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*The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: Resident Aliens
and the Concrete Church*

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MA Thesis
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on Stanley Hauerwas' thought about the church insofar as it represents a concrete ecclesiological approach. I argue first that concrete ecclesiology, while often appearing in the work of its proponents as methodological presuppositions rather than an explicit doctrine of church, is sufficiently distinctive that Hauerwas' ecclesiology can be placed within it. Through exploring Hauerwas' theology in Chapter 1, I suggest that his ecclesiology shares key influences with concrete approaches through Barth, Frei, Wittgenstein and Yale postliberalism. Hauerwas also shares concrete ecclesiology's concerns in terms of its interest in the concrete church as a valuable subject for theological reflection, attention to distinctive Christian practices, theologically therapeutic and pastoral-minded approaches to reflecting on the life of the church, and concern for how the church interacts with the world.

In Chapter 2, I evaluate Hauerwas' work by seeing how his ecclesiology deals with the realities of sin, division and confusion within the church. I argue that Hauerwas' rhetoric idealises the practices of the church, so there are limitations to the concreteness of his ecclesiology. Combined with Hauerwas' problematic and overstated use of narrative, this idealisation results in insufficient focus on the provisional and fallible nature of the church's practices, and a deleteriously pugilistic attitude towards the world. In Chapter 3, I explore how Barth balances his ecclesiology by holding its theologically centrifugal elements in tension with the various creedal contexts in which it is set forth. This not only mitigates Hauerwas' criticisms of Barth's ecclesiology, but also proffers ways in which a robust doctrinal setting would maintain the prophetic force of Hauerwas' challenges to the church without allowing Christian practice to bear the weight of realising God's kingdom. I then argue that Christ's resurrection is a helpful doctrinal setting for a methodologically and pastorally wise concrete ecclesiology.

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1. Hauerwas and Concrete Ecclesiology

This thesis addresses Stanley Hauerwas's thought about the church: what the church is, what it is for, and how we might find these things out. It is therefore an ecclesiological study of Hauerwas's work, which arises from and is directed towards classic ecclesiological concerns, rather than an examination of Hauerwas's social ethics or political propositions in isolation from their value as specifically ecclesial constructs. Like Hauerwas, my focus will be on the church: where we find it, how we find it, what we find it to be, in what ways we talk about it, and why we do so. Within this broad ecclesiological horizon, the thesis concentrates on how Hauerwas's work relates to one particular contemporary ecclesiological trend; though there is an increasing body of literature dedicated to exploring Hauerwas's ecclesiology in various different guises, the intent of this study is to examine Hauerwas's thought about the church insofar as it fits into and is representative of that wider pattern of current thought on the church which has been called 'concrete ecclesiology'.¹

What and whom am I talking about when I say 'concrete ecclesiology'? Concrete ecclesiology is possibly more easily identified negatively in contrast to earlier approaches, in that it takes a deliberate step away from talking about 'models' of

¹ For a liberation theological study of Hauerwas's ecclesiology, see John B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). For a political theological study, see Arne Rasmusson, *The Church As Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jurgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). 'Concrete ecclesiology' is a compound phrase derived from Healy's use of the phrases 'concrete church' and 'the new ecclesiology'. See Nicholas M. Healy, 'Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 5:3, (2003), 288-308, and Healy, 'Karl Barth's Ecclesiology Reconsidered', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57:3, (2004), 287-99 (289). (Hereafter *KBER*).

the church, or deducing shapes and theologies for the church based on abstract theological concepts.² More positively, delineating its growth is an exercise in genealogy, recognising the development of certain traits and their assimilation into theological discourse.³ Broadly, concrete ecclesiology is characterised by a turn away from Enlightenment presuppositions, and instead instigates a way of talking about the church resourced philosophically, with mixed success, by post-foundationalist linguistic and narrative approaches. Its philosophical godfather is Wittgenstein, as he is variously adopted, used and sometimes misused by postliberal theology, particularly in the Yale school by George Lindbeck.⁴ Concrete ecclesiology therefore inherits the Wittgensteinian/postliberal emphasis on reuniting faith and practice in describing Christian belief and the business of being a Christian. Its Wittgensteinian common sense is suspicious of divisions between the visible and invisible church that deny the value of the visible church for theological reflection, and suspicious of accounts of the church which ignore the day-to-day lives of Christians. Things Wittgensteinian are also behind concrete ecclesiology's attempt to escape from Enlightenment epistemological demands. Hand in hand with this Wittgensteinian influence is a Barthian neo-orthodox turn, coupled again with the Yale influence through the work of Hans Frei.⁵ Where Wittgenstein's legacy enabled a step away from Enlightenment

² Concrete ecclesiology moves away from what Healy calls 'blueprint ecclesiology', a classic text of which might be Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976). For Healy's discussion and critique of such ecclesiologies, see Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25-51.

³ For a good quick summary along these lines, see Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?', 288-9.

⁴ For a brief critical exposition of Hauerwas's relation to the 'Yale School', see Thomson *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 107-112.

⁵ See M. Theissen Nation, 'Stanley Hauerwas: Where Would We Be Without Him?', Mark Theissen Nation and Samuel Wells (eds.), *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 19-36, for a useful catalogue of Hauerwas's influences in this regard, or for Hauerwas on the subject, see his preface to *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), xii-xxvi. (Hereafter PK).

foundationalism generally, Barth and Frei's influence in concrete ecclesiology is visible in the conviction that there need be no deeper explanation for Christian distinctive belief and behaviour more determinative than that found in the narrative of God's dealings with humanity in scripture. This Wittgenstein-Lindbeck and Barth-Frei connection, which will become more evident as I explore Hauerwas's work, is at the heart of what might be vaguely called concrete ecclesiology's commitment to 'postfoundationalist' epistemologies. That is, concrete ecclesiology is committed to accounts of how we know things which are determined by the character of God as revealed in scripture, rather than accounts of how we know things which are based on fundamental principles that can be agreed on rationally by everybody, outside a particular epistemologically committed framework. So, four key characteristics of concrete ecclesiology as I take it up here. One: a turn to distinctive practices and the centrality of the community in discussions of what church is. Two: pastoral-mindedness in attending to that community *as it is* and *as we actually find it* as a concrete, historical body. Three: recognition of the importance of the narrative of scripture for discussions of how we should know things about God, the church and the world. Four: a concern for how the church is known in the world.

Who am I talking about when I say 'concrete ecclesiology', and where does Hauerwas fit in? Any genealogical exercise in this regard is somewhat arbitrary: where it occurs in the work of those contemporary theologians I will name, concrete ecclesiology is more accurately described as a method, or a set of theological, methodological and philosophical presuppositions, than an explicit

doctrine of church.⁶ It is more often a background, albeit conscious, assumption than a directly addressed theme.⁷ Though some of the characteristics of concrete ecclesiology have been recognisable for some decades, as far back as the work of Lindbeck, Barth and Frei, there are no clearly identifiable ‘generations’ as such in the family of concrete ecclesiology. I think it reasonable, however, to identify vague revisionist and post-revisionist strands. The vast majority of Hauerwas’s work, not least because of its generally exhortative ‘Enlightenment-bashing’ tone, probably belongs to the revisionist school – the initial break away using models of church to attending to the practices of the church as they constitute a marked and marking body in the world.⁸ Though the boundary between the new approach to ethics (carved out in part by Hauerwas) is very blurred at times, constructive and largely revisionist work (though, again, the boundary is blurred) has been done by John Howard Yoder, George Lindbeck, Reinhard Hütter, Robert Jenson, Greg Jones, Miroslav Volf, Serene Jones, Bruce Marshall, James Buckley, and David Yeago.⁹ Work in subsequent academic generations (those educated or influenced by scholars already exhibiting signs of concrete ecclesiology) has been done by David Matzko McCarthy, Amy Laura Hall, Amy Plantinga Pauw, Joseph

⁶ Hauerwas disallows any strict division between method and theology, as it betrays a false division between form and content. See *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 4, especially n.6. (Hereafter *STT*). I argue in my final chapter that such a wholesale amalgamation obscures the way in which a gentle division between method and theology is helpful – perhaps even indispensable – to concrete ecclesiological reflection.

⁷ See, for example, the list of influential figures in the introduction to the Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics: “Its [the volume’s] attempt to put the practices of the local church under proper local scrutiny follows the invitation of Nicholas Healy (2000)...” Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 14. (Hereafter *BCCE*).

⁸ Hauerwas’s stance as self-confessed unapologetic ‘Enlightenment basher’ is found in Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 23.

⁹ See, for example, James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997) and Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (eds.), *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

Mangina, Charles Pinches, William Cavanaugh, and Mark Thiessen Nation. Post-revisionist voices are beginning to be heard, questioning some of the assumptions and working definitions of concrete ecclesiology. Significant contributions here have been from Kathryn Tanner, Nicholas M. Healy (who also belongs in the revisionist category) and Christopher Insole. Though I do not wish to make too much of the so-called 'Yale School', the influence of Yale theologians is evident.¹⁰ Hauerwas's place in this ecclesiological family is probably irascible, verandah-sitting, shotgun-toting grandfather. Though it is difficult to attribute an 'ecclesiology' to him in any fulsome systematic sense, he is probably the single greatest influential figure currently writing. In terms of the sheer volume of his writings on the church – and all his later writings are, in a sense, on the church – and the energy with which he unrelentingly holds up distinctive Christian practices and narratives as the key to thinking about and revitalising the church, no other figure in the movement is comparable.

Hauerwas's place in the concrete ecclesiology trend is one justification for singling him out for such concentrated study. Much of this new ecclesiology is visible only as background assumptions in the writings of those scholars mentioned above – there is rarely any explicitly formulated ecclesiology in any systematic sense, but rather a way of talking about the church as environment for theological and ethical thinking which evidences a turn to the concrete practices of the church. The ways of thinking about ethics that characterise the contributors to the *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, for example, also bespeak a

¹⁰ All of the following were educated or taught at Yale: George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, Kathryn Tanner, Nicholas Healy, David Yeago, Serene Jones, Joseph Mangina, Miroslav Volf, Amy Laura Hall, Rusty Reno, Bruce Marshall, James Buckley. The following were also educated or taught at Duke, the centre of the 'second generation': Stanley Hauerwas, David Matzko McCarthy, Amy Laura Hall, Gregory L. Jones.

distinctive theological method. Hauerwas is much the same, rarely tackling the subject of the church head on, but always having it as the setting for his theology and the ultimate concern of his theology's practical bent. The volume of his work and the variety of concerns and situations he addresses is what makes it exhibit concrete ecclesiological tendencies more clearly than most.

Why am I addressing Hauerwas in particular as an instance of concrete ecclesiology in general? What need is there to do this as a theological exercise? Concrete ecclesiology is not, I suggest, simply an energetic but inconsequential flywheel in the engine of Wittgensteinian philosophical progress. While it certainly arose from a general movement towards post-Enlightenment ways of thinking about theology, society, human nature, language and ethics, it is not just an ecclesiological by-product of this academic cultural effort. That is, its proponents claim that it is not just philosophically happier, but practically, pastorally and theologically better also. Healy writes,

"I have been drawn to the present inquiry in part by the impression that while the ecclesiology of the last hundred years or so has been sometimes profound, and its impact upon the church sometimes also profound, it has not been as helpful as it could be for the Christian community ...in general ecclesiology in our period has been highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than oriented to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is."¹¹

The church is given to exist as a concrete body in history: it is right that we consider its concrete, historical character of central theological importance. If mind-body duality approaches to theological anthropology are less than helpful, then arguably so are concomitant ways of thinking about the church that consider

¹¹ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 3.

its ideal essence over its historical reality. Concrete ecclesiology is responding to a need in the church's life. While this need for considering the church as a historical and messy body rather than a sinless and ideal model is perennial, I think perhaps that the insights of concrete ecclesiology are particularly germane in the church's current context.¹² Concrete ecclesiology, while proposing a normative way of reflecting theologically on the church, may have particular significance for the church in (perhaps specifically Western) postmodernity: the levels of ecclesial dissonance have reached such a pitch that specifically therapeutic modes of concrete theological reflection are imperative.

Concrete ecclesiology proceeds on the basis of theological engagement with the concrete life of the church, rather than conceptual aesthetics or 'thinking right' about the church followed by practical application. This has several ramifications for my critical and theological method, affecting not just how I engage with concrete ecclesiology's subject – the concrete church in its relation to God – but also how I engage with concrete ecclesiology, how I evaluate and question it as a theological practice.¹³ The two are not, of course, easily separable: if I am to engage properly with Hauerwas's thought about the church, it means sharing something of his presuppositions and way of doing theology. So, where I call Hauerwas's ecclesiology to account, it is not simply a matter of theological nicety, but a result of theological reflection on how his proposals might adversely affect the concrete church. Where I raise systematic worries, or make systematic proposals to try and balance out doctrinal difficulties, this is as much a result of

¹² See Healy on ecclesiology's necessary relation to current context and the signs of the times, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 47-8.

¹³ My preoccupation with method at certain junctures will be explored later as a form of ensuring accountability, which I believe indispensable to the practice of concrete ecclesiology.

reflection on ecclesial dissonance as theological balance. Engaging with the task of concrete ecclesiology also means that, though I pay attention to the church's concrete character, I am not holding up the practices of the church to some higher rationality or foundationally authoritative experience outside the church.¹⁴ Rather, exercises in concrete ecclesiology require carefully maintained conversations between God, gospel, community and individual, conversations which, careful of individual experience, submit all things to the authority of Christ as it is variously mediated and discerned through the body of the church.

Though my pastoral concerns regarding the church's life will become clearer as I go on, especially in terms of the criticisms I make of Hauerwas's thought about the concrete church, I will briefly delineate some of those concerns now. This picture of the church's life and the pastoral concerns relating to it will be limited: though it strives toward an ecumenical appreciation of the state of the church and ecumenical scope in addressing what I think are the needs of the church, it is necessarily limited by my particular experience of church as a Roman Catholic, English, white woman.¹⁵ This means I perceive needs and address concerns that are, though not unique to my denomination, possibly particularly pressing in a Roman Catholic context.¹⁶ They will also be needs perhaps more proximate to

¹⁴ I am thinking of Linda Woodhead's wise comment: "Here [in exploring Hauerwas's work in feminist perspective] I hope to show that it is possible to adopt a gendered perspective without oversimplifying the complexity of women's experience, without attempting to trump Christian faith with some higher authority, and without invoking the moral high ground of victimhood." Linda Woodhead, 'Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas?', *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 161-88, (163).

¹⁵ The order of these is of no particular significance. I declare this because, as will become evident, Hauerwas's lack of appreciation for the ways in which his specific context should affect his method and homiletical style becomes a problem for his theology.

¹⁶ This exercise in discerning Christian practice may be particularly helpful for Hauerwas, then, given that he thinks that the Catholic Church has, more than other denominations, the resources for surviving liberalism and providing an alternative. See his *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 16, and the section 'In Catholic Company', 81-149.

my pastoral experience: how we talk about receiving communion 'in a state of grace' in a prison congregation, how we might conceive of Christian practices in a way that makes sense for people with dementia, how we negotiate divorce and remarriage, and how we might continue a conversation about the place of the laity and women in the church, to name a few. These concerns in particular form the areas of ecclesial dissonance against which I test Hauerwas's proposals, and for which I make constructive suggestions.

The first general point to make is that the context in Western Europe is one of increasing wariness of (if not hostility toward) religion in general: it is seen as irrational and a source of violence and unexamined allegiances; it is useful only when co-opted into a Enlightenment-humanist frame of operation and blanded of 'tribal' specificity. Religion is good insofar as it serves the liberal state agenda. Recent debates about the wearing of religious emblems in the workplace reinforce the idea that religion is most tolerable when private. Laying aside matters interreligious and conflicts with the secular state, and concentrating on Christianity in particular, the picture is scarcely more heartening. Barth once claimed that the church's offence against true witness to God lay in its divisions; Hauerwas contends that the deepest divisions in the church are between rich and poor: I do not know how one could decide which was worse.¹⁷ Churches are divided from each other, and arguments even within denominations are tearing them apart: gay bishops, women bishops, contraception, AIDS, divorce, liturgy

¹⁷ For Barth's assertion see *Church Dogmatics IV/2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Bromiley et al, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 676-8. (References for the *Church Dogmatics* will hereafter be given in the customary way – eg. CD x/y, pp.xx-xxx) For Hauerwas's claim, see Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living In Between*, (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 101-110, (105). (Hereafter CET).

and abortion. The church has sustained a great deal of damage, not just in terms of changes in worldview since the Enlightenment which have been deleterious to the church's claims, but damage from the world holding it to account and finding it hypocritical, patriarchal, prejudiced, dishonest, self-righteous, irresponsible and inattentive. It is easy enough to feel sorrow over the state of the church, or anger at the world that has damaged it; a harder task is taking a good long look at the church's sin and admitting that, to an extent, we deserve it and certainly need to take practical responsibility for it.¹⁸ This situation has evidently knocked the church's confidence, and that is a good thing: we should lack confidence, and this should provoke a time of searching and questioning by the church.

This lack of confidence the church currently experiences in public life is not simply a problem for evangelism or credibility in the eyes of the world, it has become a pastoral problem at parish level. The sense I garner from pastoral experience now is that very many Christians seem to be confused about what they should be doing and to whom they should be listening: there is a crisis of guidance, authority and trust. Perhaps this confusion owes something to the current climate of consumerism: certainly much is made, at least within the Catholic church, of the fact that people have a propensity to 'pick and choose' their beliefs and adherences.¹⁹ I do not think this a new phenomenon, but I suspect it trades on the modern separation of public and private life. However, the pastoral crisis relating to authority and practices the church faces in this regard is not just a problem of the world's making. The impact of the sexual abuse

¹⁸ Reflection on the sin of the church can all too easily slip towards self-pity at one remove. The point of acknowledging sin is to do something about it.

¹⁹ See, for example, the criticisms made of uses of the internet for religious consumerism in the document *The Church and Internet*, (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002).

scandals of recent years cannot be underestimated; a profound breach of trust has occurred which has laid bare all sorts of difficult and sorrowing areas of the church's life: the lack of accountability at all levels of the church, the divide between clergy and laity, the captivity of laity and priesthood alike, and the deep problems surrounding the way priesthood is currently conceived and practised.²⁰ I have encountered the view within the church that at a time of crisis like this we should be holding all the more tightly to the wisdom of the church's practices in order to weather out the storm. I cannot agree: if we take a deep breath and carry on as if nothing has happened we have missed an opportunity for self-reflection, difficult thinking, growth; more than that, we have failed to live honestly and truthfully. The church's attitude to these events must be to receive them as *opprobria* in the continual struggle of the conversion of the church's life.²¹

So, this thesis is as much an exercise in concrete ecclesiology as it is an examination of it. The theological foreground is Hauerwas's work, the challenge it presents to the church and the vision of the concrete church that it espouses. The theological background is a more general discussion to do with how concrete ecclesiology works and what safeguards it puts in place to ensure both its orientation to God and the kingdom, and its orientation towards the life of the concrete life of the church. The first chapter is a basic exposition of Hauerwas's thought about the church. As I have already indicated its scope will be selective,

²⁰ For further reading, see incisive studies by Gerard Mannion, ' "A Haze of Fiction": Legitimation, Accountability and Truthfulness', Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett (eds.), *Governance, Accountability and the Future of the Catholic Church* (London: Continuum, 2004), 161-177, and Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* (London: Continuum, 2002).

²¹ *Opprobria*, often translated as 'humiliations' or 'disgraces' is how the Rule of Benedict describes the difficult correction which a novice must receive in order to progress in the monastic life. For how this relates to monastic formation, see Cardinal Basil Hume, *Searching for God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 23-30.

inasmuch as I am presenting Hauerwas's ecclesiology by foregrounding the characteristic features it shares with concrete ecclesiology, which I outlined above. This means I am focussing on Hauerwas's presentation of the church *as a marked and marking body*. Within this constructive presentation, my first concern is to show how Hauerwas sees the church's distinctive practices as both *forming* and *revealing* it as a witness to Christ, so the focus of the discussion will be the church as witness. My second concern, though difficult to separate from the first, is to consider how Hauerwas sees the church as relating to the world, particularly in terms of how the church and world are *known* as such – that is, my focus is epistemological.²² These two interests are pursued through discussing Hauerwas's ecclesiology in terms of his two principal claims about the task of the church: first, that it is called to *be* the church, second, that it is called to let the world *know* that it is the world.

Outlining Hauerwas's thought on the church brings several methodological concerns to the fore, regarding how Hauerwas's theology should be presented.²³ Stanley Hauerwas delights in being something of a theological cowboy. His later work is deliberately unsystematic, and even when invited to make his theological position clear, he does so in a collection of essays on homosexuality, mental

²² This task is made slightly complex by the fact that Hauerwas denies *having* an epistemology – he claims only to have ecclesiology, which some, he admits, may find problematic. See Stanley Hauerwas, 'Failure of Communication or a Case of Uncomprehending Feminism', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, (50: 2), 1997, 228-39 (229-30). In Hauerwas's case, this seems to me to be like denying one's house timbers have dry rot – it will find you out in the end! If Hauerwas does not have an 'epistemology' as such (I don't know what he has in mind), he does have a set of interrelated ideas about how we know things about God, the church and the world: it is this set of ideas that I will address, as much in Hauerwas's terms of engagement as possible.

²³ For a helpful essay on 'how to read Hauerwas's', see Michael G. Cartwright, 'Afterword: Stanley Hauerwas's Essays in Theological Ethics: A Reader's Guide', John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (eds.), *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 623-71. (Hereafter *HR*).

disability, confession, moral agency, piety and epistemology.²⁴ Even when he recognises the centrality of the church to his theological project, this does not elicit a systematic ecclesiology, but means that his theology is situated in and oriented toward the life of the church. Hauerwas's claims for his own theology are always modest "...one of the ordinary reasons I do not ever seem to get around to doing 'real' theology is that I am a very simple believer...I simply believe, or I believe I should want to believe, what the church believes."²⁵ This context gives Hauerwas's theology a uniquely pedagogical bent. His essays frequently redraw the theological space the readers' questions occupy, thereby managing to prioritise his own purposes.²⁶ His method, his style, the occasionalist nature of his work, even his contradictions shift the reader's mode of theological engagement and confuse their epistemological expectations.²⁷ To an extent, one cannot read Hauerwas charitably without becoming his pupil.

Any exploration of Hauerwas's thought on the church must also take account of the widely varying contexts in which he articulates his theology, and the ways in which his thought has changed over the thirty five years he has been writing.

²⁴ *STT* 1.

²⁵ *STT* 3.

