distinctiveness and thereby facilitate social control.

sustain our ability to be a people of peace in a war
determined world.⁴²

Such emancipation from liberal culture and the liberal state, does not imply social sectarianism.⁴³ Rather once again, the disassociation of church from state actually reverses the charge, for the church is not as sectarian as the nation state since it exists across the nations and, in consequence of the pacifism Hauerwas espouses, should not fracture itself to sustain the self-interest of the warring state.⁴⁴ For Hauerwas the key to displaying peace to the world lies first in refusing to succumb to the strategies of the nation state, whose constitution he believes to be intrinsically violent and whose control of the church renders the latter simply a purveyor of an impotent ethical ethos. Such violence is rooted in the absence of any ontology of social integration intrinsic to liberal anthropology, with the consequent need to achieve cohesion through the imposition of power, either as social manipulation or by the common cause of war. The captivity of the church within such liberal societies fails to recognise this occluded fascism with its consequent corruption of the imaginative possibilities for peaceable living attendant to the distinctive practices of the ecclesial community. Hence for Hauerwas 'the church's social ethic is first and

⁴² *Against the Nations*, pp. 6-7.

⁴³ This distinction is made clear in his arguments with Miscamble and Quirk in 'Will the Real Sectarian Stand Up!', p.87. He returns to the same argument in the introduction to *Christian Existence Today*, p.11, in reply to the criticisms of James Gustafson. There he writes 'The issue is how the church can provide the interpretative categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation'.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

foremost found in its ability to sustain a people who are not at home in the liberal presuppositions of our civilization and society'.⁴⁵

Without such an identifiable and imaginative community, the intrinsic violence of liberal social orders is displaced either into international conflict, or into counter-cultural groups, such as that of Jonestown. In the latter mass suicide reflected the absence of imaginative resources for the sustenance of a peaceable community within liberal society and the consequent capture of such a community by a fascist leader. Despite their expressions of horror, liberal critics offer no liberating response to this phenomenon, since it simply reflects the intrinsically violent dynamics of liberal social orders, which subvert alternative communities such as the church, and thereby remove any tangible exemplars of peaceable living. Fascism, which seeks to establish social unity around a notion of singular authority, exercised as naked power, is an offspring of the deserted spaces of liberal polity, and exhibits the latter's violent ontology as it dissolves difference through authoritarian homogeneity. Hence the holocaust becomes the symbol, for Hauerwas, of the logic of liberal politics. War, fascism, the nation state, the nuclear bomb and even contemporary forms of democracy are all relative to the violent politics of liberalism with its pretensions to universalism and its willingness to require of its citizens that they be ready to kill and be killed defending its continuation.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.65. In a later article, Stanley Hauerwas, 'Christianity: it's not a Religion, it's an Adventure', *U.S Catholic*, 56/6 (January 1991), 6-13 (p.9). Hauerwas notes the paradox of liberal democratic orders which can elect someone such as Hitler. See also *After Christendom*, p.33. In William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, with Scott C. Sage, *Lord Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp 98-99, he notes a further paradox that 'democracies are every bit as murderous as

This also explains why Hauerwas remains ambivalent about contemporary forms of pacifism which draw their agenda from survivalist strategies and forms of the Just War Theory. They remain wedded to notions of human control and survival which are antithetical to the eschatological realities introduced through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. They also fail to recognise that war is both a moral and rational enterprise correlative to the liberal polity.⁴⁷ War is about an understanding of history which presumes various moral goods relative to the ends for which the nation state exists. War gives liberal polities meaning by providing them with a story and tradition by which to recognise themselves. Otherwise nation states are simply a collective of self-interested parties liable at any time to engender war among themselves.⁴⁸ Hence for Hauerwas, war becomes the hubristic attempt by the human community to supply its own eschatology. The victory of Christ's cross, which Christians proclaim to be the means by which Christ has become Lord of history and has defeated the powers that presume to reign, is ignored.⁴⁹ War is therefore a symbol, par excellence, of what it means to be 'the world'.

Thus even that Augustinian articulation of the Just War theory advocated by Paul Ramsey, which attempted to discipline the pragmatism of Reinhold

dictatorships, in defending themselves. The crime rate in the United States suggests that our modern democracy, by making each of us kings, gods unto ourselves, has devised a uniquely violent form of government'. Similarly, as we noted in chapter 2, in liberal polities, medicine takes on a violent hue as compassion elides into killing, and cure replaces care as medicine's primary *raison d'être*. See also *Dispatches*, p. 164.

⁴⁷ *Against the Nations*, pp. 149, 170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85. As Hauerwas later comments in *Christians Among the Virtues*, p. 163, America in particular has been given a common history and sense of meaning through war.

⁴⁹ 'A Pacifist Response to *In Defence of Creation*', *Asbury Theological Journal*, 41/2 (Fall 1986), 5-14 (p. 10).

Niebuhr with an explication of the command to love the innocent neighbour, is rejected on the grounds that it fails to live faithfully within the structures of the new aeon.⁵⁰ Instead of living in the peace of God, such views remain chained to the old aeon and are obliged to 'make the moral necessity of war serve human purposes'.⁵¹ They represent a peace without Christology or Eschatology, ignoring the ontological change initiated through the resurrection and the new eucharistic community of peace that has been inaugurated for Jew and Gentile alike.⁵² War therefore controls their destiny and the history of the state functions as their eschatological horizon.

This is especially so in the case of the nuclear bomb, for the bomb suggests that human beings have the power to bring about the end of the world on their own terms rather than on God's.⁵³ Thus Hauerwas notes that whilst Ramsey's challenge to Niebuhr's equation of peace with order, avoided an anarchic pragmatism, his proposals regarding the Just War discipline fail to deal adequately with the character of war in the modern era. First, Ramsey fails to

⁵⁰ *Against the Nations*, pp. 132, 163. See also *The Wisdom of the Cross*, p. 402 where Hauerwas argues against Ramsey and O'Donovan that non-violence has priority over questions of justice since, in their projects, the latter is actually a concept given ontological and epistemological priority over Christology.

⁵¹ *Against the Nations*, p. 192.

⁵² Stanley Hauerwas, 'Epilogue: A Pacifist Response to the Bishops', Paul Ramsey, ed., *Speak Up For Just War: A Critique of the United Methodist Pastoral Letter In Defence of Creation* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State Press, 1988), pp. 149-82 (pp. 153, 162). Hauerwas reiterates and develops this argument 'Can a Pacifist think about War?' There he asserts that history is God's secret, whose key has been proleptically disclosed in Christ's cross and resurrection. Thus the meaning of history is not given to human insight but only through this cross. Hence not only patience but a rejection of the Ramsey's view of war as statecraft justified by a mandate to protect the innocent is necessary if the church is to keep faith with this narrative about God's ways. *Dispatches*, p. 125.

⁵³ Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Need for an Ending', *Modern Churchman*, 27/3 (1986), 3-7 (p. 3). See also 'A Pacifist Response' op.cit., where Hauerwas argues that survivalist agendas promoted by mainstream churches are equivalent to practical atheism and underwrite a feeble notion of 'shalom'.

recognise the impossibility of a nuclear Just War, given its total and indiscriminating nature. Secondly he fails to recognise the contextual relativity of Just War assumptions, emerging as they do from a Christian pacifist tradition. Hence the justice assumed in the phrase 'Just War' is a form of Christian justice rather than a justice universally respected. Nations without a Christian heritage cannot therefore be expected to adhere to or included in the sort of Just War thinking advocated by Ramsey. Thirdly Ramsey fails to recognise how modern media techniques confuse the identification of the discriminatory criteria necessary to establish whether a particular war is just or not. Control of information and its manipulation renders it impossible to know what are the 'facts' of the case. Fourthly Ramsey fails to recognise the intrinsic connection between the moral argument and the character of the community which articulates it. In short, for Hauerwas the Just War Theory cannot bear the expectations placed upon it, leaving aside questions of whether Jesus' ethic was intended for more than simply individuals, as Hauerwas and Yoder assert it was.⁵⁴

For Hauerwas only Christological ecclesial pacifism can free the church to live faithfully within the reality of this new age even though the fullness of that age has yet to come.⁵⁵ Only through such peaceableness can the church fulfil its prophetic function and witness to the resurrection era, whereby God gives us a history which includes us and connects his creative agenda with the destiny of

⁵⁴ *Dispatches*, pp. 141-50

⁵⁵ *Against the Nations*, p.194.

the cosmos.⁵⁶ It cannot therefore be consequentialist or utilitarian in determining its success. Neither can it be deontological, for such peace is a gift which generates a character, rather than a rule or command to be obeyed. The liberation of the church is not something the church achieves but receives.⁵⁷

Hence

the church does not have something to say about war so much as the church *is* what God has said about war. The church does not have an alternative to war. The church is our alternative to war. That is why questions of the unity of the church should be our most urgent agenda.⁵⁸

Ecumenism therefore offers the greatest hope for world peace and reinforces the eschatological horizon within which Hauerwas situates both the church and the kingdom and which gives logic to his pacifism.

Focus must therefore be brought to bear not only on the eschatological fulfilment of the promise of the kingdom, but on the concrete ecclesial community established in its name. The kingdom of God is the hope of the people whom God has called out among all nations. The question of ecclesiology, therefore, precedes strategy for social action. Without the kingdom ideal, the church loses its identity forming hope; without the church the kingdom loses its concrete character. Once abstracted from the community it

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.196. See also *Christian Existence Today*, p.13.

⁵⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Pacifism: Some Philosophical Considerations', *Faith and Philosophy*, 2/2 (April 1985), 99-105 (pp. 101-02).

⁵⁸ *Against the Nations*, p.16.

presumes the kingdom ideal can be used to underwrite any conception of the just society.⁵⁹

The church, therefore, is to use the time of waiting between the Resurrection and the Parousia as a time for exciting peacemaking. In 'Peacemaking, the Virtue of the Church', Hauerwas argues that peacemaking is an ongoing and demanding way of being in the world which involves confrontation and disturbance, since the peace of Christ is the peace of truth not of rest.⁶⁰ It is the quality of life of a community who realise that they are forgiven and hence can remember the past without regret or fear. In addition it is a peace which inevitably challenges the false peace of the world as one built upon coercive power rather than upon truth. Such habits of peacemaking subvert despair and give space for the imaginative construal of patterns of life that limit violence, since the patience they reflect is rooted in the security of the peace of God.⁶¹ Nevertheless, these habits do not promise that violence will decrease. Neither will Christians be applauded for remaining faithful to such an ethic, since 'non violence cannot help but appear as a terrorist tactic by those who want to make the world safe for war'.⁶² Indeed such peaceableness will provoke what MacIntyre called an 'epistemological crisis' as it challenges the false or cruel peace of the world.⁶³ Nevertheless the question is whether Christians are prepared to remain peaceable in a world intrinsically orientated to violence, even to the point of losing their lives or those closest to them. Tragedy is an

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 112-13.

