How the Church Performs Jesus' Story

Improvising on the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas

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Abstract

The model of improvisation in the theatre vividly expresses all the principal themes of Stanley Hauerwas' work, and resolves many tensions.

I first *accept* Hauerwas' diagnosis of the flaws in the rational account of ethics. Hauerwas concentrates on person, rather than action or consequences. I argue that Hauerwas asserts (Aristotelian) efficient and formal causes as more significant than material and final causes.

Hauerwas' epistemology avoids universally-held first principles. My second step is to show how the 'Christian story', in the hands of Hauerwas and Lindbeck, *overaccepts* smaller human narratives - that is, it fits them into a much larger perspective.

Considering third the *skills* of the community, the communion of saints emerges as Hauerwas' key doctrine: Christian ethics imitates Christ in his way of confronting the powers that oppress us. The Church establishes an alternative politics which creates conflict without violence.

Fourth, the latent eschatological implications of Hauerwas' ethics are drawn out. The community lives in a new *time*, and not in a separate space from the rest of society; it is an ironic satire on the 'world'. *Reincorporation* is at the heart of nonviolence because it imitates the way God in the eschaton rehabilitates all the 'stray' and neglected elements in the story. Because the community is *not* finally answerable for the destiny of the world it can take time for 'trivial' practices - such as having children - that embody its hope in God's sovereignty.

Improvisation involves immersion in the Christian narrative, thereby learning the skills of patience, courage, hope, peaceableness, constancy: this takes moral effort. In a crisis, the community trusts the habits formed from those skills, and concentrates on doing the obvious. In this way it 'overaccepts' issues which come to it from its own experience and from the wider society, and transforms fate into divine destiny.

Contents

Introduction

0.1. Overview

Stanley Hauerwas was born in 1940 in Texas, the son of a bricklayer. He grew up as a Southern Methodist. He studied at Southwestern University before moving to Yale where he took his Ph.D. in 1968. From 1970 he taught at the Roman Catholic foundation of Notre Dame, Indiana. In 1985 he moved to Duke University, a Methodist foundation in North Carolina.

He has published fourteen books, and edited four others. All but three of these books are collections of essays; altogether he has published more than 250 scholarly articles, including those reproduced in his eleven collections. The occasional essay plays an important part in his approach to Christian ethics. He is shy of the thorough systematic ordering of theology, since he fears that this kind of disembodied scholarship can become a substitute for living the gospel through the disciplined practices of a particular Christian community.

For it is in such communities that he perceives the heart of Christian ethics to rest. His writing is intended to make clear the way Christian communities are formed by the Christian story, the kinds of practices that this story entails, and the way the Church relates to such issues as arise in community and society. A faithful Church does not dominate the secular agenda: it has no big battalions to win consent and enforce its notion of truth. But it does have a distinctive story to tell, and the task of theological ethics is to show how the distinctive claims of that story shape the life and practices of the Christian community. Hauerwas' considerable ire is chiefly directed against those who suppose the Church's task is to seek the general improvement of society, sharing a broad consensus with all 'people

of good will'. In contrast, he insists the Church's first social ethical task is to be itself: it serves neither God nor society by neglecting its distinctive claims and practices.

Through the large collection of Hauerwas' writings, several consistent themes emerge. He begins with a deep-seated frustration with the way ethics - especially Christian ethics - is generally done. The thrust of post-Enlightenment ethics has been to free discussion from the contingent, the historical, the subjective, the particular, in favour of the universal, objective and rational. This came about because of the violence of the disputes that arose between rival subjectivities, and the need to arbitrate between them. Hauerwas regards these efforts as folly, because this supposed objectivity is nothing but another subjectivity - the more dangerous because it does not know itself as such. Claiming to know us better than we know ourselves, this style of ethics in fact ignores the historical particularities that make us recognisably 'us'. Hauerwas locates ethics not in what we all have in common - actions - but in where we differ - our character and historical community. Much of his writing concerns the way the distinct practices of the Christian community form people of a particular character - or should do. This is the subject of my first chapter.

Hauerwas demonstrates convincingly that one cannot make ethical judgements without accounting for historical particularities. Rather than ground his thinking in an *a priori* account of the human condition, he makes a virtue of the contingencies of life. The extraordinary claim of Christianity is that God himself chooses to be revealed through human contingency - through Israel, Jesus and the Church. Any attempt to approach ethics by abstracting from the particularities of community is therefore a departure from God's way of dealing with the world. Only Christianity provides a story capable of forming communities of character. But how do we know that the Christian story is a true story? This is a key issue in the criticism of Hauerwas - but hardly one that is unique to him alone. Hauerwas' own tendency is to look to the community itself to 'perform' the story: if this performance creates faithful people, this is the best evidence available that the story is true. These issues form the substance of my second chapter.

The key to faithful performance by the community is that its witness is peaceful. The uniqueness of Jesus lies fundamentally in his acceptance of the cross as the way of disarming the powers that oppress us, and in the vindication of his nonviolent witness in the resurrection. Christ is at the centre of Hauerwas' theology, insofar as Christ

inaugurates and makes possible the peaceable kingdom - the nonviolent witness of Christian community. The Church is called to be holy in the way that Jesus is holy: it should be wary of the temptation to control the wider society, since this invariably results in setting up some norm other than Jesus as the path for all to follow. The resort to violence always reveals a lack of trust in God, a lack of faith in his definitive revelation in Jesus. In order to avoid resorting to violence, the Church must set up a form of politics which creates the right kind of conflict. The way the Church imitates Christ is the subject of my third chapter.

These three themes - character, narrative, and nonviolence - form the most abiding rhythms in Hauerwas' project. They each deserve detailed investigation. Meanwhile the most consistent criticisms have come from two related sources - one theological, the other ethical.

The theological question is of how Hauerwas justifies his belief in the truth of Christianity. This is of course a difficult issue for all theologians, but it is particularly pressing for Hauerwas. This is because he makes such a virtue of the contingency of the Christian narrative (as of all narratives) that he seems to open the door to relativism. Meanwhile it is hard to see how his constant reference to the Christian *story*, in the singular, does justice to the plurality of Christian witness over two thousand years. I address these issues in chapter two.

The ethical question is the one most commonly directed at Hauerwas. Does his emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Christian story and the importance of community inevitably imply a sectarian model of the Church? Some of Hauerwas' language invites this criticism. Hauerwas is anxious to insist that he is not a sectarian - indeed he doubts the validity of the terminology used in the debate. I discuss this question in chapter three.

Rather than set up Hauerwas' work as a finished product, and go on to discuss in detail various criticisms which can be made of it, I have chosen a different approach to assessing his work. The criticisms are of course assessed in the course of this study; but in each of the first three chapters, and particularly in the last two, I highlight areas which, though consistent with Hauerwas' thinking, remain undeveloped in his theology. Two particularly stand out.

For the gospel to be a story it must have an end. Christian faith in God's sovereignty is finally expressed in the belief that the eschaton is in his hands, and he will

close the story when he chooses to do so. While the faults of deontological ethics lay in chapters one and two, with the thick description of the detail of historical life and of revelation, the faults of consequential ethics cannot be fully explained without eschatology. The consequentialist's story is too short - it ends at the furthest point he or she can imagine reaching with the consequences of the proposed action. It implies one's own sovereignty. In chapter four I discuss the ways an eschatological perspective shapes the life of the Christian community.

Christian ethics concerns the performance of Christian doctrine; and Church history thus concerns the history of Christian ethics - the history of the performance of Christian doctrine. Performance is a vital but undeveloped theme in Hauerwas' work. He earmarks performance as the way to test the truth of doctrine - but he does not go into detail. In order to test the performance of my own arguments, I provide practical examples towards the end of four of my five chapters. In chapter five I develop a detailed model of how a particular kind of performance best expresses the kind of ethics Hauerwas writes about.

I am aware that in appearing to systematise the work of Stanley Hauerwas I am writing in a manner he himself might not fully endorse. Systematisation has overtones of control, and can be a substitute for commitment to the life of a particular community. Nonetheless I have gone ahead. And this is not systematisation *faute de mieux*: for the shape of the thesis embodies the force of my argument no less than the form of Hauerwas' writing embodies his. The shape of the thesis does not become fully apparent until chapter five, and its detailed character will be explained in the conclusion. Here I need only say that I seek in this study to perform the method of Christian ethics I advocate.

0.2. Summary of Main Arguments

0.2.1. Hauerwas' claims that I uphold

1. Rationality is an inadequate basis for Christian ethics. In 1.2. I endorse Hauerwas' claim that totalising accounts of ethics ('ethics for everybody') are flawed because they do not understand particular narrative. These accounts fail to *describe* the moral life. I have assumed the importance of description in the titles of my chapters. Hauerwas' discussion of children (4.6.) and mental handicap (5.4.) helps to reconceptualise what it means to be a Christian - further demonstrating the flaws in the rationalist approach.

2. Narrative best expresses the commitment of Christian theology to understand God's revelation in human particularity. The foundationalist-antifoundationalist debate is somewhat arid because all epistemologies have to start somewhere: there is no high ground from which all can be surveyed. (I also conclude in 2.3.2. that both foundationalists and antifoundationalists end up being anthropocentric for different reasons.) Hauerwas' emphasis on community averts the postliberal danger of dehistoricising scripture.

3. There is a connection between the relationship of the Church to the state and the kind of ethics the Church espouses. For instance, the Constantinian Church is likely to have a consequentialist ethic. See 3.2.

4. If a community is committed to nonviolence it is forced to use its imagination much more than it would do otherwise. Imagination is the most neglected area in ethics. See 3.5.6.

0.2.2. My own original contributions

1 Hauerwas' project can be seen in terms of Aristotelian causality as asserting the priority of efficient and formal causes over material and final causes See 1.5.

2. The tensions in postliberal narrative theology can be considerably eased by further attention to the end of the story. See 2.6.

3. Hauerwas' Christology centres around Christ as the norm of peaceableness. More central to his theology is the Church as the communion of saints. Thus the holiness of the Church and its imitation of Christ are more significant to him than its unity or catholicity. See 3 3-4.

4. Hauerwas appears to be a sectarian because he uses spatial metaphors: in fact the Church lives in a new *time*, rather than in a different space from the world. (I owe this idea to Philip Kenneson.) See 4.3.

5. Eschatology offers ethics an ironic perspective which is a better model for Christian character and Church-state relations than Hauerwas' emphasis on tragedy. Irony does justice to the whole of the Christian story - not just the cross. See 4.2 and 4.5.

6. John Milbank's notion of God's nonviolent creation of difference makes a great contribution to Hauerwas' more eschatological perception of peace by freeing it of a world-denying implication. See 4.2.1.

7. Performance is crucial to Hauerwas' ethics but he does not discuss it in detail. Recent theological literature on performance is limited in scope - often considering only the preacher. See 5.2.

8. Improvisation in the theatre offers a model which correctly expresses the relationship of the community to the written word, and offers skills analogous to those advocated by Hauerwas. In the notion of 'overaccepting' it provides a way of applying the Christian

story to the contemporary situation of the Church and dispels criticisms of sectarianism. It offers a way for the Church to retain the initiative without setting the agenda. See 5.3 and 3.4.3.

The Description of Humanity: Character and Virtue

1.1. Introduction: 'Virtue Ethics'

1.1.1. The historical background

Virtue ethics is a large and rapidly growing scholarly subject. This was not the case in 1974 when Stanley Hauerwas published *Vision and Virtue* and then in the following year *Character and the Christian Life*.[1] Hauerwas attributes this transformation from a cottage industry to an industrial giant[2] to a 'paradigm shift' along the lines described by Thomas Kuhn.[3] The tradition of ethics inherited from Kant has died the death of a thousand anomalies, exceptions and qualifications. 'Virtue ethics' was a prime candidate to step into its shoes. This revolution is symbolised by the publication in 1981 of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.[4]

MacIntyre tells the story of how this fragmented ethical world came to be. Our current ethical condition is a chaos of incompatible fragments of past ethical systems. The prevailing modern view concentrates on a particular understanding of freedom. As an individual, one is free to determine one's own good: it is not a question of there being one united good end for human life. Such an end tends, if at all, to be expressed as freedom or

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[1]Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1974; *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* third printing with a new introduction, San Antonio: Trinity University Press 1985.

[2]Lee Yearley, 'Recent Work on Virtue' *Religious Studies Review* 16/1 1990 1-9, see p. 1.

[3]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* p. xiv.

[4]Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* Second edition London: Duckworth 1984.

happiness. These are inadequate as ends since they are quiet on method and empty of content. They neither offer practical guidance for the conduct of a life oriented to such an end, nor describe what an end might be like were one to arrive at it. What has been rejected in the process is the teleological understanding of ethics - the idea that ethics is designed for a certain end, that is, the good for humankind. This teleological understanding is central to the way ethics was understood in the classical period, and is assumed by Plato and Aristotle. It sees the purpose of ethics as the production of good people. In the medieval period the understanding of the good was redefined in more theological terms and the means to the end, the virtues, were expanded to include faith, hope and love, lest they otherwise seem to imply some form of merit. The end of ethics was the production of good character, understood as the possession of the virtues. Today, however, there is no such consensus on the good. Even if there were perceived to be a single good to seek, the quest would be considered purely a matter of personal choice. Thus there is not so much an ethical vacuum as a cacophony of voices with little agreement on the method, possibility, or desirability of adjudicating between them. MacIntyre recommends a return to the classical-medieval approach: the development of human character through the practice of the virtues.

He and Hauerwas are both aware that in this fragmented condition, a renewal of interest in human community, and the virtues that community entails, is unsurprising. Yet it is significant that this approach to ethics is still a minority pursuit. Few share the view that the barbarians are waiting beyond the frontiers - let alone that they have been ruling over us for some time.[5] The mainstream of ethicists remains committed to articulating an ethic of principle which can resolve conflicts in a manner that avoids arbitrariness. 'Virtue ethics' in this light seems subjective and relative, and thus of at best limited usefulness for the ethical project. And of those who do share MacIntyre's general diagnosis, there is no consensus over the cure. 'Virtue ethics' is an umbrella term covering those who see themselves as standing in the same tradition as MacIntyre. Their diversity is shown by the number who would not describe MacIntyre as either a leader or even a highly significant member. The reason for this is that 'virtue ethics' has subscribers in several fields - theology, philosophy, and public philosophy, with interested parties among

[5]Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* p 263.

educationalists, psychologists and sociologists - while MacIntyre's book is less easy to classify.[6]

In theological ethics, one can distinguish three broad approaches to 'virtue ethics'.[7] The first sees virtue and character as being nurtured in particular communities which witness to the larger community but stand in some sense apart from it. They inherit from MacIntyre ideas surrounding narrative, community and tradition, and consider the vision of their tradition through history, symbol and story. This approach encompasses Hauerwas, McClendon and Meilaender.[8] The second group are anxious to avoid forming particular communities, being more concerned to converse with the larger, secular culture. By using philosophic and social scientific approaches, as well as the prominent place of virtue in Christian tradition, they can critique the types of character and world-view of contemporary society. This group includes Gustafson, Herms, Adams and Sokolowski.[9] The third approach is more interested in theories of human development as discussed in debates surrounding Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg. This involves rather more consideration of education and psychology than of theology. Dykstra and Capps have been the most significant contributors in this area.[10]

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[6]Yearley pp 1-3. Yearley identifies three types of philosophical work on virtue. Philippa Foot, Bernard Williams, Edmund Pincoffs and others consider the relation of virtue to deontological or contractarian theories of morality, investigating whether virtue can replace or at least supplement such theories. Amelie Rorty and others discuss philosophies of mind and action the way character affects action and the relationship of practical judgements, emotions, and dispositions (Hauerwas engages with some of these issues in *Character and the Christian Life*. See also Thomas Tracy, *God, Action and Embodiment* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1984). Finally the first group are among those concerned with axiological questions of whether one can justify one kind of life that manifests the good more thoroughly than other kinds.

The debate in public philosophy largely surrounds R. Bellah et al eds. *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985), R. Bellah et al eds. *The Good Society* (New York: Knopf 1991), and further discussions in Richard Neuhaus ed. *Virtue - Public and Private* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1986).

[7]Yearley p. 3.

[8]James McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume One* Nashville: Abingdon Press 1986. Gilbert Meilaender *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1984.

[9]James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* 2 volumes Chicago: University of Chicago Press volume 1 1981 volume 2 1984. Eilert Herms, 'Virtue: A Neglected Concept in Protestant Ethics' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35/6 481-95. Robert Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Issues in Philosophical Theology* Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987. Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1982.

[10]Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character* Paulist Press 1981. Donald Capps, *Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues* Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1987. Hauerwas discusses this approach in 'Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life' in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1981 pp 129-154.

1.1.2. The theological background

Theologians concerned with 'virtue ethics' have faced opposition from some traditional positions, both Catholic and Protestant. Those who understand ethics primarily in terms of natural law tend to see 'virtue ethics' as subjective and relative. Nonetheless, Catholic moral theology has tended to be more open to the language of character and virtue than has Protestant theology. This reflects the latter's concern not to confuse good works with attaining merit, and the insistence that on grace and faith alone rests our righteousness. This concern has entailed the distinction between the internal, passive, justified self and the external, active, sinful self.[11] Hauerwas points out in *Character and the Christian Life* that the metaphor of command[12] demonstrates the implications of this distinction: 'The object of the moral life is not to grow but to be repeatedly ready to obey each new command'.[13] This contrasts with Meilaender's use of the metaphor of journey (which corresponds to Hauerwas' understanding of character). Whereas the command/dialogue metaphor sees righteousness as relational, in the journey metaphor righteousness genuinely transforms the person by the pilgrimage on which they travel:

> Righteousness ... consists not in right relation with God but in becoming (throughout the whole of one's character) the sort of person God wills us to be and commits himself to making of us. Picturing the Christian life as a journey, we can confess our sin without thinking that the standard of which we fall short, in its accusation of us, must lead us to doubt the gracious acceptance by which God empowers us to journey toward his goal for our lives.[14]

This sits uneasily with the tradition inherited from Luther, for whom 'life is not the gradual development of a virtuous self; it is the constant return to the promise of grace.

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[11]Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* p. 50-52.

[12]Meilaender replaces the term command with the metaphor of dialogue in his article 'The Place of Ethics in the Theological Task' *Currents in Theology and Mission* 6 1979 p. 199 - a change Hauerwas recognises and endorses in his new introduction to *Character and the Christian Life* p xxvii.

[13]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* p. 2.

[14]Meilaender, 'The Place of Ethics' p. 200.

The examined life, if honestly examined, will reveal only that the best of our works are sin'.[15]

The traditional Protestant approach, with its deep distrust of the shaping of a Christian life, its tendency to distinguish between the internal and external self, and the consequent difficulty in how the acts of the 'external' self manifest the 'internal' self, deprives ethics of the conceptual categories to consider moral development. This has left Protestants vulnerable to whatever moralities their cultures happened to endorse. Hence the widespread identification of being Christian with the general social definition of being decent.[16]

Having briefly placed Stanley Hauerwas in relation to the history of virtue ethics, and in relation to the theological context, I propose now to outline what he sees himself as opposing in the tradition of philosophical ethics. I shall then outline his constructive proposals for a specifically Christian ethic of character and virtue.

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[15]Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* pp 106-7. Meilaender suggests an inevitable tension between dialogue and journey; Hauerwas borrows Meilaender's terminology but insists that the metaphor of journey is primary for the shape of the Christian life. (*Character and the Christian Life* p xxix).

It is not clear that Meilaender is justified in contrasting command and journey like this. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a prominent example of a Protestant perception of sanctification as a journey. One may also doubt if Luther is really as committed to seeing acts as good and bad in themselves as Meilander suggests. R.L. Simpson has brought to my attention the following quotation from Luther's 1520 treatise, 'The Freedom of the Christian': 'As it is necessary, therefore, that the trees exist before their fruits and the fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear; so a man must first be good or wicked before he does a good or wicked work, and his works do not make him good or wicked, but he himself makes his works either wicked or good.' (Martin Luther *Three Treatises* translated by Lambert, Philadelphia: Fortress 1970 p. 297) This implies the agent's perspective that Hauerwas advocates.

[16]*A Community of Character* p 132.

1.2. The Rationalist Captivity of Christian Ethics: What Hauerwas Opposes in the Standard Account of Moral Rationality

At the start of *Truthfulness and Tragedy* Stanley Hauerwas sets out his definitive description of the ethical context in contrast with which his understanding of ethics appears so radical.[17] He names this context 'the standard account'. He does not identify the standard account with any single author. Rather, he sees the customary antagonists in ethics - for instance Kantians and utilitarians - as agreeing more significantly than they disagree.

For all the efforts of several authors to summarise what Hauerwas calls the standard account, the precise definition remains elusive. The account Hauerwas opposes has arisen since the late eighteenth century. No contemporary moral philosopher can be identified as subscribing to the entire range of elements, though its ancestry is recognizably Kantian. Perhaps the best exposition of these tenets is by Trianosky, whose account of 'neo-Kantianism' includes the following:

1. The most important question in morality is, 'What is it right or obligatory to do?'
2. Basic moral judgements are judgements concerning the rightness of actions.
3. Basic moral judgements take the form of general rules or principles about right action. Particular judgements of the right are always instances of these.
4. Basic moral judgements are universal in form. They contain no essential reference to particular persons or particular relationships in which the agent might stand.
5. Basic moral judgements are not grounded on some account of the human good which is itself independent of morality.

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[17]Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story: An Alternative Plan for Rationality in Ethics', *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press pp. 15-39.

6. Basic moral judgements are categorical imperatives. They have a certain 'automatic reason-giving force' ... independently of their relation to the desires and/or interests of the agent.[18]

Hauerwas rejects all but one of these tenets, for reasons I shall discuss below. The one he maintains is the fifth one. In doing so, he stands not only against the deontological thrust of the other tenets, but also against utilitarianism and similar consequential theories. These latter theories ground morality on some independent account of the good - such as happiness or the satisfaction of desire or freedom. For Hauerwas there is no foundation to be abstracted from the moral process, no 'still centre'.

Trianosky, writing about philosophical ethics, discerns four categories within the debate: duty deontologists, duty teleologists, virtue deontologists, and virtue teleologists. Hauerwas is clearly one of the latter two. But which one? The key issue for settling this is, can one define the good independently of reference to moral virtue? If yes, one is a virtue-teleologist; if no, one is a virtue-deontologist. The problem is that his emphasis on perfection puts Hauerwas in the latter camp, as a virtue-deontologist; but his concern that actions (and doctrines) be judged by whether or not they produce people of character implies the former perspective. Trianosky goes some way toward resolving this confusion:

> Non-teleological ethics of virtue offer important advantages over any other view. They do justice to two guiding intuitions which seem at first to be irreconcilably at odds. The first is the minimal Kantian idea [see 5 above] that morality is autonomous. The second is the idea that, as utilitarians have always insisted, morality is essentially connected with the human good. Defenders of the non-teleological ethics of virtue [i.e. Hauerwas] can accept this latter utilitarian idea, for they can maintain that virtue is a constitutive element of the human good.[19]

Thus Hauerwas is able to reject both a certain kind of deontological reasoning and a certain kind of teleological reasoning, which together he calls the standard account, and which he perceives as agreeing with each other more significantly than they disagree (because they share the assumptions I shall shortly outline). Yet he is also able to retain

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[18]Gregory Trianosky 'What is Virtue Ethics All About?' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27/4 Oct 1990 p. 335. Trianosky has three further tenets, less relevant to the discussion here.

[19]Trianosky p. 339.

features of his ethic which at times seem to resemble both kinds of 'standard' reasoning, in a new form.

The time has now come to identify what Hauerwas sees as the key features - and the key flaws - in the standard account.[20]

1.2.1. Foundations, facts, and the observer

Inspired by the scientific ideal of objectivity, the standard account founds moral judgements upon the basis of impersonal rationality. Ethics is about the particular only insofar as it translates to the general. The particular point of view of the agent - the agent's history, community, beliefs, and character - is distrusted and seen as arbitrary and contingent, subjective and relative: in short, unscientific. Instead, various proposals have been put forward for an impersonal starting point - a basic moral principle, procedure, or viewpoint which applies to everyone engaged in moral judgement or action. Such proposals include the categorical imperative, the ideal observer, universalisability, or the original position. The search for some such foundation of ethics seems interminable. These theories make the assumption that what constitutes us as persons is not any attribute, achievement, relationship, community, role, commitment, belief, or history, but our reason. 'Such theories are not meant to tell us how to be good in relation to some ideal, but rather to ensure that what we owe to others as strangers, not as friends or sharers in a tradition, is nonarbitrary'.[21]

But is even this modest project realisable? The standard account does not fully recognise the value-laden nature of the terms it regards as factual. Notions such as 'murder', 'stealing', and 'abortion' are not simple descriptions whose meaning can be derived from rationality in itself. If they were, why then are moral controversies so hard to

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[20]*Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1983 gathers together the leading criticisms of the 'standard account'.

[21] Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story' p.17.

resolve?[22] Pro- and anti-abortion activists struggle to discuss issues of right and wrong because they hardly agree on the language they use. Moral notions depend for their display upon examples and histories. No deontological or utilitarian theory can free them from this dependence without sacrificing their rich texture, and thus failing to describe them adequately.

Thus the standard account is misguided on the *what* of morality since it overestimates our ability to separate fact from value. It is also misguided on the *who* of ethical theory since it privileges the observer's point of view. Participants, it says, cannot see as well as viewers. Morality is seen more truly by the art-critic than by the artist. There are two points to criticise here. First, is this form of disinterestedness desirable? Second, is it possible?

It is largely the contingent nature of our projects that makes them valuable to us. They matter because they are ours. The distancing implied by the standard account is identified by Hauerwas as alienation.[23] Thus we are encouraged to see the self as made up of reason's efforts to control desire - a description which seems to separate pleasure from good altogether. Reason connects us with the universal rules of conduct: desire only with our own contingent appetite. Having dismissed our passions, the standard account dispenses with our past:

> Morally, the self represents a collection of continuous decisions bound together only in the measure they approximate to the moral point of view. Our moral capacity thus depends on our ability to view our past in discontinuity with our present ..., to alienate ourselves from our past in order to be able to grasp the timelessness of the rationality offered by the standard account.[24]

Iris Murdoch points out that it is only the lure of a greater or more beautiful good than we can ourselves will into existence that can occasion genuine disinterest in the self.[25]

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[22]This is where MacIntyre begins in *After Virtue* (chapter 2). The examples he cites are war and peace, abortion, and freedom and equality. See also his 'Why is the Search for the Foundation of Ethics so Frustrating?' *Hastings Center Report* 9/4 1979 pp 21-2 where he discusses three areas of disagreement between deontologists and consequentialists: 1. causality, predictability, and intentionality, and the relationship of consciousness to the world; 2. law, evil, emotion, and the integrity of the self; 3. the relation of individual identity to social identity and ethics to politics.

[23]Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story' p.23.

[24]ibid p.24. Hauerwas bases this assessment on two quotations from Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. See Stanley Hauerwas *Truthfulness and Tragedy* pp. 207-8 n.19.

Thus disinterestedness implies access to a neutral point of view, a neutral story, independent of the past, eternally present. This appears to be the perspective of God. But this discloses Hauerwas' most important, most theological, and most far-reaching contention: *there is no such neutral standpoint, no neutral story. Even God is no neutral observer, for the God of Jews and Christians wills to reveal himself in and through a particular narrative.* The reason of humanity comes face to face with the foolishness of God. If God's actions take the form of a narrative, so should ours. This is the starting point for Hauerwas' narrative ethics.

1.2.2. Decisions and actions

By overemphasizing moments of decision the standard account fails to describe adequately the moral life. In the process it reduces moral rationality to one of its parts - and a secondary, dependent part at that - and thus fails to describe the moral experience as it is lived. For this critique, Hauerwas is primarily indebted to a key article in the 'first wave' of virtue literature by Edmund Pincoffs.[26] Pincoffs describes how often it is assumed that ethics concerns problems - dilemmas involving a conflict of choice - and concerns itself with evaluating alternative rational solutions. Such solutions involve judgements that are justified without reference to the particular agent involved in the situation.

What is wrong with 'decisionism'? Hauerwas certainly affirms that decisions are morally significant (and unavoidable). But they are 'in a certain sense ... morally secondary'.[27] They are not, for an ethic of virtue, 'the paradigmatic centre of moral reflection'. The centre of moral reflection is not the development of solutions or principles for decision-making, or rules no decision should break: it is the development of people -

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[25] *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts* Cambridge UP 1967. I shall return to Iris Murdoch in chapter 5.

[26] Edmund Pincoffs, 'Quandary Ethics' *Mind* 80 1971 552-571.

[27] Stanley Hauerwas 'The Virtues and Our Communities: Human Nature as History', in *A Community of Character* p. 114.

people of character. The manner of the actions of such people must display their moral character. It is no use talking about actions apart from the people that do them. There is no such thing as an action that is not done by somebody. The kind of events that ethics is interested in are those that can be done differently. What ethics changes is first of all the person - and only subsequently and consequently the action. A changed (saintly) person can make mistakes; and a bad person can do good. But in Hauerwas' view this risks a misuse of the notion of good: for a good action is one which encourages or reflects the creation of a good person. An overemphasis on decision implies a hard and fast distinction between an action and an agent. For Hauerwas, no such distinction is sustainable (though communities sometimes fasten on one for educative and legal purposes).[28] Even the description of circumstances is a moral event, since our terms and notions presuppose that we are people capable of using them.

Decisionism is thus inadequate in two senses. On the one hand, the vast majority of the things we do in life we do, not because we decide to do them, but because of the kinds of people we are. We do them by habit rather than by choice. An ethics that emphasizes moments of decision ignores the great preponderance of the events of life. Life is not a perpetual crisis of choice.

> Morality is not primarily concerned with quandaries or hard decisions; nor is the moral self simply the collection of such decisions. As persons of moral character we do not confront situations as mud puddles into which we have to step; rather the kind of 'situations' we confront and how we understand them are a function of the kind of people we are.[29]

The convictions we hold form our descriptions of the world and determine the shape of any quandary that presents itself. These convictions 'are like the air we breathe - we never notice them'.[30] The convictions Hauerwas has in mind are for instance the duty to provide children and the infirm with care that we do not give to the stranger. The force of such convictions is the very fact that we take them for granted. 'And morally', he adds, 'we must have the kind of character that keeps us from subjecting them to decision'.[31] It is

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[28]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* pp. xxiii-xxiv.

[29]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* pp. 114-5.

[30]Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story' p. 19.

[31]ibid p. 20.

these qualities that make up the substance of the moral life - yet they are so fundamental that we do not notice them.[32] The examined life dwells more on them than on decisions.

On the other hand when it seems there *is* in fact a crisis, and a major decision does have to be made, that decision is not made in a vacuum: it is dependent on a deeper, prior moral commitment.

> Thus persons of character or virtue may, from the perspective of others, make what appear to have been momentous and even heroic decisions, but feel that in their own lives they 'had no choice' if they were to continue to be faithful to their own characters.[33]

Hauerwas stresses that character is not formed by decisions - though decisions may confirm or reveal character: it comes instead from our beliefs and dispositions - which the standard account holds to be contingent and non-rational, and thus a retreat from moral objectivity[34]. The issue becomes one of how to reintroduce the 'dreaded first person singular' without moral rationality being reduced to 'because I want to'.

Thus decisionism fails to describe the full complexity of the moral life. Moreover, one could go further than Hauerwas and add that decisionism fails even in its own terms: for rules or principles by themselves cannot tell us how they are to be applied in specific situations, or when they are being applied well.

1.2.3. Principles, violence, and the Importance of Tragedy

Finally, the abstractions made by the standard account have a subtle but real connection with violence. The two are both expressions of alienation.

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[32]'If fish ever developed intelligence and began to codify and describe their environment, one of the last things they would notice would be the water' (Stanley Hauerwas 'Community and Diversity: The Tyranny of Normality' in *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1986 p. 211).

[33]Stanley Hauerwas 'The Virtues and Our Communities' p. 114.

[34]Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story' p. 20. The standard account does not claim that dispositions are irrelevant, but that what counts for moral consideration is the rational, objective, and universal.

This connection is implicit first of all in the universalism on which the standard account depends. Within the logic of categorical imperatives and universal laws there lies a powerful justification for violence. Once the presuppositions of a universal law have been accepted, the existence of one who will not act according to it becomes morally objectionable, since such differences should not exist. It is difficult to separate rational failure from moral failure. If someone were to deny the 'universal' laws understood by the standard account, they would seem morally obtuse: it is a short step to forcing them to mend their ways. The more 'universal' the law appears to be, the more this is the case.

The formation of moral principles is the second potentially coercive abstraction. Hauerwas sees a sense of the tragic as that which enables us to be moral and thus keeps us from violence. He focuses on the practice of medicine to make this clear.[35] It is a fallacy that greater techniques of preventing and curing disease will ever free our lives from tragic dilemmas.[36] The sometimes tragic story of caring can never be thoroughly reconstrued into a comedy of curing.[37] Just as in medicine, so in the rest of moral existence, the right is not always the successful.

> When a culture loses touch with the tragic ... we must redescribe our failures in acceptable terms. Yet to do so *ipso facto* traps us in self-deceiving accounts of what we have done. Thus our stories quickly acquire the characteristics of a policy ... . Phrases like 'current medical practice', 'standard hospital policy', or even 'professional ethics', embody exemplary stories ... . Since we fail to regard them as stories, however, but must see them as a set of principles, the establishment must set itself to secure them against competing views. If the disadvantaged regard this as a form of institutional violence, they are certainly correct.[38]

Description again appears as Hauerwas' bone of contention with the standard account. Because of our inability to recognise the tragedy implicit in the limits of our existence, we cannot bring ourselves to describe an abortion as a death, however unavoidable. Thus we deceive ourselves.

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[35]Stanley Hauerwas 'Medicine as a tragic profession' in *Truthfulness and Tragedy* pp. 184-202.

[36]Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story' p. 37.

[37]In my discussion of tragedy, comedy and irony, both here and in chapter four, I am indebted for my notions of these genres to Northrop Frye *The Anatomy of Criticism* Princeton: Princeton University Press 1957 and James Hopewell *Congregation: Stories and Structures* London: S.C.M. 1988.

[38]Stanley Hauerwas 'From System to Story' p. 38. I return to the analysis of violence in chapter three below.

Deontological and utilitarian theories seek to overcome the moral divisions of the world by an appeal to an understanding of universal moral rationality. Hauerwas sees in such attempts an inability to face the tragic. The tragic is experienced when a person (perhaps a highly virtuous person) with several responsibilities and obligations, confronted with a single decision having irreversible consequences, finds that these many interests conflict with both his or her own interest and with each other. The lurking temptation is always to avoid the tragic through violence. Hauerwas quotes Stanley Cavell: 'if you would avoid tragedy (and suffering), avoid love; if you cannot avoid love, avoid integrity; if you cannot avoid integrity, avoid the world; if you cannot avoid the world, destroy it'.[39] The world cannot be forced into a premature unity. The standard account is designed to avert violence through resolving moral conflicts. Such an ethic of abstract principle based on universal moral rationality is an attempt to resist evil and is not in itself violent; but to the extent that it fails to see the tragic dimension of moral existence it slips into coercion through its own self-deception.

1.3. Towards an Identifiably Christian Ethic: Hauerwas' Constructive Proposals

Hauerwas outlines his ethic of character in various places, but the general description is broadly consistent.[40] His concern arises from the doctrine of sanctification,

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[39]Stanley Cavell *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge UP 1969 p. 349 quoted in Stanley Hauerwas 'The Church in a Divided World' *A Community of Character* p. 107. I return to the discussion of tragedy in chapter four below.

[40]See Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* especially chapters 1 and 3, 'Toward an Ethic of Character' chapter 3 in *Vision and Virtue*, 'The Virtues and Our Communities: Human Nature as History' chapter 6 in *A Community of Character*, and 'On Being Historic: Agency, Character and Sin' chapter 3 in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* London: S.C.M. 1983.

and the way that this doctrine becomes unintelligible within the occasionalistic emphasis of the ethics of command. It is my argument that the key doctrine for Hauerwas is that of the communion of saints: it is this doctrine that unites the diverse elements in his writings. Character and virtue concern the formation of the saints (always plural, never singular - this is not about ethical elitism). An action is good if it expresses or builds up the formation of the saints - what Hauerwas calls people (or communities) of character.

In what remains of this chapter I shall examine Hauerwas' understanding of the self, and the attendant considerations of agency, causality, formation and freedom. I shall offer a neo-Aristotelian proposal of my own, in an effort to show the significance of what Hauerwas is proposing. This will lead into a preliminary discussion of the place of narrative in the ethics of character.[41] I shall go on to discuss Hauerwas' conception of virtue and the virtues, general and particular. In conclusion I shall consider some of the implications of the constructive account that has been offered.

Hauerwas' virtue ethic claims that ethics is about people rather than about actions. It is more concerned with the form of our actions than with their content: with the *how* more than with the *what*. The virtuous person may do what others do: yet for different reasons or in a different way. Actions are judged from a teleological point of view: the question is, 'to what extent will this action contribute to or fulfil my moral character?' or, 'what does this action say about what kind of person I have been, am, and want to be?'. Actions must 'fit' with the history of their agent.

The process of acquiring character is frequently compared by Hauerwas to the development of a set of skills.[42] The analogy here is with the artisan, who learns, practises, and coordinates those skills which enable a creative response to unanticipated difficulties as they may arise. The person of character is constantly in need of such skills in order to be faithful to a moral tradition - all the more so because such a moral adventure encounters obstacles that might not have been recognized by the non-virtuous. Hauerwas identifies

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[41] I shall return to more general discussion of the place of narrative in Hauerwas' ethics in chapter two.

[42] See for example Stanley Hauerwas 'The Politics of the Church: How We Lay Bricks and Make Disciples' in *After Christendom: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* Nashville: Abingdon pp. 93-111, where he compares discipleship to apprenticeship in a craft.

these skills as linguistic, emotional and rational.[43] Moral skill, like all skill, embodies power - the ability to do with facility what others do with difficulty. It is in this power, rather than in a choice between options, that freedom resides.

In *Character and the Christian Life* Hauerwas maps the field of character ethics.

> The moral importance of character begins to be seen only when the moral problem is taken to be the agent standing before a decision. There we see the importance of that which the agent brings to his decision that is either not assessable or irrelevant to the spectator making his judgement about the resulting action. Thus, the problem of character is an attempt to stress the importance of our subjectivity for the moral direction of our lives. It is concerned with how that direction becomes embodied in our selves through our beliefs, intentions, and actions.[44]

Hauerwas' perspective develops in his later work. For example, he would no longer use an expression like 'an agent standing before a decision', since what agents regard as decisions depends on their prior moral formation, and thus the decision itself cannot be separated so succinctly from the agent. Nonetheless this assessment of character sets out the project that dominates the first phase of his writing.

1.4. The Self as Agent

In *Character and the Christian Life* Hauerwas defines character as 'the qualification or determination of our self-agency formed by our having certain intentions (and beliefs) rather than others'[45]. He spends most of the book explaining this definition, justifying it, and drawing out its implications. What does this definition mean?

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[43]Stanley Hauerwas 'The Virtues and our Communities' p. 115.

[44]Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life* p. 33.

[45]p. 115. In his 1985 Introduction, Hauerwas acknowledges a 'lingering "Kantianism"' in this definition, for it 'still suggests a kind of dualism insofar as a "self" seems to stand behind our character' (xx). He prefers in the introduction to call character the 'form of our agency'.

In the first place Hauerwas insists that persons are

> in essence self-determining beings, who act upon and through their nature and environment to give their lives particular form. In a sense [they] control their futures by becoming the kind of [persons] they are through their present choices and actions. [Persons] are at the mercy of external forces only if they allow themselves to be. To be a [person] is to be an autonomous centre of activity and the source of one's own determinations.[46]

Hauerwas is not here trying to insist that humanity is self-made and in the centre of the universe. The emphasis is rather that one cannot conceive of *action* without considering the person or persons *acting*; and that the person acting is formed by the actions he or she performs.

> To emphasize the idea of character is to recognize that our actions are also acts of self-determination; in them we not only reaffirm what we have been but also determine what we will be in the future. By our actions we not only shape a particular situation, we also form ourselves to meet future situations in a particular way.[47]

The term self-agency therefore is not an assertion that ethics concerns autonomous individuals with wide-ranging powers to create their own personalities; it is instead an affirmation of the interrelation of action, the agent, and the agent's character. The agent's character both shapes and is shaped by the action.

1.4.1. Indeterminism

Hauerwas' concern in outlining his notion of character as the qualification of our self-agency (or the form of our agency) is to steer a path between libertarianism and indeterminism on the one hand and behaviourism and determinism on the other. Indeterminism arises out of a commitment to the concept of self-agency. Self-agency understands that the self is not simply a link in a chain of causes. The self is not determined

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He also retracts some of his enthusiasm for 'action theory', but recommends Thomas F. Tracy *God, Action, and Embodiment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1984) for the metaphysical background to the theory.

[46]ibid p. 18.

[47]Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* p. 49.

by external forces to act in any particular way - it is thus, in some sense, indeterminate. But indeterminism contradicts some other presuppositions about actions: in particular, the assumption that all events have causes. If one holds that all events have causes, then self-agency, the self-determination of an agent's actions, appears to be an anomaly: an uncaused cause. Everything is caused except the agent's actions: this is absurd, unless the agent is considered to be divine - and it is not clear it makes much sense even then. And this is not the only problem with seeing the agent's actions as indeterminate. For it is hard to see how the indeterminate person can be free and responsible - two conditions which seem integral to the concept of self-agency. Consider the case of a person acting out of will, motives, desires or character: this person is not entirely free, in the sense of being indeterminate. By contrast, if one acts thoroughly indeterminately, without any sufficient cause, how can one be considered responsible? Such a self can hardly be praised or blamed.[48] Indeterminism is therefore to be rejected on two counts, both involving incompatibility with prior assumptions.

Thus the self is not indeterminate. The self *is* determined; but character is *that which ensures that the self is nonetheless not lost in the fact of being determined.* This is made possible by appreciating the interrelation of agent, action, and character. The self is determined, but this determination need not take the form of a 'cause'. We do not need to think in terms of a physical, social or mental cause for our behaviour: 'volitions, motives, intentions, reasons do not *cause* or move [persons] to act, but [persons] acting embody them'[49]. Character emerges as that which breaks out of the confusion surrounding the indeterminate-yet-determined self. If we see character in this way we dispense with trying to understand all behaviour in terms of 'causes' visible to an observer. The connections with Hauerwas' critique of the 'standard account' are clear: we have rejected the privileged status of the objective observer.

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[48]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* p. 18-29.

[49]ibid p. 21 my italics.

1.4.2. 'Free Will'

If indeterminism is self-contradictory, then libertarian or dualist approaches are no more helpful. These latter approaches identify the true self as possessing a 'free will', which cannot be affected by actions. Just as Hauerwas rejected indeterminism because it made an unwarranted separation between action and character, so now he rejects 'free will' arguments because they make an unwarranted separation between action and agent. 'Free will', if it is not to be affected by actions, implies a separation between interior action (will) and exterior action (what the agent actually does). How could one begin to demonstrate this interior action? How can one be sure there is not another action (or many in turn) inside it?[50] Does the interior will correlate to the whole of the exterior action or only part of it? Such questions are very difficult to answer. It seems impossible to separate causation entirely from the action itself. How can one describe an act of will except in relation to what it has caused? Hauerwas insists that the will is a property of an action, and not a separate quality.[51]

Hauerwas points out that 'free will' arguments have little time for character. They see character as a limiting factor which the self must transcend if it is to be a free agent. 'Character is but the external and accidental feature of a moral real "internal" and substantive self'.[52] There is no point in developing character: one must overcome it. Again the connections with Hauerwas' description of the standard account are clear: just as indeterminism supposed the observer's point of view, so 'free will' emphasises moments of decision rather than development of character. For Hauerwas, by contrast, it is character that is the stuff of ethics; it refers to the way our being is determined by our doing:

> Character is not an accidental feature of our lives that can be distinguished from 'what we really are'; rather character is a concept that denotes what makes us determinative moral agents. Our character is not a shadow of some deeper but more hidden real self; it is the form of our agency acquired through our beliefs and actions.[53]

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[50]This corresponds to what Timothy O'Connell defends as the 'onion peel view of the self' - moving inward from environment to actions to body to feelings to convictions to the dimensionless pinpoint - the 'I'. See Timothy O'Connell *Principles for a Catholic Morality* New York: Seabury 1978, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 40.

[51]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* pp. 23-24.

[52]ibid p. 23.

[53]ibid p. 21. Hauerwas puts this another way when he denies that there is one aspect of our being (such as rationality) that distinguishes us from all other species. He quotes Mary Midgely (*Beast and Man: The*

1.4.3. Determinism

Having rejected indeterminist and 'free will' arguments, Hauerwas is careful to distance himself from behaviourist and determinist models of the self. Behaviourists assume that each person is no more than the product of the interaction of external forces. The observer can therefore perceive the dispositions and actions that go to make up the self. Determinists tend to have a predominantly passive understanding of the self as a being to whom things happen rather than as a self-determining agent. Determinists do not obliterate choice, but understand a set of preconditions that limit the field of choice. Both 'free will' and behaviourist arguments assume the need for a cause for behaviour: the former locate the cause inside the self, the latter outside. Hauerwas steers a path between them by denying the need to search for such a cause beyond the activity itself:

> The self does not cause its activities or have its experiences; it simply is its activities as well as its experience. I *am* rather than *have* both my activities and my nonvoluntary traits and processes. To the extent that I am the latter, I am largely the product of heredity and environment; to the extent that I am my self-activity, I am self-creating and self-determining.[54]

Hauerwas insists that if we are looking for an explanation (or an evaluation) of behaviour, we need look no further than the agent. The agent defines and determines the activity. There is no 'event' that can be separated from the action (the determinist mistake) any more than there is a substantive 'self' that can be separated from the agent (the indeterminist mistake). Character refers to the extent and manner of the determination of the agent.

Roots of Human Nature Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1978 p. 207) to point out that what is special about each creature, including humans, 'is not a single, unique quality but a rich and complex arrangement of powers and qualities, some of which it will certainly share with its neighbours. And the more complex the species, the more true this is. To expect a single differentia is absurd. And it is not even effectively flattering to the species, since it obscures our truly characteristic richness and versatility.' See *A Community of Character* p. 123-124.

Hauerwas' use of Mary Midgely in his later work is significant because it marks a departure from his attention to Iris Murdoch in his earlier *Vision and Virtue*. Midgely's more Aristotelian concentration on the concrete particularity of the moral life coincides with Hauerwas' interest in narrative and counters Murdoch's more Platonist perception of 'the Good'. See chapter five below for further discussion of these matters.

[54]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* p. 26.

Hauerwas' early critics focused on the sometimes contradictory claims he made for character. Character, for Hauerwas, appears to be the fundamental way in which the self is oriented to the world in general, and the particular choices that shape this orientation. Thomas Ogletree calls this account intellectualistic, voluntaristic, and downright Pelagian, because it exaggerates the role of core convictions and our ability to form our lives by means of them.[55] Gene Outka wrestles with whether Hauerwas is interested in sustaining his early claim that it is better to shape than to be shaped. Outka correctly predicts that Hauerwas will leave this claim behind. The fact that Hauerwas does so weakens the force of most of Outka's and Ogletree's criticisms.[56]

Both Ogletree and Outka concentrate on the underlying conflict between Hauerwas' emerging theme of narrative and his earlier theme of character. Ogletree anticipates that narrative will prove to be the more lasting theme of the two. Outka points out that vision and narrative both incline towards taking the self out of the centre of the picture, in a way that might appear to interfere with the autonomy of the self. In the light of such observations, one may wonder if there is still an abiding place for character within Hauerwas' ethics - at least, if the notion of character involved is to be compatible with the one outlined in *Character and the Christian Life*.

I suggest that Hauerwas' original notion of character still has a place in his overall picture, but that in order for it to do so, we must look into an area that Hauerwas does not explore. That area is causality. In what follows I hope to show that an understanding of causality can restore the place of character in an understanding of Hauerwas' ethics.

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[55]Thomas Ogletree 'Character and Narrative: Stanley Hauerwas' Studies of the Christian Life' *Religious Studies Review* 6/1 January 1980 25-30.

[56]Gene Outka 'Character, Vision, and Narrative' *Religious Studies Review* 6/2 April 1980 110-118.

1.5. Causality

Lying behind Hauerwas' discussion of agent, action and character, is an understanding of causality which he does not sufficiently explore. I do not believe it is necessary, possible or desirable to dispense with all talk of causes. Hauerwas excludes discussion of causes in order to deny the privilege of the observer and to explain how the self is inseparable from its experiences and activities. I believe that in rejecting talk of causality, Hauerwas is showing a (justified) suspicion of an overemphasis on one type of causality - final causality. In the discussion that follows, I develop an understanding of Aristotelian causality that demonstrates the subtleties of what Hauerwas is doing in Christian ethics. I hope to show first that final causality must take its place as one among several forms of causality, and second that final causality is not to be construed individually. I believe that a reexamination of Aristotelian causality will clarify, rather than obscure, Hauerwas' notion of character.

Two commentators on Hauerwas hint that causality may have a significant part to play in clarifying Hauerwas' position. Leslie Muray and John Milbank, in their discussions of Hauerwas, allude to the possibility of a departure from a concentration on final causality. John Milbank's argument in *Theology and Social Theory* is that Aristotle understands ethics as rhetorical rather than dialectical; in other words, ethics is not about the proving or testing of virtue, but about the demonstration and thus the description of virtue. In the course of this argument Milbank points out what he describes as 'a key to deconstructing Aristotle'. The key is, that 'at the heart of [Aristotle's] ethics the apparent dominance of final causality, the means/end axis, is subverted by formal causality and a form/matter axis'.[57]

Meanwhile from a very different starting point Leslie Muray, a process theologian, argues that Hauerwas fails to discount a substantialist understanding of the self. By a 'substantialist view' Muray means the dualist view corresponding to the one I have described in terms of the 'free will' argument above: it sees the self as a separate substance with accidental (and thus detachable) properties. In Muray's view, Hauerwas identifies

[57] John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* Oxford: Blackwell 1990 p. 350.

agency and human freedom with efficient causality, in sentences like the following: 'The self is not different from our agency, for we have the power of efficient causation through our capacity to intentionally form our action'.[58] Muray calls on Hauerwas to provide 'a conceptual elaboration of the relationship between efficient and final causality': Muray himself is anxious not to let go of the latter, which he identifies as the capacity for self-creation and thus freedom.[59] I am aiming here to provide the conceptual elaboration which Muray seeks.

What implications does Hauerwas' understanding of character have for causality? For Aristotle, there are four causes - material, efficient, formal and final. These may be illustrated in relation to a statue: the material cause, out of which the statue is made (bronze); the efficient cause, which brings the statue about (the chisel or sculptor); the formal cause, the shape into which the statue is made; and the final cause, the purpose for which the statue is made (the decoration of the square, or the glorification of the model).[60] Since Aristotle, attention has come to concentrate on what makes things the way they are - and thus on efficient and final causes; meanwhile what things are in themselves - formal and material causes - have come to be seen not as causes at all but as properties of the things themselves.