²⁶ See, for example, his claim in the introduction to *STT* that the sermon illustrations are the most important part of the book, (14). For an interesting piece on issues of the ethics of writing as they relate to Hauerwas's work, see Hans S. Reinders, 'The Virtue of Writing Appropriately Or: Is Stanley Hauerwas Right in Thinking He Should Not Write Anymore on the Mentally Handicapped?', L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hütter and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell (eds.), *God, Truth and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 53-70.

²⁷ See Hauerwas, 'Hooks: Random Thoughts by Way of a Response to Griffiths and Ochs', *Modern Theology* 19:1, (2003), 89-101, (89). (Hereafter 'Hooks') for Hauerwas's statement that his argument cannot be separated from the way he tells the story. Hauerwas's rhetorical style and pedagogical method mean that his theology resists certain forms of analysis: Gustavsson's close attention to the logical claims implied by Hauerwas's exact wording in sections of *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, (London: SCM, 2001) (Hereafter *WGU*), is useful for clarification, but either misses the point of the way Hauerwas writes or, in disagreeing with his style's resistance to philosophical questions, continues to pursue a thoroughly logical semantic analysis which is not as fruitful as it might be. See Roger Gustavsson, 'Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe* and the Barthian Outlook: Some Observations', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 35:1, (2007), 25-86. (Hereafter 'The Barthian Outlook').

Hauerwas's theology does not so much develop linearly or systematically as spiral cumulatively, covering the same ground repeatedly in different ways, with different emphases and each time building a little more. Hauerwas compares his way of doing theology with the art of bricklaying: "You can only lay one brick at a time...you have to adjust how you lay the next brick because of what happened when you laid the previous brick and, at the same time, in anticipation of the one to come."²⁸ This means that, in many ways, summarising Hauerwas's 'ecclesiology' or 'Christology' is a self-defeating exercise, because it disregards the way in which context is so important to what he says and the way he says it. Hauerwas's bricklaying approach makes it difficult to present an accurate general picture of his position on any given matter. The task is made more complex by the fact that Hauerwas has changed his position on some matters during his career, as will become evident when I explore his work. It is often difficult to assess the nature of the changes in his thought. Sometimes they make a position more nuanced, sometimes more radical, and sometimes they seem like outright contradictions of his earlier work. Nowhere are these changes more evident than in Hauerwas's gradual realisation of the centrality of the Christian community – the church – to his theology: "In short, all theology must begin and end with ecclesiology."²⁹ More formally, he writes, "...I now realise the Church as Christ's body is a conceptual cornerstone of my constructive project."³⁰ More typically, *qua* son of a brickie, he writes, "Man, I wish I had started with that one."³¹ This makes reading Hauerwas's thought on the church and doing justice to its breadth quite hard. It would be capricious to take him to task over whatever

²⁸ *STT* 9.

²⁹ Hauerwas, 'Why *Resident Aliens* Struck a Chord', *In Good Company*, 58.

³⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, 'A Retrospective Assessment of an "Ethics of Character": The Development of Hauerwas's Theological Project' (1985-2001), *HR* 75-89, (75).

³¹ Hauerwas, 'A Retrospective Assessment', 89.

ecclesiology could be gleaned from his early work, or criticise the place that the church occupies in his theology there. However, despite talk of his ‘early work’, there are not two distinct Hauerwases, just one complicated one, so inasmuch as one cannot really criticise him for positions he has since modified, neither can one squeeze him into a false homogeneity by being too selective.³² Where Hauerwas’s thought has clearly changed or become more nuanced, I discuss the new improved model. Where I suspect that his old presuppositions are at play in his more recent work, explicitly or implicitly, I critique them. Owing to the fact that Hauerwas’s work is so occasionalist, it is sometimes genuinely not clear how his stance on an issue should be interpreted. In these cases, I make all the interpretative options clear, and proceed on the basis of which I consider the most likely and sympathetic interpretation in the light of his whole theological project.

Having thus delineated the contours of Hauerwas’s ecclesiology as faithfully as possible, the second chapter moves on to open up critical perspectives on his ecclesiology, particularly in light of the pastoral concerns I mentioned above. The task of developing critical perspectives on Hauerwas brings another methodological point to the fore: how to really engage with Stanley Hauerwas’s thought about the church. Stanley Hauerwas is passionately interested in the life of the church. Any ‘critical systematic perspective’ on Hauerwas’s thought about the church will completely miss the point if it limits the scope of its criticisms to the theoretical and dogmatic. Really engaging with Stanley Hauerwas means engaging with the life of the church. As I have already indicated, this means that making criticisms of his work and teasing out its systematic limitations should

³² Thomson concurs. See *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 128.

arise from careful reflection on God's revelation and the state of the church, and should be directed towards how those problems might affect the life of the church. It also means that any constructive theological proposals offered in amelioration must also be directed to practical ends: the glory of God and the flourishing of the church. To do anything less would be to fail to connect with Hauerwas's project on a fundamental level. Moreover, Hauerwas's aspirations for the church are far too important to be taken with anything but full practical, as well as dogmatic, seriousness. Stanley Hauerwas wants to change the world and the church – agreeing or disagreeing with him is a serious business. Hauerwas's vision of the dangers threatening the church and the gifts the church has to offer the world demands a response in kind.

The critical approach taken in the second chapter focuses on how 'concrete' Hauerwas's thought about the church is. The characteristics of concrete ecclesiology mentioned above noted the turn to distinctive practices, the concern for the church *as it is* in history, the use of narratives and the question of how the church is known in the world. In the second chapter, the concrete church as we find it becomes the test of Hauerwas's turn to practices as a theological resource for talking about the church. Most Christians experience the church as what Healy calls a 'confused and confusing body' – one in which sin and human frailty are very much evident in the ordinary day-to-day life of the church.³³ The reality of the church as a sinful, muddling body raises significant questions about *how* Hauerwas makes the turn to practices in order to talk about the church. I argue here that Hauerwas's working definition of 'practices' is inadequate. Both

³³ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 3.

Hauerwas in particular and theology's use of anthropological method and concepts in general have received suitable critical and constructive attention from Nicholas Healy and Kathryn Tanner respectively, so I do not engage in a detailed sociological critique of Hauerwas's notion of practices. Rather, I argue that 'practices' cannot bear the theological weight to which Hauerwas's thought about the church subjects them, not just for theoretical reasons regarding sociologically astute definitions of what 'a practice' is, but for good pastoral reasons. Not only are there good sociological and pastoral reasons why practices simply *cannot* in reality bear the weight Hauerwas is asking of them, but there are very good theological and pastoral reasons why a good, well-balanced concrete ecclesiology *should not* ask them to bear such weight.

I have already begun to delineate some of the pastoral concerns arising from the current situation of the church, and the degree to which concrete ecclesiology is oriented toward addressing those concerns. In this critical chapter, these pastoral concerns take particular shape as concerns about how the reality of the church as a sinful body demands a pastorally careful approach to ecclesiology, and how this ought to affect how we conceive of and discern the church's practices. The church is vulnerable, and all its members are frail simply on account of being human. Being careful means looking out for the weakest and most vulnerable members of the church and desiring a community that seeks out the lost, and does not abandon them in pursuit of the perfection of the kingdom. This requires pastoral sensitivity and a certain gentleness in the way we articulate and preach a vision for the church.³⁴ It also demands that concrete ecclesiologies do not, in turning to the

³⁴ This is less a cautionary note for Hauerwas, whose theology is most often nuanced enough to avoid brutalising anybody, and more a note for some of his disciples, who have Hauerwas's vigour

concrete church, tie up rhetorical burdens too heavy for ordinary people to lift. In light of this concern, I begin to draw out ways in which Hauerwas's theology is pastorally problematic, and could be made more careful. This focuses on the church's communal task of *conversio morum*.³⁵ For various reasons, the church has become deeply unskilled in practices of discovering and confessing sin. Though Hauerwas is aware of this, his acknowledgement of the fact does not go far enough: if the church is so desperately unskilled in these therapeutic practices of self reflection, then it is imperative that we open up spaces and conversations for discerning our own practices; this is vital to any attempt to restore the church with these practices and vital to the service whereby we offer them as gifts to the world. The church needs to nurture practices of discernment about the practices that constitute its life. This task of mutual discernment and questioning is made both fruitful and awkward by the church's division and confusion within itself.

Having examined Hauerwas's use of practices in the light of pastoral concerns, the second chapter culminates in two critical-constructive studies that are intended to highlight problematic areas in Hauerwas's theology and begin to suggest ways in which they might be fruitfully addressed. The first is the result of a close examination of the role of the Holy Spirit in Hauerwas's theology, and focuses on how Hauerwas conceives of the church as witness in the world. I argue that

and preached style without his gentleness and measure. I think of some of David Matzko McCarthy's pronouncements on sex in the Blackwell Reader, for example, which I hardly think can be either a help, a comfort or a realistic vision for those in difficult marriages. See David Matzko McCarthy, 'Becoming One Flesh: Marriage, Remarriage and Sex', *BCCE* 276-88.

³⁵ I have chosen the Benedictine expression *conversio morum* rather than the often-favoured twofold 'ecclesia semper reformanda' and 'ecclesia semper purificanda', because of its emphasis on discernment in community and practices of forgiveness. *Conversio morum*, ('conversion of life') is one of the three vows taken by professed Benedictine monastics, and signifies a daily struggle of conversion away from sin and towards Christ. See the chapter on conversion in Daniel Rees et al, *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* (London: SPCK, 1978), 144-53. See also n.21 on *opprobria* above.

Hauerwas's theology would benefit from a clearer distinction, eschatological in character, between the action of the Spirit and the action of the church in the event of witness. Such a distinction would preserve a better account of grace in relation to the church's practices by relativising the church's successes and failings within a wider horizon of God's sovereign purposes with the world. In outlining the theological reasons why practices should not bear the weight Hauerwas asks of them, the ways in which practices can still fit into a systematically balanced and pastorally conscientious concrete ecclesiology should become clearer. The second area for attention is Hauerwas's use of narrative, and, particularly, the ways in which he brings it to bear as an epistemological principle. I argue that Hauerwas's use of narrative with regard to the church ends up confusing the ways in which we know God with the ways in which the church is known – a confusion which presents both theological and pastoral dangers. Though Hauerwas is correct that the church cannot let the world know it is the world without knowing itself as the church first, we need to be careful that we separate out the ways of knowing that pertain to the church and to the world, and that we distinguish between the skills and practices that pertain to the church's knowledge of itself, and those that pertain to its engagement with the world.

The third chapter opens a conversation with Karl Barth's ecclesiology. I have already suggested that Barthian moves lie behind some of the post-foundationalist emphases of concrete ecclesiology. Barth's formative influence on Hauerwas, though not often explicitly acknowledged, is considerable.³⁶ I have chosen Barth as an interlocutor for Hauerwas, partly because their similarities as theologians are

³⁶ See, for example, the statement "We cut our theological teeth on Barth." in Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20.

sufficient to make such an engagement particularly illuminating, and partly because their differences are such that Barth serves as a useful corrective to Hauerwas's extremes. Barth and Hauerwas stand in similar places in relation to their societal contexts and how they feel the church should fit into those contexts. Just as Barth saw that liberal Protestant theology had left the church without any resources to fight the rise of Nazism, so Hauerwas sees much in liberal democracy as an insidious attack on the church against which the church is unable to defend itself.³⁷

Barth and Hauerwas are involved in a very similar theological endeavour. Both are interested in describing a theological world, or, better, in evincing a kind of world of Christian language which speaks of God confidently as the ground, being and reality of all that is.³⁸ Barth and Hauerwas are engaged in a struggle to get the church to grow out of the story told it by modernity, which has made it no more than a child with an invisible friend, and let it stand, confident and hopeful, as a witness to God's truth. Hauerwas sees in the *Church Dogmatics* not just a superb retelling of the Christian story, but an important pedagogical move. The *Church Dogmatics* is a manual designed to train Christians in the habits of Godly speech, and Barth's constant repetition is as much a pedagogical device enabling Christians to become immersed in the world of Christian language as it is a necessary form for faithful theology.³⁹ Hauerwas clearly admires the repetitious nature of Barth's work very much. Not only does the constant redescription reveal our relation to God's knowledge, but Hauerwas also argues that Barth's

³⁷ See S. Hauerwas and M. Baxter, 'The Kingdom of Christ: Why Freedom of "Belief" is Not Enough' *In Good Company*, 199-216.

³⁸ See Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 90-105, particularly 98-103.

³⁹ See Stanley Hauerwas, *WGU* 10, 141, 145-6, 182-3. Hauerwas also sees Barth as trying to develop a theological metaphysics (by which he means an account of all that is), for which see *WGU* 184.

methods show he believed that Christian speech about God must transform the speaker.⁴⁰ Theology done Karl Barth's way is not explaining or reducing the truths of Christian faith, but a crucial form of witness as it shows the truth about God and the world over and over again.⁴¹ Only thus can God become the true subject of theology, and only thus can natural theology's fallacy that God is another piece of the metaphysical furniture of the universe be finally overcome.⁴² Scotching the 'invisible friend' myth of modernity (in which natural theology is unwittingly complicit) involves a confident display of Christian speech, which Hauerwas sees in the world of the *Church Dogmatics*.⁴³

"The *Church Dogmatics*, with its unending and confident display of Christian speech, is Barth's attempt to train us to be a people capable of truthful witness to the God who alone is the truth."⁴⁴ The same statement could be made of Hauerwas's body of work. Hauerwas, clearly recognising affinity between the way Barth unselfconsciously applies himself to theological spadework and his own preferred methods, writes, "...I remain instructed by Barth's lack of concern with theological prolegomena. He simply does theology without being overly concerned about how theology should be done. For clearly a preoccupation with the latter would detract from doing the former."⁴⁵ There is little in Hauerwas's work that lies outside his pedagogical purposes: all his theology is designed to challenge the reader to examine their preconceptions and shift their mode of

⁴⁰ *WGU* 176. Hauerwas shares Barth's conviction that ethics is properly contained within and inseparable from dogmatics. See Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 90-123, particularly 90-1.

⁴¹ For the necessity of narrative form for theology see *WGU* 182-4.

⁴² *WGU* 145-6.

⁴³ *WGU* 176. For a critique of narrative as a form of argument, see Gustavsson, 'The Barthian Outlook', 75-7.

⁴⁴ *WGU* 176.

⁴⁵ 'Hooks', 93.

engagement with the subject matter. Hauerwas achieves this with a more generous use of shock value than Barth ever managed (compare the titles ‘Nein!’ and ‘Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians Are Doing It’, for example), but Barth’s evident joy in relentlessly representing Christian truth and Stanley Hauerwas’s exuberant swearing fulfil rather similar functions. Hauerwas, too, is trying to confidently present a habitable world of intelligible, plausible Christian witness and shock Christians out of habits that are destroying the church.⁴⁶ Both are trying to produce faithful disciples of Christ, not a theological school.⁴⁷ Hauerwas’s work aims to demonstrate the possibility of Christian living and the necessity of its peaceful and distinctive nature. The sheer number of books and papers he has written, the speeches he gives and the wide variety of subjects and contexts in which he delivers them together present a worldview that demands a response. Both Hauerwas and Barth are interested in presenting people with a crisis: either these Christian things we talk about are the most important things in the world, or they are meaningless; either we must respond and change our lives, or the truth of their witness has not reached us.

Despite the formidable scope of the *Church Dogmatics* and Stanley Hauerwas’s professed aversion to all approaches systematic, the ways Karl Barth and Stanley Hauerwas do theology have much in common.⁴⁸ Both work by picking up the objects of faith and examining them, turning them over and redescribing them from different directions and placing them in different settings in order to explore

⁴⁶ *WGU* 214.

⁴⁷ See *WGU* 218-9, *STT* 7.

⁴⁸ See Hauerwas’s comment, “I refuse to be a systematic theologian, but that does not mean what I write is not interconnected.” Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Where Would I Be Without Friends?’, *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 313-332, (319-20).

their conceptual richness and see how they function in Christian life.⁴⁹ Just as this continual process of redescription makes it hard to summarise Hauerwas's work on the church in a fruitful and comprehensive way, so trying to produce a faithful and accurate sketch of Barth's ecclesiology is immensely difficult. Barth works by describing multiple key theological nodal points and using them as a vista onto the doctrine of the church, so his ecclesiology is a sort of mapping exercise whereby the location of the church in Christian life and doctrine is plotted from various creedal coordinates. This means 'the Church' in the *Church Dogmatics* can have quite a vague shape at times, as Barth sketches it repeatedly in terms of its relation to election, sanctification or mission. It also means that Barth's work on the church can easily be pulled out of shape by overemphasising one of his approaches. The biggest challenge in presenting Barth's ecclesiology is keeping all these various viewpoints on the church in conversation. While trying to present a wholesome picture of Barth's ecclesiology, I concentrate on showing how his ecclesiological pronouncements fit into wider systematic contexts.

The ways in which Hauerwas and Barth's theological projects diverge also make them fruitful conversation partners. Though Barth is a tremendously important unspoken influence on Hauerwas's theological outlook, Hauerwas seeks to move beyond his work. For Hauerwas, Barth's systematic structures are only really valuable in the life of the church when they become lived stories, part of the script

⁴⁹ "We can only describe him again and again, and often, and in the last resort infinitely often...We can only speak of it [knowledge of God] again and again in different variations as God in His true revelation gives us part in the truth of His knowing, and therefore gives our knowing similarity with His own, and therefore truth." Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics II/1: The Doctrine of God*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Parker et al, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 250. See also Hauerwas's appreciation of Barth's methods in relation to his own in the introduction of *STT* 2-3. For a particularly metaphorically apt discussion of Hauerwas's method, see *STT* 8-9.

of Christian worship and action in community. It is for this reason that Hauerwas's Gifford Lectures, though they include a largely appreciatory study of Barth in contrast to William James and Reinhold Niebuhr, culminate in an account of what Christian witness looks like embodied in the church – Hauerwas picks John Howard Yoder, John Paul II and Dorothy Day. I have already drawn attention to the ways in which Hauerwas and Barth's theological methods are similar. One of the key reasons why Barth's ecclesiology is such a useful corrective to Hauerwas's, however, is because their methods diverge in one important respect. Barth's writings have what John Webster calls a 'musical' structure, where a theme is announced and then goes through many variations.⁵⁰ Barth explores the nature of the church in relation to a number of different doctrinal contexts – the Holy Spirit, the resurrection, the crucifixion, the ascension, the eschaton. This gives Barth's thought about the church a breadth and inhabitability that Hauerwas's more occasionalist structure cannot match. The problematic areas in Barth's ecclesiology – and Hauerwas is aware of them – can be held in tension with the whole range of doctrinal contexts in which Barth speaks about the church, and held in balance.⁵¹ Hauerwas's method of working, as much as any specific defect in his theology, means he lacks the breadth of doctrinal contexts to restrain the more theologically runaway aspects of his work.⁵² The aim of this conversation with Barth is to look at how Barth structures his ecclesiology in relation to its respective doctrinal contexts. This study will not

⁵⁰ John Webster, *Outstanding Christian Thinkers: Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000), 13-4.

⁵¹ A similar point to the one I am making about Barth's ecclesiology is made by Werpehowski in relation to Barth's ethics: he writes, "Second, Barth dialectically specifies the meaning of concepts central to his ethics of divine command through further specification of the concepts which locate it appropriately. In so doing, he will tend to use ordinary words in a peculiar but coherent way by assimilating them to his conceptual scheme." (His emphasis). William Werpehowski, 'Command and History in the Ethics of Karl Barth' *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 9:2, (1981), 298-320, (302).

⁵² David Fergusson makes a similar point about Hauerwas's imprecision in expounding dogmatic themes, for which see 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, (50:2), 1997, 242-9, (245).

only highlight the areas of tension in Hauerwas's theology, but will also help to clarify in a constructive way the doctrinal loci that I have been reinforcing throughout, by criticising the more problematic areas in Hauerwas's work.

The final chapter recalls and builds upon the critical-constructive work of the foregoing chapters. Having built a cumulative picture both of what is troublesome about Hauerwas's agenda in a concrete ecclesiology context and which doctrinal emphases might need strengthening, it begins to suggest ways in which, where the criticisms of Hauerwas in particular have purchase on concrete ecclesiology in general, others may also wish to modify their approach. Healy's constructive and methodological study *Church, World and the Christian Life* was a ground clearing exercise, opening up space in contemporary discussion for what he calls 'practical-prophetic' ways of thinking about the church. One of the principal areas for attention in my study of Hauerwas has been the need to open up space for ecclesial discernment, and discernment about the practice of ecclesiology itself. My final remarks are intended to open a conversation about how that 'space' that Healy identifies might be made more pastorally careful by being subjected to thoroughgoing modes of concrete doctrinal reflection and by being held in conversation with the world. Simultaneously, safeguards need to be sketched out to ensure that, while caring for the 'weaker' members, the church responds robustly and hopefully to the gospel challenge, and continuously orients its life to the greater glory of God.

2. *Being the Church and Knowing the World*

Being the Church

“...one of the ordinary reasons why I do not ever seem to get around to doing ‘real’ theology is that I am a very simple believer...The truth is that I simply believe, or want to believe, what the church believes...Therefore, I do not assume that my task as a theologian is to make what the church believes somehow more truthful than the truth inherent in the fact that this is what the church believes.”¹

In introducing Stanley Hauerwas as a person, a theologian and a preacher, it will have become apparent that he is not easily characterised as a ‘very simple believer’. The interrelation between the words ‘church’, ‘belief’ and ‘truth’ in those few sentences alone, taken from the introduction to *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, suggests there is a great deal more at stake in Hauerwas’s vision for the church than such a disarming set of statements would suggest. On one level, Hauerwas is absolutely right: his desire for the church is that it fall in love all over again with the beauty, truth and sufficiency of its own story and calling. However, Hauerwas’s demure statement here downplays that fact that the consequences of this call for re-enchantment and the form that it takes are far-reaching, touching everything from how we conceive of the purpose of the church and its witness to the practicalities of arranging Sunday worship. In fact, Hauerwas’s claim simply to link the truth of what the church believes to the fact of the church’s belief at all should alert the reader to his intention to turn thinking about the church on its head, such that warts-and-all Sunday worship becomes the gravitational centre of the ecclesiological universe.²

¹ STT 3-4.

² See the ambitions of Hauerwas and Wells in Chapters 1 and 2 of *BCCE*, ‘Christian Ethics as Informed Prayer’, 3-12, and ‘The Gift of the Church’, 13-27, or Hauerwas’s ambition to “foment a modest revolution” in *In Good Company*, 12.

Hauerwas's central claim is that the first task of the church is to *be* the church.³ 'Church' here obviously entails something that the church is by virtue of its establishment, that is, its placement in a story and where it finds itself in history, something the church is by virtue of its being a community in the midst of the world now, and something that the church is called to be in the end. Though, for Hauerwas, this protology and eschatology are inseparable strands of the same narrative of God's dealings with the world, it will help to deal with Christology under the first heading, salvation under the second and eschatology under the third. Having thus delineated the basic form of Hauerwas's thought about the church, I will go on to consider in greater detail how Hauerwas sees Christian practices as central to the church *being* the church.