⁶⁰ *Christian Existence Today*, p.92.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁶² *Sanctify Them*, p.178.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 187, 246. For the insights of MacIntyre see above chapter 2.

ever present reality. However, for Hauerwas, the resurrection is the assurance that martyrdom not only claims a Christological interpretation for its death, but also, thereby, trusts itself to the victory of the new aeon.⁶⁴

5:5 Liberation as Release from Constantinianism

Such an equation of violence not only with explicit warmongering but with the very constitution and assumptions of liberal polities, raises fundamental questions about Hauerwas' conception of the state, its relationship to the church and the way power is exercised in society and in the Christian polis.⁶⁵ If ecclesial emancipation involves distinguishing between church and state, church and the world and an ambivalence about certainly coercive power, can Christians participate in the state in any way or is it simply the character of liberal states that renders them problematic? Is Hauerwas correct in his contentions concerning the intrinsic violence immanent within liberal orders? Can the church as a polity remain a cohesive and disciplined community if no coercive power is available to guard its perimeter, especially if sin, the secular and the world are not simply outside the church but within it? Has the failure of the church throughout history to display the peaceableness spoken of by Hauerwas falsified his thesis? Is his eschatological perspective sufficient to cope with the complexity of the relationship between the two aeons, the relationship between the coming of the kingdom and the consummation of the kingdom and the ambiguous character of the era of the Spirit post Pentecost?

⁶⁴ 'Epilogue: A Pacifist Response', p. 181.

⁶⁵ Barth as we saw in chapter 3 regarded the state as in the service of God's kingdom. Hauerwas is less certain. See *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, pp. 140-43 and 'On Learning Simplicity in an Ambiguous Age', pp. 43-46.

To what extent does Hauerwas conflate the cultic and political dimensions of the church in contrast to the way earlier Christian eras sought to distinguish them, particularly when notions of belonging to the church did not involve the sort of individualistic voluntarism presumed necessary for authentic participation in liberal societies?

In part Hauerwas' understanding of the church's emancipation from the state's control, is about liberating this state to take on its proper role now that the new age has dawned.⁶⁶ Hauerwas, unlike Barth, appears to regard the state as part of the old order, or the order of the world, rather than part of the new. It is not clear whether this should be interpreted as being part of the order of creation. It certainly does not seem to be part of the order of redemption. He comments

my concern is whether Barth's Christological interpretation of the state within the order of redemption may not collapse the necessary eschatological tension between the Kingdom and the world. As a result, Barth's largely implicit theology of the state results in a false utopianism that fails to provide the concrete guidance Christians need to deal with the actual states they confront.⁶⁷

What is clear is that Hauerwas is hostile to any Erastian model of church-state relationship. As he writes 'it is intrinsic to the free church tradition [...] that it refuses legal support by the nation to make clear that the church has a loyalty

⁶⁶ This point is made in the title of the essay 'The Reality of the Church: Even a Democratic State is not the Kingdom', *Against the Nations*, pp. 122-30.

⁶⁷ 'On Learning Simplicity in an Ambiguous Age', p.44.

that cannot be captured by the nation'.⁶⁸ For him, the state is that institution which structurally cannot acknowledge the lordship of Christ in its affairs, since its identity is not given through baptism. At best it represents a penultimate reality, a contingent and historically contextual way of ruling which therefore does not take its agenda from the peaceable kingdom of Christ.⁶⁹ In this sense it is part of the world and can only know itself to be such when the church distinguishes itself from the state. Otherwise it is tempted either to make itself a pseudo-church or to rule the church as a department of state. In each case it loses its proper function in a hubristic usurpation of the church's role, which falsely presumes that the nation state carries the true history of the world.⁷⁰

The other temptation, particularly if the church becomes socially strong and rulers become part of the church, is for the church to see the state as a vehicle for its mission agenda. In chapter 1 we noted that this temptation has been called 'Constantinianism', particularly in the thought of John Howard Yoder, upon whom Hauerwas is so dependent for his Christological peaceableness and its attendant implications for the church.⁷¹ From Yoder Hauerwas argues that

⁶⁸ 'The Family as a School for Character', *Religious Education* 80/2 (Spring 1985), pp 272-86 (p.276).

⁶⁹ 'The Need for an Ending', *Modern Churchman*, 27/3 (1986), 3-7 (p.7). Hauerwas' contextuality also admonishes those tempted to abstract Barth's response to the state represented by Hitler as if it can be used to describe the United States, even with its nuclear policy. See 'On Learning Simplicity', p.43.

⁷⁰ 'Should War be Eliminated?', *Against the Nations*, p.196. See also 'Faith and the Republic: A Francis Lewis Law Centre Conversation Between Stanley Hauerwas, Sanford Levinson and Mark Tushnet', *Washington and Lee Law Review*, 45:467 (Spring 1988), 467-534 (p.485), where Hauerwas notes that the acidic effects of liberal polity upon intermediate groups aids the development of carceral bureaucracies and police states.

⁷¹ Constantinianism is defined as that attempt 'through force of the state to make the world into the kingdom which attempted to make the worship of God unavoidable, which attempted to make Christian convictions available to all without conversion or transformation'. *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.25.

such Constantinianism changes the composition of the church from being a voluntary community to being one which assumes that all citizens are in the institutional church. Hence a division occurs between the invisible and the visible church and between the 'perfect' and the 'ordinary' Christian. Changes in belief also happen as providence, equated with the government of the Christian ruler, replaces eschatology as the horizon for ethics. The ruler now becomes the ethical paradigm and his quandaries determine the possibilities of peaceable living for all. Effectiveness thus becomes the criterion for ethics rather than faithfulness.

For Hauerwas, such an alliance corrupted the integrity of the church and deceived the state about its proper role. With the fall of the Holy Roman Empire in the west, the rise of the modern nation state and the Enlightenment, with its formal, though not effective disestablishment of church and state in America at least, Constantinianism has displayed its ambiguous legacy. Hence the temptation is ever present in societies with significant numbers of Christians to feel obliged to underwrite theologically and actively the political arrangements of various states and thereby continue the confusion of roles appropriate to church and state.⁷² This is especially pernicious when it renders Christians unable to discern when they should say 'No!' to the demands of the state, a problem Hauerwas discerns particularly in the rhetorical of freedom of

⁷² 'A Christian Critique of Christian America' in J.R. Pennock and J.W. Chapman, eds. *Religion, Morality and Law, Nomos*, 30 (New York: New York University Press, 1988), pp 122-25. Hauerwas believes that the closet Constantinian pact even within the formal disestablishment of religion in America came to an end during the 1960s forcing upon the church the challenge either to recover its distinctive liberty or to dissolve in the liberal polity. See *Resident Aliens*, p.16. See also *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.25 for the death of Constantinianism as a plausible ecclesial project in the United States.

religion in American society.⁷³ Instead the church should recover its political identity and true freedom, seeking not strategies for organising society as represented in the state, but by using tactics of a more occasionalistic kind as it engages with the societies of which it is a part.⁷⁴ Perhaps this is why Hauerwas finds the analogy of peasants to be a helpful guide for Christian participation in society. Peasants are patient, knowing that it is not within their power to change the structures of society, yet they develop tactics of resistance which maintain a degree of freedom within the limitations they are confronted with.⁷⁵ This does not mean that Christians should not or cannot contribute to the shape of states and the processes of social government. Again following Yoder, Hauerwas sees in the 16th century Reformation tradition of 'open process' and the Anabaptist politics of forgiveness, the roots of much democratic participation in contemporary society. The problem then as now was that such occasionalistic contributions swiftly became attempts to underwrite the general morality and polity of society, especially of the modern nation state.⁷⁶

Given that, the state is part of the ontology of violence which is called the world, Hauerwas finds himself wrestling with how Christians determine their participation in the state in a way that maintains their primary identity as a peaceable church. Such discriminatory participation cannot be established abstractly, since the contingency of the state, its forms and the particulars of

⁷³ 'Freedom of Religion: A Subtle Temptation', *Soundings*, 72/2-3 (Summer/Fall, 1989), 317-40 (pp. 317-20).

⁷⁴ *After Christendom*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁵ 'The Democratic Policing of Christians', pp. 104-05. See also 'The Sanctified Body', p. 79.

⁷⁶ *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 72-73.

how it seeks to rule, are so varied.⁷⁷ What is evident is that the prophetic role of the church emerges as the church represents the truth of Jesus as the prophetic sign of God in whom the words and works of God are united. Hence fundamental to this prophetic role, according to Hauerwas, is the understanding that

the church is prophetic because without it the world would have no means of knowing that it is the world; that is, the world would be without a history sufficient to understand itself as God's creation.⁷⁸

Hence for Hauerwas the most prophetic activities are preaching the Word and serving the Eucharist, since here the church's identity and freedom are constituted and displayed. Prophecy therefore is not about calling everyone to account before a universal moral agenda evident to all without ecclesial formation. Instead it is about generating a sign that exposes the falsity of the world as a locus of fundamental human identity and freedom. Thus the ethical focus of prophecy is not the community at large, but the church, since only here are the resources by which the sign can be generated and displayed. Such a sign will include practices intrinsic to the Christian narrative such as welcoming the stranger and visiting the sick.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ In the Introduction to *Christian Existence Today*, p.13. Hauerwas argues that rulers and states do matter, since some are better than others. However this cannot be determined in an 'a priori' manner.

⁷⁸ 'The Pastor as Prophet', p.160.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-62.

Hence Hauerwas is unwilling to provide a doctrine of the state or to offer detailed examples of engagement tactics. Commenting on Barth again, he asserts that

Barth remained caught by the Constantinian assumption that Christians need to provide a theory of legitimate state authority. A more realistic view, one more in accordance with the New Testament, is that the state simply exists. Our task as Christians is not to justify its existence, but to be the kind of community that demands of the state that it face its limits.⁸⁰

With its variable character and its location in the old aeon, the state is part of the order that is passing away. Hence rather than justifying its existence, Hauerwas simply advocates that Christians deal with the particular states that confront them. In his case, this is American liberal democracy expressed as a nation state, a unique social experiment seeking to unite a diversity of people through a polity expressed as a social contract.⁸¹ However, in accord with Yoder's approach, Hauerwas rules out activities which involve coercion. Thus military service is impossible, but it is not clear whether police or judicial service can be undertaken.⁸² What is evident is that Christians are enjoined to

⁸⁰ 'On Learning Simplicity', p.45.