What Hauerwas is doing should now be easier to explain. Ethics cannot jump straight to *final* causes, as if there were a consensus on the other three areas. One cannot simply discuss whether or not an action should take place without first considering who the person is who is doing it and how a community understands the action that is being considered. This is Hauerwas' constant complaint about 'value-free' ethics, such as the supposedly autonomous disciplines of medical ethics and business ethics. It is therefore a mistake to assume that matter and form are simply the properties of things which can be objectively described by the outside observer. In Hauerwas' hands, the *efficient* cause is

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[58]Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* p. 56.

[59]Leslie A. Muray, 'Confessional Postmodernism and the Process-Relational Vision' *Process Studies* 18/2 1989 p. 85. In his response to Muray, Charles Pinches highlights Muray's concern about the relationship between efficient and final causality: he describes the suggestion as 'quite promising' (Charles R. Pinches, 'Hauerwas Represented: A Response to Muray' *Process Studies* 18/2 p. 100).

[60]Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1014.

king - to the extent that even the 'nature' of things (their matter and form) is not always able to withstand it. In short, things are what we make of them.[61] There is no objective definition of matter and form to which all agents (efficient causes) must subscribe. Baldly put, the question is not 'What is this thing for (in itself)?', but 'What can it become in the kingdom of God?'.

Once it has been established that final causality is not king, it is easy to see why Hauerwas is so concerned not to place decision-making at the centre of ethical debate. For decision-making is about final causality - the 'means-ends axis', as Milbank calls it. Despite Muray's protestations, freedom does not lie in final causality. The stuff of ethics lies further upstream, in the formation of the agents who are to become the efficient causes. Decisions are still important, but now because they are part of the inescapable form of the self.

The self is not simply matter - that would be the substantialist view. But we can see the force of Muray's criticism that Hauerwas' position 'lends itself to a substantialist interpretation'.[62] Statements such as '[the self] simply is its activities as well as its experience' are designed to get away from a self separate from activity. But the self does develop - it is in some sense a material cause, if not a detachable substance. The self is not, however, just a material cause. If we are self-agents, then the self is also an efficient cause. What enables the self to be both a material and an efficient cause? The answer is, its character. *Character is the formal cause* - 'the form of our self-agency'. It is thus character, the formal cause, that prevents the self from becoming simply matter - the subject of the efficient causes of other agents - and enables the self to be an efficient cause. The self is of course not the only efficient cause in the world - there are countless circumstances beyond our control - but it is because of character that the self is able to be an efficient cause at all. Without character, we would be simply material at the mercy of circumstance - in short, simply determined beings. Indeterminism, on the other hand, stresses the self as an efficient cause to the exclusion of the self as a material cause: thus the self appears to be an 'uncaused cause'.

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[61]For an essential elaboration of this rather sweeping claim, see chapter five below. Hauerwas does not altogether deny the existence of 'natural' properties: he simply resists making them the starting-point of ethical enquiry. John Milbank points out that natural laws are laws of *physis*, and thus subject to change, since *physis* is the changeable. 'Aristotle does not really connect the ethical with what is eternally valid' (*Theology and Social Theory* p. 350).

[62]Leslie Muray 'Confessional Postmodernism' p. 85.

Thus when Hauerwas talks about 'active and passive aspects of our existence'[63], on my present interpretation he is talking about how the self is both an efficient (active) cause and a material (largely passive) cause. He points out that 'much of what we are is that which "happens to us"... the passive resides at the very core of our agency'. He goes on to say that though a person may conform to a society's expectations, his or her resulting character is still uniquely his or her own. This discussion is, I suggest, made clearer by restoring the notions of causality. The material cause is subject to outside forces - notably culture, society, place and time of birth.[64] These are the 'given' aspects of our existence. But we are never just material causes: our character is that which 'transforms our fate into our destiny'.[65]

The expression 'transforming fate into destiny' gives a clue to the way character ensures our freedom. Freedom is an aspect of our character. Character is that which prevents us from being merely passive, simply material causes; meanwhile freedom is that which 'protects us from being at the mercy of the moment'.[66]

> [Our] choices consist in limiting an indeterminate range of possibilities by ordering them in accordance with [our] intentions. To be free is to set a course through the multitude of possibilities that confront us and so impose order on the world and ourselves.[67]

Being free means claiming that what was done was one's own, that what took place was not just an event but was one's action. Freedom thus resembles power rather than choice: the 'power of self-possession necessary to avoid the parameters of life that others would impose'.[68] Hauerwas quotes with approval Frithjof Bergmann's compelling

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[63]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* pp. 116-117.

[64]Hauerwas accuses situation ethics of 'working with a very passive model of the self. The self is always lost amid the contingencies of the particular situation. For men to have autonomy in any meaningful sense, they must be able to meet "the situation" on grounds other than those which the situation itself provides. Such grounds must be based on their character. Situation ethics seem but a secular restatement of the passive view of man associated with the traditional protestant insistence on justification by faith.' Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* p. 54 n. 16.

[65]The phrase 'transform fate into destiny' comes from Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 10; I consider it in detail in chapter five below.

[66]Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* p. 65.

[67]*Character and the Christian Life* p. 114.

[68]Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* p. 125. Milbank makes a similar claim: 'in the Christian understanding, virtue ... means a power that constantly generates its own field of operation,

argument which begins to show how freedom understood in the light of virtue opens the door to providence and the Christian narrative.

> If it is now understood that the making of a choice gives rise to freedom only if I identify with the agency that does the choosing (i.e. if I regard the thought-process that makes the decision as truly mine, despite its being conditioned, or influenced, or so forth), then it should be clear that freedom can also result from my identifying with an agency other than those processes of thought - and this means that I may be free even if the decisive difference between two alternatives was not made by my own choice, as long as I identify with (i.e. regard as *myself*) the agency that did tip the scales.[69]

Hauerwas is not interested in some ideal state in which we might have absolute control over our lives. Freedom means being able to go from saying 'it happened' to 'I did it'. If we are to face our lives without illusion or deception, we need courage. Courage teaches us to face our own death not with denial or illusion but with hope. No ideal freedom could enable us to do this. Virtue is therefore a condition of freedom.

> 'Virtue as its own reward' is a reminder that we choose to be virtuous for no other reason than that to be so is the only condition under which we would desire to survive. Only by so embodying the virtues have we the power to make our lives our own.[70]

If we see character as the formal cause of our agency, it becomes easier to see what is meant by saying decisions are part of our character. The kinds of decisions we face - the kinds of circumstances in which we sense a decision is required - are the result of the kinds of people we are. One kind of person will face moral difficulties and obstacles of which another kind of person might be unaware. To an observer, such decisions might seem momentous or heroic: to the agent, they might simply seem an inescapable result of being true to his or her own character.

Character emerges as that which provides a proper bridge between our past and our future. This is what opens the door for Hauerwas to enter the world of narrative. It does not imply the limiting of actions to a protective routine which escapes the novelty of the unknown. It anticipates responsible reaction to new circumstances. But novelty sometimes denies the good of the past; character therefore does not accept the future

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which is no longer something to be formed, dominated or inhibited, but instead liberated as a new power and a new freedom' (*Theology and Social Theory* p. 362-3).

[69]Frithjof Bergmann *On Being Free* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1977 p. 65 quoted in Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* pp. 115-116.

[70]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 125. Charles Dickens provides a ghastly parody of this notion of virtue in the character of Mr Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit.

unconditionally, it does not passively accommodate to. circumstance: it changes circumstance and forms the future. 'The kind of person we are determines the kind of future we will face'.[71]

Where does this leave the final cause? The answer to this question is what takes the discussion away from pure philosophy into theological approaches. A community of character is not a means to an end, it is an end in itself. The final cause is therefore not to be construed individually: it is the production and maintenance of a community made up of people of character - the *communio sanctorum*. This approach is evident in Hauerwas' discussions of matters such as sexual intercourse and *in vitro* fertilization. Whereas the discussion of such issues generally concerns the inherent (and objectively-judged) rightness or wrongness of certain acts, Hauerwas does not discuss these issues in such terms. He is primarily concerned with what will form, maintain, and express the quality of a community of character. This is not narcissistic, because it is a quality of such a people to serve the wider society. Final causes are therefore incomprehensible when separated from the other three causes. There is nothing 'given' about the final cause: its very nature changes by the practices undertaken to shape it.

I trust that this discussion of Hauerwas' ethics in terms of causality has clarified what is at stake in the debate about the self. I am aware that Hauerwas himself believes that the language of causality can be replaced by the language of description.[72] I hope to have shown why I believe Hauerwas is mistaken in laying causes aside, and how in fact Aristotelian categories clarify various aspects of his conception of character.

To sum up my argument about causality: I have developed Milbank's claim that Aristotle subverts final causality by his emphasis on formal causality. In Hauerwas' language, this means insisting on character (the formal cause) in place of decision (the final cause). I have pointed to an answer to Muray's enquiry about the relationship between efficient and final causality. These two should not be detached as forcibly from material

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[71] Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* p. 64.

[72] 'I am not an agent because I can "cause" certain things to happen, but because certain things that happen, whether through the result of my decision or not, can be made mine through my power of attention and intention. The "causation" proper to agents and their actions is not rendered by cause and effect, but by the agent's power of description.' *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 42. It is possible that the language of description may be construed causally - that is, description focuses attention on material and formal causes. I have assumed this in the titles of my chapters.

and formal causes: when all four causes are restored to a place in the understanding of the self, Hauerwas' argument becomes simple and clear: the self is not just a (passive, determined) material cause, or just an (indeterminate, active) efficient cause, but is enabled to be both by its character, the formal cause of its agency and the form of its material. Character is that which enables the self to be both a material cause and an efficient cause. The purpose or final cause of the self is to be in a community of character. It is when all four causes are in harmony that one can talk in terms of the 'unity' of the self. An action is good if it leads to the formation of a good agent; it is bad, not because it is bad in itself, but if it does not lead to the formation of agents of character. 'That certain actions are always wrong is but a way of saying that no virtuous person could ever envision so acting' - because 'such actions injure the practices of the community necessary for sustaining virtuous people'.[73]

1.6. Narrative

One problem with seeing ethics from the agent's perspective is that it leaves unclear the relationship between God, the world, and the self. These are among the issues left unresolved by *Character and the Christian Life*. If character forms the self, what forms character? How does the agent relate to other beings, past and present? How does the concept of self-agency relate to grace, providence, and the priority of God's activity? Hauerwas' solution to these problems is through his understanding of narrative.

The resource from which we derive our character is a truthful narrative. The only way to know ourselves is through our history, and we come to know the world and God in the same way. As soon as we begin to use the language of change, growth, and

[73]Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Difference of Virtue and the Difference it Makes: Courage Exemplified' in *Modern Theology* 9/3 July 1993 p.263 n. 5. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* pp. 149-152.

development, we enter the world of narrative. If we are to make our experience coherent, we must see it as an incipient story. Narrative arises from our need for coherence, our resistance to the random. Hauerwas stresses that

> ethics must be concerned with retrospective judgements, as we seek the means to make what we 'have done' and what has happened to us our own. Moral 'principles' cannot do that; what is required is a narrative that gives us the ability to be what we are and yet go on.[74]

Narrative is required in order that we may understand how persons grow morally without losing their integrity. A coherent story can explain how persons can develop while still remaining faithful to their 'true self'.

1.6.1. Narrative from above or narrative from below?

In the second chapter of *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas acknowledges three crucial claims made for narrative.[75]

First, it is indispensable for disclosing the contingent nature of the self. If we ignore our narrative quality, we are in danger of forgetting that we are creatures and assuming that we exist by necessity. For instance, if one simply asks, 'What should I do?' one may miss the insights of 'Who am I?' and thus the more obviously narrative-based 'How have I come to be here?'.

Second, it discloses the historical nature of existence in society. A person who can thread together separate events and realities in his or her life has established an identity; a community which can do the same has established a tradition. The latter is necessary for the former to be possible. 'Objective' ethics, ethics without community, therefore consider the self outside its setting. They might as well consider fish outside the sea.

Third, narrative is the form of God's salvation: 'Scripture as a whole tells the story of the covenant with Israel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the ongoing

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[74]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 271 n. 14.

[75]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 28.

history of the Church as the recapitulation of that life.'[76] If God reveals himself in narrative, the (revealed) Christian life should respond in kind.

At least one writer has identified a discontinuity between the third of these claims and those that precede it.[77] The first and second claims could be described as 'narrative from below'. They describe human experience in general, rather than Christian experience in particular.[78] Though they point out the story-formed nature of human existence, they offer no prescriptive or metaphysical considerations. By contrast, the third claim is not grounded in human experience. It derives from revelation, and is thus 'narrative from above'.[79] It is concerned to show that the biblical narrative manifests God's character, that narratives display character in the way they link intentional action, and thus that the Christian community's tradition of stories shapes the character of Christians.[80] Thus the first two claims are experiential and descriptive, while the third is revelatory and prescriptive.

The discontinuity is visible in the development of Hauerwas' thought. *Character and the Christian Life* is concerned largely with the individual self. The category of narrative emerges as Hauerwas considers the unresolved issues arising from that book. As he himself says, 'it is a mistake to assume that my emphasis on narrative is the central focus of my position ... Narrative is but a concept that helps clarify the various themes I have sought to develop ...'.[81] 'Narrative from below' can be seen as Hauerwas' attempt to

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[76]ibid p. 29.

[77]Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Enquiry* Pennsylvania State UP 1987 p. 112-113. Thomas Ogletree ('Character and Narrative' p. 28) makes a similar point in describing Hauerwas' discussion of narrative as overgeneralised. Autobiography, short story, novel, parable, the story of a people (including history and legend) and myth are all thrown together in Hauerwas' early work, complains Ogletree.

[78]This 'narrative from below' position is well expressed by Stephen Crites. See 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39 3* 1971 pp 291-311, and 'Myth, Story, History' in Tony Stoneburger ed. *Parable, Myth and Language* Cambridge, Mass: Church Society for College Work 1968.

[79]Here Hauerwas' principal forebear is Hans Frei.

[80]Nelson points out that such claims are not assisted, and may even be undermined by the general anthropological claims.

[81]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p xxv. Hauerwas is really criticising his own earlier work when he complains of 'the general tendency of action theory to isolate and abstract "action" from the narrative contexts that make an action intelligible.' *A Community of Character* p. 262 n. 11.

save the agent's perspective from death by a thousand qualifications. It arises chiefly from Hauerwas' concern to avoid a substantialist understanding of the self. In his stress on the agent's perspective, he is in danger of implying a new internality - that of intention - to replace old and rejected internalities such as 'free will'. In Milbank's more radical view, the problem begins in trying to separate a discrete sphere of 'action'.

> To hang on to 'action' as a special ethical sphere is still to cling to certain notions of internality. Hence many current proponents of an 'ethics of virtue' began by insisting on 'the agent's perspective' to distinguish intentionally informed action (although not a Cartesian intention posited 'before' an action) from mere natural causation, which can be fully comprehended from 'outside'. However, they have quickly realised that post-Wittgensteinian considerations force one to see that if an intention is situated within an action, then it is also constituted through language, and so is in principle as comprehensible to an outside observer as to the agent herself.[82]

Hauerwas himself acknowledges the importance of Wittgenstein: 'Wittgenstein ended forever any attempt on my part to anchor theology in some general account of "human experience"' and taught him to look instead to 'the grammar of the language used by believers'.[83] He also clarifies the agent's perspective by invoking the agent's community in the role that he previously (in *Character and the Christian Life*) assigned to the agent and Milbank earmarks for the 'observer'. In doing so, he remains consistent with the second ('historical') claim for narrative as discussed above. He is concerned to find

> an account of how my way of appropriating the convictions of my community contributes to the story of that people. ... It is useful to think of such an account as a narrative that is more basic than either the agent's or observer's standpoint.[84]

This clarification of the agent's perspective ensures that Hauerwas avoids criticisms of a substantialist view of the internal self. What replaces the internal self is the 'internal' community. To talk of an internal community simply means that the community is ethically prior to the individual self. This has implications for the way the community is perceived to relate to the outside world: for a substantialist view of community is intolerable to many.[85]

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[82]John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* p. 358. Milbank believes, against Aristotle, that 'there is no universal, special sphere of "action", and therefore no distinct subject called "ethics". Questions of "the moral" rather intrude everywhere.'

[83]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p xxi.

[84]*A Community of Character* p. 135.

[85]I shall return to these views in chapter three below.

What really saves Hauerwas from charges of internality is his identification of one particular narrative as normative for ethics: 'Narrative provides the conceptual means to suggest how the stories of Israel and Jesus are a "morality" for the formation of the Christian community and character'.[86] It is his third claim, the nonfoundational assertion that narrative is the form of God's salvation, that resolves the foundational first and second claims.[87] 'We are "storied people" because the God that sustains us is a "storied God" whom we come to know only by having our character formed appropriate to God's character. The formation of such character is not an isolated event but requires the existence of a corresponding society - a "storied society"'.[88]

What emerges is the unique importance and pivotal role of the Church. It is the Church that enables Hauerwas to hold onto all three claims about narrative made in *The Peaceable Kingdom*. For the Church concerns the character of the individual ('that community where we as individuals continue to test and are tested by the particular way those stories live through us'[89]) as well as the character of God ('the earnest of God's kingdom'[90], the 'recapitulation' of the life of Jesus[91]) and the character of the world ('the ... space for us to ... understand the disobedient, sinful, but still God-created character of the world'[92]). It is Hauerwas' concept of Church, absent from *Character and the Christian Life*, and derived from his understanding of the ongoing nature of God's story, that finally saves ethics from the clutches of agent or observer, and demonstrates the compatibility of contingent, historical, and community-dependent ethics with antifoundational claims about the nature of revelation.

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[86]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 95.

[87]For a discussion of foundationalism and antifoundationalism, see chapter two.

[88]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 91.

[89]ibid p. 96.

[90]ibid p. 92

[91]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 29.

[92]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 92.

1.7. The *Communio Sanctorum*

This first chapter has set out to show the centrality of the Church in Hauerwas' proposal for Christian ethics. First we saw the shortcomings in 'decisionist' ethics. An ethics of character and narrative better describes the moral life, moving the emphasis away from final causality - the end in view - toward formal causality - the who and how of the agent. I suggested that if we restore the notions of Aristotle's description of causality, we can identify the self as both the material cause (the 'passive' matter acted upon) and the effective cause (the 'active' agent). This prevents us from having to see the self as primarily either active or passive.[93] We can go on to see character as the formal cause - 'the form of our agency'. It is a mistake to see the final cause in isolation from the other three causes - this is the error made by the 'standard account'. Yet how are we to think of the final cause?

My suggestion is that the final cause is the Church. If we return to Milbank's criticism of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, we can see that his concern is on exactly this point, the final cause or *telos*.

> What makes an action is *not* the presence of a 'human' or 'cultural' motive or 'internal' reason: all this is still Cartesian and Kantian. What matters is the objective surface presence of a teleological ordering where intention of a goal shows up in visible structure.[94]

In Christian theology there is a tension between what might be called a creation/ incarnational approach (largely corresponding to 'nature') and an eschatological/ soteriological approach (largely corresponding to 'grace'). One can discern a tendency of foundational enterprises toward the former approach, affirming the value of human reason and experience, while nonfoundational enterprises lean toward the latter approach, aware of human shortcomings and the otherness of God. A tendency of Christian ethics of the former kind is to ask of a material 'What is it for?', while the latter ethics will be more likely to ask 'What might it become in God's kingdom?'.

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[93]Milbank still feels he has to make a choice: 'Narrative is our primary mode of inhabiting the world, and it characterises the way the world happens to us, not, primarily, the cultural world humans happen to make' (*Theology and Social Theory* p. 359).

[94]John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* p. 359.

These are all generalisations, but they help us to see that Hauerwas' approach is largely of the latter kind. As such, it has a central implicit role for eschatology. The world has an End. Hence Hauerwas' view that the moral life be lived not prospectively (the possibilities created by each new choice) but retrospectively. The Church is a body of people whose vision of the world is retrospective from the end. In short, Christian ethics are not teleological but eschatological. The *telos* of the church is the eschaton. But the crucial fact in the life of the Church is that unlike the secular *telos*, the eschaton has in some sense *already* been achieved in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church trusts that what it will discover of God at the eschaton will be consistent with what has already been revealed in Christ. The Church is therefore delivered from structuring its ethics around an incomplete *telos* which it is obliged somehow to bring about. It need not make the mistake of consequential ethics in assuming a responsibility to make the story end correctly. The story *has* ended correctly. Faithful witness therefore means trusting that this is so - this is the witness of the Church. The Church can therefore be seen in some sense as the proleptic presence of the eschaton. It is therefore the final cause of Christian ethics. In its 'visible structure' is what Milbank describes as 'the objective surface presence of a teleological ordering'. The Church's vision of the world from an eschatological point of view is what enables it, through narrative, to form its character by claiming its actions as its own.[95]

Sanctification is a dynamic process, not a static condition. It is a collective movement, not an individual attribute. It concerns the gradual conformity of the community to the description of life offered by Jesus Christ. Christians develop by attending to certain descriptions and forming actions in accordance with them. This attention forms Christian character[96]. Once we have fixed our attention on these descriptions, our continuing action reveals to us surprising and unforeseen new aspects and implications of our descriptions.

> Thus we may find that we cannot wish to gain as much money as we can and at the same time treat all men fairly. At some point, in relation to a particular situation, we discover that though our agency can be determined by either one of these descriptions,

[95]For an extended discussion of eschatological ethics, see chapter four below.

[96]See Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* p. 58.

> they cannot both be harmonized in the same act. We must choose one or the other, and thereby become as we have chosen.[97]

This illustrates the interrelationship between character, agent, and action. For Christians, it is the Church that offers the particular description of the world. Sustained attention to this description informs and forms the life of the Christian. 'Sanctification is thus the formation of the Christian's character that is the result of his [or her] intention to see the world as redeemed in Jesus Christ.'[98]

In the Introduction to the third printing of *Character and the Christian Life* Hauerwas adopts the metaphor of the moral life as a journey.[99] He is concerned that sanctification should not be descriptive of a status: it is in danger of becoming an abstract condition.[100] He therefore retains the meaning of the term but plays down its significance: sanctification simply reminds Christians of the kind of journey they must undertake if they adopt and attend to the Church's description of the world.[101]

Part of the problem is that sanctification seems to imply a normative description of the virtues of the Christian life. But a glance at the diversity of virtues recommended by different societies and thinkers reveals a disarming lack of consensus, even upon a principle for determining the key virtues. This leaves the notion of sanctification vulnerable to historical disputes and enquiry: hence the temptation toward abstraction. Hauerwas is anxious to maintain the historical character of virtue, and therefore begins to steer away from the term sanctification toward language that speaks more concretely about participation in the Church. Nonetheless sanctification as a theme remains crucial to Hauerwas, as we shall see elsewhere, because it concerns performance and is thus crucial to assessing the truth of Christian convictions. It is also a collective thing: the communion

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[97] ibid p. 63.

[98] ibid p. 67.

[99] p xxvii. He derives the metaphor from Meilaender, who distinguishes between dialogue (a continual back-and-forth between law and gospel) and journey ('becoming...the sort of person God wants us to be'). See G. Meilaender, 'The Place of Ethics in the Theological Task', *Currents in Theology and Mission* 6 1979 p. 199.

[100] For this reason it drops out of his more recent work almost entirely, and is replaced by particular narratives of individuals and communities.

[101] See *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 94.

of saints, just as much as the community of character, represents the final cause of Christian ethics.[102]

1.8. Virtue

Even among those who still regard the virtues as worthy of attention there is no consensus on how they are to be understood. Are the virtues one or are they many? Is there a definitive list of virtues and which are primary? Can the virtues conflict? How are they acquired? In what do they reside?

Hauerwas is committed to a view of human existence as historical, bounded by creation and eschaton, embedded in particularities and contingencies, far removed from ideals and abstractions. He goes back to the pre-Christian era and finds that Aristotle's account of the virtues is well suited to the temporal character of life. It is as if Aristotle is all dressed up for a strenuous journey yet requires the medieval theologians to provide somewhere to go. What Aristotle lacked was a narrative context for the development of virtues. His account 'begs for a narrative display'. Here Hauerwas sees through the eyes of MacIntyre:

> The medieval vision is historical in a way that Aristotle's could not be. It situates our aiming at the good not just in specific contexts ... but in contexts which themselves have

[102]Hauerwas would no doubt heartily concur with Karl Barth's discussion of whether *communio sanctorum* refers to sacred things (*sancta*) or sacred people (*sancti*). Barth commends both. '*Sancti* means not specially fine people, but, for example, people like 'the saints of Corinth', who were very queer saints. But these queer folk, to whom we too may belong, are *sancti*, that is, men set apart - for holy gifts and works, for *sancta*.' (Karl Barth *Dogmatics in Outline* translated by G.T. Thomson London: S.C.M. 1949.) For a more detailed discussion of holiness, see chapter three below.

> a history. To move towards the good is to move in time and that movement may itself involve new understandings of what it is to move towards the good.[103]

Hauerwas confesses that Aristotle's list of the virtues is chaotic and arbitrary. But underlying Aristotle's account is a sense of unity expressed in terms of self-possession. This is the notion of integrity, constancy, steadfastness of character - 'the kind of character necessary to be able to feel the right things rightly as well as act at the right time, in the right way and toward the right people'.[104] Both Hauerwas and MacIntyre identify the importance of the novel in portraying constancy. Constancy unites commitments and obligations, past and future, and demands narrative display.[105] In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* Fanny Price refuses marriage to Henry Crawford and thereby 'places the danger of losing her soul before the reward of gaining what for her would be a whole world. She pursues virtue for the sake of a certain kind of happiness and not for its utility'.[106]

If constancy is one aspect of the historical character of virtue, perhaps the definitive aspect is habit. Hauerwas sees habit as the key, and he identifies this as a difference between foundational and nonfoundational accounts of ethics. Both Plato and Kant try to establish a foundation for morality that makes habits and their acquisition secondary. Aristotle's insistence that morality begins with the acquisition of habits indicates that there is no foundation for morality apart from historic communities.[107]

The discussion of habit concerns the way character is developed through behaviour. Training and repetition enable people to learn simple habits early in life. The

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[103]Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* p. 176. See also Stanley Hauerwas, 'Happiness, the Life of Virtue and Friendship: Theological Reflections on Aristotelian Themes' *Asbury Theological Journal* 45/1 1990 p. 29.

[104]Stanley Hauerwas 'Happiness...' p. 24. See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a26-35 and 1105b7-9.

[105]'The virtues and the harms and evils which the virtues alone will overcome provide the structure both of a life in which the *telos* can be achieved and of a narrative in which the story of such a life can be unfolded.' Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* p. 243.

[106]Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* p. 242. If Austen is MacIntyre's (and Gilbert Ryle's) heroine, Hauerwas' hero is Trollope - to whom none is the equal for characterisation. Reading novels is moral training: 'we are stretched through a narrative world that gives us the skills to make something of our own lives.' See Hauerwas, 'Constancy and Forgiveness: The Novel as a School for Virtue' *Notre Dame English Journal* Summer 1983 p. 46. See also Hauerwas' admiration for the Aristotelian Martha Nussbaum in his 'Can Aristotle be a Liberal? Nussbaum on Luck' *Soundings* 72/4 Winter 1989 675-691.

[107]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 273 n. 20.

actions which people perform in turn shape the performer. The vast majority of actions are performed not by rational decision but by habit. The implications of this are not fully worked out in *Character and the Christian Life*, where the fact that habit appears to describe automatic or mechanical response causes Hauerwas some anxiety.[108] At this stage Hauerwas is concerned to protect the agent as decision-maker, and is concerned lest habit make virtue seem mechanical. In later works - particularly after his contact with people with a mental handicap has qualified his understanding of moral rationality - habit comes increasingly to take the role in Hauerwas' thought that MacIntyre reserves for practice.[109] Habit offers a dimension that the term 'practice' lacks: the dimension of non-cognitive yet learned behaviour - a level open to people with a mental handicap.[110] It is habit that preserves Hauerwas' ethic of virtue from charges of elitism.

More important than the specific virtues commended by Hauerwas is where he goes looking for them. The key to understanding how his concept of character develops into a call for specific virtues lies within the foregoing discussion of narrative. For the twin aspects of virtue correspond to the twin aspects of narrative. On the one hand narrative conveys the particular, historical, temporal, contingent nature of human existence, and thus virtue correspondingly engages with the questions of the unity of our lives and the extent to which we can be held accountable for our character. Constancy and habit are among Hauerwas' concerns in this broad understanding of virtue. On the other hand every story has an End, and the virtues particularly commended by Hauerwas - especially faithfulness, hope, patience, peacemaking and courage - are those appropriate to an eschatological view of the world.[111] In *The Peaceable Kingdom* he identifies patience and hope as the central Christian virtues, and he emphasises that love should not be separated from hope and patience, lest the eschatological and political aspects of Christian existence be neglected.[112]

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[108]Stanley Hauerwas *Character and the Christian Life* pp. 69-70.

[109]Hauerwas acknowledges in *Character and the Christian Life* that some have come to understand habit as involving imagination, intellect, and will (p. 69).

[110]The ethical significance of mental handicap and the way retarded people challenge assumptions of moral rationality is very important in Hauerwas' work. I return to it in chapter five below.

[111]Hauerwas suggests this in 'Happiness, the Life of Virtue and Friendship' p. 29.

[112]See Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 268 n. 66.

We may continue the distinction between the broad notion of *telos* and the specifically Christian anticipation of eschaton, and extend this distinction into the area of virtue. For the cardinal virtues are those suited to the notion of *telos*, and the theological virtues - to which Hauerwas adds a few of his own, notably peacemaking - are those which anticipate the eschaton. This accords with the thrust of the most significant criticism of the way Hauerwas adapts Aristotle's discussion of virtue and the virtues, which comes from John Milbank. It is the most significant because its concern is one even closer to Hauerwas' heart than virtue - nonviolence. Hauerwas himself describes how in the absence of virtues sufficient to structure self-possession we seek security through power and violence.[113] Milbank questions whether any notion of virtue can be founded on antiquity. Just as Augustine charged the Romans with having no real virtue, because they had no real peace, so Milbank extends this charge, on both a practical and an ontological level, to the whole of antiquity. Antique virtue, says Milbank, assumed violence, and thus was concerned with control - of self, soul or city. Milbank considers that the ontological priority of peace is more important than virtue.[114] A distinction between *telos* and eschaton, and its extension into a distinction between theological and antique virtue, enables Hauerwas to withstand Milbank's criticisms on this point.

1.9. Summary of Chapter One

Hauerwas began his career by exposing the flaws in the conventional way of doing ethics. I have begun by explaining what these shortcomings are, notably the emphasis on the neutral observer and on decisions. I have also drawn out an underlying suspicion that conventional ethics presupposes violence. In place of the 'standard account of moral

[113]See *A Community of Character* p. 126 and 267 n. 58.

[114]John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* chapter 11 especially pp. 363-364. I shall return to Hauerwas' eschatological emphasis in chapter four below.

rationality', Hauerwas proposes an ethic of character and an attention to particular narratives. Character is Hauerwas' way of explaining how we are not simply passive beings at the mercy of circumstance, yet neither are we entirely independent. Hauerwas' account of character is incomplete. By restoring Aristotle's notion of causality I explained that what Hauerwas is doing in asserting character over decision is to say that ethics is about how things are done and who does them, rather than solely about the anticipated end-products of these actions. Actions only have significance because of who is doing them and how they are being done.

A frequently-aired criticism of Hauerwas is that narrative and character are helpful themes, but that one cannot do away with principles altogether. Hauerwas never supposes that one can do away with principles altogether. He simply suggests that the reduction of ethics to principles alone is a method which implies a story of its own - and a sinister one at that. My discussion of tragedy and violence in this chapter makes this point. By displaying the issues in terms of causality I have demonstrated that the whole thrust of Hauerwas' approach is away from the action toward the agent; but principles remain useful for intermediate interpretations of the story, as we shall see in the next chapter.[115]

In my preliminary discussion of narrative I noted that narrative discloses the formation of character, particularly in its historical and contingent nature. A truthful narrative lies not with the agent or the observer, but with the community - the Church. The Church maintains that the end (or conclusion) of all action, the eschaton, has its character revealed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore any other intended end (or *telos*) of action is secondary to the building-up of the Church, which is the true final cause of Christian ethics. This communion of saints unites Hauerwas's notions of character, narrative and virtue.

[115] See 2.4.5. below

The Description of God: Narrative

2.1. Introduction: Hauerwas' 'Second Period'

The first period of Stanley Hauerwas' work established his reputation as one who sees ethics as requiring an emphasis on virtue and character. This emphasis is examined in relation to a series of contemporary concerns, largely from the field of medicine. With the publication in 1977 of *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, Hauerwas' work begins to incorporate the key role of narrative. Narrative becomes the dominant theme of his next book, *A Community of Character*, and is a theme running through *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1983). In the latter work, however, a new theme emerges, that of peace. Peace, along with the relationship of Church to world and the internal upbuilding of the Church, is the primary theme of most of his subsequent works.[115] Thus narrative is the definitive theme of Hauerwas' 'second period', but is not such a significant element of his more recent work. However it remains important for a number of reasons, and these reasons will form the outline of this chapter.

First, Hauerwas' emphasis on narrative is perhaps the closest he comes to being a member of a theological 'school'. Many of the criticisms of this 'school' of 'postliberal' theologians have been applied to Hauerwas himself. I shall therefore examine the distinctive features of postliberalism, particularly as represented by George Lindbeck and Hans Frei.

Second, there have been a great number of criticisms of postliberalism. I shall discuss the work Lindbeck in particular still has to do to render his project consistent, and the areas on which he is relatively quiet, notably the justification of Christian truth-claims.

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[116] This categorisation should not be exaggerated, since Hauerwas has continued to publish on earlier themes, particularly medicine and character, in *Suffering Presence*, *Naming the Silences*, and *Dispatches from the Front*.

Third, I shall look at Stanley Hauerwas' own presentation of the issues of narrative and truth, and discuss in particular his understanding of truth as performance.

Fourth, I shall examine the criticisms that have been made of Hauerwas' understanding of narrative and performance, and alternative responses that can be made to these criticisms.

Fifth and finally I shall propose a resolution of many of the arguments and criticisms that have been discussed. The resolution is intended to be fully intratextual and faithful to Hauerwas' approach, yet expanding on areas he does not sufficiently develop.

2.2 The Postliberal World

In introducing his *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society*[117], Hauerwas allies himself with those referred to by George Lindbeck as concerned to 'renew in a posttraditional and postliberal mode the ancient practice of absorbing the universe into the biblical world'.[118] He thus recognises both his place alongside such theologians as Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and David Kelsey, and his debt to Karl Barth. This loose grouping has been given a variety of names. They have been described as 'nonfoundationalists' because they start theological reflection with God's self-revelation rather than with an a priori philosophical understanding of the nature of existence.[119] They have been thought of as a new theological school, 'the New Yale Theologians', since they all have a connection

[117]San Francisco: Harper and Row 1985

[118]George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* Philadelphia: Westminster 1984 p. 135.

[119]Ronald F. Thiemann *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1985 chapter 4.

with Yale as opposed to Chicago or Berkeley, the other chief centres of narrative theology.[120] Following Lindbeck's designation they have been called 'cultural-linguistic theologians'[121] (inspired by Wittgenstein and by Clifford Geertz' notion of 'thick description'[122]). More sophisticated descriptions include 'Wittgensteinian-inspired descriptivists' (since they see the theologian's primary task as to describe - rather than to explain or to justify - the way the faith works, somewhat like a Wittgensteinian 'language-game'), and 'pure narrativists'.[123] Each of these descriptions has its strengths and weaknesses: I shall generally use the term 'postliberal' since it seems to be the one most widely understood in the current debate.

The broad thrust of the postliberal alternative is to return the Christian community to a distinctive vision of the world narrated in the Bible. The common features of postliberalism can be gathered under three headings: hermeneutics, doctrine and apologetics.

2.2.1. Frei, Hermeneutics and Narrative

The first common area for postliberalism is an intratextual method. For postliberal theologians, theology reflects on the Biblical narratives primarily as *narratives*, rather than sources for historical investigation, or expressions of common human experience, or truths which could equally well (or better) be expressed non-narratively. This form of hermeneutics is described as intratextual. Extratextual theology reinterprets the scriptural world according to a variety of concepts and approaches from other disciplines in order to

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[120]The phrase is first used by Brevard Childs in 'The Canonical Approach and the "New Yale Theology"' in *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984 pp. 541-546, and is used extensively by Mark I. Wallace *The Second Naivete: Barth, Ricoeur and the New Yale Theology* Macon GA: Mercer University Press 1990.

[121]George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* pp. 32-41.

[122] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* Basic Books 1973.

[123]The last two descriptions come from Gary L. Comstock, in what is the best introductory and classificatory article in the field. See Gary L. Comstock 'Two Types of Narrative Theology' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55/4 Winter 1987 pp. 687-717.

'help' the Bible speak to contemporary concerns and clarify its 'message'. By contrast, intratextual theology

> does not make scriptural contents into metaphors for extra-scriptural realities, but the other way around. It does not suggest ... that believers find their stories in the Bible, but rather that they make the story of the Bible their story. ... It is the religion instantiated in scripture which defines being, truth, goodness, and beauty, and the non-scriptural exemplifications of those realities need to be transformed into figures ... of the scriptural ones. Intratextual theology redescribes theology within the scriptural framework rather than translating scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.[124]

This intratextual method is developed by Hans Frei. Frei describes how theologians of the early Church and the Reformation period derived their theological method from the narrated world of the scripture. The great change came in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since the Enlightenment, Frei argues, biblical scholars have looked to general, extratextual categories to determine the validity of the theological claims of scripture. In other words, the rules of interpretation were set not by the text itself, or even by the worshipping community formed by the text, but by the historian, social scientist, or philosopher. This change is what Frei calls 'the great reversal':

> interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story.[125]

Thereafter the touchstone was human experience: the truth of the biblical narrative could, it seemed, only be preserved by reinterpreting its meaning so that it conveyed a moral lesson or a way of being-in-the-world. Deism, historical criticism, and Hume's scepticism about historical claims undermined confidence in the veracity of the Biblical narratives. The result was the separation of the meaning of the text (what it literally says) from its reference (what historical events it describes). For Frei, the Bible is 'literally', though not always 'historically' true.

We move on to Frei's concept of narrative. Frei draws on the description by the French literary critic Eric Auerbach of the method of the 'realistic novel'[126]. The interplay

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[124]George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* p. 118.

[125]Hans Frei *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* p. 130.

[126] Erich Auerbach *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* Princeton: Princeton University Press 1953.

of plot and character in a realistic novel renders its vision of reality. Theologians, in Frei's view, should cease to be distracted by the 'failure' of the Bible to refer to objective history, and recognise that it is history*like* - that is, that the genre of narrative is indispensable for grasping the meaning of the greater part of scripture. What Frei intends by the term 'narrative' here is that we understand the story's meaning not as

> *illustrated* (as though it were an intellectually pre-subsisting or preconceived archetype or ideal essence), but *constituted* through the mutual, specific determination of agents, speech, social context and circumstances that form the indispensable narrative web.[127]

In *The Identity of Jesus Christ* Frei develops this intratextual method of interpretation. He traces how the gospels provide normative patterns of Jesus' identity and thus offer a way of redescribing the reality of Jesus within the world of the Bible, rather than translating this reality into abstraction or timeless typological or mythological universals.

Despite using an extratheological source - Erich Auerbach - Frei is anxious to stress that narrative is important because it is what we find in the Bible, and not vice versa.

> I am not proposing or arguing a general anthropology. I am precisely *not* claiming that narrative sequence is the built-in constitution of human being phenomenologically uncovered. That may or may not be the case. ... If there is a 'narrative theology', the meaning of that term in the context of the self-description of the Christian community is that we are specified by relation to its particular narrative and by our conceptual redescription of it in belief and life, not by a quality of 'narrativity' inherent in our picture of self and world at large.[128]

Frei's belief in the perspicuity of scripture - the transparency and accessibility of the 'literal sense' - seems to be in conflict with other concerns of postliberal theology. It seems inconsistent with Lindbeck's emphasis on the alien-ness of the text to the modern mind and the need for catechesis. It is also out of step with the whole thrust of Hauerwas' book *Unleashing the Scripture*, which denies that 'America knows how to read the Bible'.[129] Frei talks of the 'plain sense' and the 'literal sense': but his assumption that there is one such sense and that it is the one he identifies seems to put him on the very context-invariant hermeneutical neutral high ground that Lindbeck - in common with several

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[127]Hans Frei *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* p. 280.

[128] Quoted by Paul Nelson *Narrative and Morality* p. 77.

[129]Stanley Hauerwas *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* Nashville: Abingdon 1993. For further discussion of this point, see 2.3.2. below.

schools of suspicion from Marx onwards - disavows. Frei amends his position in a later article, where he recognises that the reader is part of an interpretative community, and that the 'literal' reading is specific to this community.[130] I shall return to the 'hermeneutical community' in considering Hauerwas' approach later in this chapter.

2.2.2. Lindbeck and Doctrine

A further common area for postliberalism is its antifoundationalism. Foundationalism, in this sense, is the principle that it is possible to step outside a tradition (a culture and language) and express doctrine in a universalisable way. It is this view that the postliberals reject. In chapter one above we saw how Hauerwas rejects foundationalism in ethics - the idea that a neutral observer is best placed to adjudicate objectively on the basis of impersonal rationality. Hauerwas argues that this exaggerates the distinction between fact and value; but the crucial point is that not even God is a neutral observer, because God is revealed through a particular narrative. This argument takes Hauerwas into the area of theological antifoundationalism. Hauerwas bases his *Against the Nations* on the premise that 'theological convictions have lost their intelligibility'.[131] That is to say, the universal rational principles, that are the *sine qua non* of foundationalism, simply no longer exist - if they ever did. There must therefore be another criterion for judging the truth or falsity of Christian convictions. For Lindbeck this criterion is internal coherence, measured by performance.

Preliberals (whom Lindbeck also calls 'cognitive-propositionalists') have a very different method for judging truth-claims. Using Frei's analysis, Lindbeck identifies how preliberals separate the reference of the Biblical text from its meaning, and take religious utterances to refer to objective facts conveying information, after the manner of empirical

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[130] 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?' in Frank McConnell ed. *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* New York: Oxford University Press 1986 pp. 36-77.

[131] Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* Minneapolis: Harper and Row 1985 p. 6.

science. Thus some positions are true and others are false. In this preliberal view there is a permanent and simple correspondence between what is known and the way it is known - between proposition and reality. There is an assumption here of the universalisability of certain facts and information. As Frei also shows, the onslaught made by Hume, Lessing and their contemporaries against religious truth-claims left this precritical method in retreat.

The issue between foundationalists and antifoundationalists is primarily one of rationality. The foundational task in religion is committed to showing that particularistic convictions are the surface beneath which lie universal principles or structures. Intelligibility and credibility - for believer and unbeliever alike - rest on such universals. The problem is this:

> If there are no universal or foundational structures and standards of judgement by which one can decide between different religious and non-religious options, the choice of any one of them becomes, it would seem, purely irrational, a matter of arbitrary whim or blind faith.[132]

Thus the key problem for the intelligibility of Lindbeck's project - and for most postliberals - is that antifoundationalism seems to be purely irrational, since it undermines the acceptance of universal foundations of reasonableness. It thereby gives itself no visible means of support. Lindbeck's response is as follows:

> Antifoundationalism ... is not to be equated with irrationalism. The issue is not whether there are universal norms of reasonableness, but whether these can be formulated in some neutral, framework-independent language. Increasing awareness of how standards of rationality vary from field to field and age to age makes the discovery of such a language more and more unlikely and the possibility of foundational disciplines doubtful.[133]

This sounds to many foundationalists like a surrender to postmodernism and a counsel of despair. It puts the whole foundational project at risk. How then is it possible for Lindbeck's project to be rational and intelligible, when criteria for judgement are not available?

Lindbeck meets this need for reasonableness by appealing to Aristotle's notion of rationality as a matter more of skill than of universal principle. In Aristotle's view,

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[132] George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* p. 130.

[133] ibid.

rationality is not innate but acquired; it lies not in the mind but in intelligible practices, which must be learnt.

> Reasonableness in religion and theology, as in other domains, has something of that aesthetic character, that quality of unformalizable skill, which we usually associate with the artist or the linguistically competent. ... Intelligibility comes from skill, not theory, and credibility comes from good performance, not adherence to independently formulated criteria.[134]

Since there is no neutral high ground from which to adjudicate truth, the only criteria for assessment come from within theology itself. A sentence has truth within its appropriate context; but abstracted from that context it is neither true nor untrue: it is simply meaningless.

> The sentence 'this car is red' ... cannot be a proposition, for it specifies no particular auto and no particular time before or after which the vehicle might be of a different color: it can be neither true nor false. The same point holds *mutatis mutandis* for religious sentences: they acquire enough referential specificity to have first-order or ontological truth or falsity only in determinate settings, and this rarely if ever happens on the pages of theological treatises or in the course of doctrinal discussions.[135]

The point is not that there is no such thing as propositional truth[136]: the point is that theological truth demands response and participation, and its merits cannot be investigated any other way. For Lindbeck, the proposition 'Jesus is Lord' is true, but the only way to assert its truth is to act accordingly. Lindbeck cites St Paul and Luther as two theologians who believed in the objective reality of the lordship of Christ - but both insisted

> that the only way to assert this truth is to do something about it, i.e. to commit oneself to a way of life; and this concern, it would seem, is wholly congruent with the suggestion that it is only through the performatory use of religious utterances that they acquire propositional force.[137]

The sentence 'Christ is Lord' becomes, for Lindbeck, a proposition capable of making ontological truth claims only when it is used by individuals and communities acting

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[134] ibid p. 130, 131.

[135] ibid p. 68.

[136] Note especially 'There is nothing in the cultural-linguistic approach that requires the rejection (or the acceptance) of the epistemological realism and correspondence theory of truth' ibid p. 68-69. Several critics of Lindbeck choose to ignore his abiding realism.

[137] ibid p. 66

in accordance with the truth of such a statement - that is, in 'the activities of adoration, proclamation, promise-hearing, and promise-keeping', activities which affirm Christ's lordship.[138]

The result of Lindbeck's understanding of truth claims is a new hierarchy of disciplines. Whereas the preliberal approach to truth is in danger of ceding decisive authority to history and science, Lindbeck's 'first division' comprises liturgy, preaching, and ethics. It is in these latter activities that one aligns oneself performatively with what one takes to be most important in the universe - and thus claims the truth.

2.2.3. Apologetics

Lindbeck's new hierarchy of disciplines apparently leaves metaphysics and ontology in the second division. He never disavows these disciplines: it is simply that the cultural-linguistic model he advocates leave them an open question. Justification of Christianity for Lindbeck lies primarily with narrative description accompanied by performance of the implications of the story. Wittgenstein offers a discussion of the difficulty of recognising this kind of justification for what it is:

> The difficulty ... is not that of finding the solution but of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it. 'We have already said everything. - Not anything that follows from this, no *this* itself is the solution!' This is connected, I believe, with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. If we dwell upon it and do not try to get beyond it. The difficulty here is: to stop.[139]

If the temptation to move from description to explanation is one that should, in general, be resisted, what form of apologetics is permissable? Lindbeck looks back to Aquinas and Luther, and perceives that for both,

> revelation dominates all aspects of the theological enterprise, but without excluding a subsidiary use of philosophical and experiential considerations in the explication and

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[138] ibid p. 68.

[139] This passage is quoted by D.Z. Phillips 'Wittgenstein's Full Stop' in Irving Block ed. *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* Cambridge: M.I.T. Press pp. 179-200 and subsequently highlighted by Gary L. Comstock 'Two Types of Narrative Theology' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LV/4 Winter 1987 p. 705.

> defense of the faith. Similarly, a postliberal approach need not exclude an ad hoc apologetics, but only one that is systematically prior and controlling in the fashion of post-Cartesian natural theology and of later liberalism.[140]

Reason is not used to shore up faith with general non-theological foundations: its role is to advance the intelligibility of nonfoundational claims that have already been made. Argument is something that one engages in within the 'language of faith': it does not lead one to faith. Thus postliberal theologians all derive insights from extratheological sources to make their own claims more intelligible. Frei employs Auerbach, Lindbeck makes considerable use of Wittgenstein, Geertz and Kuhn, and Hauerwas often cites MacIntyre, Bernard Williams and Iris Murdoch. The important point is that this is done in an ad hoc manner: what postliberals are anxious to avoid is the extratheological models materially framing the theology, in the way one might see the relation between for example Heidegger and Bultmann.

Frei shares with Lindbeck a belief in ad hoc apologetics, but rather than tending in a Wittgensteinian direction his stake is more along the lines of Anselm's ontological argument. Frei notes that hermeneutics has often been dominated by an apologetic thrust: it becomes more important that the Bible is relevant than that it is historically true. Those concerned with relevance insist on settling questions of how Christ is present to us and how we can know it. This leads to the search for foundations, either in historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection or in his symbolic presence in universal human concerns.[141] Instead of anxieties about Jesus' presence, Frei recommends that we follow the gospels and concentrate on Jesus' identity. This identity is most fully revealed in his resurrection. If his identity is that of the resurrection and the life, he must accordingly be resurrected.[142] This apparently circular argument corresponds to Anselm's ontological argument for the

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[140] George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* p. 131-132.

[141] Hans Frei *The Identity of Jesus Christ* chapter 1. See also William C. Placher 'Postliberal Theology' in David F. Ford ed. *The Modern Theologians* volume 2 pp. 118-119.

[142] ibid p. 146. We may choose between thinking of Jesus as fictional, or as alive and present with us now: we may not think of him as dead and gone. Issues such as the place of his birth are but details; but 'to think of him as not raised ... is such a fundamental distortion of the character depicted that it cannot be said to be Jesus.' I owe this to Mike Higton, 'Frei's Christology and Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Theory', paper read at the Society for the Study of Theology, April 1995. Higton draws out helpful distinctions between Frei and Lindbeck, concluding that while Lindbeck is over-reliant on his (non-theological) cultural-linguistic theory, Frei's mature position is more thoroughly christological.

existence of God. Though other postliberals are more reluctant to commit themselves to this style of argument, their reluctance to treat apologetics and their emphasis on the *descriptive* role of Christian theology incline them towards either circularity or silence on the question of God's existence (or presence).[143]

2.3. Critique of Postliberalism

2.3.1. Internal problems within the antifoundationalist position

Given Lindbeck's emphasis on assessment being made from within the tradition, rather than from some framework-independent neutral high ground, it is appropriate to begin a survey of criticisms made of the general postliberal position by discussing the ways it falls short of its own demands. There are three main areas, and I shall discuss each in turn.

First, Mark I. Wallace identifies confusion over the term 'foundationalism', which is understood in two senses. The stronger sense grounds theological claims on general philosophical foundations that materially control the substance of faith. This is the search for universal invariable standards of rationality. The weaker sense relates to the apologetic impulse to find common ground or experiential structures in order to make the Church's teaching more intelligible to a modern mind.[144] In Wallace's view, the stronger form of foundationalism does not apply to most of the theologians suspected of it (Frei lists

[143]Ronald Thiemann's *Revelation and Theology* can be seen as in part an attempt to deal with this problem.

[144] Mark I. Wallace *The Second Naivete* p. 97.

Locke, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Ebeling, Pannenberg, Rahner, Moltmann);[145] while the weaker form applies just as much to the postliberals themselves.