Jesus' life is the foundation of the church's life. In making this statement, we come into the story halfway through, because God's calling of a people in Christ comes as the fulfilment and climax of God's calling Israel to be a nation set apart. Israel's hope of the kingdom is revealed in Jesus and made present by his life, death, resurrection and his calling of a people whose lives exhibit the life God desires for all people. Hauerwas does not so much call on Christ as an ontological principle as Jesus' concrete life and example: it is the 'life of this man Jesus' that saves, not the hypostatic union as an abstract floating principle.⁴ What Jesus said and did is the substance of the church's redemption and the means of her life. Jesus preaches the kingdom, the reality of which can only be understood through

³ See 'The Gesture of Truthful Story', *CET* 102-3, *PK* 100 and Stanley Hauerwas, with Richard Bondi and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).6. (Hereafter *TT*).

⁴ *PK* 72-3. For Hauerwas's ecclesiological Christocentricity in distinction from Barth's, see Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 101-2.

the standards by which Jesus lived.⁵ The church is therefore the foretaste of the kingdom given to the world because “...the content of the kingdom, the means of our citizenship, turns out to be nothing more or less than learning to imitate Jesus’ life through taking on the task of being his disciple.”⁶ Redemption is made possible because Jesus’ life, death and resurrection give us the practices necessary to live truthfully and non-violently as a people set apart: “...he [Jesus] proclaims that the kingdom is present insofar as his life reveals the effective power of God to create a transformed people capable of living peaceably in a violent world.”⁷

The strong link between God’s calling of a people in Israel and Christ means that the idea of an ‘ethical significance’ of Christ apart from the story of the church is hollow: Jesus cannot be known apart from his significance, the lives he changed.⁸ Like an atomic experiment where the presence of the scientist affects the behaviour of the particles, Jesus disturbs our interpretation of his life, and disturbs those who relate it to us in their turn, and we cannot see it any other way. Knowing Jesus cannot be separated from the story of Israel and the church. Thus, it is only by following the kingdom-oriented patterns of Jesus’ life that we can know the significance of Christ’s resurrection.⁹ Because in Jesus’ life we understand what imitating God is, being a people called to be holy as God is holy

⁵ PK 74. Because of its strong link to the life of the church and Hauerwas’s desire to prioritise Jesus’ founding of a way of life over more traditional soteriological concerns (specific theories of atonement, incarnation etc.), Hauerwas’s christology can come across as veering toward exemplarism. Fergusson writes, “The christological language tends to be that of revelation rather than redemption. The latter seems confined to quality of life realised only in the church.” See D. Fergusson, ‘Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?’, 245. Hauerwas acknowledges in response that his refusal to separate Christological and soteriological reflection may unintentionally downplay the ‘once-for-all’ nature of Christ’s death and resurrection, but also argues that his work focuses on the change in the universe that the Christ event effects. *STT* 5, n.8. See Chapter 2 for my more specific criticisms in this vein.

⁶ PK 80.

⁷ PK 83.

⁸ PK 73-4, ‘Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom’, *HR* 119-20.

⁹ PK 75.

means following and imitating Jesus.¹⁰ Hauerwas is careful to distance himself from a simple account of Christ as example. He claims we cannot, as individuals, imitate what Jesus did: “To be like Jesus requires that I become part of a community that practices virtues, not that I copy his life point by point.” Sure, we should copy virtuous people, but by doing what they do *in the manner in which they do it* – this means learning what practices mean from the Christian community.¹¹ The key idea here is that “...to be like Jesus is to join him in the journey through which we are trained to be a people capable of claiming citizenship in God’s kingdom of non-violent love – a love that would overcome the powers of this world, not through coercion and force, but through the power of this one man’s death.”¹²

So, being the church is being a people called in Christ to be holy and thus to imitate his life through discipleship in the church community. This life of discipleship springs from the forgiveness made possible by Christ’s resurrection and shows that being church is following our calling in Christ to become agents in the history of the kingdom of God.¹³ It has already become evident that Hauerwas’s Christology has a pronounced narrative streak. Theology must be narrative in form, based on the conviction that God has acted by calling a people in Christ.¹⁴ More than that, because knowing Jesus cannot be separated from

¹⁰ Wells argues that this emphasis on imitation “...expresses the continuity of Christian ethics with the ethics of the Old Testament.” See Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 93-4. For the imitation of Christ as a theme in Hauerwas’s ethics, see 93-7.

¹¹ PK 76-81, ‘Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom’, HR 121. See also Hauerwas and Wells’ discussion of discipleship in BCCE 24-6.

¹² ‘Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom’, 121.

¹³ PK 90.

¹⁴ No. 1 of ‘Reforming Christian Social Ethics: Ten Theses’, HR 111. This is a Barthian move. For Hauerwas’s discussion of Barth on how the narrative structure of theological reflection is a consequence of the incarnation, see WGU 178-9 and particularly 182.

knowing the story of Israel and the church and because God has chosen to reveal salvation narratively, narrative is epistemically fundamental.¹⁵ This emphasis on narrative also makes the community epistemically indispensable. We only know God by being transformed, gradually coming to understanding asymptotically as God enlarges our hearts through the action of the Holy Spirit. But we know God as a person, not a set of attributes, and come to know the story of God's calling a people through the existence of a community bearing the name of Christ. Thus, Hauerwas very often talks about salvation in terms of being made part of a story: the story of the church and therefore the story of Christ, God and Israel. Redemption is placing oneself (or being placed) in God's story by becoming part of a people.¹⁶ It is the distinctive narrative of God's dealings with the world that forms the community as a distinctive presence in the world, a people set apart.¹⁷

This narrative and communal nature of redemption as being made part of the story of Jesus means that Hauerwas is interested in the sanctification of the body of Christ, not in the piety of individuals, and that sanctification cannot be a nominal change but a real difference. Salvation, for Hauerwas, is transformation of our lives through our embodiment of the practices of peace given by Christ. Faith as a response to salvation takes the form of fidelity and moral transformation, such that justification becomes inseparable from salvation.¹⁸ This means that the Christian community, naturally, must be distinctive in its practices. Transformation of life in response to the gospel, as we have already seen, is central to the individual's knowledge of God. Unsurprisingly, as we shall see, the epistemological centrality

¹⁵ PK 28.

¹⁶ Hauerwas speaks of both 'placing oneself' in the narrative (eg. PK 35), and of 'being placed' (PK 68, 87).

¹⁷ PK 60.

¹⁸ PK 92-3.

of the church also relates to its tangible holiness insofar as it is God's giving the world a foretaste of the kingdom.¹⁹

Hauerwas's claims for Christian distinctiveness are very strong, such that he is quite frequently accused of being sectarian.²⁰ Hauerwas holds that it is the concrete practices of the church that make it constitutive of the good news. "The church does not have a social ethic but is a social ethic, then, insofar as it is a community that can be clearly distinguished from the world...Put bluntly, the church is in the world to mark us."²¹ Hauerwas is adamant that there should be some kind of visible social difference between Christians and secular society.²² He does not just mean the sacraments, although confession, eucharist and baptism play a large role in forming a community which is truth-telling, united and peaceful.²³ Rather, the Christian community must be distinctive in its orientation towards the kingdom, which means being distinctive not just in its inner life (sacraments etc.), but in the way it engages with the world. So the way we treat the handicapped must illustrate our orientation towards the kingdom; we do not desire their self-authored autonomy, but recognise in friendship with the mentally

¹⁹ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 107.

²⁰ I will not discuss this at length, as it receives much attention in secondary literature and is unlikely ever to be resolved. See, for example, the classic accusation from James Gustafson, 'The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University', *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society*, 40 (1985), 83-94, or more recently Theo Hobson's hostile piece, 'Against Hauerwas' *New Blackfriars*, 88:1015, (2007), 300-12. For a classic response from Hauerwas to specific criticisms, see 'Failure of Communication or a Case of Uncomprehending Feminism'. For an even-handed, constructive review, see Nigel Biggar's piece 'Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?' *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 141-160.

²¹ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 101, 103.

²² "Salvation Even In Sin": Learning to Speak Truthfully About Ourselves', *STT* 61-74, (65).

²³ For baptism, see 'Going Forward by Looking Back: Agency Reconsidered', *STT* 93-103, particularly 102-3. For Eucharist, see 'The Sanctified Body: Why Perfection Does Not Require a "Self"' *STT* 77-91, particularly 90-1. For confession, see 'On Doctrine and Ethics', *STT* 19-36, particularly 23-9.

handicapped God teaching us love, wisdom and God's own patience.²⁴ The Christian community should be distinctive in the way it engages in politics and public life, withdrawing from 'civic republicanism' when it authorises violence, recognising the limits of political liberalism: in terms of concrete practices, Hauerwas supports the Mennonite avoidance of suing in civil law courts.²⁵ The distinctive holiness of the Christian community comes into Hauerwas's work at every turn – it is the context in which his 'ecclesiology' most often meets his 'ethics' - but his most insistent theme is that the distinguishing characteristic of the church should be non-violence.

Hauerwas's eschatology bears the same narrative stamp and the same inseparable relation to community.²⁶ Redemption is becoming part of a shared history that God intends for all creation by following a way of life inaugurated by Christ.²⁷ That Christians are to live 'out of control' is the practical point of Hauerwas's eschatology. God is the Lord of history, and the cross determines the meaning of

²⁴ Hauerwas discusses the work of Jean Vanier and the L'Arche Communities with great approval. See 'Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped', *STT* 143-156. See also 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 107-10.

²⁵ Hauerwas's long standing critique of liberalism, theological and political, can be found throughout his work: see his criticism of Reinhold Niebuhr in *WGU* 87-140, or *Dispatches From The Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) 18-25, or *BCCE* 28-34. For a potted objection, see No. 9 in 'Reforming Christian Social Ethics: Ten Theses', *HR* 111-15, (114). For potted (and specific) political discussion of what Christians should do, see 'Why the "Sectarian Temptation" Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson', *HR* 90-110. For civic republicanism see 105, for the limits of liberalism see 102, for the Mennonite law stance see 104. I will not engage in the anti-liberalism debate, as there is much secondary literature. For two critiques of Hauerwas's understanding of liberalism and the enlightenment project, see (briefly) Gustavsson, 'The Barthian Outlook', 43-5, or Rasmusson, *The Church As Polis*, 248-302.

²⁶ Hauerwas's theology is often seen as predominantly eschatological in emphasis, to the exclusion of a thorough doctrine of creation. See, for example, James Gustafson, 'The Sectarian Temptation', and Hauerwas's response in the introduction to *CET* 1-21. While not addressing directly the need for a more developed doctrine of creation, I will argue that Hauerwas's eschatology is problematic.

²⁷ *PK* 61-2.

history, so Christian convictions mean that they must live 'out of control'.²⁸ Jesus came to preach the kingdom and the end of this world, and the kingdom arrives with him insofar as his life enables and establishes a community of people capable of living peacefully. Christians must learn to see the world eschatologically and live by a different story.²⁹ Thus, discipleship is dispossession in response to the cross, which is the ultimate dispossession of Jesus by which God conquers the powers of this world and frees us from the lie of the stories we create for ourselves.³⁰ This means making ourselves vulnerable by forgiving again and again, and being peaceful in the face of violence that might destroy us. "We must, then, learn to wait as we seek to manifest to the world God's peace which comes into our lives by no other means than the power of that truth itself. Such waiting is painful indeed in a world as unjust and violent as ours. But we believe it justified, since we have been promised that God will use our waiting for the complete triumph of the Kingdom."³¹ Only by accepting and practising forgiveness can Christians "...make the forgiveness wrought by God...the absolute centre of history."³² So, Christians are called to eschatological peace by joining a peaceful, forgiving, truthful community made possible by the example of Christ. In so doing, their peacefulness in the world is a witness to and sign of the kingdom, participating in Christ as the ultimate defining sign. Christians are

²⁸ 'Reforming Christian Social Ethics: Ten Theses', *HR* 113, 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* p.135, see also 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 102.

²⁹ *PK* 83, 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 129. For a particularly combative formulation of the idea that Christians belong to another story, see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 15-9. Hauerwas's insistence that we are not in control of history is linked to his agreement with Barth that it is only the illusion of sin that makes us think that our lives are fated – only *God's* being is identical with his act. Therefore only God is actual, and the meaning of our lives is contingent upon his actuality – so the cross is really the meaning of history. See *WGU* 187 and Barth's 'Fate and Idea in Theology', H. Martin Rumscheidt (ed.), *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 25-61. (Hereafter FI).

³⁰ *PK* 72-87, 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', 133.

³¹ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 104.

³² 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 136, *PK* 72-87.

agents in the history of the kingdom, and they are in Christ insofar as they participate in the peaceful community that follows him into the kingdom.³³

Hauerwas contends often that the church does not have a social ethic, but is a social ethic. The first focus of that ethic is the fellowship of the church and the formation of a people according to a story that makes them a distinctive presence in the world.³⁴ Having briefly surveyed Hauerwas's thought on what the church *is* in terms of its relation to Christ, its role in redemption and its relation to the kingdom, it remains to take a closer look at how practices form the church. Hauerwas's commitment to the unity of theology and ethics and his self-consciously contextualised way of doing theology mean that the specific practices of the church are often the proximate edge of the deeper systematic grammar at work in his theology. The loosely woven nature of Hauerwas's theology means it is not always easy to recover a very joined up account of precisely how particular practices form the Christian community. However, Hauerwas discusses the peace that should characterise the church so often and in so many different contexts that it shows perhaps the clearest systematic pattern of how a distinctive practice functions as both a calling of the church to holiness and a consequence of the church's belief in Christ.

Jesus' life gives us practices of peaceableness through showing us how to live non-violently. He died at the hands of the violent powers of the world, but his subsequent resurrection reveals God's eschatological peace to be a present reality by establishing a community that can live in peace through the power of the

³³ *PK* 72-87, 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 136, 141.

³⁴ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 101, 103, 105.

forgiveness shown in Christ. Peacefulness is linked to truth, because truth is the condition for genuine peace, and truth by its nature cannot rely on violence.³⁵ The peacefulness of truth is a sign that the church is a forgiven people: it is a sign that Christ actually makes a difference.³⁶ Because the church is a people called by God through the work of Christ, they are called to the peace of the Kingdom. Therefore, the calling to live peaceably is a privileged task of the church.³⁷ The church is called to correspond to Christ's peaceableness, for in Christ God has already laid down our weapons before we take them up. Christians should continue to be peaceable in the face of the world's violence despite their stance's apparent ineffectiveness, because their lives are now part of a different narrative: the narrative God has enacted in Christ and is continuing to enact through the ongoing work of the Spirit.³⁸

The belief in this calling of the church is embodied in practices of peace – Hauerwas is certain that peace is a virtue, which requires practice.³⁹ Being a forgiven people means telling the truth to one another and having the skills to recognise our own sin, confess it and thereby acknowledge the dependence of our own lives on God's forgiveness.⁴⁰ This skill is not one of our own contriving: the story of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and gives us the ability to confess our failings. Therefore, naming one's own sin or recognising the sin of others is a thoroughly theological achievement, not a vague

³⁵ *PK* 15.

³⁶ 'Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church', *HR* 318-326, (321-2).

³⁷ 'Peacemaking', *HR* 326.

³⁸ *WGU* 212.

³⁹ 'Peacemaking', *HR* 318ff, see also 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 108.

⁴⁰ 'Peacemaking', *HR* 322 see also 'Salvation Even in Sin: Learning to Speak Truthfully about Ourselves', *STT* 61-74, 'The Sanctified Body' *STT* 90-1.

sociological or philosophical exercise.⁴¹ Hauerwas is clear that peacefulness is a task of the church, not just a result of its calling, so it involves practices of truth: “Just as we are only able to name as well as identify violence by discovering the practises of peace in which we are imbedded, so we are only able to name, identify and see the connection between our sins by the practises that constitute a community made possible by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.”⁴² It is only by confronting the sin of others from the middle of our own that the church can become a ‘...community of the forgiven empowered to witness to God’s kingdom of peace wrought through Jesus of Nazareth.’⁴³ Thus, through the belief and practices of Christians, the peacefulness of the church becomes a challenge and witness to the false peace of the world.⁴⁴

Hauerwas quotes Joseph Mangina approvingly when he asserts that the church is “the binding medium in which faith takes place. The medium is, if not the message, the condition of possibility of grasping the message in its truth.”⁴⁵ We have seen the epistemological centrality of the community and the narrative form of revelation to the possibilities of knowing God and being ‘saved’, but the way in

⁴¹ ‘Salvation Even in Sin’ *STT* 70-2.

⁴² ‘Salvation Even In Sin’, *STT* 70.

⁴³ ‘Peacemaking’, *HR* 323.

⁴⁴ ‘Peacemaking’, *HR* 324-5. Linda Woodhead notes that Hauerwas’s preoccupation with the peace/violence dynamic bespeaks an androcentric definition of violence, based on war as violence from ‘outside’, rather than the violence from ‘inside’ (intimates and family) to which women are often more exposed. See Linda Woodhead, ‘Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas?’ *Faithfulness and Fortitude* 171-6. I would take Woodhead’s criticism further and suggest that Hauerwas’s language of pacifism as the forsaking of the option to retaliate is also an androcentric perspective: without wishing to falsely homogenise women’s experience, women frequently do not have the option to retaliate. Jean Bethke Elshtain makes similar points in her *Women and War* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1987). This double preoccupation with male-perspective driven peace/violence dichotomy is probably implicated in the slightly macho attitude to the role of the Christian community I identify as ‘Robin Hood ecclesiology’ in Chapter 2. For a relevant response from Hauerwas to this kind of criticism, see ‘Failure of Communication or a Case of Uncomprehending Feminism’, 228-39.

⁴⁵ Joseph L. Mangina ‘Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas’ *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 52:3, (1999), 269-305, (294-5).

which people either ‘place themselves’ or ‘are placed’ in that narrative of salvation has so far been left unexplained. Part of the reason why Hauerwas so often finds himself on the wrong end of accusations of sectarianism is because it sometimes appears from his theology that one is either in or out of the church’s story, either a Christian or a denizen of the world, and there can seem little gradation in either category.⁴⁶ As I hope to show further on, this ‘sectarian’ bent is more a function of his homiletical style and occasionalist method than a thoroughgoing theological stance, though it is nonetheless something to be careful about. Something close to an aporia of learning, albeit resolved through retrospective reflection rather than recourse to desire, operates in Hauerwas’s theology here.⁴⁷ This will become clearer after examining how Hauerwas sees individuals becoming part of God’s story through the church, that is, how practices can form us with godly characters.

The first thing to do when looking at how practices form characters is to look at what Hauerwas means by ‘character’ and how he believes it is formed. His thought in this area has developed significantly, from his doctoral dissertation,

⁴⁶ See, for example, Gloria Albrecht’s criticisms in Gloria Albrecht, Review of *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), by Stanley Hauerwas, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50:2, (1997), 219-227 (223-6). Samuel Wells provides an interesting defence of Hauerwas from charges of sectarianism by emphasising his ethics as essentially *eschatological* in character, and by arguing that he could avoid accusations of sectarianism by using temporal rather than spatial metaphors about the kingdom of God. See Samuel Wells, ‘Stanley Hauerwas’ Ethics in Eschatological Perspective’ *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53:3, (2000), 431-48. Healy suggests that this ‘sectarian’ bent betrays misplaced ecclesial cultural anxiety. See *KBER* 297.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Hauerwas’s clarification in *The Peacable Kingdom* that church and world are relational terms, and that ‘world’ is not an ontological designation, but that “The difference between church and world is the difference between agents.” 101. Hauerwas also cites Miroslav Volf’s description of the division between church and world as a ‘soft difference’: “Our difference does not mean that we think that the world is more evil than we, that we think that we are redeemed and the world is fallen. We believe that the world and the church are both fallen *and* redeemed by the cross of Christ. It’s just that the church knows this and is attempting to live in the light of that knowledge, whereas the world does not know this.” *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 53-4. Whether Hauerwas’s claim to a ‘soft difference’ withstands his rhetoric will be addressed in Chapter 2.

published as *Character and the Christian Life* (1975) to his 'Going Forward by Looking Back: Agency Reconsidered' in *Sanctify Them in the Truth* (1998). Hauerwas describes his first attempts to describe moral agency as an effort to balance the idea of 'agency' against 'character', allowing for moral continuity in a person's decisions without their being determined by their character.⁴⁸ Agency and character were to be held in tension. Hauerwas's subsequent attention to Alasdair MacIntyre led him to change his thought quite radically. MacIntyre's insistence that 'action' was not a single primitive concept which could be divided into 'intelligible' and 'unintelligible' action, but rather that unintelligible actions were simply failed intelligible actions meant Hauerwas had to reconsider the centrality of 'intelligibility' to any account of the moral life.⁴⁹ Hauerwas turned his account of the moral life inside out: instead of believing we need agency to understand how we acquire character, he realised that character is the source of our ability to act with integrity.⁵⁰ This effected a turn to narrative as Hauerwas came to believe that story is more important than self in accounts of the moral life and human behaviour.⁵¹ Consciousness, the ability to make sense of one's life, is not so much an awareness as a set of skills that enable us to make sense of our lives.⁵²

⁴⁸ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 94. Samuel Wells argues that Hauerwas's emphasis on narrative did not evolve organically out of his concern for character: in many ways, Hauerwas simply uses narrative as a tool to clarify themes from his earlier work. See *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 46, and below, Chapter 2.

⁴⁹ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 95.

⁵⁰ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 95.

⁵¹ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 101, for this principle in action, see Hauerwas's discussion of Barth and Trollope, 'On Honor: By Way of a Comparison of Barth and Trollope', *Dispatches From the Front*, 58-79. Samuel Wells distinguishes between 'narrative from below' and 'narrative from above' in Hauerwas's work: " 'Narrative from below' is chiefly concerned with expressing the character of the agent: by using narrative one can give a much more adequate description of the agent than is allowed for in most moral thinking. 'Narrative from above' is more concerned with prescription than description; it points towards how the agent's character can be formed and trained." *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 46.

⁵² 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 102, 'A Retrospective Assessment of an "Ethics of Character"', *HR* 81.