⁸¹ For the way different contexts use the same political rhetoric in diametrically opposite ways see Hauerwas' attention to the use of terms such as liberal and conservative in the USA and in Europe in Stanley Hauerwas, 'Marriage and the Family: An Open Dialogue between Stanley Hauerwas and David Bournes', *Quaker Religious Thought* 56/20:2 (Spring, 1984), 2-24 (pp. 6-8). Hauerwas also notes the way American versions of democracy trade on resources which they cannot explain and which they ultimately destroy. Whilst this can appear to echo a communitarian perspective, Hauerwas refuses to be identified with such because they too represent another version of the same pathology. See Stanley Hauerwas, 'A Communitarian Lament', *First Things* (January 1992), 45-46.

⁸² 'The Non-Violent Terrorist: In Defence of Christian Fanaticism', *Sanctify Them*, pp. 177-190 (p.181). Hauerwas does distinguish between the role of police within a nation state and

engage creatively with the state and to offer imaginative alternatives to activities which include explicit violence. They are also to encourage those forms of polity which limit the pretensions of the state and which avail the church of social space within which to live out its calling. As we saw in chapter one, the failure of Henry VIII to provide this led to Thomas More's martyrdom, for 'it is the function of the state to encourage those institutions and communities within society to produce people whose virtue is the resource that makes possible a non coercive society'.⁸³ This is particularly important in liberal contexts since the nation state as it has developed here is structurally orientated to conflict for

to accept war is not to accept violence or anarchy; it is to accept commonality and co-operation [and] the unity of the nation [...] is partly derived from antagonism generated by international conflict.⁸⁴

5:6 Liberation as Cruciform Power

Since Hauerwas holds that the power of the nation state, even in its modern American democratic form, is structurally organised to violence, such agonistic power must necessarily conflict with the sort of peaceable practice which he identifies as intrinsic to the character of the church. Yet Hauerwas is not opposed to power as such. In part this is because of his own grasp of the

the role of nations acting as police in the international arena. Within the state, police have limited powers of arrest and prosecution, whereas states are accountable only to themselves or to more powerful states.

⁸³ 'Virtue in Public', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 191-98 (p.194). See also 'Hope Faces Power', pp. 199-217.

⁸⁴ 'Should War Be Eliminated', p.181.

power of the cross and resurrection and the power of correlative Christological pacifism. These are powerful events, if by power we mean that capacity to achieve material results within the dimensions of the created era. For Hauerwas, 'in Christ's resurrection the very character of the universe is changed [and] that changes us'.⁸⁵ The cross and resurrection have achieved a particular victory over the 'principalities and powers' which presumed to reign.⁸⁶ Hauerwas therefore stands within the 'Christus Victor' tradition of interpreting the atonement, whose inauguration of a new era of peace, enables relationships of power, such as medicine, marriage and the family, to be repositioned, redescribed and relativised.⁸⁷

Power, therefore, is correlative to the truth about God's good creation and the politics this truth generates. Different eschatologies suggest different operations of power. This is what offers Hauerwas real 'space for peace', since his Christological eschatology indicates that powers, such as the nuclear bomb, do not ultimately determine the destiny of the created order.⁸⁸ Hence, as part of

⁸⁵ *Sanctify Them*, pp. 5-6, footnote 8.

⁸⁶ Hauerwas' reading of Yoder's work on principalities and powers is evident in the way he approaches the issue. In 'Should War Be Eliminated', p.169 he comments 'we all, leaders and followers alike, seem caught in a web of powers that is one of our own making yet not under our control. We say we want peace, but we seem destined for war'. Such an incarceration requires a distinctive community to offer a liberating alternative. The 'powers' that can incarcerate are described in *Lord Teach Us*, p.89 as economic, race, gender, media powers, i.e. those powers that seek to describe reality.

⁸⁷ See 'The Family as a School for Character', pp. 274-79 where the tyranny of family and parents is subverted by the ontological priority of the church. On medicine and the abuse of power in its name, see particularly *Naming the Silences*, which Hauerwas regards as an articulation of political theology since its intention is to delineate the pathology of power within contemporary medicine as liberal thought both undermines the former's traditioned-community based character and increasingly reduces it to a form of bureaucratic and technical power which overwhelms the integrity of the patient. For a discussion of this work see chapter 2. For Hauerwas' advocacy of the Christus Victor model of the atonement see 'A Pacifist Response', p.10.

⁸⁸ See 'Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 253-65.

a witness to the freedom participation in the new age brings, Hauerwas asserts that Christians can undertake practices such as having children, caring for the retarded, etc., which deny the bomb power over their lives. Similarly, as we noted in our discussion of Hauerwas' ambivalence about much so called liberation theology, the eschatology to which he is committed releases the church from that Constantinian temptation to employ coercive and expedient power to achieve its missionary and apologetic ends. Instead the power of the imagination, resourced by the habits, traditions and practices of the peaceable community, offers other creative ways of respectfully exercising power. Thus the power and truth that make Christian service possible are intrinsic to the church's character and correlative interpretative skills which enable Christians to name what is happening and to discern what to do thereafter.⁸⁹

As we have seen this is why Hauerwas' early essay on Thomas More remains seminal in his ongoing reflections on power. Hauerwas uses More as an example of a Christian discriminatingly using power in consequence of his Christian formation. Hence, temporal power, though needing to be exercised, is always seen as penultimate, as More's death displayed. Ecclesially formed wisdom enabled such discrimination to take place and More to find in Christian hope a stronger resource than political power. What is particularly interesting is how Hauerwas sees in More's use of the law a paradigm of Christian engagement with the state. This involves calling the state to account in terms of its responsibility to order society, without allowing that public role to

⁸⁹ *Resident Aliens*, p.146.

overwhelm the strengths of his core Christian identity. In this not only Christian hope, but Christian truth that emerges as more significant for More than political power since 'a society that does not demand truthfulness is a society that cannot be trusted'.⁹⁰ Hence in order to remain faithful to this core insight, More has to die the death of a martyr, a freedom which witnesses to the ultimate power of the Lordship of Christ, rather than the penultimate power of Henry, a freedom whose guarantee is given eschatologically. As Hauerwas later comments in 'Taking Time For Peace', God is powerful not in the sense that we need a God of power but rather 'God's power is manifest in those who continue to be drawn to be a people trained in the trust made possible by God's presence'.⁹¹

Consequently the power of the church's faithful peaceableness, particularly exhibited in the lives of its saints and martyrs, is one which materially disturbs the complacency of those other 'powers' that presume they should continue to rule through violence.⁹² As Hauerwas explores more rigorously his understanding of virtues and character, these 'powers that make us human', not only generate distinctively Christian lives, but thereby reveal the true identity of the world.⁹³ In particular Hauerwas' theology of martyrdom asserts that such

⁹⁰ *Christian Existence Today*, p.215.

⁹¹ 'Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial', p.257.

⁹² See the discussion in chapter 1 of Hauerwas' paper, 'Characterising Perfection', pp. 253-54, in which Hauerwas applauds William Law's use of character studies to illustrate attractive lives that display holiness.

⁹³ This is the title of the book to which Hauerwas contributes an article on 'Virtue' in Kenneth Vaux, ed., *Powers That Make Us Human: The Foundations of Medical Ethics* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), pp.117-40. See also 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 101-110 (p.106), where he describes the church as a community of virtue, whose character becomes 'God's gesture on behalf of the world to create space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the kingdom'.

deaths deny the power of naming and interpretation to those who have killed these saints. Instead an alternative hermeneutic of eschatological peaceableness properly renders these deaths as illustrations of the power of trust in God's promises and vindication which transcends the power of human control.⁹⁴ Only God has the power to determine their lives, deaths and destiny. They themselves are willingly decentred in the process of renouncing their own capacity for self-determination.⁹⁵ Hence, for Hauerwas, such martyrs display the distinctive character of Christian freedom taken to its logical conclusion. They reflect the proper integrity of the church, whose identity is established by its place in the divine narrative rather than that of the state.

Hauerwas' increasing attention to the place of friendship within the church is also indicative of the particular character of power within the ecclesial community.⁹⁶ As Wannenwetsch has indicated, this suggests that within the church the world's hermeneutic of suspicion should be replaced by a hermeneutic of trust.⁹⁷ Firstly friendship, as Hauerwas understands it, respects the integrity of the other and seeks the well-being of the other, rather than

⁹⁴ *Suffering Presence*, pp. 105-06

⁹⁵ 'See Going Forward by Looking Back: Agency Reconsidered', *Sanctify Them*, pp. 93-104 (p.99), where Hauerwas makes use of the work of David Matzko in this regard.

⁹⁶ A significant example of the power of friendship is included in Hauerwas' essay 'The Testament of Friends', *Christian Century*, 107/7 (28th February 1990), 212-16. Friends have enabled his theology to progress through remembering, disagreement, faithfulness and the challenge to live a sanctified life. Hauerwas' exploration of the continuities and differences between ancient views of friendship and Christian views is contained in the collection *Christians Among the Virtues*. There he notes above all that Christian friendship is informed, as Aquinas' realised, by charity rather than by the autonomous power of the magnanimous man so favoured by Aristotle. Such friendship therefore co-ordinates human relationships rather than segregating them and can find in them communion with God and thereby resources for truth seeking which avoid the will to power.

⁹⁷ Bernd Wannenwetsch, 'The Political Worship of the Church: A Critical and Empowering Practice', *Modern Theology*, 12/3 (1996), 268-94 (p.288). This approach also offers Hauerwas a way of responding with respect to the question of homosexuality in 'Gay Friendship: A Thought Experiment in Catholic Moral Theology', *Sanctify Them*, pp. 105-19

engaging in a manipulative relationship. Secondly friendship also depends upon the practices of truth telling and reconciliation to survive, hence the power of truth to liberate people from self-deception depends upon the structure of friendship relationships. Thirdly friendship, through its respect of the otherness of the befriended is able to recognise and welcome the stranger without fear, thereby releasing the befriender from the shackles of narcissism endemic within liberal thought and the consequent phobia such self-preoccupation engenders. As we shall note below, this exposes the way Hauerwas understands the power of the 'powerless' in the church, as the marginal, such as the retarded, evoke our friendship.⁹⁸ This, of course, will have consequences for the way Christians relate to the world, since truth telling practices correlative to Christian character cannot be restricted in effect to the ecclesial community. Such truth telling acts as a powerful challenge to the sort of deceptions integral to liberal societies such as the United States. Fourthly, friendship depends upon practices of reconciliation. Only communities which practice forgiveness can continue together through the challenges of living. As he comments in the essay 'Why Truthfulness Requires Forgiveness', the 'Mennonites have been reminding other Christians that forgiveness is a community process that makes discipleship possible'.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.167, 'the issue is not whether retarded children can serve a human good, but whether we should be the kind of people, the kind of parents, and community that can receive, even welcome, them into our midst in a manner that allows them to flourish'. Again, as we have noted above in the discussion of Hauerwas' exchange with Gloria Albrecht, this is precisely how Hauerwas' ecclesiology makes space for the emancipation of the powerless and their empowerment as voices within the ongoing Christian conversation.