The latter accusation is overstated. Wallace overstates his case because his concern is to show that Ricoeur is no more a foundationalist than the postliberals are. Wallace demonstrates that Ricoeur has no general theory to found his hermeneutics, and is more similar to Barth than Frei and others had supposed, since he has an understanding of revelation as 'standing under the free object of the biblical witness'. It seems wiser to suggest that Ricoeur is closer to Frei and Lindbeck than had previously been argued, than to suggest that the postliberals are in fact foundationalists after all, simply because they refer to Auerbach, Wittgenstein and others. The more important general point that emerges from Wallace's discussion, however, is that some of the postliberals' criticism of other theologians is ill-directed and reductionist, and that one must be wary of a new foundationalism grounded on the shortcomings of other approaches. The slogan 'explanation is always a form of reduction' is itself, after all, a form of reduction.

Second, a more complex and ultimately much more damaging criticism is made by Terrence W. Tilley, and concerns the plurality of the Christian tradition. Lindbeck asserts that concepts acquire meaning from how they operate in a system of signs, symbols and actions. Religions are among such systems. The 'scriptural world' is such a system: it 'absorbs the universe'[146]. Tilley points out that while Lindbeck makes a point of the difficulty of transferring meaning from one system to another, he ignores this problem when addressing the history of the Church. For example, Augustine, Thomas, Luther and Lindbeck do not share the same canon or understanding of it, nor do they share the same social location or 'native language'. Can they therefore be said to live in the same cultural-linguistic framework?

> Lindbeck's view presumes a normality, a stability, of a religious framework, independent of its actual instantiations in multiple cultural contexts. *But this contradicts the basic insight of a cultural-linguistic model of religion*, that the meanings of concepts are determined by their place in the semiotic system which the community uses.[147]

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[145]The air has been loud with those who resist the designation 'experiential-expressive' - notably Tracy and Ricoeur and their advocates. See especially David Tracy 'Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection' *The Thomist* 49 1985 pp. 460-472.

[146] George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* pp. 114-120.

[147] Terrence W. Tilley 'Incommensurability, Intertextuality and Fideism' *Modern Theology* 5:2 January 1989 pp. 87-111, my italics.

Given the extraordinary importance Lindbeck places on the biblical text, it is difficult to see how he reconciles the fact that Catholics, Protestants and Jews do not recognise the same scriptures. Do the identity-descriptions 'render' different identities (to use Frei's terminology)?[148] Tilley enforces his point by examining the concept of divine providence. The term appears only in the Apocrypha. Intratextualists must therefore either recognise a larger canon, or recognise that extra-biblical texts *have* partially determined the 'grammar of God'; the only alternatives are to reduce providence to references in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, or to read providence into those texts.[149] Thus does intratextuality appear neither possible nor desirable, nor true to the practice of the Church through the centuries.

Third comes a criticism which arises out of the first two. Anxious to avoid systems, the postliberals are in danger of being caught in another system, and one that is difficult to break out of, since postliberals are adept at denying validity to opposing proposals. Again, Lindbeck is accused of the ironic step of breaking one of his own principles. John Milbank accuses Lindbeck of abstracting narrative from history. Despite his attention to the context of concepts, Lindbeck's narratives are 'hypostasized', atemporal, and 'dangerously ahistorical', functioning with an 'essentially unproblematic code' which 'has artificially insulated the Christian narrative from its historical genesis'. Milbank calls Lindbeck's metanarrative realism 'a new narratological foundationalism' which is 'more rigid, and less open to revision' than the doctrine it replaces. Thus narrative has lost its temporal, historical character, and become a rigid system.[150] Milbank's suggestion is to extend the narrative to embrace the Church - a point I shall return to later in my examination of Hauerwas.

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[148] See Michael Goldberg 'God, Action and Narrative: *Which* Narrative? *Which* Action? *Which* God?' *Journal of Religion* 68:1 January 1988 pp. 39-56.

[149] Terrence W. Tilley 'Incommensurability, Intertextuality and Fideism' p. 102.

[150] John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* Oxford: Blackwell 1990 pp. 386-387. Milbank even calls Lindbeck Kantian on this point.

2.3.2. External Problems with Lindbeck's Argument

Criticisms of Lindbeck's proposal thus begin by demonstrating his occasional inconsistency in living up to his own principles. However the most vehement criticisms concern not what Lindbeck says inconsistently, but what he does not say at all. It is the two areas where Lindbeck remains notably silent that have caused most anxiety to his external critics. These areas are ontology and revelation.

The logic of Lindbeck's proposal appears to lead to a relativist notion of truth. It is not that Lindbeck believes all religions to be equally true, but that he is sceptical about attempts to compare them. In discussing the relationship of Christianity with other faiths, Lindbeck is

> open to the possibility that different religions and/or philosophies may have incommensurable notions of truth, of experience, and of categorial adequacy ... [since there is] no common framework such as ... truth or ... experience within which to compare religions.[151]

Despite the logic of his approach, Lindbeck still wants to maintain a realist approach to truth. But can he really have it both ways? Realism refers to the notion that there is some sort of objective order that theological claims conform to, whether we recognise these claims as true or not. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach never disallows realism, but neither does it specifically include it as a necessity, and this is where the problem lies. Since realism is not built into Lindbeck's approach, his desire to hang onto realism looks like fideism, that is, belief without rational grounds.

So which is Lindbeck, a realist or a relativist fideist? His acknowledged debt to Barth would suggest that realist assumptions lie not too far beneath the surface. On the one hand Barth is committed to intratextualism. One of his chief concerns is to render Christian theology in scriptural language. On the other hand he is a thoroughgoing realist. For Barth, theological language does make assertions and not just descriptions since God, by disclosing reality in Christ, has given us the language to render his word. Theology addresses

> the very definite order of being which holy scripture makes manifest, when in its witness to God's revelation it confronts and relates God and man, divine facts and human attitudes, [which] enforces an order of knowing conforming to it.[152]

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[151] George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* p. 49.

[152] Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics* 1:2,5 quoted in Mark I. Wallace *The Second Naivete* p. 109.

Thus Christian religious language, for Barth, does more than describe the internal relationships between doctrines. It conforms to a revealed reality.

George Hunsinger provides a way out of the confusion that tends to cloud the truth-claims debate at this point. He offers a helpful comparison between Lindbeck and Barth by distinguishing four different dimensions of validity claims - intelligibility, truth, rightness and truthfulness - which represent different media of reality - linguistic, external, social and internal respectively:

> 1. Claims of *intelligibility* ... relate to the domain of language; they would pertain to formal matters of logic, internal consistency, and sense.
> 2. Claims of *truth* relate to the domain of external reality; they would pertain to matters of cognitive content, predication, and reference.
> 3. Claims of *rightness* relate to the domain of social reality; they would pertain to performative content, patterns of behaviour, and communal norms and values.
> 4. Claims of *truthfulness* relate to the domain of internal reality; they would pertain to matters of intention, sincerity, and aptness of emotive expression.[153]

For Lindbeck, the hierarchy runs roughly as follows: rightness, intelligibility, truthfulness, truth. This is because Lindbeck places social reality at the head of understanding, mediating first of all linguistic reality, and subsequently all external reality. One consequence of this is that rightness (social performance) becomes a necessary condition for the possibility of truth.[154]

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[153] George Hunsinger *How to Read Karl Barth* p.167. It is very important to note that Hunsinger uses the term 'truthfulness' in a different sense to that used by Hauerwas, for example in Hauerwas' debate with Julian Hartt and Stephen Crites (recorded in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones eds *Why Narrative?* pp. 279-319). Hauerwas' use of the term 'truthfulness' corresponds more to Hunsinger's term 'rightness'.

[154] Lindbeck illustrates this by referring to the nadir of Christian performance in the Crusades. 'The crusader's battle cry "*Christus est Dominus*," for example, is false when used to authorise cleaving the skull of the infidel (even though the same words in other contexts may be a true utterance).' George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* p. 64.

For Barth, truth and intelligibility never depend as fully as for Lindbeck on rightness and truthfulness - in fact external reality and language are logically independent of social and internal reality. Frei retains this strain in Barth's thought when he claims that the 'plain sense' of scripture is intelligible to any reader, regardless of the social reality. This is why Frei seems to conflict with Lindbeck on this point.

Hunsinger's four dimensions of validity and reality demonstrate why there is a conflict between Lindbeck and his critics over truth, and why some see Lindbeck as a fideist while Lindbeck resists the charge. The question resolves into this: To what extent is there a *logical* and *sequential* relation between these four domains of truth? If there is little or no logical connection between the four, it is quite reasonable to wonder why Lindbeck should apparently fail to address one of them, external reality, while addressing the other three. If on the other hand there *is* a logic connecting and a hierarchy between them, it becomes easier to see why Lindbeck concentrates on social, internal and linguistic reality and is sceptical of any attempts to jump straight to external reality without proceeding through the three necessary hoops.[155]

Who is right? Lindbeck, who believes we get to external reality only through social, linguistic and internal reality, or his 'cultured despisers', who sense a more direct route is possible and desirable? This question leads us into the area of revelation.

Revelation is significant because Lindbeck's main problem in reaching external reality through social, linguistic and internal reality is a tendency to anthropocentrism. Lindbeck has been accused several times of being weak in his understanding of revelation.[156] His emphasis on narrative concentrates on the way God chooses to reveal himself through the story of Israel, Jesus and subsequently the Church. To a large extent the controversy over revelation resolves itself into a matter of emphasis. Those who, like Lindbeck, stress narrative as the definitive form of revelation are analogous to those who in other debates have concentrated on the particularity and humanity of Christ; meanwhile

[155]Hauerwas has a stake in Lindbeck's side of this argument. As I suggested in chapter one, it is the social reality (rightness), or Church, that is the primary form of reality for Hauerwas. It is this emphasis on the 'internal' community that enables Hauerwas to avoid criticisms of having a 'substantialist' view of the internal self. See 1.6.1. above.

[156] See Alister E. McGrath *The Genesis of Doctrine* chapter 1, and John Sykes 'Narrative Accounts of Biblical Authority: The Need for a Doctrine of Revelation' *Modern Theology* 5/4 July 1989 p. 329-342.

those who stress God's sovereign ability to communicate in a variety of ways are analogous to those who in other debates have concentrated on the universality and divinity of Christ.

Hunsinger insists that the total context of truth is determined by God, rather than by culture or language. In his view Lindbeck seems to underestimate the 'miracle of grace'. Meanwhile Lindbeck's understanding of revelation corresponds with his antifoundationalist epistemology. Resisting all temptation to found revelation on a prior phenomenology of existence, Lindbeck understands that the role of revelation is defined by scripture (and is therefore narrative in character) rather than that the role of scripture is defined by revelation. The danger of this is that it retains God's prevenience as its starting point, but thereafter appears anthropocentric, since it concentrates on human language and society.

The ironic conclusion is that both foundationalist and antifoundationalist epistemologies involve anthropocentrism: the former in (philosophical, experiential) theory, the latter in (cultural-linguistic) practice. To a postliberal mind an effort to reassert God's grace and prevenience (and meanwhile bypass human culture and language en route to external truth) will fall into the hands of foundationalism. However, in an effort to avoid foundationalism, postliberals can get so involved in the social and linguistic media of revelation that the sovereign power of the Revealer is neglected.

2.4. Stanley Hauerwas and the *Communio Sanctorum*

2.4.1. 'Narrative from below'

Stanley Hauerwas' use of the term narrative develops from the formal, general understanding of human experience found largely in his earlier work, to an understanding

based on the scriptural narrative, found more in his later work. In the last chapter I described the former understanding as 'narrative from below' and the latter as 'narrative from above'.

Here is Hauerwas in his 'narrative from below' vein:

> All significant moral claims are historically derived and require narrative display. ... Appeal to the narrative dependence and structure of moral rationality is ... an attempt to illuminate, in a formal manner, the character of our moral existence as historic beings.[157]

Hauerwas establishes that the reality in which people think, speak and act derives from the specific community in which they live and that community is a historical entity which is formed by a narrative. It is this narrative which forms the convictions of the community, and any attempt to abstract rationality and ethics from this embeddedness fails to do justice to the historical dimension of human existence. Narrative ethics simply start from a different place from foundational ethics. We do not begin by asking what we should do; rather, 'Our first moral question must be, Of what history am I a part and how can I best understand it?'.[158]

Hauerwas allies narrative to his previously-established notion of character. It is character that enables us to talk of the moral life as a coherent whole:

> The growth of character, and the corresponding ability to claim our actions as our own, is a correlative of our being initiated into a determinative story. For it is only through a narrative which we learn to 'live into' that we acquire a character sufficient to make our history our own.[159]

What is therefore crucial is that we have the right story: for a truthful story forms a truthful community and truthful people. For Hauerwas, Christianity is the truthful story and the Church is that which it (and he) seeks to make a truthful people. Thus does 'narrative from below' arrive at the Christian story, or set of stories and tradition.

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[157] Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 99.

[158] ibid p. 100.

[159] ibid p. 151.

2.4.2. 'Narrative from above'

Turning to 'narrative from above', Hauerwas develops his understanding of the role of scripture in forming Christian doctrine and life in three key essays, 'The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering', 'The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story' and 'The Church as God's New Language'.[160] In these essays, particularly the last of them, Hauerwas clarifies the relationship between narrative as a formal claim and narrative as the definitive form of Christian understanding.

> The emphasis on narrative, therefore, is not first a claim about the narrative quality of experience from some unspecified standpoint, but rather is 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. For ... the story is not self-referential but creates a people capable of being the continuation of the narrative by witnessing to the world that all creation is ordered to God's good end. ... The church is ... at once the storyteller as well as a character in the story.[161]

The development from the general thrust of Frei's thought is a development from text to people as the bearer of narrative.[162] In Hauerwas' words, 'the text does not refer, people do'[163]. The point is well expressed by Nicholas Lash:

> The *poles* of Christian interpretation are not ... written texts ... but patterns of human action: what was said and done and suffered, then, by Jesus and his disciples, and what is said and done and suffered, now, by those who seek to share his obedience and his hope. We talk of 'holy' scripture, and for good reason. And yet it is not, in fact, the *script* that is 'holy', but the people: the company who perform the script. ... The fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of scripture is the life, activity and organization of the believing community.[164]

This makes clear how Christian ethics, for Hauerwas, is inseparable from narrative, and inseparable from the Church. Each is the context for the other two. In terms

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[160] *A Community of Character* pp. 53-71 and 89-110, *Christian Existence Today* pp. 47-66, respectively.

[161] 'The Church as God's New Language' p. 61.

[162] Hauerwas is, nonetheless, anxious to point out that Frei occasionally refers to the hermeneutical indispensability of the Church. See 'The Church as God's New Language' p. 59 and Hans Frei *The Identity of Jesus Christ* p. 157.

[163] 'The Church as God's New Language' p. 59.

[164] Nicholas Lash *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* London: SCM 1986 pp. 42-43.

of Hunsinger's four domains of reality detailed above, this is a claim for the priority of the domain of social reality. Hauerwas underlines this understanding by describing the authority of scripture as a political claim. The term 'political', for Hauerwas, means much the same as 'social reality' does for Hunsinger. In 'The Moral Authority of Scripture', Hauerwas argues that scripture shapes a community of people who respond to it. Without such a community, the idea of a canon of scripture makes no sense. This community aims, through its hearing and performance of scripture, to be true to the character of God.

> Christian social ethics should begin ... with the formation of a society shaped and informed by the truthful character of the God we find revealed in the stories of Israel and Jesus. The remarkable richness of these stories of God requires that the church be a community of discourse and interpretation that endeavours to tell these stories and form its life in accordance with them.[165]

Like Lindbeck, Hauerwas denies that one can get to the external reality (in this case the character of God and the authority of scripture) without beginning with the social, or 'political' reality. Hauerwas is making a hermeneutical point: there is a spiralling relationship (though Hauerwas does not use the term) between the text and the extent to which a community puts it into practice. Since the text creates a world and demands that the readers inhabit that world, one cannot step out of that world in an effort to read the text 'truthfully'. Inhabiting the world that the text demands constitutes accepting scriptural authority. The text is read truthfully by a community which seeks to establish its form of life in accordance with the text; reading theoretically, outside the context of the practising community, is not reading 'objectively' but reading unfaithfully.[166]

Ronald Grimes makes a suggestion in accord with Hauerwas' understanding of narrative and community when he asks 'What would happen if the road from narrative to ethics passed through ritual?'. He goes on, in a manner reminiscent of Hauerwas' discussion of the ethical value of the novel:

> Ritual can contain rich dramatic possibilities that allow us trial runs and explorations not possible in the ethically framed world. ... Without a ritual-dramatic stage between the narrative experience and the ethical judgement we are extremely subject to self-

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[165] Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 92.

[166] Hauerwas agrees with his Duke colleague Stanley Fish that the meaning of a text lies not in the text itself, nor in the reader, but in the interpretative community with its particular interests. This identifies a common flaw in both historical criticism of the bible and fundamentalism: both assume that there is a clear meaning of the text which anyone can perceive, whether trained and faithful or not. Once again we see Hauerwas rejecting the perspective of the neutral observer. See Stanley Hauerwas *Unleashing the Scripture* chapters 2 and 3.

> deception [one of Hauerwas' emphases] concerning the degree to which we have embodied our ethics. Without a keenly developed ritual-dramatic sense our narratives are at best intellectual ideals and at worst sources of heteronomously imposed, introjected images.[167]

Grimes also helpfully points out the difference, underestimated by most theological treatments of narrative, between reading (or hearing) for the first time and re-reading (or hearing again).[168] This perhaps, along with preaching, provides a bridge between narrative and ritual. The activity of worship is the place where in word and sacrament, through hearing and ritual, text is converted to deed and deed is informed and challenged by text. The practice of reading and reinterpreting the same stories constitutes Christian tradition: and tradition, which Hauerwas describes as 'the memory sustained over time by ritual and habit', involves the incorporation of the history of the Church into the narrative of Israel and Jesus.[169]

Finally, narrative is not simply the form of scripture or that which constitutes the Christian tradition or that which presupposes the Church. The narrative of scripture forms our understanding of God:

> Scripture contains much material that is not narrative in character. But such material ... gains its intelligibility by being a product of and contribution to a community that lives through remembering. The narrative of scripture not only 'renders a character' but renders a community capable of ordering its existence appropriate to such stories. Jews and Christians believe this narrative does nothing less than render the character of God and in doing so renders us to be the kind of people appropriate to that character. ... Our understanding of God is not inferred from the stories but is the stories.[170]

As Hauerwas' own work has developed, these comments apply more and more to him too. His non-narrative work relies for its power on the concrete display of character in the stories he tells and the story he recalls.

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[167] Ronald Grimes 'Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer' *Journal of Religion* 1986 p. 6, 8. On the novel, see Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* pp. 9-35, and *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* Durham: Duke University Press 1994 pp. 31-79. On self-deception, see Stanley Hauerwas *Truthfulness and Tragedy* pp. 82-98.

[168] Ronald Grimes 'Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer' p. 16.

[169] For Hauerwas' definition of tradition, see *A Community of Character* p. 92. For Hauerwas' view of the place of the sermon, see *Christian Existence Today* pp. 47-65, as well as *Preaching to Strangers* and *Unleashing the Scripture*.

[170] Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 67.

2.4.3. Performance

The context of the believing community, so vital for understanding the role of scripture, is equally significant for Hauerwas in assessing truth claims. Like Lindbeck, Hauerwas sees the Christian community as performing the scripture, and thereby providing the only means of testing its validity. The danger, in his view, in seeing ethics as the performance of theology comes where it is assumed that one 'must begin with beliefs about God, Jesus, sin and the like, and the moral implications of those beliefs'.[171] This makes such beliefs look like a primitive metaphysics which the observer could analyse as a system of belief detached from the Church. Hauerwas insists

> Christian beliefs about God, Jesus, sin, the nature of human existence, and salvation are intelligible only if they are seen against the background of the church - that is, a body of people who stand apart from the 'world' because of the peculiar task of worshipping a God whom the world knows not.[172]

Hauerwas' model for performance comes from the first Christians, whose peculiarity came in 'their social inventiveness in creating a community whose like had not been seen before':

> They thought that their belief in God as they had encountered him in Jesus required the formation of a community distinct from the world exactly because of the kind of God he was.[173]

Hauerwas addresses the justification of Christianity in pragmatic terms - since a theoretical justification would almost inevitably be foundationalist. In order to avert the charge of relativism or of fideism, he needs to show how Christian claims can be assessed as true or false. Given Hauerwas' reluctance to disembody truth and authority, he seeks an actualised form of truth. Thus he speaks not so much of the truth of Christian doctrines but more of the truthfulness of Christians' lives. Truth is not a virtue or attribute on its own: it cannot be separated 'from other measures of value - from consistency, righteousness, justice, happiness, satisfaction'.[174] One must ask, What forms of life issue

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[171] Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* p. 42.

[172] ibid.

[173] ibid.

[174] Stanley Hauerwas *Truthfulness and Tragedy* p.80, quoting James McClendon and James Smith *Understanding Religious Convictions* Notre Dame: UNDP 1975 p. 15.

from Christian convictions? Do the beliefs form communities, confer courage, patience and hope, develop wisdom, discernment and honesty within the body, offer a spirituality of tragedy that sustains nonviolence, free people from self-deception, sustain worship, produce saints, and help people understand why they do what they do? For Hauerwas, following Wittgenstein, the truth of a story is not just that it provides an accurate description of the past, but that it helps us go on into the unknown - without a false story.[175] Pragmatic tests of Christianity focus on Christian tradition and the 'richness of moral character' it produces in much the same way that science judges its theories by the fruitfulness of the activities they generate, and significant works of art become so in the light of the interpretation and criticism that surround them.

Hauerwas constantly has to steer a path between on the one hand the objectivity that supposes we can find a place to 'stick our heads above history' and judge all truth claims from neutral territory, and on the other hand a relativism which suggests that any assessment of truth claims is circular at best and impossible at worst, because there is no neutral ground from which to begin. His path is to see the *assessment* of truth claims as itself a skill. We learn how to judge between stories by ourselves living truthfully within a story. Who is the person who says Christian claims are false? What story has taught such a person what is good and right and true? Is this person criticising Christianity for being something it never set out to be - perspicuous, context-independent, objectively justifiable? Hauerwas summarises his position in concluding his essay 'Story and Theology'

> The true stories that we learn of God are those that help us best to know what story we are and should be, that is, which gives us the courage to go on. Namely, the story that is necessary to know God is the story that is also necessary to know the self, but such knowing is not passive accommodation to an external object. Rather such knowing is more like a skill that gives us the ability to know the world as it is and should be - it is a knowing that changes the self.[176]

It is thus the story of God which forms communities of character whose practice of virtue develops people of the skill required to assess the truthfulness of the story.

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[175] Stanley Hauerwas *Truthfulness and Tragedy* p. 80.

[176] ibid p. 81.

2.4.4. Truth as Performance: The Example of Jonestown

One of the key questions that Hauerwas has to face is that of how one knows a narrative is false. Many grotesque evils have been done in the name of Christianity throughout the history of the Church. What criteria may the Christian community use to criticise its own practice?

The mass suicide of nine hundred members of the People's Temple at Jonestown, Guyana is an extreme case of the practice of a false story. Hauerwas' response to Jonestown illustrates his assessment of truth as performance.[177]

Hauerwas begins by insisting that Jim Jones was not wrong to make great demands on his followers. What happened at Jonestown was an act of revolutionary suicide - and one that should be respected. The participants felt that to lose Jones amounted to the dissolution of the community; losing the community was tantamount to losing their life: 'so, like the martyrs, they chose spiritual life rather than spiritual death'.[178] And in several respects, Jones' community exhibited the features of spiritual life: blacks and whites found they could be brothers, the dispossessed found they could be responsible for one another, people experienced the joy of being loved and of loving in return. This gave the people a vision and a sense of mission - a mission to offer this equality and love to wider society: a mission worthy of making sacrifices.

It is important to note the features that Jones shared with Christianity. Like the early Church, the People's Temple thought in terms of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, a struggle that required of the disciple a complete sacrifice both privately and publicly - wealth, status, money, health, family, even life itself. The Christian community took precedence over one's own family. Thus it is not for the Church to follow secular critics and attack the People's temple for interfering with individual autonomy: the church should have no stake in underwriting the notion that religion belongs only to the private realm.

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[177]Stanley Hauerwas 'On Taking Religion Seriously: The Challenge of Jonestown' in *Against the Nations* pp. 91-106.

[178]ibid p. 100.

The tragedy of Jonestown is twofold. In the first place, the tragedy is that Jones' beliefs were false. The participants died because they believed that Jones told the truth: but they were wrong. They were not wrong to give their lives for their beliefs: they were wrong because the cause of the sacrifice was not worthy. The clue to the falsity of Jones' claims was the command to suicide itself. This command exposed the emptiness of the whole of Jones' project - a project based on himself, not on the character of God:

> The willingness to take their lives, and the lives of others, manifests the assumption that they must insure their own existence. The Jewish and Christian prohibition against suicide is not based on the inherent sacredness of life but rather on God's sovereignty over all life. Our life is not for us to do with as we please, but rather we must learn to look on our life as a gift that is not ours to dispose of. ... Those ... who would contemplate and indeed even practice suicide as did those at Jonestown must be judged worshippers of a false god.[179]

For Hauerwas, the fact that the community had already resorted to violence in killing a congressman and some reporters ought already to have demonstrated the falsity of its performance. For any community that feels the need to use violence of this kind is unlikely to be a community grounded in the truth.

> Anytime a religion must resort to violence to secure its beliefs that is a sure sign that something has gone wrong with its claim to worship the God of truth and peace. Unfortunately Christianity provided Jones with many past precedents for the violence he used to protect his community. The use of violence is a sure sign that the community trusts not God, but themselves.[180]

In this summary passage Hauerwas unites the themes of narrative, truth, performance and nonviolence. A point he does not develop, but one which will be the focus of my fourth chapter, is that suicide denies the Christian story by prematurely foreclosing it. A correct perception of the narrative involves an awareness of its ending - that is, it demands eschatology. Violence in general and suicide in particular exhibit a rejection of the ending of the Christian story as portrayed by Jesus. Just as it is the ending of the Jonestown story that exposes its falsity, so it is by confidence in the ending of their narrative that Christians display their faithfulness.

The second dimension of the tragedy of Jonestown is that the Church's contemporary practice is so unused to matters of truth and falsity that no one was able to

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[179]ibid pp. 101-2.

[180]ibid p. 106 n. 13.

recognise heresy when they saw it. Fearing themselves to violate people's autonomy, the watchword of tolerance is so honoured by the Churches that they are reluctant to criticise any but those who interfere with the same autonomy. The only sin seems to be to take religion seriously. The moral, for Hauerwas, is a familiar one: the powers that reigned at Jonestown can only be countered by the kind of convictions that can only be fostered by a community of character. In the absence of such a community, Christians can only find themselves assenting to secular dismay at how anyone could be so foolish as to be a martyr.

2.4.5. Principles and Performance: Reflections on Jonestown

Hauerwas selects suicide and violence as clear indicators of the falsity of Jonestown's performance of Christianity. It is important to recognise that he is here using principles derived from the Christian narrative to criticise Christian performance. In other words, he does not use the narrative directly: he applies what he takes to be the principles implied by the narrative.

In practice this begins to look like some of the ethical reasoning from which Hauerwas has wanted to distance himself. It seems to suggest that performance can be assessed by some form of abstraction - in this case, injunctions against suicide and violence. But Hauerwas never states a desire to abandon principles altogether: he is simply suspicious of attempts to bypass human community in practising and assessing those principles. Jonestown is an appropriate case, because it is itself a human community: and indeed it has many commendable features. The difference between Hauerwas and the 'ethics of principle' school is demonstrated by their differing criticisms of Jonestown. Hence the title of Hauerwas' essay. He commends Jim Jones for taking religion seriously: the problem with Jones lies with his resort to violence and suicide - what I shall in 5.3.1. below describe as 'killing the story'.

Thus there is a danger in overstating the difference between 'narrative ethics' and an 'ethics of principle'. For narrative ethics cannot do away with principles. But Hauerwas

derives principles from the narrative, whereas those he opposes derive principles from theories of human nature or elsewhere.

2.5. Problems with Stanley Hauerwas on Narrative

2.5.1. Plurality

Given Stanley Hauerwas' emphasis on performance as a crucial and indispensable element in scriptural hermeneutics and the assessment of Christian truth, one of the biggest problems for him lies in coming to terms with the plurality and variety of responses to the gospel. The problem is this: if the performance of the Christian story requires specific forms of behaviour, how can one account for the fact that neither today nor at any time in its history has the Christian Church been united in most of the controversial areas of behaviour? If on the other hand no specific forms of behaviour are entailed, in what sense can communities be said to be performing the story? Is there one tradition, or is there simply a plurality of traditions?

This is, I believe, Hauerwas' weakest point. Paul Lauritzen demonstrates how Hauerwas and Johannes Metz, for example, broadly concur in three respects in their understanding of narrative.[181] Both see the self as located within the narratives of his or her community; both see practice and theory as inseparable; and both have a functional or pragmatic approach to justifying Christian convictions. Both connect narrative and community; both draw out the implications of the memory of Jesus' crucifixion and

[181] Paul Lauritzen 'Is "Narrative" Really a Panacea? The Use of "Narrative" in Metz and Hauerwas' *Journal of Religion* 1987 pp. 322-339.

resurrection; both talk of Christian social action in terms of the imitation of Christ. But Metz believes in revolutionary social action, while Hauerwas is a pacifist. Metz is committed to liberation from economic and social inequality, while Hauerwas maintains that Christians need fear not even their oppressors since it is the cross, not the armies or markets, which determines the meaning of history, and also that Christian stories help us *understand* our life difficulties rather than necessarily change them.

When it comes to practical consequences, therefore, Hauerwas and Metz are some way apart. But both appeal to narrative and both appeal to pragmatic tests for the truthfulness of Christian convictions. There are two problems here. In the first place, do Hauerwas and Metz share a common story? Coming from different denominations, they hold to different texts, and may frequently read the same text in a different way. Hauerwas' ambivalence about his own denomination is an illustration of this problem. The nature of the sacraments and the status of the saints are among the issues at stake. Here as elsewhere we see Hauerwas straining at the boundaries of his own Methodist denomination. We have already seen the central place of the *commmnio sanctorum* in his theology. It seems that his natural home lies within the Catholic Church, yet, as we shall see in chapter three below, its Constantinianism and resistance to pacifism seems a perpetual barrier. Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* starts with a concern for ecumenical dialogue, and it is clear that a greater understanding between the churches is a necessary ingredient of Hauerwas' theology too. In the second place, even if Christians share a common story they need not share a common praxis. And this undermines the truth of Christian convictions if they are to be assessed pragmatically.

Hauerwas does say that

> The church, the whole body of believers, ... cannot be limited to any one historical paradigm or contained by any one institutional form. Rather the very character of the stories of God requires a people who are willing to have their understanding of the story constantly challenged by what others have discovered in their attempt to live faithful to that tradition.[182]

The question is, what is the extent of the variety of understandings that the tradition can absorb before becoming incoherent? Hauerwas may well be right that non-

[182] Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 92.

pragmatic criteria of truthfulness tend to try to bypass the Church - but pragmatic criteria have here been shown to be difficult to assess.

Hauerwas acknowledges that Christians can often be found on nearly every side of any issue.[183] But he denies that this undermines the truth of their convictions. His job as a theological ethicist is to elicit what Christians ought to think given their basic convictions and practices, to enhance the 'political' process through which disagreement is adjudicated, and remember that Christian convictions are represented as much by the *manner* of the confrontation as by its resolution.

Hauerwas is correct in showing the significance of the context in which the narrative is read and how the story forms communities capable, in turn, of understanding the story. He is correct in demonstrating how a person or community attempting to live out the story will read the story in a different way from a person scouring it for objective, context-invariant truth. He is correct in showing how close attention to the Christian story can deliver persons and communities from the self-deception that arises from adopting a false story in times of anxiety and fear. But the principle that pragmatic justification is the only way to assess the truth of the narrative is very difficult to sustain, not least because of the variety of Christian responses within similar contexts evidenced by the tradition.

2.5.2. Donatism

The three further criticisms of Hauerwas all develop the theme identified as his weakest area: the performative aspect of truth claims. To what extent does human sinfulness reduce the effectiveness of Christian behaviour in demonstrating the truth of Christian convictions? If sinfulness affects the ability of Christians to *act* truthfully, surely it also affects their ability to *speak* and think truthfully as well. In Comstock's assessment, Hauerwas

> seems to have a problem with weakness of will. Can't Christians truly believe the story, want to live by it, and yet fail to do so? But if we can only say that the story is accepted

[183] ibid p. 108.

> as 'true' by those who actually *practise* pacifism, then we could not have Christian pacifists who, through some flaw of character, fail to act on their convictions. Yet there are such people.[184]

Just as Lindbeck appears anthropocentric on the issue of revelation, since he concentrates on the culture and language of the human community to the near exclusion of God's prevenience, so Hauerwas here seems anthropocentric for much the same reasons. He appears to be making truth a prisoner of the practice of the Christian community. This certainly takes narrative, incarnation, particularity and embeddedness seriously, but it does seem to underplay the otherness and the sovereign prevenience of God. It seems that the truth of God's presence and action in the Christian community is subject to the community, rather than vice versa. Hauerwas is concerned that Christian belief in grace and the action of the Holy Spirit would be called into question if Christians were never changed by the practice of their faith and the community failed to produce saints. Once again the *communio sanctorum* emerges as the key doctrine. Hauerwas takes seriously Nietzsche's protest - that Christians 'don't look redeemed' - as an appeal to falsification.

Hauerwas perhaps slightly overstates his case here. Nietzsche's objection does not restrict the sovereignty of God. There is a level of theological realism which is not entirely subordinate to the social domain of reality. The Christian who lives unfaithfully yet says 'Jesus is the Son of God' does not thereby invalidate the doctrinal claim. The character of the Trinity is not subject to the performance of the community.[185]

In response to this Hauerwas points out that the enquiry into truth claims tends to single out individual propositions or historical events as if they could be abstracted from the whole picture. Theology cannot be separated from ethics and narrative in this way. Again, like Lindbeck, Hauerwas insists that one cannot bypass the social and linguistic reality and simply settle on individual external realities. The context of the Christian community is indispensable if the question is to be rightly asked.

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[184] Gary L. Comstock 'Two Types of Narrative Theology' p. 708 n. 19. It is interesting to note Hauerwas' own comments in his introduction to the second edition of *Character and the Christian Life* (p. xxxii): 'I think this book was enough on the right track that its mistakes have proved fruitful. For finally I think this is the best most of us can do: make interesting mistakes.'

[185] Mark I. Wallace *The Second Naivete* p. 106 calls the Lindbeck/Hauerwas position here 'Donatistlike'.

> Questions like does God really exist or did Jesus rise from the grave are sometimes taken as the central questions that determine the truth or falsity of religious convictions. God's existence and Jesus' resurrection are not unimportant convictions for Christians, but it is inappropriate to single them out as *the* issues of religious truth. For the prior question is 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. The emphasis on story as the grammatical setting for religious convictions is the attempt to remind us that Christian convictions are not isolatable 'facts', but those 'facts' are part of a story that helps locate what kind of 'fact' you have at all.[186]

2.5.3. Relativism

If a religion is to be judged by its practical consequences, and a great variety of religions appear to have very agreeable consequences, are a great number of religions equally true? If a sacred story leads believers into lives without deception, lives of selflessness and sacrifice, an awareness of tragedy and a spirituality of peace, is it thereby a story about God? If it were, it would be hard to sustain the uniqueness of the Christian story or the exclusivist claims the Bible makes for itself.

In response to this there are two clear options. The first is the one unequivocally adopted by John Milbank. In his book *Theology and Social Theory* he recognises that the chief candidates to fill the role as judge over the plurality of stories are the social sciences. But Christianity is not content to be just one story amongst many, one path to virtue alongside several others. Milbank insists on the 'metanarrative realism' of Christianity, its ability to out-narrate all other stories: and he insists that this applies in the social field as much as the ontological and historical. Like Hauerwas, he holds up the social practice of the Church as the visible test of the truth of its story:

> A gigantic claim to be able to read, criticize, say what is going on in other human societies, is absolutely integral to the Christian Church, which itself claims to exhibit the exemplary form of human community. ... The *logic* of Christianity involves the claim that the 'interruption' of history by Christ and his bride, the Church, is the most fundamental of events, interpreting all other events. And it is *most especially* a social event, able to interpret other social formations, because it compares them with its own new social practice.[187]

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[186] *Truthfulness and Tragedy* p. 73. It is not clear whether or not Jesus' resurrection should be so singled out. Barth tends to treat it in this manner.

[187] John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* p. 388.

By the metanarrative Milbank means not just the scriptural narrative, but the continuing story of the Church, 'already realised in a finally exemplary way by Christ, yet still to be realized universally, in harmony with Christ, and yet *differently*, by all generations of Christians'.[188]

To what extent does Hauerwas subscribe to Milbank's 'metanarrative realism'? In his earlier work it would seem he does not:

> There is no story of stories, i.e. an account that is literal and that thus provides a criterion to say which stories are true or false. All we can do is compare stories to see what they ask of us and the world we inhabit.[189]

However in his later work Hauerwas moves nearer to Milbank's Augustinian approach, particularly on the question of the performance of good deeds by bad people. Hauerwas concurs with the view that to say a bad person has done a good action is a misuse of the notion of good.[190] This is because Hauerwas subscribes to a teleological, rather than consequential, notion of ethics. What the bad person did might have had some good results, but if it did not put them on the path towards being good, it cannot be called a good action. For fundamentally, it is people that are good or bad, not actions. This argument can be extended to the discussion of whether there can be more than one truthful story. Hauerwas might say that a story might *appear* good and true if people who believed in it performed good actions; but this would be only a semblance of virtue, since teleologically their actions would not be good unless they contributed to the final cause: the upbuilding of the Church.[191]

The alternative to Milbank, the second response to the problem of relativism, involves a less ambitious but more nuanced attempt to show how the Christian community lives alongside other stories. In an early essay, Hauerwas proposes four working criteria for the evaluation of stories. These involve an emphasis on avoiding self-deception,

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[188] ibid p. 387, italics original.

[189] Stanley Hauerwas *Truthfulness and Tragedy* pp. 78-79.

[190] *Character and the Christian Life* p. xxiii.

[191] See chapter one. The teleological notion is best seen as an eschatological one, as I argue in chapters one and four.

violence, and false notions of power.[192] However, Hauerwas is no innocent when it comes to the use of heavily value-laden language, and there can be no question that the terminology of these criteria - 'destructive', 'violence', 'tragic' - is governed by the particular narrative he is representing. It is better to look to his 'Ten theses for the reform of Christian social ethics' for a thoroughly contextual approach.[193] The third thesis runs: 'The ability to provide an adequate account of our existence is the primary test of the truthfulness of a social ethic'. There is no neutral ground for adjudicating this, of course, but Christians believe that the cross and resurrection of Christ describe the world, its history and future most adequately. The fourth thesis runs: 'Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills for transforming fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as a gift'.

Hauerwas explores the implications of this fourth thesis in a discussion that resembles the ad hoc apologetics characteristic of Frei, Lindbeck, Werpehowski and Ford.[194] Hauerwas adopts Bernard Williams' notion of a 'real option'.[195] The notion of a real option excludes from the debate about truth those examples which, usually for historical reasons, are not ways of life that we could possibly adopt. The 'real option' approach does not underestimate the depth of division between those who hold different commitments, or try to formulate a theory capable of defeating relativism. Instead, it deals with confrontations one at a time. Again Hauerwas argues that what we need are not *proofs* to destroy relativism but *skills* to live in a divided world.

The notion of the 'real option' enables Hauerwas to reconceive the command to witness in a plural world.[196] Again Hauerwas resists all attempts to substitute theory and argument for personal encounter and practice. It is not that Christians possess 'a universal truth which others must also implicitly possess or have sinfully rejected'; nor that they can

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[192] *Truthfulness and Tragedy* p. 35.

[193] *A Community of Character* pp. 9-12.

[194] In addition to the works cited above, see William Werpehowski 'Ad Hoc Apologetics' *The Journal of Religion* 66 1986 pp. 282-301; David F. Ford 'The Best Apologetics is Good Systematics: A Proposal about the Place of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology' *Anglican Theological Review* 67/3 July 1985 pp. 232-254.

[195] *A Community of Character* p. 103-4.

[196] ibid p. 105-6.

make a priori judgements about other faiths. For *all* are sinners and fall short: and all can find redemption through participation in the life made possible by Christ's passion and resurrection. So the Christian community's task is 'to be the sort of community that can become a real option and provide a real confrontation for others', showing the unity in diversity that judges 'the diversity of the world where most of our confrontations are either notional or violent'.[197]

Once again, we see how a thoroughgoing commitment to the social embodiment of truth enables Hauerwas to form a faithful ethic despite the charges of fideism and relativism.

2.5.4. Hermeneutics

There still remain a host of hermeneutical questions - though by now it should be clear that Hauerwas responds to most of them by directing attention to the historical, embedded community rather than by addressing each one in theory.

Is there not much in scripture that is not narrative in character? Hauerwas replies to this question in terms of the community's memory. The term 'narrative' incorporates the Church as well as Israel and Jesus. 'Narrative' does not simply refer to the literary genre of the text: it is in many ways a shorthand term to denote the ethical method of a tradition that tries to regulate its character according to the character of God as found in scripture.

Does the Bible tell one story or several? Hauerwas is critical of efforts to render the theology of Old or New Testaments in terms of a handful of abstract nouns such as law, covenant or promise. He commends David Kelsey's view of the Bible as a long 'loosely structured non-fiction novel'.[198] The Bible abounds in sub-plots and minor characters, representing the potential for a host of different ways of telling the story. It is

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[197] ibid p. 105.

[198] David Kelsey *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* Philadelphia: Fortress 1975 p. 48. See *A Community of Character* p. 67.

important that the Church retains an awareness of these subplots, and countless others in the subsequent tradition, so that it understands the narrative not as a single story that tyrannises minor stories, but as a continuing conversation. Perhaps the most significant of the subplots is the continuing history of the Jews: the relationship of Church to Jews is analogous to the relationship of the two testaments. It is a sub-tradition with which Hauerwas is anxious to maintain a conversation. The issue of subplots is significant, for it relates to the issues discussed earlier under the heading of Donatism.[199] It is important to note that subplots are less a matter of differing conceptions of truth than of the continuing conversation - between evangelists, legislators, prophets, exiles, kings, prisoners and generations of hearers - about what kind of a community we should be to follow this kind of a God.

Are some texts more significant than others? There can be no question, despite Hauerwas' enjoyment of Christian diversity, that he has something of a 'canon within the canon'. There is a backbone of doctrine that seems to focus on the synoptic gospels as central to his scriptural understanding.[200] Though he talks of faithfulness to the story of Israel, it is to the story of Jesus, especially his passion, death and resurrection, and the Sermon on the Mount, that he constantly turns. His justification for this seems to lie with the practice of the early Church - the Christian community who took their Jewishness for granted, did not dwell so much on more abstract doctrines such as revelation and prevenience, but concentrated on the concrete - discipleship, faithfulness, memory, community. This accords with Hauerwas' insistence that ethics and theology are but two sides of the same coin.

Who tells the story? Several generations of the hermeneutics of suspicion have increased the awareness of many modern hearers that the Bible was written by dead Jewish males. The question of who tells the story is related to that of whether there is one story or several - especially if one assumes that many have been suppressed. Hauerwas again turns to the conversational character of the tradition, the incorporation of Church

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[199]For the reincorporation of subplots as a mark of eschatological ethics, see chapter five below.

[200] Frei focuses on Mark, as does McClendon, and Thiemann concentrates on Matthew. Hans Frei *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, James McClendon *Ethics: Systematic Theology* chapter 12, Ronald Thiemann *Revelation and Theology*.

history into the narrative, and the variety of the kinds of literature in the Bible to assert that no conspiracy theory is sustainable:

> One reason the church has had to be content with the notion of canon rather than some more intellectually satisfying summary of the content of scripture is that only through the means of a canon can the church adequately manifest the kind of tension with which it must live.[201]

The canon makes no attempt to resolve the diversity of the texts it draws within itself. Diversity and disagreement are therefore an integral part of the tradition.

Perhaps Hauerwas' weakest hermeneutical question is again one of justification, namely, Why *these* texts? Having established a method that understands the role of narrative in the community's continuing discussion of what and how it should be, it is difficult for Hauerwas to answer this last question satisfactorily. The tendency is either to revert to foundationalism ('these texts ... alone satisfy ... our craving for a perfect story which we feel to be true') or simply to maintain a circularity ('Faith is Christian because it relates itself to classically-expressed models').[202] The only consistent way Hauerwas can answer this question is to say once again that Christians do not find themselves on neutral territory, adjudicating over a plurality of competing claims. Instead they are in mid-stream, in a tradition that has taken this canon as authoritative. The questions therefore are rather, Are these texts treated as authoritative in the community? (the descriptive question) and, Should they continue to be? (the 'what kind of community?' question). The fact that these texts are considered authoritative is an implied judgement on other texts and practices which contradict these texts: but that judgement is not made from a supposed neutral standpoint.

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[201] *A Community of Character* p. 66.

[202] ibid. for both quotations.

2.6. Summary and Resolution: The End of the Story

I shall now summarise what has gone before. Frei and Lindbeck insist that the scriptural world is the real world - indeed Lindbeck says that the scripture absorbs the world rather than vice versa. The text makes such a demand on us that we cannot properly read it unless we are performing it. We cannot step outside the world we inhabit in order to justify that world.

Critics of this position question whether scripture creates one coherent world or several; whether there is any reason to opt for this world in the first place; and in what sense this world can be said to be 'revealed'. As my discussion showed, the question becomes one of whether we can have any access to ontological truth except by stepping through the contextual hoops of social practice, culture and language. Those who say we can are accused of being foundationalists, since they suppose we can bypass human community in search of truth; those who, like Lindbeck, are more sanguine, are challenged to come up with some justification for entering the 'world' they propose.

Stanley Hauerwas develops the notion of narrative to incorporate the history and tradition of the Church. This potentially eases some of the problems associated with the somewhat static view of the text held by Frei and Lindbeck, and introduces the idea of a continuing conversation. The emphasis moves from holy scripture to holy people, the communion of saints. Hauerwas opposes any efforts to set up a theory of revelation or knowledge or religion that attempts to bypass the community of faith. The ontological level is definitely there - there is no doubt that he is a theological realist - but the narrative of the community is the only way to get to it. He advocates performance as the only way to assess the truth of Christian convictions. This is not because performance provides unequivocal proof - he is well aware of the host of hermeneutical problems such as who should assess and how they should go about it - but because of the impossibility of assessing any other way.

The danger in overstressing performance is that the text can be absorbed into the community, so that the two stand or fall together. This fails to do justice to the otherness

of the text. For the community frequently fails miserably, but that does not mean the text is not true. What matters increasingly in Hauerwas' later work is that the community reading the text is committed to shaping its life in accordance with the text. Without this, a truthful reading is not possible. But this remains a tension in Hauerwas' work.

How can the numerous areas of continuing criticism be resolved? I suggest that the feature of story that has yet to be fully discussed is the fact that a story has an ending. When a story has been told, whether non-fiction or fiction, one can look back over the story and see which actions and people in the story were oriented towards the story's ending, and which actions and people hinted at a possible alternative ending. One can trace what one might call a 'critical path' through the story, of actions and people which, though not necessarily bringing the ending *about*, had the same *character* as the ending.

I suggest that it is the role of the Church, placed as it is in the 'middle' of the narrative, to strive to live on that critical path. This is what it means to live teleologically - according to the end. For Christians the end, or closure, of the world is identical with its *telos*, or purpose. Thus a teleological Christian ethic involves developing and sustaining the practices that conform to the *end* of the world - in both senses. Actions can be said to be truthful to the extent that they follow that critical path. Doctrines and ontological claims can be described as true to the extent that they describe that ultimate state of affairs.

Questions of hermeneutics remain, and always will. But I argue that an eschatological approach resolves some criticisms from the hermeneutics of suspicion since its 'critical path' of 'actions and lives oriented to the end' provides a way of rehabilitating many neglected parts of the tradition. Such parts may be unheard today, since they perhaps played a small or forgotten part in getting us to our present circumstances; but they will finally be judged by the extent to which they were oriented to the final reality, the End.

I also believe that an eschatological approach is more faithful to intratextualism than some other approaches. For if the text is a *narrative*, then we must follow the direction in which it points. And while most of the narrative is contextual, concerning Israel's responses to Yahweh's covenant and the early disciples' responses to Jesus, there can be little doubt that the end that the narrative points to is the fulfilment of ultimate closure.

An eschatological approach can help with the stalemate that sometimes appears in intratextualist attempts to make sense of Christian witness. A serious danger for some intratextualists is that they seem to assume that describing Christian practice and what Christians mean by what they say is as far as they can go, without assuming any common ground with the stranger. But the New Testament, part of the text in question, assumes witness and conversion. What therefore is a postliberal Christian witness? Lindbeck offers a dismal picture of the contemporary 'unchurched masses ... immunised against catechesis' - but he offers no alternative.[203] He is limited by his purely retrospective understanding of narrative. Of course it is difficult to re-educate adults with an alien theological language. The teleological approach does not begin by asking people the somewhat unappealing question 'Would you like to come from where we are coming from?', but instead focuses on the more accessible, but no less intratextual and antifoundationalist question, 'Would you like to be going where we are going?'.

I further believe that the approach I suggest is more contextual than that of some cultural-linguistic approaches. Lindbeck speaks of the 'world' of the text as the 'real' world. By the 'world of the text' he means the world of creation, fall, covenant, incarnation, redemption, church and eschaton. But if we are to sustain his commitment to context, then surely these must include space and time. Is it not escapist to see the only real world as that of Sinai, Zion, Babylon and Galilee - at a time separated from ours by millennia? Is not the ultimately real world, to which Lindbeck refers, the one which ultimately will be the only world, that of the reign of God - that could at any time be suddenly upon us, ending the story? The biblical stories, which hardly constitute one single coherent world, inaugurate this ultimate world, instantiate it, anticipate it and most importantly direct our attention towards it - but they surely do not *constitute* that world. If scripture is itself the world in which we act, the result for ethics can only be confusion over the difference between our world and the scriptural world, or escapism into a disembodied scriptural world.

Attention to the ending of the story makes more sense of the plurality of Christian practice. For if one's narrative only enables one to look *back*, then any deviation from the practice of Israel, Jesus and the early Church is bound to look like unfaithfulness. But if

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[203] *The Nature of Doctrine* pp. 132-133.

one's narrative is concerned with where one is going, one's method of getting there is bound to be affected by where one is starting from. A contextual approach recognises that Christians are currently in different places, but emphasises that they are all going to the same place.

By retelling the tragic story of Jonestown I hoped to show that performance could be used as a valid criterion for assessing truth. Jonestown is an example of the way a premature closure of the story is a form of unfaithfulness: advocates of such foreclosure could be described as heretics. Once again, one is not simply looking back to the story of Jesus to assess faithfulness: one is asking 'In the light of the story of Jesus, what ending of this story is appropriate?'. Suicide was clearly not an appropriate ending - not because the participants were too faithful to Jim Jones, but because they were not sufficiently faithful to God.