What does this mean for Hauerwas's theology of the church and its practices? Hauerwas's placement of narrative and character at the heart of the moral life means an event or action does not have to make sense to us *at the time* for it to be a legitimate and intelligible action. That is, we do not have to know what we are doing: Hauerwas gives the example of marriage as an event where the church witnesses to the lifelong promise of a couple that cannot possibly know what they are letting themselves in for.⁵³ That Hauerwas believes Christians have a stake in accounts of the moral life where the community can hold individuals accountable for decisions they made when they did not know what they were doing is obviously crucial for discussing how the Holy Spirit's action is involved in our action. Lest this idea sound ominous, the principle mitigates the starkness of the divide between church and world which some commentators see in Hauerwas's theology.⁵⁴ The church is not a community of virtuous heroes branded at baptism and corralled off from the world, but a group of people who have chosen to learn from and make themselves accountable to one another and the gospel. Acknowledging that it is only in retrospect that particular actions become intelligible in the story of our lives draws attention to the ways in which our baptism is a choice we make every day, as well as a once-for-all thing that happened to us when we were too young to object, insofar as we follow or do not follow the patterns of life which make our baptism intelligible.

⁵³ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 102-3.

⁵⁴ Albrecht, however, is very critical of Hauerwas's attitude to authority, arguing that women's experience of authority, or 'being made to do what we would not otherwise do' does not suggest that unquestioning assent is a good thing. See 'Review of *In Good Company*', 225-6. Theo Hobson also argues that Hauerwas's personal failure to align himself under any particular tradition episcopal authority gives the lie to his call for others to do so, and also undermines his anti-liberal stance. See Hobson, 'Against Hauerwas', 309-12.

If narrating our lives is of central importance to the moral task, our narratives are never single, but bound up with other people's: we are (at most) only co-authors of our lives.⁵⁵ Making sense of our lives always requires a community, which in a Christian context is the distinctive body of the church.⁵⁶ Thus, the background of community and the ways we inhabit it become central. The church is the background to our attempts to make sense and the gifts (or 'givens') of that context are crucial for understanding what it means to practice and choose to follow Christ.⁵⁷ The practice of virtues also becomes central to an account of the Christian life. Hauerwas describes Christian life as a journey, a pilgrimage of grace, and the grace-filled practice of virtues is what enables progress.⁵⁸ This is not a move towards individual piety through practices, because the practice of virtues necessarily involves the whole community, which obviously relates to Hauerwas's idea that sanctification does not require a 'self'.⁵⁹ Practices are sustained and made possible by communities, and it is the individual's practicing in that community which enables them to align themselves with God's story.

So, if the first task of the church is to *be* the church, what does this involve? The church is the church because it is a people called by Christ and made part of the story of the kingdom he inaugurated in his life, death and resurrection. Through the hope of the kingdom made present in its graced practices of truthfulness, forgiveness and peaceableness, it is called forwards from this distinctive history

⁵⁵ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 101.

⁵⁶ See 'A Retrospective Assessment of an "Ethics of Character"', *HR* 75, 89.

⁵⁷ 'Going Forward by Looking Back', *STT* 93-4. For an account of the church as gift, see Hauerwas and Wells 'The Gift of the Church and the Gifts God Gives It', *BCCE* 13-27.

⁵⁸ 'A Retrospective Assessment of an "Ethics of Character"', *HR* 83 and 'Practice Preaching', *STT* 235-240, (236). Here Hauerwas describes being a Christian as like being apprenticed to a master and learning a set of skills necessary to transform one's life.

⁵⁹ 'Practice Preaching', 236-7. For sanctification not requiring a self, see 'The Sanctified Body', *STT* 77-91. Stephen Sykes engages with relates the Hauerwasian approach to medicine in his essay on mental health care 'Spirituality and Mental Sickness', *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 59-81.

into embodying the polity God desires for all people. Thus, the church lives eschatologically according to the story of God's love for humanity and becomes a witness to the world of the truth of reality.

Knowing the World

The second task of the church is really a function of the first: to let the world know that it is the world, or to allow it to be seen as such. Though 'church' and 'world' are, at least when Hauerwas's rhetoric is treading more carefully, relational rather than ontological categories, there is something more theologically interesting going on than an ecclesiological version of animal, vegetable or mineral. The epistemological centrality of the church has already become evident in the extent to which Hauerwas relates the possibility of knowledge of God with participation in the church. His account of how the church shows us the world is most systematically laid out in the Gifford Lectures, where his response to the theme of 'natural theology' provided by Adam Gifford is a rampantly confident presentation of the church's witness which takes no prisoners from liberal or Enlightenment quarters, but advances a view of Christian witness which rests on what Peter Ochs calls "the story of revelation *as* a grammar of presupposition *qua* presupposition".⁶⁰

Hauerwas's epistemological moves are as evident in what he does and the way he constructs an argument as in what he says.⁶¹ The early Gifford lectures surveyed

⁶⁰ Peter Ochs, 'On Hauerwas' *With the Grain of the Universe*, *Modern Theology*, 19:1, (2003), 76-88, (80).

⁶¹ I realise that talking about Hauerwas's 'epistemology' is a mode of engagement he rejects, as he claims only to have ecclesiology. I continue to use the term 'epistemology' of Hauerwas's work simply as shorthand for 'the beliefs Hauerwas has about how particular ways of knowing or criteria for truthful knowledge correspond to particular knowable things'.

the contributions to natural theology from William James and Reinhold Niebuhr. Hauerwas finds their picture of how humans relate to God wanting, in James' case because Christianity only became acceptable as a sort of disguised humanism, and in Niebuhr's case because he made knowing God a matter of generic liberal generalities rather than specific truths of revelation.⁶² Hauerwas's final three chapters of *With the Grain* are a Barthian turn from natural theology towards revelation and a Christocentric epistemology. This epistemology is worked out through discussing how Christian language about God works, and through making the Church's witness necessary for knowledge of the world. Hauerwas develops the first part, Christian language, in close and approving conversation with Barth's Romans commentary and his *Church Dogmatics*. Natural theology is impossible. God is radically unknown, but chooses to make himself known to us while remaining *always subject* in that revelation.⁶³ God and humanity have no shared ground or being, time and eternity have nothing in common. This means that Christian speech about God is wholly determined by its subject. Humans cannot be the measure of God's revealed truth, so all our speech about God must acknowledge that it is not separate from the truth it addresses, but sustained by it and changed by it.⁶⁴ This is not simply an epistemological principle: Barth's development of his doctrine of election and the *analogia fidei* makes it Christological first, and epistemological second.⁶⁵ Christ is the truth by which all else is measured, Christ is the Word by which all our utterances are judged. The deep impression Barth's idea of Christian language makes on Hauerwas is evident

⁶² For a comprehensive defence of Niebuhr (and a limited defence of James) against Hauerwas's charges, see Gustavsson, 'The Barthian Outlook' 45-59.

⁶³ *WGU* 153.

⁶⁴ *WGU* 189.

⁶⁵ Roger Gustavsson discusses Barth's *analogia fidei* as it pertains to Hauerwas's work in 'The Barthian Outlook', 59-63, 72-5.

throughout his work, and relates closely to his agenda of restoring confident Christian speech.⁶⁶

Hauerwas makes Barth's Christocentric disordering of the epistemological priorities of modernity (and postmodernity) central to his project.⁶⁷ However, in as much as he appropriates Barth's epistemological move, he also criticises him and moves away from what he sees as Barth's failings towards a stronger account of the church's involvement in our knowledge of the world, and thus a stronger role for the church in the process of salvation. Finally, Hauerwas finds Barth insufficiently catholic because he fails to provide an account of the Holy Spirit's work, and finds his account of the church's role in the economy of salvation overly cautious.⁶⁸ Crucially, Hauerwas also argues that Barth's theology of the church's witness languishes without witness.⁶⁹ Having surveyed Barth's contribution to natural theology and his view of the epistemological significance of the church for Christian belief, Hauerwas says he will go on to provide a full account of the practices necessary for the witness of the Church.⁷⁰ Then, instead of a systematic discussion of church practice, preaching or sacraments, he simply offers witnesses: John Howard Yoder, John Paul II and Dorothy Day. This is the key to the epistemological shift he is trying to effect: Christians can theorise all

⁶⁶ WGU 176.

⁶⁷ Hauerwas confesses to feeling overwhelmed every time he writes on Barth, which may go some way towards explaining why his criticisms, though quite serious, are brief and set within what is for the most part a delighted homage to Barth. See 'Hooks', 93. Peter Ochs provides an assessment of Barth's contribution to *With the Grain on the Universe* with which Hauerwas concurs: "His [Barth's] account provides what James' theory of the will to believe requires: the story of revelation as a grammar of presupposition *qua* presupposition, which means as offered in its own terms, independently of the laws of natural knowing." Peter Ochs, 'On Hauerwas' *With the Grain of the Universe*', 76-88. For Hauerwas's concurrence, see 'Hooks', 91, 93, 95.

⁶⁸ WGU 145, 202.

⁶⁹ WGU 216-7.

⁷⁰ WGU 215.

they like, but it is the witness of their lives that make their claims believable.⁷¹ This is inseparable from his Barthian convictions about the nature of Christian language and his idea that the changing of lives in the Christian community is made part of the good news through the Holy Spirit.

Hauerwas writes, “If what Christians believe about God and the world could be known without witnesses, then we would have evidence that what Christians believe about God and the world is not true.”⁷² Behind this blunt contradiction to Barth’s conclusion that the church’s witness is not necessary lies a fairly sophisticated account of the church as witness, first in terms of how the church’s witness relates to the life of the Trinity and second in terms of the concrete practices of individual Christian lives.⁷³ The extraordinary lives and writings of these three individuals show, according to Hauerwas, that Christianity is an attractive and inhabitable world.⁷⁴ Christian witness must show that Christ is followable, that the way of life Christ preached is really life giving.⁷⁵ It is the concrete life of the church that witnesses to the truth of the gospel, and therefore the practices of the church become central to the proclamation and truth of the gospel, such that lives of witness are the ground of arguments about the truth of the gospel.⁷⁶ Hauerwas is clear, however, that although the role of witnesses is to make Christianity intelligible, they are not evidence, but signs.⁷⁷ As signs, they

⁷¹ See ‘Hooks’, 89.

⁷² *WGU* 207, see also ‘Hooks’, 92.

⁷³ *WGU* 193.

⁷⁴ *WGU* 214. Hauerwas writes, “I never try to find an explanation more determinative than Christian convictions themselves. Rather, I try to show how those convictions are interrelated so as to render intelligible, for example, why suicide is not an alternative for Christians.”, ‘Hooks’, 93.

⁷⁵ *WGU* 214.

⁷⁶ *WGU* 207.

⁷⁷ *WGU* 214. It’s debatable whether Hauerwas makes this distinction sufficiently significant.

participate in Christ's status as the original sign, the Word incarnate.⁷⁸ Christian practices, however well performed, are never self referential or self-justifying – they are justified by God because they witness to how things really are.⁷⁹

This move towards a theological metaphysics, or towards a Christocentric overcoming of metaphysics, is also linked to Hauerwas's idea of the nature and purpose of theology and Christian language.⁸⁰ True, confident Christian speech is not subject to the epistemological demands of the world, but transforms the speaker by the renewing of their universe.⁸¹ The Christian community's language should be formed and determined by the holiness of God.⁸² Because the church precedes the world axiologically as well as epistemologically, all Christian language and truth claims must be brought before Christ to be judged.⁸³ To justify the church's truth claims by secular standards or processes not only betrays the grammar of faith, but would also suggest that the true meaning of history lies outside the church, something Hauerwas's theological metaphysics cannot admit.⁸⁴ For Hauerwas, this priority of Christ and the church means that when we get theology wrong, we get the world wrong.⁸⁵ By insisting that human reason works by participation in the *logos*, and that we cannot know nature without

⁷⁸ *WGU* 199.

⁷⁹ *WGU* 207.

⁸⁰ For which see his brief discussion of Milbank, *WGU* 188-9. For a critique of Hauerwas's Barthian turn to 'overcoming metaphysics', see Roger Gustavsson, 'Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe* and the Barthian Outlook: Some Observations', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 35:1, (2007), 25-86, (75-83).

⁸¹ This unity of belief, speech and action and Hauerwas's link to the Trinity has the unity of God's being and action very much in the background. See *WGU* 187. See also *STT* 5, n.7, "Bruce Marshall rightly argues that beliefs which identify Jesus and the Triune God cannot be held as true except by engagement in worship and prayer in the name of the Trinity. As he puts it, holding such beliefs as true 'changes your life and unless it changes your life, you are holding true some other beliefs.'"

⁸² 'Why the "Sectarian Temptation" Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson', *HR* 90-110, (102-3).

⁸³ *WGU* 220.

⁸⁴ *WGU* 220-1, 231.

⁸⁵ *WGU* 183.

grace, Hauerwas explicitly situates his epistemology in the wider landscape of the concrete, historically situated ways in which we come to know the ‘mutual interpenetration’ of nature and grace, such that knowledge of God is analogical.⁸⁶

Hauerwas’s account of the church as witness is also explicitly Trinitarian.⁸⁷

Where (Hauerwas claims) Barth leaves a gap in his theology in terms of how the Holy Spirit relates Christ to the church, never explaining how our agency is involved in the Spirit’s work, Hauerwas explicitly states that witness is the work of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸ The Holy Spirit animates the church, turning the hope of the kingdom into action, making Christ present through scripture, and in each generation acting to turn the words, stories and ideas that are the heritage of the church into practices, habits and patterns of action.⁸⁹ Through the communal witness of the church, the Holy Spirit witnesses to the truth of the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit teaches Christians to believe that their arguments and the witness of their lives are, though refutable, persuasive.⁹⁰ By identifying the Spirit’s work with human practices and the church’s witness, Hauerwas is trying to avoid the problem he sees with Barth, whereby the church’s realisation of its essence is an uncertain event. To this end, he is very clear that the Spirit does not *add* anything to Christian witness to make us or others believe, but elicits our assent to a God-centred structuring of the world.⁹¹ Thus, Hauerwas is able to say,

“Christians therefore should not be surprised to discover that people who are not Christians find themselves attracted to the church not so much by our beliefs, nor necessarily always by how we live, but by the God whom we

⁸⁶ ‘The Truth About God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech’, *STT*, 44.

⁸⁷ Hauerwas draws heavily on Bruce Marshall’s *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸⁸ *WGU* 145, 210.

⁸⁹ ‘The Gift of the Church’, *BCCE* 17.

⁹⁰ *WGU* 208.

⁹¹ *WGU* 214.

worship and who by his Spirit is pleased to dwell within and among us. Of course we hope through such attraction they will discover why our beliefs are the way we live.”⁹²

For all Hauerwas’s protestations of ad-hoc simplicity, his presentation of practices and the church as witness in the Gifford Lectures is quite careful and nuanced. Christian truth can be known by witness because God is Trinity: Hauerwas draws a clear parallel between the movement of love in Christ whereby the immanent Trinity ‘becomes’ economic, and the idea that recognition of truth involves the heart as well as the mind, witnesses as well as profession.⁹³ Thus, epistemologically speaking, because existence comes before epistemology, the church comes before the world.⁹⁴ The church and the church’s practices are thus *necessary* for knowledge of the world, as they witness to the true order of reality. This, again, is grounded in Christology. As the particular, concrete personhood of Jesus invalidates attempts to establish Christian faith on experience, or some undisputed common ground shared with the world, so it is the concrete lives of witnesses, rather than some general principles extractable from their stories, that make them important.⁹⁵

We have seen how Hauerwas makes the church’s witness central to an account of how people may come to know Christ as Lord. In some respects, his claims seem quite modest, or even common sense – we only *really* hold beliefs as true when

⁹² ‘The Truth About God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech’, *STT* 37-59, (57).

⁹³ *WGU* 210-1, see also ‘The Truth about God’, *STT* 45.

⁹⁴ I think Hauerwas aligns himself quite clearly with Webster’s assessment of Barth’s ‘foundationalism’: “His [Barth’s] rejection of non-theological prolegomena to dogmatics...is much more than an attempt to secure cognitive privileges for the theologian by separating theology from the ‘non-theological’ disciplines. It is grounded in an assertion of the *ontological* supremacy of God in his self-manifestation”. Quoted in *WGU* 180-1 from John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26. How successfully he does so, and to what degree he may misappropriate Barth’s ‘foundationalism’, I will discuss later.

⁹⁵ *WGU* 223-5, 216.

we act in way consonant with those beliefs. It seems like common sense to say that people are made holy only by their being holy, that the transformation in Christ is real. It naturally follows that the witness of the church is needed for Christian beliefs to be intelligible. However, some variation in the way Hauerwas talks about the church's witness and its role in Christian conviction should be becoming evident. Compare, for example, his statements that Christian witness is necessary in order to know the truth about the world (*WGU* 207) and that the truth of Christian beliefs depends on the faithfulness of the church (*WGU* 231) with his statement that people are attracted to the church despite the church's beliefs and the lives of Christians (*STT* 57). Evidently, this plays into the calling-consequence tension in Hauerwas's work on the church: Hauerwas's statements on distinctive practices and the church's witness are prescriptive as well as descriptive.⁹⁶ However, it may be that Hauerwas's move from his common sense statements on the church to his bolder claims for the significance of Christian witness shows a little conceptual confusion. Paul Griffiths argues that Hauerwas makes three sorts of claim about the epistemological significance of the church in

With the Grain:

"This [*WGU* p.231] seems to say not only that the church's faithfulness – the continuation of witness through time – is necessary in order that Christian conviction may be understood and passed on; not only that the church's faithfulness is necessary in order that Christian conviction may be rightly held; but also that the church's faithfulness is necessary in order that Christian conviction be true. If this is the correct reading, Hauerwas ascends from a pedagogical claim (witness is necessary for understanding) to an epistemological claim (you shouldn't have Christian conviction if there are no witnesses), and then to a strictly ontological claim (witness is among the conditions for the truth of Christian conviction)."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ See David Fergusson, 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?', 243-4.

⁹⁷ Paul J. Griffiths, 'Witness and Conviction in *With the Grain of the Universe*', *Modern Theology*, 19:1, (2003), 67-75 (73). Roger Gustavsson makes similar criticisms, including interrogating the difference between evidentialism and foundationalism, in 'The Barthian Outlook', 34-7.

Hauerwas's response to Griffiths offers a defence along the lines that Griffiths is thinking about truth through epistemology, which criticism does seem to have some purchase on Griffiths' argument: Christian truth claims to be *the* Truth, which is identifiable with a person, Jesus Christ, and it therefore makes claims on us which do not respect the boundaries observed by ordinary self-respecting epistemology. Nevertheless, Griffiths does put his finger on what may be an important dynamic in Hauerwas's work. He argues that Hauerwas fends off the demands of epistemologists for a universally agreed foundational foundation to Christian belief with one arm, while with the other arm embracing their demands and providing a rational response.⁹⁸ Further, Griffiths argues that the reason Hauerwas fails to reject the epistemologists' demands root and branch is because he ties the reasons for his rejection too closely to the particulars of Christian belief.⁹⁹ That is, when Hauerwas says that Christianity must have witnesses because God is Trinity, he is taking a point which applies to any complex human belief (that it need not have an agreed rational 'foundation' as such) and making it specifically Christian, which is rather tendentious given that the practices of many other major religions (for starters) produce many saints and holy people, and that great numbers of the earth's inhabitants find that witness persuasive.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ 'Witness and Conviction', 71-3.

⁹⁹ 'Witness and Conviction', 74.

¹⁰⁰ Hauerwas counters those who would see the Gifford Lectures as "a nice example of special pleading" by saying, "For those inclined to so dismiss my argument, I have no decisive response other than to ask if they represent practices that can produce a Dorothy Day." (*WGU* 231) Well, yes, a great many people do! The question is not so much dismissal of Hauerwas's argument as its modification so it does not overreach itself. Griffiths makes a similar point in 'Witness and Conviction' 74-5. Thomson argues that what distinguishes Hauerwas from Yale is "...that embodiment of this universal truth is the church, diachronically and from all nations living in God's peace. This sign, rather than the rhetorical capacity of the Christian story to out-narrate its rivals, is the key to the truthfulness and freedom of the Gospel, for here is the tribe of all tribes whose contemporary relativism is relative to its destiny rather than to the claims of other contingent colonies." *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 112. As will become clear in the following chapter, I think Hauerwas's problem is that he takes this move too far, and ends up relocating the competition within Christian fruitfulness without sufficient recourse to relativising

Griffiths' dual diagnosis that Hauerwas's epistemological claims show some slippage and that he fails to reject the epistemologists' demands by tying the rejection of foundationalism too closely to the particulars of Christian faith is indeed useful, but does not get to the root of the problems with Hauerwas's theology that I will delineate later on. In order to engage with Hauerwas's theology, it needs to be established not just *what* the problems are, but *why* they are and, given the worries I expressed at the start, why these problems matter for the life of the church. What structural difficulties are there in Hauerwas's thought about the church which manifest themselves in these particular weaknesses? There are two points to be made here, one a matter of style and the other of substance.

Hauerwas's homiletical style tends towards a certain amount of conceptual slippage, as he addresses the church's problems where he finds them. Thus, the three distinct claims Griffiths identifies (pedagogical, epistemological, ontological) could reasonably correspond to three strands of preaching: the pattern of our lives should be unintelligible but for the Lordship of Jesus, God's revelation to us should show us that our convictions must needs be lived practically, and, really, if we are not practicing properly we ought to ask some tough questions about where our allegiances lie and what it is we actually believe. In the clothing of the pulpit, these claims are reasonable: it is perhaps in their vesting with ill-fitting philosophical garb that they become uncomfortable. What is the problem here?

eschatology, such that the church is so inseparable from the 'universal truth' that it causes problems for discerning Christian practice.

My first worry, and this applies to the school currently gathering in the wake of Hauerwas, is that international theology publishing is a sphere in which heavily contextualised preaching must be a little ginger.¹⁰¹ Hauerwas is out to change the world and the church, and his wonderfully lively and exhortative style is indispensable to this aim. However, his adjuring the church is something to be careful about. First, his systematic setting is insufficiently delineated. He lacks the broad doctrinal context to make clear how a pronouncement in one place (say, that the truth of the church's convictions depend on its faithfulness) can reasonably relate to a contrary pronouncement in another place (say, that failed lives do not prove the gospel false).¹⁰² This lack is as much a result of the theology he doesn't provide, his inbuilt theological reticence, as it is the product of confusion within the doctrinal setting he does provide, particularly with relation to the Holy Spirit. Hauerwas's systematic doctrinal setting is neither comprehensive enough nor strong enough to rein in the more runaway aspects of his rhetoric. As things stand, his homiletical style introduces currents dangerous to the life of the church that he is unable to control. My second worry is that preaching to 'the church' in general must err on the side of the careful rather than the exacting. The church is certainly part of the narrative of God's story of

¹⁰¹ This is drawn attention to by Christopher Insole in 'The Truth Behind Practices', forthcoming in *Studies in Christian Ethics*. A useful brief delineation of how Hauerwas's anti-liberal theology, formed in an American context, may lack purchase in an English ecclesial environment, see Thomson *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 120-1. For Hauerwas's admission that his theology is 'parochially American', see *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 331. For a fascinating study of how Hauerwas's ecclesiology might fit with an African Christian social imagination, see Emmanuel M. Katangole, 'Hauerwasian Hooks and the Christian Social Imagination: Critical Reflections from an African Perspective', *God, Truth and Witness*, 131-52.