⁹⁹ *Dispatches*, p.83.

Hence whilst Hauerwas recognises the presence of a variety of forms of power in social arrangements, he will not provide a theology or ideology of power as an abstract universal. 'Power' is the word we use to describe a multitude of potencies, whose characteristics and pathology will require contextual discrimination and assessment by ecclesial communities. This is why he prefers to explore how power is manifested in particular practices, such as medicine, the university, and the church's ministry. In *Suffering Presence*, as we saw in chapter 2, medicine illuminates analogically, the way power operates in liberal societies. It also displays the relationship of power to traditioned authority and to finitude.¹⁰⁰ In *Naming the Silences*, he exposes the way theodicy has become a screen for human pretensions to control the world in a manner dislocated from both their created status and from the cruciform way God has chosen to rule through Christ. Likewise in 'The Ministry of a Congregation', Hauerwas notes how the most mundane of Christian practices, such as building a church in a neglected urban area and providing an open Sunday meal as a continuation of the church's eucharist, act as powerful symbols of the kingdom of God.¹⁰¹ Furthermore in 'Clerical Character', he speaks about the ordained ministry in terms of power rather than in terms of skills, 'the power the minister has been given to perform the rites of the church for the church'.¹⁰² In 'The Morality of Teaching' he speaks of the need for teachers, especially in the university, to recover the politics which underlies their common purpose to explore the

¹⁰⁰ *Suffering Presence*, pp. 42-49. This is especially evident in the limitations of the body, especially in its dying.

¹⁰¹ "The Ministry of a Congregation: Rethinking Christian Ethics for a Church-centred Seminary", *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 111-32.

¹⁰² *Christian Existence Today*, p. 136.

wisdom of life, to avoid becoming academic technicians or powerful manipulators.¹⁰³

Although Hauerwas delineates more explicitly the expressions of power he expects to find exercised respectively within church and state, he is unwilling to offer abstract guidance for how Christians should exercise power in the state. He does not expect the state, given its constitution and ontology, to exercise power in the same sort of way as the church. Instead, in concert with Yoder, he appears to suggest that Christians hold the state to account in terms of its own function within the present era of overlapping aeons. Hence, in matters of war, Hauerwas does not expect the nation state to be a peaceable kingdom, but he does argue that those living in states influenced by the Just War tradition should hold their state's behaviour to account in terms of this theory. Similarly, if the state is now positioned by God's redemption of the world as that social institution which is to check the vengeance dynamic still present in the world, then its own use of power should be challenged to attend to contextual understandings of justice, rather than the naked expression of superior power. The failure of Reinhold Niebuhr to recognise the contingencies and community relative character of such notions led him to ideological blindness and consequent underwriting of the power interests or 'realism' of the hegemonic bourgeois elite of his era.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ 'The Morality of Teaching', A. Leigh De Nuff, Crauford Goodwin and Ellen Stern McCrate, *The Academics Handbook* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 19-28 (pp 20-27).

¹⁰⁴ 'The Irony of Reinhold Niebuhr', *Wilderness Wanderings*, p 50.

5:7 Liberating of and for the Ordinary and the Marginal

As we noted in chapter 1, Hauerwas' attention to character and to the significance of the retarded and the unborn provided an opportunity to reverse the tendency of liberal thinking to be enthralled by the expert and the powerful. In contrast, particularly as he is challenged to expose and exhibit the character of his church, Hauerwas seeks to recover the vital significance of the ordinary and the marginal to the formation of the church as a community of sanctification, displaying the Christological peaceableness of the eschatological kingdom inaugurated in Christ. 'If my work has any centre it has been to help Christians across God's church discover the moral significance of these extraordinary yet everyday practices'.¹⁰⁵ Attention to character, as we noted, led Hauerwas not only to appreciate the intrinsic place of the church in Christian discipleship and the vital character of intra-communal conversation, but also the way practices correlative to such narrative display exhibited the particular significance of those on the margins, the strangers. Such strangers, both by their own narratives and also by the contribution their presence makes to the formation of the church's polity, are intrinsically liberating. As he comments

the issue is not whether retarded children can serve a human good, but whether we should be the kind of people, the kind of parents, and community that can receive, even welcome, them into our midst in a manner that allows them to flourish.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ 'The Testament of Friends', p.215.

¹⁰⁶ *Suffering Presence*, p.167.

This also exposes the ecclesial priority of love, gratitude and the welcome of the stranger before intelligence, aptitude and expertise. Such welcoming reveals the core plot of the Christian story to be God welcoming the stranger and, as we noted above, leads Hauerwas to attend with increasing rigour, to the place and character of friendship in the Christian polis.¹⁰⁷ These practices also display the proper sort of ecclesial responsibility Hauerwas seeks to espouse, rather than some abstract responsibility for society as a whole, which, in effect, becomes a rationale for the interests of the powerful elites whose particular interests are closeted within claims for universal significance. It is only those who offer no occasion for self-interest, those who are strangers to us, who can liberate us from confusing responsibility with our own interests. The church, therefore, acts as a context for liberating responsibility when it welcomes the stranger into its midst with joy.¹⁰⁸

Similarly ordinary habits, practices, apparent trivialities and gestures by ordinary Christian communities become occasions for unique and particular manifestations or embodiments of the grace and critical challenge of God for the world.¹⁰⁹ As he and Willimon comment in their exposition of the Lord's

Prayer

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 184,187. Hauerwas' investigation of the corruption of the university and its education is informed by this 'friendship theology' and acts as an reflection to the church of what can happen when individual autonomy replaces friendship as the foundation for potential community. The former reduces community to a warring fragmenting collective. See *Dispatches*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Irony of Reinhold Niebuhr', op.cit.

¹⁰⁹ Gestures are of particular interest to Hauerwas, since they enact the story and facilitate learning. Indeed the whole church is 'God's gesture on behalf of the world to create a space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the kingdom'. See 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', p.106.

Our God is placed, located, has an address-heaven. This is not just a way of saying that God must be everywhere or God is nowhere. On the contrary our God is not everywhere, but somewhere. We have names for those places - the promise to Abraham on a starry night, the land of Israel [...] the prophets [...] Jesus of Nazareth [...] baptism, the Eucharist. God can be located in such places because our God is Lord of all God has made. Heaven is the name given to God's realm.¹¹⁰

For Hauerwas one example of this confidence is having children and raising them. Such nurture reflects trust in God's future and hence the sovereignty of God over all life in a world that has lost this hope and named self-interest as its cardinal virtue.¹¹¹ Equally liturgical gestures, such as kneeling, confessing the creed in the context of worship, baptism, eucharist etc. take on particular significance, as part of that social and political formation which is church. 'Liturgy is social action. Through liturgy we are shaped to live rightly the story of God'¹¹² and the retarded in particular, are enabled to participate.

¹¹⁰ *Lord, Teach Us*, p.35.

¹¹¹ *Suffering Presence*, pp. 145-52.

¹¹² 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', p.107. See also 'Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial', *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 253-65 (pp.259,263), where Hauerwas notes 'I think peace is all around us: it is in the air we breathe, but we simply fail to notice it because it is so common [...] to speak of the significance of the trivial is to remind is that some of our everyday activities, e.g., the birth of a child, embody significant moral commitments [...] without the trivial life would have no duration, as we keep time by giving the trivial significance through memory'.

This also protects ecclesial worship from the temptation to exchange its embodied materiality for varieties of mystification. Distinguishing himself from his former mentor, Iris Murdoch, Hauerwas comments

Christian salvation, then, is not 'mystical', but comes through the ordinary. Murdoch rightly calls attention to the wisdom of 'ordinary people' who know that prayer can induce a better quality of consciousness [...] but 'ordinary people' called Christian, also know that they must learn to pray together in communities that will teach them to pray rightly. Prayer after all, is not a self-authenticating 'spiritual exercise', but a practice that becomes intelligible only as we learn to acknowledge our existence as forgiven creatures.¹¹³

This eventually leads Hauerwas to teach the whole of an ethics course through attention to the way such liturgical practices mediate politico-ethical insight.¹¹⁴ Doxology is therefore central to Hauerwas' theology of the ordinary for if 'ethics is first a way of seeing before it is a matter of doing',¹¹⁵ then the practice of liturgical worship is of fundamental formative importance, especially in local ecclesial congregations meeting regularly week by week. Hence, not only the ordinary Christian, but the ordinary Christian congregation becomes a critical character in the display of God's ways with His good creation. Everyday lives, ordinary bodies, become vessels charged with God's

¹¹³ 'Murdochian Muddles', pp. 165-66.

¹¹⁴ 'The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life', pp. 35-47.

¹¹⁵ *Resident Aliens*, p.95.

grandeur.¹¹⁶ 'Those ordinary tasks are the most determinative political challenge to our culture'.¹¹⁷

The local congregation's missiological significance is consequently in inverse relationship to the way liberal theology conceived of it. It no longer simply functions as a context for producing Christian activists or candidates for ordained ministry. In itself it is a theological agency of irreplaceable value, certainly in conversation with other ecclesial communities and as a resource for the wider church in terms liberal theology assumed, but without mitigating its own distinctive place as a contextually sensitive intensity of grace. Indeed in terms of the mission of God, Hauerwas appears to argue that such 'base communities' are the locations of particular liberation, which broader or abstract notions of church cannot rival. It is especially in the local situation that the depths and intimacies of a communal character can be generated and the intensities of conversation, sharing, interpreting the Bible, reconciliation, forgiveness, tangible practices and particular gestures be experienced. It is especially here that the peaceableness of friendship, with its attention to the uniqueness of the particular can be formed. It is here that the church negotiates the detailed challenges of serving God in the variables of his world.¹¹⁸ This conviction is increasingly reflected both in the importance Hauerwas attaches to his so called 'popular theology' and to the way he explicates such intensities

¹¹⁶ 'Foreword to Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p.xi.

¹¹⁷ 'Why Resident Aliens Struck a Chord', *In Good Company*, p.57.

¹¹⁸ It is no accident that Hauerwas seeks to explore a Christian understanding of homosexuality through reflection upon the way friendship generates a moral relationship and community. See 'Gay Friendship', pp. 105-22.

using the example of Aldersgate Methodist Church.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless it would be a mistake to imply that Hauerwas is a committed congregationalist. Not only is it 'desirable that some laity and some clergy foster the intellectual love of God and give our clergy the disciplines not only of *praxis*, but also of *theoria*'¹²⁰ and hence that the theological task more broadly conceived is to encouraged, but his engagements with the hierarchy of the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches are evidence of his commitment to the more encompassing structures of ecclesial communities.

