CRITICAL REVIEW ESSAY

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Work of Theology.* Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015. (293 pp.) [ISBN: 9780802871909]

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The Work of Theology is as dynamic as a möbius strip. Mirroring its enigmatic writer, Stanley Hauerwas, and vindicating his claim that "the character of theology and the theologian are inseparable" (p. 22). The book traverses ethics, 'methodology', constructive theology, and political theology. Hauerwas forewarns his readers that the book is "unusual" in its internal "organisation" which is neither "random essays," nor cumulative chapter arguments (p. 7). This "organisation" is hinted at through the "how" that commences each chapter title (except the post-script).

The essays ripple out from Hauerwas' assertion in Chapter 1 that thinking theologically is "an exercise in practical reason" (p. 7). The "how" in Hauerwas' chapter titles indicates that *The Work of Theology* has a "performative character" (p. 4) that is true of the work of theology more generally. Hauerwas hopes that his essays are analogous to Paul's epistles through their engagement with a concrete time and location, necessitating a theological 'method' starting from "the middle," contrasting with the fabricated timelessness of conventional systematic theologies (pp. 23—34). Consequently, he rejects any "prolegomena for all future theology," favouring a more performative theological mediums, like "letters, sermons, and essays" (p. 24). Hauerwas has confidence that properly ordered theological speech offers the church a future (pp. 21, 30).

In chapter two Hauerwas answers his accusers and questioners over his sparse pneumatology (p. 32). Although he defensively displays his Trinitarian orthodoxy credentials he admits that until recent years "[he] was unsure how best to say what the Spirit does" (p. 33). Hauerwas explains his reticence to make pneumatological attributions because of appeals to experience making theology "about us and not God" (p. 37). Hauerwas notes that the "Spirit makes us believers…through the witness of the church," making the Spirit, in turn, "the subject and objection of our faith" (pp. 38–39). Thus, identifying the Spirit as the "animating principle" of the church's sacraments (p. 39). For the chapter's remainder, Hauerwas engages with Stephen Pickard, Eugene Rogers, and Claude Welch to consider the Spirit's divine and human interactions (pp. 38-52). Rogers' insight on the Spirit's self-effacing "penchant" for resting on others—namely Jesus and his ecclesial body (pp. 42–43)—leads Hauerwas to articulate an ecclesial pneumatology: "The name of the agency the Holy Spirit enables is 'church'" (p. 47).

Hauerwas' reluctance to self-identify as a Protestant Christian ethicist is explored in chapter three. His reasons being his Catholic sympathies and corresponding ambivalence towards Protestantism (p. 53), and the absence of a distinct Protestant ethic, such that Christian academics *alma mater* trumps their denominational affiliation (p. 54). Hauerwas accuses Protestant theologians of disconnecting Protestantism from the reformation, two consequences being an ethics detached from the quotidian existence of Protestant Christians and the rise of denominational proliferation (p. 57). Hauerwas concludes the chapter

with an 'ecumenical' dialogue on ethics informed by the best insights of the church catholic (p. 64), for the sake of "[recovering] our distinctive way of speaking to God, and about God, and about the difference God makes for how our lives are lived" (p. 65).

Themes from earlier in Hauerwas' corpus are reworked in chapter four, "How to Be an Agent," which answers questions regarding agency, contingency, and narrative. An opening quote from Austin Farrer on the creaturely limitations that create vulnerability and partial dispossession ("not [being] wholly in our acts") informs Hauerwas' thematic re-engagement (ps. 70, 71). Unsurprisingly, MacIntyre is mentioned frequently to underpin the necessity of virtue for character formation (pp. 75–82). However, Hauerwas diverges from MacIntyre because of the latter's lack of a concrete narrative necessary to uphold an account of agency (p. 81). Hauerwas compensates for the shortfall through recounting a thick account of Bonhoeffer's story (pp. 82–87) to recognise that "our inability to be wholly in our acts…is why we so desperately need to be incorporated into a community of practices that can provide the formation of our agency through a truthful narrative (p. 88)."

In chapter four Hauerwas asserts that the timefulness of the Christian life is conditioned by the past and the future with Jesus being the very fulcrum of God's created and contingent universe (p. 91). Time's God-given nature produces the paradox that "[w]e are embedded in histories we have not chosen, but through having our lives storied by God, fate can be transformed into destiny" (pp. 92–93). The ecclesial bodies-in-concert given in worship to God, "the Lord of history", results in our timeful engagement instead of escapism (p. 94). An examination of Augustine's *Confessions* leads to the conclusion that time, due to God creating and sustaining it, is a gift that enables our narratival existence (pp. 95–99). Therefore, over a lifetime we learn to be "creatures of time" (p. 102).