To be sure Hauerwas is right when he directs our attention to the memory of the community of faith, for it is only in this narrative that the community finds itself directed towards the 'life of the end'. The problem with decisionist ethics is that it is unhistorical - dealing simply in the present, without reference to memory, character, context, or the practices of the end of the story. A further problem of consequentialist ethics is that it has a highly premature conception of the end of its particular story. The eschatological approach broadens the picture to reconceive the terms of the story the consequentialist tells.[204]

Finally, revelation is not an abstract doctrine of the manner of our knowledge of God, but an anticipation of the revealing of the full picture in the future. Integral to revelation is the process of how we come to trust in the God we hear described in scripture. The resurrection of Jesus is the key event in scripture. This is because it is this event that leads us to trust in the God to whom the life and death of Jesus point, and helps us to see Jesus as the instantiation of the end - the full appearance of the reign of God.

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[204] Stanley Hauerwas does this on the nuclear annihilation issue. See *Against the Nations* chapters 8 and 9.

The Story of God in the Character of Humanity: The Church

3.1. Introduction

In the first chapter I argued that Stanley Hauerwas is right to place character as the starting point for ethical discussion. I went on to make two claims, which formed the substance of the next two chapters. The first of these claims was that character implies and demands narrative; the second, that the central doctrine for Hauerwas is the communion of saints and that the final cause of the agency of Christians is the Church. In chapter two I took up the first of these claims. I showed how Hauerwas and others understand the Christian narrative, and how performance is central to the way Christian communities make truth-claims. I went on to argue that most of the criticisms of Hauerwas are resolved if one understands the Christian narrative eschatologically. In this third chapter I take up the second claim. How does the Church perform Jesus' story?

In this chapter I shall examine Hauerwas' understanding of the Church's performance of the story. For Hauerwas, the Church embodies its beliefs about the purposes of God, the nature of sin and the character of salvation, such that it does not *have* a social ethic but indeed *is* a social ethic. The way the Church deals with conflict, externally and internally, is at the heart of its mission. The question is, is Hauerwas' understanding of the Church a true rendering of the Church? Does it bear the credal marks of the Church?

I shall use the four credal marks of the Church - unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity - as a way of explicating and assessing the faithfulness of Hauerwas' performance. My argument is as follows. Hauerwas attacks a bland 'catholicity' by reasserting an 'apostolic holiness'. 'Holiness' here refers to the 'virtue' tradition, and

'apostolicity' to the emphasis on the narrative of Jesus and the early Church. Underlying this attack is a deep suspicion of a false 'unity' - a suspicion learned from Yoder and shared with the radical reformers. Hauerwas' position is, however, made vulnerable to accusations of sectarianism by his tendency to use spatial metaphors. Talk of a spatial distinction between Church and world invites criticism on the issues of unity and catholicity, particularly from those of a 'Constantinian' inclination. Temporal or 'aeonic' distinctions are more helpful, and will be explored in chapter four. Hauerwas' understanding of the Church requires narrative display; therefore the chapter concludes with the performance of the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in Vichy France during the Second World War, demonstrating the strengths and weaknesses of Hauerwas' approach.

3.2. The Politics of the Church

The most distinctive, and perhaps the most notorious, characteristic of Stanley Hauerwas' social ethics is his belief that morality lies not so much in rules, principles, situations or consequences, but in the formation and sustenance of communities of characterful people. It is a theme he returns to regularly; perhaps most cogently in the following passage:

> The first social ethical task of the church is to be the church - the servant community. Such a claim may sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic: it *is* a social ethic.[205]

[205]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 99. See also *A Community of Character* p. 40, *Against the Nations* p. 74, *Christian Existence Today* p. 101, *Resident Aliens* p. 43.

If there could be a summary of Stanley Hauerwas' ethical foundation, this would be it.[206] The claim has implications both for the internal life of the Christian community and to the way the community relates to the rest of the world. I shall examine these implications in this first section of the chapter.

3.2.1. Politics within the Church

Being rather than having a social ethic entails offering a model of how to be peaceful. The unity-in-diversity of the Church offers an alternative to the often violent divisions found elsewhere. Hauerwas laments the scandal of the disunity of the Church - a disunity based not only on doctrine, history and practice, but more sinisterly on race, class and nationality. It is this disunity that hinders the Church's task of reminding the world that it is the world.

Hauerwas has been deeply influenced by the writings of John Howard Yoder. Yoder's Mennonite background accounts for a good deal of more 'mainstream' discomfort with Hauerwas' ecclesiology. Hauerwas and Yoder talk extensively of the 'politics' of the Church. Both have written significant meditations on Matthew 18:15ff.[207] For Yoder, Christian ethics happens in the Church rather than at the desk. Obedience to Christ's will is promised to the community gathered in his name around scripture, in the face of a given moral challenge. Yoder relies on Matthew 18:15: 'What you bind on earth shall be considered as bound in heaven'. Yoder renders this in carefully chosen words:

> A transcendent moral ratification is claimed for the decisions made in the conversation of two or three or more, in a context of forgiveness and in the juridical form of listening to several witnesses.[208]

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[206]'This is not only Hauerwas' departure point. It is also his conclusion.' Wilson Miscamble 'Sectarian Passivism?' *Theology Today* April 1987 p.72.

[207]J.H. Yoder 'The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood' *The Priestly Kingdom* pp. 15-45, especially pp. 26-28. Stanley Hauerwas 'Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church' *Christian Existence Today* pp. 89-97.

[208]J.H. Yoder 'The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood' p. 27.

Thus there is conversation - not the deductive application of universally valid rules. The conversation begins with the two parties of the conflict and gradually involves others only insofar as is needed to achieve reconciliation. The decision is ratified in heaven. The intention is to reconcile.

Since this is the mission of the Church, the ministry required is that which can sustain this mission. Yoder identifies four kinds of people in particular who are needed in such a community. The Church needs prophets who have a vision of the place of the community in history. It needs scribes who know what to bring out of the storeroom of community memory - and when to do so. It needs teachers who are aware of the tyranny of language. And it needs agents of due process whose business is to facilitate and sum up.[209]

Stanley Hauerwas' discussion of Matthew 18 greatly illuminates what it means when he says that the Church's first social task is to be itself. For Hauerwas, the peacemaking that is based on Matthew 18:15ff is not the avoidance of conflict but the creation of the right kind of conflict. His essay is a call for the Church to be 'the most political of institutions', given that unlike politics as it is generally understood it is interested in truth. Hauerwas sees 'political' peacekeeping as 'the development of the processes and institutions that make possible confrontation and resolution of differences so that violence can be avoided'; as such, 'peacemaking 'is not simply one activity among others but is the very form of the church'.[210]

The passage from Matthew 18 is central because it unites the themes of confrontation and forgiveness. Christians are called to confront their enemies. In the process they may discover they have been mistaken about being wronged, or even that their enemy might repent and they will therefore have to be reconciled. For the Church to be 'a community of truthful peace' it must not fail to challenge sinners, for this would abandon them to their sin. There is no limit to forgiveness (Matt 18:22); but the wronged person always approaches the confrontation as one who has been forgiven. This is not to be a recipe for self-righteousness (another form of power). Those who are excluded from the process and treated as Gentiles or tax-collectors, are the self-righteous themselves -

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[209]ibid pp. 29-34.

[210]Stanley Hauerwas 'Peacemaking' pp. 96, 95.

those who act like they have no need of forgiveness. 'There is no more violent act than the unwillingness to accept reconciliation freely and honestly offered.'[211]

In relation to those outside the Church, the Church must be as truthful with the world as it is with itself. It must call for a peace based on forgiveness rather than forgetfulness. It must challenge 'the false peace of the world which is too often built more on power than on truth'; in doing so it realises the world may become a more violent place. Yet humanity is 'not naturally violent' but is 'created for peace'. Thus it is the Church's task to 'help the world find the habits of peace' by witnessing in its own life the right kind of conflict. For 'without the example of a peacemaking community, the world has no alternative but to use violence as the means to settle disputes.'[212]

What is missing in Hauerwas is a lengthier discussion of these themes. If the Church's first social-ethical task is to be itself, one needs to know more what 'being itself' involves. Hauerwas sometimes concentrates on what it does *not* involve, much to the consternation of Niebuhrians. It still remains for Hauerwas to write more essays like 'Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church' to show what practices are required to be the Church. Once the focus has settled on the internal working of the Christian community, more needs to be said on how that community works.

3.2.2. The Constantinian Reversal

The change in Christian social practice and ecclesiology symbolised by the conversion of Constantine is so significant to the thinking of John Howard Yoder and those inspired by him that it is worth considering in detail. Yoder gives his most thorough exposition of this profound shift in his essay 'The Constantinian Sources of Western Social

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[211] ibid p. 94. In *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder provides helpful insights into the nature of the forgiveness that Hauerwas recommends. 'The personhood which [Jesus] proclaims as a healing, forgiving call to all is integrated into the social novelty of the healing community. This ... would be even more clear if we could read the Jesus story with a stronger sense of the Jewishness of his context and with Amos ringing in our ears.' (p. 108). 'The forgiveness of sins is not, for Jesus, a mere assuaging of personal guiltiness or interpersonal estrangement; it is a sign of the new age and the presupposition of a new possibility of community.' (p. 108 n. 16).

[212] ibid p. 95.

Ethics'.[213] Yoder's concern is not with the year 311 or with Constantine the man: it is with how, for example, Christians went from rejecting the violence of army and empire in the third century to considering it their vocation and duty to fight in the fourth and fifth.

What had happened? First of all, the forbidden had become the obligatory. From persecuting Christians the empire before long began to persecute heretics. It became increasingly difficult to identify the minority of 'true' Christians. In various interpretations the 'invisible Church' were seen as the Elect (chosen by God), the sincerely faithful (practised by humans), the 'religious' (who retained some social nonconformity) or - most visibly - the hierarchy.

Second, eschatology and ecclesiology swapped places. The confession that 'Jesus Christ is Lord' meant, for the early Christians, that in a largely hidden way Christ subdued even the rebellion of the principalities and powers under his lordship and used it for his ultimate purpose. With the conversion of Constantine, Christ's lordship was hidden no longer. Providence was now an object no longer of faith but of empirical observation. A Christian (and therefore Christians) ruled the world. The millennium was not a far-off dream but a present reality.

> Before Constantine, one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a believing Christian community but one had to 'take it on faith' that God was governing history. After Constantine, one had to believe without seeing that there was a community of believers, within the larger nominally Christian mass, but one knew for a fact that God was in control of history.[214]

Before the shift the beleaguered Church represented God's providential working in the world. Afterwards, the empire supported the Church, and the success of the two went hand in hand. It was now the empire as a whole, rather than simply the Church, which made God's providence visible. There was no reason for the Church to confront society: its new duty was to support society. When faced with non-Christians outside the empire, the cause of throne and altar was identical; the outsider was the 'infidel'; the result was the crusade.

Third, the ruler or emperor replaced Jesus as the norm for Christian social ethics. Ethics concerned what was possible for rulers to do in positions of power. Only a

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[213] J.H. Yoder *The Priestly Kingdom* pp. 135-147.

[214] ibid p. 137.

minimum standard of behaviour applied to all Christians; the state maintains justice and need not seek sanctity. The strenuous commands of Jesus were left to the 'religious'. What, after all, if everyone were to give all their money away or love their enemies? The trend is highly utilitarian, favouring what Yoder calls the 'engineering approach to ethics':

> Once the evident course of history is held to be empirically discernible, and prosperity of the regime is the measure of good, all morality boils down to efficacy. Right action is what works; what does not promise results can hardly be right.[215]

Fourth, the prevailing metaphysic was dualist. The tension of the visible and the invisible, the personal and the structural, the natural and the revealed, the needs of justice and the counsels of the gospel: all these justified the new social arrangements. Interiorisation and individualisation were functional explanations and justifications for the displacement of the gospels as the primary authority for the ordering of the external world of the Christian community. The sovereignty of Jesus in Christian social practice became increasingly qualified by other values - power, mammon, fame, efficacy. Such other values, known as responsibility, nature, efficiency or wisdom tended to become part of the meaning of 'Christ', speaking where Jesus was silent or inappropriate.[216]

These four dimensions of 'Constantinianism' are significant because of their influence on the thinking of Hauerwas and of theologians in the Mennonite and believers' Church tradition.[217]

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[215] ibid p. 140.

[216] J.H. Yoder *The Priestly Kingdom* pp. 85-86.

[217] In a recent article, J. Denny Weaver extends Yoder's analysis into the field of soteriology. Weaver argues that the 'classic' or 'victory over the powers' theory of the atonement, so prominent in the early Church, fell out of favour in the post-Constantine era due largely to a change in social circumstances. Weaver describes how the early Church saw confrontation with the world as normal, and thus understood the atonement in similarly adversarial terms. Jesus had escaped from clutches of death and Satan, taking with him the souls of humankind, now free to reign with him in the Kingdom of God. The cross of Jesus assured the manner of the confrontation, while the resurrection demonstrated the validity of the confrontation. Christ's atonement established a new social order which stood over against, and in confrontation with, the society as contemporary Christians found it. This accords with the soteriology of Irenaeus and Origen.

Weaver is anxious not to identify his argument with specific historical events: he is more interested in a gradual trend. He acknowledges that he offers 'a hermeneutical model with which to understand the relationship between understandings of atonement and ecclesiology rather than arguing for causal relationships between history and theology'. His approach rests on Yoder's identification of the 'Constantinian' shift. In the context of the primitive Church the social institution of the Church confronted the social institution of the empire. Being a Christian was synonymous with being a part of the Church made visible by its confrontation with the contemporary world. Salvation therefore had an inherently social component - belonging to the people of God. Atonement was not simply a description of the

3.2.3. Responsible Social Ethics?

It is almost universally acknowledged amongst recent Christian ethicists that the Christian's attitude to society cannot be one of indifference. It is commonly argued that the Christian can or must work for the betterment of society. This will no doubt involve using means that one would not employ in ideal circumstances - forms of evil or at least less good. If one is to be effective, one must be prepared when necessary to meet force with force. Those who refuse to do so thereby withdraw from the political mainstream.

Lying behind this apparent unanimity is a wide variety of understandings of how Christianity and Christians are to be related to the state. This variety is explored by John Howard Yoder in *The Christian Witness to the State*. What are the nature and extent of the Christian's 'responsibility' to the state?

The medieval view understands two kinds of persons each with their respective vocation. The saints, a small minority, act on the level of love. Those responsible for the economic and political function of the world can, indeed should, operate on a level of justice. This level of justice is fixed, attainable, and knowable outside the revelation of the incarnate Christ: it is based on natural law.

Lutheranism accepts the distinction between love and justice. Instead of dividing people into religious and lay, however, it sees all people in a tension between both levels, being nonresistant with the neighbour while justly following the 'orders of creation' in society. While as sinners we can never attain perfect love, justice is possible.

The Reformed thinkers dispensed with the distinction between reason (or nature) and revelation. It would be wrong for individuals to try to act in a more loving way than the entire people: to do so would deny their common responsibility for the civil order. If a government is unjust, the responsible Christian must rebel.

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restored relationship between the believer and the saviour: inseparable from that relationship was the community of God's people, which was the expression and the instrument of the work of Christ. After the Church moved to a position within the mainstream of society, its theologians gradually acknowledged that the 'victory over the powers' theory had become irrelevant. This was not because of its demon imagery or the objections to tricking the devil, but because social circumstances had changed and confrontation was a distant memory. See J. Denny Weaver 'Atonement for the NonConstantinian Church' *Modern Theology* 6 July 1990 pp. 307-323.

Reinhold Niebuhr accepts the Greek and Roman insights which supplement Christian revelation to guide responsible witness to the state. He also accepts Luther's distinction between face-to-face relations and those of social responsibility. Justice is no longer a fixed quantity, but a balance between present practice and a line higher but not so much so as to make it irrelevant. The duality, such as it is, is between the Christian and sin.

These four conceptions of Christian social ethics cover most of what I have called 'the conventional wisdom'. What they have in common is that they all formulate the problem in Constantinian terms. The issue is posed as if the only alternatives for the Christian were 'responsibility' or 'withdrawal'. 'Responsibility' is a slogan whose use assumes the loss of the Church's visible distinctiveness in order to leaven the whole of society. Thus the Church tries to formulate an ethic that will work as well for non-Christians as for Christians.

The implications are subtle but considerable. 'Responsibility' assumes the Christian has a stake in the survival of the contemporary social order, an interest which surpasses what most of these thinkers acknowledge to be the law of nonresistant love found in the gospel. This law of love is no longer decisive but is substituted by a new autonomous moral absolute called 'responsibility'.

In the name of 'responsibility', orders of creation, and natural law, Christians depart from Christian revelation when grounding the authority of their witness. There are held to be insights or ways of working which claim Christ-like authority yet which call people to do things that Christ does not call people to do. Each of these alternatives bases its social ethics and conception of justice on a reality other than the redemption that is in Christ.

The Constantinian formulations of Christian social ethics all assume that it is the Christian's duty to make the world come out right. They tend to posit metaphysical distinctions between the orders of creation and redemption or God-given levels of righteousness. They are also concerned to ensure survival by establishing a general, fundamental ethical norm which can be met by those who do not confess Jesus Christ as Lord as much as by those who can.

This is what Hauerwas and Yoder are determined to avoid. Yoder's writing, which has been so deeply influential on Hauerwas, especially in the areas of ecclesiology and

pacifism, presupposes a minority community. Yoder is not interested in public ethics - one cannot do 'ethics for anyone'.

> The obedience of faith does not make sense apart from the context of faith. ... Crossbearing in the hope of resurrection, enemy love as a reflection of God's love, forgiving as one has been forgiven ... do not make sense in the context of unbelief.[218]

The duality in Christian social ethics is one not of orders but of agents: some believe and some do not. If the Christian knows and does the good on the strength of the forgiveness and regeneration of the gospel, how can one expect a society which has not encountered the gospel to do likewise? The resources for making such redeemed behaviour possible are lacking.

> The Christian is a person who ... *by the power of God working in him or her is a new* person. Conflict before was a normal built-in part of one's nature; but now the person has been disarmed ... The believer knows how to deal with [enmity] as with any other temptation - *in repentance, confession, and spiritual victory. ... We cannot impose* [Christian behaviour] on entire nations ... We do not wait for the world to be ready to follow us before we follow Christ.[219]

It does require some subtlety to separate minority ethics from a world-denying tendency. Yoder does this with a thoroughly postmodern twist.

> The dominant moral views of any *known* world are oppressive, provincial or (to say it theologically) 'fallen'. This is true even if the terrain of the provincialism is large or the majority holding the views is great. There is no 'public' that is not just another particular province. We need a communal instrument of moral reasoning in the light of faith precisely to defend the decision-maker against the stream of conformity to his own world's self-evidence.[220]

In his attack upon the 'Constantinian' presuppositions of much Christian social ethics, Yoder points out as a cause for repentance that which is generally taken for granted. His essay 'The Kingdom as Social Ethic' is a discussion of the logic and psychology of weakness and how they differ from the logic and psychology of control. For instance, 'in a situation of majority control, if something happens it is because you let it happen and you are to blame for it, even for results which are partly evil'. Christians in

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[218]J.H. Yoder 'Radical Reformation Ethics in Ecumenical Perspective' *The Priestly Kingdom* p. 110.

[219]J.H. Yoder 'Living the Disarmed Life' p. 43.

[220]J.H. Yoder 'The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood' *The Priestly Kingdom* p. 40. In *The Politics of Jesus* he writes 'The Church does not attack the powers; this Christ has done. The Church concentrates on not being seduced by them' (p. 150).

majority or large-minority contexts often assume that 'perhaps the only way to do moral deliberation is to work out a consequentialist calculation of the direction one wants the whole social system to take'.[221] Ethics done by the weak looks very different:

> There are things that we cannot control, which are nonetheless going to happen. ... This means that it will be an expression of wisdom, and not of self-righteousness or unconcern or isolation, if we accept the fact that those deeds are going to be done and that we cannot stop them, and concentrate for ourselves on doing other things which no one will do. This looks to our friends of a majoritarian cast of mind like acquiescence in evil. It is; one of the differences between being powerful and powerless is that one has thought more about the fact that there are evils one cannot prevent.[222]

Yoder sums up his position in two pairs of questions.

> Instead of asking about one's action 'if I do this how will it tip the scale ... ?', one rather asks 'in a situation in which I cannot tip the scales, on what other grounds might I decide what to do?'[223]

> If everyone gave their wealth away what would we do for capital? If everyone loved their enemies who would ward off the Communists? ... Such reasoning remains ludicrous wherever committed Christians accept realistically their minority status. For more fitting than 'What if everybody did it?' would be its inverse, 'What if nobody else acted like a Christian, but we did?'[224]

Christian ethics are therefore done by powerless people who recognise that their faithfulness will inevitably result in their being a minority community. It is not so much that they have renounced control as that the forms of life they have adopted mean that control is unlikely to come their way. They do not believe that the forces that determine the march of history are controlled by the leaders of the armies and markets, so it is not inevitable that Christians must become lords of the state and the economy so as to use that power towards the ends they consider desirable. Yoder roots the central theme of powerlessness squarely in the New Testament itself.

> The cross and not the sword, suffering and not brute power determines the meaning of history. The key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience (Rev 13:10). ... The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.[225]

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[221] J.H. Yoder 'The Kingdom as Social Ethic' *The Priestly Kingdom* pp. 100, 96.

[222] ibid p. 101.

[223] ibid.

[224] J.H. Yoder *The Priestly Kingdom* p. 139.

[225] J.H. Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* p. 232.

In the worship life of the late New Testament Church is displayed the most desperate encounter of the Church's weakness - John in exile, Paul in prison - with the power of evil rulers. This, says Yoder, is simply a logical unfolding of the meaning and work of Jesus Christ himself, whose life followed suffering servanthood not violent lordship, who was 'so faithful to the enemy-love of God that it cost him all his effectiveness; he gave up every handle on history.'[226]

It is important to note that while faithfulness is a more important goal than effectiveness, the two are by no means in opposition, and many churches that have not claimed direct social significance or concern for society have often had the most social significance. Indeed to accept an opposition between faithfulness and effectiveness would be to accept a typology imposed by the 'responsibility' school. It is no more true to suppose that the 'responsible' use of power always gets results than to presume that minority faithfulness is by definition ineffective. Yoder details a number of ways in which social results can be a by-product of suffering love. The minority group can maintain awareness of an issue, doing jobs no one else is doing, until social circumstances alter to make the issue one of general concern. The Quaker experience of fair trading in the eighteenth century eventually rewarded transcendent rather than consequential commitments by creating a body of trust. Faithful minorities can move the public conscience, as with Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. They can represent those who have no one to speak for them. They command respect when their social goals are in the interest of others.[227]

Yoder's examples of the social significance of minority faith communities make it clear that in following the gospels' social ethic the Church is not withdrawing from public or political life. What the Christian withdraws from is the responsibility to transform society from the top down.[228]

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[226]ibid p. 233.

[227]J.H. Yoder *The Priestly Kingdom* pp. 96-99.

[228]This 'ad hoc politics' may be compared with the 'ad hoc apologetics' discussed in chapter two. Yoder gives a social-ethical embodiment to Hauerwas' postliberal distrust of the 'large battalions' of systematic theology, rooted in the medieval era when Church and state were so close. See 3.4.3. below for de Certeau's impressive contribution to this argument.

3.2.4. The Church is not the World

3.2.4.1. The Church is not the World

A great deal of subtlety is necessary for Hauerwas to affirm the particularity of the Church without suggesting a dualism between Church and world. The Church, 'the people capable of remembering and telling the story of God we find in Jesus', exists for the world. The world is God's good creation; God has redeemed it, even though it refuses to acknowledge the fact. Thus the Church attempts to show the world what it is meant to be. Church and world cannot survive without each other; and each sins in frequently forgetting this. The Church is constantly tempted to a dualism that suggests God's redemption extends only to itself, or to a triumphalism that confuses servanthood with domination as its mode of relation to the world. The Church has no right to determine the boundaries of God's kingdom, for such is to limit the sphere of God's sovereignty.

It is important to stress that although 'wider society [is] the institutionalization of unbelief and sin'[229], Church and world are not concepts which are intelligible without the other. The 'world' is not an ontological designation;[230] it is not inherently sinful. As often, Hauerwas invokes Yoder when in need of subtle distinctions:

> The distinction between church and the world is not something that God has imposed on the world by a prior metaphysical definition, nor is it only something which timid and pharisaical Christians have built up around themselves. It is all of that in creation that has taken the freedom not yet to believe.[231]

In Hauerwas' language:

> ...the world consists of those, including ourselves, who have chosen not to make the story of God their story. The world in us refuses to affirm that this is God's world and that, as loving Lord, God's care for creation is greater than our illusion of control. The world is those aspects of our individual and social lives where we live untruthfully by continuing to rely on violence to bring order.[232]

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[229]Stanley Hauerwas 'The Nonresistant Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder' *Vision and Virtue* p. 206.

[230]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 100.

[231]J.H. Yoder *The Original Revolution* Scottdale, Pennsylvania:Herald Press 1971 p. 116.

[232]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 101.

There is no room for Christians to be self-righteous, since the distinction between Church and world runs through every agent. Christians will no doubt find non-Christians who manifest God's peace better than they do; cooperation with such people is based not on a generally shared natural morality but on the boundless width of God's kingdom, which the Church has no right to circumscribe.

3.2.4.2. The Church understands the world

Related to the second dimension is the way the Church offers the correct perspective from which to describe and understand the world. The story that stands at the centre of the Church is one which, Christians believe, correctly describes the world. An insight that Hauerwas originally gained from Iris Murdoch is that people act in the world that they see.[233] What they are to do will be determined by what they perceive to be 'going on'. How Christians see is learned through being a people who are formed by the preaching and practice of their narrative. Hauerwas calls for the Church to be 'a community which tries to develop the resources to stand within the world witnessing to the peaceable kingdom and thus rightly understanding the world'.[234]

> The search for a public moral language is motivated ... by embarrassment about particularity, which is not willing to break through the embarrassment to confession by taking the risk of a specific encounter, preferring to posit something argued to be more solid and less threatening than an open market place, even if that 'something' be nonexistent or vacuous ... The way to affirm our respect for others is to respect their particularity and learn their languages, not to project in their absence a claim that we see the truth of things with an authority unvitiated by our particularity.[235]

There is no question that some in the world are bound to hate this people for describing the world in these terms. For this reason the price of being unafraid to speak the truth may be geographical mobility. Just as their saviour was often on the move, Christians may find they have no earthly home but the Church itself. It is in no one's

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[233]See chapter five below for further discussion of this point.

[234]ibid p. 102.

[235]J.H. Yoder *The Priestly Kingdom* p. 42. There is a clear link here with Hauerwas' rejection of ethics from the neutral observer's perspective. See 1.2.1. above.

interest for the Church to abandon particularity in order to seek some less particular moral consensus; for Christians believe that the way they see reality is the way reality really is.

The Church begins its social ethic by seeking to understand the world rather than rush into acting in it. For John Milbank, theology is a social science which claims to read and criticise what is going on in other societies. Meanwhile Christ and the Church are a new social practice, critiquing all others.[236] On the basis of its counter-ontology - the priority of nonviolent creating - the Church sets about 'out-narrating' a politics based on coercion and falsehood.

This is the only context in which terms such as the 'ghetto' make any sense. If the Church insists on calling attention to what the world is, if it has no reason to fear the truth, if it is able to exist in the world without resorting to violence to maintain its presence, it is not likely to be popular. When 'ghetto' is used as a slogan, it tends to be forgotten that historically a ghetto was not an enclave chosen by a self-righteous group but a refuge into which society drove those whose loyalty to the God of the Hebrew scriptures made them cosmopolitans and therefore misfits in medieval Europe.[237] This is highly significant: if the Church does come to be isolated, it will not be from withdrawal or from deliberately provoking the world's violence. It may however mean that the only available path of resistance is to leave one place for another. Christians are at home in no nation: their only home is the Church itself.

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[236]John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* p. 388.

[237]John Howard Yoder *The Christian Witness to the State* p. 88 n. 10. Hauerwas is aware that although initially most Anabaptists did not withdraw but were forced to the periphery, 'this forced withdrawal later became a self-fulfilling prophecy as Anabaptists misdescribed their own theological and social commitments by making a virtue of necessity.' Stanley Hauerwas 'Will the real Sectarian Stand Up?' *Theology Today* April 1987 p. 91.

3.2.4.3. The world is not the Church

In several essays, Hauerwas argues that Christians have only a qualified loyalty to the nation state.[238] Hauerwas is anxious to resist the presumption of the state; he also wishes to resist the supposition that the world's way of ruling is the only way to rule.

In resisting the presumption of the state, Hauerwas is most at odds with those such as Richard Neuhaus who suppose that the Church should choose sides between totalitarian and democratic states. A demand of this kind makes democracy an end in itself. It expects Christians to kill in order to preserve the democratic state against her enemies; and yet that Church persists in supposing that it is free to recognise idolatry. In Hauerwas' view, the Church in the United States is the captive of the state. The overriding conflict of the twentieth century has not been that between freedom and oppression, or democracy and totalitarianism. It has been, as ever, the conflict between

> those that would remain loyal to God's kingdom and those that would side with the world. And the world is exactly those people and institutions claiming that Christians too must be willing to choose sides and kill in order to preserve the social orders in which they find themselves. As Christians when we accept that alternative it means we are no longer the church that witnesses to God's sovereignty over *all* nations, but instead we have become part of the world.[239]

With great clarity, Hauerwas charts how Christians have assumed that it was their task to make the 'liberal' world work. In this 'liberal' world, Christian belief and practice was restricted to the private realm; the result was a peaceful society. Hauerwas characterises the ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr as one which focuses on love and justice, requiring a balance of freedom and equality; Hauerwas describes this as 'functionally atheistic'. 'In the name of Christian responsibility to the "world", theologians became "ethicists" so they could be of service to liberal political regimens'. In a sardonic tone, Hauerwas recalls Jeffrey Stout's observation that liberalism arose out of the chaos of the Thirty Years' War:

> The whole point ... of the philosophical and political developments since the Enlightenment is to create people incapable of killing other people in the name of God.

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[238]See especially 'The Reality of the Church: Even a Democratic State is Not the Kingdom' *Against the Nations* pp. 122-131, 'A Christian Critique of Christian America' *Christian existence Today* pp 171-190 and 'The Politics of Salvation: Why there is no Salvation Outside the Church' *After Christendom* pp. 23-44.

[239]Stanley Hauerwas 'The Reality of the Church' p. 129.

> Ironically, since the Enlightenment's triumph, people no longer kill one another in the name of God but in the names of nation-states. ... The ultimate pathos of our times is that we live in societies and polities formed by the assumption that there is literally nothing worth for which it is worth dying. The irony is that such societies cannot live without war as they seek to hide in war the essential emptiness of their commitments.[240]

3.2.5. Summary

Much of Stanley Hauerwas' writing is concerned with exposing false notions of what it means to be Church. This outline of the dimensions of his understanding of the Church began with his discussion of the practice of reconciliation in the Christian community. I began with this in order to emphasise the centrality of the formation and sustenance of the community of character as the final cause of Christian ethics. Without the practices of such an alternative community, the world has no way of knowing it is the world. Hauerwas and Yoder outline how this distinctive mission of the Church - to be itself - has been deeply affected by historical developments, notably the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire and the rise of liberalism in response to religious intolerance after the reformation. No Christian ethic can ignore these significant developments; however by identifying them Hauerwas is developing a Christian ethic that is not a hostage to them.

Though Hauerwas discusses some of the internal practices of the Church at length, others he does not describe in great detail. This outline has been sufficient to introduce a discussion on whether Hauerwas is true to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church - and, in particular, whether there is any justification or significance in describing him as a sectarian.

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[240]Stanley Hauerwas 'The Politics of the Church' pp. 31, 33, 44. See also Reinhold Niebuhr *The Nature and Destiny of Man* volume 2 New York: Scribners 1949 pp. 244-286 and Jeffrey Stout *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and their Discontents* Boston: Beacon 1988.

3.3. Apostolic Holiness

Stanley Hauerwas' theology is Christocentric. Apostolicity is not a term he specifically uses about his ethics; when I use it I refer to the way he identifies Jesus as the norm for Christian behaviour. He bases this conviction on the fact that it was the apostles and the early Church whose practice formed the canon of the New Testament; and the close connection of the narrative of Jesus with the practice of the early Church implies that Jesus expected the ethical behaviour of his followers to be little different from his own.

Though Hauerwas makes the notion that I have termed apostolicity central to his ethical foundation, he does not have an idealised picture of the early Christian communities; nor does he suppose that these communities should be reproduced today as if there had never been a Constantine or a Thirty Years War or an Enlightenment. Apostolicity is central to his antifoundationalist epistemology, and thus links his ecclesiology with his concern for narrative, outlined in chapter two. It was in the Christian community that the gospels were written: and it has been in Christian communities that they have been performed. It is only in the performance of those communities that their truth can be assessed.

My use of the term 'holiness' refers to the crucial role that sanctification plays from the very beginning of Hauerwas' work.[241] There are perhaps inevitable criticisms to be considered. If holiness concentrates on the individual, suggestions of callous self-righteousness, of the kind associated with deontological ethics, tend to appear. It can appear that the individual's adherence to principle outweighs any other consideration. If, on the other hand, holiness concentrates on the community, charges of sectarianism quickly arise.

Thus when I use the term 'apostolic holiness' to refer to the general thrust of Hauerwas' ecclesiology and social ethics, the expression denotes the belief that disciples

[241] 'Sanctification is not a recommended ethical programme of good dispositions and actions but rather the effect of the conformation of the self to God's act.' *Character and the Christian Life* p. 191. See 1.7. above.

are called to imitate the way God deals with the world, and that the definitive expression of the manner of God way with the world is the life and passion of Jesus.

3.3.1. Jesus and the Sovereignty of God

For Hauerwas, Jesus' story provides the Church with 'a path to follow'. This is Hauerwas' understanding of justification.[242] In Jesus Christ God establishes a new kingdom by reclaiming the creation and subduing the powers to his will. The foundation of Hauerwas' pacifism is not therefore on a prior definition of peace of which Christ is the great exemplar. There is no independent, abstracted norm which determines the meaning of Christ: instead, Christ and discipleship are the norm which determine the treatment of evil.

It is important to Yoder that, though Jesus inaugurated a new ethic for dealing with evil, the situation he faced was not new, but of abiding significance. Yoder begins *The Politics of Jesus* by quoting C.H.Dodd's diagnosis of the political forces at work in the gospel narrative:

> ... We should observe that the situation into which Jesus came was genuinely typical. ... The forces with which he came into contact were such as are permanent factors in history: - government, institutional religion, nationalism, social unrest ...[243]

Among these forces one may also note religious bigotry, the violent use of political power, the corruption of justice, mob spirit and action, militarism and racism.

This understanding of Christian nonviolence is apostolic insofar as it recognises the abiding character of the forces which Jesus confronted - in the temptation narratives, in the confrontations of his ministry with evil, ignorance, disease and self-interest, in the

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[242]Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 94.

[243]C.H.Dodd 'The Kingdom of God and the Present Situation' *Christian News-Letter* May 29 1940, supplement no. 31 quoted in J.H.Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* Second Edition p. i.

weakness of his followers and in the way of the cross. Apostolicity lies in Christians looking to the way Jesus dealt with much the same problems as are present today.

The key for both Hauerwas and Yoder is whether one sees these forces as characterising the true nature of history, or whether one understands that Jesus Christ exposed, addressed and redeemed these forces and defined history differently. The issue is one of sovereignty. If Jesus Christ is Lord, then it is his activity, not that of the armies and markets, that determines the meaning of history. Jesus' lordship relativises the sovereignty of all other powers. All the 'givens' of history have their authority undermined if Jesus is lord. And Jesus' lordship is revealed definitively in the cross. Thus it is the cross that is the meaning of history. The revelation of the victory of the cross disarms all the powers the Christian might be tempted to use. They do not have the force they once had. Thus 'when the Christian whom God has disarmed lays aside carnal weapons, it is not, in the last analysis, because they are too dangerous, but because they are too weak'.[244]

Therefore Christian nonviolence is a recognition of the sovereignty of God. It is not just that Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies and not to resist evil: for if Jesus were not fully divine, this ethic would not be binding or necessary. It is not just the fact that Christ went to the cross: for if Christ were not fully human, this ethic would be an impossible ideal. The Christian's belief in the sovereignty of God is an ontological and eschatological claim. It is an ontological belief that in the cross God decisively dealt with evil, not by responding in kind, but through self-giving, nonresistant love. And it is an eschatological belief in the final triumph of the lamb who was slain.

What Christian nonviolence is not is a tactical calculation of appropriate methods for getting one's way. Nonviolence is not right because it 'works'. Hauerwas is well aware that the nonviolence of Christians may make the world a more violent place. His concern is not with effective action but with faithful recognition of the approach to evil that Jesus has made possible. The Christian response is that of imitation and participation.

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[244]J.H.Yoder 'Living the Disarmed Life' *A Matter of Faith: A Study Guide for Churches on the Nuclear Arms Race* Washington D.C.: Sojourners 1981 p.43.

3.3.2. The Imitation of Christ

Hauerwas describes this second area as sanctification. Justification concerned the ontological and eschatological matters of the sovereignty of God. When it comes to sanctification, the issues come down to earth, and are more ecclesiological. Sanctification is 'a way of reminding us of the kind of journey we must undertake in order to make the story of Jesus our story'.[245] It is a reminder that holiness is a practical, as well as ethereal, thing.

Hauerwas' understanding of the imitation of God is most fully expressed in the fifth chapter of *The Peaceable Kingdom*. It is here that one can see how Hauerwas' commitment to nonviolence arises out of his understanding of narrative as outlined in my previous chapter. When the early Church searched for ways of establishing the significance of Jesus, they told stories of his life.

Hauerwas recognises that the picture of Jesus provided by the gospels is not the 'real' Jesus but Jesus as he was perceived by the early Church. But Hauerwas is undeterred by this:

> The historical fact that we only learn who Jesus is as he is reflected through the eyes of his followers, a fact that has driven many to despair because it seems they cannot know the real Jesus, in fact is a theological necessity. For the 'real Jesus' did not come to leave us unchanged, but rather to transform us to be worthy members of the community of the new age. ... It was assumed by the churches that gave us the gospels that we cannot know who Jesus is and what he stands for without learning to be his followers.[246]

Learning to be followers of Jesus means being called to imitate God. Hauerwas concentrates on Matthew 5:48: 'you must be *teleioi*, as your heavenly Father is *teleios*'.[247] This is a point that is picked up by Yoder

> Christians love their enemies not because they think the enemies are wonderful people, nor because they believe that love is sure to conquer these enemies ... [nor] because they fail to respect their native land or its rulers; nor because they are unconcerned for the safety of their neighbours ... The Christian loves his or her enemies because God does, and God commands his followers to do so: that is the only reason, and that is enough.[248]

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[245]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 94.

[246]ibid pp. 73-4.

[247]Hauerwas translates this 'perfect', though it could also be translated 'oriented toward the end', which has implications on the eschatological approach to ethics I outlined at the end of chapter two.

[248]J.H.Yoder 'Living the Disarmed Life' p.42.

The Christian is called to be *like* Jesus, not to *be* Jesus. This rules out a simple copying of the external circumstances of Jesus. Yoder is careful to highlight that there is no general notion of living like Jesus in the New Testament. Neither Paul nor any other writer looks to barefoot mendicancy, the forsaking of home or property, the formation of a close-knit group of disciples, the use of parables, singleness, time on mountains or in the wilderness, or the artisan background for a model for the imitation of Christ.[249] Hauerwas insists that one can only learn to be like Jesus if one joins a community that practises his virtues - not by simply copying his external circumstances.

Hauerwas' understanding of imitation begins with the Biblical narrative. The early Christians saw in Jesus a continuation of God's dealings with Israel. These dealings included in particular the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the law at Sinai, the crossing of the Jordan and the construction of the Temple at Zion. By obeying the commands, by fearing and loving the Lord, Israel believed it was imitating God. '... To love God meant to learn to love as God loved and loves'.[250] By imitating God, Israel depicted God's kingdom in the world. The early Church saw in Jesus a recapitulation of the life of Israel, and a similar presentation of the life of God before the world. Imitating Jesus was therefore continuing Israel's vocation by imitating God.

God does not impose his will upon Israel. Though he constantly calls her back to faithfulness, she retains the possibility of disobedience. This pattern is continued in the gospels. God does not accept violent means, but creates a people who refuse to meet the world on its own terms. Being like Jesus means using the same methods as Jesus did when he was confronted with powerful enemies. Because Jesus chose servanthood and forgiveness rather than force and hostility, he went to the cross. Christians imitate him when they make a similar choice, recognising that 'it shall not be so among you' (Mark 10:43).

Christian nonviolence in this light is apostolic because it affirms the definitive character of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus faced the same calls to 'responsible' action in society that the Church faces today. He too was concerned for the downtrodden and oppressed; he too longed for justice on earth; he too saw the potential

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[249]See especially J.H.Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* Second Edition pp.130-133.

[250]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p.78.

of political power. Yet he took the path not of power and justice, but of humility and love. He 'committed his cause to one who judges justly' (1 Peter 2:23). And so 'the weapons we wield' - our almighty meekness - 'are not merely human, but divinely potent' (2 Corinthians 10:4). Part of this definitive character of Christ is that he incorporates the story of God's dealings with Israel, in a way that is particularly apparent in Matthew's gospel. Part of the apostolicity of the Church is that it recognises this Jewishness of Jesus. Hauerwas constantly underlines the importance of the Church's recognition of the place of the Jews in God's providence.

3.3.3. Participation - the Mystical Union

'Truth, for Christianity, is not correspondence, but rather *participation* of the beautiful in the beauty of God'.[251] Sharing God's way with his world is a participation in the life of God. It is not just a question of imitating Christ: the readiness to renounce legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means is a *participation* in the triumphant suffering of the lamb.[252]

Christian nonviolence in this third light is a recognition of the incarnation: it is the belief that God participated in human nature so that humanity might participate in God's nature. Jesus Christ

> was not simply a divine figure masquerading as a man whose apparent obedience was therefore irrelevant to the rest of us; he was the true human being. Faith in Jesus Christ is not an arbitrary or magical inscription on heavenly ledgers; faith is rather participation in the being of God, incorporation into the body of Christ. The possibility of obedience is therefore a statement not about our own human capabilities, but about the fullness of the humanity of Jesus and the believers' identity with him through the Spirit in the Church.[253]

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[251] John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* Oxford: Blackwell 1990 p.427.

[252] Stanley Hauerwas 'Messianic Pacifism' *Worldview* 16/6 June 1973 p.31.

[253] J.H.Yoder '"Christ and Culture", A Critique of H. Richard Niebuhr' p.16 quoted in Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* p.201.

This is the kind of statement with which Yoder ties together ontology, Christology and ecclesiology. In this context a phrase like 'being (or doing) the truth' makes sense. The Christian should conform him or herself to the perfect obedience of Christ. This is done by participation in the nonviolent community. Participation in this community, the body of Christ, the communion of saints, is in fact participation in the being of Christ - indeed, in the life of God. The life of God is itself nonviolent, as we can see from the manner of both creation and redemption, and God will triumph, as truth must, in the only nonviolent, self-giving way that truth knows. This picture is thus 'the way things really (ontologically) are'. Not to participate in the nonviolent community is therefore to part company with the truth.

Holiness is fundamentally the character of God. The Church is holy by participating in God's way of dealing with the world. Through the notion of participation, all that Hauerwas has said about the community of character - and the implications this has for the *communio sanctorum* - becomes incorporated into his Christology. Participation therefore emerges as a term which sums up the connection between what I have termed apostolicity and holiness in Hauerwas' thought.

3.3.4. Ethics and the Life of Christ

Both Hauerwas and Yoder base Christian ethics on the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. Their response to alternative views is thus that such views do not do full justice to this orthodox doctrine. If Jesus were not fully human, his ethic would be an impossible ideal; if he were not fully divine, his ethic would not be binding or necessary. Mistakes made in Christian ethics tend to correspond with the denial either of Christ's full divinity or of his full humanity.

Yoder describes the first mistake as Ebionism. This is the term he uses for methods which do not treat Jesus as the norm.[254] Yoder lists several grounds on which

[254]He has in mind recent situation ethics and Roman Catholic natural law ethics.

Jesus' irrelevance is asserted. Jesus anticipated an imminent eschaton; he thought in terms of simple rural face-to-face relations; the contemporary Christian faces problems Jesus did not face, particularly problems of the use of authority unthinkable before the 'Constantinian' revolution; his concern was spiritual not social; only his death has abiding significance.[255] There is historical-critical scepticism about whether the text is clear enough to guide us, or about whether it is consistent in its guidance from redactor to redactor; and there is the characteristically Lutheran view that Jesus' ethic is designed not to tell us what we can do but to bring us to our knees because we cannot do it.[256]

This style of ethics begins with the rhythms of the world in the realities around us. It tends to be grounded on one or more of 'nature', 'reason', 'creation', and 'reality'. Rather than choose not to follow Jesus, or read the story and find in it a different message, this approach claims that the particular claims of the Jesus' ethic upon the life of the disciple can be set aside on systematic, logical grounds. Yoder identifies this approach with a denial of the absolute relevance, sovereignty and divinity of Jesus.

The second mistake Yoder describes as docetism. Docetism involves the perennial subjugation of the historical Jesus to the givens of contemporary theological presuppositions, and thus the undermining of the full humanity of Christ. The most common form of docetism is to make Christology the servant of soteriology. It is not, of course, possible to distinguish clinically the person of Christ from his work; the two cannot be separated. However when today's society, and the social situation of the Church within it, are taken as a given, Christology tends to become distorted. When soteriological issues take a primary place, the character of Jesus becomes a function of the saving acts required of him. His mission defines his person, rather than *vice versa*. Projected onto Jesus are human desires to be saved, to become like God, to overcome guilt, to make satisfaction for sin, to be perfect in action, purity, and trust. The historical Jesus can get left behind.

The narrative character of the gospels discourages such a propositional rendering of soteriology. The gospels do not separate the person of Christ from his work, the

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[255]J.H.Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* Second Edition pp. 4-8.

[256]These latter arguments are among those additions noted by Yoder in his second edition, ibid pp. 15-19.

incarnation from the atonement. There is no moral, metaphysical, or anthropological point or message that is separable from the story of Jesus as the gospels render it. The character of Jesus is unsubstitutable - he is not a myth but a particular person with particular followers whom he called to do particular things. His identity is not gathered by researching his titles or by assessing the effects of his ministry, but by learning to follow him. He is the only given.

By starting with soteriology we tend to accept the ills from which Christ came to deliver us as given. We then shape a saviour such as will deal with these given ills. Such a method is often found in apologetics. We start with a great list of woes, of what is wrong with the world: on these, at least, we can agree - and the apologist will habitually stop before the catalogue of given ills becomes of unbearable dimension. But can all people agree on these ills? And is it clear that these are the ills from which Christ came to deliver us, or that - when the woes are expressed in these terms - he succeeded in doing so? Many of the woes seem to be very much still with us. It is doubtful whether we can put together a neat equation wherein such ills are simply subtracted by the work of Christ. The ills that Christ overcomes are discovered as the disciple walks the way of the cross with him. In the same way the gospel narratives do not begin *with a catalogue of the world's given ills*, followed by diagnosis and cure. On the contrary, it is in learning to be an apostolic community that follows a particular Saviour that Christians discover what are the sins and shortcomings and powers from which they need to be, and have been, delivered.

3.3.5. Ethics and the Death of Christ

Yoder's concern is to establish the life of Jesus as normative for Christian ethics. In order to do this Yoder steers a course between those who abstract certain elements from the life of Christ, and those who advocate a step-by-step imitation of Jesus' lifestyle. In common with the first group, Yoder asserts that one point in Jesus' life is more important than the others; in common with the second group Yoder insists that this point is not an abstraction.

Yoder first criticises those who abstract from the gospel narrative some value such as absolute love or humility or faith. Yet Yoder also criticises the 'mendicant' tradition which develops a general concept of living like Jesus. The former approach is insufficiently concrete; the latter is 'a red herring', since it does not offer a political alternative to the 'ethos of Caesar'.[257]

Despite his concern for the whole of Christ's life, Yoder does single out the voluntary suffering of the cross as the normative revelation within the normative revelation. There is no exaltation of suffering-in-general:

> The early Christians had to be warned about claiming merit for any and all suffering; only if their suffering be innocent, and as a result of the evil will of their adversaries, may it be understood as meaningful before God (1 Peter 2:18-21, 3:14-18, 4:1,13-16, 5:9, James 4:10).[258]

The concept of imitation concentrates on one realm above all others: the 'concrete social meaning of the cross in relation to enmity and power'.[259] The believer's cross is voluntary, not inexplicable, suffering. It is 'the price of his social nonconformity'. It is up to the believer to choose to be persecuted just as Jesus was.

> Representing as he did the divine order now at hand, accessible; renouncing as he did the legitimate use of violence and the accrediting of the existing authorities; renouncing as well the ritual purity of noninvolvement, his people will encounter in ways analogous to his own the hostility of the old order.
>
> Being human, Jesus must have been subject somehow or other to the testings of pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust; but it does not enter into the concerns of the gospel writer to give us any information about any struggles he may have had with their attraction. The one temptation the man Jesus faced - and faced again and again - as a constitutive element in his public ministry, was the temptation to exercise social responsibility, in the interest of justified revolution, through the use of available violent methods. Social withdrawal was no temptation to him; that option (which most Christians take part of the time) was excluded at the outset. Any alliance with the Sadducean establishment in the exercise of *conservative* social responsibility (which most Christians choose the rest of the time) was likewise excluded at the outset. We understand Jesus only if we can empathize with this threefold rejection: the self-evident, axiomatic, sweeping rejection of both quietism and establishment responsibility, and the difficult, constantly reopened, genuinely attractive option of the crusade.[260]

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[257] *The Politics of Jesus* Second Edition pp. 132-133.

[258] ibid p. 129.

[259] ibid p. 131.

[260] ibid pp. 96-97.

Thus the cross is central not because of its role in the atonement, not as an illustration of suffering-in-general, but as the voluntary choice of the Son of God whose commitment to nonviolence and enemy-love led inevitably there.

An apostolic Church must always place the cross at the heart of its reflection on social practice. This was where Jesus' ministry led him; this was where the ministry of many of his earliest followers led. They did not believe that there was nothing worth dying for; but there is no suggestion that they saw the necessity to kill.

3.3.6. The Problem of Perfectionism

The danger with holiness-renewal movements throughout the history of the Church is their tendency to Donatism, to justification by works and to world-denying sectarianism. One reason that it seems appropriate to highlight the 'apostolic holiness' emphasis of Hauerwas' approach is that criticisms cluster around these areas. One criticism is that Hauerwas and Yoder's approach simply asks too much - simply makes Jesus' commands too strenuous. Are we expected to be perfect?

Matthew 5:48, 'you must be *teleioi*, as your heavenly Father is *teleios*', has often been seen as a summary of the Sermon on the Mount. It could be seen as the highpoint of apostolic holiness. I shall briefly discuss three approaches to the implications of this verse for Christian social ethics.