This is further reinforced by his attention to the diachronic and international character of the church as we have seen. Certainly theologians and bishops matter representatively and in what they do. Yet it is important that a proper perspective be kept. Theology, he claims, is one of the lesser offices of the church and episcopacy is about service, especially to those unable to articulate their baptismal story, rather than about significance and power.¹²¹ Hauerwas is opposed to 'the professionalization of theology, which I consider a Babylonian captivity of theology by the Enlightenment university'.¹²²

¹¹⁹ The dedication to his most recent collection of essays *Sanctify Them*, p.xi, exemplifies this exquisitely. Hauerwas writes 'I seem condemned not only to be a Methodist, but to be a member of churches whose names I so not like [...] Aldersgate, a name that has served as a pietistic distortion for the reading of Methodist history. [...] I take it as a sign of the material character of God's good care to make me come to terms with being stuck in churches in which not only do I have to live, but with whom I fall hopelessly in love'. For his comments on popular theology see p.8 footnote 12.

¹²⁰ William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, 'What About The Church? A Response', *Christian Century*, 106/4 (Feb. 1-8, 1989), 111,128.

¹²¹ 'The Testament of Friends', p.213. See also *Sanctify Them*, p.6 footnote 10.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.215.

Two consequences follow from this concern. The first relates to the recovery of the proper function of theology as a service to the church, not in an introspective sense, but in the sense of 'having to do with the clarification of the faith of the ordinary believer' and thereby, given the location of that believer, with matters essential and integral to our culture and politics.¹²³

Liberal theology had rendered the church enthralled to the ideology of liberal society, particularly as articulated by the liberal university. This rendered theology safe but irrelevant. Church theology in its richest and proper sense needs to be liberated from this incarceration and impotency. In his introduction to *Sanctify Them*, he writes

if theology is a servant ministry in and for the church, I do not think the alienation of theology from the church's common life, which is so prevalent today, can be a matter of indifference.¹²⁴

Thus at the very least Christian theologians should attend a church. Secondly for Hauerwas the local church is now a site of particular theological interest. Hence, as we have reiterated above, his own reflections upon the practices of the local ecclesial community of which he is a part become a significant part of his theological project,¹²⁵ for 'God does not redeem us in the abstract, but as people who are constituted in and by concrete histories'.¹²⁶

¹²³ *Sanctify Them*, p.208.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹²⁵ In the same essay his anxiety that his own intuitions may simply be fantasies in this regard emerges as he comments 'it taunts me that I am not a church theologian, but just another academic theologian who continues to draw off the residual resources of Constantinian Christianity to fantasise about a church that does not and probably cannot or should not exist, given the political and social realities of our time', *ibid.*

¹²⁶ 'A Response to Quinn: Athens May Be a Long Way From Jerusalem But Prussia Is Even Further', *Asbury Theological Journal*, 45/1 (Spring 1990), 59-64 (p.60)

Hauerwas, therefore, is especially interested in the ordinariness of Christian ecclesial practices which form ordinary people into those who can do extraordinary things in whatever context they find themselves in. An example of this is Olin Teague, the Mennonite business man who refuses to sue, not through a detailed analytical decision, but because his ecclesial formation prohibits such a course of action being possible. Instead he finds himself compelled to seek reconciliation.¹²⁷ For Hauerwas people such as Olin Teague are true saints and 'it is perhaps one of the church's most important tasks to identify those people who in a compelling manner embody in their lives that larger journey' of a people being sanctified.¹²⁸

Equally, Hauerwas does not see the ordinary as legitimating individualism as opposed to ecclesial control. The communal character of the ordinary is correlative to the way the church forms the identity of the baptised. The narrative value of ordinary Christians and ordinary Christian practices is correlative to their unique and distinctive contribution to the Christian story as a whole. As we noted above, this repositions power in the church, away from those identified as powerful in the world, to those recognised as reflective of the divine and cruciform power of Jesus. Thus Hauerwas never ceases to remind himself and his co-theologians, that they represent but an office within the church, which he regards as relatively minor and certainly inadequate if abstracted from ecclesial participation. Likewise, in his reflections on the place

¹²⁷ 'Reconciling the Practice of Reason', pp. 74-85.

¹²⁸ 'Characterising Perfection', p.260.

of authority and the ordained ministry of the church, the character of that ministry is correlative to the character and witness of the church as a whole. This explains his attraction to the Anabaptist tradition as a liberating resource for mainstream Christian churches. As an historically marginalised tradition Anabaptist ecclesiology and theology, particularly as mediated by John Howard Yoder, has not only provided Hauerwas with much to inform his own theologico-ethical project, but represents an attention to the marginal, comparable with his attention to the retarded, the aborted and the gay community. For Hauerwas liberation for the church can only come as it listens to those who have not confused their loyalty to Christ with loyalty to the state and, today, to liberal ideology and polity. As he and Willimon comment, when reflecting upon the Magnificat

this is salvation and it is excruciatingly political, economic and social. When the poor are lifted up and the rich are sent away empty, God's kingdom is breaking out [...] the church exists as to sign, to signal, to sing about that tension whereby those who are at the bottom are being lifted up and those who are at the top are being sent down.¹²⁹

5:8 Liberation for Creation

Hauerwas' project is primarily concerned with ecclesial ethics. He does not intend to write a book of systematic theology or to try exhaustively to address every ethical question. His is an occasionalistic style, inviting others to join him

¹²⁹ *Lord Teach Us*, p.97.

in the conversations necessary to explicate the theological insights church and indeed creation offer. His hostility to liberal views of natural theology is fundamentally related to its unwillingness to read creation through Christology. 'Creation in Christian theology is an eschatological act that binds nature and history together by placing them in a teleological order'.¹³⁰ This is evident in the way Christ's resurrection body integrates nature and history and reveals that the natural order manifests God's kingdom. The anthropocentricity Hauerwas sees in much so called natural theology renders them effectively atheistic as we discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

However Hauerwas is open to exploring the interface between the human and non human creation. In 'Disciplined Seeing: Imagination and the Moral Life' he and Foubert lament the absence of debate in the church about eating animals.¹³¹ His essay 'A Trinitarian Theology of the 'Chief End of All Flesh' notes how modernity's anthropocentrism has failed to respect animals as 'other', thereby contributing to the hubristic tendencies of liberalism to regard the human community as the 'chief end of all flesh'.¹³² In particular the language of rights has robbed animals of their distinctive integrity by drawing them into the language games of human beings. What Hauerwas is concerned to avoid is an identification of creation as nature and thereby a failure to recognise that creation begins not with what is spoken of in Genesis but with Christ's kingdom. Since all creatures share a common end in that kingdom, that is all

¹³⁰ *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 16-17.

¹³¹ 'Disciplined Seeing: Imagination and the Moral Life', *New Catholic World*, 225 1350 (November/December 1982), 250-53.

¹³² Stanley Hauerwas and John Birkman, 'A Trinitarian Theology of the 'Chief End of All Flesh', *In Good Company*, pp. 185-97.

are to manifest the glory of God, their value and the respect due to them should be seen in this light by Christians. For Hauerwas this implies the sign of vegetarianism as an expression of the proleptic eschatological peaceableness present in the church. It also suggests the importance of retrieving images of God's care and love for creation such as gardening, vinedressing and shepherding which can complement the over dependency of much theology upon the ambiguous analogy of kingship.¹³³

This reflects the particular focus of Hauerwas' attention which is not the relationship between creation and redemption. As he sees it the world needs no redemption, since it is embraced in the salvation of Christ.¹³⁴ Indeed 'the church is the carrier of the memory of creation in Mary, so that the world may know where it began'.¹³⁵ Hauerwas' principal concern is with the manner in which this truth can be displayed and the concomitant exposure of the world's identity in that process. Thus Hauerwas' seeks to subverting the anthropocentric assumption that history is everything, in order to establish the pivotal place of eschatology and the coming of God's kingdom from beyond the human community.¹³⁶ Only thus can a proper anthropology be had, an

¹³³ Stanley Hauerwas and James Fodor, 'Remaining in Babylon: Oliver O'Donovan's Defence of Christendom', *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 199-224 (p.212)

¹³⁴ As he and Fodor comment in their debate with O'Donovan, redemption is not about continuous creation understood in terms of a reading of the Ascension and thereby justifying a Constantinian quasi millenarian view of history. Rather the church rejoices that God has restored his good order and thus it can be glad rather than stoical about the creation's destiny. Hauerwas and Foder feel O'Donovan's eschatology requires more reserve. *Ibid.* pp 201, 206.

¹³⁵ *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p.57.

¹³⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, 'History as Fate: How Justification by Faith became Anthropology (and History) in America', *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 32-47.

anthropology which takes proper account of its status as part of creation.¹³⁷

Only thus can the final causes shaping human history be seen as God's ongoing work of creation, whose music of creation the church sings about in her worship.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ See Hauerwas' disagreement with Murdoch's confusion of freedom with escape from the historical and contingent, instead of being a recognition of being a creature. 'Murdochian Muddles', p.156.

¹³⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Creation, Contingency, and Truthfulness: A Milbankian Reflection', *Wilderness Wanderings*, pp. 188-196 (pp. 192-93).

Section III: Hauerwas' Project: An Adequate Ecclesiology of Liberation?

In the previous sections of this chapter we sought to show that Hauerwas' ecclesiology offers a political understanding of Christian freedom which seeks to transcend the limitations of liberal thought and theology. Such a politics of Christian freedom depends for its credibility upon the plausibility of its architecture. In this final section we shall look at four key areas of concern. The first involves Hauerwas' eschatology and the possibilities for a distinctively Christian theology of liberation which it suggests. The second is the continuing tendency for politics to concern itself with the human or linguistic community and thereby to ignore the non-human world. Can a liberative politics be truly Christian unless it includes all of God's dynamic creation without loss? The third relates to the possibilities of power intrinsic to ecclesial politics. The fourth is the Christological concentration of Hauerwas thought and the question of whether a more pneumatological and sacramental approach would offer additional resources for sustaining his politics of Christian freedom within the mystery of God's ways with the world?