¹⁰² In *With the Grain of the Universe*, Hauerwas maintains both these statements in the space of thirty five pages, see 196, 231.

relationship with the world, but it is not a fictive body.¹⁰³ That is, the church's life, from the smallest congregation to the entire church militant, is more like that of a real person than a fictional one; it is complicated, divided, never simple, always changing and vulnerable. It must be the object of a merciful care that cultivates hope as well as expressing frustration. This should be all the more true of preaching that is published on several continents: it must be careful. I will show later that such a theology of care should function as part of a well-balanced eschatology.

The point of substance is to raise at this juncture some of the structural difficulties that establish problematic tendencies in Hauerwas's theology. The first suspicion to note is the possibility that Hauerwas's epistemological problems are the result of his tying the ontological particularity of God in revelation far too closely to the social distinctiveness of the Christian community. My second suspicion is that Hauerwas's epistemological slip and his defence of it by drawing attention to the asymmetric relationship between truth and epistemology are *both* the result of a lingering confusion about the place of narrative, which is caused more by his lack of systematic theological setting than specifically philosophical inadequacies. Both suspicions will become clearer once I have explored in the second chapter how Hauerwas deals with sin in the church, and in the third chapter, how Hauerwas's theology relates to Barth.

¹⁰³ I am grateful to Chris Insole for clarifying this by referring me to the early twentieth century British pluralists and their discussions of whether civic bodies were more like real or fictive bodies. See P. Q. Hirst (ed.), *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G.D.H. Cole, J.N. Figgis and H.J. Laski* (London: Routledge, 1989).

3. *The Concrete Church*

In the last chapter we saw Hauerwas's vision of the church take shape as a people called by Christ to be a distinctive witness in the world to the reality of the kingdom of God. This vision is characterised by a turn to considering the church in terms of its distinctive practices and its calling into the narrative of God's dealings with humanity. In this chapter I wish to take a closer look at narrative and practices, because they form significant theological weight-bearing structures in Hauerwas's theology. I will be testing their theological soundness by looking in detail at how they operate in the context of two points of caution to which I drew attention at the outset. First, how does the turn to practices and narrative fare theologically in a church of ordinary sinners? Second, how does the turn to practices and narratives fare in a church of uncertainty?

Hauerwas's account of the church's witness in *With the Grain of the Universe*, rather than discussing the nature and function of church practices generally, culminates in an account of the lives of John Howard Yoder, John Paul II and Dorothy Day. Minimally, the exemplary lives of such individual Christians demonstrate the 'followability' of Christ and the habitability of the church. Maximally, Christian faith is not credible without their witness. It is not hard to find many examples of such admirable witnesses, but it is perhaps harder to see how their particular examples can make a general case for the attractiveness of the church or its orientation towards Christ. Like the piously named seventeenth-century economist 'Hath-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-Thee-Thou-Hadst-Been-Damned Barbon', who became known as 'Damned Barbon', it is much easier to

find more numerous and persuasive cases to suggest that Christianity is not a habitable world, and that Christ is not followable.¹ The account of how practices form individual characters in the last chapter shows how Hauerwas is able to bring such particular cases as Damned Barbon into the Christian corral, by arguing that “Lives that seem like failures do not disconfirm the gospel, because Christians learn to confess their sins by being made part of the work of the Spirit.”² If Christians fail, their failure can be brought back into the story of Christ again and made part of the witness of the church. We have seen already how practices can form the church as a sanctified body, and how individual Christians are enabled to narrate their own individual stories into the story of the church’s journey towards salvation in Christ. But what is the ‘dark side’ of this account of sanctification? How does Hauerwas deal with the ways in which sin takes general and systemic as well as particular shape in the life of the church? The point of turning attention to a church of ordinary sinners is not to seek out the exceptionally wicked and assess their impact on the witness of the church, rather, the point is to see how ordinary, boring human struggle, sin and failure fits into Hauerwas’s account of the church.

The simplest answer is that Hauerwas does not deal with sin in general, because he is always interested in specific communities and specific practices. First, only Christians sin: it is not a vague social or civil wrongdoing, but an affront to God and the church that is only recognisable because the church exists.³ Sin is not an

¹ Nicholas ‘Damned’ Barbon was a particularly fascinating and visionary seventeenth century exponent of modern capitalism. See William Letwin, ‘Nicholas Barbon – Projector’, *The Origins of Scientific Economics: English Economic Thought 1660-1776* (London: Methuen, 1963), pp.48-75.

² *WGU* 212. For similar points, see *BCCE*, 17 and ‘The Gesture of a Truthful Story’, *CET* 102.

³ ‘Salvation Even In Sin’, *STT* 71-2.

abstract problem that takes various forms, the problem is our *sins*, which are always specific and concrete.⁴ How does Hauerwas deal with this ordinary, everyday sin? Again, his answer is a turn to concrete practices and narrative. The church furnishes us with the skills of recognising and naming our sins, the first by embedding us in correct practices so we recognise when we depart from them, and the second (not entirely a separate notion) by giving us the skills to reconcile our sins within the story of the church.⁵ Practices of confession and forgiveness also enable us to reconcile our sins into the stories of our own lives: only by accepting forgiveness can we accept that it was really *us* that committed the sin, and make it part of our history and character without letting it determine the way we behave thereafter. For Hauerwas, the holiness of the church consists in the privilege of confessing our sins to one another: it is *because* of our sin, not *in spite of* it that the church progresses towards salvation through practices of confession and reconciliation.⁶ “Salvation, then, is best understood not as being accepted no matter what we have done, but rather as our material embodiment in the habits and practices of a people that makes possible a way of life that is otherwise impossible.”⁷

Apart from how sin fits into the church’s calling to be the church, how does our ordinary sin fit into the church’s calling to let the world know that it is the world?

First, Hauerwas is clear that witness is the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit

⁴ ‘Salvation Even In Sin’, *STT* 62. This is related to Hauerwas’s insistence that it is the *concrete lives* of Christian witnesses that make them valuable, not some general principles distilled from their stories. *WGU* 223-5, 216. Linda Woodhead draws attention to the problems inherent in linking sin and violence, as Hauerwas does: “To identify the anti-Kingdom with violence, in other words, may be to mask the reality of sin as it is encountered by many women...many feminist theologians believe the Kingdom is better described in terms of liberation than peace...”, ‘Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas?’, 175-6.

⁵ ‘Salvation Even In Sin’, *STT* 70.

⁶ ‘Salvation Even In Sin’, *STT* 72-4.

⁷ ‘Salvation Even In Sin’, *STT* 74. This sentence does not actually seem to make sense.

does not simply ‘rubber-stamp’ adequate Christian practices after we carry them out, the Spirit inspires them from the start so that witnessing practices are the performative fruits of Christian faith. Though Hauerwas occasionally extends the work of the Spirit in witness by arguing that Christians are marked through baptism such that they can be witnesses even in unfaithfulness, his primary focus is on the positive witness given by Christian practices.⁸ But what sense can this account of Christian sin and the Spirit’s witness make of the experience of many (if not most) Christians, which is that by Hauerwas’s standards their congregations give at best equivocal witness to the lordship of Jesus and the reality of the kingdom? How does Christian sin fit in to Hauerwas’s strong link between the truthfulness of the church’s witness and the quality of its witness? Attention to Hauerwas’s homiletical style should already have alerted us to the exhortative vector of such pictures of the church’s life. He acknowledges the problem that the communal witness of the church is not always convincing, saying “...Christians do not look very new; nor do we feel very new. We may claim that we are among the redeemed, but basically we feel pretty much the way we always do.”⁹ However, Hauerwas argues against such a way of talking about the church, arguing that it fails to take the challenge of the kingdom seriously. That is, making observations on the evident lack of sanctification in the church ignores the fact that the sanctification of the church is a claim about the possibility of a process, not a claim about an already achieved state.¹⁰ Of this homiletical focus

⁸ To what degree this may or may not rely on Barth’s account of Israel is unclear. It has been suggested that Hauerwas needs to develop a better account of the sacraments. See Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis*, 190-3.

⁹ ‘Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom’, *HR* 139.

¹⁰ ‘Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom’, *HR* 140. See also, “Those of us who attempt to live faithful to that Kingdom are acutely aware how deeply our lives remain held to and by the world. But this cannot be an excuse for acting as if there were no difference between us and the world. For if we use our sin to deny our peculiar task as Christians and as members of the

Hauerwas writes, "...my polemics are seldom directed against those outside the practice of Christianity; they are rather directed *against Christians* who engage in practices, or accept presuppositions sustaining such practices, that cannot help but make the God we worship an unnecessary hypothesis."¹¹

It would appear that sin is not a huge problem for Hauerwas's account of church witness: first, the church gives us skills to recognise and reconcile our sins, second, the Holy Spirit is the author of Christian witness, and third, witness is a challenge. Hauerwas's claims do not appear extravagant: the sin of the average congregation is integrated by saying that "Christians do not claim to be superior to others, only that by having the skill to confess our sins we at least have been given the means to discover our lies."¹² However, the problem with this account of the witness of a church of ordinary sinners is that it is really quite extraordinary - it demands that, if we get it wrong, we have to get 'getting it wrong' right. Healy argues that Hauerwas's account of the witness of the church and its ability to form and produce faithful witnesses to Christ relies on practices being performed rightly most of the time, and relies on the abstract, idealised practices of the church being adequate.¹³ If idealised practices are the basis of Hauerwas's turn to the concrete, then this does not account for how ordinary mis-performance or non-performance of Christian practices affects character formation and the witness of the church.¹⁴ If performances really make a difference, misperformances cannot

church, we are unfaithful both to the kingdom and ourselves – and most importantly to the world itself.", 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 102.

¹¹ 'Hooks', 94-5.

¹² 'Salvation Even In Sin', *STT* 72.

¹³ Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?', 301.

¹⁴ Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?', 301.

be treated as privations – they really do affect the life of the church, too.¹⁵ We need to take seriously the ways in which ordinary human sin affects the life of the church.

I do not think that practices as conceived by Hauerwas can bear the theological weight being asked of them. More importantly, I do not think it theologically wise that they should bear such weight, even if they could. Though Hauerwas's polemical approach is fruitful in some respects, one of the casualties of his style here is any theologically robust account of the ordinary lives of most Christians. Thus, Healy writes: "...a genuinely concrete ecclesiology must be able to make theological sense of the lives of those to whom Jesus Christ brought the good news of salvation in him, the obviously sinful, the publicans and the tax gatherers, those of little faith who can rely only upon the faithfulness of God."¹⁶ What does this 'making theological sense' mean? At the outset, I noted that Hauerwas perhaps needed to be more careful of the frailty of the church.¹⁷ Hauerwas's theology is deeply challenging and exhilarating, and also very demanding. He writes, "As pastors, letting ourselves off the hook too easily (by appealing to our

¹⁵ Occasionally, Hauerwas makes remarks that suggest that if one is not practicing properly, one is not part of the church, and therefore presumably one's misperformance has no bearing on the witness of the church. See, for example, his assertion that if someone does not accept forgiveness, they are to be excluded, in 'Peacemaking', *HR* 323. However, on a fulsome reading of Stanley Hauerwas's work, this does not seem to amount to a systematic or consistent position (indeed, quite the opposite, as he denies there is any such thing as the 'invisible church'), and it is most likely rhetorical.

¹⁶ Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?', 302. More than this, I suggest that Hauerwas needs to provide a more comprehensive account of how Christians interact with the world. David Fergusson writes, "Most Christian people in liberal societies do not belong only to the community of the church. They belong to other communities through their work, leisure, political and cultural interests, and there they make common cause in a variety of ways with others who do not share their religious convictions. Some theological description of how this is possible and how they should comport themselves is owed them." 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?', 248. If a concrete ecclesiology is to be *concrete*, it should make theological sense of the places people ordinarily find themselves.

¹⁷ There is a difference between loss of membership incurred through the church's loss of social status, which Hauerwas considers a good thing (see 'Why *Resident Aliens* Struck a Chord', *In Good Company*, 58-9), and loss of membership caused by theologians and pastors tying up burdens too heavy for people to lift and not doing enough to help.

sympathy for our people's fragility and limits) robs us of some of our most rewarding opportunities to confirm our ministry within a church that really looks like a church rather than a social club."¹⁸ But I am appealing to frailty and limits and counselling caution, with good reason. Hauerwas is right that if we take the freedom and forgiveness God has wrought in Christ seriously, then our desire to be made new creations in Christ must reach beyond what can be normally expected of fallen humanity. As a church we must be challenged and exhorted to take the adventure of becoming involved in God's kingdom seriously.¹⁹ However, as theologians and as people involved in pastoral care, it is imperative that we be wary of tying up rhetorical burdens for people that they are unable to lift. The wider theological setting, both concrete and systematic, must be able to support the weight of the homiletical challenge. It will become evident in the next section on practices that I do not think the church's concrete practices are able to bear the theological weight being asked of them. In the section addressing narrative that follows, it will become evident that Hauerwas's theological setting is also unable to control the impetus of his rhetoric. It is crucial to note at this stage that responding to these two problems in Hauerwas's theology by simply ignoring his challenge to the church would be failing to take his vision with the full seriousness it deserves; more than that, it would be failing the church, too. Some of the theological moves Hauerwas has made and the ways in which he has made them are tremendously valuable lessons for the church. I mentioned at the beginning that taking Hauerwas seriously involves not only directing criticisms to their effect on the life of the church, but responding in kind to the challenge he

¹⁸ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 133.

¹⁹ David Fergusson notes that Hauerwas's picture of the church is primarily prescriptive, not descriptive. See David Fergusson, 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?', 243-4.

offers: this means making constructive proposals for his theology and making them concrete, to which task I will return later.

To address the first charge, what theological weight is it that practices are being asked to bear? As Hauerwas sees it, Christian practices are meant to mark us. Hauerwas is not always clear as to what Christian practices are. His definition of a 'practice' follows MacIntyre:

"Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the results that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."²⁰

Hauerwas is not one for thoroughgoing definitions, and the selected index of practices at the back of *Where Resident Aliens Live* is probably the best indication of the range of the term 'practice' in his work: it includes naming the enemy, suffering, courage, oddness and obedience in addition to the more obvious practices of sacraments, fasting and almsgiving.²¹ What is clear? Practicing as part of the church should form us as disciples of Christ whose beliefs are integrated with their lives; they should form us so that we are Christian more by instinct than conscious decision.²² Practices should also mark us out in the world as a sign of our orientation to Christ and his kingdom, with which the meaning of

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187. Quoted in *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 78.

²¹ The debatable resemblance of any of these practices to Wittgenstein's *Lebensformen* should alert the reader to the limited purchase that Wittgensteinian critiques have on Hauerwas's somewhat slippery notion of what a practice is. Healy has a brief critique along these lines in 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 289-96, particularly 294-95. I have mimicked Hauerwas's 'fuzziness' about what practices *are* in my analysis, and focused on what theological work they are doing.

²² See Hauerwas's story about Olin Teague, a Mennonite man who refused to sue a defaulting business partner, 'Reconciling the Practice of Reason: Casuistry in a Christian Context', *CET* 67-87, (74-82), and his story about a friend who refused a sexual liaison out of a habit of fidelity, *PK* 129-30.

our lives is bound up. Christian practices are unified and unifying; they are the normative faith of the church for theological reflection. Where Christian practices are a witness to the reality of God it is because of the work of the Holy Spirit, because Christian practices are not self referential, but ordered towards the life of the Trinity.²³ It is the work of the Holy Spirit that enacts God's story, not only by making God's word heard in the church, but by making the word bear fruit in Christian lives and practices. Hauerwas is clear, however, that the work of the Holy Spirit is not to 'prove' Christianity by animating practices as evidence: "...that martyrs die for their faith does not *prove* that Jesus is risen; on the other hand, that some people have assented to a totality of belief that Jesus is risen surely means that martyrs will die for their faith."²⁴

What is the problem here? If Christian practices are not all these things already, why should we not employ a rhetoric that says they should be so?²⁵ There are a couple of points to make here. First, if an ecclesiology is going to be truly concrete, if Hauerwas's theology wants to have the real church at its centre, then it needs to take account of where the church is, as well as where it should be going. Otherwise, a turn to abstract, idealised practices, however well intentioned, is only as useful as starting with a definition of the church like 'bride of Christ', working out an entire ecclesiology from one image and ignoring church practices altogether: stirring and theologically aesthetically pleasing it may be, but not

²³ WGU 211.

²⁴ WGU 214.

²⁵ Fergusson holds that a clear distinction simply needs to be made between the church as it is, and the church as God calls it to be. 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?', 244. This will go some way to alleviating Hauerwas's problem, but it is still the case that rhetoric must be deployed with pastoral carefulness and, I will argue, with a doctrinal backbone that can make sense of what the concrete reality of the church actually is. The problems in Hauerwas's work can be mitigated, but not avoided, by labelling it as prescriptive.

altogether practically useful.²⁶ Kathryn Tanner writes, “There is no point in academic theology’s making a proposal for change if it does not address people where they already are theologically.”²⁷ Similarly, there is little point making an exhortative appeal for change if there are only very negligible ‘hooks’ to the ordinary, concrete situations in which Christians find themselves. Hauerwas and Willimon give an example in *Resident Aliens* of how a community rallied round to help a man and his alcoholic wife stay together through providing meals, childcare and the fees for a rehabilitation course.²⁸ Hauerwas’s focus is relentlessly on the community, indeed his challenge to the church on the matter of human frailty is that we are too used to looking out for the needs of the individual rather than the community.²⁹ Of course, the church must continually ask questions about what kind of a community it must be to allow every person to be what Christ desires for them, and Hauerwas is right that our modern-postmodern context often works against the asking of such questions. However, the danger of allowing the church’s practices to bear the full weight of realising Christ’s desires for each person is that it results in a mythic, ‘Robin Hood’ sort of ecclesiology: if under-attention to practices risks making the church unnecessary, then over-attention to idealised practices risks making Christ’s achievement unnecessary. I am not suggesting that Hauerwas is drastically Pelagian or to be denounced for ‘works-righteousness’ or some such; I am suggesting that the ‘Robin Hood’ element of his ecclesiological rhetoric is not sufficiently reined in by attention to how human

²⁶ Thomson writes of Hauerwas’s view of Barth, “Barth’s attempt to defend the freedom of God engenders an idealistic theology whose credibility can only appear rhetorical rather than substantial.” *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 100. Unless Hauerwas’s turn to the concrete is to the *real*, rather than idealised, practices of the church, then he will be hoist with his own petard in this regard.

²⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 85.

²⁸ This is much like his challenge on pacifism in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, which puts possessiveness at the heart of attempts at self-defence against violence. See 124-7.

²⁹ Eg. *Resident Aliens*, 136-40.

frailty relates to Christ's Lordship and how the Holy Spirit works through our flawed, feeble attempts at practice to bring us closer to Christ.

The second set of points to make on Hauerwas's turn to Christian practices is sociological and philosophical.³⁰ While a quick survey of the churches' variations on baptism and Eucharist suggests that these practices divide church from church as well as church from world, practices are also points of contention and division in a more fundamental sense.³¹ That is, if Christian practices are distinctive, it is because they are points of negotiation within the community and with the world: they are, as Tanner puts it, the practices of others made odd.³² Practices are markers of identity because they represent and are produced by a history of negotiation of key Christian beliefs, rather than agreement on their precise meaning: "Christian practices are ones in which people participate together in an argument over how to elaborate the claims, feelings and forms of action around which Christian life revolves."³³ Tanner's comment also raises questions about how Hauerwas views the provenance of Christian practices. While he gives account on occasion of how, for example, Roman Catholics came by their current practice of sacramental confession, he downplays the ways in which Christian practices are constructed as much by Roman civil law and medieval feudalism as

³⁰ This has received much attention in recent debates, so I will cover the points swiftly and refer the reader to more detailed and helpful works on the subjects. Hauerwas's turn to practices has also occasioned Wittgensteinian critique. For criticisms in this vein, see C. J. Insole 'The Truth Behind Practices', forthcoming in *Studies in Christian Ethics*.

³¹ See Woodhead: "Hauerwas sponsors the idealised view that we only find true community in the 'colony' of the church. Yet most of us participate in many communities (families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, clubs, associations, charitable bodies, music festivals and raves, alternative religious communities, self-help groups, etc.) in which we glimpse something of the true community of which the Church should be the highest representation. The fact that it is not always so is, of course, because we generally find the vices which inhibit community in our churches as well as in the other forms of community to which we belong.", 'Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas?', 184.

³² Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 113.

³³ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 124-5. Tanner's view of the church is that of a community of argument, for which see 124-55.

their establishment by Christ.³⁴ Further, Hauerwas does not address the ways in which we can construct various narratives to describe the meaning and function of Christian practices, nor is he, I suggest, sufficiently alert to the operation of particular and fallible church authority in determining Christian practice.³⁵

The effect of Hauerwas's reliance on idealised practices is that the church's witness becomes more associated with ideal church practices than the work of the Spirit. What does this mean for Hauerwas's reliance on practices? If practices are not so distinctive as he suggests, nor so wholesome in terms of their Christological provenance, nor so unified or unifying in operation, nor so clear in meaning – quite apart from the church's failure to perform them adequately – then how could they fit into Hauerwas's theology better? Part of the problem of engaging with Hauerwas's theology is that his vision of what the church's practices could be is so profound that we lack the imaginative resources to know what it would look like in reality. His enlarging our imaginations through repeated description and exhortation is part of this exercise, and though we have seen the limits of rhetoric's usefulness, I think the visionary quality of his ecclesiology must be preserved. How? Healy suggests, "[T]o avoid confusion and to address directly the sociological and theological issues that pertain to practices in so far as they are concretely mis-performed, a more substantial account of how the Spirit works in the church and how the church is related to its

³⁴ See 'On Doctrine and Ethics', *STT* 19-36 (23-9).

³⁵ For an interesting study on the Christian practice of marriage, for example, see Mark D. Jordan's *Blessing Same Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). In response to a similar point made by Albrecht, Hauerwas writes, "All practices, even the best, are surely capable of perversion. Yet what I take to be the crucial issue is whether or not there are resources in the tradition to locate and correct these perversions...To be sure, the magisterium has and does abuse its office, but at least the resources are there to name them as abuses." 'Uncomprehending Feminism', 235-6, 238. See also my comments on authority and concrete ecclesiology below, Chapter 4.