Chapter six concerns "The 'How' of Theology and Ministry". The title with its "and" is presumably grudgingly written given Hauerwas' antipathy to "and" being used in theological sentences because of it creating artificial separations within theology, like 'theology *and* ethics' (p. 109, cf. p. 23). Hauerwas laments both the reduction of ministry to another "helping profession" and the reduction in "educated" Christian readers (p. 106). Consequently, Hauerwas finds problematic any modern consciousness that relegates theology to the proverbial ivory tower which impinges on the performative theology of the ecclesial body (p. 107). Accordingly, Hauerwas' has the pedagogical goal of giving confidence to Christian influencers and leaders to reclaim the efficacy of theological speech in order that the church walks *and* talks Christianly (p. 111). Thus, ministers and theologians are "in the business of word care (p. 115)."

"How to Write a Theological Sentence" – chapter seven – was this work's first chapter and became for Hauerwas its "prototype" (p. x). Hauerwas argues that theological sentences should not be straightforward for their writers or readers, for effective theological sentences "[make] the familiar strange" (p. 123). As a case study Hauerwas chooses Jenson's "exemplary" statement, "God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt" (p. 127). Jenson's wordcraft is lauded by Hauerwas for its implicit acknowledgement on the primacy of God revealing "whoever" God is and Jenson's wordplay of "raised" with its Christological priority that implicitly acknowledges the Trinity (pp. 134–36). This chapter later gives theology a clarion call for it to be less focused on secondary sources and more on its source –

God—as Hauerwas pronounces that our theological speech sounds empty because it echoes the state of our lives (p. 123). To write well theologians need faith in God and his church, hence Hauerwas's church-first, world-second philosophy (p. 124). Consequently, the church is to embody a theological politics under Christ's lordship that makes the familiar strange to the world (p. 138).

The question of "How to Be Theologically Ironic" occupies chapter eight. Hauerwas' essential argument is that irony must accompany the truthful performativity of the faith if we are to relearn how to speak Christian during the death-throes of Christendom (p. 148). Irony offers practical reason for the formation of truthful Christians, so they may humbly recognise their paradoxical state of being simultaneously sinners and saints (p. 152). Hauerwas appreciates Kierkegaard candidly admitting the disparity between "who he is and what he writes;" Hauerwas identifies this is an occupational hazard that haunts all theologians (pp. 154–55). *Pace* Rorty and his account of irony, Hauerwas embraces Christian discourse which recognises *and* exceeds life's contingencies because Christianity's concomitant convictions offer the infrastructure of practical reason to outwork an ecclesial politics (pp. 156–59). Thus, truth-filled speech with the gospel's inherent "ironic grammar" is necessary to constitute Christians (pp. 165–67).

Chapter nine reveals Hauerwas' resistance to being labelled a "political theologian" for reasons similar to his hesitancy to being a "social ethicist" (pp. 170–71). He stresses that theology is always already outworked socially and politically, and chooses to distance himself from political theology until it is disambiguated (p. 171). Accordingly, any discourse that places an "and" between theology and politics has "failed to account for the political reality of the church" (p. 173). Hauerwas retraces his embrace of "Yoder's ecclesiology," which he claims, "supplied the politics I needed to make intelligible the stress on the virtues," to reject anew the normative politics of Reinhold Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch who fixate on democratic nation-states (p. 179). Citing Alex Sider's scholarship, he concedes that Constantinianism is inescapable (p. 183), however, he endorses James C. Scott's strategy of "foot-dragging" to stand up against the status quo to induce change (pp. 186–90).

In chapter ten, Hauerwas appraises rights theologically and conditionally affirms the exercising of rights to protect the vulnerable while rejecting notions of inherent rights (ps. 191, 195). But he doubts that any ideology of inherent or inalienable rights can match "first-order moral descriptions" in making satisfactory "moral discriminations" (p. 195). Simone Weil is referenced to challenge how personalism reduces rights to entitlements without considering the common vulnerability that necessitates commitment to goods in commons (pp. 198–202). Hauerwas concludes through utilising Rowan Williams' work to acknowledge how all God-given bodies are intrinsically social and vulnerable requiring a recognition of our inviolability to inform rights (pp. 203–6). Accordingly, rights must serve as a testament to "the thick moral relationships our bodies make possible and necessary (p. 206)."