5:9 Ecclesial Liberation and Eschatology

As we noted in chapter 1, Hauerwas has sustained his project from the outset with an eschatological perspective derived from his early engagement with the work of John Yoder. Yoder offered Hauerwas not simply resources to sustain a liberation from the Enlightenment Project, but also a substantial notion of what

such freedom is for; namely Christological peaceableness displayed ecclesially. This does not mean that their views are identical or that the implications each draws are the same. As we observed in that chapter, Hauerwas' initially believed that Yoder's work was too historicist and inadequately integrated into the ongoing narrative of the church. Yoder sought to derive his ecclesiology of a peaceable people from his scripturally delineated Christological pacifism whereas Hauerwas believes that it is only as a people are properly peaceable that they can grasp the particularity of the Christological pacifism found in those Scriptures. Hauerwas, whilst not dismissive of the historico-critical method, is less convinced that textually evoked imagination can offer a plausible Christology and attendant pacifism. It is the reality of a people whose lives display the peace of God across the nations and through time, that includes and underwrites a particular reading of the Scriptural texts and indicates why this reading is to be preferred to others. Nevertheless, the character of this eschatology is what enables Hauerwas to see in the apparent impotence of the church a truthful representation of the way God reigns, particularly as this peaceableness offers space and meaning for the retarded, the marginal and the martyr's death.

However, since Hauerwas closely follows Yoder's thesis, he is also liable to the sort of criticism Yoder attracts regarding his eschatology and, since without a plausible eschatology his politics cannot appear Christologically realistic and relevant, this challenge must be met. One such criticism, articulated by Ogeltree, is that Yoder conflates the variety of eschatologies present in the

New Testament in order to achieve a singular perspective that will resource his ecclesiological ethics. In so doing, Ogletree believes that Yoder's thesis also asks too much of the texts as a socio-political resource. For example Ogletree is sceptical about the suggestion that Jesus promoted the Jubilee Year theme.¹³⁹ Thus he believes that the exegetical roots of Yoder's project are suspect and with it the suggestion that Christian salvation should be born witness to through the distinctive pacifism Yoder advocates.

Whilst, as we saw in chapter 4, Hauerwas has likewise been criticised by Richard Hays for exegetical poverty, it is important to reiterate that Hauerwas' eschatology takes its cue, not simply from the exegesis of Scriptural texts but rather from the reality of a distinctive people drawn from all nations and through time who participate in a common narrative called church and thereby display the universal reign of God anticipated in the Scriptures. Hence a truthful eschatology is known in lives which narrate the liberation of the cosmos through the cruciform mission of Christ. It is the evidence of a people of such liberty which establishes the way the texts are to be understood in their diversity rather than vice-versa.¹⁴⁰

However although this may indicate the eschatological horizon which Hauerwas derives from the church, a further problem concerns the character and possibility of this peaceableness given the finitude and fallen nature of the

¹³⁹ Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.117. For Ogletree's comments on the Jubilee theme see p.134, footnote 43.

¹⁴⁰ For a similar point made to counter Richard Hay's criticisms see chapter 4.

cosmos and indeed the empirical ambivalence of the church itself, as Reinhold Niebuhr has indicated. Whilst Hauerwas, as we have seen, speaks of the redemption of the cosmos as a present reality, present redemption, this, as Moltmann indicates, does not equate with a glorified creation.¹⁴¹ If the church is not yet the resurrected church, then its witness to the eschatological peace of God cannot ignore the limitations of the created order. Whilst Hauerwas is correct to distinguish between the world and the church as communities inhabiting the same space but different times and orientations, it is the character of that space which raises the most pressing questions. How provisional is the peaceableness of the church in this space and to what extent is that peaceableness constrained by the nature of that space, shared as it is with those whose freedom enables them to ignore the call of God? To what extent is the church able to live in the eschatological freedom of God's reign if such limitations remain? Furthermore how can the two Christological moments in the advent of the divine reign be related and what is the character of the space opened up between them? What is the relationship between the kingdom that has come in Jesus Christ and the kingdom that is coming when all will be given by the Son to the Father, that is between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of glory as mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 15.24? Is the kingdom of the Son to be equated with the kingdom of the Father, or is the latter distinguished from the former by being the new creation, without the limitations still outstanding as the new and old eras continue to share the same created space? Can it be argued, without losing the sanctificationist thrust of

¹⁴¹ Richard Bauckham, ed., *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 20-23.

Hauerwas' project, that the perfectionism of the kingdom of the Father is not identical with the holiness possible in the kingdom of the Son, given the latter's historical and social context, the ongoing problems of sin and the finitude that attend the contingent created now fallen order?

For Moltmann the key to this lies in attention to the temporal space between the advent of Christ and the kingdom of glory yet to come.¹⁴² He achieves this through a pneumatology which gives a distinctive place to the church without suggesting that the church can live as if the old order has no claim upon it for though Christ is raised yet we are not yet raised. 'Through the strength of grace Christ has broken the power of sin, but the end of death's reign is still to come'.¹⁴³ Hence with Christ we are on the way to God's kingdom. We experience newness of life rather than resurrection life in the present, newness which remains to some degree, integrated with the broken yet not eliminated powers of sin and death.

The anticipation of the kingdom of God is not yet the kingdom itself, but it is a life which is determined by that hope. It is a historical form of God's kingdom. Hence God's righteousness appears in the conditions and potentialities of history, not yet in its own new world.¹⁴⁴

The challenge is to live in this advent, rather than presuming to live as if the fullness of the Parousia is present. Hauerwas might strengthen the plausibility

¹⁴² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1996).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.104.

¹⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, 'The Liberation of the Future and the Anticipation in History', in Bauckham (1999), p.286.

of his theological politics if he explored the character of this era between the two Christological advents. According to Moltmann the problem of the Constantinian Settlement was to lose this space in the embrace of a presentative millenarianism which not only led to totalitarian terrors, but also failed to listen to the apocalyptic cries of the alienated oppressed.

5:10 Ecclesial Liberation and History

Superficially Hauerwas can be construed as representing a form of presentative millenarianism with affinities to that very Constantinian Settlement. Eusebius of Caesarea and the Settlement's protagonists regarded that event as evidence of the liberative character of the Christian Gospel and the possibility of living as a Christian society freely reflecting the international embrace of God's reign.¹⁴⁵ Hence the politics of their presentative millenarianism was premised around the phrase 'the people of God' which included the ecclesiastical and the temporal within it, since all formally and liturgically were included in the ecclesia. The

¹⁴⁵ Evidence for Eusebius' interpretation of the Constantinian Settlement can be found in Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church*, trans. by G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin, 1965), pp. 380-413. See also J. Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to AD 337* (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 300-91. Obviously Eusebius' interpretation is not uncontested and the agenda of Constantine was no doubt more pragmatic than theological. However the comparison between Hauerwas' ecclesiology and that of the Constantinian Settlement as portrayed by Eusebius is to establish that both offer a form of presentative millenarianism with attendant dangers. The only difference is that Eusebius believed that this was an effectively universal reality, whereas the presentivism of Hauerwas is one only known and lived by the church, which knows itself to be a sign of that universalism which is not yet universally known. Adrian Hastings has also challenged the view that the nation-state was the invention of modernity, arguing that actually nations in Europe gained their identity ecclesially as the mission of the church gave the vernacular particular significance in cultic, priestly and literary terms. This generated a sense of national identity which was governed through various models of state long before the Enlightenment. Thus, for Hastings, the nation-state is the offspring, not of modernity, but of the mission of the church. Perhaps Hauerwas accepts too swiftly the modernist claim to the state. See Adrian Hastings, *The Constitution of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

understanding of this may appear, retrospectively, naïve, yet given the conversion of the emperor, theologically it could not be avoided.

Thus Hauerwas' own ecclesial politics appear structurally no different from the ecclesial politics of the Constantinian Settlement, if the politics of church are to be those of a distinctive society with a distribution of powers that are not solely clerically led and cultically focused.¹⁴⁶ Neither represent a symphonic relationship between church and state, but rather reflect different orders within the one people of God, since this state was seen as part of the church and hence within the new aeon.¹⁴⁷ The ecclesia should not be equated with the liturgical cult but rather be seen as the polity of all the baptised. The liberation of the church therefore included a new understanding of the place and role of the state as that structure of the church devoted to organising society beyond the cult. Hence Constantine could describe himself as a bishop for those outside the liturgical gathering of the church. His task was to oversee them, just as Eusebius' was to oversee the church in its cultic responsibilities.¹⁴⁸

Hauerwas, of course, is attempting to generate a politics of the church which now exists within a society which he believes has dissented from the Constantinian Settlement. In particular the United States sought to be a society explicitly structured in such dissent, whatever the religious affiliation of its

¹⁴⁶ Indeed, as Pannenberg points out, the phrase 'the people of God' was also inclusive of those before the age of the church, i.e. Israel. For the basic argument underlying this section regarding the misreading of the Constantinian Settlement and its political theology see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 464-81.

¹⁴⁷ See Pannenberg's comments on the Constantinian Settlement in *Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 480-81.

¹⁴⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Life of Constantine* in *A New Eusebius*, p.390.

citizens. Since the 1960s this formal dissent has become effective dissent in legal and practical terms, though in ideological terms its roots are in the Enlightenment. Hence Hauerwas sees no possibility of recovering the Constantinian model of a Christian society in modern liberal societies. For Hauerwas Christian freedom can only be recovered as the church recognises the degree to which it has become colonised and emasculated through its confusion of liberal rhetoric with the narrative of faith. Its integrity and consequent freedom requires that Christian politics be purged of this and a distinctive Christian community established. However, in effect, this represents a scaled down version of the Constantinian Settlement.

Nevertheless, given the pedigree of liberalism and the infusion, especially in Europe, of social structures with Christian wisdom, it is difficult to disentangle the church even from a dissenting society. This is especially the case in England, as Hardy and O'Donovan display. Hardy's perspective we engaged with in chapter 3. O'Donovan, whilst recognising the force of Hauerwas' concerns about the way civil religion has uncritically been co-opted by powers which no longer align themselves with the church, believes that it is impossible for even liberal society to escape from its Christian heritage. The socio-political and ecclesiastical arrangements of the United States cannot therefore be equated with those of Europe. Given the Constantinian structure of many western European societies the chaplaincy role of church leaders still represents the pastoring of the church in its extra-cultic life. This also enables a genuinely prophetic ministry, since the call to attend to God is given to those structurally

formed in a society still integrated with Christianity. Certainly the level of contemporary cultic dissent questions the future possibilities of this political ecclesiology. Nevertheless given such a history and identity, the twin tactics of deconstructing liberalism's pretensions to autonomy and universality along with a recovery of the theological identity of such societies remains a possibility. This also enables the church to remain in conversation about issues such as freedom, justice, mercy, natural right, free speech etc., since even the liberal articulation of these ideas is intrinsically related to the Christian tradition.¹⁴⁹

Hauerwas' is understandably sceptical about O'Donovan's project from the vantage point of the United States. To him it appears captivated by the old order against which the church is to be a contrast pilgrim politics rather than a supportive residential politics. 'We differ from O'Donovan to the extent that he thinks resurrection and ascension make it possible for Christians to be more than God's wandering people'.¹⁵⁰ O'Donovan's project is a misguided attempt to claim, the politics of modernity for the church, regarding them as 'a child of Christianity, albeit one that has forsaken the father's house and followed the path of the prodigal'.¹⁵¹ Such retrieval and remembering, positioned as they are within the master narrative of an Augustinian political theory are wedded to a conviction that Christianity should rule, at least morally, by recovering for society at large its forgotten heritage and thereby to supply the state with the ontological basis for its relative authority under the reign of God. For

¹⁴⁹ *Against the Nations*, pp. 243-70.