Lord is needed.”³⁶ I concur with this need for a stronger systematic framework for these aspects of Hauerwas’s theology, in order that it might be able to withstand the pressure of his rhetoric and in order that the frail reality of the church’s practices might be more fruitfully addressed. If there is no clear line of demarcation between what is a Christian practice and what is not, then we need a ‘bigger’ theology of the Holy Spirit that extends beyond the boundaries of our practices in order to make sense of what practices are. This ‘bigger’ theology should include openness to correction, for if we are to hand ourselves over without reserve to the practices of our particular denomination, then we must also have practices of discernment.³⁷

My charge that Hauerwas ties the Spirit’s witness too closely to idealised Christian practices will become clearer on examining the same dynamic on a larger scale by looking at the relation between the church and the kingdom of God in Hauerwas’s theology. This becomes most evident in his use of the category of narrative. Hauerwas frequently talks about Christian life in the church as a journey or pilgrimage, but more frequently speaks about narratives: individual narratives, the story of the church, the story of God’s involvement with Israel and the church. By our practices, we retell the story of God’s history with Israel, culminating in the story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and, by retelling it, fix our place in the narrative.³⁸ Salvation means aligning oneself through practice

³⁶ Healy, ‘Misplaced Concreteness?’, 301. Wells also argues that Hauerwas would do well to clarify his doctrinal position by attention to the Holy Spirit. See *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 97-8.

³⁷ To give some explicitly Roman Catholic examples, do we use contraception? Do we admit those politicians who support abortion to communion? Do we dissuade gay men from seeking ordination?

³⁸ ‘A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*’, *HR* 171-99, (198). See also ‘Practice Preaching’, *STT* 235-40 (238), also ‘No Enemy, No Christianity: Preaching between “Worlds”’, *STT* 191-200 (198-200), ‘The Church as God’s New Language’, *HR* 142-62, (148).

to the story of the Christian community, which itself stands in the story of Christ's redeeming love because it is Christ's body. The church is the condition for the world's story: without the church, there is no history at all.³⁹ The church must align itself with the story of Christ, and it is part of that story to the extent that it embodies its beliefs, which are exemplified in the person of Christ. However, Hauerwas notes that the concept of story is only the beginning of the Christian endeavour – the task still remains.⁴⁰ So practising right, aligning oneself and the church with the story of Christ, is participating in a story, but not corresponding to an already known narrative. Jesus is prior to the category of 'story'; Jesus is not just another possible narrative to choose from, he is *the* story.⁴¹

In explaining Hauerwas's Christology earlier, it became clear that being holy as God is holy means following the example of Jesus. Hauerwas qualified this by saying that we "are not called to *be* Jesus. In the same way, we cannot become virtuous by copying the lives and practices of virtuous people. We have to learn how to do virtuous things *in the manner that virtuous people do them*, which can only be learned in community."⁴² To imitate God is to remember, not mentally but in practical orientation, the 'way of the Lord': that is what made Israel Israel, and it is now what makes the church the church. (122) Imitation means remembering the covenant between God and Israel and learning by that story to love as God

³⁹ 'Preaching Between Worlds', 192.

⁴⁰ 'The Church as God's New Language', *HR* 153.

⁴¹ 'The Church as God's New Language', *HR* 155. Mangina has noted that Hauerwas's idea of the Christian story has a Christological basis, but that this is inadequately developed. 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 285. See also the discussion between Marshall and Kerr footnoted in *WGU* 211 as to whether Aquinas has a notion of truth based in the *analogia entis* whereby things could be 'true' in relation to God without human cognizance, or whether Aquinas' notion of truth in created likeness is inseparable from Christ as truth.

⁴² 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 121. All page numbers in the following paragraph refer to this paper, which is an extensively edited version of the same chapter in *The Peaceable Kingdom*. There is a good example of how this idea of imitation in community might work in practice in the example of the confirmation class in *Resident Aliens*, 103-11.

loves. (122-3) Jesus, as the fullest revelation of God's love, is therefore the clearest call to discipleship and the fullest example to follow in imitating God. (123-5) So, in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, Hauerwas sees a call for Christian disciples to serve others as Christ served God, through non-violence, utter dispossession, complete faithfulness. This call to follow Jesus can only be undertaken in community, because only Israel and the church can teach us how to live in covenant and inhabit a story that begins and ends with God. (128-9, 141) "We are 'in Christ' insofar as we are part of that community pledged to be faithful to this life as the initiator of the kingdom of peace." (139)

So, Hauerwas says practices are valuable when they are done in community in the right manner. Right practice, imitating Jesus, is not an end in itself, but "...puts one in the position of being part of a kingdom."⁴³ The kingdom, Hauerwas goes on to explain, is not an other-worldly vacuum onto which we can project our utopian ideals, but finds its meaning in the person of Jesus. "...he [Jesus] proclaims that the kingdom is present insofar as his life reveals the effective power of God to create a transformed people capable of living peacefully in a violent world."⁴⁴ Jesus proclaims the kingdom by embodying it, and God makes the kingdom possible precisely through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The first thing to note about Hauerwas's theology here is the gap that is beginning to appear in his explanation of how practices operate. The church is not the kingdom, and yet we are in Christ insofar as we are in the church; we realise the kingdom insofar as we imitate Jesus, but imitating Jesus simply means practising (in the right manner) as part of the community of disciples he calls; the right

⁴³ 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 127.

⁴⁴ 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 129.

manner is following the full revelation and perfect example of Christ, but not by copying him: by copying virtuous people in the right manner. Hauerwas's language is always passive: the kingdom is 'made possible', we join a journey 'through which we are trained', salvation is our embodiment of practices which 'make possible a way of life that is otherwise impossible'.⁴⁵

Hauerwas's theology appears to display some confusion here, or at least it is not very well joined up. The church must align itself with the story of Christ, but the story of Christ is practically inseparable from the church. Though Hauerwas argues (sometimes) that the truth of the gospel does not depend on the faithfulness of the church, the two seem to run entirely parallel such that their conceptual distinction has no practical effect. Of course, the story of Christ is not a distinct, 'true' parallel narrative that the church must correspond to, because the church is both the subject and the agent of the narrative.⁴⁶ The story of Christ is, in one sense, the story of the church, which is what allows Frei to say that when Christians speak of the presence of the Spirit, they *mean* the church. So, yes, narrating the story of the church does (or can) create a people capable of being the continuation of the story.⁴⁷ The kingdom *can* arrive insofar as Jesus manages to create a people able to live peacefully in the world. The difficulty comes in Hauerwas's insistence that the church's witness is epistemologically necessary for knowing the truth of the gospel, that the church's witness is only truthful insofar as it is embodied, and that Christians must live 'out of control'.

⁴⁵ 'The Church as God's New Language', *HR* 143, 149.

⁴⁶ 'The Church as God's New Language', *HR* 158. Hauerwas is quoting Hans Frei's *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 157.

⁴⁷ 'The Church as God's New Language', *HR* 160.

The kingdom of God is a structure in Hauerwas's theology which appears to have a great deal of play in it. When in more Barthian or systematic mode, Hauerwas will describe the kingdom independently of the church: "Both church and world remain under the judgement of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, we must remember that the church is but the earnest of the Kingdom", while maintaining that God uses our faithfulness to realise the Kingdom for all.⁴⁸ For Hauerwas, the kingdom is "...the fulfilment of the purposes of God, all creation in perfect service and harmonious relationship and joyful communion."⁴⁹ The kingdom is defined and identified by Jesus, who exemplified these three qualities. Jesus is remembered in scripture, but is also the figure the church is going to meet. However, the particularity of Jesus does not mean that God's dominion is found only in the church, just that the church is its most concentrated expression.⁵⁰ It is easy to find quotations from Hauerwas where he treats the kingdom as an eschatological concept, one out of the control of Christians and wholly the gift of God – God's fulfilment of his purposes as they have been shown forth in Christ. However, clarifying Hauerwas's theology is not so much a case of finding evidence to establish a position one way or the other as finding which concepts 'do the work'. Frequently, Hauerwas's eschatology becomes rather problematic, because he ties the kingdom too closely to the activity of the church. Though he says the hope of the kingdom is a gift *to* the church, the idea that the church itself is the actualisation of God's fulfilled purposes appears repeatedly. Thus, our small acts of care are the heart's blood of the kingdom, whether they appear to be effective

⁴⁸ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 102, 104.

⁴⁹ Hauerwas and Wells, *BCCE* 17.

⁵⁰ 'The Truth About God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech', *STT* 45. See also 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 106, where Hauerwas describes the church as the foretaste of the kingdom.

or not – God brings about the kingdom through our care.⁵¹ The kingdom is realised insofar as Jesus manages to fashion a people capable of living peacefully in the world.⁵² The gestures of the church are the only way in which we can discover the story that constitutes the kingdom.⁵³ The result of Hauerwas's polemics is that the eschatological value of the kingdom of God in Hauerwas's theology becomes equal to the fullness of God's purposes minus the achievements of the church in the time God gives. That is, because the kingdom of God is brought into the world through God's action in creating a people capable of living peaceably, truthfully etc., the extra-ecclesial eschatological force of the concept 'kingdom of God' is reduced to whatever the church does not manage to effect in the world by then.⁵⁴ While 'the kingdom of God' theoretically stands in judgement over the church, we have no way of discovering what the kingdom might be apart from the practices the church gives us, on which we have no critical distance whatsoever. It seems that, for Hauerwas, there are only two stories: the story of God told by the church, and the story the world tells itself.⁵⁵ God and the church are one story, and his eschatology is dangerously close to becoming a scale against which the church's ability to embody the story is measured.

⁵¹ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 105.

⁵² 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR* 129.

⁵³ 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story', *CET* 106, 108. Moreover, "There is no point that can be known separate from the story. There is no experience we want people to have apart from the story." (107).

⁵⁴ In 'Hooks', Hauerwas notes his agreement with a statement by Charles Pinches that, for Christians, the existence of the church is a necessary criterion for the truth of their eschatological narrative. See 'Hooks', 99-100 fn.8. Despite this alignment of eschatological discourse with the existence of the church community in any age, with which I agree, I still think that Hauerwas's eschatology lacks any real dialectical force.

⁵⁵ For which see 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story'. Here Hauerwas also appears to collapse God's time into the church's time. (110). James Gustafson has criticised Hauerwas for a weak theology of creation. Hauerwas's response seems to see Gustafson's call for an independent theology of creation as a foundationalist move, or at least one that seeks to deny the Christocentric nature of ethics. See 'Why the "Sectarian Temptation" Is a Misrepresentation', *HR* 106-9. See also *BCCE* 33 for a similar criticism of Gustafson from Hauerwas and Wells.

Having examined the role of narrative in Hauerwas's theology, my assertion that he ties the Spirit's witness too closely to ideal practices should now be clearer. There is an old Catholic joke in which a bishop is visiting a successful, enthusiastic and thriving parish, which six months ago was variously lacklustre and depraved. The bishop says, "Isn't it wonderful what the Holy Spirit is doing in this parish!" The beleaguered new curate replies "You oughta seen it when the Holy Spirit was on his own!" Hauerwas's use of the Holy Spirit raises a similar question. As it is, although Hauerwas does manage to make the church constitutive of the good news of the gospel, he does not provide an adequate account of how the Holy Spirit is involved in the church's practices.⁵⁶ Because his idea of the kingdom is too close to an idealised church and because practices cannot support the theological weight to which he subjects them, the Spirit drifts towards simply becoming responsible for the witness that Christians cannot manage by themselves. The Holy Spirit appears to become a kind of hermeneutical puncture-repair patch for the gap in Hauerwas's theology between our action and the eschatological end of the church in the fullness of Christ's peace. Though the church's witness is epistemologically necessary, Hauerwas writes "Christians...should not be surprised to discover that people who are not Christians find themselves attracted to the church not so much by our beliefs, nor necessarily always by how we live, but by the God whom we worship and who by his Spirit is pleased to dwell within and among us."⁵⁷ There is a gap between

⁵⁶ Fergusson also argues that Hauerwas is imprecise in this regard: "In particular, it is not clear in what sense the work of Christ can be described as completed in his resurrection and ascension, or in what sense Christ is active in the church by the power of the Spirit," 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?', 245.

⁵⁷ 'The Truth About God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech', *STT* 37-59, (57).

what we do and the ‘effectiveness’ of the practice, which Hauerwas typically plugs by using the passive tense and the Holy Spirit, thus:

“...it is not the preacher who makes the sermon efficacious. To think that would be but the form of *ex operator operans* [*sic*] applied to the preached word. Rather, for the preached word to be God’s word the Holy Spirit must make us a body of people capable of hearing that word rightly. Put differently, the preached word’s power is its capacity to create a people receptive to being formed by that word.”⁵⁸

In idealising practices, Hauerwas provides no account of how the Spirit could be involved in a practice that was less than ideal but nonetheless (and this is a good thing) saying that others may come to know truth through the Spirit *despite* what we do. The gap in Hauerwas’s theology is testament to his inbuilt theological reluctance to pin the Holy Spirit down, and it is a gap that is partly simply the result of his homiletical style and occasionalism. He simply does not have the developed account of sacraments that would mitigate some of these dangers. It seems Hauerwas is aware of the problems of tying the Spirit too closely to the current practices of the church for fear of absolutising a human institution, with all its flaws. Nevertheless, his insistence that church practice is epistemologically necessary and that Christian truth is necessarily embodied demands that we have tools for discerning practice and a more thorough account of how the Holy Spirit works in the church. Constructive theological ‘gaps’ or silences can be useful, especially when they are used out of reluctance to pronounce on some aspect of the church’s life for pastoral reasons, as I hope to show. The difficulty with Hauerwas is that the gap is in the wrong place. Instead of an appropriate silence

⁵⁸ ‘The Church as God’s New Language’, *HR* 159. This quotation may also be illustrative of a further problem with the epistemological significance Hauerwas imputes to the Christian community. If the embodiment given by the Christian community is indispensable to the possibility of knowing about God’s kingdom, but if the work of the Holy Spirit is short-circuited in the way I suggest Hauerwas does, then one perhaps ends up with the same liberal anthropocentricity, albeit at one remove.

coming between the necessary witness of the church through practice and an eschatology that would allow for discernment and a fuller appreciation of the sovereignty of Christ, Hauerwas remains reticent about how our flawed human action relates to the action of the Spirit, but eschatologically confirms the ‘effectiveness’ of the church’s practices.⁵⁹

My emphasis thus far has been on taking care of the church and addressing the effects of sin on Christian formation and the life of discipleship: counselling caution for human frailty and asking for space to be opened up for discernment about the church’s practices. What of the effects Hauerwas’s theological difficulties have on how we conceive of the witness of the church? There are two sets of points to be made here, one regarding how Hauerwas’s use of the witnesses with which this chapter opened might be ameliorated, one regarding how his narrative could be brought within more helpful limits in order to better preserve the eschatological character of the kingdom of God.

Though the emphasis is not as clear as it might usefully be, Hauerwas’s account of the Spirit’s action makes Christian witness a decision of God. Only if Christian witness is wholly dependent on God’s will can Hauerwas claim that Christians can witness despite their unfaithfulness. It is God’s choice (a funny way of putting it) if we are moved from rest to hearing, belief to action: better, it is God’s

⁵⁹ Barth relates the ‘event’ character of the coincidence between human action and the witness of the Spirit to the dialectical character of theology. Both are oriented toward the eschatological provisional nature of witness on one hand, and theological discourse on the other. Reinhard Hütter argues that the provisionality emphasis (which refers to the parousia of Christ) contradicts the promise of the presence of Christ working through the Spirit in the church. See *Suffering Divine Things* 106-8 and my discussion below in Chapter 3.

gift.⁶⁰ What does it mean, then, to say that the Christian witness is necessary for knowing the truthfulness of the gospel? It means that God, in an overflow of love as part of the vigorous joy of Christ's resurrection, chooses to begin making people a new creation. It is also God's good pleasure that those whose lives resonate with the power of the resurrection are witnesses to others: that the depth of the Spirit in one person can call out to the Spirit deep within another. If witness is epistemologically necessary, it is because God does it, not because it is the only thing that can be done. If witnesses are necessary because God is Trinity, it is because only God can declare what God is. We can make general statements about what kind of epistemological categories pertain to Christianity, the same as we can make statements about what sort of proof one would have for Hinduism or Mormonism. But the link between the *Trinity* and Christian witness, the link Hauerwas is making, is so thoroughly a gift of God that it remains curiously internal to the life of the church.⁶¹ Hauerwas rejects the idea that "if there are witnesses, then God must be true". I believe that his counter suggestion, "if people believe God to be true, then there will be witnesses" can only be intelligibly made *inside* the church.⁶² That is, it is because I know, however weakly, that God delights in my transformation, however negligible, that I can recognise God's desire to transform the lives of others; it also means I can recognise the work of the Spirit outside the church. To be sure, in the scriptures

⁶⁰ See Philip J. Rosato on Barth's pneumatology: "Barth so weds anthropology to pneumatology that man can only exist because of God's Spirit; man is not a being who is a "given" but whose very existence is a "gift of God." This apparently pessimistic stress on man's incapacity to acquire grace or live an ethical life is counterbalanced, however, by a thunderous persistence on the fact that man is promised the ability to do so, and actually does so through the being and work of the Holy Spirit." Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord: Karl Barth's Pneumatology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 36-7.

⁶¹ I suggested at the outset that Hauerwas needed to be careful to separate out the ways of knowing that pertain to the church and to the world. For an interesting discussion in this area about relations between church and state, see Arne Rasmussen, 'The Politics of Diaspora: The Post-Christendom Theologies of Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder', *God, Truth and Witness*, 88-111.

⁶² *WGU* 214.

and in the saints we have many centuries of ‘evidence’ that God wants his justification of us in Christ to overflow into redemption, but in this sense, too, the knowledge of the Holy Spirit’s depth in the church is a mystery of the church’s life, hidden in Christ.

So, when we say “outside the Church, no salvation”, it should not be a claim about how well the church embodies the alternative politics of the kingdom of God: we are not saying to the world, “Look, see how we are transformed – this is salvation”. Rather, we are offering a piece of nonsense to the world that is very dear to us because it has been revealed to us as true by the Holy Spirit. It is an epistemological claim, but not one relating to the action of the church: rather, it relates to the action of the Holy Spirit as we know it in the church. The claim it makes about the Holy Spirit is like saying “Without light, no vision”, that is, it is only when we are standing in light, however dim, that we are in a position to understand what vision is and how light makes vision possible. We are not making any claims about how much light the church gives the world, only that we think there is sufficient light that we have begun to falteringly understand what vision is, and what the glorious light promised in Christ might look like.

To put the question in *Resident Aliens* language, the problem is not that Christians are ‘weird’, but *why* we say they are weird, and what *significance* we attach to their being so.⁶³ This means that when we claim that the witness of people like John Howard Yoder, John Paul II and Dorothy Day is epistemologically necessary then we must be careful. We are not holding them up to the world and

⁶³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 113-4.

definitively saying for each one, “Look, see how they were transformed – this is what salvation means”, because God’s saving grace in Christ and the Spirit is always greater than one human life can show forth. The saints are not like ‘WANTED’ posters - individual police photofit pictures of ‘persons suspected to be saved’, nor are they like individual photofit features that we assemble into a picture of what ‘salvation’ might look like – the communion of saints. If this were the case, salvation would be 70% male and predominantly European! It is because Hauerwas associates the practices of the church too strongly with its witness that his use of particular examples endangers the eschatological orientation of the church. The action of Christians and the witness of the Church (which is the action of the Holy Spirit) need to be prised apart a bit, or we end up holding saints against the church, not for it.

How do we prise apart Christian action and the Spirit’s witness? Is this not a counter-intuitive move for an ecclesiology that would call itself concrete? Let us take a specific example. Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-62) was a woman who, on discovering that she had a uterine fibroma during pregnancy, refused the operations which would have saved her and killed her child, and chose instead to sacrifice her own life for that of her daughter by opting for less radical surgery. She died shortly after giving birth, but her daughter Giovanna Emmanuela survived, and was present at her canonisation in 2004. Gianna Beretta Molla was undoubtedly extraordinary, not just in her final sacrifice, but also in her joyful life of service as a paediatrician, wife, and mother. What Gianna Molla did was wonderful by human standards alone, *but it is the work of the Spirit alone that makes it a witness to God*. If we rejoice in her as a gift to the church, it is because

the Spirit leaps within us when we hear the voice of the Spirit calling out from the lives of others: in a sense, we rejoice not in what Gianna Molla did, but in what the Spirit did in Gianna Molla.⁶⁴ Gianna Molla's canonisation has generated quite a lot of controversy, with many critics angry that she has been held up as an example to the church, as though she had been hoisted up the mast as a signal that the church expects that every pregnant woman will do her duty.⁶⁵ Yet how can we not see her life as a witness to God? To repeat: saints are to be held up *for* us, not *against* us. They are extraordinary, and most of us are simply not capable of doing what they did, however much our distinctive community might make a choice like Gianna Molla's possible, and however much it is incumbent on the church to proclaim the extraordinary demands God makes of us. Saints are *gifts* to the church, and not examples to be followed to attain salvation.⁶⁶ It is precisely *because* it is the action of the Spirit that makes them witnesses to God that the demands their extraordinary lives make on us are limited. We give glory to God for the Spirit at work in the lives of the saints, but we do not have to imitate them in order to be saved, neither individually nor by imitating an exemplary highest common factor derived from their communal witness. To do so would be to misinterpret them as signs and thereby endanger the eschatological orientation of the church: they are signs because they point to God, not themselves, and if we focus too hard on *them*, collectively or individually, we detract from giving glory to God and fold their witness up on itself into nothing.

⁶⁴ This point must be made carefully so that we do not make the Spirit an 'add-on' subsequent to independently judged 'good' Christian practice.

⁶⁵ Frances Kennedy, 'Gianna's Choice', *The Tablet*, 22nd May, 2004.

⁶⁶ Moreover, a quick flick through a dictionary of saints will highlight quite how unrepresentative they are of the body of Christian faithful.

We have already seen how Hauerwas says we must follow Christ by practicing in the church community, not by imitating his life point by point. I have argued that it is not incumbent upon us to imitate the lives of saints, either.⁶⁷ Just as we are not called to *be* Christ, so neither are we called to *be* someone else. Yes, we are called to practice a life of discipleship in community, but we are not called to imitate unthinkingly or slavishly the practices of those who have gone before us in order to be saved. It may well be the case that the practices we inherit, because they are focuses of dispute, need to be adapted in order to be fruitful. Hauerwas's turn from the idea of imitating Jesus to the task of practicing in community is helpful, but it is imperative to reinforce the fact that the community does not have the same authority over us as Christ does. Salvation belongs to Christ alone. The demands the practices of the church make on us are the same as the demands made by the lives of the saints. Insofar as they are oriented towards God and the kingdom, then we rejoice in them as gifts to us, and we delight in turning our lives towards God through performing them as best we can. We do not rejoice in them in themselves, nor because following them necessarily has the power to produce distinctive Christians, because this would be to reduce Christianity to a kind of magic. We rejoice in God alone. When the church's practices make demands on us it is because we recognise the presence of the Spirit in them, but this demand is focussed Godwards, not practicewards.