Yoder points out that perfectionist preachers have seen in this verse the promise that sinlessness can be attained. More often, ethicists pointed to the verse to illustrate their belief that the Sermon is an impossible ideal. Yoder finds fault with extra-biblical concepts of perfection which see perfection as a condition without limitation or flaw or temptation. In the light of 5:43 ('...who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and dishonest...'), Yoder perceives a simple command that the disciples should

not discriminate between friend and enemy, in and out, good and evil. He therefore understands the command to be, 'Be ye indiscriminate'.[261]

Hauerwas' concern is with deontological approaches to perfection which result in moral callousness and self-righteousness. If perfection resides more in the principle than in the person, the result can be legalism. The meaning of absolute commands or ideals is seldom unequivocal; and principles can conflict with each other. Deontological principles tend to be negatively formulated: they can easily slip into a search for moral purity rather than an expression of agape. Nonviolence is not simply a question of not taking life; it requires positive action that respects life. Christian faith is not simply an ethical stance to be kept consistent, or a set of rules not to be broken. This is not perfection.

Hauerwas' proposal is based on narrative. Christians seek perfection by imitating God's way of dealing with the world, as set forth in the biblical narrative. Like Yoder, Hauerwas is uninterested in any static, abstract notion of perfection. If God's perfection is displayed in human form and in Israel and the Church, why should human perfection be any different? Hauerwas has a highly pragmatic approach to doctrine: doctrines are tested by the forms of community they produce. He therefore has little interest in a definition of perfection that distracted from the indispensable commitment of the practising community. Human perfection is thus a dynamic, embodied story: participation in the communion of saints.

I contend, as I have already done at the end of chapter two, that the element implicit but undeveloped in Hauerwas' and Yoder's understanding is an eschatological one. 'You must be *teleioi*...' implies in its very language 'you must be oriented toward the end'. This is hinted at in the passage quoted from Yoder above, 'representing the divine order now at hand...', and in Hauerwas' understanding of narrative. Being *teleios* resembles the behaviour that coincides with a belief that the end of the story is as has been revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - or, to use the shorthand of Yoder, the belief that the cross is the meaning of history. The question is therefore neither 'How will this situation turn out if I act in this way? nor 'Am I doing the "right" thing?'. The question is more one of 'How does this practice enact and continue God's way of dealing with the world?'.

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[261] J.H. Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* pp. 116-7 and p. 225.

3.4. Unity and Catholicity

I have chosen to look at unity and catholicity under one heading since it is so often difficult to separate them. In this area lie the principal criticisms of Hauerwas as a sociological sectarian. In principle there are two forms of criticism: that Hauerwas separates his brand of Christianity from other brands; and that he separates the Church from the world, such that the Church withdraws from wider society. In practice these two areas become one. No one expects that the unity of the Church will be achieved by one theological ethicist. He is deeply conscious of the sin of Christian disunity, and of the way it hampers Christian mission. Yet he is unusually well placed to embody the catholicity of the Church, since he has taught and studied at both Roman Catholic and Protestant foundations. In 1981 he described himself as

> ... a (Southern) Methodist of doubtful theological background (when you are a Methodist it goes without saying you have a doubtful theological background); who teaches and worships with and is sustained morally and financially by Roman Catholics; who believes that the most nearly faithful form of Christian witness is best exemplified by the often unjustly ignored people called anabaptists or Mennonites. In short my ecclesial preference is to be a high-church Mennonite.[262]

He went on to say he writes 'not only for the church that does exist but also for the church that should exist if we were more courageous and faithful'.[263]

Hauerwas has set out his stall in terms that I have described as apostolic. His foundation lies not in the search for a categorical imperative or in an understanding of natural law or in an assessment of likely consequences; it lies in faithfulness to the practice of Jesus as revealed in the gospels. It has often been said that this makes him a sectarian.[264] I have reviewed the epistemological dimensions of this criticism in chapter two; here I shall concentrate on the sociological issues involved.

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[262]Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* p. 6.

[263]ibid.

[264]See particularly James Gustafson 'The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University' *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 1985 pp. 83-94, and Wilson D. Miscamble 'Sectarian Passivism?' *Theology Today* April 1987 pp. 69-77.

A working definition of catholicity is provided by the Vincentian canon: *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*. Hauerwas' notion of apostolicity, as I have rendered it, puts apostolicity immediately in conflict with such a catholicity so defined. For the ways the Church catholic responded to the conversion of the emperor and the universalising thrust of the Enlightenment, among other developments, has weakened the notion that the church should be other than a support to the state. It is this bland catholicity that Hauerwas sets out to undermine. The catholicity with which he hopes to replace it is one based on an apostolic holiness. However it is difficult to claim this as catholic under the terms of the Vincentian canon. Apostolic holiness has always been a *part* of the catholic tradition; Hauerwas regards as especially patronising those suggestions which imply it should simply remain one option among many.

3.4.1. Consequentialism

Perhaps Hauerwas' most powerful defence against charges of sectarianism is that there have been so few criticisms of his biblical exegesis or doctrinal orthodoxy. In his introduction to *The Peaceable Kingdom* Hauerwas readily acknowledges the influence of the John Howard Yoder's work *The Politics of Jesus*.[265] It is significant that Yoder's book was based on wide biblical scholarship - not on controversial new readings.[266] In the terminology I have adopted in this chapter therefore, criticisms of Hauerwas are not criticisms of his reading of the apostolic witness. What then are they? This point has caused Hauerwas some frustration:

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[265]For an even more striking acknowledgement, see the start of James W. McClendon's *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume One* Nashville: Abingdon 1986, where McClendon says 'that book changed my life' (p. 7).

[266]'Each of the chapters of the 1972 book was *then* a summary of the widely known scholarship of the time. As *New Testament scholarship* it was popularization, not fresh research.' J.H. Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* Preface to the Second Edition p. vii (original italics).

> Show me where I am wrong about God, Jesus, the limits of liberalism, the nature of the virtues, or the doctrine of the Church - but do not shortcut that task by calling me a sectarian.[267]

The point that Hauerwas is making is that his ethics is being rejected for consequential reasons. It is not so much that his doctrine and exegesis are flawed, as that they take us to a place where we do not wish to be. The criticism of Hauerwas is that he is making too much of the mark of apostolicity, to the detriment of catholicity and unity. This is where the heart of the argument lies. Whatever Hauerwas says about the apostolic claims of the ethic he outlines, it is not what has been believed everywhere, always and by everybody - or at least, not what has been practised everywhere, always and by everybody. Hauerwas himself does not see this as a damaging criticism: for in every age there have been people of character schooled in the scriptural narrative prepared to be faithful in the manner Hauerwas describes.

The question of consequences is fundamentally an eschatological matter, as I shall explain in chapter four. For the story which is told by the consequentialist, and results in the conclusion that the Christian should take 'responsibility' for public life, is a story whose ending is premature. Hauerwas' understanding of ethics is teleological, that is, oriented to the end of the story, where the story is going, rather than in foreclosing the story by determining all consequences.

In his more recent work, Hauerwas has come to an understanding that the contrast between faithfulness and effectiveness is a caricature arising from the shortcomings of the consequentialist perspective. How long a timescale does the consequentialist envisage? How often do things turn out as their perpetrators expect? It is, in the end unnecessary to have to choose between a faithfulness ethic and a principle ethic: since both are different forms of a principle ethic. In the same way, the contrast between pacifism and 'responsibility' is a contrast between two different eschatologies.

> The person who says, 'You must give up some of your scruples in order to be effective', is still saying that because the goal for the sake of which to be effective is *in principle* a good goal. So the argument which takes the clothing of 'principles versus effectiveness' really means this principle versus that principle. It really means that goal, for the sake of which I want you to give up other scruples, is so overridingly important that those other things are less important. That's an ethic of principle. ... Likewise, the people who say 'You must simply be true to God' ... and 'let the heavens fall' ... really say that because of a conviction about Providence, trusting that if the heavens fall God has another better

[267]Stanley Hauerwas *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and living in Between* Durham: Labyrinth 1988 p. 8.

> set of heavens ready, which is part of the process, so even that is not thumbing your nose at results. It's trusting God who gave the rules to know more about the results than we know. So I am increasingly convinced that the debate between the effectiveness ethic and the principle ethic is a false debate.[268]

What this quotation from Yoder shows is that consequentialist criticisms of the ethic developed by Hauerwas are making ethical distinctions that are finally unsustainable. Hauerwas' pacifism is founded on the sovereignty of God and on apostolic faithfulness to the definitive practice of Jesus. There is no guarantee that a consequentialist calculation would be more catholic.

3.4.2. Who is the Real Sectarian?

Hauerwas' response to claims that his ecclesiology is weak on unity and catholicity is to say that the alternative to the Church is the nation state and if ever there were a sect, the nation state is it. 'The closest approximation we have to a universal society is in fact the church through its unwillingness to be captured by narrow national loyalties'.[269] This is a bold claim for catholicity based on the rejection of 'Constantinianism'. Hauerwas calls the kingdom 'God's international'.[270] Those who give their primary loyalty to the nation state (for instance because it preserves democracy against totalitarianism) have the more reason to be called sectarian -

> since they are usually the ones that develop justifications for Christians in one country killing Christians in another country on grounds of some value entailed by national loyalties. Surely if any position deserves the name 'sectarian' it is this, since it qualifies the unity of the church in the name of a loyalty other than that to the kingdom of God. ... What kind of unity is it that would have us eat at the same table to which we have been invited by a crucified saviour only to be told at the end of the meal that the peace of

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[268]J.H. Yoder *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* Elkhart Indiana: Goshen 1983 pp. 436-437, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas 'Epilogue: A Pacifist Response to the Bishops' in Paul Ramsey *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishop's Pastoral Letter 'In Defense of Creation'* University Park: The Pennsylvania State Press 1988 p. 180. See also Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon *Resident Aliens:Life in the Christian Colony* Nashville: Abingdon 1989 p. 46.

[269]Stanley Hauerwas 'Will the Real Sectarian Stand Up?' *Theology Today* April 1987 p. 88.

[270]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 151.

> that table does not mean we cannot kill one another for the goods of the nations in which we find ourselves living?[271]

Hauerwas thus faces the charge of disunity head on, by confronting the idolatry of the nation state. What claims to be the voice of general well-being may be no more than the voice of a particularly influential economic or political interest. It requires an alternative conversation to give a different reading of what may otherwise be taken for granted. The Church provides such an alternative conversation.

It is important for Hauerwas that the conversation should not take place in a language defined only by the nation state. It is a common assumption that once Hauerwas has adopted Christian pacifism he must correspondingly envisage the withdrawal of the Christian community from political life. Hauerwas strenuously denies this assumption. He points out that it presumes that to be involved in politics requires that one is prepared to kill on behalf of the state. There is plenty of politics that does not require killing. A further underlying assumption is that all politics is in the end a cover for violence. For Hauerwas, by contrast, it is the disavowal of violence that is the beginning of politics. Hauerwas advocates not withdrawal but 'selective service': there are times when participation in some aspects of education, law, or government will not be appropriate; but these times will be determined by the political commitments of the community of character.

3.4.3. Unity and power

Underlying most of the scholarly discussion of the issue of social engagement in this century has been an assumption that the language of the debate has been set by Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr.[272] The rejection of their two typologies is the subtext

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[271] Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* pp. 7, 128.

[272] Ernst Troeltsch *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* New York: Macmillan 1931 and H.R. Niebuhr *Christ and Culture* New York: Harper and Row 1951. In *Christian Existence Today* (p. 19 n. 2) Hauerwas quotes Troeltsch's definition of a sect: 'a voluntary society ... (who) live apart from the world, are limited to small groups, emphasize the law instead of grace, and ... set up the Christian order, based on love ... in preparation for the coming Kingdom of God' (*The Social Teachings* II 993). For a helpful discussion of the background to Weber, Troeltsch and Niebuhr, see Arne Rasmusson *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jurgen Moltman and Stanley*

of Hauerwas' polemic. Troeltsch assumes the 'church type' is superior to the 'sect type'; Niebuhr assumes (in practice if not in theory) the superiority of the 'Christ the transformer of culture' model. It is not at all clear that Troeltsch's binary typology is adequate to cover the nuances of a host of different positions; while Niebuhr's study is uncritical of the term 'culture', which begs the question of what culture is, and whether it is ever in the singular.[273] Both of these come under what I have called Hauerwas' attack on a 'bland catholicity' and restoration of an 'apostolic holiness'.

By being tied into the 'responsibility' model, what both Troeltsch and Niebuhr miss is the subtle way that unity can be a construction imposed by the powerful. A key dimension of an eschatological understanding of unity is that it sees unity as a gift from God, not a static norm to be imposed. Hauerwas ties this insight into his thought by referring to a telling distinction made by Michel de Certeau.

> De Certeau distinguishes between 'strategies' and 'tactics'. A strategy is any
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> > calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject that will empower (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research etc.) can be managed. As in management, every 'strategic' rationalisation seeks first of all to distinguish its 'own place', that is, the place of its own power and will, from an 'environment'. A Cartesian attitude, if you wish: it is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. It is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy.[274]

Hauerwas follows this quotation with an observation which sums up my argument in this chapter. 'Strategy provides for a triumph of place over time insofar as it allows one

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Hauerwas Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1994 pp. 231-245; for a critique, see John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* pp. 75-143.

[273]See Duane Friesen 'Normative Factors in Troeltsch's Typology of Religious Association' *Journal of Religious Ethics* 3/2 Fall 1975 pp. 271-283. If Yoder can come up with seventeen varieties of religious pacifism, one might look for more subtleties in the larger area of relationship of Church and 'society'. See J.H. Yoder *Nevertheless: Varieties of Religious Pacifism* Scottdale Pa: Herald 1992. In *Resident Aliens* (pp. 39-47) Hauerwas and Willimon refer to Yoder's more helpful threefold typology of the *activist* church (religiously glorified liberalism), the *conversionist* church (oriented inward and thus religiously-glorified conservatism) and the *confessing* church (determined to worship Christ in all things). See J.H. Yoder 'A People in the World: Theological Interpretation' in ed. James Leo Garrett jr, *The Concept of the Believers' Church* Scottdale: Herald 1969 pp. 252-283.

[274]Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* translated by Stephen Rendall Berkley: University of California Press 1988 pp. 35-36, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas *After Christendom* pp. 16-17. (Original italics.)

to acquire advantages, to prepare for future expansions, and in general to create an independence against contingency'.[275] The key to Hauerwas' defence against charges of sectarianism lies here. Hauerwas enjoys expressions such as 'outside the church there is no salvation'.[276] To his detractors this sounds like downright sectarianism. But this would only be true if in his understanding the Church had a 'strategy'. Hauerwas maintains that on the contrary it is the *Constantinian* version of the Church that adopts a 'strategy', demarcating a world in which it is safe.

The Church that Hauerwas describes does not have that kind of power. Instead, it adopts a 'tactic'. A tactic, according to de Certeau, is a

> calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delineation of exteriority, then, provides it with the conditions necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other, thus it must play on and with the terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power.[277]

Hauerwas explains how a tactic does not form a general strategy: it makes *ad hoc* engagements and must take advantage of such opportunities that arise. It has no 'base where it can build up stockpiles for the next battle'. It is always on the hoof - at best a resident alien. The tactic is 'the art of the weak'.

Once the Church's social ethic is seen as tactic rather than strategy, the concept of withdrawal becomes meaningless. Whither is the Church to withdraw? There is no safe place, no citadel, no barricade to patrol. The Church is always occupying 'the space of the other'. In this regard the subtitles of two of Hauerwas' books - 'Church, World and Living in Between' and 'Life in the Christian Colony' are unfortunate. Such phrases only suggest that Hauerwas is a sectarian after all, because they imply a separate space. More in keeping is the subtitle of his 'Unleashing the Scripture' - 'Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America'.

Thus the argument is that it is the Constantinian Church, rather than the community of character, that is sectarian. The Constantinian Church, like an army, marks out a territory that it can defend, considers the exterior in terms of targets and threats, and then makes forays across the boundary. I would add to Hauerwas' discussion that the

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[275]Stanley Hauerwas *After Christendom* p. 17.

[276]See for example *After Christendom* chapter one.

[277]Quoted in ibid pp.17-18.

community of character inhabits not a different space but a different time. This different time arises from the eschatological perspective, which I shall discuss in chapter four.

3.4.4. Detachment better serves the world

George Lindbeck picks up a theme dear to the heart of Yoder when he points out that the Church gains little by pursuing relevance for its own sake.

> Religious communities are likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is practical or relevant, but instead concentrate on their own intratextual outlooks and forms of life. ... A religious community's salvation is not by works ... and yet good works of unforeseeable kinds flow from faithfulness. It was thus, rather than by intentional effort, that biblical religion helped produce democracy and science ...; and it is in similarly unimaginable and unplanned ways, if at all, that biblical religion will help save the world ... from the demonic corruptions of these same values.[278]

Hauerwas has no hesitation in asserting the positive role of Christians within the public realm. This does not compromise the 'Church being itself': for the Church seeks service rather than dominion. Therefore the Church does society an important service by being a community capable of developing people of virtue. One does not have to have an Aristotelian notion of political life to regard it as important that at least some citizens be people of robust moral character. Hauerwas insists that any society will gain by honouring honour.

One of the chief virtues of the community is to preserve a language of discourse that enables imaginative approaches to ethical enquiry to be sustained. 'Christians should ... provide imaginative alternatives for social policy as they are released from the "necessities" of those who would control the world in the name of security'.[279] I shall develop this theme of imagination in chapter five. Here it will be enough to say that the false unity of the nation state may tend to impose a false 'realism' which suggests that there is no alternative to the necessary course of events. It is the peaceable practice of the

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[278]George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* p. 128. In its theme and its place in the book, this paragraph appears to be a gesture toward the last paragraph of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

[279]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 11.

kingdom that pictures a world that does not have to be this way, and makes possible a resistance to this naturalistic fallacy.

Michael Quirk points out that Hauerwas is related to the tradition of civic republicanism revived by Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor. As Quirk notes, Hauerwas parts company with this movement insofar as its roots are humanist rather than Christian.[280] The litmus test tends to be that of violence. To the extent that the state demands that Christians commit violent acts to further its policy, the Church will be deeply suspicious of the state. Upto that point, Hauerwas and the civic republicans have much in common.

3.4.5. Pacifism demands politics

If one were to summarise Hauerwas' discontent with charges of advocating withdrawal from political life, one would hear him asking the question, 'If one has renounced violence, how is one to resolve disputes without politics?'. Politics is not excluded by Hauerwas' ethics; it is positively *demanded* by his requirement that Christians ask 'How can I be a reconciling presence in the life of my neighbour?'.

Hauerwas is adamant that what society needs is not theories of justice or theories of the state. What is required is people prepared to be formed with the virtue of justice by being shaped by the practices of a characterful community - not a disembodied theory which can be applied in all situations and attempts to bypass the need for community. Here, if anywhere, is Hauerwas' common ground with the civic republicans. If, as society fragments, politics is not preserved in the Church, where else are civic republicans to look in search of an embodiment of the justice they seek? It is perhaps Hauerwas' chief frustration with the United States of America that many of its constitutionalists have assumed that the place to begin social formation is with an understanding of rationality and a blank sheet of paper. The Church and the Jews have millennia of reconciling

[280]Michael J. Quirk 'Beyond Sectarianism?' *Theology Today* April 1987 pp. 78-79.

experience upon which to draw: and if civic republicans learn from their practices they may avoid repeating some of their failures.

Hauerwas is not interested in the Church providing a blueprint for secular society. He welcomes Milbank's demonstration of the centrality of particularity to Christian witness. Milbank shows how positivist and dialectical social sciences tried to replace Christianity's inherent dependence upon particular revelation by establishing universals. But these universals were inevitably founded on their own metaphysic. Milbank relates how in the postmodern era an apparently infinite number of discourses claim to represent humanity: universality can do no more than take its place among them.[281] Christian moral judgements are related to regeneration, to forgiveness, to the church, to Christian hope: they cannot simply be moralised into a blueprint for a non-Christian society.

Because the Church claims no special insight into the general form of the good society, its witness will always be expressed in specific criticisms and suggestions, addressing particular injustices at a given time and place. There is no level to which the state could rise beyond which the Christian critique would have nothing more to ask. The Church should not attempt to speak on every matter that arises: only when it is engaging with the problem itself, and when it has something to say.

3.4.6. Summary

This discussion on the marks of unity and catholicity in Hauerwas' understanding of the Church has focused on the issue of whether he can be described as a sociological sectarian. Hauerwas addresses the issue with scepticism about the terminology generally used in the debate. With the aid of Yoder's analyses he convincingly demonstrates that supposed dichotomies, such as that between faithfulness and effectiveness, are false ones. De Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic makes clear that withdrawal is simply inconceivable for the Church. Hauerwas goes on to demonstrate that the Church serves the world best by having something distinct to say and embodying its own practices. A

[281] John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* p. 260.

Church which does not do so conforms instead to the sectarianism of the nation state. Chief among the practices of the Church is the kind of politics indispensable for those who have renounced violence and yet wish to be reconcilers. Only when such starting points are acknowledged is the imagination released to become a significant factor in ethical polity.

As Hauerwas himself points out, subtleties tend to be early casualties in debates of this kind. The distinct community Hauerwas envisages is not a matter of the all-or-nothing decision between responsibility or withdrawal. Hauerwas simply recommends 'selective participation'. The emphasis on the decision between 'realism' and the 'sect' would lead back to a decisionism that Hauerwas began his career by debunking.

When all Hauerwas' arguments are acknowledged, it remains true that he has a case to answer. He goes much of the way to answering it himself. In his later work he opens the direction in which further answers are to be found. There remains a tendency to use spatial metaphors about the 'territory' occupied by Church and world.[282] Yet Hauerwas is deeply aware that in addition to their membership of the Church, Christians will and should always be members of other communities. Hauerwas is proud not just of his faith community, but also of his state, country, and baseball team.[283] Their stories are woven together and inform each other.

It is the spatial metaphors that tinge Hauerwas' thought with the colour of sectarianism. In chapter four I hope to show that the significant distinctions between Church and world are not of space but of time. For as long as Hauerwas continues to be attracted to spatial metaphors, he fails to throw off the last traces of the charge of sectarianism. But these are only traces.

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[282]For example the title of his 1994 work *Dispatches from the Front.*

[283]Stanley Hauerwas 'A Tale of Two Stories: On Being a Christian and a Texan' *Christian Existence Today* pp. 25-46. Note that the subtitle of this book refers to 'living in between' Church and world - another spatial metaphor.

3.5. Christian Nonviolence: A Test Case

3.5.1. Introduction: Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

In his book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* Philip Hallie tells the story of how the people of the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in the south of France resisted the Nazis during the years 1940-1944.[284] The story is more thoroughly documented in a large collection of papers edited locally by Pierre Bolle.[285] The area was controlled first by the Vichy government and gradually more directly by the Nazis, but the leaders of the village community got it into their heads that they were going to do all they could to provide a safe haven for Jews and other refugees fleeing from central Europe. Gradually during 1941 and 1942 it became known that this village called Le Chambon was a place where Jews would be protected, often being put up in boarding houses and private homes and farms away up in the hills and mountains above the village. From time to time groups were spirited away across the 200 miles to safety in Switzerland. The Nazi army and the French police knew what the villagers were up to, and often raided houses in the village, but only very seldom found any refugees stored away. Somehow the bush telegraph almost always beat them to it, and the refugees hid in the mountains for a few days until the coast was clear. Hallie describes the story of Le Chambon in these years as 'a kitchen struggle, a battle between a community of intimates and a vast, surrounding world of violence, betrayal and indifference.'[286]

I propose to examine some of the features of this story as Hallie tells it, in order to illuminate the more abstract foregoing discussion. Hallie is not a Christian, and Hauerwas'

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[284]Philip Hallie *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon-sur Lignon and How Goodness Happened There* London: Michael Joseph 1979. Stanley Hauerwas refers to this work in *Against the Nations* pp. 87-88 n. 37.

[285]Pierre Bolle ed. *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Resistance 1939-1944* Le Chambon-sur-Lignon: Societe d'Histoire de la Montagne 1992.

[286]Philip Hallie *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* p. 57.

mention of the book is concerned largely with pointing out how little Hallie understands the theological grounds of the nonviolence of the leaders in Le Chambon.[287] But this drawback is simply an invitation to concentrate on what Hallie relates of the facts of the story, without dwelling too much on his analysis. I shall take several themes of Hauerwas' ethics and look at the Le Chambon story in their light.

3.5.2. The Practices of a Community are formed by a Narrative

Integral to the self-understanding of the village of Le Chambon was the fact that more than two-thirds of its three thousand residents were Protestants in a country where Protestants formed perhaps one per cent of the population. Their ancestors had survived through three centuries of persecution, often losing their property, their liberty, or their lives; worship had to be conducted in darkened homes or secluded fields or woods. Pastors and people had been burned in Le Chambon since the sixteenth century. The population had remained remarkably stable: the thousand refugees who arrived after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685 had long been assimilated. History was very much alive in the mind.

Centuries of persecution left among Protestants a tradition of resistance to the law of the land and devotion to their pastors who maintained their solidarity. Le Chambon's response to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes came not in battle but in

> the devices peculiar to mountain people: silence, cunning and secrecy ... they resisted by quietly refusing to abjure their faith, and by quietly conducting their services in meadows within the pine forests ... This was ... the resistance of exile.[288]

This tradition was written on the hearts of even those on the fringes of the congregational life of Le Chambon. Hallie records a conversation with a daughter of a woman who had run a boarding house which hid Jewish girls. Resistance came by habit:

> One of the Marion daughters said 'What they were asking us to do was very much like what the Protestants have done in France ever since the Reformation. Pastors were

[287] Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* pp. 87-88 n. 37.

[288] Philip Hallie *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* p. 167.

> hidden here in Le Chambon from the sixteenth century through the period of the 'desert' in the eighteenth century.'[289]

This quotation vividly expresses what Hauerwas means by a community being formed by a narrative.

In his sermons, the pastor, André Trocmé emphasised that the community were continuing part, not only of the protestant narrative, but of the narrative of the Jews in exile. As early as March 1939 he took as his text for a sermon Deuteronomy 10:19 - 'And you are to love those who are aliens (étrangers), for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt'. At Christmas 1942 he recalls a town in Samaria where an old lady gave everything she had to a Jewish couple hunted by Herod (whom he equates with Pétain) and Archelaus (whom he equates with Laval, the head of the police). Her generosity inspired others, and the town became known as the most hospitable in Samaria.[290]

3.5.3. The narrative of Jesus reveals God's way with the world

Faithfulness to the narrative of Jesus is what I have in this chapter described as 'apostolicity'. In Hallie's description, the faithfulness of the community as a whole is not described at length. The account concentrates on the thinking of the pastor, André Trocmé. Hallie associates his nonviolence primarily with a personal journey in which he recognised the precious character of human life. Hauerwas points out the humanism of Hallie's account, and quotes from Trocmé's own *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* to broaden the picture of Trocmé's theological position. Trocmé's view that Jesus had inaugurated a social revolution based on the jubilee year was influential on John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*. Trocmé understands nonviolence as related to the delay of the coming kingdom granted to humanity because of Jesus' sacrifice.[291]

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[289]ibid p. 179.

[290]Francois Boulet 'L'Attitude Spirituelle des Protestants devant les Juifs Refugies' in Pierre Bolle ed. *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon* pp. 402-4.

[291]Andre Trocmé *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* Scottdale: Herald 1973.

Notwithstanding Hauerwas' criticisms, Hallie outlines the key dimensions of Trocmé's 'apostolic' nonviolence. In a passage very similar to some of Yoder's arguments, Hallie quotes Trocmé's words to a men's circle meeting:

> If Jesus really walked upon this earth, why do we keep treating him as if he were a disembodied, impossibly idealistic ethical theory? ... If he existed God has shown us in flesh-and-blood what goodness is for flesh-and-blood people.[292]

Hallie describes Trocmé's desire to be with and imitate and obey Jesus, like the obedience of a lover to his beloved. 'Jesus was for Trocmé the embodied forgiveness of sins, and staying close to Jesus meant always being ready to forgive your enemies instead of torturing and killing them.' Hallie mentions later that nonviolence gives the enemy an opportunity to repent, whereas killing the enemy leaves no time to do so.[293]

3.5.4. Virtue arises more through habit than through decision

Hallie begins his narrative with the arrest of the leaders of Le Chambon in February 1943. During the arrest comes an incident which demonstrates the way the practices of a community make nonviolence a matter of habit and instinct rather than decision. It exemplifies Hauerwas' insistence that the ethics of a community are more about what all its members take for granted than about what an individual may decide to do by consulting a moral law or assessing likely consequences. When the police arrived to arrest Andre Trocmé, and sat in the dining room awaiting his return with a suitcase, Magda Trocmé invited the two policemen to dine with them. This was despite the presence in the house of refugee Jews, concealed upstairs. When asked by Hallie how she could be so magnanimous to men who were there to take her husband away, perhaps to his death, she replied 'It was dinnertime ... the food was ready. What do you mean by such

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[292]Philip Hallie *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* p. 68.

[293]Ibid pp. 161, 34, 220. Consider Yoder's discussion of the ethics of killing someone who was attacking a third party: 'To keep out of heaven temporarily someone who wants to go there ultimately anyway, I would consign to hell immediately someone whom I am in the world to save.' J.H. Yoder *What Would You Do?* Scottdale: Herald 1992 p. 40.

foolish words as "forgiving" and "decent"?'. Hallie sums up the general attitude of the Chambonnais to what they did in these years:

> 'How can you call us "good"? We were doing what had to be done. Who else could help them? And what has all this to do with goodness? Things had to be done, that's all, and we happened to be there to do them. You must understand that it was the most natural thing in the world to help these people.'[294]

The villagers of Le Chambon did not decide that the village was to become a haven for refugees. They did not cast themselves in the role of rescuers. They simply found themselves incapable of turning refugees away. It was in the process of caring for the refugees that they realised how dangerous was their guests' position. If the Gestapo could kill an unarmed person for protecting a refugee, what would they do to the refugees themselves? Gradually the villagers took on increasing danger and increasing hunger in addition to the hardships of the Occupation. Eventually Andre Trocmé established a more formal scheme in some of the houses funded by the Quakers from Marseilles - but this was not a 'decision', so much as an extension of what was already taken for granted.

3.5.5. The community is open to luck, surprise and the stranger

One of Yoder's emphases in discussing issues of nonviolence is the importance of considering luck, surprise and accident. Things seldom turn out as predicted, especially when the prediction entails the wholesome fruit to be borne by violence:

> By assuming that it is my business to prevent or bring judgement upon evil, I authorise myself to close the door upon the possibilities of reconciling and healing. When I take it into my own hands to guarantee that events will not turn out in a way that is painful or disadvantageous to me, I close off the live possibilities of reconciliation which might have been let loose in the world.[295]

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[294]Philip Hallie *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* pp. 196-7.

[295]J.H. Yoder *What Would You Do?* pp. 31-32. The consequentialist negotiation tends to leave no room for providence by assuming that history is our slave. Providence, for Yoder, 'designates the conviction that the events of history are under control in ways that are beyond both our discerning and our manipulating, although their pattern may occasionally be perceived by the prophet, and will later be celebrated by the community.' (ibid p. 35).

Hallie's account contains a remarkable incident which bears this out. After the three leaders were arrested, they were taken to the internment camp of Saint-Paul d'Eyjeaux near Limoges. After a month, they were offered release on condition that they sign a promise to obey without question the orders of Marshal Pétain's government. Trocmé and Edouard Theis refused to sign, to the consternation of fellow inmates who recommended they be 'a skunk with the skunks'. The following morning, to everyone's amazement, they were released on the orders of the prime minister of France - no one has discovered why. Days later the other prisoners were deported to labour and concentration camps in Poland and Silesia, where few survived.

Another characteristic story concerns the churchwarden Amélie who refused to ring the church bells to mark the anniversary of the *Legion Francaise des Combattants*, later to become the Milice. Challenged by two women who tried to do it themselves, she bravely defended the church and was rescued by a downpour which drove the women away.[296]

The unexpected was common and essential to the life of the village. It came most frequently in the form of the stranger. Several times in Hallie's account the stranger disturbs and reveals the truth to the community. It is a German soldier during the First War who convinces the young Frenchman Trocmé that it was possible and necessary not to carry weapons. It is the strange policemen who receive the presbytery's hospitality. It is a young Jewish girl knocking on the door of the pastor's house who elicits the response from Magda Trocmé 'Naturally, come in, and come in'. It is this response which Hallie takes to sum up the whole character of the village; and in the conclusion of his book, it appears that Hallie himself has become this stranger. The fact that the stranger may be the bringer of the gospel is underlined by the strangeness of Trocmé himself: from a bourgeois family, educated in Paris, married to an Italian, yet acting as the yeast to a farming community.[297]

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[296]Georges Menut 'André Trocmé, un Violent Vaincu par Dieu' in Pierre Bolle ed. *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon* p. 398.

[297]ibid p. 399.

3.5.6. Christian nonviolence provokes and demands imagination

Throughout the period described by Hallie, the initiative lay with the occupying power. The villagers were not in control of the situation; they could only survive by day-to-day responses to moves from the powerful. They were therefore not in a position to calculate likely outcomes in a consequentialist way. André Trocmé described predictions in such circumstances as 'a refuge for cowards'.[298] The position corresponds to de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics. The villagers were in no position to contemplate a strategy; they had no safe space from which to make forays into 'enemy' territory. They had to manage a tactic, constantly adapting to initiatives coming from others.

Hallie records how Trocmé had learned from his time as a soldier with the French army in Morocco in 1921.[299] This taught him that it was no use professing a commitment to nonviolence half-way through a campaign. The conviction had to be embodied from the word go. This required a whole change of heart, rather than a temporary change in strategy. It stimulated the imagination to find ways of living peaceably. Trocmé met weekly with the key members of the village. In these meetings they evolved 'practical plans for overcoming evil with good': 'nonviolence was not a theory superimposed upon reality; it was an *itinerary* that we explored day after day in communal prayer and in obedience to the commands of the Spirit'.[300]

> Nonviolence goes beyond violence, and allows us to create new situations. It brings hope by inventing ways of breaking through the deadlock the world finds itself in. It creates unshakeable hope. It will no doubt be a long road which will demand patience as new ways are gradually invented day by day.[301]

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[298]Philip Hallie *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* p. 285.

[299]ibid p. 92.

[300]ibid p. 173. My italics.

[301]Jacques Martin 'La Nonviolence, une Question a Notre Temps' in Pierre Bolle *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon* p. 377.

3.5.7. Summary

Philip Hallie's account of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon demonstrates the claims and the issues at stake in Hauerwas' approach. There is no question of withdrawal: the community of character is surrounded. A history of dealing with minority status illustrates the significance of narrative in forming the virtues of a people. It is crucial that this community regarded Jesus as God's definitive ethical embodiment, not as merely an abstract ideal or pious principle. Once the commitment to nonviolence had been made, moments of decision did not disappear but were subservient - they explored the itinerary of nonviolence and demanded imaginative responses from those involved in protecting Jews. There was no rejection of politics: rather, constant wheeling and dealing was the rule in order to keep the community alive.

The drawbacks are equally clear. Although there is no question of withdrawal, Le Chambon is a geographically isolated community made up largely of one oppressed denomination. Once again, it proves very difficult to avoid spatial conceptions in describing the community of character. And on the question of catholicity, there remains the abiding question of why the wider Church did not act in the way the Le Chambonnais pioneered. Hauerwas' answer to this would no doubt be that this is a question for the wider Church, not for the heroic people of Le Chambon. To echo Yoder's words, the question is not 'what if everyone were to act in this way?', but 'What if no one acted in this way, but we did?'.

3.6. Conclusion

Stanley Hauerwas' description of Christian ethics emphasizes what might be called 'apostolic holiness'. This is wholly consistent with his claims (discussed in chapters one and

two), that what kind of person one is has more significance than what one 'should' do, that virtue implies and demands a narrative, and that the 'Christian story' reveals God's way of dealing with the world. The 'holiness' dimension is broadly covered by Hauerwas' work on virtue - concentrating on the doctrine of the communion of saints - and the 'apostolic' dimension is covered by the role of narrative, particularly the way the community recognise that the story of Jesus has become their story.

The chief criticisms of Hauerwas are that this is not what is and has been believed by the majority of Christians (the 'catholicity' question), and that the apostolic holiness emphasis implies a sectarian community (the 'unity' question). Hauerwas makes several robust and imaginative responses to these criticisms. Underlying his responses is a challenge to the conventional assumptions of the power and influence of the Church. I have suggested that his argument is the weaker for his tendency to use spatial metaphors ('colony', 'living between church and world'); in chapter four I shall examine how the eschatological distinction between Church and world is better expressed in the language of time.

Hauerwas' strongest argument against those who assume his advocacy of nonviolence is sectarian is that the Church requires and embodies a different form of politics. The reason why his response to the charge of sectarianism has not been completely convincing is that he has not yet fully displayed what he expects the politics of the Church to be. Much of his work amply demonstrates that the Church *needs* a politics, but with some exceptions this has not been mapped out in detail. He has shown convincingly that 'withdrawal' is a meaningless term to describe his approach. I suggest the underdeveloped regions lie less in how Christians relate to the world than in how they relate to each other. The question is less about the sanctity of the *Communio sanctorum*, but more about in what resides their communion. Perhaps the weakness of Methodism's sacramental tradition lets Hauerwas down here.

Hauerwas' reluctance to be specific about the politics of the Church is understandable, given his misgivings about providing an ethical blueprint. Nothing can substitute for the actual practices of a community. What Hauerwas does do is to move towards telling the stories of those who have been part of communities of character. The community of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon is one such community (although Hauerwas mentions it only in a footnote). By telling the story of Le Chambon, I hope to have shown

the strengths and weaknesses of Hauerwas' politics. The Le Chambon story in some ways confirms the more friendly criticisms of Hauerwas' approach: for it is realised in the story of an isolated village in a minority denomination in a time of crisis. Nonetheless, this heroic story shows that what Hauerwas commends can be done, has been done, and does produce people of virtue.

The Description of Time:
The Ethics of the End

4.1. The Shape of the Christian Narrative:
Why Ethics Needs an End

In the first chapter I argued that character is more significant than decision in the practice of Christian ethics. In the course of the chapter I made two claims which formed the substance of the next two chapters. In chapter two I took up the claim that character implies and demands a narrative. I discussed the strengths and weaknesses of intratextual narrative theology, and concluded that the debate would be greatly aided were narrative theologians to pay more attention to the *ending* of the Christian story. In chapter three I took up the claim that the Church - the communion of saints - is the final cause of Christian ethics. I considered whether Stanley Hauerwas' nonviolent approach made him sectarian, and I concluded that his approach to the Church would be clarified if one perceived the Church as inhabiting *a new time*, rather than a new space.

In this chapter I shall develop the conclusions reached in the two previous chapters. I shall concentrate on the new time that the Church inhabits and on the perception of the end which the Church sustains. In short, I shall examine the bearing of eschatology upon Christian ethics.

Since eschatology has a low profile in most ethical discussion, I shall begin with a discussion of why an eschatological perspective is necessary. This involves a discussion of how eschatology relates to the Church's understanding of creation and salvation. I shall go on to examine what it means to say the Church lives in a new time, and what perceptions derive from this perspective. As with the other chapters, I conclude with a practical

example - in this case the example of eschatological practice most often quoted by Hauerwas: having children.

The philosophical argument against eschatology generally assumes that the biblical notion of eschatology is incomprehensible given the 'modern world view'. A great part of the Old Testament, and almost all of the New, were written by people who anticipated an end to history: many of them assumed the end was imminent. Their understanding that the world had an end corresponded with their belief that it had a beginning. Whereas life continually subverts efforts to bind it in meaningful segments - proceeding on through crises, climaxes, and deaths, full of unanticipated events and unforeseen consequences - most of the Bible construes existence in terms of a coherent story. Crucial to rendering life meaningful and endurable is the sense of an end to which all is tending, an end commensurate with the rights and wrongs of this present existence, in which abiding issues are resolved, so that judgement and assessment can be made, and a plot discerned in the sequence of events. An end provides a necessary perspective for continuing life in this world.

Yet the language in which the Biblical writers explore eschatology is strange and confusing to the critical mind of most contemporary Western readers. It is not at all clear which of the events described are to be taken literally and which figuratively. Rudolf Bultmann famously expressed the view that the one who used the electric light switch could no longer believe in the three-decker universe presupposed by biblical eschatology.[302]

Leaving aside the questions of definition begged by a term such as 'modern world view', the force of this argument must be recognised. The otherness of the biblical world is profound and far-reaching. That said, one may also wonder whether eschatology is unique among the Biblical material in causing offence to the liberal scientific conscience. Prophecy, healing, authority, nature miracles, Satan: to varying degrees all of these sit uncomfortably with Bultmann's electric light switch. One may, indeed, like Bultmann, undertake a thoroughgoing restatement of the gospel in non-'mythological' terms; failing that, however, it is arbitrary to excise the explicitly eschatological material alone. If we do

[302]Rudolf Bultmann 'New Testament and Mythology' in H.-W. Bartsch ed. *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (translated by R.H. Fuller) London: S.P.C.K. 1972 p. 5.

so, as Hauerwas points out, we are left with a collection of baffling commands which seem impractical and burdensome.[303] It may require the life of a community which structures its behaviour around what it knows of the *telos* and *eschaton* of the world to give the commands of Matthew 5-7 and elsewhere their proper context: in the absence of such an eschatological interpretation, the commands seem strange and ominous.

Eschatology is therefore essential if the Church is to do justice to the New Testament witness. It is also essential if one is to follow the narrative character of Christian ethics. MacIntyre affirms the indispensability of teleology when he says there

> is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos* - or a variety of ends or goals - towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present.[304]

MacIntyre sees human life as a narrative quest - a journey directed toward a determinate goal. As one journeys, one learns about the goal one seeks and also about oneself.

For the Church, the *telos* is formed by Christians' perception of the eschaton. It is the sense of an end to the story that makes it possible to speak of a story at all. The Church learns about its hope by seeking it. It seeks, or quests, by embodying its belief in God's sovereignty in the way it structures its own life and acts in the world.

The great failure of so many consequentialist approaches to Christian ethics is that they have a highly premature notion of the end of the story they tell. They also tend to suppose that that end will be brought about by the actions under review. Christian theology demands that the story told be the story that stretches from creation to eschaton, and that the centre of that story be not the acting subject but the sovereign God. Eschatological ethics are an affirmation that God has (as well as is) the last Word.

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[303] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* p. 90.

[304] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* Second Edition p. 216.

4.2. How Eschatology Relates to the Christian Narrative

The theological issues concerning the place of eschatology in relation to Christian ethics can be distinguished into two: how eschatology relates to creation, and how eschatology relates to salvation.

4.2.1. Creation and Eschatology

There is an abiding danger among those who write about Christian ethics that a split will emerge between those who incline to 'creation ethics' and those who demand 'kingdom ethics'. The tendency of the former is to concentrate on the created order, often in terms of natural law, to the neglect of salvation and eschatology. Stanley Hauerwas is in no danger of falling into this former camp. He has, however, been accused of a world-denying tenor, hand-in-hand with suggestions of sectarianism, deriving from his refusal to do 'ethics for everybody'. This is how he explains his position, in a somewhat rare explicitly eschatological passage:

> Those who emphasize apocalyptic often are accused, of course, of failing to do justice to God as creator. Despite the apparent centrality of creation to Christian faith as actually employed, creation talk often serves as a means for the domestication of the Gospel. Appeals to creation are meant to suggest that all people, Christian or not, share fundamental moral commitments that can provide a basis for common action. These appeals to creation too often amount to legitimating strategies for the principalities and powers that determine our lives. This type of creation talk is fundamentally false to the biblical profession of faith in the Lord of creation because it implicitly underwrites the lordship of the principalities and powers.[305]

In this scepticism about using a 'doctrine of creation' for ethics Hauerwas has been much influenced by John Howard Yoder.[306] It has brought Hauerwas into conflict with

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[305]Stanley Hauerwas *Dispatches from the Front* p. 111.

[306]The following passage is a virtuoso display of Yoderian polemic: 'Historical study shows that it has been possible to understand under "order of nature" just about anything a philosopher wanted: stoicism or

those, such as Oliver O'Donovan, who have sought to mediate between 'creation ethics' and 'kingdom ethics'. Hauerwas criticises O'Donovan for using resurrection as a way of bringing creation and natural law in by the back door.

> I fear such appeals to order, and the correlative confessions in God's creation that sustain them, because I do not believe such order is knowable apart from cross and resurrection. O'Donovan seeks an account of natural law that is not governed by the eschatological witness of Christ's resurrection. We cannot write about *Resurrection and Moral Order* because any order we know as Christians is resurrection.[307]

In reply O'Donovan doubts whether Hauerwas has a view of the resurrection which sufficiently differentiates it from the crucifixion. To some extent O'Donovan misses the point here, because Hauerwas is talking of the resurrection as an *eschatological* witness, rather than more narrowly of an event tied to Jesus' death. Yet O'Donovan is perceptive in pointing out Hauerwas' increasing 'tendency to privilege the crucifixion over other moments of the Christ-event, in keeping with an emphasis on martyrdom and death as the normative expression of Christian witness'.[308] What O'Donovan does not point out, but is implicit in his criticism, is that by over-emphasising the cross and underplaying

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epicureanism, creative evolution or political restorationism, Puritan democracy or Aryan dictatorship. ... "Nature" may be the struggle of the species for survival; it may be the existing social order in its interplay of hierarchies and power claims; or, on the other hand, it may be the essence of a person or thing that he is called to become. The word thus includes two different scales of variability; when nature is understood to mean a quasi-platonic essence, distinct from what things appear to do, we have the whole gamut of ideals which have not yet been actualized in experience: if, on the other hand, by nature we understand "things as they are", we must deal with the entire scale of empirical realities. The conviction, almost universally shared, that nature is a reliable source of knowable and binding ethical norms rests on failure to clarify either the content which it claims to have proved or the truth claims which it presupposes.' (John Howard Yoder *The Christian Witness to the State* Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press 1964 pp. 33, 82).

This is a devastating critique of natural law foundationalism. Yoder goes on to say that we may be able to establish the structures of 'things as they are' - this is the aim of 'natural' science - but this structure cannot be a critique or a moral imperative. Alternatively we may be able to understand 'the nature of things' as some sort of philosophical essence to be distinguished from things as they are - this could be a moral imperative, but it gives up any claim to be empirically ascertained from nature; moreover for a Christian this essentialist approach must justify itself since it is foreign to the historical thrust of the Biblical revelation.

The 'almost universally shared' conviction that nature is a reliable source of ethical norms is not simply a harmless fallacy, in Yoder's view. There is within the logic of natural law and corresponding natural (or universal) rights a powerful justification for violence. If one first accepts the presuppositions of natural law, the existence of one who will not act according to them becomes morally objectionable, since such differences should not exist. If someone were to deny the 'universal' right to be free, to worship, to speak, to assemble, they would seem morally obtuse: it is a short step to forcing them to mend their ways.

[307]Stanley Hauerwas *Dispatches from the Front* p. 175.

[308]Oliver O'Donovan *Resurrection and Moral Order* Second edition p. xv. The emphasis on the crucifixion is a theme Hauerwas shares with Yoder.

creation, Hauerwas falls short of his own criteria. By this I mean that Hauerwas is failing to do full justice to the *narrative* form of Christian convictions. This narrative has a beginning, a middle and an end. By concentrating too much on one point (the crucifixion), Hauerwas may be led to neglect those other dimensions of the narrative.

Hauerwas develops this point in response to another of his critics, James Gustafson. Hauerwas is unimpressed by Gustafson's suggestion that an independent doctrine of creation is required as a basis for ethics: 'Why doesn't Gustafson simply say that what is needed is a morality in which all people can agree?'. Hauerwas is concerned that when abstracted from reference to Israel and Jesus, creation (and redemption) become ciphers. For Hauerwas, common ground lies not in the breadth of shared humanity but in the wideness of God's mercy, stretching beyond the Church. What a commitment to revelation through narrative enables Hauerwas to say is that creation only has theological substance when it is seen as part of the Christian story: 'creation in Christian theology is an eschatological act that binds nature and history together by placing them in a teleological order.' Christ's resurrection unites nature and history so that they can no longer be talked of as separate orders.[309]

It would not be fair, however, to ignore steps Hauerwas has made towards a more positive view of creation. For these steps we need to look to two unpublished papers, one distancing himself from Iris Murdoch, another aligning himself with John Milbank.

In 'Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get Through Them If God Does Not Exist?', Hauerwas recognises that Iris Murdoch's philosophy is finally incompatible with Christian ethics for a number of reasons, of which two are pertinent here. The first concerns Murdoch's confidence in the myth of the demiurge, the 'paradigmatic artist making beauty out of necessity'.[310] As convinced as Murdoch is by this model, the ontological argument demonstrates to her the fact that no such God can exist. In response, Hauerwas asserts that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* affirms the free decision of God, a decision exercised spontaneously and graciously. The transition from Murdoch to Hauerwas is expressed in the transition from talking of the 'contingent' to talking of the 'created'. Each

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[309]See James Gustafson 'The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University' *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 1985 83-94; Stanley Hauerwas *Christian Existence Today* pp. 1-19.

[310]Stanley Hauerwas 'Murdochian Muddles' p. 14.

created thing is a gift whose purpose is to praise the creator. Hence a definition of sin arises from the doctrine of creation:

> For the Christian 'sin' names the training we must undergo to discover our lives are possessed by powers, by narratives, whose purpose it is to hide from us the fact that we are creatures of a gracious God. Such 'knowledge' does not come 'naturally', but rather from being made part of a community with practices that offer the transformation and reordering of our lives and relationships. ... Only through [forgiveness and] reconciliation do we believe we can fully acknowledge our contingency and particularity.[311]

Murdoch's second unacceptable belief is in the absolute pointlessness of existence. Hauerwas responds to this claim by demonstrating the way the doctrine of creation initiates the Christian story, whose purpose is that all creation should worship God. This narrative needs constant retelling: indeed the whole story must remain open to renarration, due to the constant creating work of providence. The following is perhaps the closest Hauerwas comes to meeting his critics' demand for clarification of the relation of creation and eschaton:

> The 'telos' that characterises the Christian understanding of morality is not that of a single overriding purpose that violently forces all we do into a preestablished hierarchy. Rather it is a telos of hope that gives us the confidence to believe that we are not fated by our collective and individual pasts. We know that we cannot avoid being creatures of history, but that very way of putting the matter presumes we should desire, if possible, an alternative. Such a desire cannot help but appear to the Christian as a sinful attempt to escape our creatureliness. Our only alternative is not a salvation that mystically frees us from history, from our past, but rather an alternative history made possible by a community of people across time who maintain a memory of God's hope for us and for the world.[312]

In his dialogue with Murdoch, Hauerwas is drawn to emphasise the importance of Christian community in demonstrating that what appears to be contingent is in fact created. With his second dialogue partner, John Milbank, the concern is more with the character of the God that does the creating.[313] In his unpublished paper 'Creation, Contingency, and Truthful Nonviolence: A Milbankian Reflection' Hauerwas combines a view of creation with an eschatological perspective, while still maintaining his emphasis on witness through martyrdom. In this paper Hauerwas commends Milbank's view of

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[311] ibid p. 21.

[312] ibid p. 20-21.

[313] John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* Oxford: Blackwell 1990.

creation as the ongoing nonviolent work of the Trinity. The reason why Milbank is so important to Hauerwas is that Milbank gives Hauerwas a way of talking about creation. Hauerwas has tended to avoid talk of creation because it seemed to underwrite the project of universalist epistemology. Having accepted the critique of 'foundationalist' epistemology of this kind, Hauerwas was left with no way of talking about creation.