¹⁵⁰ 'Remaining in Babylon: Oliver O'Donovan's Defence of Christendom', p.200.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.202.

Hauerwas and Fodor, in contrast, the loss of Christendom is not to be lamented but to be seen as God's discipline to show the church not how it may rule in Babylon, but how it should survive freely and uncomplacently in Babylon. This will involve living Christians living by their wits, rather than seeking to generate political theologies intended to underwrite the sorts of societies within which they live.

Perhaps, though, respect for contextuality and a more profound grasp of the Constantine Settlement would enable both to be seen as appropriate articulations of Christian politics.¹⁵² Hauerwas rightly recognises the United States to be a unique society, in its claim to have founded itself ideologically upon a constitution articulating self-evident values that required no religious establishment. The idolatrous and fascist possibilities inherent in this project are the ones Hauerwas believes the church has been colonised by and must segregate itself from. O'Donovan is writing in a European and particularly English context, in which the identity of the nation is understood through its tradition and attendant symbols. O'Donovan and Pannenberg's recovery of the Christendom model may be too optimistic now, given the way society is understood in western societies. Nevertheless a recovery of the notion of the 'people of God' and the inextricable relationship between the liberal project and Christianity may offer occasions to challenge the former's pretensions to independence through explication of social tradition.¹⁵³

¹⁵² *The Desire of the Nations*, pp. 151 where his attention is upon Yoder, but could equally be upon Hauerwas.

¹⁵³ This is precisely the approach Yoder advocates as he exposes the religious heritage of the liberal and democratic state in puritan congregationalism. Yoder's 'holy experiments' offer a

5:11 Ecclesial Liberation and Creation

From the above we can see that to misrepresent the Constantinian Settlement as some sort of fall or enslavement is to confuse a contingent contextual grasp of the way a Christian people should organise itself as a society, with the ambiguity that attends all presentative millenarianism.¹⁵⁴ However, as we have noted before, one of the dangers inherent in a concentration upon politics is that this attention tends to exclude the non-human creation. As we saw in our earlier discussion, for Barth the redemption of all is intrinsic to Christ's mission. For God to be all in all necessarily means that nothing must be lost of his creation. All, including the non-human domain, is included in Christ, not simply the human community.

Whilst Hauerwas begins to reflect upon the wider creation in his later essays and shares with Barth a universalist soteriology, his distinctively Christian understanding of liberation would benefit from a more explicit discussion of the relationship between the liberation of the church, the human community and the non-human community. Certainly this need not be mediated about survivalism as his debates concerning nuclear war indicate. Yet as Barth's Christology and O'Donovan's attention to the resurrection have shown, there is much within

more engaged model of church-state relations in the present North American context than Hauerwas' who appears to have less confidence that the democratic orders of North America carry anything intrinsically redeemable. For Yoder see *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 166-68, and for Hauerwas see 'On Witnessing Our Story: Christian Education in Liberal Societies' in *Schooling Christians*, pp. 214-31.

¹⁵⁴ This, of course, represents among others Paul Ramsey's conviction, one of Hauerwas' interlocutors and mentors. See especially the chapter entitled 'Christian Vocation and Resistance', a compilation of sections from Ramsey's *Basic Christian Ethics*, in W. Werpehowski and S. Crocco, eds., *The Essential Paul Ramsey: A Collection* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.49.

the Christian narrative to resource such ethical reflection.¹⁵⁵ However, as Pannenberg rightly points out, this will require an explicitly more pneumatological approach since it is the creative Spirit who underwrites the consistency between the 'contents of the eschatological promise [...] and the nature and destiny of creatures'.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore

fellowship with Jesus Christ as the basis of Christian eschatology is more than just promise because it rests on an event of fulfilment that has taken place already. Nevertheless this event is not yet complete [...] this means [...] that salvation has not yet been definitively actualised already for humanity merely by the mission of the Son. It will be so only when the work of the Spirit completes it, the work of the Spirit being to bear witness to, and to glorify, the Son and the work of the Son in the heart of believers.¹⁵⁷

If such a provisional yet proleptic politics is embraced a richer understanding of ecclesial responsibility would also emerge as intrinsic to the narrative of Christian freedom. Christians would seek to live in ways that do not contribute to the destruction of that creation but rather intend to live responsibly in the

¹⁵⁵ As O'Donovan comments, 'This eschatological triumph of mankind is not an innovative order that has nothing to do with the primal ordering of man as creature to his Creator. It fulfils and vindicates the primal order in a way that was always implied, but which could not be fully realised in the fallen state of man and the universe'. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Apollos 1986), p. 54. For our earlier discussion of Barth see chapter 3.

¹⁵⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, III, p. 541. See also O'Donovan's understanding of Christian freedom as relative to understanding our being in creation through the mediation of the Spirit. *Resurrection and the Moral Order*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁷ Pannenberg, pp. 550-51.

light of its destiny. Such responsibility would not be about attending to the agendas of liberal anthropology and its survivalist anxieties, but about attending to the eschatological agenda of God for creation. However, given that the church and the world share the same created space, such responsibility and respect will require that alliances be made with others beyond the church. This will not entail supporting survivalism as a new form of liberal utilitarianism but will respect the destiny of the creation as redeemed and awaiting transfiguration into the Kingdom of Glory. Hence Hauerwas' proper attention to the integrity and freedom the church would be enriched by a more extensive exploration of the implications of sharing in the destiny of all creation, not simply the human. For this emancipatory destiny is not simply the politics of that citizenship from heaven which it awaits, but the new creation, a more embracing reality, as Moltmann points out, than either eternal life or the kingdom of God.¹⁵⁸ Otherwise ecclesial liberation remains trapped in the historicism of modernity, whose incarceration of creation as a subset of human cognition, subverts the alien dignity of the non-human creation.¹⁵⁹

5:12 Ecclesial Liberation and Power

As we have seen Hauerwas' interpretation of Constantinianism and the emergence of liberal society rendered him suspicious of attempts by Christian thinkers to integrate the agendas of the church with those of that society. In

¹⁵⁸ *The Coming of God*, pp. 131-32.

¹⁵⁹ This is how William Schweiker understands integrity rather than responsibility as the key matrix through which Christians engage with life. Integrity is about the whole of life before God, rather than simply the human community and includes, thereby responsibility for finite life, its respect and continuation. See William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.215.

particular, as we have seen, he was critical of the Social Gospel's naivety and Reinhold Niebuhr's pragmatism. In both cases, he believed their alliance with the agonistic politics of the liberal state corrupted the identity of the church and required the embrace of a politics of violence. However, the capacity for peaceableness given the finitude and sinfulness within the empirical church remains questionable. We have seen how Reinhold Niebuhr exposed the greater potential to corruptibility of collectives and communities than of individuals¹⁶⁰ Hauerwas can seem to expect too much of the church as a substantive display of salvation. Perhaps the church should be seen as a community on the way to liberation rather than being a liberated community as such. As Wannenwetsch suggests it would be a community characterised by a hermeneutic of trust amidst a world enslaved to the hermeneutics of suspicion. As such it would reflect an ontology of peace in formation rather than one already established¹⁶¹ and thus accept that there will always remain a residual agony within the provisional peace of the church.¹⁶² The fundamental task of the church, therefore is a doxological one rather than a political one. The church must point not primarily to what it is but to what is beyond it and to which it travels in hope. *It is a real, yet provisional sign rather than the substance of the kingdom.* As Pannenberg comments

¹⁶⁰ See *Moral Man and Immoral Society* op.cit.

¹⁶¹ Wannenwetsch, 'The Political Worship of the Church', pp. 272-76, where he argues that the church's ontology emerges through the practices of worship rather than being part of an 'a priori' ontology. Hence peace comes through the distinctive practices of worship, rather than already being present.

¹⁶² Thiselton makes this point when he agrees with Moltmann that eschatology implies that truth is never wholly immanent in the practices and character of a community. Everything is not already given. There is always the surprise of the transcendent new. See 'Signs for the Times: Towards a Theology for the Year 2000 as a Grammar of Grace. Truth and Eschatology in so-called Post-Modernity', in David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot, eds. *The Future as God's Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 9-39.

the church is not yet the kingdom of God; it is a preceding sign of the future fellowship of humanity under God's reign [...] precisely as a sign the church's liturgical life is thus also an effective presence and mediation of future salvation.¹⁶³

All this raises questions concerning the character of the power that the church exercises in its politics.¹⁶⁴ Given his Christological pacifism Hauerwas rejects any form of violence within the Christian polis. This, in part, is what led him to believe that the Constantinian project had failed to maintain the peace of Christ liturgically demanded of it. It had attended to virtues and practices resourced from the antique polis rather than the Christian polis, to the domineering leadership model of the magnanimous warrior of Aristotle instead of the suffering servant example of Christ, to war rather than to the demands of peace. Yet if the ontology of peace has not yet been fully realised as we argued above, can even the ecclesial community expect to see the sort of peace Hauerwas advocates, present in its own practices? As O'Donovan comments

The church does not confront those structures already garbed in structures of its own [...] but appears rather underdressed politically, waiting for a fuller clothing when the public form in which it has placed its hope is made available by Israel's own self-giving to God.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 31-32.

¹⁶⁴ Paul Ramsey argues in *Just War*, reprinted in *The Essential Paul Ramsey*, p.86, 'the use of power and the possible use of force is of the esse of politics. By this I mean it belongs to politic's very act of being politics'.

¹⁶⁵ O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations*, p.25.

Hauerwas seems to suggest that the ecclesial community through sanctification is rendered less corruptible than those who exist beyond it. In this sense it represents a unique society in the world. Yet even he admits that sin, even as a theologically disclosed condition, is present in the church. Perhaps therefore a less emphatic approach would recognise that coercive power cannot simply be avoided in a community characterised by finitude. Disciplines, especially if the church is not constituted along purely voluntarist lines, are inevitably coercive in some sense.¹⁶⁶ They may not be violent in the liberal sense of compromising the individuated identity of the singular agent, but they do demand that within the Christian polis certain practices be adhered to and certain excluded. Excommunication of any sort is an example of this. Hence to sustain ecclesial identity disciplines are necessary and have some coercive force which can appear violating.