In chapter eleven, Hauerwas engages with biblical scholars and political theologians to address both his past silence on the church's response to poverty *and* appropriations of his ecclesial primacy that frame the world's problems as peripheral (ps. 9, 209, 225). Hauerwas then challenges the abstraction of "the poor" and certain conceptions of charity (pp. 209–14) before declaring that Christians are "obligated to be charitable" (p. 214). For charity is a duty to the poor *and* to God because these sacrificial acts offer worship

to the God who has a preferential option for the poor (ps. 214–17, 225–27). After offering a fair but critical appraisal of Adam Smith and Niebuhr, Hauerwas challenges conscientious Christians to remember not only structural poverty but also the poor through charity (pp. 219–25).

Chapter thirteen testifies that retirement is unbefitting of Hauerwas who rejects its possibility or desirability for the theologian (pp. 251–52, 257–58). The final chapter confirms Hauerwas' descriptions of the book being "unapologetically self-referential" (p. 2) and "retrospective" while also functioning to correct misconstruals of his work (p. viii). Therefore, his fervour for a performative theology witnessed throughout a career "possessed by what we say, or…should say" (p. 265) is unequivocal.

The post-script offers Hauerwas' response to Nicholas Healy's *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*.[32] Hauerwas holds Healy in esteem even though he characterises Healy's critiques of himself as "off the mark" (pp. 10, 266). Consequently, he considers *The Work of Theology* "a response to Healy's criticisms" notwithstanding that it had been mostly written before Hauerwas had read Healy's book (p. 266). This is evident in Hauerwas' choice of "how" for each of his chapter titles. This choice challenges Healy's distinction between the "what" and "how" of theology; between theology proper and theology in practice. The presence of "how" in Hauerwas' titles is intended to emphasise "the essential connection between doctrine and life" (p. 266) that makes "theology…a performative discipline" (p. 271). Hauerwas edgily advances the *ad hominem* that Healy's critiques, such as his claim that Hauerwas has a "thin" (p. 267) and unsystematic theology, signal Healy's indifference to Hauerwas' methodological concerns of theological convictions being "abstracted from how we are to live" (p. 270). Hauerwas unapologetically accepts the accusation of conflating "the logic of belief" with "the logic of living out our beliefs" because, for Hauerwas, "what" we believe is inseparable from "how" we are to live it out (pp. 268–70, 277). However, he refutes Healy's "more fundamental critique" of him conflating "the logic of belief" with "the logic of coming to believe" (pp. 268–269).

But what of Hauerwas' disclosure that his work "[has] *tried to show* that fundamental theological convictions about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are inseparable from the *work they do for* the formation of a people set loose in and for the world" (p. 23, italics mine). Remarks like this raise questions about him instrumentalising the logic of belief. Consequently, I am unconvinced by Hauerwas' rebuttal as Healy rightly claims that Hauerwas does write about God (a logic of belief) but *not without* involving the other two logics. Healy correctly observes that Hauerwas has a logic of coming to believe that provides an apologetic defence of his logic of living out our beliefs.[33] Hauerwas, then, has missed both Healy's point that his conflation of the logic of belief and the logic of living out our beliefs is fundamentally apologetics and Healy's understandable ensuing unease about whether Hauerwas' amalgamation of logics impinges on his logic of belief (ibid. p. 56).

While Hauerwas' *Work of Theology* positively provides a pneumatology, he risks pursuing an ecclesiological pneumatology instead of a pneumatological ecclesiology because of the functional conflation

[32] Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).
[33] Ibid., 23, 54–56.

of logics identified by Healy. Given his appreciation for Coakley's third article theology in *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (p. 8),[34] Hauerwas should consider an appropriate theological 'method' despite his dislike of methodology (p. 24, cf. pps. 7, 270–71). Greg Liston in *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology*[35] identifies Hauerwas' project as being potentially complimentary with third article ecclesiology's adoption of narrative. However, Hauerwas' ecclesio-pneumatological claim that "[t]he name of the agency the Holy Spirit enables is 'church'" (p. 47) would be strongly critiqued by Third Article theologians for permitting the church to set the parameters for the Spirit rather than vice versa. The failure to sufficiently differentiate between divine and human action within the church is the by-product of Hauerwas' conflation of logics. In response to Hauerwas' invitation to the reader to judge for themselves whether this theological move is a "deep mistake" or not (p. 278), this reader thinks it is.

[34] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[35] Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).