What Milbank does is to talk of God's nonviolent *creation*. This gives Hauerwas the opportunity to extend to creation the insights he has derived (originally from Yoder and outlined in Chapter 3 above) from God's nonviolent salvation. The crucial link between non-foundationalism and nonviolence that connects them with creation is the fact that they accept, acknowledge and encourage *difference*. Difference is at the heart of non-foundationalism, because unlike liberalism it does not assume that all accounts of knowledge and existence are at root the same. Difference is at the heart of nonviolence, because without a commitment to nonviolence, the conflict that inevitably arises from difference would be destructive (especially given the foundationalist presumption that unity is in the nature of things).[314] It is in this context that Milbank's understanding of creation in terms of harmonious difference is so fruitful. For Milbank, the Trinity itself is a social being embodying harmonious difference. This is his foundation. Creation is thus the bringing-about in existence of the Trinity's own harmonious difference. This is how Milbank summarises his position:

> Christianity ... recognises no original violence. It construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any totalising reason. Peace no longer depends on the reduction to the self-identical, but is the *sociality* of harmonious difference. Violence, by contrast, is always a secondary willed intrusion upon this possible infinite order (which is actual for God). ... It is Christianity which exposes the non-necessity of supposing, like the Nietzscheans, that difference, non-totalisation and indeterminacy of meaning *necessarily* imply arbitrariness and violence. ... Christianity, by contrast, is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.[315]

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[314]In *Against the Nations* (p. 84 n. 26), Hauerwas quotes Reinhold Niebuhr's indictment of the violence of universalism: 'The logic of the decay of modern culture from universalistic humanism to nationalistic anarchy may be expressed as follows: Men seek a universal standard of human good. After painful effort they define it. The painfulness of their effort convinces them that they have discovered a genuinely universal value. To their sorrow, some of their fellow men refuse to accept the standard. Since they know the standard to be universal the recalcitrance of their fellows is a proof, in their minds, of some defect in the humanity of the non-conformists. Thus a rationalistic age creates a new fanaticism. The non-conformists are figuratively expelled from the human community'. Reinhold Niebuhr *Beyond Tragedy* New York: Scribners 1965 p. 237.

[315]ibid pp. 5-6; italics original.

This summary is tremendously important for integrating the whole of Hauerwas' theology. Creation, upto now, has undoubtedly been the missing ingredient. It was missing because it seemed to open the door to formal theories of natural law, foundational accounts of knowledge, and in the end to a violence that denied the particularity of story, Christian or otherwise. Milbank offers a way for Hauerwas' perception of the Christian narrative to have a greater emphasis on the *beginning* of the story. Thus Hauerwas can finally bridge the divide between creation ethics and kingdom ethics.

4.2.2. Salvation and Eschatology

In the foregoing discussion of eschatology and creation I have shown how the two are compatible when we see creation as the nonviolent establishment of harmonious difference. The theological difficulty which remains is whether an emphasis on eschatology plays down and underestimates the significance of the person and work of Christ. Can one continue to maintain the finality of Christ for Christian doctrine and his centrality in Christian ethics (see Chapter 3 above), while talking of the ultimate resolution of things and the command to live in the world which will be and is coming to be?

The views that look forward to a future resolution of human aspirations in this world may be termed historicist.[316] Historicist positions put a high value on the notion of history. In this perspective, all teleology is historical teleology. One cannot talk of an 'end' (or a beginning) outside time. All meanings emerge within the process of time itself. The future is the only judge: all our strivings undergo the 'test of time'. For the gradualist, the world is growing from childhood to adulthood, and its problems are largely due to immaturity. The revolutionary is more inclined than the gradualist to hurry up the growth process, but the only force that can do the hurrying is the revolutionaries themselves, since an intervention from outside time and history is excluded.

[316]Here I am following the use of the term 'historicist' by Oliver O'Donovan in his *Resurrection and Moral Order* Second Edition Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1994 chapter 3.

There are several problems with this perspective. The chief problem is that it does not distinguish between the immature and the evil. If creation is portrayed as incomplete, one comes close to a gnosticism that says creation is bad. If creation is not 'good', but only 'getting better', what would constitute evil? This comes close to an idealism which denies the reality of evil. O'Donovan summarises the problem neatly: 'The characterization of history as a process replaces the categories of good and evil with those of past and future'[317]. The monopoly of history over all meanings also excludes grace, the definitive action of God. One could say no more about Christ than that he is a representative and an anticipation of the tendency and potential that was already in the world. There is no place for a decisive act, only for a guiding hand. This is an inability to distinguish providence, the teleological ordering of and within the created order, from salvation, the eschatological action from without. Historicism has a place for providence, but not for salvation.[318]

In the chapter three I cited John Howard Yoder's description of the 'Constantinian' shift, by which the Church came to see its own best interests coinciding with those of the state. One can see the way the 'Constantinian' shift favoured a historicist perspective. The workings of providence and the activity of salvation became difficult to distinguish from one another. A decisive eschaton seemed unnecessary, since all that could be wished for was simply more of what already existed. Eschatology lost its transcendent power to criticise historical tendencies and instead underwrote them with a promise of more of the same. A this-worldly eschatology not only favours a 'Constantinian' politics: the two together are intimately connected with a consequentialist ethical method, as O'Donovan, here talking of Western liberal culture, implies:

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[317]Oliver O'Donovan *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 1986 p. 63. It is hard to see how such a perspective is sustainable in view of the delay of the eschaton noted by the New Testament authors. The fact that evil was still very much around was surely one of the most important reasons why the New Testament was written.

[318]Hence the tendency of this kind of eschatology to be more concerned with the incompleteness to be removed than in describing or conceiving of the wonders to come. Such a reticence is appropriate for those who believe in an other-worldly eschaton, for such would be by nature inconceivable. The same should not apply for a salvation within time, which should be much more open to conception, but seems not to be. One recalls Oscar Wilde: 'One wonders how long the meek will keep the earth after they inherit it.'

The shortcomings of an ethical gradualist version of eschatology, such as that of Albrecht Ritschl, were caricatured by Richard Niebuhr: 'A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross' (H.R.Niebuhr *The Kingdom of God in America* New York: Harper Torchbooks 1959 p. 193).

> To criticize the culture as a whole is unthinkable; one can only speak *for* the culture *against* the culture, as the representative of a new strand in the culture which will fashion its future. To this implausible disguise, then, moral criticism resorts in modern liberal society, presenting itself partly as sociological prediction, partly as threat. The critic must describe the future of the culture in a way that justifies his concerns; and he must show that he speaks for a constituency sufficiently large or sufficiently determined to make his predictions come true![319]

In short, one must be able to show one is master of one's own eschaton. What is missing from this approach is both the transcendent quality of the eschaton and the perception of grace, in particular Christ, as decisive.[320]

However a more continuous relationship between eschatology and salvation can be established by attending to the context in which the synoptic gospels were written. It is impossible to separate the 'historical Jesus' from the Jesus handed on to us through the understanding of the early Church. Our principal evidence of him is in the transformation he made in the lives of his followers. From the canonical gospels, particularly the synoptics, two related themes emerge. First, Jesus' healing, teaching and miraculous power were focused not so much on himself but on the kingdom of God. Second, Jesus and his followers saw his ministry and passion as decisive. It was not that the first disciples had a mistaken notion of eschatology; rather, they knew, better than us, the decisive effect of the climax of Jesus' ministry. The early Christians

> looked to the end of the world because they were so profoundly convinced that they had already seen the end in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They did not look to the future because they thought the kingdom had not been fulfilled but because they thought it had been fulfilled through the vocation of this man Jesus. ... The kind of nonresistant love characteristic of Jesus' disciples was possible only because they were convinced the kingdom, the end, had in fact come through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.[321]

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[319]O'Donovan, ibid p. 73. O'Donovan observes that protest is the way liberalism pinches itself to find out if it is still alive. Many theologians have asserted a Christological foundation for the significance of protest. O'Donovan, however, suspects 'that here, as with the crowd before the praetorium, what is really happening is the replacement of Christ by Barabbas'. (p. 73).

[320]An ironic twist to the this-worldly and future version of eschatology is that it is not necessarily immune from some of the dangers perceived in an other-worldly and future version. This has been demonstrated in the failure of the Marxist rendering of the revolutionary apocalypse. Ruether summarises the similarity thus: 'As in Christian history, Marxism begins with the announcement of the apocalyptic day of wrath and the speedy advent of the kingdom of God, but ends in the indefinite prolonging of the era of the Church, which can justify all persecution and suppression of liberty in the name of that final liberation which never comes but to which it is the exclusive gateway.' (Rosemary Radford Ruether *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope* New York: Harper and Row 1970 p. 25.)

[321]Hauerwas, 'The Need for an Ending' *The Modern Churchman* 27/3 1986 pp. 4-5.

It may be that Jesus anticipated that the events of his passion would precipitate the apocalyptic events described in Mark 13 and elsewhere. It may also be *the case that many* of the anticipated events concerned not the cosmic end of the world but the destruction of the Temple, which took place in 70 AD. In any case the writers of the New Testament assume that the decisive, all-important event has *already* happened; we are those 'upon whom the end of the ages has come' (1 Corinthians 10:11); we have 'tasted the powers of the age to come' (Hebrews 6:5). It must therefore be a mistake to understand the kingdom as a purely future event. And yet an other-worldly element remains in the abiding expectation of an imminent closure to the story.

The other-worldliness of the kingdom is important in the sense that God's ways are not our ways. The this-worldliness is affirmed by the fact that the kingdom has already come to this world in Jesus and will return when he does. Yet the fact that the kingdom is a past event clarifies the distinction between whether it is present or future: it can be present and it will be future because it has been in the past. And what it was in the past shows us what it is in the present and what it will be in the future. In short, the kingdom can be present, and can break into the present from another world, because it *has been* decisively present in the past in the career of Jesus. Christians proclaim a future hope and a present community on the basis of a past event.

The theological demands of creation and salvation should therefore profoundly influence the place given to eschatology in Christian ethics. From creation is gained an emphasis on ontology - that which was, is, and will be true before, during, and after the eschaton. From salvation is gained what Hauerwas usually calls the Christian narrative - the historical character of Christian convictions, that which cannot be gainsaid by any future eschaton. So eschatological ethics are characterised by a rootedness in the ontology of continuing nonviolent creation and particular nonviolent salvation.

I shall now proceed to the examination of the character of eschatological ethics, under two headings: the twin themes of time and ending.

4.3. The Significance of Time

> Jesus' ethical teaching [lies] ... at the very edge of what we usually believe to be possible. Jesus' message has power not in spite of, but because of, its promise of a future which is not ideal or utopian, nor a mere variation on what we know already, but is both radically new and able to be envisioned on a human time-scale, 'in our generation'. Faithful and eager attention to such a future introduces a new dimension to the present; for the present becomes, not a mere working out of the consequences of the past, but a transition to an altogether different future. The present is transformed by the discovery of possibilities which were not apparent until it was seen in the light of the future.[322]

In the last chapter I argued that Hauerwas leaves himself open to the charge of being a sectarian by his use of spatial metaphors for the relationship between Church and world. He uses these metaphors in order to stress his conviction that the two differ in their most fundamental convictions, and that Christian communities have distinctive practices which embody their particular narrative. Hauerwas' most helpful discussion of this issue is in his employment of Michel de Certeau's distinction between a strategy and a tactic.[323] A strategy is the art of the strong: it concentrates its power in one place and makes systematic forays into enemy territory. A tactic is the art of the weak: it has no front line since it is perpetually surrounded. It thus entertains *ad hoc* encounters with powerful forces.[324] De Certeau's distinction suggests that it is not the Christian community that is sectarian: on the contrary it is the dominant secular forces that adopt strategies and thus power bases. However it seems Hauerwas will go on being accused of sectarianism (and go on being exasperated by the accusation) until he ceases to use confusing spatial metaphors.[325]

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[322]A.E.Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, London: Duckworth 1982 p. 97

[323]See 3.4.3. above.

[324]Thus, for example, Hauerwas' observation that Christianity 'must always be a Diaspora religion' *Against the Nations* p. 77.

[325]The title of his recent book *Dispatches from the Front* seems in contradiction with de Certeau's notion of tactic: for where is the front line? the same book, *Theological Engagements with the Secular* restores a more 'tactical' approach.

It is my argument now that it makes much more sense of Hauerwas' approach to understand the Church as existing in a new *time*.[326] It is this observation that enables us to see how Hauerwas' perspective on Christian ethics is profoundly eschatological. The theme of time emerges as a unifying theme of Hauerwas' work. Each of his major claims is a claim about the significance of time for Christian ethics. In Kenneson's words,

> All of the categories that have become the hallmark of Hauerwas' work - character, narrative, memory, virtue - all are attempts to make connections between the self's communal nature and the community's irreducibly temporal character.

In exploring eschatology therefore, I am examining the direction implicit throughout Hauerwas' work. I shall now briefly demonstrate the implicit place of time in each of my three previous chapters.

Time is implicit in Hauerwas' treatment of character, examined in chapter one above. It arises at the point where Hauerwas becomes aware of the significance of narrative. This most clearly represented in his 'Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life':

> The growth of character, and our corresponding ability to claim our actions as our own, is a correlative of our being initiated into a determinative story. For it is only through a narrative which we learn to 'live into' that we acquire a character sufficient to make our history our own.[327]

A key difference between a 'determinative story' and a story of one's own choosing is that a determinative story is a communal thing. In practice the term 'character', for Hauerwas, means a person's ability to identify the place or part they fulfil in a narrative. Thus a phrase such as 'my story' is almost meaningless: the story is always communal, and communal identity is prior to personal identity. Character and community emerge as the way Hauerwas ensures the identity of the self over time. Meanwhile the communion of saints is the way doctrine speaks of the Church over time.

Time is implicit in my discussion in chapter two of Hauerwas' treatment of the particular Christian narrative. Narrative is the way Christians understand the revelation of God over time. The faithfulness and providence of God would be meaningless if there was not a continuity to the story stretching from Israel through Jesus to the Church. Just as

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[326]I derive this idea from Philip Kenneson 'Taking Time for the Trivial: Reflections on Yet Another Book from Hauerwas' *Asbury Theological Journal* 45 Spring 1990 65-74.

[327]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 151.

when Christians guide their ethical behaviour by asking 'of what story am I a part?', so they seek the character of God by considering his revelation over time.

Time is implicit in my discussion of Hauerwas' treatment of nonviolence. It arises at the point where one considers the end of the story. Consequential reasoning tends to foreshorten the story by concentrating on the destiny one can oneself determine. Eschatological reasoning has a longer view of time, and commends action in accordance with the End of the story.

Hauerwas unites the themes of time, character, narrative and nonviolence in his essay 'Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial'.[328] His argument is that Christians witness by distinguishing survival from life; and the way Christians affirm that God has done what is necessary to ensure the latter is by taking time to do apparently trivial things. The unity of the themes comes through in the following passage:

> The virtues ... are timeful activities. This is not just because the virtues can only be developed through habitual formation, but because the virtues bind our past with our future by providing us with continuity of self. Because we are virtuous people, as we are peaceful people, we do not confront just any future but a future of a very definite kind. Just as fears of a courageous person are not the fears of a coward, so the future of the virtuous person is not the future of those who lack character.[329]

I shall now proceed to reinterpret the traditional categories of eschatological thought - resurrection, millennium, second coming in judgement, and the kingdom of heaven - in the light of what I have demonstrated about the way the implicit theme of time unifies Hauerwas' work.

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[328] *Christian Existence Today* pp. 253-266.

[329] ibid p. 265.

4.4. The Content of Eschatology

4.4.1. Resurrection: living forgiven histories

Forgiveness, giving and receiving, is the key to Hauerwas' vision of life in the messianic community.[330] Forgiveness is the way Hauerwas integrates the political and personal demand to renounce control. Discipleship requires letting go of the ways we give significance to the world and ourselves, letting go of our impulse to control the world and make it come out right, and also letting go of the control we can exert over one another by forgiving without receiving forgiveness. Accepting forgiveness tends to make us powerless: asking us to be a forgiven people is asking us to live out of control. Our lives are not in our own hands: we depend on others, learning to trust them as we learn to trust God.

Forgiveness implies being at peace with our histories. This is not an ethic which tries to abstract the individual or the community from its history. We are able to claim our past, inexorably sinful, as our own, with no need to tell ourselves false stories, because we can accept forgiveness for what we have done and not done. Only then can we live in peace with ourselves and one another.[331]

This forgiveness is founded on the resurrection in which we 'recognize our victim as our hope'[332]. It is through this recognition that the love of the enemy comes to symbolize the eschatological ethic. By giving himself up to be killed, Jesus handed over the kingdom into the hands of God's people. In the killing of Jesus we see what happens when the kingdom to which we belong is seen as the kingdom which belongs to us - to control and dispose of, or to deem irrelevant to contemporary demands. In the resurrection we see that this is not the end of the story, that the kingdom is not limited by

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[330]See Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* Chapter 5.

[331]See especially 'Resurrection, the Holocaust, and the Obligation to Forgive' in *Unleashing the Scripture* pp. 140-148.

[332]ibid p. 90.

our limitations, that our victim is offered back to us as our hope at Easter and Pentecost. Therefore we can forgive the enemy, because our control over our own sin has been taken away from us. We are dispossessed - dispossessed of our illusions of security and power, dispossessed of our efforts to exclude the presence of surprises in our lives, dispossessed of the false stories of our history, dispossessed of any righteousness that we may have thought we deserved, dispossessed of any control over the end of the world - and as dispossessed, we have nothing to withhold from the stranger. Imitating the resurrection, imitating the end of the world, we deal as we have been dealt with, and offer forgiveness where it has not been deserved.

In Jesus we see not only the proclamation and the possibility of what seemed to be impossible ethical ideals, but the embodiment of a way of life that God has now made possible. His life reveals to us the manner of God's reign. Eschatological ethics requires seeing Christ's life as decisive for the breaking in of the kingdom into this world, as integral to the nature and possibility of the kingdom. 'The kingdom is *present* insofar as [Jesus'] life reveals the effective power of God to create a transformed people capable of living peaceably in a violent world. ... His life is the life of the end - this is the way the world is meant to be - and thus those who follow him become a people of the last times, the people of the new age'[333].

The resurrection of Jesus reveals the manner in which the end of the world is disclosed. The last enemy is overcome. God breaks into a world dominated by death.

> The resurrection, therefore, is not an extra-ordinary event added to this man's life, but a confirmation by God that the character of Jesus' life prior to the resurrection is perfectly faithful to his claim to proclaim and make present God's kingdom. Without the resurrection our concentration on Jesus would be idolatry, but without Jesus' life we would not know what kind of God it is who has raised him from the dead.[334]

If the last enemy has been overcome, then all lesser powers must inevitably give way to the rule of the crucified one. On the resurrection is founded the hope that forgiveness and love are in the end to prevail over coercion and violence. Our true nature and end - creation and eschatology - are revealed in the story of this one man.

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[333]Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* pp. 83, 85.

[334]ibid p. 79.

Besides making us a 'people of the last times', in what other way does the resurrection bring a new time? The conflicts Jesus has with religious leaders over observance of the sabbath make much more sense when one recognises that the resurrection of Jesus is 'the embodiment of God's sabbath as a reality for all people'[335]. If the resurrection is the end of the world, living the sabbath is living toward the world's end - living in the *telos* and eschaton of creation, to follow the Genesis account. Since our lives are in God's hands, since we have seen the end of the world, it is possible to rest: the sabbath becomes a form of life, a new time, a peace between people and between people and our world. Life is valued not as an end in itself, not as the foundation of all value, but as valuable because God has valued and created it.

4.4.2. The Millennium: Time to Make Peace with the Jews

The millennium is significant because it ties eschatology firmly to concrete history, and thus with the Christian narrative. It indicates that the eschaton is 'not the replacement of one kind of reality by another but the final interweaving of God's acts in all dimensions'.[336] The 'ingrafting' of Israel is particularly important here, both in providing a context for Jesus' life and in reminding us that the present history of the Jewish people is not outside God's main concern.

> The kingdom does not start with nature, with the notion that the perfection implicit in creation be reformed by divine assistance; rather, the kingdom starts as the hope of a people formed by God, which for Christians is defined by the life and death of the crucified Christ. ... What we can know of this God and his kingdom is always given through the history of Israel filtered through the light of Jesus' cross.[337]

It is only in eschatological terms that we can make sense of the role of the Jewish people, before Christ and since. For the issue in Romans 11 is a crucial one: if God has 'rejected his people whom he foreknew', then his promises and his faithfulness, the

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[335]ibid p. 87.

[336]Thomas Finger *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* Nashville: Nelson 1985 pp. 170-171.

[337]Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* p. 115.

foundation of the gospel, are unreliable. What makes Israel Israel is to remember (in an active, Hebrew, sense) the definitive acts of God - the Exodus, the law-giving at Sinai, the crossing of the Jordan, the temple at Zion - and to meditate on the way of the Lord, with the help of the prophet, the priest, and the king, living in obedience, fear, love, and perfection. It is nothing less than a call to imitate God, to reflect the character expressed in his deliverance of his people.[338] The prophet, priest and king were to be the models for the people to imitate. In the Servant of Second Isaiah these three functions coalesce. The servant enacts the three offices, displaying on the purpose and task of Israel and revealing the life of God. In Jesus' life, death and resurrection the early Christians saw a continuation of Israel's vocation to imitate God and manifest God's kingdom. Imitating Jesus would be imitating God, and entering the inheritance of the kingdom.

By rooting us in the concrete history of Israel and Jesus, the millennium prevents us from diverting attention from the crucified one to a calculation of events and timings. The narrative of Israel, fulfilled and renewed in the narrative of the life of Jesus, not only displays a life, but trains us to 'situate our lives in relation to that life'.[339] We discover who Jesus is and what his resurrection means by learning to follow him in his life, and in the process losing false notions about what kind of kingdom he brings. In Jerusalem we discover the cost and the crown of the kingdom. We keep our eyes on the kingdom by never taking our eyes off the king.

The cutting edge of Christian belief in the eschatological role of Israel lies in contemporary Christian relationships with the Jews, particularly in the light of the Holocaust. In his essay 'Remembering as a Moral Task: The Challenge of the Holocaust', Hauerwas suggests a number of approaches.[340] Christians need to learn their history in a different way: reading Midrash, Talmud, and Jewish experience of Christianity. Christians should acknowledge that its universalist claim is eschatological, grounded in the final unity of all people, rather than anthropological, based on the commonalities of humankind. It is perhaps here that Hauerwas' concern for the particular Christian narrative coincides most clearly with my own emphasis that that narrative should include the eschaton. The two are

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[338]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* pp. 76-78.

[339]ibid p. 74.

[340]See *Against the Nations* Chapter 4, especially pp. 74-78.

well expressed by Andre Trocme, the pastor of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon: 'Let us never forget that the God of Jesus Christ was the God of Israel. The Christian faith dissolves into mythology as soon as it no longer leans on Judaism.'[341]

4.4.3. Second Coming and Judgement: An End to the Story

A constant theme of Hauerwas' writing is the need for patience among members of the Christian community. It is one of the most important of all the virtues - perhaps the definitive virtue, next to charity. A key fault of consequentialist reasoning is that by assuming it can predict outcomes it foreshortens the story. Belief in the second coming and last judgement remind the Christian that the end of the story comes much later - or very much sooner - than may be supposed. Tragedy can only be sustained by a belief in the ultimate wiping away of every tear from every eye: as I noted in chapter one, too much social ethics tends toward violence precisely because it seeks to wipe away the tear all too hastily.

Two claims relate specifically to the establishment of a new time. The first is the discontinuity implied by the personal, bodily return of Christ. The ethical implications of Christ's sudden return contrast with the implication of other versions of eschatology. The version that supposes all the language of the parousia should be interpreted figuratively or existentially provides no challenge to the existing order. Like belief in the immortal soul, it allows the interiorisation of the decisiveness of Christ, and dispenses with the cosmic dimension. Faith in the crucified one may, in this version, be a private matter. Yet it was not for the crucified one. Neither was it for his earliest followers, who saw in his life the coming of the kingdom. Meanwhile there is the version that understands that the universal kingdom of justice and peace will come literally and gradually. This view provides even more encouragement to those who suppose that Christians must seek to control the present order, making it most nearly conform to the kingdom of justice and peace. But

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[341] André Trocmé *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* Scottdale: Herald Press 1973 p. 2, quoted by Hauerwas in *Against the Nations* p. 86 n. 33.

this would suggest that there is hope for the world other than in the way of Christ's cross and his return, that we can hope in what we can do rather than in what Christ has already done. The need to control, and the fear of failure that underlies it, imply that we, not God, are the lords of history.

By contrast, belief in the catastrophic discontinuity of a personal, bodily return means we are obliged not to succeed, but to be faithful and ready. If we are concerned with the gradual, continuous manifestation of Christ's advancing reign, it is tempting to form alliances with what seem to be the agreeable forces of the contemporary age. A more discontinuous eschatology reminds us that evil can cloak itself under the guise of progress; apparently agreeable forces were among those which Jesus rejected in the temptation narrative and which put him to death.

In *The Peaceable Kingdom* (pp. 78-9) Hauerwas discusses the temptation narrative in the light of these agreeable forces. The first temptation recalls Israel's desire for a certain future of her own choosing. 'Surely it would be a good thing to ... feed the hungry and poor. But Jesus rejects that means of proving how God reigns with his people knowing that the life offered Israel is more than bread can supply.' The second temptation is to a dominion that will bring peace to nations. But God's rule is through weakness, his power is love, his peace is not coercion. 'Jesus ... rejects Israel's temptation to an idolatry that necessarily results in violence between people and nations. For our violence is correlative to the falseness of the objects we worship, and the more false they are, the greater our stake in maintaining loyalty to them and protecting them through coercion.' The third temptation is to dictate the manner and timing of God's intervention in history. Jesus' refusal shows his commitment that God's will be done in his life and death.[342]

The second claim which relates specifically to a new time is more concerned with the last judgement. The fact that the person who returns as judge is none other than the person who went to the cross like a lamb to the slaughter is the foundation for the Christian response to evil. It is Christ who judges, not the Christian or the Church. His judgement waits until after his passion.

Throughout the story narrated in the Bible the apparently righteous often suffer. The apparently wicked prosper. This raises many questions. Who is really righteous? Will

[342]For further discussion of the temptation narrative, see chapter five below.

God keep his promises to those who suffer? Does he really care about them? Can he overcome the forces that oppress the righteous? The questions are abiding ones. Is God good and is his reign universal? There must come a day when evil is abolished and righteousness reigns, when the significance of history is revealed, the secrets of all hearts made plain, the plot unravelled; when the agony of poverty, violence, starvation, loneliness and despair is lifted. Things will not always be this way.

In the meantime, Christians have nothing to gain by in practice assuming God got it wrong in Christ, that the crucifixion was a ghastly mistake, and that we must consequently act differently to ensure the world comes out right second time around. We know that God acted decisively in Christ; we also know that things in the contemporary world do not conform to the end of the world. But in the words of Michael Ramsey, God is Christlike: in him there is no un-Christlikeness at all. History has already come out right in Christ. In Christ God has shown us the way he deals with the world and the way he would have his world governed. Because we see that forgiveness and love have been vindicated in the resurrection, we know that he will end the story justly, in a manner not unlike the manner in which he has already decisively acted.

The commitment of Christians to live life in God's sabbath - in the belief that God has already made the world come out right and it is not upto us to do so - does not close their eyes to the magnitude of evil in the contemporary world. God has defeated evil and vindicated love and forgiveness. The victory is absolute. Those who open themselves to this reign and join others who are structuring a life around it need not fear the final destruction of evil. Nevertheless, evil is still present, and Christians constantly pursue a nonviolent commitment to turn against it.

The further virtue associated with belief in the last judgement is the virtue of courage. Courage is an eschatological virtue because it consists in recognising that the End does not lie in the death of the self but in the final eschaton. The Christian life is beset by great dangers. The person of courage experiences a different set of dangers from the coward, since courage itself makes the world more dangerous.[343] For the courageous person fears not to possess the spiritual benefits and goods of the virtuous person;

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[343]See 'The Difference of Virtue and the Difference it Makes: Courage Exemplified' *Modern Theology* 9/3 1993 pp. 249-264.

whereas the coward fears merely to lose temporal goods. The courageous have the characteristics that befit those who know their cause will finally succeed: endurance, steadfastness, constancy, patience and perseverance. The courageous person knows the prize will be attained; knows the journey may be long and arduous; knows the sorrow that comes of losing some goods on the way. The paradigm of Christian courage is martyrdom. Martyrdom requires an extraordinary courage, made possible by the belief in a last judgement that vindicates the righteous.

> Through Christ [Christians] have been given power over death and all forms of victimization that trade on the power of death. ... Though our enemies may kill us they cannot determine the meaning of our death. ... We refuse to let our oppressors define us as victims. We endure because no matter what may be done to us we know that those who would determine the meaning of our life by threatening our death have already decisively lost.[344]

This explains Hauerwas' response to O'Donovan's criticism. O'Donovan says Hauerwas' treatment of martyrdom constitutes an overemphasis on the cross. But the perspective of the last judgement shows that martyrdom is a feature of Hauerwas' implicit emphasis on the eschatological character of Christian ethics.

4.4.4. The Kingdom of Heaven: The Community of a New Time

As Thomas Finger points out, the biblical writings speak of heaven in two principal ways.[345] The first is a literal place, a created realm, a place of disharmony as well as harmony (Ephesians 2:2, 3:10, 4: 9-10), which will, unlike God's reign but like the earth, one day pass away. The second is a figurative space where God is fully obeyed. In this latter sense, the healings, teachings and exorcisms of Jesus' early ministry showed that 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 4:17). Heaven is more nearly a verb than a noun. It is very much like what is meant by 'life' or 'eternal life'. It speaks not of a territory over which God rules but of God's reign as dynamic and transforming, and met with

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[344]Stanley Hauerwas 'On Developing Hopeful Virtues' *Christian Scholar's Review* 18/2 1988 p. 113.

[345]Thomas Finger *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* p. 157.

obedience, service and joy. The coming of heaven to earth means a radical transformation of the way we do and are done by.

> The ultimate eschatological hope, then, is not that individuals will go to heaven but that heaven will fully and finally pervade earth. It is that 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea' (Habbakuk 2:14).[346]

Thus the eschatological hope is embodied by people who see heaven not so much as a 'space' but as a way of understanding acting in time - as a verb, rather than as a noun. The ethical implications of this last dimension of eschatology orient the Christian *toward* time, rather than away from time in search of timeless reward. As has been seen with other features of eschatological hope, it is important to steer away from temptations to gnosticism.

Perhaps because Christians are so often unfaithful, and the Church is such an abject witness to the kingdom, there abides an understandable temptation to try to escape the fallibility of Christian life, step out of time and talk of salvation in ahistorical terms.[347] The doctrine of the atonement is often discussed in such abstract categories. When salvation is discussed in ahistorical terms it is possible to bypass the human community that such salvation creates. This is a gnostic tendency since it implies that salvation is simply a matter of God's achievement and our knowledge of it. However we are not just saved *from* something, we are saved *to* something. That latter something is the new people, the eschatological community, that lives as if God, not humanity, rules. The life of this community cannot be bypassed when describing salvation: its very life is a crucial, albeit insufficient, manifestation of God's rule. Indeed it may not be possible to know what salvation means apart from such a community. Salvation saves humans within time, not from time. In Hauerwas' words, 'That God "saves" is not a pietistic claim about my status individually. ... Rather, the God of Israel and Jesus offers us salvation insofar as we are

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[346]ibid p. 158. This is not the place to enter into the philosophical and ethical issues raised by hell. If the final coming of heaven is to be complete, we may assume that to stand before the coming brightness and glory of God, knowing one has irreversibly set one's face against that irresistible reality, will be an occasion of complete horror. To be aware of other life going on to the fulfilment for which it was created, while one knows that one is set against that: this is an agony. It is an agony which we may suppose may be a purgatory, and not eternal: but this may not be obvious at the time, and of small consolation if all that has turned against the brightness is integral to one's person.

[347]This discussion follows that of Philip Kenneson in 'Taking Time for the Trivial'.

invited to become citizens of the kingdom and thus to become participants in the history which God is creating'.[348]

An ahistorical salvation accords well with an ahistorical eschatology. The heresy involved in both is docetism. God is so other that he could not stoop to be involved in time. The moral consequence is that Christ has no decisive relevance for ethics. In these circumstances the temptation towards either human control or despair is almost irresistible.

Neither of these responses recognises hope. Christian hope expresses the relationship between salvation and time. Salvation involves time and does not bypass temporal human activities and communities. Yet time seems to be the ultimate unalterable 'given'.[349] Time enslaves us and tyrannises us. In our contemporary culture time is the most valuable commodity: we spend it, save it, use it, waste it, put it aside and buy it; we seek after the elixir of 'quality time'. Time is an 'enemy bearing arms for oblivion'. Our pathetic efforts to kill it only show its mastery over us. Time cannot, it appears, be recycled: it is the ultimate non-renewable resource.

A historical salvation is a salvation that establishes a new time. Salvation creates a new people, the eschatological people: and a characteristic of this new people is that they live in a new time - an eschatological time. In this new time the priorities of existence are transformed: activities are significant to the extent that they proclaim and accord with the new time.

Christians may agree with the 'realists' that ethics must be earthed in the real world; there may however be some disagreement on what the real world is. How we act in the world depends on how we see the world in which we act. The New Testament, and in particular the description of the kingdom given in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, train Christians to see the world as it really is. The Beatitudes display, not a manifesto for a new society, but a picture and a promise of the kingdom which has happened in Jesus and is breaking in to this society; not a prudential ethic for a sensible approach to conflict resolution, but a shock to the imagination to show that all is not as it

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[348]Stanley Hauerwas The Peaceable Kingdom p. 63. In *Against the Nations* p. 115, he adds 'The kingdom of God is a category which presumes and creates a people'.

[349]For the full dimensions of 'givens', see chapter five below.

seems. This is ethics on the very edge of possibility, an ethic which is breaking into a new time, where the demands of reality are very different. The transformation is summarised most lucidly in a passage in *Resident Aliens*.

> If the world is a society in which only the strong, the independent, the detached, the liberated, and the successful are blessed, then we act accordingly. However, if the world is really a place where God blesses the poor, the hungry, and the persecuted for righteousness' sake, then we must act in accordance with reality or else appear bafflingly out of step with the way things are. ... So discipleship, seen through this eschatology, becomes extended training in letting go of the ways we try to preserve and give significance to the world, ways brought to an end in Jesus, and in relying on God's definition of the direction and meaning of the world - that is, the kingdom of God.[350]

4.5 Eschatology and Irony

In the previous section I took up the implications for Hauerwas' ethics of the claim that the Church lives in a new, eschatological, time (as opposed to a separate, sectarian, space). In this section I concentrate on the other major concern of this chapter, the claim that attention to the *ending* of the Christian narrative offers a different perspective on the genre of the Church's story.

4.5.1. Tragedy

Tragedy is a theme to which Stanley Hauerwas returns regularly, particularly in the period 1977-1983. He makes a number of claims for the way tragedy forms the moral

[350]Hauerwas and Willimon *Resident Aliens* pp. 88-89.

life. Three areas are particularly significant and illustrate the way tragedy applies to a much wider field. First, in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, Hauerwas is largely concerned with the importance of tragedy in medicine. The tragic is experienced when a person (perhaps a highly virtuous person) with several responsibilities and obligations, confronted with a single decision having irreversible consequences, finds that these many interests conflict with both his or her own interest and with each other.

> The practice of medicine offers an intense paradigm of the moral life. For the moral task is to continue to do the right, to care for this immediate patient, even when we have no assurance that it will be the successful thing to do. ... When a culture loses touch with the tragic, ... we must redescribe our failures in acceptable terms. Yet to do so *ipso facto* traps us in self-deceiving accounts of what we have done.[351]

Hauerwas goes on to argue that policies based on these premises lead to coercion. Medicine teaches us that tragic circumstances are 'what the moral life is all about'.[352] In the last essay in the book, 'Medicine as a Tragic Profession', Hauerwas explores these issues in greater detail, and concludes that medicine serves us best when it helps us face up to (rather than cure) the tragic character of our existence.

Second, in *A Community of Character*, Hauerwas applies his notion of tragedy to the issue of relativism. In doing so he develops his notion of tragedy:

> The conflict of right with right ... is but a form of a more profound sense of tragedy inherent in living in a divided world. For tragedy consists in the moral necessity of having to risk our lives and the lives of others in order to live faithful to the histories that are the only means we have for knowing and living truthfully.[353]

Hauerwas goes on to argue that tragedy arises when the faithfulness to one's character leads one into situations in which one's 'multiple responsibilities and obligations conflict not only with self-interest, but with each other'. There is no use trying to underestimate or deny the extent of division in the moral world. The tendency of deontological or utilitarian theories is to try to bypass these moral divisions; thus they deny the tragic. This, says Hauerwas, only leads to violence.[354] This leads him to an understanding of the Church as a people who can keep each other faithful despite the inevitable tragedies each member faces.

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[351] Stanley Hauerwas *Truthfulness and Tragedy* pp. 37-38.

[352] Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 115.

[353] ibid p. 106.

[354] ibid p. 107. See 1.2.3. above.

Third, Hauerwas considers tragedy in his profound meditation on the spirituality of peaceableness in the last chapter of *The Peaceable Kingdom*. The virtue of patience emerges as the key to enabling Christians to be faithful despite the inevitable tragedies of their lives. This is the point at which the eschatological perspective implicit in his discussion of tragedy comes to the surface.

> As H. Richard Niebuhr suggested, our unwillingness to employ violence to make the world 'better' means that we must often learn to wait. Yet such a waiting must resist the temptation to cynicism, conservatism, or false utopianism that assumes the process of history will result in 'everything coming out all right'. For Christians hope not in the 'processes of history', but in the God whom we believe has already determined the end of history in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[355]

Hauerwas goes on to contrast the peace based on conspiracies of lies, with the Church's peace, which unmasks those conspiracies, faces the forces those conspiracies had kept in check, and cares for the casualties.

4.5.2. Beyond Tragedy

Hauerwas' arguments for the significance of tragedy are insightful and persuasive. However when it comes to placing them in an eschatological perspective, it begins to appear that tragedy is not quite the right genre. Tragedy has deep associations with Greek notions of fate: fate is stronger even than the gods. Tragic heroes are often those who transgress the natural moral law. Fate and natural law are notions which sit uncomfortably with Hauerwas' interest in providence and destiny.[356] More importantly, the last word in any Christian narrative can never be tragedy since, as Hauerwas himself insists, the last word is Jesus Christ. The Christian narrative claims 'that God has taken the tragic character of our existence into his very life'.[357] Hauerwas himself acknowledges, in the

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[355]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 145.

[356]'Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills to transform fate into destiny'. *A Community of Character* p. 10.

[357]ibid p. 108.

words of Reinhold Niebuhr, that the Christian hope lies 'beyond tragedy'.[358] But where is that?

Hauerwas' insistence on tragedy makes sense when tragedy is used as a way of not trying to escape the dilemmas of human existence. His argument for the tragic character of medicine is directed against the tendency of consequentialist reasoning to assume that 'right answers' can be plucked out of the moral whirlpool. The consequentialist tells what we might call a 'comic' story - one with a happy ending, which the action under consideration will aim to bring about. Hauerwas is absolutely right to expose and reject this rendering of the story. But by telling a tragic story Hauerwas comes to share a number of the problems of the deontological approach. He is aware that deontological approaches can become 'a formula for moral callousness and self-righteousness' if the narrative context is ignored.[359] Yet the deontological 'story' is often a tragic story too.

What is missing from Hauerwas' discussion of tragedy is the notion of irony. It is not totally absent: he uses the word 'irony' three times in his discussion of 'Tragedy and Peaceableness';[360] but it is the genre which resolves the ambiguities of the notion of tragedy. John Howard Yoder introduces a dimension of irony into Hauerwas' thought by his insistence on luck, surprise and accident, and the way a commitment to nonviolence introduces these factors into ethical discussion. But Hauerwas still tends to concentrate on martyrdom and the cross, emphasising the tragic character of Christian faithfulness.

The journey from tragedy to irony may be illustrated by returning to the notion of 'medicine as a tragic profession'. Hauerwas derives this notion from MacIntyre. And indeed it is true: for medicine should teach society the disciplines of tragedy. But the journey from MacIntyre to Hauerwas is the journey from society to the Church. That journey is a journey from tragedy to irony. For what the Church has to say to the profession of medicine is, yes, medicine is not a 'comic' story, but no, medicine is not just a tragic story. It goes beyond tragedy. To say this much is to enter the field of irony.

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[358] *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 148.

[359] ibid p. 128.

[360] ibid pp. 142-146.

4.5.3. Irony as the Genre of Eschatology

The tenor of an ironic story is one of contrast - contrast between how things appear and how they are, between what participants are aware of and what happens in spite of them, between the status quo and its increasingly apparent absurdities. The contrasts of the Christian story are between human expectations and God's reality, between human failure and God's victory, between what we suppose to be the end of the story and the final end of the world. The central irony of the Christian story is that it is a human tragedy and a divine comedy. Christians perform that story by affirming the central role of God in the narrative.

> The pure or archetypal ironist is God. ... He is the ironist par excellence because he is omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent, absolute, infinite and free. ... 'In earthly art, irony has this meaning - conduct similar to God's' (Karl Solger). The archetypal victim of irony is man, seen, par contra, as trapped and submerged in time and matter, blind, contingent, limited and unfree - and confidently unaware that this is his predicament.[361]

It becomes clear that irony is a characteristic both of Hauerwas' method and of an eschatological approach to ethics. Hauerwas is constantly chipping away at the self-assurance of those who are confidently unaware of the insecurity or transitoriness or violence of their convictions. He sets up no grand plan, no strategy of the big battalion as a new Babel; instead he engages in hand to hand disputes with those who challenge the pattern of the Christian narrative.

Meanwhile an eschatological perspective is intensely ironic. It truly transforms fate into destiny. It sits in judgement over this time and this world; it mocks all who attempt to thwart its power - by arrogating power to themselves, by trying to evade death, or by behaving as if impervious to judgement. All human efforts to construct an earthly paradise are subsumed in a heaven beyond human imagining. All complacency is undermined when the eschaton comes at a time that no one expects. Apparent triumph turns to dust; apparent defeat is exalted. The secrets of all hearts are revealed: neither the sheep nor the goats know quite what to expect. The ethic could best be summarised thus: it is better to

[361] D.C. Muecke *Irony, the Critical Idiom* London: Methuen 1970 pp. 37-8.

fail in a cause that will finally succeed than to succeed in a cause that will finally fail.[362] This is the language of profound irony: beyond tragedy.

When Hauerwas talks at length of the cross and martyrdom, critics such as Oliver O'Donovan complain that his outlook is too bleak. The reason for this bleakness, I suggest, is that Hauerwas takes the ironic perspective for granted, and thus overstresses the tragic dimensions of discipleship. The result is that he labours the human tragedy, and skips the divine comedy. But all the while, the ironic perspective is implicit in what he is saying. This is illustrated by one of the most gruesome stories he tells, that of the Dunkard Brethren.

Hauerwas quotes U.J. Jones' thoroughly unsympathetic account of the German 'Dunkard' Brethren in Morrison's Cove, Pennsylvania, who refused to take up arms or pay for others to do so during the French, Indian and Revolutionary wars in the eighteenth century. Jones notes that during an Indian raid the Dunkards made no effort at resistance. A handful of Dunkards hid themselves away; 'but by far the most of them stood by and witnessed the butchery of wives and children, merely saying "Gottes wille sei gethan".' The warriors carried off more than thirty scalps and plenty of plunder. Upto this point this is an extraordinary example of the demands of discipleship implied by Hauerwas. But then there is an ironic twist. Jones apparently misses the significance of his own observation that the Brethren repeated 'Gottes wille sei gethan' so often during the massacre that the Indians thought it was the name of this strange tribe; a fact that came to light when some of the Indians were later captured and enquired whether the 'Gotswilthans' still lived in the Cove.[363] What appeared to be a tragic story turns out to be beyond tragedy. This is at the heart of an eschatological perspective.

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[362]I owe this expression to Bill Arlow.

[363]See Stanley Hauerwas 'Creation, Contingency and Truthful Nonviolence: A Milbankian Reflection' unpublished paper 1992, Rufus D. Bowman *Church of the Brethren and War* Elgin: Brethren Publishing House 1944 pp. 74-75.

4.5.4. Ethics without irony

A further illustration of the ironic character of Hauerwas' eschatological perspective may be taken from his essay 'On Surviving Justly: Ethics and Nuclear Disarmament'. The issue here is that one cannot dispense with eschatology: one simply chooses between good eschatology and bad eschatology. In characteristic fashion, Hauerwas exposes the absurdity of the survivalist argument.

The survivalist argument concludes that because nuclear weapons are so destructive; because any nuclear war would probably be a total war; and because the human species may not survive such a war, nuclear war must be excluded at all costs.[364] Humanity, it is said, has no right to endanger a common world based on the biological immortality of our species. This common world is seen as the source of all value: 'there are no ethics apart from service to the human community, and therefore no ethical commandments that can justify the extinction of humanity'.[365] Thus anything that threatens the value of value itself must be immoral. Survival becomes the first principle of ethics.

This argument relies on the human species as the determinant moral factor. But is it so clear that without humanity there will be nothing left of value? This certainly has implications for the relation of humanity to the animal world. The end of survival appears on this view to be so paramount that any means necessary to secure it are presumably legitimate. Such peace at any price is unlikely to be a just peace. Survivalism thus exhibits the shortcomings of an ethic with a weak eschatology. In heavily ironic terms, Hauerwas summarises the problems involved in the rejection of eschatology on ethical grounds:

> What good is a peace movement that works for peace for the same idolatrous reason that we build bombs - namely, the anxious self-interested protection of our world as it is? ... We do not argue that the bomb is the worst thing humanity can do to itself. We have already done the worst thing we could do when we hung God's Son on a cross. We do not argue that we must do something about the bomb or else we shall obliterate our civilisation, because God has already obliterated our civilisation in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. ... Our hope is based not on Caesar's missiles or Caesar's treaties but on the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. People often work for peace out of the same anxieties and perverted views of reality that lead people to build bombs.[366]

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[364]Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* pp. 140-146.

[365]Jonathan Schell *The Fate Of The Earth* New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982, quoted in Hauerwas, *Against the Nations* p. 142.

[366]Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens* pp. 89-90.

4.5.5. The Dangers of Ironic Ethics

If Hauerwas' style is so clearly ironic, and his ethic has such a strong tendency toward eschatology, why are these themes not more thoroughly embraced by his work?

I suspect that the reason may be that irony tends to assume the position of the observer. The archetypal ironic figure is the stranger in a new country, noticing the absurd habits that the locals take for granted. Now in one respect this is very much Hauerwas' position: he is the Christian in a secular world, noticing the absurdities of liberal presuppositions; he also writes as if he is at one remove from denominational differences. Yet in another respect the position of the observer is one that Hauerwas shuns. He shuns it because the kind of ethics he has set himself against is that which assumes it can take the neutral high ground of the disinterested observer. Such an observer has no understanding of the particular narrative and character of those involved in an issue, and thus is in no position to pass judgement - besides which, no such neutral ground exists.

A corresponding criticism of the eschatological perspective on Christian ethics is the danger of gnosticism. If eschatology becomes a secret knowledge concerning events and timings, the Christian ethics has lost the perspective on time that I outlined earlier in this chapter. Time has ceased to be a gift, and has become another object to be manipulated. If the eschaton is seen as the complete *replacement* of the present order, both creation and salvation are undermined. Such a view prizes the Kingdom so highly that it denies our present existence altogether. The result is a gnostic view that assumes that the *telos* of the world is wholly other than its present form, and thus that creation will be set aside in the eschaton. The gnostic approach sees the decisive events in salvation not as creation and Christ but as Fall and eschaton.

The theologian who has come closest to the approach I am outlining is Wolfhart Pannenberg. The following passage expresses his metaphysical commitment to the 'ontological priority of the future':

> If it is true that only with reference to the *totality* of reality can one speak meaningfully about a revelation of God as the world's Creator and Lord, and that reality (understood as historical) is first constituted as the totality of a single history by the end of all occurrences, then eschatology acquires a constitutive significance not only for the question of the knowledge, but also for that of the reality, of God.[367]

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[367] Wolfhart Pannenberg *Basic Questions in Theology* Volume One London: S.C.M. 1971 p. xv.

In an important dialogue with Pannenberg, Hauerwas makes explicit his misgivings about what I have called an ironic approach.[368] The issue at stake is whether one can talk meaningfully of the not-yet-existent as if it were the most concrete thing of all. Hauerwas' scepticism here reflects his concern with the particular and contingent: he is, as ever, suspicious of attempts to escape the practical and everyday in search of the timeless and absolute. Hauerwas goes on to criticise Pannenberg for translating the otherness of the kingdom into undefined generalities of justice and love. The heart of Hauerwas' frustration with Pannenberg lies in the latter's resort to abstraction when articulating the ethics of the kingdom. But I believe Hauerwas goes unnecessarily far in criticising the notion of the 'ontological priority of the future' as an abstraction also. For, as I have already shown, this eschatological perspective does thorough justice to two key elements in Hauerwas' thought: the significance of Jesus as the embodiment of the kingdom, and the perception of the *length* of the Christian story which consequentialist approaches underestimate. The problem with Pannenberg, in my view, is not that he makes metaphysical claims about something that is not yet fully realised - for surely this tension runs through Christian theology, Hauerwas included - but that he does not go far enough towards outlining the particular implications of his eschatological perspective. I have attempted in this chapter to deepen the metaphysical dimensions of Hauerwas' thought by embracing it with Milbank's view of creation and Pannenberg's perspective on eschatology.

While Hauerwas may well have misgivings about irony, I maintain that his concentration on Christian community is the strongest safeguard against them. It is the lives and habits of an actual community that gives eschatology its contemporary concrete embodiment. It is the earthing in the traditions and practices of such a community that both ensures a narrative approach and ties salvation to vocation and thus prevents it becoming other-worldly and world-denying. The existence of an eschatological community, expressing its faithfulness especially in its attitude to time, is the new reality that salvation brings. Standing in the same place as the world, but in a different time; looking for a time when all shall be well; appearing at times absurd to the secular mind;

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[368]Stanley Hauerwas and Mark Sherwindt 'The Reality of the Kingdom: An Ecclesial Space for Peace' in Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* pp. 107-121.

modelling a parallel way of being society; affirming all the while that God's ways are different from human ways; in all these ways the Church embodies an ironic perspective and tells its ironic story. Charles Pinches expresses beautifully this vocation to imitate the archetypal ironist:

> God is committed to the world, but is not identical with the world; he is *for* the world, but this is not his whole being; he is *prior* to the world; without him, the world could not know itself as world; he would do the world no favour by being absorbed into the world; he serves the world, but has his own integrity and inner life. The Church is the same.[369]

Thus one could describe the Church as an ironic parody of society, a satire on secularism. The Church is the cuckoo in the nest, on others' territory, a resident alien. Hauerwas revels in this approach: he adores to point out to emperors that they have no clothes. The ironist inhabits the same space as the rest of society, but has a perspective that makes some of the nostrums of that society seem absurd. The ironic community makes no claims to superiority or seclusion: it simply operates with a different timescale from the rest of society. For the Church, that is the eschatological perspective.