⁶⁷ Hauerwas often talks about imitating the lives of others in terms of learning a new language. See, for example, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 77-8. Though this is an informative and helpful analogy, it only goes so far – Christian practices do not form a whole context as languages do, and the language metaphor plays down the complexity of living in church and world. As soon as one tries to translate the language metaphor into 'cash value', it raises more questions than it solves: Christians continue to face difficult decisions that cannot be resolved by recourse to a linguistic analogy. For Thomson on the limitations of the post-liberal linguistic turn, see *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 107-12.

This claim that the witness and practices of others make only limited demands on us seems to blast a large hole in Hauerwas's pedagogical purposes.⁶⁸ His basic claim for the significance of Christian witness is that it says to those outside the church, "Try it, you might like it". Is the significance of Christian practices inside the church now reduced to "If they happen, that's nice, if they don't, it doesn't particularly matter"? Doesn't this move kneecap Christian preaching and, in purporting to acknowledge human frailty, reduce the challenge of the kingdom to a fond, foolish illusion? I suggest not, and here I will introduce Hauerwas's assertion that the church is as real as Christ's cross.⁶⁹ There are two points to be made here. The first key idea is the interaction of contingency and necessity through gift. Christ might not have died on a cross, but it was God's will that he did, and this is given as a gift and a mystery to the church. The church might not have existed, but it is God's will that it does. In closer focus (say, a parish council meeting), this principle becomes more complicated because of human sin: I cannot claim that it is God's will that we had a potluck dinner, simply because it happened. However, our attitude in discerning practices ought to be careful thought about whether this practice is indeed a gift from God, in what ways it is so and in what ways we can offer it as a gift to others.⁷⁰ I will explore this idea of practice as gift later on, but the point here is that contingency does not detract from the call to holiness. Not all of us are called to be John Howard Yoders or Dorothy Days, and this acknowledgement of human frailty is intended simply to

⁶⁸ That is, it seems to follow Ambrose Gwinnet Bierce's definition of a Christian: "One who follows the teachings of Christ in so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin." in M. Hill (ed.) *Devil's Dictionary* (Bury St. Edmunds: Quince Tree Press).

⁶⁹ 'The Servant Community', *HR* 371-91, (382).

⁷⁰ For this discernment of gifts approach in ecumenical perspective, see the forthcoming volume Paul Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), particularly in the introductory essay, Paul Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda', and in Margaret O'Gara's contribution, 'Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue'.

reflect the particularity of each person's capability, formation and vocation and to balance that frailty against the Lordship of Christ.

The second key idea is that when I limit the demands made on us by the lives of the saints and the church's practices, I mean this only in a lesser spotted sense of the way in which Hauerwas limits the demands made on us by Jesus' life by saying we are not called to imitate him.⁷¹ Where Hauerwas 'qualifies' the demands of Christ by introducing the community, I am qualifying the demands of the community by introducing Christ. The practical nature of this qualification will become later on. The practices of the church are gifts from God and the community that should be cherished and nurtured, but also sorted through regularly for repair and dispensation in the light of the Spirit's guidance.

Hauerwas's theological project sets out to restore the unity between God's existence and God's character that became so obscured in modernity, and explore the epistemological implications of this for the life and witness of the church. He wants to 'join up' the ways in which God is known in the life of the church with the ways we talk more generally about how God can be known, and delineate how the church fits in with this. As we have seen, Hauerwas's tool for this task is the turn to practices and, particularly, the concept of narrative.⁷² Attending to the grammar of Christian belief means looking at revelation in scripture – what Peter Ochs calls "the story of revelation *as* a grammar of presupposition *qua*

⁷¹ Obviously, the greater spotted species of the argument is that Christ is by nature what we are by grace, so we cannot imitate him: we can only be like him in all things but sinlessness. My qualification is to reintroduce Christ with perhaps a more strongly Chalcedonian flavour than Hauerwas's portrayal.

⁷² Thomson argues that Hauerwas uses narrative simply as a heuristic tool for exposing the character of theology and narrating the Christian story in a way that escapes the strictures of the Enlightenment. *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 15-7, 127-67.

presupposition”, and looking at the practices of the church. Ochs writes, “*There is no a priori argument to be offered about the relative superiority of Christianity as a source for our presuppositions.* Christianity is to be proven (tested), that is, through its practical consequences, rather than through any evidentiary apologetics.”⁷³ Hauerwas is not, of course, claiming that the church is part of a narrative, or has a story, and secular society is not – rather, he is drawing conclusions about the kind of things we can know and say about the church, given the character of the narrative of which it is part.⁷⁴ The possible difficulties I will identify pertain to what kind of things Hauerwas thinks we can say or know about the church from its narrative, as opposed to his move in calling upon narrative as a descriptive tool. As we have seen, Hauerwas links revelation in scripture very strongly indeed with the story of the church. For example, we cannot look around the gospel narratives and the lives of those Jesus touched to discover a ‘real Jesus’, nor can we abstract Jesus from the stories of Israel and the church. The problem is that Hauerwas makes the association too strongly, and the story of Christ becomes conceptually inseparable from the story of the church, because the way Hauerwas uses narrative closes down the gap between the event of revelation on the one hand and its reception and embodiment by the community on the other. ‘Narrative’ is not doing the same work as ‘tradition’.⁷⁵ Insofar as Hauerwas uses

⁷³ Ochs, ‘On Hauerwas’ *With the Grain of the Universe*, 79-80. His emphasis.

⁷⁴ See Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 129-36 in particular. Hauerwas’s defence against the charge of sectarianism usually takes the form of pointing out that liberalism is a particular story too, and not a neutral backdrop for religious or specific interest groups. See, for example, his response to Gloria Albrecht, ‘Uncomprehending Feminism’, or ‘Why the “Sectarian Temptation” is a Misrepresentation’. Not all stories are equally truthful, however, and Hauerwas is concerned to maintain the truthfulness of the Christian narrative above others. Hauerwas’s notion of truthfulness denotes “...justifiability or warranty, illuminating capacity, intra-systemic coherence synchronically and diachronically and...hermeneutical or explanatory powers.” *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 127. Thomson also provides brief criteria for assessing the truthfulness of a narrative, for which see 127-8, or for Hauerwas’s more general discussion, see *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 129-52.

⁷⁵ And even if it were, this would be problematic. See Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 128-38.

narrative to make the claim that our experience of God in discipleship and worship belongs to the same epistemological order as God's character in scripture, then he is simply using it as a descriptive tool, as Thomson suggests. That is, insofar as we claim that 'insider knowledge' of God in scripture is indispensable to a full portrait of who God is, we can make the same claim of our experience of faith: as far as Hauerwas is using narrative to reject the Enlightenment's claim that Christianity ought to prove itself on grounds other than its own, then his use of narrative has not overreached itself.⁷⁶ But no further: if narrative becomes a metaphysical category with a life of its own outside particular stories, with a concomitant demand for a certain sort of epistemological approach, then it is no longer descriptive, and no longer valid.⁷⁷

What is this 'gap' I am identifying between God's revelation and the life of the church? It is the gap which Hauerwas closes down in the following quotation:

"The people of God are no less an empirical reality than the crucifixion of Christ. The church is as real as his cross. There is no 'ideal church,' no 'invisible church,' no 'mystically existing universal church' more real than the concrete church with parking lots and pot luck dinners. It is the church of parking lots and potluck dinners that comprises the sanctified ones formed by and forming the continuing story of Jesus Christ in the world."⁷⁸

What work does 'the continuing story of Jesus Christ' do in this set of remarks? It links the kinds of claims we make about the crucifixion of Christ (which is not

⁷⁶ See 'Story and Theology', *TT* 71-81: "...I am interested in "story" and theology not because the narrative form may be a way of avoiding how religious convictions may or may not be true...To emphasize the story character of the gospel is an attempt to suggest that examining the truth of Christian convictions is closely akin to seeing how other kinds of stories form our lives truly or falsely." (73).

⁷⁷ See Thomson, "...it is important not to misunderstand the purpose of narrative. It is not about illustrating meaning as if the latter were an independent reality beyond the story. Hauerwas regards meaning as embodied in the story. Hence narrative is a heuristic tool." *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 134. Thomson argues that 'early' Hauerwas is guilty of narrative infelicities, but that Hauerwas's mature work is wiser and does not slip into narrative foundationalism. See 153-4.

⁷⁸ 'The Servant Community', *HR* 382-3.

just an historical event, but also one of universal significance) with the kinds of claims we make about the church. It collapses together God's story with the church's story and seeks the same epistemological approach for both because they are linked by the same story. However, the narrative of God's involvement with the world demands a certain sort of epistemology because it is God's, not because it is narrative. Knowing the full significance of the cross requires faith and, yes, knowing the full significance of what the church does requires faith, too. But the criteria we use to judge the truthfulness of the former are not the same as the criteria 'outsiders' use to judge the truthfulness of the latter. Hauerwas must be careful, as I argued at the beginning, to separate out the ways in which different sorts of knowing pertain to God, the church and the world. Paul Griffiths points out that Hauerwas ties his rejection of the Enlightenment's demands too closely to the particulars of Christian faith, when his comments should apply to any complex human belief.⁷⁹ Hauerwas, in reply, admonished him for still thinking about truth in terms of epistemology.⁸⁰ However, I would like to suggest in reply to both that particular Christian truth demands that we do not tie the way we know God too closely to the ways the church is known.

First, only God's being is identical with God's act, and only God can act in such a way that contingency and necessity become unified in the divine will.⁸¹ Asking 'what if Christ had not been crucified?' is like asking a cosmologist what happened 'before' the Big Bang – it is really a non-question. Asking 'what if the church did not have a car park?' is not the same kind of question at all. Already we are putting clear water between how the crucifixion is 'real' and how the

⁷⁹ Griffiths, 'Witness and Conviction', 74.

⁸⁰ 'Hooks', 92.

⁸¹ As Hauerwas acknowledges: *WGU* 182-93.

church car park is 'real'. God's being is God's act: the Church's being is not identical with its act.⁸² The church exists simply because God has decided that it should be so. The church's witness, which is contingent (it may or may not happen), cannot be strictly epistemologically *necessary*, or not in the same way that God's revelation and its epistemological demands are necessary.⁸³ It is not possible to make the leap Hauerwas does (albeit inadvertently), that God's ontological supremacy in revelation corresponds to the church's distinctiveness in the world, because the church's witness is only participation by grace in what God is by nature.⁸⁴ Hauerwas's leaning towards correspondence on this regard comes about because scripture is both the grammar by which we articulate God's otherness and the story by which we claim to live. However, in scripture, God encounters the church through his Word. God, whose providence underlies everything, is also the creator (through the action of the Holy Spirit) of our capacity to hear scripture. If we slide from God's being in act, which we experience through revelation, to a pragmatic principle of Christian fruitfulness by this strange metaphysical use of the term 'narrative', then we ignore the fact that, as Barth wrote in *Fate and Idea in Theology*, it is grace that encounters sinners.⁸⁵

Kathryn Tanner warns against the effects of attempting to mark off Christianity

⁸² Except perhaps in a very attenuated sense: Barth comes some way towards associating the church's being with its act when he links the church's being with its act of witness very strongly in IV/3.2. However, that the church exists in witnessing is itself an act of God's will and is therefore located in divine providence.

⁸³ That is, Dorothy's contingent 'Skydiving for Christ' venture (she may or may not bottle out on the day) is only necessary in Edith's coming to faith in God (it may or may not persuade her that faith is a good thing) if God decides it should be so.

⁸⁴ This phrase about grace and nature is Kathryn Tanner's. See *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 46-7, 55.

⁸⁵ FI 40. This approach could be seen to introduce an anarchy similar to the one Hauerwas finds problematic in Barth's ethics, which he finds too occasionalist and individualistic. (See Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 103-4) That is, if too much emphasis is placed on church witness as 'event', we could be in danger of incapacitating the church's practices of discernment more gravely than Hauerwas does. I will safeguard against this when I talk about practices of discernment in chapter four. Briefly, naming and making accountable those places where the 'power' to discern church practices currently lies is one way to take account of sin and church witness as 'event' and yet avoid anarchy.

too clearly from the world: if we divide all that is into two stories, that of the world and that of God and the church, then we risk saying that God's grace does not find us where we are.⁸⁶

This means that there are now two ways in which Hauerwas's theology could become more concrete with regard to how it deals with the reality of sin in the church. The first results from his use of practices, and suggests that his theology might do well to open up spaces for discernment and reflection on the church's practices. This is not just because of the frailty of the church, but because Hauerwas's doctrinal context does not provide the necessary drag for the impetus of his rhetoric. This requires attention to how the Holy Spirit is involved in the church's practices and attention to the ways in which the kingdom is not just a reality the church is moving towards, but a reality which is coming to meet the church. The second way in which Hauerwas's theology could be rendered more concrete is by being made more open to the ways in which the Holy Spirit works outside the church and the ways in which the church quite properly should be in conversation with, as well as mission to, the world.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 113.

⁸⁷ Thomson argues in a brief counter-critique that Barth may be more open to the grace of God operating beyond the boundaries of the church than Hauerwas is. (104) Though I will not address this directly, it should be evident from my explication of Barth in the following chapter that Barth's dogmatic context enables him to be looser with the significance of the church's boundaries in giving an account of God's action in the world.

4. Barthian Lessons

Having examined Hauerwas's account of the witness of the church, I concluded that there were various ways in which Hauerwas's theology could be ameliorated by opening up space for critical reflection and discernment about practices in the church's life. At several points during my critical exploration of Hauerwas ecclesiology it has become clear that many of his problems could be avoided or improved if his thought on the church had a wider doctrinal setting. Situating his pronouncements about the church's practices, the church's witness and individual transformation in relation to a more explicit treatment of creation and eschatology would alleviate some of the tensions between the areas I have outlined, and rein in some theologically runaway aspects of Hauerwas's work. I also mentioned at the outset that Hauerwas's ecclesiology owes much to his engagement with Barth, both appreciative and critical. Though it has its own theological difficulties and areas of tension, Barth's thought on the church probably has the widest doctrinal setting in the twentieth century. My aim in this section is to bring Barth and Hauerwas into closer conversation, first by looking at why the very extremes of Barth's ecclesiology that Hauerwas objects to might be a useful corrective for Hauerwas's own theology. Second, I will re-examine Hauerwas's attitude to Barth in more depth and consider the motivation and accuracy of his criticisms. Thirdly, I will delineate Barth's ecclesiology in its broad doctrinal context to show how Hauerwas's work might benefit from such a move. Finally, I will begin to draw out what theological lessons Hauerwas's ecclesiology might usefully learn from Barth's theological project.

As I noted in the introduction, Barth and Hauerwas have a great deal to say to one another, and a shared sense of mission garnered from their respective judgements of their societal and ecclesial contexts. Though Hauerwas and Barth share much in common and Hauerwas is broadly appreciative of the shift Barth was trying to effect in theology, it has already been made clear that the two part company on the subject of the church. As is probably evident from the brief and summary nature of the criticisms with which Hauerwas puts clear water between himself and Barth on the subject of the church, Hauerwas's quarrel with Barth is not new.¹ His analysis in *With the Grain of the Universe* explicitly relies on two articles, first on Joseph Mangina's article 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas', and also on Nicholas Healy's 'The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications'.²

Healy argues that Barth's high ecclesiology, though developed in the context of *credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, is an outworking of his high Christology, and it means high claims for the church in terms of it truly being the Body of Christ.³ However, he notes that the way this belief interacts with Barth's sense of the church as a *contingent event*, as people may or may not respond to the Holy Spirit, leaves the church vacillating between reality and unreality.⁴ Though intended as a check on triumphalism, Healy argues that Barth's division of the church into *die*

¹ It relates to several other common strands of criticism on Barth, for example that his understanding of the cross renders the resurrection superfluous, for an example of which see J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl, (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 230-1. For specifically pneumatological criticism, see Robert W. Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', *Pro Ecclesia*, 2: Summer, (1993), 296-304.

² Nicholas M. Healy, 'The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications' *Modern Theology*, 10:1, (1994), 253-70. (264-5). (Hereafter LKBE).

³ LKBE 254-5 See Karl Barth *CD* II/1 149.

⁴ LKBE 260-3, *CD* IV/2 §67, 'The Upbuilding of the Christian Community'.

wirkliche Kirche (the true spiritual church) and *die Scheinkirche* (the earthly apparent-church), with Christ the only guarantor of the former and our human action causally unrelated to the 'event' of the church, results in an abstract and reductionist ecclesiology.⁵ Importantly for Healy's own agenda, he argues that Barth's consistent prioritising of the Christological rule makes it difficult to see the church's response to Christ as concretely human.⁶

Mangina takes Healy's argument further. He argues that, for Barth, the cross is a decisive end to history, such that there is no real role left for the Church or the Holy Spirit.⁷ The only task of the Spirit is to witness to Jesus, the sole content of its witness is Christ, such that the Spirit is not a salvific entity in its own right.⁸ Pointing first to the role left to faith by Barth's soteriological objectivism (namely that faith is internal and analytic rather than external and synthetic in our salvation), and then to a thought experiment where Barth wonders what things would be like if the resurrection had not happened, Mangina concludes that Barth's theology routinely exalts the cross at the expense of making post-

⁵ LKBE 258-63 Healy concludes, "...Barth's ecclesiology is internally inconsistent, is difficult to reconcile with Scripture, and seems to work against his larger theological agenda." LKBE 268.

⁶ LKBE 264.

⁷ Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 270.

⁸ Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 270. Hütter sees a similar problem, arguing that by playing off witness as 'event' against eschatological provisionality, Barth "...ascribes no unique work of any concretion or duration to the Holy Spirit..." *Suffering Divine Things*, 107. I am suspicious of the provenance of questions about allocating identifiably 'unique' work to the Holy Spirit (see below, n.44), and think Hütter's criticism misplaced in two ways. First, Barth's understanding of the church as *actual history*, a 'has-happened', relocates the contingent event-provisionality dynamic within the will of God (and hence our election in Christ). (See below, 94ff) Barth is clear that faith, while an 'event' brought about by the Spirit, must be concrete. (See Hütter on obedience, 103-4, or Healy on 'knowledge' in KBER 290-4. Apart from this, the sacramental life of the church surely *is* provisional. Hütter acknowledges the limited nature of his remarks (108), but suspects the Peterson-Barth debate evidences a problematic vector in Barth's theology in the *Church Dogmatics* also (108-11).

resurrection history superfluous.⁹ Mangina goes so far as to suggest that Barth's treatment of the church is similar to his treatment of Israel after the resurrection: "If Israel disappears in a negative *Aufhebung* at the cross, the Christian community is positively established – and at the same moment deprived of its contingent historical identity."¹⁰ Finally, Mangina outlines the way in which Barth's high view of revelation and scripture locates apostolic witness outside the believing community and situates it entirely within the self-witness of Christ through the Spirit, which renders the church unnecessary.¹¹

It is these criticisms that lie behind Hauerwas's attack on Barth. Drawing on Mangina and Healy, Hauerwas concludes that Barth is insufficiently catholic, because he cannot "acknowledge that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are made part of God's care of the world through the church."¹² Barth, he says, never explains how our human agency is involved in the Spirit's work, and so has an inadequate picture of how we come to faith in Christ. Though Hauerwas admires Barth's theological world very much, his final assessment of Barth's contribution is "...a stunning intellectual performance, but it was just that – an intellectual performance."¹³ Barth's achievement, he argues, languishes without witnesses.¹⁴

⁹ On soteriology, see Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 274. The faith and soteriological objectivism point comes from George Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109-10. On resurrection, see Mangina 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 275-77.

¹⁰ Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 277-8. Rasmusson sees in Barth's treatment of the state a similarly atemporal, non-concrete problematic. See Arne Rasmusson, 'The Politics of Diaspora: The Post-Christendom Theologies of Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder', *God, Truth and Witness*, 88-111, (94, 100-3).

¹¹ Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 280-1 For Barth on the church as unnecessary, see *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Bromiley, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 826.

¹² *WGU* 145.

¹³ *WGU* 216. Thomson summarises Hauerwas's more general disagreement with Barth in *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 98-101.

¹⁴ Interestingly, Hauerwas claims that without the concrete lives of witnesses, his argument could only be idealism. (*WGU* 217) It's unclear whether this is an implicit criticism of Barth, whose

Witnesses are necessary for Christians to make the world of Christian language habitable, and to really regain confident Christian speech: simply rehearsing it as Barth does will not work.¹⁵ Because Hauerwas suspects that Barth's ecclesiology cannot sustain the witness he thought essential to Christianity, Hauerwas refocuses his attention on Mangina's claim for what the church should be: "...the binding medium in which faith takes place. The medium is, if not the message, the condition of possibility of grasping the message in its truth."¹⁶

I mentioned at the outset that Hauerwas's use of Barth is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, he fails to set Barth's ecclesiology in any one place in the *Church Dogmatics* in the context of the doctrinal viewpoint from which the church is being described, which results in a rather skewed presentation. Secondly, Hauerwas fails to set Barth's description of the church in one place in tension with the way he may plot the church from another doctrinal coordinate. In fairness, Hauerwas's criticisms of Barth are brief and not entirely original, and a full presentation of Barth's thought on the church would be rather beside the point of *With the Grain of the Universe*. Though my departure point for discussing Hauerwas's ecclesiology was his disagreement with Barth, the brevity of his attack (really only a few pages) suggests that their disagreement is not the most

work Hauerwas believes was hampered by philosophical resources (particularly Kant) that he thought he had left behind. See *WGU* 144. This would tally with Thomson's diagnosis that Hauerwas believes Barth "...is still enthralled by the liberal conviction that the Scriptures, properly expounded, can give a sufficiently compelling account of the Word of God to facilitate an encounter with that Word without intrinsically involving the church." *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 100. On Barth, see Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 3-22, particularly 6-7.

¹⁵ *WGU* 217.