Perhaps William Schweiker's insights regarding the varieties of power may clarify the issues. He distinguishes between three sorts of power, ontological power, characterised as dominance or power over something/someone, political power characterised as mutual empowerment or power with others, and charismatic power, characterised as the ability to act or power to do something.¹⁶⁷ For Schweiker the pathology of late modern societies is to conflate all into ontological power or the will to dominate, expressed in the ubiquity of technological power. However, given the ecclesial narrative about

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.223. O'Donovan's particular concern with Yoder's explicit voluntarism is its anachronistic character, more reflective of late modernity than of the ancient world. Hauerwas arguably escapes this criticism since his attention to the place of the retarded and infants in the church suggests a less voluntarist perspective.

¹⁶⁷ Schweiker, p.25.

creation and its integrity, for Christians the sorts of power consonant with that narrative are the second and third, which empower folk to live responsibly in the sense of respecting the integrity, or wholeness/completeness of the created order as gift.¹⁶⁸ This represents a soft sense of responsibility, since it rejects domineering power, but it has the advantage of suggesting that such mutual empowerment and co-operation will reduce situations in which coercive power will appear the attractive option, especially within the church. Hence, given the finitude intrinsic to creation and the presence of sin in the church, a theology of Christian freedom cannot advocate a limitless liberation devoid of any coercive power. However the character of this power will aim to minimise the potential for abuse and, through inter-ecclesial accountability, approximate to the peaceableness to which the church travels in hope.

5:13 Ecclesial Liberation and Pneumatology

Although the above raises questions concerning the adequacy of Hauerwas' eschatological reserve, it is not an attempt to reject his grasp of the importance of the politics of the church in the present era, nor to undermine the sanctificationist challenge his theological ethics presents. Similarly, his confidence in the salvation of God, though needing to expand and explore the space within the 'not yet' of God's advent as well as attending to the possibilities of the 'now', still offers sufficient resources to expect a distinctive life to be displayed as the practices of that church form those open to them. This, as we noted above, will both distinguish those so formed from those in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.32.

society who choose not to be so exposed. It will also contribute to the generation of a distinctive epistemology, as perspective is shaped by these practices. Thus the trivial and the ordinary, the local and the mundane, remain significant occasions for the display of the divine narrative and the politics and practices of the church attendant upon its worship are indeed sacramental as Joseph Mangina suggests. Yet 'Hauerwas no-where offers a developed sacramentology; indeed the whole pneumatological side of his proposal needs working out'.¹⁶⁹ For Mangina, therefore, Hauerwas needs to situate the church within the larger context of the Spirit's work and to recognise that his own work actually makes space for such a 'concrete pneumatology' in his attention to the contingent particularities of ecclesial life, such as liturgical gestures, tradition, politics and the sacraments.¹⁷⁰ Mangina also notes that the concept of journey, reflective of his Wesleyan sanctificationist heritage, enables Hauerwas to provide time for the work of the Spirit and thereby for the sacramental freedom of the church. However as we have already argued, such an epistemology is not resourced solely from within the existing practices of the church since eschatology keeps the future open to the advent of the new. Similarly, as O'Donovan is keen to assert, Christian epistemology is realist, in the sense that it holds to the priority of the given in creation, that is, to the otherness that delimits our capacity to know. The resurrection order, as he calls it, is not in discontinuity with the created order. Indeed the resurrection of the body of the crucified Jesus is testimony to the transfiguration of the creation

¹⁶⁹ Joseph L. Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus.: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 52/3 (1999), 269-305 (p.304).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.300.

within the new aeon, rather than its demise. Thus for O'Donovan, as for Milbank, Augustine's understanding of participation allows for the infinite to be known in the finite, ontology to be included in epistemology.¹⁷¹

Hauerwas could therefore strengthen his project by explicating the sacramental character of the church's politics and practices, albeit recognising that the characteristic of a sacrament is its mystery. He could also benefit from appropriating Augustine's notion of participation, thereby ensuring a transcendent dimension to his ecclesiology. Together these would reiterate the importance of the gathered ecclesial community attending to the way its practices, its reading of the Scriptures, its worship, its welcome of the stranger, the story of its saints and martyrs are forming it into a community of witness to the ways of God. However they would further underline the way these mediate the lively presence of God.

Such an approach, as Pannenberg, Moltmann and Mangina suggest, might better be articulated in pneumatological rather than Christological terms. The Spirit is the sacramental presence of God immanent in the church in the interim between the two advents.¹⁷² Thus, just as the Spirit is the agent of divine emancipation, so the church, in the power of the Spirit, displays and provides occasion for that emancipation to be offered to the world as part of its mission. In addition reflection upon the Spirit's action within the interim era of the two

¹⁷¹ John Milbank, 'Intensities', *Modern Theology*, 15/4 (October 1999), pp. 449-50. See also O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order*, p.17.

¹⁷² For Moltmann see *The Spirit of Life*, p.69. For Pannenberg see *Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 550-51.

ages, the era since the resurrection and before the Parousia, would also ensure that Hauerwas' emphasis upon character and habits would not entail enslavement to the past with no possibility of change. O'Donovan's concern that Hauerwas is in danger of an impenitent ethic has similarities with Milbank's concerns about the incarcerationist tendencies intrinsic to an ancient virtue ethic. As we have seen Hauerwas responds explicitly to the latter in *Christians Among the Virtues*. It might substantiate his promotion of Christian character if the possibility of the new intrinsic to Christian eschatological understanding was integrated with attention to the particular work of the Spirit in this interim era.¹⁷³

5:14 Summary

In this chapter we have sought to show how Hauerwas' distinctively Christian theology of liberation from the pathology of the Enlightenment Project indicates a distinctive freedom for contextual ecclesial politics. We have raised questions about *how substantial these politics can be*, given the finitude and fallenness of the church even in redemption, and suggested that attention to the pneumatological character of the era between the two Christological advents might *retain a significant place for the church as a sign of the coming kingdom and sacrament of the immanent Spirit* without subjecting it to the threat of empirical falsification intrinsic to presentative millenarianism. Such liberating ecclesiology will also be better able to include the non-human creation if the pneumatological character of this era is explicit, since the Spirit

¹⁷³ This would also excuse Hauerwas from the criticisms of Thiselton regarding the problems attendant upon confessionalistic projects. See Thiselton 'Signs for the Times' pp. 1, 41

is the Creator Spirit whose presence in the church indicates the salvific destiny not simply of the human community but of all creation.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to represent Hauerwas' ecclesiology as a distinctively Christian theology of liberation from the Enlightenment Project. I have attempted to demonstrate how he transcends the pathology of post-Enlightenment attempts to articulate human liberation and how he locates true freedom within the politics and practices of the church. In the process I have tried to indicate why I believe Hauerwas' project is both consistent and coherent and as one presenting a creative, if disturbing, challenge to the contemporary church.

At the same time I have also highlighted a number of areas of vulnerability. First there remain uncertainties about the security of Hauerwas' theological realism. Whilst he has offered some defence against Biggar's charge of ecclesial immanentism, this needs to be worked through more categorically if the suspicion of sociological aestheticism is to be rebutted. Perhaps Hauerwas' forthcoming Gifford Lectures at St Andrews University in Scotland will clarify this since they are explicitly about showing 'that there is nothing more certain than the existence of God' and that theology is knowledge about God and that there is every reason to believe it is rationally defensible.¹ In addition such attention to natural theology might reinforce the trans-human extent of his project.

Secondly there remain outstanding questions concerning the plausibility of his eschatology given Reinhold Niebuhr's exposure of the sheer falsifying effect of evil in every collective. Whilst his emphasis upon the political character of sanctification as a

¹ See Hauerwas' remarks on the Duke web site, 'http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/Latest_stanwon.htm'.

distinctive way of being draws sustenance from the reality of the eschatological kingdom inaugurated by Christ, the way this inauguration relates to the ongoing presence of dimensions of the old aeon still impinging upon the Christian community remains problematic. Finitude, the reality of death and the presence of sin raise questions about the capacity of the church to live out the qualities of peaceableness Hauerwas advocates. Indeed Hauerwas' ecclesiology is also necessarily eschatological, given this ecclesial ambiguity and the need for the Parousia to disclose the full truth of the narrative embodied by the church. Perhaps greater attention to the pneumatological and sacramental character of the church would enable a more subtle articulation of the relationship between his realised and his futuristic eschatology and release the church from captivity to empirical inadequacy.

The third area relates to the way Hauerwas understands Constantinianism. Like Yoder, Hauerwas interprets Constantinianism through assumptions rooted in political arrangements of the United States. This reading presumes the intrinsically separate character of church and state which Constantinianism has confused through the attempt by the church to further its mission through the state. However not only is this to misunderstand the Constantinian Settlement's expression in European history and especially the shaping influence of the church in the formation of the nation state, but it fails to notice that Hauerwas' own ecclesial politics represent a scaled down version of the same arrangements, unless he is implying that the politics of the church are clerically led. Hauerwas may well challenge European Christians about the present plausibility of the Constantinian Settlement given the large scale dissent from it by those who are not part of the doxological community. However, what cannot be

denied is that the differences between the United States and Europe require a different tactical response by the church to this changed socio-political situation.

From our engagement with Hauerwas, therefore, there emerge three avenues for further study. First, as mentioned above, a clarification and substantiation of the relationship between theology and ecclesiology in Hauerwas' project. Secondly, the trans-contextual possibilities of Hauerwas' ecclesiology. In particular the way Hauerwas' project might need refining if it is to address the context of European and especially English Christianity. Whilst the narrative and embodied ecclesiology delineated by Hauerwas offers space for distinctively contextual expressions of the church, there remains a need for a more profound conversation between projects, such as O'Donovan's, Hardy's and Hauerwas'. In particular, given their common American heritage, yet differing ecclesial locations, Hardy and Hauerwas could provide considerable illumination here. Indeed, Hardy's project might ask Hauerwas to reconsider the extent to which the political settlement of the United States still provides the possibility for a prophetic and theological reading of liberalism, less substantial, but nevertheless inextricably engaged with the politics represented by the church. In short, is liberalism in the United States necessarily anthropocentric, or is this a corruption of the American dream which the church, in part, should be challenging? Such a conversation might also strengthen the case for Hauerwas' trans-contextuality or his universality. Thirdly a more substantial comparison and contrast between the sort of Liberation Theology Hauerwas represents, with its Anabaptist leanings, and other sorts of Liberation Theology would be fruitful as a way of developing what we have begun in this thesis.

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