4.6. An Eschatological Practice: Having Children

In his book *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*, Thomas Ogletree distinguishes between two kinds of eschatology. He labels them futurist and dialectical eschatologies. The futurist eschatologies, largely found in exilic and post-exilic literature, combine an ethic of hope toward a time of fulfilment with an ethic of patient waiting (or in some cases determined action) in the meantime. Dialectical eschatologies see the hoped-

[369]Charles Pinches 'A Response to Muray' *Process Studies* 18/2 1989 p. 99.

for age as already becoming a reality, taking form in faithful communities as they encounter the larger society. The new reality is present, though the old reality still holds sway.

The differences between the two eschatologies largely concern the way in which the faithful community places itself in history. For futurist eschatologies, a break with the present reality is essential in order to affirm the legacy of the past: the Messiah has not yet come. For dialectical eschatologies, the Messiah has indeed come, a break with the past has been made, and the new age has begun. Ogletree notes that the crucial institutional distinctions between futurist (Jewish) and dialectical (Christian) eschatologies concern the relation between family and community of faith.

> In postexilic Judaism, ... the family is foundational for the existence of the people. The community of faith is constituted through the joining of families in covenant. ... For Christian understanding, the family is secondary and derivative; the community of faith, primary and fundamental.[370]

So the family is deeply challenged by eschatological ethics. And yet having children is commonplace. Why is having children so seldom regarded as a moral issue?

Having children has often been excluded from ethical debate because of the shortcomings in the way moral theology is often conducted. It has been excluded because it is value-laden, and it is often (wrongly) assumed that ethics concerns objective value-free facts such as 'rights' and 'nature'. It has been excluded also because it is often (again wrongly) assumed that ethics consists of moments of conscious choice: and having children is not something that many people do after an agony of moral decision, so again it does not *look* like a moral issue.[371] But the moral ethos of a community is generally revealed more by issues that are taken for granted than by a decision made in a crisis. Ethics is more about the long-term formation of people than it is about immediate judgements about actions. Rights and wrongs cannot simply be settled instantly in any situation by some universally-applicable principles: they depend on the prior moral commitments of the people involved, and these commitments are largely derived from the

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[370]Thomas Ogletree *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* Oxford: Blackwell 1984 p. 181.

[371]Many may indeed have agonies of decision, but such are generally about methods of aiding or impeding conception; seldom is it perceived that actually having the child is a moral question. The issues are usually considered to be whether and how one should 'interfere' with 'nature'.

community of which the people are a part. The question of whether we should switch off a life-support machine cannot be settled by abstract principle: it rests, instead, on what view of life we already have. The treatment of a severely retarded child has no a priori solution: it depends, instead, on what we value about all children. The assertion of a child's rights is not about 'natural law': it is determined by our prior view of how children differ from adults and what parenting involves.

For example one of the great injustices of giving birth to a child with a severe mental handicap is often perceived to be that such a child does not and will not turn out as the parents had expected. Yet on a little more reflection it is clear that no child turns out as we had expected: we are not able to control the outcome of any child's life [372]. The question thus develops into a wider one of how we receive the unexpected child, what we expect any child to be, and why, in fact, we have children at all.

Christians and non-Christians alike have children: and perhaps few Christians understand what they are doing as different from what a non-Christian is doing in having children. But having children is not a necessity or simply a 'natural' fact. Instead, it forms and expresses our deepest assumptions and convictions about our lives and identities. It therefore offers a helpful demonstration of the embodiment of the eschatological ethic in the life of the Christian community.

I thus conclude this chapter with an extended illustration of the way eschatological perspectives translate into the 'trivial' life or everyday activity of the Christian community.[373] In doing so I hope to show how the kingdom involves a new ethical time, and how we can see the 'trivial' practice of having children as a key practice for the eschatological community. Under four headings I outline how the practice of having children embodies the significant claims made in this chapter.

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[372]See *Truthfulness and Tragedy* pp. 153-154.

[373]'The primary meaning of "trivial"... is not "trifling" but "that which can be met anywhere".' Stanley Hauerwas *Christian Existence Today* p. 263.

4.6.1. Having Children is a Vocation

Christians see the world from a particular point of view, and describe the world in a particular way.[374] They understand that the world is deeply damaged by sin. This sin is in turn displayed in the way that all relationships experience distrust. Distrust commonly issues in violence and coercion, and thus in fear. Fear evokes the belief that security is to be attained only through control. Anyone whom one cannot control is a potential enemy. Distrust, fear, violence and untruthfulness are thus characteristics of despair in a world which assumes that control lies with humanity and not with God.

Christians are called to form the Church - that is, communities which recognise God's sovereignty over all existence and therefore do not need to control the world in order to be secure. Because these communities are not based on fear, they can display the trust and love which God's rule makes possible. Christians and their communities often get it wrong: they often live in fear, particularly fear of the truth; they are often distrustful and sometimes violent. Yet the power of despair and falsehood only illustrates the urgency of truthful, hopeful living. This new, eschatological, community is the crucial demonstration that salvation affirms creation: salvation does not extract humans from time but restores them in a new time.

Having children anchors Christians to historical time. A parent cannot escape the mundanities of existence in the way a single person can.[375] The inter-generational ties of the family teach us what it means to be historic beings. Being in a family is part of being 'stuck with' a history and a people. If ethics is to be as historical as salvation, it must resist the timeless abstractions of the universal, the abstract, and the moment, and take seriously the habits, ordinariness, and triviality of family life.

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[374]In the discussion that follows, I owe the understanding of salvation to Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence* pp. 147-148, and the discussion of time to Philip D. Kenneson, 'Taking Time for the Trivial: Reflections on Yet Another Book from Hauerwas', *Asbury Theological Journal* 45/1 1990 pp. 70-72.

[375]Janet Martin Soskice summarises this parental 'contingency': 'I have been in the past envious and in awe of colleagues (usually bachelors) who spend their holidays living with monks in the Egyptian desert or making long retreats on Mount Athos. They return refreshed and renewed and say things like "It was wonderful. I was able to read the whole of *The City of God* in the Latin ... something I've not done for three or four years now." I then recall my own "holiday" as entirely taken up with explaining why you can't swim in the river with an infected ear, why two ice creams before lunch is a bad idea, with trips to disgusting public conveniences with children who are "desperate"...'. (Janet Martin Soskice, 'Love and Attention' in Michael McGee ed. *Philosophy, Religion and Spiritual Life* Cambridge University Press p. 61.)

This commitment to historical time is implied by a narrative understanding of revelation. But it also implies an awareness of how things could have been different. The origin of the Christian understanding of having children is itself intimately bound up with historical contingency. The writers of the New Testament did not make marriage and the family the norm for the Christian life: what was required was complete service to the Kingdom. The Christian community was expected to grow through the conversion and baptism of outsiders rather than simply through marriage and procreation from within.[376] As the urgency of the imminent eschaton receded, the legacy remained: marriage and family had ceased to be a natural or moral necessity and had become a vocation - that is, not the result of choice but the result of being called.

The demand for complete service to the Kingdom not only removed the necessity of marriage: it showed that marriage and the family were not objects of loyalty in themselves but were transcended by loyalty to God's rule. Since, as we have seen, God's sovereignty is not to be understood as abstracted from time, it is the Christian community, the Church, that transcends the family.[377] God's salvation infuses all aspects of humanity, including those - language, interpretation, memory, belief, action, understanding - which are inextricably communal.[378]

Whether we ourselves are called to have children or not, we would not be here unless our ancestors and parents had had children. Again, we cannot abstract ourselves from contingency. The only way to know ourselves is through our history: when we talk of inheritance, expectation, change, growth and development, we are using the language of an incipient story. We establish our own identity when we are able to thread together

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[376]This is a clear departure from the Old Testament period, with which in other respects the themes of vocation and historical contingency have much in common.

[377]This is significant for the issue of children's rights. Parents in a Christian community do not raise their children to conform just to what they, the child's particular parents, think right. The parents are the agents of the community's commitments, memories and understandings. The child is able to appeal to these symbols of significance beyond the family - which apply equally to child and parent - thus guaranteeing the necessary moral and physical space to gain independence from his or her parents. The Church has a role in protecting the child: this is exercised not through the rights of the child, but through the higher loyalty of both the parents and the child. Everyone in the community is responsible for children, though not everyone has children: it is not a matter of protecting individual rights but of learning public duties. In the absence of the Church, the child is likely to turn to its peer group or culture to balance the pull of the family to be a substitute church.

[378]See Philip Kenneson 'Taking Time' p. 71.

separate events and realities in our history. Being able to make judgements and give reasons for our actions is an important part of claiming our life as something *we* have done, something that is our own.[379] These judgements and reasons are very often retrospective ones: history is lived forwards and understood backwards. This is all the more reason for needing a sense of a narrative that acknowledges truthfully what we have been yet enables us to go on. For instance, if we treat having children as something that simply happens (or does not happen) to us, we fail to claim our lives and actions as our own.[380] What we need is a story that places having children in a coherent relation to other events in our lives and does not see our actions as either determined or random. Without such a story of and for the self we are particularly vulnerable to those who will offer us their own ideological rendering of our existence. As Hauerwas frequently comments, the ideology of Western liberal democracies is a story which assumes we can live without a story. This leaves us with children but with no idea why we had them. The story that enables Christians to claim the action of having children as their own is the story of salvation whose broad dimensions I have briefly outlined above.

4.6.2. Having Children Demonstrates the Virtue of Patience

The understanding of having children as a vocation within a community rests on a fundamental description of Christian hope. This is the conviction that despite the evidence of misery in the world, God is sovereign, creator and redeemer; though racked with sin, the world and existence are good, and our Lord has given us the skills to deal with sin, in

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[379]Hauerwas' clearest exposition of this point is in his essay 'Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life' *A Community of Character* chapter 7.

[380]Parents do no favours to their children by refraining from teaching them 'values' in order that they might later be free to make up their own minds. This is another doomed effort to free children from contingency. More often, it can mask a moral cowardice, since if we ask our children to believe as we believe, act as we act, and live as we live, we must have the courage to expect ourselves to live faithfully. (See Hauerwas' discussion of this in *A Community of Character* p. 166.) If our values are not good enough for our children, they are not good enough for us. It is less a matter of controlling our children than of being faithful ourselves.

ourselves and others, in a manner that will destroy neither us nor them. In this context, children are our 'promissory note' to present and future generations that we trust the Lord who has called us as his people. Having children witnesses to our belief that life is worth living.

Christian hope expresses the relationship between salvation and time. We saw above that salvation involves time and does not bypass temporal human activities and communities. Yet time seems to be the ultimate unalterable 'given'. Time enslaves us and tyrannises us, as we saw above. And with much wrong that needs righting in the world, having children may appear to be a surrender to the tyranny of time. For having children simply takes up so much time - time that could be spent on scholarship, creating wealth, alleviating poverty, curing disease, or undermining unjust structures.

To the one committed to making the world 'come out right', having children seems an act of despair. On the one hand having children seems pointless and cruel, since one is bringing them into such an unjust world, and one should not be tied down until the world is made fair and just; on the other hand the world seems beyond hope, and having children is a self-indulgent form of capitulation to the status quo. How, in a world of injustice, can having children be anything other than an admission of failure, a complacent retreat to the 'private' realm, in short, an act of either selfishness or despair?

The answer to this pressing question lies again in the manner of salvation discussed above. Salvation establishes a new people, the eschatological people: and a characteristic of that people is that they live in a new time - an eschatological time. Thus all our contemporary society's struggles with time, our greatest enemy, are but another - perhaps the definitive - effort to assert control. Instead, time is a gift. Patience means living in a new time. Just as the kingdom made having children a vocation rather than a necessity, so eschatology makes time, like children, a gift rather than a given.[381] God is sovereign, and not us; the kingdom is of God's making, not ours; the Christian community can afford to spend time on the ordinary and trivial, since the tyranny of time has been broken, and they trust in a 'new' time, in which their salvation and happiness do not depend on how they 'spend' or 'use' their time.

[381] For the distinction between a gift and a given, see chapter five below.

In this 'new' time, Christians can care for those who cannot make the world healthier, wealthier, or wiser. They can comfort one person rather than seek the status of comforting many. They can have time for worship, though the time might have been 'spent' making the world come out 'right'. Such activities, which challenge the prevailing view of time, are eschatological practices. Having children is one of them. Whenever Christian communities engage in such practices, the kingdom breaks in.

4.6.3. Having Children Creates Time

In his early work, Hauerwas is critical of the emphasis on decision in Christian ethics. One of the fruits of this criticism is a recovery of the significance of everyday habits and practices. Having children is one of a number of practices that are generally taken for granted in Christian communities. In Hauerwas' eyes, ethics is about learning to take the right things for granted, about educating one's habits.

Having children is commonly passed over as an ethical issue because it is perceived as being natural, normal and necessary. These are all suppositions about creation. I have pointed out elsewhere that 'natural' and 'normal' are not the value-free terms they at first appear to be. They may certainly be replaced by the word 'common' (or 'trivial'), but, as I have noted, the most ordinary activities of life are among the most significant.

In his' essay 'Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial', Hauerwas unites the themes of time, narrative, peace, and creation, around the commitment to take care over 'trivial' practices. The first step in a two-step argument is that peace and time are closely related.

> Peace takes time. Put even more strongly, peace creates time by its steadfast refusal to force the other to submit in the name of order. Peace is not a static state but an activity which requires constant attention and care. An activity by its very nature takes place over time. In fact, activity creates time, as we know how to characterise duration only by noting that we did this first, and then this second, and so on, until we either got somewhere or accomplished this or that task. So peace is the process through which we

> make time our own rather than be determined by 'events' over which, it is alleged, we have no control.[382]

The second step is to apply this notion of activity to the practice of having children. Having children emerges as the embodiment of the relationship between time and peace.

> Having children is activity in its most paradigmatic form, as the having of a child is its own meaning. Moreover, having children is our most basic time-full project, not only in the sense that children are time-consuming, but because through children our world quite literally is made timeful. Children bind existence temporally, as through them we are given beginnings, middles and ends. They require us to take time and, as a result, we learn that time is only possible as a form of peace.[383]

Hauerwas goes on to maintain that 'the most radical stance possible for any human is the willingness to have a child in the face of injustice, oppression and tyranny. Having children is the ultimate defeat of all totalitarianisms ... Nothing can be more important for us ... than to go on having children.'

'Taking Time for Peace' is a very important essay because it shows how a practice that affirms creation is also an eschatological practice. I shall go on in chapter six to explain how the notion of gift is the most successful way of uniting the beginning and end of the story. In the meantime, it is important to stress that children are a gift.

Children are not the possession of their parents, as might be the case if the parents' choice were the only factor in their birth; they are not the possession simply of the community, as a strong view of the state might imply; nor are they owned by themselves, as the language of rights suggests. Instead they are the possession of God, called and chosen by him. Parents do not so much choose their children as discover them as gifts that are not simply of their own making. Children are therefore a gift. They are not simply under our control, they are not always what we expect or want, the surprises they bring may be ones of pain and suffering rather than joy. As gifts, they do not just supply needs or wants, they create needs, teaching us what wants we should have. Children teach us how to be: they create in us the need to want and love one another. They draw our love to them while refusing to be as we wish them to be.

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[382]'Taking Time for Peace' p. 258.

[383]ibid p. 262.

Having children emerges as a practice crucial to helping Christians understand the doctrine of creation in the light of the eschatological ethic. Children teach us that life is not under our control. The willingness to bear them is an affirmation that time is in safe hands.

4.6.4. Having Children is an Ironic Practice

Having children is therefore an ironic practice. It seems to be one of the few things in life that is under our control, but it turns out to be the opposite. Having children is a recognition that God is in control. Irony is a characteristic of eschatology, since it contrasts the ways of God, who sees all things, with the ways of his people, who see dimly and respond weakly. An eschatological view of having children makes clear that the activity, the child, and the consequences are nothing like so much ours as they appear.

Seeing childrearing as an ironic practice avoids two particular misunderstandings of having children. In the first place, having children is not a direct embodiment of resurrection - as might be understood by saying 'life goes on'. This reductionist view of resurrection is inadequate in the light of the eschatological view offered earlier in this chapter. The vital insight is the connection outlined there between resurrection and forgiveness. Just as resurrection is an ironic commentary on the limitations of human life, so forgiveness is an ironic statement that human sinfulness does not have the last word.

Neither, in the second place, should childrearing be understood in gradualist terms. There is no analogy to be drawn between the growth of children to maturity and the moral growth of the world: this leads to replacing the categories of good and evil with those of past and future. If an analogy is to be drawn it is between having children and the relationship of the Church to wider society. Hauerwas describes the idea that one should not impose one's own values on one's children as 'moral cowardice'.[384] Yet failing to influence the world in the same way is not moral cowardice. Is this inconsistent? Perhaps the answer is that Christians share their values with their children not in order to make them faithful, but in order to be faithful themselves. In the same way they act in the world

[384]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 166.

in a certain way (such as nonviolence) not in order to conform the world to them, but because they see that way as the only way to be faithful to the gospel. It is certainly the case that if the Church is to be cohesive as an ironic satire on contemporary society it must have disciplined training and faithful teachers.

The Church learns to deal with time through the way it learns to understand children. The Christian community learns that children are not a natural, normal or necessary 'given' but a gift. Children are a gift to the Church, teaching the practices of peace. Likewise the Church learns to see time not as an enemy to be controlled but as a gift to be enjoyed. Time is not simply a necessary fact of existence: the way Christians respond to time is a witness to their faith in God's sovereignty. To the extent that the Christian community is called to have children, it is given time to do so.

4.7. Summary

Eschatology brings a shape to Christian theology and in turn to Christian ethics. By providing an end to the story it enables us to perceive that the christian narrative *is* indeed a story, not an endless sequence of events. Since the end is provided from outside, it is not humanity's task to bring this end about. Christian ethics is therefore about acting in accord with the ending that will come about, rather than acting so that a desirable end will come about.

Christians believe that God is trustworthy. His character has been revealed definitively in Jesus Christ. They therefore believe that the character of the eschaton - God's final act - will resemble the character of Christ - God's definitive act. The traditional elements of eschatological thinking - resurrection, thousand-year reign, last judgement,

and the kingdom - affirm what has been said in earlier chapters about the timeful, narrative, communal character of human life.

Viewing human existence from the end of the story lends an ironic perspective to Christian ethics. For the ending of any story exposes the folly of those who had acted assuming an alternative conclusion. If one knows how the story is going to end, and that ending is final, one is more likely to live that way in the middle of the story. It is better to fail in a cause that will finally succeed than to succeed in a cause that will finally fail. The danger of an ironic perspective is that it can lead to a sectarian, quietist, detached gnosticism - the possession of a special knowledge that separates one from the world and makes action unnecessary. This is where the narrative is so important: because God has immersed himself in his world through Israel, Christ, and the Church, Christians must do the same.

This immersion in the 'triviality' of the world expresses the new time in which Christians live. Because they are not anxious about creating a propitious end to the story, they can spend their time doing things that witness their faith that the story has already been assigned an end. Having children is a key practice that affirms Christians' commitment to the contingencies of life while exhibiting their patience and hope.

The Description of Ethics: Improvisation

The argument of this chapter is a bold one. I maintain that the analogy with improvisation in the theatre resolves many of the tensions in Stanley Hauerwas' theological ethics. I begin by examining Hauerwas' initial venture into the moral imagination - his use of Iris Murdoch's notion of vision. I then establish that a tension exists in Hauerwas' discussion of vision and throughout his subsequent work between habit, on the one hand, and moral effort, on the other. I then return to the narrative character of the Christian tradition, and suggest that theological ethics concerns the *performance* of Christian doctrine. Given that the Church faces ever new situations, this performance is closer to improvisation than to simple repetition. Improvisation resolves the tension between habit and moral effort: the dimensions of the analogy are explored in some detail. As in previous chapters, the thesis is tested in relation to a practical example: in this case the response of Christian ethics to a severely mentally and physically handicapped child.

5.1. Vision and Imagination

5.1.1. Vision

The essay 'The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic' is such a landmark in Hauerwas' early work that it is worth outlining its argument in full.[385] It anticipates a transition that later takes place as Hauerwas' centre of gravity shifts from

[385]Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* pp 30-47.

character to narrative. The transition is from ethics as right action to ethics as the vision of God.

Hauerwas describes how the ethical worlds people inhabit vary enormously. One cannot simply adjudicate correct choices based on an even assessment of the facts - for people act in the world that they see, and they see different worlds. It is not just that people select different facts from a common world: they actually see different worlds. One can only choose from within the world one sees. Ethics considers and recommends these different worlds, rather than different choices.

The important thing about the world one sees is that it should be the world as it really is. Virtue is the pursuit of this real world, divested of selfish consciousness. Ethics is directed toward seeing the Good without illusion or fantasy: only love enables us to see, in the unique particularity of circumstance, the key to ultimate destiny. In a phrase that anticipates Milbank, Murdoch describes love as 'the nonviolent apprehension of differences'.[386] Like great art, therefore, love shows aspects of reality to which fantasy or convention usually keep us blind. Love and art require us to allow the existence of things and persons other than ourselves. It is love that makes freedom possible: we learn to be free as we learn to respect and accept things and persons other than ourselves. Freedom is a matter of degree, not an absolute; it concerns the degree to which we respect difference and the other; in short, the degree to which we have adapted to reality. Murdoch's term for the process by which we learn to love the other as an equal is attention. To form our attention, and thus our vision, is a matter of 'moral imagination and moral effort'.[387]

Hauerwas draws two principal conclusions from his discussion. Each of them is picked up in his subsequent work on narrative. The first is that once vision becomes integral to ethics, the latter becomes not so much a debate about decisions as an attempt, through loving attention, to become more like the world that one sees. This point is developed in later work as Hauerwas more fully articulates his Christology under Yoder's guidance The reality of the world is disclosed by Jesus Christ, and it is the Christian's vocation to imitate God's way of dealing with the world as disclosed in the incarnate Son.

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[386]ibid p. 39. See Iris Murdoch 'The Sublime and the Good' *Chicago Review* 13 Autumn 1959 p. 54. Compare John Milbank's phrase 'Christianity ... is the coding of transcendental difference as peace' *Theology and Social Theory* Oxford: Blackwell 1990 pp. 5-6.

[387]Stanley Hauerwas 'The Significance of Vision' p. 42.

The second conclusion is that 'attention' reaffirms the ethical commitment to the everyday and particular, by contrast with the temptation to concentrate on occasional crises.[388] The Christian life is constantly tested by its encounter with reality.

5.1.2. Imagination

Vision drops out of Hauerwas' subsequent discussion to such an extent that it does not even register in the index of *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Why is this? Vision came in for criticism from some of Hauerwas' early critics. Gene Outka points out three ways in which an ethics of vision is incompatible with an ethics of character.[389] Thomas Ogletree correctly anticipates that issues of vision will be absorbed into the emerging category of narrative.[390] Wesley Robbins objects to Hauerwas' assertion that a total vision of life is a necessary precondition of having any specific morality at all.[391] Most of the criticisms hint

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[388]For illustrations of this from another perspective, see Janet Martin Soskice, 'Love and Attention' in Michael McGee ed. *Philosophy, Religion and Spiritual Life* Cambridge University Press p. 61.

[389]Outka's concerns are (a) that Hauerwas has talked of the self as agent whereas Murdoch criticises this; (b) that Murdoch's notion of submission to a vision of reality sits uneasily with human freedom (one can see the influence of Simone Weil here); (c) that Murdoch sees the ego as the enemy of the moral life whereas Hauerwas' early work inclines more toward seeing the enemy as human passivity. Murdoch's understanding of human freedom is largely derived from Simone Weil. For further discussion of freedom, see 1.4.2. and 1.5. above. For Outka's criticisms, see Gene Outka 'Character, Vision, and Narrative' *Religious Studies Review* 6/2 April 1980 pp. 110-118. Hauerwas moves in Murdoch's direction and away from his emphases in *Character and the Christian Life* on all of these issues.

[390]Thomas Ogletree 'Character and Narrative: Stanley Hauerwas' Studies of the Christian Life' *Religious Studies Review* 6/1 January 1980 pp. 24-30.

[391]Robbins claims (a) that Hauerwas' understanding of morality as a 'total vision of life' is as restrictive as those theories Hauerwas opposes - do we, for example, exclude those whose lives are disorganised? (Hauerwas replies that a vision of life is not a *sine qua non* for having morality, but simply a way of affirming the cohesiveness of the Christian story); (b) that theists and polytheists may often act in similar ways (Hauerwas responds that this statement does not therefore mean they have the same morality: to suggest so would artificially separate what people do from why they do it); (c) that Hauerwas' understanding leads to moral relativism (Hauerwas does not provide a theory against moral relativism: he simply challenges people to live out the implications of their position). See J. Wesley Robbins 'On the Role of Vision in Morality' and Stanley Hauerwas 'Learning to See Red Wheelbarrows: On Vision and Relativism' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45 1977 pp. 623-641 and 643-655. See also Paul Nelson *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Enquiry* University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1987 chapter 7.

at the interminable underlying tension between the (broadly Platonic) vision of the good and the (broadly Aristotelian) commitment to the pragmatic outworking of theory in the everyday. Hauerwas' increasing sympathy with theologians such as Lindbeck who concentrate on the detail of cultural practice and with philosophers such as Midgely who affirm the complexity of human life inclines him in an Aristotelian direction. Murdoch's own response to this tension is found largely in the detail of her novels.

I suggest that more important than these criticisms is a general broadening of Hauerwas' understanding of the ethical background - what might be called the prolegomena of morality. In his later work he is less anxious to distance himself from decisionists, and more aware of the communal dimension of moral discernment. What he once focused on as moral vision, he comes to see as part of the whole area of the moral imagination. Imagination encompasses both vision and projected action, both formation and instinct. In the following quotation one can see that his earlier interest in Murdoch's notion of attention is alive and well, but now thoroughly assimilated into his category of narrative:

> There is perhaps no more serious Christian offence than to fail in imagination, that is, to abandon or forget the resources God has given us as the means of calling us to his kingdom.
>
> The Christian community lives through a hope fastened on the imaginative world created by God. ... His reality as the Christ is the resource empowering Christians with the courage to create the necessity of being a peaceable people in a violent world. ... Christians live on hope and learn to trust in an imagination disciplined by God's peaceable kingdom into accepting the cross as the alternative to violence. Our imagination is the very means by which we live morally, and our moral life is in truth the source of our imagination.[392]

In this and several other places Hauerwas suggests that imagination may rightly take the place in Christian ethics that he had once earmarked for vision. Imagination is the active, inward assimilation of the insights of vision.

The tensions in the area of imagination are similar to those experienced when considering vision. They are helpfully brought out by Mary Warnock in her study *Imagination*.[393] Warnock begins with Hume and Kant, and goes on to Schelling; she looks at Romantic thought, especially Coleridge, in detail before going on to Sartre and Wittgenstein. She does not discuss Hegel: in consequence she does not acknowledge

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[392]Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations* p. 59.

[393]London: Faber 1976.

either that in Western philosophy imagination has, in status, traditionally been inferior to intellect, or that imagination is indispensable to religious faith. These omissions are the starting point for James Mackey in his introduction to *Religious Imagination.*[394] Together, these two works establish the place of the imagination in ordinary and religious perception.

As I have suggested, there is a tension between imagination as habit and imagination as moral effort. Warnock distinguishes between imagination understood as an indispensable feature of *all* perception, and imagination understood as a creative characteristic, idiosyncratic to each perceiver. In the first place, Warnock makes clear that

> we use imagination in our ordinary perception of the world. This perception cannot be separated from interpretation. ... Imagination is necessary ... to enable us to recognize things in the world as familiar, to take for granted features of the world which we need to take for granted and rely on, if we are to go about our ordinary business.[395]

The very process of perceiving the world about us at all is to construe it as an organised pattern of objects which we can categorise, name, abstract into concepts, investigate, and to a large extent predict. We understand the nature of objects by referring to their past, by positing their future, and by comparing them with other objects - and none of these alternatives are immediately perceptible; we therefore go beyond the limits of immediate perception by summoning images, and these images are the building blocks from which thoughts emerge.

If we step out of Warnock and Mackey's argument for a moment and glance across to the conventional discussions of morality, it is clear that the argument applies equally well. We do not simply act in a situation. We remember the history of the situation, we suppose its possible future and the consequences of any projected action, and we consider relevant examples of comparable situations. None of these is immediately perceptible; they require memory, interpretation, guesswork, supposition, inspiration: in short, the field of the imagination.

Returning to Warnock and Mackey, there is a second understanding of the term 'imagination':

> Interpretation ... can be inventive, personal, and revolutionary. Imagination is ... also necessary if we are to see the world as significant of something unfamiliar, if we are

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[394]ed J. P. Mackey, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1986.

[395]Mary Warnock *Imagination* p. 10.

> ever to treat the objects of perception as symbolising or suggesting things other than themselves.[396]
>
> The peculiar strength of the imagination is to be able to see simultaneously what is and what might yet be for the best, to engage at the same time the most creative of human passions, and consequently to lure into action and to sustain commitment.[397]

Mackey thus distinguishes between 'what is' and 'what might yet be'. When this distinction has been made it becomes easier to see the tension in the ethics of Stanley Hauerwas. One the one hand lies that which is in the nature of human society - doing most things by habit, sharing assumptions between members of a community, not being aware of most of the decisions one has made - in short, what I have earlier described as 'narrative from below'.[398] On the other hand lie the themes of Hauerwas' later period - the particularities and distinctive claims of the Christian story, the challenge nonviolence makes to the imagination, the significance of martyrdom: these correspond rather more with the Barthian character of the postliberal 'narrative from above'.[399] The first category moves away from an ethics of decision toward an ethics of habit; the second category suggests that these habits, though perhaps undemonstrative, may well be very distinctive, and very hard to develop. Hauerwas moves from commending an ethic of character to recommending what specific character that ethic should have. It is important to recognise that both of these steps involve the moral imagination.

Are the two sets of arguments reconcilable? I suggest they are, and that the point at issue is that identified in Hauerwas' early essay on Murdoch, 'The Significance of Vision'. The key to the tension lies in what one perceives to be the first task of ethics. For Murdoch, ethical debate is less about choices than about different worlds. Moral theologians and philosophers seek to commend the world that they see as the true one. In Hauerwas' later work, he is more influenced by the postliberal claim that the scriptural world *is* the real world, and thus he elaborates how Christians are to live in this world.[400]

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[396]ibid

[397]James Mackey *Religious Imagination* p. 23.

[398]See above 1.6.1. and 2.4.1.

[399]See above 1.6.1. and 2.4.2.

[400]'Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, that absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.' George Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* Philadelphia: Westminster 1984 p. 118.

The important point is that for Hauerwas the moral effort takes place in terms of Christian *formation* - the establishment and maintenance of communities of character; Christian *practice*, by contrast, which others see as an agony of moral choice, is for Hauerwas more a matter of habit and instinct - of not realising, for example, that some time ago one did without thinking what others might regard as an act of great courage. The creative side of the imagination is largely about forming people of character. Moments of moral crisis, by contrast, are emphatically *not* moments of creativity: they are times for doing the obvious - or what has come to seem obvious within the creative formation by the Christian narrative. For example, the practices of nonviolence can only be maintained by people who have become used to establishing other means of resolving conflict: nonviolence is not a spontaneous one-off tactic to disarm an attacker.

In *The Peaceable Kingdom* Hauerwas, in contrast to the general Roman Catholic tradition, recasts the practice of casuistry as an imaginative enterprise. The novelty of associating casuistry with the imagination perhaps reflects a number of misconceptions about imagination and morality. As Hauerwas points out in his essay 'On Keeping Theological Ethics Imaginative'[401], the field of imagination is customarily associated with spontaneity, originality, creativity, the artist, the unexpected, the unpredictable - a world not subject to discipline and necessity, a world full of wayward but tolerated individuals, a world which challenges, threatens, and disrupts the established conventions of our social morality. By contrast the field of morality is that of fulfilling expectations, furthering the common good of society, keeping obligations and maintaining trust, staying in the real world not escaping to an imaginary one.

According to Hauerwas, this dichotomy is a false one. It makes several very doubtful assumptions. Imagination is not the unique preserve of a few talented individuals but a necessity for the whole Christian community. It does not depend entirely on the inspiration of the moment but can be developed through training. Christian ethics is not primarily about fulfilling expectations of the common good of society: many of the conventions of our social morality need threatening and disrupting. Maintaining trust is not a virtue in itself: it depends on the parties maintaining the trust and what practices are required to maintain it. Staying in the real world presupposes that ontological reality

[401] *Against the Nations* pp. 51-60.

corresponds with the necessities of the passing moment - even though retrospect, let alone eschatology, suggests otherwise.

Hauerwas maintains that it is not the task of Christian ethics to underpin the social status quo. Rather its task is to describe the world in which Christians perceive themselves to live and act, and to help the Christian community form practices consistent with life in such a world. When ethics is understood as the adjudication of tricky cases of conscience by balancing moral principles, the practice is implicitly socially conservative - since it assumes there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the status quo, only with its anomalies. In contrast, the Christian community lives within a tradition based on a story which in many respects contradicts the assumptions of the contemporary social status quo. How then does the community faithfully live out its story? This is the field of casuistry. Casuistry, for Hauerwas, is

> the process by which a tradition tests whether its practices are consistent (that is, truthful) or inconsistent in the light of its basic habits and convictions or whether these convictions require new habits and behaviour. ... We only recognise certain dangers and challenges because we have been trained to do so by the narrative that has bound our lives. It is true that in the beginning we perhaps do not recognise such dangers to be part of the narrative but as we 'grow into the story' we see more fully its implications. Casuistry is the reflection by a community on its experience to test imaginatively the often unnoticed and unacknowledged implications of its narrative commitments.[402]

Once a community has made a prior commitment that, for instance, the kingdom of God embodied in Jesus demands a response which must be nonviolent, imagination is essential if Christian practice is to be delivered from a callous self-righteousness which preserves its own integrity at the expense of the welfare of others. Many pacifists assume, like those they oppose, that it is the armies and markets that determine the meaning of history. It is possible for a community to deny that this is the case; but it takes imagination for such a community to live as if it believes that it is the cross, rather than the armies or markets, that determines history's meaning. Such a commitment assumes the formation of people used to the practices of nonviolence. Ethics in a given situation then becomes less a matter of making a decision than of using our imaginations (informed by a truthful narrative) to describe the situation in a perspective that enables the community to act in a

[402]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* London: S.C.M. 1983 p. 120.

manner consistent with its moral commitments and habits. This perspective may well reveal that less in the situation is 'given' than at first appeared.

5.2. Performance

In chapter two I discussed the extent to which the truth of a narrative might be assessed by the performance of that narrative.[403] I now return to the notion of performance as a way of understanding the use of the Bible in Christian ethics.

Nicholas Lash develops this notion of performance in his essay 'Performing the Scriptures'.[404] Taken together, he argues, the texts of the New Testament 'tell the story' of Jesus and the early communities of believers. It is the life and practices of the believing community that are the fundamental form of the *Christian* interpretation of scripture. The performance of scripture is the life of the Church. Lash goes on to argue

> that Christian practice, as interpretative action, consists in the *performance* of texts which are construed as 'rendering', bearing witness to, one whose words and deeds, discourse and suffering, 'rendered' the truth of God in human history. The performance of the New Testament enacts the conviction that these texts are most appropriately read as the story of Jesus, the story of everyone else, and the story of God.[405]

Lash illustrates this by pointing to the American society, whose life, activity and organisation are the enactment of the American constitution. Thus the scriptures are the 'constitution' of the Church, and Christian ethics concerns their enactment. In the performance of a play there must always be an element of creativity which enables the performers to make the text a living event. Lash describes the eucharist as the best

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[403] See above 2.4.3.

[404] *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* London: S.C.M. 1986 pp. 37-46.

[405] ibid p. 42.

illustration of the interpretative performance that is the whole of the Christian life. Praise, confession and petition enact the meanings they embody. The story is told in order that it may be performed when the participants depart in peace: 'the quality of our *humanity* will be the criterion of the adequacy of our performance'.[406]

Times and circumstances change, however, and there is no final or definitive interpretation of either constitution or scripture. This is a problem for Lash. He is concerned that the finality of God's self-disclosure in Christ should not be impeded. He concludes that those performing the text should continue to understand the question to which this text sought to provide an answer. If the text ascribed unsurpassable significance to the life and death of this one man, then appropriate performance should do the same. The story is told differently: but it must continue to be the same story.

What remains unclear from the ethical implications of Lash's conclusion is what the Christian community is to do when it faces circumstances in which it is not clear how the story is to be performed. Christian ethics cannot, unlike *King Lear*, be read off the page of the text: Christians do not have 'parts' in the drama, with 'lines' pre-prepared and learnt by heart. Frances Young hints at this issue in the last chapter of her book *The Art of Performance*.[407] She talks of the practice of cadenzas in concertos. The performer of a cadenza keeps to the style and themes of the concerto, but also shows virtuosity and inspiration in adapting and continuing in keeping with the setting and form. However Young's vision of performance is very limited - considering only the hermeneutical skills needed by the preacher and teacher. What of the skills needed by the Christian community as a whole?

Walter Brueggemann discusses in some detail the notion of Biblical faith as drama.[408] He notes several dimensions of drama that make the metaphor attractive. Drama must sustain both the constancy and the development of character, so that the third act is consistent with the first, without being a simple repetition. One is told all one needs to

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[406]ibid p. 46, italics original.

[407]London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1990. See also Stephen Barton 'Biblical Interpretation as Performance' unpublished paper 1994.

[408]Walter Brueggemann *The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination: Texts Under Negotiation* London: S.C.M. 1993, especially pp. 64-70.

know about the characters by what happens to them on stage.[409] There is a settled script - yet one which can be rendered in a variety of ways. He describes our life as 'a collage of dramas, in which we cope with significant others, in which we struggle for constancy and freedom, and in which we find ourselves endlessly scripted but seeking to act gracefully and freely, to work the script in a new way.'[410] Drama teaches us that we need other characters to play with and against: the Biblical drama teaches us that God is 'a genuinely other character who takes a decisive role in the drama', and that we are 'others' to God.[411]

Like Young, Brueggemann limits his perspective to that of the preacher and teacher.[412] Brueggemann's view is incomplete because it does not incorporate the activity of a *community* of interpretation; and because it does not offer ways in which such a community might face ethical practice in the future. There is insufficient attention to the sense of open-endedness of the drama. It is not just a question of repeating the same script, albeit in different ways: Brueggemann's account needs an extra dimension.

It is clear from Lash, Young and Brueggemann that theatrical (and also musical) performance is a very helpful way of understanding the role of the Bible in Christian ethics. This is especially the case for Stanley Hauerwas, who in his early work discusses the method of assessing the truth of Christian convictions by their performance in Christian communities. Yet the analogy clearly needs more than simply the reproduction of the Christian scriptures in ever-changing circumstances.

What I now offer is an analogy that develops this notion of Christian ethics as the performance of scripture, while taking note both of the inadequacy of mere repetition, and of the presence in the moral imagination of both habit and creative effort. I offer a model of Christian ethics along the lines of improvisation in the theatre.

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[409]This observation has much in common with Hans Frei's notion of the way Mark's gospel 'renders' the identity of Jesus. See Hans Frei *The Identity of Jesus Christ* Philadelphia: Fortress 1975.

[410]Walter Brueggemann *The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination* p. 67.

[411]ibid p. 68. Brueggemann's most suggestive words are these: 'Barth has made clear that the God of the Bible is "Wholly Other". In conventional interpretation, the accent has been on "wholly", stressing the contrast and discontinuity. When, however, accent is placed on "other", dramatic interpretation can pay attention to the dialectical, dialogical interaction in which each "other" impinges upon its partner in transformative ways. That is, "otherness" need not mean distance and severity, but can also mean dialectical, transformative engagement with. (p. 106 n. 19.)

[412]'The minister enacts the drama and invites members of the listening, participating congregation to come be in the drama as he or she chooses or is able' (p. 68).

5.3. Improvisation

I shall use as my model of theatrical improvisation Keith Johnstone's work *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*.[413] I shall start by examining some of the misgivings that may be felt at entering this area, before going on to examine the parallels and insights to be made.

I shall begin by returning to Hauerwas' observation that 'There is perhaps no more serious Christian offence than to fail in imagination, that is, to abandon or forget the resources God has given us as the means of calling us to his kingdom.'[414] As I have already argued, this refers to imagination in both a creative (formative) sense, and a habitual (practical) sense. In what sense is sin a failure of the imagination? The strenuous ethic of the synoptic gospels expressed particularly in the parables and the Sermon on the Mount stretches the imagination of the disciple: Jesus' teaching pushes us to the very edge and almost beyond what we generally accept to be possible. Given that the future will be an unanticipated rearrangement of the materials of the present, it is appropriate that Jesus' ethic is in an eschatological perspective. The present is given possibilities, and judged, by a promised future.

In this perspective one improvises by behaving in the light of the eschatological promise. One improvises well by finding a response that enables one to act in the present in accordance with the world pictured by the parables, accepting that this may place one on the way of the cross. One improvises badly when one fails to hope in the promised eschatological future, falling back instead on one's own originality, one's own ability to create a world in which to act. This is our sin, our assumption that it is up to us to create the world, our resistance to living in the world that God has created. Our sin refuses to let our imagination enter the kingdom into which God invites us. The kingdom is almost unimaginable, only made imaginable by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

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[413]London: Methuen 1981.

[414]*Against the Nations* p. 59.

Some of the differences between improvisation in the theatre and living in accordance with eschatological hope can be explained by the role of the audience. The behaviour of improvising actors is amusing and engaging, and often challenging, so long as it does not appear to be out of control or perverted. If the audience were not seated a safe distance away, and the participants, though still improvising, were not acting, the process would be much more threatening, and perhaps close to violence. For it is not an easy thing to be with people who may be out of control.[415] Those who are prepared to live life 'out of control' in the manner that Hauerwas advocates must expect hostility from those many who find the presence of such people intolerable. An 'improvising community' might well receive treatment comparable to that received by people with a mental handicap. This latter group already experiences much of society's inability to cope with those whom it perceives to be out of control. It may be that an 'improvising community' will have a great deal to learn from the experience of such people.

5.3.1. Keeping the story going

Much of the fear of improvisation derives from a fear of the unconscious, and an unstated suspicion that unconscious thoughts and desires are generally sinful. Such a fear suggests that the future, and the self, particularly the self in a group, are dangerous.

In his chapter dealing with narrative skills, Keith Johnstone describes a game called 'Word at a time', in which he asks one student for the first word of a story, and another for the second word, and another for the third word, and so on. This is played in a circle as quickly as possible. Johnstone's comments on the game are illuminating:

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[415]Hauerwas describes his view of living life out of control in the sixth of his ten theses for the reform of Christian social ethics in *A Community of Character* p. 11: 'To do ethics from the perspective of those 'out of control' means Christians must find the means to make clear to both the oppressed and the oppressor that the cross determines the meaning of history. Christians should thus provide imaginative alternatives for social policy as they are released from the 'necessities' of those that would control the world in the name of security. For to be out of control means Christians can risk trusting in gifts, as they have no reason to deny the contingent character of our existence.

> Anyone who tries to control the future of the story can only succeed in ruining it. Every time you add a word, you know what word you would like to follow. Unless you can continually wipe your ideas out of your mind you're paralysed. ... Once you say whatever comes to mind, then it's as if the story is being told by some outside force. ... The group learn that this method of storytelling won't work unless they relax, stop worrying about being 'obvious' and remain attentive.[416]

What is being described here is clearly an activity of the imagination; but Johnstone is demonstrating the point I made earlier in this chapter in my distinction between the imagination of creative effort and the practical imagination of habit - what Johnstone calls 'being "obvious"'. I said earlier that the mistake in Christian ethics is to regard the moment of decision as the occasion for spontaneous creativity: I went on to say that sin is a falling back on our own originality, our own ability to create a world. Johnstone's game 'Word at a time' illustrates what happens when participants fail to trust their own characters - characters that have been formed by the time the game begins.[417] The 'sin' in a game such as 'Word at a time' is to kill the story. This is done by forcing which way the story is to go - trying to control its future, insisting on being clever or original, or closing it without reference to the foregoing content whenever it threatens to become obscene, psychotic, or unoriginal. The sin does not consist in having unconscious thoughts, or in their disclosure, but in withholding those thoughts.

What is required is an imagination that enables us to keep the story going. This is where it is important to remember that the story is not just *our* story. The originality lies in the story already: this is the sense in which we are continuing to perform the Christian story whose decisive elements have already been set in place. Nothing we can do will be so bad that it could pervert the whole story. The creative side of the imagination is

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[416]Keith Johnstone *Impro* p. 131.

[417]When Johnstone took to composing letters in this word-at-a-time fashion he found that they tended to go through four discernable stages (pp 132-3). At first the letters were usually cautious or nonsensical and full of concealed sexual references. Then they became obscene and psychotic, before developing deep religious feeling, and finally expressing vulnerability and loneliness. Johnstone goes on to point out that improvisations go through similar stages, provided they are not censored. He comments: 'Sanity is ... a way we *learn* to behave. (It) has nothing directly to do with the way you think. It's a matter of presenting yourself as *safe*. ... A Canadian study on attitudes to mental illness concluded that it was when someone's behaviour was perceived as "unpredictable" that the community rejected them' (p. 83). His comments on obscenity are similar. The point is that definitions of sanity and obscenity vary but are largely concerned with making social behaviour predictable, safe, and therefore acceptable. But these are all epithets that the Christian community is likely to question. Many of the fears concerning improvisation of this kind are thus not well founded.

employed in forming us to be the kind of people who have the courage to keep the story going, even when it looks dangerous or when it threatens to reveal uncomfortable parts of ourselves.

It is the aim of the forthcoming discussion to avoid the common shortcomings of the various forms of Christian ethics. How can one prevent a deontological ethic from callously saying 'no'? How can one prevent a consequential ethic from trying to control the future? How can one prevent a narrative ethic from being limited to one interpretation of one text?

5.3.2. Blocking and Accepting Offers

> There are people who prefer to say 'Yes', and there are people who prefer to say 'No'. Those who say 'Yes' are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say 'no' are rewarded by the safety they attain. There are far more 'No' sayers around than 'Yes' sayers, but you can train one type to behave like the other.[418]

Johnstone describes anything an actor does as an 'offer'. Every time an offer is made, it can be either 'accepted' or 'blocked' by the other actors. To block means to prevent the action from developing, or to 'wipe out your partner's premise'.[419] Saying no is therefore usually a block (but not always, since it may enable the action to continue - for example if one has been asked to leave and one refuses to do so). Johnstone describes what it is like to be in the practice of accepting all offers.

> Good improvisers seem telepathic; everything seems prearranged. This is because they accept all offers made - which is something no 'normal' person would do. ... Once you learn to accept offers then accidents can no longer interrupt the action. ... The actor who will accept anything that happens seems supernatural; it's the most marvellous thing about improvisation: you are suddenly in contact with people who are unbounded, whose imagination seems to function without limit. ... People with dull lives often think that their lives are dull by chance. In reality everyone chooses more or less what kind of events will happen to them by their conscious patterns of blocking and yielding.[420]

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[418]ibid p. 92.

[419]ibid p. 97.

[420]ibid pp. 99-100.

Accepting in this way might be seen as a very dangerous exercise. It is a popular perception that the Church, for instance, is principally concerned with saying no - that is, in Johnstone's terms, blocking. It is worth noting that blocking is likely to be subtly aggressive. While a commitment to accept allows space for the other and recognizes one's dependence on the other, a determination to block undermines the other. Accepting shares a space and requires imagination how to continue to do so; blocking denies the other space and refuses to use the imagination.

It may be objected that accepting would be all very well in a prelapsarian world, but is inappropriate in a world where there is much evil that must be resisted. This is an argument familiar from criticisms of the nonviolent ethic propounded by Hauerwas and Yoder. The response is similar to theirs: while the question of which response (nonresistant or 'realist'/'responsible') is most *effective* is unresolved, the issue is rather which response is the most *faithful* to the gospel. The mistake is to assume that giving up the resort to violence is inextricably quietist and passive. There are ways of retaining the initiative which are not violent.[421]

5.3.3. Overaccepting gifts

The most suggestive manner of retaining the initiative without 'blocking' is the response that Johnstone calls 'overaccepting'. This is illustrated by a game called 'Presents'. Imagine a game which is played in pairs. Person A thinks of a present they would like to give to person B, and then mimes giving it to them. Person B has to guess what it is, and use it accordingly. Person B then does the same to person A, and so on. The trouble with

[421] John Howard Yoder is never short of illustrations on this theme. He contrasts the way native North Americans chose a military option against the colonisers and were defeated. The result is the demoralised and degraded state of their culture today. By contrast the native South Americans were unable or unready to defend themselves, and were overrun by the Spanish and Portuguese. Yet today their culture and population are a significant feature of South American religion and society. This is a perfect contrast of 'blocking' and 'accepting'. John H. Yoder *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* ed. Michael Cartwright Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1994 p. 213.

this game is, of course, that it can be difficult to identify what the gift is; the players can get frustrated with each other, as each mimes more and more outlandish gifts, leaving the other more and more bewildered. Each actor seems in competition, and feels it. The secret to make the game a success is, not to think of interesting things to give, but to concentrate on making the thing one is *given* as interesting as possible. If person A simply holds out two hands, as if to hold a box, person B may be delighted to receive an array of possible gifts: 'Everything you are given delights you. Maybe you wind it up and let it walk about the floor, or you sit it on your arm and let it fly off after a small bird, or maybe you put it on and turn into a gorilla.'[422] If the game is played this way, the stifling sense of competition disappears, and great joy and energy are released.

To see all offers as potential gifts involves an enormous change in thinking. Whereas putting the emphasis on the giver requires the kind of imagination that determines the future, and can lead to great frustration if the gift is misinterpreted, emphasizing the receiver requires an imagination that cooperates and adapts.

What the gift game pictures is a revolution in thinking about Christian ethics. Person B has three options when offered a present by person A. She can say (1) no, I am not going to receive this gift. Saying no appears, in the short term, to maintain one's own security. Throughout Christian history there have always been groups which said no to all 'gifts' which came their way from wider society. The Plymouth Brethren might be said to represent this position today. There are many things to which it is often said the wider church should say no to today. Everyone has their own list, sometimes including tobacco and alcohol, sometimes abortion and euthanasia, sometimes nuclear weapons and embryo research. Most churches have recognised that one cannot say no to one's culture wholesale. To do so is to deny the goodness of God's creation, and to declare war on society.

So, what else can person B do? She can say (2) what *is* this gift? What is it *for*? What am I *supposed* to do with it? This is the way the game is usually played, as I have described above. It is also the way the game is usually played in Christian ethics. Person B accepts the gift, but does not know what the gift is. The dilemma of person B as to the

[422]Keith Johnstone *Impro* p. 101.

nature of the gift corresponds to the moment of decision I discussed in chapter one.[423] For just as the present is given by person A in the game, so are circumstances 'given' at moments of decision, and the decision-maker must adjudicate between them. And just as the game is frustrating when played this way, so is decision-making often immensely trying. The assumption is often made that there *is* a right thing to do in each circumstance. Such reasoning is often based on natural law. Natural law arguments tend to assume that everything was created for a purpose, and that when it is employed about its correct purpose all is well. This is the position of person B: desperately wondering what this gift is *for*.

There is a third option. Person B can say (3) how do I want to *receive* this gift? This is the transition that I have described in the way the gift game is played above. It is not a question of what the gift is *supposed* to be: it is a question of what the gift *can* be. One does not say 'What is this gift *for*?' - and even less 'Is this a good gift?'; one says 'How can this gift be understood or used in a faithful way?', 'What does the way we accept this gift say about the kind of people we are and want to be?', 'What can (or has) this gift become in the kingdom of God?' The ethical issues are less about the gift itself than about where it is perceived to fit into the story of the way God deals with his people and how that fitting-in takes place.

When God builds his kingdom he does not toss away the raw material, as in (1) above: nor does he accept us on our own terms, as in (2) above. Instead, he 'overaccepts' us - he sees what we can be, and by the way he incorporates us into his kingdom, through his incarnation, his cross and resurrection, he demonstrates his character, the kind of God he is. In just the same way, Christian ethics, which is about imitating the character of God, strives to overaccept the gifts offered by creation and culture.

In another overaccepting game, called 'It's Tuesday', inconsequential remarks (that is, 'dull offers') are overaccepted so as to produce the maximum possible effect on the acceptor. Thus:

> A: It's Tuesday.
> B: No ... it can't be ... It's the day predicted for my death by the old gypsy! [Dies horribly, saying] Feed the goldfish.
> A: That's all he ever thought about, that goldfish. ... Fifty years' supply of ants' eggs, and what did he leave to me - not a penny. I shall write to mother.

[423]See 1.2.2 above.

B: [Recovering] Your mother! You mean Milly is still alive? [and so on][424]

The apparently trivial nature of what the actors actually say in this example should not obscure the importance of what is happening. What overaccepting opens up is a whole approach to nonviolent response by a Christian community schooled in the scriptural story. The method is similar to what Milbank describes as Christianity's ability to 'outnarrate' all secular stories. Many of the 'offers' the Church in general or Christians in particular receive are 'dull' ones, represented by Actor A's first remarks above. But many offers are challenging, threatening, and urgent: the 'sectarian passivist' response would be to 'block', while the 'responsible realist' approach might be to 'accept' without reservation. The search for a third way leads us to overaccepting. Overaccepting fits the remarks of the previous actor into a context enormously larger than his or her counterpart could have supposed. This is exactly what the Christian community does with offers that come to it from wider society. It overaccepts in the light of the Church's tradition and story seen in eschatological perspective - a perspective much wider than urgent protagonists may have imagined.

Tom Wright makes a very pertinent analogy when he speaks of world history as a five-act drama.[425] The story moves through creation, the Jews, and Jesus, and finishes with the eschaton. The Church finds itself in Act Four. While secular society supposes itself to be in a one-act play (what Hauerwas calls 'the story that we have no story'), the Church knows itself to be bounded in past and future by God's decisive acts. Hence the Church can overaccept the pressing secular demands by outnarrating them - fitting them into a much larger story, one which begins at creation and ends with the eschaton, where the main character is God, and where the definitive event is Jesus Christ.

Those who see world history as a one-act play can only see events as governed by human choices at best and fate at worst. The perspective of the five-act drama transforms fate into destiny. Conventional ethics, because it is so anxious to establish what is right for everyone, everywhere, at all times, plays down the distinctive claims of the Christian story. It assumes that we must accept the givens of the contemporary world, and make decisions

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[424]Keith Johnstone *Impro* p. 102.

[425]N.T. Wright *The New Testament and the People of God* London: S.P.C.K. 1992 p. 141.

based on those givens. What I am suggesting, by contrast, is that we use our imaginations to see how the gifts of creation and culture fit into the story of the way God deals with the world, given that the fundamental decision has already been made - God's decision for humanity and creation in Christ.

The temptation narratives in Matthew and Luke are a particularly illuminating illustration of overaccepting.[426] Jesus appears to say no: no to turning stones to bread, no to jumping off the pinnacle of the temple and no to ruling the kingdoms of the world. As the gospel unfolds, we see how each of the temptations is not so much suppressed as fitted into a far greater story, a story of a much larger 'yes', of which the incarnation is the most striking element.

The first temptation, 'command these stones to become loaves of bread', is the desire to be independent of the grace of God, to have food on demand and one's future secure. Something Israel had always wanted. Jesus of course says no to the gimmick. But he says yes to bread, overaccepting it in the words 'This is my body, broken for you', and 'I am the bread of life: whoever comes to me will never be hungry'.

The second temptation - 'throw yourself from the pinnacle of the temple, for the angels will bear you up' is the desire, as Hauerwas comments, to be the priest of priests - to force God's hand as the sacrifice God can't refuse. But throughout the gospel story we see Jesus fulfilling not his own will but the Father's. The resurrection is the Father's thorough endorsement of Jesus' whole life as the manifestation of the kingdom. Jesus says yes to the Temple, not as a high diving-board, but as the new Temple, his body, the Church.

The last temptation is about power. 'All these kingdoms I will give you, if you will just worship me'. Jesus says yes to power - but the power of God is the power of humility and weakness. Jesus says yes to peace - but peace can only come through the worship of the living God. Jesus overaccepts this temptation on Ascension Day, ruling at the right hand of the Father, and on Easter Day, as the power of love conquers the tomb. Jesus says yes to the kingdoms because he is the King who reigns from the tree. The kingdom of

[426]Hauerwas discusses the temptations in *The Peaceable Kingdom* (pp. 78-9), when he sees them as the recapitulation of God's way with Israel. See 4.4.4. above. My discussion is an improvisation on Hauerwas' approach.

God is crowned on the cross. Thus each of the devil's temptations is revealed as offering a world far smaller, a story far shorter, than the one the kingdom reveals.

To return to a theme explored in chapter one above, it should now be much clearer how my proposals about causality affect the rest of the thesis.[427] I argued that we may see character as the formal cause, while the self is the material and efficient cause, and the Church - the *communio sanctorum* - is the final cause. The shortcomings of conventional ethics largely concern their concentration on the final cause - as if there were a consensus on the other three causes. This is the attempt to do value-free ethics, where outside observers are all agreed on the first three causes and meet to debate the fourth, final cause. I suggested that with Hauerwas the emphasis shifts away from the final cause, or purpose, toward the efficient cause, or purposer. In other words, we do not act according to the purposes contained in things in themselves (as in some natural law approaches); things are, to a large extent, what we make of them. In the language of improvisation, this enables us to make the journey from 'accepting' the simple facts of a gift to 'overaccepting' - perceiving what that gift could be in the kingdom. Accepting the gift keeps attention on the material and final causes - the nature and purpose of the gift itself. Overaccepting the gift shifts attention to the formal and efficient causes - where the gift can be fitted into the story and how that fitting in takes place.[428]

Hauerwas expands on a similar notion of gift in the fourth of his 'ten theses toward the reform of Christian social ethics':

> Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills to transform fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as a gift.[429]

One may see an ethic overawed by fate as one which concentrates on material causes, the unavoidable and unalterable 'givenness' of things. An ethic of destiny, by contrast, asserts that the kingdom, rather than the materiality of things, has the last word. It is less a question of what things *are*, than of what they can become or are becoming.

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[427] See 1.5. above.

[428] 'The problem lies not in knowing *what* we must do, but *how* we are to do it.' Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 131.

[429] Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 10.

Hauerwas' conception of the stranger as gift and Johnstone's conception of overaccepting are highly suggestive when seen together. Hauerwas' phrase 'transform fate into destiny' summarizes the nonresistant approach of renouncing violence while not losing the initiative. It is upto the receiver to make something out of the gift, and communities that have renounced violence are more commonly in the position of receiver than of giver.[430] However this is not simply a matter of passively receiving one's fate.

It is helpful to make a distinction between 'givens' and 'gifts'. The emphasis in 'givens' is on the material and final cause; in 'gifts', upon the efficient and formal cause. It is the task of the imagination to change or challenge the presumed 'necessities' of the world, to resist the implication that what the Christian community receives are 'givens' rather than 'gifts'. In this sense, 'givens' are things that are simply there and the community must simply adapt to, if it is to remain in the 'real' world, whereas 'gifts' are largely what we make of them. For 'Christian realists', the task of Christian ethics is to adapt to such 'givens' as prevail in the contemporary world - the objective material causes of life. Ethics becomes a process of adjudicating between competing 'givens'.[431] Since the emphasis of givenness is on the giver, ethics is primarily seen from the point of view of those who are in the best position to control the majority of the giving - that is, the powerful. It is thus supposed that if Christians put themselves in positions of power they will influence the 'givens' in a positive way. This corresponds to Michel de Certeau's notion of a 'strategy', to which I referred in chapter three.[432] A strategy concentrates on locating power in a particular place, and making forays (we can here call them 'gifts') into unknown or enemy territory.

For the nonviolent Christian community, by contrast, the only 'given' is the Church's narrative: all else is potentially 'gift'. It is not therefore a question of putting oneself in a position of power. Ethics is not principally about how to do the giving. God is

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[430]Hauerwas himself describes movingly how difficult it can sometimes be to be the recipient of a gift, when he tells of the gun his father gave him as a present and of his own self-righteous response. See *A Community of Character* 145-147.

[431]'We are not to accept the world with its hates and resentments as a given, but to recognise that we live in a new age which makes possible a new way of life'. Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 85.

[432]See above 3.4.3.

the only true giver. His story of how he deals with his people is the definitive 'given'. Ethics is done by people who are on the *receiving* end, working out how to accept (or 'overaccept') things that present themselves as 'givens' but cannot be since there is only one 'given' - the narrative of scripture and the Church's tradition. This corresponds to Michel de Certeau's notion of a 'tactic'. A tactic does not have a space of its own, but gets by through hand to hand *ad hoc* encounters (what we can here call 'receiving'). It is the art of the weak, rather than the powerful. 'Overaccepting' is one method of receiving, in that by 'overaccepting' one places the apparent 'given' within a larger story and thus renders it a 'gift'.

The process of transforming fate into destiny can be seen as a threefold process: first recognising that much of what seems 'given' is in fact 'gift' (this is the result of reversing the importance of material and efficient causes); second realising that the key to a 'gift' is not its intrinsic nature or purpose but in how we respond and accept it (this is the efficient cause in action); and third receiving the gift in such a way that it becomes part of the continuing story of the way God deals with his people. Thus is fate (a 'given') transformed into destiny (a 'gift').[433]

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[433]The perspective I have outlined has common features with that of Garrett Green (*Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* San Francisco: Harper and Row 1989 especially pp. 137-45). Green points out that living 'as if' implies living contrary to ('given') fact. By contrast, living 'as' acknowledges no 'given', but exposes the presumption of the generally accepted ('given') 'as', and treats the new 'as' as an 'is'. It is a welcoming of the postmodern rejection of 'given' definitions, and a recognition that each rival 'as' must now be argued out - or performed. Walter Brueggemann sees the Christian gospel as a 'counter-"as"'(*The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination* p. 15). He illustrates the revolutionary power of a new 'as' by citing André Brink's novel *A Change of Voices* (New York: Penguin 1983), in which a group of South African slaves hear that the British are about to invade and free them, and, anticipating their liberation, rise up and kill their owners. Brueggemann also (p. 16) commends the way David Bryant (in his *Faith and the Play of the Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion* Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 1989) amends Green's 'see "as"' to 'take "as"'. 'Take "as"' implies a much more active process than simple reception.

I suggest that the journey from Garrett Green's 'see "as"' to David Bryant's 'take "as"', corresponds to the journey I have commended from Iris Murdoch's 'vision' to Keith Johnstone's 'overaccepting'. I am proposing that the Christian community overaccepts what may previously have been regarded as givens - and thereby treats them as gifts; this has much in common with Bryant's (and Brueggemann's) notion of 'take "as"' - though I suggest the notion of 'overaccepting' is a more far-reaching one. I am also concerned that 'take "as"' implies a choice - to take or to leave. But the Christian community seldom has such a choice. Overaccepting gives the Christian community a way of addressing those forces and issues that threaten to overwhelm it - a way of making part of their destiny what would otherwise become their fate.

5.3.4. Skill

Hauerwas refers to the community's need 'to provide the skills to transform fate into destiny'. What are these skills and how does one go about acquiring them? How is the Christian community to develop the ability to treat apparent 'givens' as 'gifts', and thus transform fate into destiny? It is clearly a great feat of the imagination, and, as such, appears awesome and impossible to any but the most talented.

It is important to retain the distinction I made earlier in this chapter between imagination as a feature of all perception (the imagination of habit) and imagination as a creative enterprise (the imagination of moral effort).[434] The association of imagination with creativity and improvisation with originality stresses their oddness and elusiveness. Is this really how creative people experience their craft? More often it is discipline and training that provide them with the skills to perceive the unexpected - that which lies unrecognized or taken for granted because no one has the skill to see its significance. The skills of the artist's craft may take years to develop. 'Spontaneity ... is but the outcome of years of training and practice and thousands of experiments'[435]. This training includes the discovery of the limits of the discipline which it seeks to explore.

Though imagination is not the preserve of the few, neither is it to be equated with self-expression. Another fear about improvisation is that it is simply self-indulgence. To the extent that it is an art, this is not the case. All artists operate within a tradition, using or commenting on a set of shared guidelines.

> An artist used to be seen as a medium through which something else operated. He was the servant of the God. Maybe a mask-maker would have fasted and prayed for a week before he had a vision of the mask he was to carve, because no one wanted to see *his* mask, they wanted to see the God's. When Eskimos believed that each piece of bone only had one shape inside it, then the artist didn't have to 'think up' an idea. He had to wait until he knew what was in there - and this is crucial. When he'd finished carving his friends couldn't say 'I'm a bit worried about that Nanook at the third igloo', but only, 'He made a mess getting that out!' or 'There are some very odd bits of bone about these days'. ... Once we believe that art is self-expression, then the individual can be criticised not only for his skill or lack of skill, but simply for being what he is.[436]

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[434]Johnstone points out that moral effort arises only when people try to limit their imagination to what will be thought acceptable. Otherwise the creative imagination can be quite effortless. He shows how ingenious people can be in maintaining prejudices in the face of overwhelming evidence, for instance constantly adapting an argument in order to continue to discriminate against minorities (*Impro* p. 80-1).

[435]Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* p. 52.

[436]Keith Johnstone *Impro* pp. 78-9.

An ethic based on community and shared tradition will not reduce art or ethics to self-expression. It need not deny the self, but it understands that the self apart from community and tradition is an abstraction. The Christian is given skills to transform self-expression into Christian life. These skills are found in the narrative of Israel, Christ, and the Church.

The convictions of the Christian community, which enable the community to transform 'givens' into 'gifts', resemble the skills of the artist. These convictions picture a world where the cross of Christ determines the meaning of history, the stranger is regarded as a gift, the weak command unconditional care, and forgiveness is both a possibility and a duty. These are convictions which become assumptions, habits and even reflexes through years of practised use. It is these skills, rather than moments of rational decision, that will frame Christian life.

> Our convictions, then, are much like the skills of artists, forming us to be the kinds of people capable of corresponding to the way the world ought to be but is not. Our imagination prompts us to do what is necessary to share in God's way with the world.[437]

The obsession with escaping the prison of convention can deliver an improviser into another prison: a prison of trying too hard to be original. This comes from a misunderstanding of the nature of spontaneity.

> The improviser has to realise that the more obvious he is, the more original he appears. ... People trying to be original always arrive at the same boring old answers. Ask people to give you an original idea and see the chaos it throws them into. If they said the first thing that came into their head, there'd be no problem.
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> An artist who is inspired is being *obvious*. He's not making any decisions, he's not weighing up one idea against another. ... How else could Dostoyevsky have dictated one novel in the morning and one in the afternoon for three weeks in order to fulfil his contracts?[438]

Accepting 'gifts' is not the business of moments of inspiration but of years of practice. We may see the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of the kingdom in this light. They train us to perceive givens as gifts. The poor, the hungry, the peacemaker, and the persecuted for righteousness' sake are those whom God blesses.[439] This forms the way

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[437]Stanley Hauerwas *Against the Nations* p. 57.

[438]Keith Johnstone *Impro* pp. 87-8.

[439]Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon *Resident Aliens* Nashville: Abingdon 1989 pp. 88-9.

we see our own community. The vast proportion of things people do they do by habit. The Christian community strives to form practices from its convictions, and form habits from its practices. Thus it should act faithfully by habit rather than by conscious decision. Decisions are a last resort: the real moral creativity and moral effort lie not at the moment of crisis but in the formation of habits and practices. The gospels train our instincts not to recognise and adjudicate givens but to perceive gifts. Though perhaps strange, and even original, to the wider society, these actions seem obvious to the Christian community itself: they are unaware of making a decision - indeed, they do the first thing that comes into their head, provided that they take the right things for granted (given). Ethics therefore becomes a matter of training in taking the right things for granted.

5.3.5. Reincorporation

It is important for the understanding of Christian ethics as improvisation to understand the relationship between providence and the written text of scripture. While the Christian increasingly discovers what it means for the story of God to become one's own story, this does not mean that the text is like a script from which the Christian actor reads a 'part'. Hauerwas' description of casuistry in chapter seven of *The Peaceable Kingdom* suggests more that the text forms the convictions and skills of a people, enabling them to discover how to be faithful to the gospel in a new situation. This is exactly where the analogy with improvisation in the theatre arises. The story told in scripture is not the entire story of creation; but it is the definitive exposition of God's way with the world. Whenever the Christian community faces a trying situation, it does not have an 'answer' in a script, but it is able to respond in a manner analogous to 'overaccepting', by placing the event within the larger, providential story which is under God's control. The response cannot be violent, since that would contradict God's way of dealing with the world as revealed in Jesus Christ. Neither can the response be to block - that is, to end the story - since that would imply that the larger story were incapable of incorporating the situation.

Where in the larger story the particular situation will fit is a matter for the skill of the community to perceive. The particular skill which is required is that of memory.

In two essays, 'The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering', and 'Remembering as a Moral Task: The Challenge of the Holocaust', Hauerwas outlines the significance of memory in Christian ethics.[440] Memory is closely related to the theme of narrative. Scripture enables the Church to remember the stories of God so that those stories may continue to guide the Christian community's life. The Church *is* a social ethic, serving society in that it nourishes its life remembering God's presence in Jesus Christ.[441] This remembering is an active practice of moral enquiry, since 'questions about how to remember the stories [are] not just questions about "fact" or accuracy, but about what kind of community we must be to be faithful to Yahweh and his purposes for us.'[442] This means both remembering the past and continuing to live in very different circumstances:

> How we use scripture is finally an affair of the imagination, but it is nonetheless a political activity, since our imagination depends on our ability to remember and interpret our traditions as they are mediated through the moral reality of our community.[443]

Moral casuistry remembers, not just scripture, but the whole of the inherited tradition of the Church. The moral adventure of casuistry seeks constantly 'a better understanding of what it means to make God's story my story':

> We continue to depend on the ... wisdom of our ancestors. Indeed, one of our first moral tasks is always to preserve their memory as a lively memory - that is, as still part of the conversation, across generations. Such preservation ... at least means that the wisdom of the tradition often has the beginning word, even if we think we must dissent from it. For the standard of dissent is always faithfulness to the kingdom we find in the life and death of Jesus - a standard to which our ancestors also rightly lay claim.[444]

Improvising within a narrative is less a constant striving after being original, and more a matter of remembering. A story is not simply a series of events happening one after

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[440]See Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* pp. 53-71, and *Against the Nations* pp. 61-90.

[441]'Remembering as a Moral Task' pp. 74-5.

[442]'The Moral Authority of Scripture' p. 67.

[443]ibid p. 65.

[444]Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 134.

another. Such sequences have no reason for stopping in any one place rather than any other. It is not simply a matter of free association: a story requires 'reincorporation'[445]. Reincorporation is what marks the end of the story. When elements found earlier in the story begin to be reincorporated, then some pattern emerges and a sense of completion is possible. Christian ethics seen from an eschatological perspective is always profoundly aware of the end of the story, and of the way this end reincorporates earlier (perhaps all earlier) parts of the narrative. It is reincorporation that distinguishes the end from just another event in the narrative.

If reincorporation is such a crucial skill in storytelling, then remembering becomes correspondingly essential, and much more significant than originality. The improviser does not set out to create the future, but responds to the past, reincorporating to form a story. Johnstone describes a game in which actor A provides free-associated disconnected material, while actor B is somehow to connect it:

> A: It was a cold winter's night. The wolves howled in the trees. The concert pianist adjusted his sleeves and began to play. An old lady was shovelling snow from her door ...
> B: ... When she heard the piano the little old lady began shovelling at a fantastic speed. When she reached the concert hall she cried, 'That pianist is my son!' Wolves appeared at all the windows, and the pianist sprang onto the piano, thick fur growing visibly from under his clothes.[446]

The Christian community is in a position much more similar to actor B than to actor A. The community is not able to determine the 'gifts' it is given: it is obliged to use the skill of its convictions to transform the 'fate' (or givenness) of the disconnected gifts into the destiny of a story consonant with the one given story. It does not do this by changing the subject, or by refusing to continue; both of these would do violence to the emerging narrative. This perspective sees all events in creation as offering possibilities for narrative, needing skills nurtured by the gospel to be reincorporated.

These skills are not primarily those of moments of inspiration (or decision). The future is formed out of the past.

> The improviser has to be *like a man walking backwards*. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future. His story can take him anywhere, but he must still 'balance' it, and give it shape, by remembering incidents that have been shelved and reincorporating them.[447]

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[445]Keith Johnstone *Impro* p. 112.

[446]ibid pp. 116-7.

[447]ibid p. 116; my italics.

This picture of a man walking backwards is an immensely significant and fruitful one. The only given in his life is that at which he is looking - the tradition of which he is a part. This contrasts with the model of consequential ethics. An ethic based on the assessment of consequences is likely to have both eyes fixed firmly on apparent realities of the future. Its 'solutions' to ethical dilemmas need not necessarily have much awareness of the past - indeed, they may well be designed to be free from such considerations. The potential for forming the future tends to be dependent not on an awareness of shelved elements in the past which are ripe for reincorporation, but on control of the present. Whereas the improviser looks back when stuck, the consequentialist looks forward. Yet as we saw in the discussion of the eschatological perspective in chapter four, the story told by the consequentialist is far too short: the perception of the future seldom accounts for the final resolution of all things.

The good improviser, in the eyes of Johnstone, accepts all offers and perceives no end to the story unless there has been a thorough reincorporation. Implicit in all acceptance of offers, particularly the overacceptance illustrated above by 'It's Tuesday' and the exchange of gifts, is the openness to a larger story. Each new development in 'It's Tuesday' discloses a larger story than was disclosed in the previous speech. The assumption that there always is a larger story is a state of mind - a skill. The Christian understanding of this larger story is providence - not the notion that everything will come out right in the end, but

> the conviction that the events of history are under God's control. This manifests itself in ways beyond both our discerning and our manipulating. Their pattern may occasionally be perceived by the prophet, and later they will be celebrated by the community.[448]

So how does the Christian community respond in the face of a trying situation? Its technique is to start by looking back into the history of the situation (the smaller story) and the history of God's providence (the larger story) to see if there are any shelved elements ripe for reincorporation.[449] The process of reincorporation therefore first looks back to

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[448]John Howard Yoder *What Would You Do?* Second Edition Scottdale: Herald 1992 p. 35; quoted in Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom* p. 126.

[449]'Shelved elements' can refer to all parts of the story. There is a tension, in the Bible as elsewhere, between the large drama and the host of small ones - many of which resist the stream of the larger story. 'As we attend to the minor, unincorporated dramas of the Bible, we give folk freedom and permit to attend to the minor, unincorporated ares of our own life, which are not to be run over roughshod, either by imperial orthodoxy, by imperious ego-structure, or by rationalistic criticism.' (Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination* p. 70.)

seek out the 'lost' elements in the story, but also anticipates the eschaton by imitating its pattern - the pattern of reincorporating the gifts of creation in the strength of the givenness of Christ.[450]

The process I have described as 'reincorporation' is similar to the principle Yoder describes as reconciliation.

> [Christians] guide their lives not so much by 'How can I avoid doing wrong?' or even 'How can I do the right?' as by 'How can I be a reconciling presence in the life of my neighbour?'. From this perspective, I might justify firm nonviolent restraint, but certainly never killing.[451]

The term reincorporation adds to the notion of reconciliation the idea of providence, the larger story. The Christian community follows Christ's pattern of not blocking evil, but reincorporating it within the larger story. We cannot know how to act in situations if they are abstracted from any narrative context; our response is to place the situation in as wide a narrative context as possible, including the larger story. We do not throw away the text, but, our practices, habits, assumptions and instincts soaked in the renewing pool of the Christian story, we face each new context ready to accept (or overaccept) it faithfully.

I now move to a practical example, to test and illustrate whether what has been said about imagination and improvisation stands up in the light of a pressing issue in Hauerwas' work: severe mental and physical handicap.

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[450]Hauerwas uses David Kelsey's description of scripture as a long 'loosely structured non-fiction novel. It has subplots that appear minor but become central; yet it does not try to suppress these subplots or characters that challenge the main story line. See 'The Moral Authority of Scripture' p. 67. This has a clear application for relations between Jews and Christians, since Jews represent a substantial 'forgotten strand' in the Christian story. 'The great social challenge for Christians is learning how to remember the history of the Jews, as part of and essential to our history' ('Remembering as a Moral Task' p. 75).

[451]J.H. Yoder *What Would You Do?* p. 40.

5.4. The Testimony of Mental Handicap

I shall consider the question of severe mental and physical handicap through the eyes of Frances Young. In her book *Face to Face*[452], she tells the story of her life with her son Arthur, from the joint perspective of theologian and parent. She begins to write in 1984 on the day after her sixteen-year-old son Arthur stood unsupported for a few seconds for the first time. Arthur was born brain-damaged due to a small placenta. Frances Young describes in detail a life which 'lacks event ... a kind of slow motion in which all track of time gets lost.'[453] The details concern sleeping in leg splints, withstanding fits, getting dressed, feeding, school, games, bathing, and so on. She goes on to raise questions of grief, frustration, and theodicy, as well as tracing her own vocation to the ministry and discussing the role of the Church and wider society to a child like Arthur.

Since Young makes no hint of being aware of Hauerwas' work, she provides an ideal case history to set against Hauerwas' discourse. I shall trace the pattern of improvisation through the four steps outlined above.

5.4.1. Step One: Accepting the Offer

Hauerwas begins his essay 'Suffering the Retarded' by recalling an advertisement for the American Association of Retarded Citizens. Standing, broken-hearted, beside a baby's cot, the parents say 'Our child was born retarded ... He will never have an independent existence ... Our lives have been ruined ... Be tested early if you think you are

[452]London: Epworth 1985.

[453]ibid p. 6.

pregnant ... Please do not let this happen to you - prevent retardation.'[454] In a success- and independence-oriented culture, retardation is bound to be seen as an evil that needs to be eliminated. How then is the handicapped child to be seen as a gift? A child with mental handicap is a typically Hauerwasian example of a given that may become a gift - not by the power of positive thinking, but through the fact that being committed not to kill the child the community draw on their tradition for how to understand this child's presence in the community.

There is a violence behind several conventional ways of dealing with retardation. Sometimes the severely mentally handicapped are kept out of public sight - in institutions often geographically secluded. Another approach, hinted at in the advertisement, is to dispose of those whose difference from ourselves is intolerable. A third approach is to assume that there is no difference between the retarded and the rest of society - to obscure any suggestion to the contrary. Each of these approaches represents a failure to cope with difference. In the language of improvisation, these are three ways of 'blocking'.[455]

How does a community begin to 'accept' a severely handicapped child? The virtue mentioned most often by both Hauerwas and Frances Young as needed in the community is the acceptance of difference. This returns to the theme of the fourth of Hauerwas's theses - that of welcoming the unexpected, especially the stranger as a gift. Hauerwas starts out in characteristic vein.

> The very way we are taught to perceive [the retarded] is an ethic. To begin our reflection by asking 'How ought we to treat the retarded?' is already too late, as it presupposes that the category retardation makes sense.

In fact, retardation is 'a moral claim that puts some people at a disadvantage simply because they seem different from us in humanly significant ways'[456]; what the 'medical model' of handicap obscures is that the disadvantages that result from most handicaps derive more from society's prejudices than from the handicap itself. The question becomes another characteristically Hauerwasian one: 'What kind of community

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[454]Stanley Hauerwas 'Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?' *Suffering Presence* pp. 159-181.

[455]There is an analogy here between three historical ways the Church has 'blocked' other faiths - keeping the infidel out of sight, killing him, or pretending he is the same as us.

[456]ibid p. 184.

ought we to be so that we can welcome and care for the other in our midst without that "otherness" being used to justify discrimination?' What is required is to become 'that kind of people who are capable of recognizing the other without fear and/or resentment'.[457]

This is the point at which Hauerwas's approach becomes most telling. Truthful stories such as Frances Young's remind us of both the necessity and the cost of rearing the retarded in the family. But Hauerwas is able to point out that the recognition of difference is implicit in the delegation to the family of the rearing of *all* children. For those who are different know that being treated equally is not sufficient for being treated justly. If being treated equally means having to forget who one is then the price is not worth paying, as the experience of black Americans bears out. Therefore

> The commitment of parents to their retarded children ... implies a more profound and richer sense of community than the language of equality can provide ... The retarded are a concrete test of the moral implications of a society's willingness to let the differences occasioned by our familial heritages flourish.[458]

Thus we start with what we already take for granted - that parents should bring up their own children, even if the parents are strange or the children different - and see that this assumption makes diversity inevitable. The challenge is not to make new decisions, but to face the consequences of assumptions already made.

In addition to coping with difference, there is a second commitment of the Christian community which is required if it is to 'accept' a severely handicapped child. It must renounce the need to exert power over people's lives. This echoes Hauerwas's sixth thesis:

> Christian social ethics can only be done from the perspective of those who do not seek to control national or world history but who are content to live 'out of control'.[459]

Frances Young describes this process in her own relationship with Arthur. Realising that her need to control Arthur's life derived from her own needs and not from his, she became more detached and allowed him to be more free of the 'binding cords of possessiveness'.[460]

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[457] ibid pp. 185, 186.

[458] ibid pp. 207-8.

[459] *A Community of Character* p. 11.

[460] Frances Young *Face to Face* p. 35.

This renunciation of the impulse to control has implications for the moral status of the mentally handicapped. They are not to be seen simply as recipients of care. The Christian community should regard people as inherently valuable, not valuable for the power they command. Christian community is not about those in the centre succouring those on the margins: this would be another 'strategy' of the powerful. The Christian tactic is to find itself on the periphery and make friends with those others it finds there.

5.4.2. Step Two: Overaccepting

The key to overaccepting is to locate this 'smaller story' into the 'larger story' of the continuing way God deals with his people, as revealed in the narrative of Israel, Jesus and the Church. The difference between improvisation as a model for Christian ethics and improvisation in the theatre is that when it comes to overaccepting, the former has less room for the latter's sense of the absurd and humorous. The story has to be a consistent one. But what kind of story is the story of a retarded child?

Like most historiography, such stories beg the question of whose story is being told. It is notoriously difficult to tell a story from the point of view of all the parties involved. Is it a story of need: the parents' (or families') need for community support, the retarded's need for parents, the parents' need to be needed, or the community's need for parents of character, who will not shy away from the discomforts of such parenting and the lack of 'progress'? Or is it a story of learning: the retarded learning from the parents to live, the parents learning from the retarded what being a parent means, the community learning from both what the issues at stake are and whether 'experts' are the best placed to settle them? Or is it a story in which all the parties discover on their 'journey' that their own self-understanding needs reassessment: parents reassess why we have children, communities reassess what they mean by 'achievement', 'normal', 'suffering', and indeed 'community' itself (which community, for example, do we have in mind?), while the retarded grows and gains some self-understanding for the first time? Or is it merely a story of the marginalisation of the weak and different by the strong and normal, in which the retarded cannot share their parents' or community's benefits, the parents cannot share the

retarded's inner life, and the community (including the experts) can never understand the grief, struggle, joy or insight of the parents?

Each of these could represent a different way of telling the same story. When it comes to overaccepting, however, the story perceived by Christian social ethics is that which responds to the revealed nature of God. I have listed four possible themes that could each be regarded as central in the telling of the same story: need, learning, the journey of discovery, and marginalisation. Each is attractive as a unifying theme. Marginalisation appeals to the Christian concern for the weak and downtrodden - though it is important to remember that the retarded are integral members of our community, not simply recipients of charity. The journey of discovery appeals to a positive approach to retardation, but may not do justice to the suffering involved. Learning clearly has an important place, so long as learning that life is under God's direction is not limited to the tragic climax of the Creon who through suffering has become wise.

Hauerwas' method of overaccepting, as he makes clear at the end of 'Suffering The Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?' is that of need. The theological issue is the same as between Athanasius and Arius: is the dependent derived Son a blot upon God's divinity, or, from the perspective of self-communicating love, a mode of its perfection? There must be a receptive, dependent, needy pole within the being of God.

Like God therefore, the retarded show us the character of our neediness; they are 'a prophetic sign of our true nature as creatures destined to need God and, thus, one another'. Centrally,

> The challenge of learning to know, be with, and care for the retarded is nothing less than learning to know, be with, and love God. God's face is the face of the retarded; God's body is the body of the retarded; God's being is that of the retarded. For the God we Christians must learn to worship is not a God of self-sufficient power, a God who in self-possession needs no one; rather ours is a God who needs a people, who needs a Son. Absoluteness of being or power is not a work of the God we have come to know through the cross of Christ.[461]

Frances Young confesses that her experience with Arthur has placed her face to face with God - hence the title of the book. She adds that the reality and presence of God are the crucial determinants of any account. It was the absence of God, rather than his

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[461] Stanley Hauerwas *Suffering Presence* p. 178, quoting Arthur McGill, *Suffering: A Test Case of Theological Method* Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1983 p. 75.

actual pain, that constituted Job's torment - in God's presence the demand for explanation ceases.[462]

This is how the Christian community overaccepts a troublesome question like the reception of a severely handicapped child. It does so with a story that means little or nothing to a secular ear: but it recognises that the debate between Arius and Athanasius is alive and well and experienced in the stories of retarded people.

5.4.3. Step Three: Forming Skills

The eighth of Hauerwas' ten theses toward the reform of Christian social ethics focuses on the practices and habits that he sees as far more important than decision in considering moral questions.

> For the Church to be, rather than to have, a social ethic means we must recapture the social significance of common behaviour, such as acts of kindness, friendship, and the formation of families.
>
> Trust is impossible in communities that always regard the other as a challenge and threat to their existence. One of the profoundest commitments of a community, therefore, is providing a context that encourages us to trust and depend on one another. Particularly significant is a community's determination to be open to new life that is destined to challenge as well as carry on the story.[463]

By opening her book with what could be called a 'thick description' of her life with Arthur, Frances Young tells the story in exactly the manner Hauerwas proposes in thesis eight. It is a description of common behaviour in an uncommon situation. The considerable detail demonstrates the depth and complexities of the story: its ethics are not to be decided by detached observers (even experts) with categorical imperatives at crisis moments. The heart of the story, as told in Young's first chapter, is of the mundanities of standing, walking, sleeping, dressing, feeding, being a family - mundanities which struggle to become habits. This is indeed 'recapturing the social significance of common behaviour'.

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[462]Frances Young *Face to Face* pp. 72-3.

[463]Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 11.

Skills are practised in the mundanities of life: but they need to be nurtured by a community, especially when they involve the more creative side of the imagination. Frances Young describes an experience of such a community in her worship in an inner-city church, an experience of shared vulnerability.

> The sense that every single member of that very assorted congregation mattered and had a gift to contribute and that there was something about even the least to be respected ... created an atmosphere and a level of relationship which I have scarcely encountered anywhere else.[464]

Having seen diversity accepted in the inner-city church, she was able to take on chaplaincy work at a mentally handicapped hospital with a renewed vision.

> One of Origen's arguments for the truth of Christianity was that while philosophy had only made the elite good, Christianity had lifted people of all levels of society and of every different type and race to a 'philosophical' way of life. ... Just as male needs female, rich needs poor, white needs black, so intellectuals need the simple. ... The church is itself when it bridges all these gaps and tensions between people of different kinds.[465]

5.4.4. Step Four: Reincorporation

Reincorporation is a backward-looking exercise: it seeks out the lost or neglected parts of the tradition and restores them to a place in the fulfilment of the story. Frances Young describes an evening at a fellowship group in which reincorporation took place at the instigation of one member's remark: the result is a vivid portrayal of the transformation of fate into destiny.

> I began by confessing that every now and again things happened which revealed that I still had not resolved my deepest questioning ... When I had finished my long confession, one member of the group commented that it sounded like a tragedy, and yet what a rich life I had had. It still felt like a tragedy, living with meaninglessness ... The tragedy was not so much Arthur as my sense of abandonment, my inability to accept the existence and love of God at those deeper levels where it makes a real difference to one's life. ... I had no hope for the future. Despair was lodged deep down inside. ... It felt like tragedy. Yet my friend's comment on the richness of my life came across as a healthy rebuke. It is since that evening that I have been enabled to climb out of my black hole

[464]Frances Young *Face to Face* p 79.

[465]ibid p. 83.

> and find complete release from the doubts and fears and self-concern that had imprisoned me.[466]

This movement beyond tragedy is an ironic one which corresponds with the description of irony I offered in chapter four.[467] Irony and reincorporation are both ways of rendering the eschatological perspective.

Frances Young considers fate and destiny in her prelude - and, with hindsight, decisively favours the latter:

> I can only look back on all that has happened with a sense of gratitude and awareness of the grace of providence. Somehow now God seems behind and before everything...[I]t is there in the Bible; whether you look at Jeremiah, or the Psalms, or Paul, you find that sense that God had known, consecrated and appointed even before birth, a sense of destiny.[468]

A feature of the experience was to bring her into a closer sense of sharing with other marginalised groups in society - and these are exactly the people who one would expect to 'reappear in the narrative' at a time of reincorporation. In her Psalm of Testimony at the start of the book she notes the activity of the Lord in terms that speak of reincorporation:

> He shaped my ministry,
> he took up into my ministry the whole of my past,
> my studies and my sufferings - even my handicapped son.[469]

In chapter four above I explored how Christian hope, by assuring the future, releases the past. The practice of the Jews throughout history in continuing to bring children into a world of persecution is a remarkable statement of such a hope. The description of reincorporation outlined in this chapter illuminates that claim. Perhaps the most significant expression of Frances Young's hope is the fact that she had two more children after Arthur, and that their upbringing was influenced but not dominated by their brother.

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[466]ibid p. 41.

[467]See 4.5.3. above.

[468]ibid p. 1.

[469]ibid p. 4.

5.5. Summary

'The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic' is the most suggestive of all Hauerwas' early essays.[470] He describes how we act in the world that we see, and people act differently because they see different worlds; ethics commends certain ways of seeing the world. This relates to George Lindbeck's discussion of the 'scriptural world' as the real world.[471] Yet Hauerwas ceases to talk about vision, transferring his energy into narrative. Phrases like 'becoming like the world one sees' are replaced by 'entering the Christian story'. In *Against the Nations* Hauerwas picks up again on the creative dimension in ethics by discussing the moral *imagination*.

In the moral imagination there is a tension between the imagination which is a feature of all perception - what we might call habit - and imagination which perceives what 'might yet be' - what might be called moral effort. I argue that the time for moral effort is in the *formation* of the Christian community: the moment of decision is *not* the moment for moral creativity, but for falling back on habit. This explains Hauerwas' mature position on 'decisionism'. Decisions are inevitable, but are not the correct focus for moral effort or moral debate. It is too late to form a habit by this stage.

Several contemporary writers discuss the way hermeneutics involves the *performance* of the scriptures, with musical and theatrical analogies. None of these treatments adequately discusses the place of the written text in the living community, or the way a *community* (rather than a preacher) performs the text. The Bible is not simply a script.

I suggest that improvisation in the theatre offers a more suggestive model for Christian ethics. It links with much of what I have discussed in earlier chapters about formation, habit, skill, narrative, nonviolence, imagination, irony affirmation of creation, the end of the story, not seeking to 'make the story come out right', ethics as a collective exercise, avoiding sectarianism, and questioning the 'givens' of moral debate.

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[470] Stanley Hauerwas *Vision and Virtue* chapter 2.

[471] See 2.2.2. above.

Improvisation is not about being clever or original, but about being so trained in one's tradition that one trusts that the obvious is the appropriate. This is just how Hauerwas sees Christian ethics.

I demonstrated in four stages the way the process of improvisation can work in relation to mental handicap. The study also bore out many of Hauerwas' own insights relating to the significance of mental handicap for Christian ethics.

In my use of the analogy of theatrical improvisation I have intended to marry form and content. What I have done in this chapter is, from the position of Hauerwas' thought, to 'accept' the 'offer' that comes in the form of the insights of Keith Johnstone's description of improvisation in the theatre. Some of Johnstone's comments have been 'overaccepted' by being seen in the context of a much wider story than he acknowledges. In the next chapter I shall 'reincorporate' by showing how this analogy restores some of Hauerwas' more controversial themes to a proper place in the in the larger, providential narrative. In the whole process Johnstone's book has been understood not as a 'given', or summary of the way things are, but as a 'gift', to be received actively and not to be 'blocked'. The exercise is one of keeping the story going, using the habits that practices form from skill, and skills form from conviction, to transform our fate into our destiny.

It should also now be clear that the whole thesis is intended as a similar marriage of form and content. Each of the chapters corresponds to one of the four steps of improvisation outlined in this chapter. Chapter one 'accepted the offer' of human character, in the largely philosophical terms suggested by Stanley Hauerwas' early work. Chapter two 'overaccepted' by placing the smaller narrative of human character within the large drama of God's revelation through the story of Israel, Jesus and the Church. Chapter three concerned the 'skills' of the communion of saints: these largely concerned the imitation of Christ and the establishment of an appropriate relationship with wider society. Chapter four concerned 'reincorporation', the way God accommodates his whole creation in its consummation, and thus the way belief in the eschaton ironically affirms Christians' commitment to the 'trivial' details of faithful discipleship. Chapter five has therefore not only concluded the thesis, but introduced a second reading of the thesis as an improvisation on the work of Stanley Hauerwas.

Conclusion: Some Criticisms Revisited

It is the aim of this conclusion to the thesis to reincorporate the stray parts of my argument in order to create the sense of an ending, in accord with the manner of the promised eschaton. The whole thesis has been structured with the model of improvisation in mind, although this was not explained until 5.5. above. Chapter one accepted the offer of human moral experience; chapter two overaccepted this experience in the light of the Christian story; chapter three focused on the distinctive skills of the community, notably peaceableness; chapter four showed how the eschaton reincorporates the stray elements in Church and world. Chapter five overaccepted the description of theatrical improvisation in the light of the account of Hauerwas' Christian ethics. The task of this conclusion is to reincorporate the arguments and criticisms that have gone before. In this conclusion I shall make clear what is gained by the extended analogy between theatrical improvisation and Hauerwasian Christian ethics. I propose that theatrical improvisation *both* provides a helpful analogy and exposition of Hauerwas' thought in practice *and* helps to make clear how he may respond to his critics. I suggest seven constructive insights derived from the model of improvisation in the theatre as described in 5.3. above.

First, improvisation offers a description of nonviolence that avoids some potential pitfalls. Nonviolence can seem like a devious manner of getting one's way - a strategy that avoids violence itself but can be highly manipulative and achieve similar ends. Such a conception can have some appeal for consequential ethics. Nonviolent blockades and embargoes are still the 'strategy' of the strong, and still tend to leave the weakest suffering.[472] An alternative, passive, kind of nonviolence can appear callous and self-righteous, especially when it seems to identify righteousness with quietism. This has more in common with some deontological approaches.

These pitfalls, of which Hauerwas is well aware, are avoided by a nonviolence which commits itself to accept or overaccept. This position assumes the status of the

[472]For 'strategies' and 'tactics' see 3.4.3. above.

weak, since it does not assume one is in a position to set the agenda. Instead it concentrates on imaginative responses to the offers of others, committed to perceiving those offers as potential gifts, and seeking resources in the tradition and the larger story to accept these gifts without blocking since blocking is an implicitly aggressive act.[473] Manipulation is excluded since the other has the first move; and quietism is excluded because the onus is always on the receiver of the gift to make something of it, rather than be determined by it - and thus to transform fate into destiny. Hauerwas is anxious to stress that his form of peaceableness is not quietist or manipulative: overaccepting is a helpful way of expressing how nonviolence retains its integrity.

Second, the fact that improvisation is a collective enterprise helps to address some of the questions of truth raised in chapter two. Lindbeck is accused of being a fideist because he wants to hold on to realism but he never discusses external reality - only social, linguistic, and internal reality. Meanwhile Frei and Lindbeck appear to dehistoricise scripture by speaking of it as a 'world' - almost a world of its own.[474] Hauerwas does not address the criticisms of Lindbeck. Nonetheless in chapter one we saw that he understands community as the primary form of reality.[475] So he would, like Lindbeck, doubt whether it would make any sense to talk about external reality (or truth) without first considering social reality (what Hauerwas calls 'truthfulness' - communal norms, values, and practices), linguistic reality (internal consistency) and internal reality (intention and sincerity). In short, he would place metaphysics second to the practices of community. It is the activity of this community which 'historicises' scripture: here Hauerwas would take a more Roman Catholic view, that the Church is the embodiment of the witness of scripture. Improvisation in the theatre makes sense of this collective emphasis of Hauerwas' thought. Improvisation is not about individual initiative and instinct in a situation: one is always part of a group of people in the middle of a story which is connected to all other stories, and when stuck one looks back into the *history* of that story, not to external criteria.

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[473]Keith Johnstone *Impro* p. 98.

[474]See 2.3.2. and 2.2.1. above.

[475]See 1.6.1. above. His emphasis on community is how he finally avoids the suggestion that his discussion of character is just another way of positing an 'internal' self.

Third, theatrical improvisation offers an understanding of the place of the written text within a living community. The written text is more concerned with form than content. It manifests the *way* God deals with his people, and specifically the definitive manner in which he does so in Christ.[476] Christ does not block, but imaginatively accepts every eventuality in the light of the larger story. This is vividly portrayed in the temptation narrative.[477] The passion narratives are marked by a change from the Christ who acts to the Christ who is acted upon. The tension of the passion narratives can be expressed as the drama of whether he who had overaccepted human life in his incarnate body can also overaccept human death. What emerges is that even the cross is transformed from fate to destiny when in the resurrection it is incorporated in the larger story as that story's definitive action.

Accepting, overaccepting, and reincorporating are thus actions which the community finds in its narrative and improvises in the world it experiences. They are written into the pattern of incarnation, kingdom and eschaton. The narrative of the written text of scripture forms the Christian community: the task of the community is to find ways of accepting and overaccepting that keep the story going. These are the ways in which it continues the vocation of Israel - to imitate the God it finds revealed in scripture.

Fourth, improvisation illustrates the distinction between the ethics that demands effort and the ethics that requires following habit or instinct. The moment of decision is not the moment for spontaneous creativity; the artistry of community and character formation comes in the establishment of practices, the discipline of training, the learning to take the right things for granted. The moment of crisis resembles the performance of the improviser - there is nothing for it but to do the obvious thing. Yet the obvious thing to the one schooled in the practices of Christian nonviolence may be far from the obvious thing to the one who is not. This clarifies an ambiguity in the way Hauerwas speaks about the moral imagination. It is clear that he sees sin as a failure of the imagination, and that he encourages moral effort; but he has never made this connection between his work on imagination and his work on the flaws in 'decisionism'. The most frequent

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[476]This does not rule out content altogether. For instance the acceptance of circumstances as gifts does not undermine the definitive gifts that God gives to the Church; and these are disclosed by the written text.

[477]See 5.3.3. above.

misunderstanding about improvisation is that it is taken to be about spontaneity and originality: in fact it requires years of apprenticeship to learn to do the obvious, just as virtue requires formation in community. The community embodies the scripture's way of seeing the world: this takes imagination and moral effort to bring about. The virtues that emerge are like the skills of the improviser.

Fifth, improvisation makes clear the change in emphasis Hauerwas advocates in Christian ethics. Natural law concentrates on material causes - what things are in themselves, what they were created for. Situation ethics concentrates on final causes - seeking the most loving solution, naively assuming a consensus on the other three causes. I argued in chapter one that what Hauerwas is doing is asserting the primary significance of efficient and formal causes - who is acting and how.[478] The language of accepting and overaccepting makes this transition more vivid. Attention moves from the 'gift' itself - what it is supposed to be, what is the right thing to do with it - to the receiver of the gift, and the story of which the receiver is already a part. Ethics is about good people rather than good actions, about an ongoing story rather than a moment of crisis, about the practices of a community rather than the force of circumstance.

Sixth, improvisation corrects an impression gained by several of Hauerwas' critics that Hauerwas advocates closed communities set apart from the world - in short, sectarianism. In chapters three and four I suggested that the church-world distinction is more about time than about space. The analogy of gifts and accepting I have outlined in this chapter is inspired particularly by the fourth of Hauerwas' Ten Theses For The Reform Of Christian Social Ethics.[479] Christian communities must retain their integrity: the convictions and skills I have described do not come 'naturally', though the imaginative potential is there. The written text (and, the text and tradition suggest, the Holy Spirit) prevents any total perversion of the tradition. However these skills will not survive unaided in a liberal individualist culture that 'presupposes that society can be organized without any narrative that is commonly held to be true' and suggests that 'we are free to

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[478]See 1.5. above.

[479]'Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills to transform fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as a gift.' Stanley Hauerwas *A Community of Character* p. 10. All ten theses are consistent with my proposal.

the extent that we have no story'.[480] So a community is necessary. But that is not to say that the community is isolationist. The stranger is a gift; the community is committed not to block: in these circumstances the epithet sectarian hardly seems to apply. Overaccepting offers a third way in addition to blocking or uncritically accepting. The great sin in improvisation is to kill the story - to block without making any return offer. This is the sectarian temptation: but it is clearly not a policy advocated by Hauerwas. He even accuses his critics - advocates of the nation-state - of being more sectarian than him. In the light of the model of improvisation, we can see that trying to 'make the world come out right' is itself a form of killing the story, by attempting to foreclose it prematurely.

Seventh, improvisation corrects an unintended but implied world-denying tenor in some of Hauerwas' writing. More extreme criticisms of Hauerwas have seen him as advocating a new totalitarianism, with a totalising narrative that is quiet on the subtlety of its oppressive power. The positive thrust of Hauerwas' ethic is that in eschatological perspective, Christ's way with the world is the only one that is *really* there. The negative implication of this is that all other human strivings are in vain, there is no revelation whatsoever through 'nature', outside the Church there is no salvation. The doctrine of creation seems somewhat underdeveloped. In chapter five I described the notion of 'reincorporation' with this in mind. Reincorporation is a backward-looking art, which rediscovers hidden potential in disparate and hitherto neglected events tossed to one side away from the mainstream of the narrative. These neglected elements include many of the shameful periods in Church history. Liberation comes through the community's ability and skill of reincorporating these lost elements. Reincorporation combines the notion of providence, the larger, all-embracing story, with the practice of reconciliation: as Hauerwas says, forgiveness is at the heart of community. Reincorporation remains true to the issue Milbank identifies as the key to nonviolent creation - how to accommodate difference without violence. Hauerwas' whole project may be understood in the light of this aim: accommodating difference without violence. Reincorporation has the great merit that it affirms the value of the most disparate elements in creation: yet it still recognises that the Christian story and community are the key to transforming fate into destiny.

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[480]ibid p. 12.

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