¹⁶ For Hauerwas's doubts about Barth's ecclesiology, see *WGU* 39. For Mangina see *WGU* 145 and 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 294-5.

important thing about Hauerwas's ecclesiology.¹⁷ Nicholas Healy has suggested in his reconsidering of Barth's ecclesiology that:

"In my view, Hauerwas and those who raise similar concerns about Barth have not necessarily misread or misunderstood Barth, or if they have, that is not the most interesting issue between them. Rather, they disagree with him in significant ways, and any misreading of Barth seems to be more of a consequence than the premise of their disagreement."¹⁸

Healy also proposes that the reason Hauerwas (and others) disagree with Barth over anthropology and pneumatology may be because of their disagreement with him over the church.¹⁹ That is, Hauerwas might come to Barth with an already formed ecclesiology of his own which is the *source* of the disagreement, rather than Hauerwas's ecclesiology proceeding constructively from a critical engagement with Barth.²⁰

In his reconsideration of Barth's ecclesiology, Healy presents what Barth might say in self-defence against Hauerwas's criticisms. His focus is on the active connotations of the concept 'knowledge' in Barth (III/3, IV/1), the idea of the church as co-operating and corresponding with Christ (III/3) and Barth's account of sanctification and witness in community (IV/2, IV/3).²¹ Healy's broader

¹⁷ See also 'Hooks', 93.

¹⁸ KBER 289. In this paper, Healy substantially reconsiders his approach to Barth ten years before in 'The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology', presenting a sympathetic account of how Barth might respond to Hauerwas's criticisms of him in *With the Grain of the Universe*. Healy's broader treatment of Barth's ecclesiology here is far closer to the view of Barth's thought on the church that I would like to articulate.

¹⁹ KBER 289.

²⁰ Having said this, Rosato conducts such a study and still concludes that Barth's ecclesiology is insufficiently prophetic: "The dangerous tendency in Barth's ecclesiology is that, where the Spirit should be most prominent, Christ's death and resurrection distort the picture, and an ecclesial community is described which is not the painful concern of the triune God who through preaching and sacraments grants the Church a share in the very arrival of the Kingdom; the Church is huddled around Christ the Victor, but not sent out on the liberating mission of the Kingdom's harbinger, the Lord and Giver of Life." *The Spirit as Lord*, 185.

²¹ KBER 290-4. For the pneumatological nature of this view of the possibility of knowledge, see Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord* 38-43. Werpehowski argues that Barth's ethics can be defended against the charge of intuitionism by considering how he "annexes" terms such as "command" and "obedience", albeit legally, and puts them to a use determined by reflection which

account of Barth's ecclesiology is closer to the view I would like to articulate, and a necessary corrective to the impression one gets from Hauerwas and Mangina of Barth's ecclesiology, which I have already suggested is too narrow. However, there are enough remarks about the church in the *Church Dogmatics* alone to construct several different (and conflicting) views of the church from Barth's theology. Hauerwas's problem is not taking Barth's remarks out of context so much as not setting them in tension with the equally valid remarks on the church that Healy documents. The debate as to who is right about Barth's ecclesiology could go back and forth forever, and even disregarding the fact that I lack the expertise to contribute to the debate, I suggest the outcome would not be terribly important for Hauerwas's ecclesiology. To be sure, it is important to present a full view of the diversity of Barth's remarks about the church. Arguably far more important than looking at *what* Barth says is looking at *how* he says it. How is it that Barth manages to hold these disparate pronouncements on the church in tension? (Does he manage this?) What are the doctrinal contexts or mitigating nuances that allow Barth to say all of these things about the church?

So, given that Hauerwas's disagreement with Barth is not their most interesting or important interaction, that I lack the expertise to fully address who has got Barth right or not, and that I doubt the fruitfulness of too much proof-texting with the *Church Dogmatics*, I will restrict my presentation of Barth to the following questions, in ascending order of importance.

is bound in principle to the narrative depiction of God's dealings with humanity in Jesus Christ. The sense of these terms, so bound, is irreducible to any other sense generated by or in any other world of depicted discourse and activity." William Werpehowski, 'Command and History', 302. Healy's defence of Barth's ecclesiology shows that terms like 'knowledge' and 'sanctification' are annexed, but does not illustrate fully how it is that Barth's specifically *narrative* setting allows such annexed terms to function in his ecclesiology.

- i) How do Barth's remarks about the church interact with their context?
- ii) How do his various contexts interact, and what vector does that give to his ecclesiological pronouncements?²²
- iii) How might the doctrinal contexts or nuances with which Barth alleviates the tensions in his own ecclesiology work to ease the tensions in Hauerwas's theological project?

The views of a German reformed Lutheran and an American Mennonite/Catholic/Methodist/Episcopalian on the church cannot be expected to coincide completely, so there is little point calling Hauerwas to account for parting company with Barth, or vice versa – one can hardly expect them to be presenting the same account of the church. This means that presenting Barth's account of the church's witness is a secondary concern. Rather, in presenting a broad sweep of the context of Barth's various discussions on the church, particularly in relation to their doctrinal contexts, I hope to show how a more robust doctrinal framework might ease some of the tensions in Hauerwas's work. In doing so, I hope that some of the aspects of Barth's ecclesiology I present will mitigate Mangina's and Hauerwas's presentation of his thought, which I suggest is rather too severe.

Despite all the aims and methods Hauerwas and Barth hold in common, Barth's use of many credal loci as viewpoints on the life of the church gives his ecclesiology a breadth and inhabitability that Hauerwas's rather more shotgun approach cannot match. Because Hauerwas's theology explicitly takes the church

²² John Webster, *Karl Barth*, (London: Continuum, 2000) "...Barth's views on any given topic cannot be comprehended in a single statement, even if the statement is one of his own, but only in the interplay of a range of articulations of a theme." 13-4.

as its starting point as the community that makes theological reflection on doctrine possible and meaningful, and because he presupposes a stable church in this way, his articulation of what the church *is* in itself is slightly compromised. Obviously, Hauerwas wants his theology to be spoken out of the context of the church in order to help it live its witness to God better, and any such theology presupposes the community context – there is no ‘view from nowhere’ when it comes to theological reflection on the church, and nor should we want one. Rather, the point is that Hauerwas’s theology ties the whole task of Christian discipleship so completely to the church that what he ends up describing is the church’s perspective on the church’s life and action, without very much recourse to other creedal doctrinal loci.²³ To be sure, Hauerwas would be the first to defend the idea that the truth of Christianity possesses the church, the church does not possess the truth as such. But, in collapsing Christian discipleship into following Jesus through the practices of the church, Hauerwas is unable to map the church sufficiently into the wider context of a doctrine of God such that it is accountable, questionable and relative.²⁴ I have already suggested that Hauerwas’s emphasis on the witness of the church as epistemologically necessary makes the church less provisional than perhaps it ought to be, and makes his eschatology a yardstick for how well the church is behaving. Whether or not Barth’s ecclesiology or pneumatology are finally satisfactory for Hauerwas, Barth’s more systematic

²³ Fergusson, having criticised Hauerwas in a similar vein, also briefly suggests that Barthian language about correspondence between the work of God in Christ and the continuing agency of the Spirit in the church may be more helpful than Hauerwas’s sense of simply continuing what has been begun in Christ. See ‘Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?’, 246.

²⁴ Fergusson suggests that Barthian language of correspondence may be a happier way of describing the relationship of the church and the story of Christ through the agency of the Spirit, rather than Hauerwas’s language of continuity. ‘Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?’, 246. For Barth’s development of the Spirit in relation to Christ as Word rather than the church tradition or human spirituality, see *The Spirit as Lord*, 31-7. “Barth thus continues to use categories of contradiction so as to offset what he now regards as Schleiermacher’s and Roman Catholicism’s categories of continuity.” (33).

approach to describing how the church fits in a wider context has much to offer Hauerwas in terms of establishing some checks and balances for Hauerwas's own ecclesiology.

The problem with trying to present the world of the *Church Dogmatics* is that, just as in trying to present the globe of planet earth as a flat map, one ends up distorting some elements at the expense of others. It is possible to produce various projections of Barth's theology, all equally promising and flawed for theological reflection – after all, Barth never intended to have his life's work summarised, in fact it rather defies the point.²⁵ Sketching Barth's thought on the church inevitably produces a rather cubist picture: in taking account of all the contexts in which Barth writes about the church, one ends up presenting far more facets than would be normally visible in any single view of his theology. My presentation here is restricted to how the church fits into the wider theological context in which he places it each time, and I have foregrounded those elements which I consider helpful to Hauerwas's project. These are firstly: an increased appreciation of the role played by the concept of 'history' in Barth's ecclesiology, which I hope will nuance Hauerwas's approach to truth and discernment, and secondly: an exploration of how Barth sees Christ's resurrection as the source of the waiting and hurrying church, which I hope will give Hauerwas's picture of church discipleship a stronger eschatological focus.

²⁵ Hence, to those who suggested that one might read *Dogmatics in Outline* as a condensed version of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth replied, "If a man will not work, let him not eat." *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM, 2001), 6. (Hereafter *DO*) On the other hand, when asked to summarise his theology (by either a journalist or a student in America, accounts vary), Barth replied "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Martin Rumscheidt, in the epilogue to Barth's *Fragments Grave and Gay* (London: Collins, 1971), 124.

The church is founded on Jesus' resurrection.²⁶ In God's raising of Jesus from the grave, the fullness of God's victory over death achieved in the crucifixion is revealed, and humanity's complete reconciliation with God is accomplished.²⁷ God chooses to divide the one event of Jesus' glorification into two: the resurrection reveals God's glory in a hidden, provisional way and it will only be revealed wholly at the end of time in the final revelation of Jesus' Lordship over all creation.²⁸ Jesus' resurrection from the dead, unlike the public event of his crucifixion, is not available to historical scrutiny; like the disciples, we can only be convinced of its truth by the working of the Spirit.²⁹ Just as the resurrection is the now and not-yet of Jesus' glorification, so it is the pledge of humanity's hope, and so we see that not-yet future hope already present in the Easter proclamation.³⁰ Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the Father shows the reality of his Lordship, and it marks the beginning of the church's time.³¹ The church is truly the earthly-historical form of Christ, the environment of the man Jesus, but Christ enthroned at God's right hand is the only guarantor of the church's reality as such.³²

So, the good news is not so much about something that took place in first century Palestine, but something world history is going to meet, and that not a fate or destiny, but a person.³³ The church hurries from the tomb of Christ's resurrection, through the time God graciously gives it for faith and witness, all the while

²⁶ II/2 267, IV/1 728ff.

²⁷ IV/2 620.

²⁸ II/2 237, IV/1 660-2, 651, 734-5, *DO* 124ff.

²⁹ IV/1 728-9.

³⁰ *DO* 113.

³¹ *DO* 116, 119.

³² II/2 233ff, IV/1 664-6, IV/2 631-2, *DO* 117, 120.

³³ *DO* 122. For the Holy Spirit as also hastening from the resurrection to the final revelation, see IV/1 648.

waiting for Jesus' coming in glory.³⁴ God could have ended history on Easter Sunday, with all the fullness of reconciliation achieved in Christ. However, God's concrete, historical and particular grace revealed in the person of Jesus is not tyrannical or abstract, but calls out for a response from human hearts of joyful faith and thankfulness.³⁵ God is waiting for the church and, with the church, the world.³⁶ The knowledge of God's decision about us in Christ, given by the Spirit, should bring about in us a joyful response of thanks and gratitude which should grow as God reveals his grace to us more and more.³⁷ Where God's promise finds faith by creating faith, that is, where the Holy Spirit awakens us to the knowledge of Easter Day, the church comes into life.³⁸ There, waiting and hurrying, Christians participate in the resurrection's particular and provisional witness, and await the full revelation of God's glory in Christ at the end of time. The witness Christians give in this way, their provisional representation of the sanctification of all humanity in Christ through the Spirit, is not just made possible, but necessary.³⁹ Because our response in faith is a complete gift from God, and because God has already decided our salvation, the church is not *part* of God's revelation as such, and God does not strictly *need* the church for his revelation.⁴⁰ Rather, the church participates in Jesus' self-witness in the Holy Spirit by being a reflection of his glory, a shadowing forth of Jesus as the head of his body on earth.⁴¹

³⁴ IV/1 725, in relation to time, see 734-5. The kingdom of God is also between the two parousias: IV/2 655-6.

³⁵ IV/1 737, For the patience of God see DO 118-9, for the waiting and hurrying church DO 117, 139, IV/1 726-7.

³⁶ DO 119, IV/1 726-33.

³⁷ IV/1 646.

³⁸ II/2 237, IV/1 725, DO 132.

³⁹ IV/1 646, 651, 662, 737, IV/2 617, 620ff, DO 10

⁴⁰ IV/3.2 816.

⁴¹ II/2 197 ff, IV/3.2 794 DO 118. The language of mirroring indicates a link to the *analogia fidei* here, as Mangina points out: 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 272.

God is patiently waiting for humanity to respond, but not simply standing back waiting for applause.⁴² The Holy Spirit, Christ's instrument of witness to himself, brings about faith in us as a wholly unmerited gift.⁴³ The Spirit's work in the world is redemption, the subjective realisation of reconciliation in Christ, and so it has no other task than to bear witness to Christ and therefore to mediate, through the gift of faith, our participation in that reconciliation.⁴⁴ The faith, hope and love given by the Spirit are not natural or regenerated capacities in us, nor are they our graceful habits, nor our achievements – they are pure grace which, like the manna in the desert, God gives new each moment: the Holy Spirit is an ongoing miracle which turns us to God.⁴⁵ It is because the Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ and to the reconciliation achieved in him that it shows salvation as something outside us, not our renewed dispositions or experiences.⁴⁶ Just as the Holy Spirit is the only active ingredient in our coming to faith, so it is only the Spirit that makes

⁴² IV/1 737-9.

⁴³ DO 123, 130-3, IV/1 646-9, IV/2 623.

⁴⁴ George Hunsinger, 'The mediator of communion: Karl Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit', in John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177-94 (177ff, 181). (Hereafter MC). See also IV/2 651-4. Mangina argues that this makes the Holy Spirit less than a distinct salvific divine economy ('Bearing the Marks of Jesus', 270) because it manifests Christ's work rather than having any agency of its own. This seems to rest more on Mangina implying 'merely' whenever Barth says 'only' with relation to the Spirit's activity. Barth's claims about the Holy Spirit seem no more problematic than Jesus' own statement in John 5:30-1: "I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me. If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony cannot be verified." Concomitantly, Rosato writes of Barth's pneumatological anthropology "Man thus assumes solely a receptive role in Barth's pneumatology, but it is a role nevertheless..." *The Spirit as Lord*, 34.

⁴⁵ Barth, FI 40, Hunsinger, MC 182-3. That faith is a gift means there is no double predestination in Barth: "...there is a fluid distinction between those to whom it is given here and now in a specific way to exist for the world in the sense described, and those to whom it is not given here and now in this specific way, who have thus to look forward, or rather eagerly and humbly to move forward, to the hour of their own particular equipment for it." (IV/3.2, 781). That our honest desire for the Holy Spirit makes it present means this distinction will remain fluid (782-3). Reinhard Hütter argues that Barth's use of the Holy Spirit in this regard makes it into an 'unstable center': "The crucial problem of the "center" thus conceived is that it is unstable, that is, that it lacks any unequivocal referent, quite unlike the original Christological "life setting" of the Chalcedonian definition." *Suffering Divine Things*, 107. Hauerwas's concentration on the narrative of the church might ameliorate Barth in this regard.

⁴⁶ Hunsinger, MC 181. See Barth's work in *Die Christliche Dogmatik* discussed in *The Spirit as Lord*, 34-6.

Christian witness a true attestation of Christ. Though only God makes our action worthy of him, Christian persons are not simply an ornamental mill-race for love between members of the Trinity.⁴⁷ Christians participate in God's work, not by synergism, but by the contradiction of grace spoken into their lives, making them new.⁴⁸

Faith in God is knowledge about the truth of reality - Jesus' Lordship - so it takes the form of obedience and a decision for service.⁴⁹ Faith is necessarily public, because it is a relationship with the Trinity.⁵⁰ This means that the church must be visible, because it is an assembly of faithful people called in the Holy Spirit: the same Holy Spirit who gives us the Word made flesh.⁵¹ So, the church has a definite history.⁵² However, the church is not to be sought abstractly in the visible.⁵³ Barth often talks about the church as though it were a three dimensional object. The church that is visible to everyone acting as a historical community is only 2D; the third dimension, the Church's depth and significance, is given only by Christ through the Spirit.⁵⁴ So, the true nature of the church, its 3D character, is invisible and not open to historical scrutiny from outside – like Jesus'

⁴⁷ Hunsinger, MC 183.

⁴⁸ Hunsinger, MC 184, FI 49-50. Thus, God's witness does not depend on ours, but ours on God's. We do what we can, and thereafter the Word speaks and we keep silent. (IV/3.2 738)

⁴⁹ DO 10, 20, 123, IV/3.2 716. Barth often speaks about faith in terms of knowledge: "For all men are ordained to eternal life...Christians are those who are awake to the question [of preparing to attain it]." (IV/2 702). Nicholas Healy discusses this more fully in KBER 290-1.

⁵⁰ DO 20-1.

⁵¹ DO 132-5, IV/1 650-2. For visibility of church as Chalcedonian principle see IV/3.2 724-6.

⁵² IV/1 650, 704, 721.

⁵³ IV/1 654.

⁵⁴ IV/1 654. Barth says the same of the holiness of the church, which is given only by Christ and visible only in the Spirit. IV/1 693-701. The visible and invisible elements are not two different churches. Barth also talks about *die wirkliche Kirche* (the true church, Jesus' witness to himself in the Spirit) and *die Scheinkirche* (the semblance-church, the church's witness to itself). Both are historical realities, but the first cannot be seen, and the second can. IV/2 617-20. Because the church is Christ's body, Barth also talks about the true church as the *pleroma*, the *totus Christus*, or Christ's fullness, without which Christ would not be what he has been appointed by God. IV/2 625, 659.

resurrection.⁵⁵ However, it is a form of ecclesiological docetism to consider the church abstractly in the invisible, too, because the third dimension of the church is not ahistorical – how could it be when Jesus’ particular history, now universally significant in his resurrection, is the foundation of its life?⁵⁶ We must take the visible church seriously, in all its frailty and sin, but live in the hope of the third dimension and Christ’s promise in the Spirit.⁵⁷ Apart from the praise of God, which follows from the thankfulness of the individual, the church’s task is to witness to the gospel in the world.⁵⁸ This witness to the gospel is inseparable from the being of the church – if it isn’t witnessing, it isn’t the church.⁵⁹ The idea is not that the witness of the church converts the world or brings about the kingdom – only God does that.⁶⁰ The church witnesses to the kingdom in a small, provisional, imperfect, and yet necessary and historical way.⁶¹

Hopefully it is already becoming clear that Barth has mapped the church onto the resurrection (its hidden character), the incarnation (its visibility and historical particularity) and God’s being (the church’s being is its act of witness). A further dynamic interrelating all these points is Barth’s consideration of the Holy Spirit as the mediator of communion, the One who holds together difference. This happens

⁵⁵ IV/1 657-62. The church’s growth is also a secret phenomenon. IV/2 644. The church’s third dimension is only visible in the Holy Spirit: IV/1 685, 693-4.

⁵⁶ IV/1 669, on the danger of the church separating itself from the rest of humanity see IV/2 670.

⁵⁷ IV/1 654-60, IV/2 696-7. Just as Christ’s glory has not yet been revealed to the whole of humanity, and has a hidden character until the last day, so the church’s glory is hidden. IV/1 656-7.

⁵⁸ Glorifying God IV/1 658, IV/2 697-8, task of witness *DO* 137ff, IV/1 725, throughout IV/3.2 §72 ‘The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community’ esp. 780ff, 825.

⁵⁹ IV/1 650-2.

⁶⁰ IV/2 647-8, IV/3.2 714, 719.

⁶¹ *Church Dogmatics* IV/1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Bromiley, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 666, 732, IV/2 620-1. The church doesn’t make *progress* as such: IV/2 673, 704

in the incarnation, where the Spirit holds Christ's two natures together.⁶² Though Jesus is at the right hand of God, the Spirit bridges the abyss between Christ the head and his earthly historical form in the church, and connects his hidden life in God with the hidden life of the true church on earth.⁶³ The Spirit also holds together God's action with ours: God's action transcends ours so it is not in tension with it, and so it works like the hypostatic union: our actions are not working with God, nor does God make puppets of us, but our action is held in accordance with (but distinct from) divine precedence by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴ This means that all our action can really be is a prayer for participation in the holiness of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ As the promise of the church's deliverance the Holy Spirit is also a source of humble confidence for Christians, because even though our efforts at a Christian life may be feeble, God's 'nevertheless' in the witness of the Spirit gives us again the truth of Christ's resurrection and the knowledge that all has already been made good in Christ in a way that strengthens us to continue in hope.⁶⁶

⁶² However, Barth is clear that though the church is a predicate of Christ's being, we cannot say things about the church that we would say of Christ: the church is not incarnate and does not sanctify or justify. (IV/3.2 755)

⁶³ Hunsinger MC 179, IV/2 652-3. That is, the Holy Spirit coordinates the *totus Christus*. See Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 109-11.

⁶⁴ Tanner, 'Creation and Providence', *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 111-26, (124), DO 47. For instance, Christ can use our words, so that they have a different function and capability, but are nevertheless our words. (IV/3.2 737) The Holy Spirit makes possible a human echo to God's accomplished work of reconciliation by making Jesus known and making God's Word rung out in creation find resonance in human hearts. (IV/3.2 761) Reinhard Hütter, discussing Barth's Chalcedonian move in the context of his disagreement with Peterson, finds Barth's emphasis on the event character of the coincidence between God's action and human witness through the Spirit problematic. See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 95-115.

⁶⁵ IV/1 693-4. See Hütter for a criticism of this move: "What doubtless constituted a meaningful regulative in a substance-ontological context does not in an action-determined context automatically apply. First, the unequivocal referent, one already given in the christological context, is obviously missing in this kind of problematic action-determined nexus of "God and human being." Second, this model reduces the person and work of the Holy Spirit in a highly problematic fashion." *Suffering Divine Things*, 106.

⁶⁶ DO 62, 114, 122, IV/1 667, 773, IV/3.2 716. Interestingly, Barth's ongoing discussion of Romans 9-11 in II/2 § 34 seems to suggest a parallel between *sola fide* as the truth which unites Jews and Gentiles and frees them to continue in unified service in God's church, and the Holy Spirit here as the truth which, in imparting knowledge of the promise of Christ to the community,



The Holy Spirit realises reconciliation subjectively, so it is obviously central to Barth's account of the church; indeed, the Holy Spirit, not the church, is the proper object of belief in the third section of the creed.⁶⁷ However, the body of Christ has its source in election, not Pentecost.⁶⁸ The church participates in Christ's election from eternity, and this is the basis of its unity.⁶⁹ Jesus is the primary acting subject in concept "community".⁷⁰ Christ's election, the person of Jesus, *is* reality, whether we realise, act on it, or not: God has made a decision about our existence in Christ.⁷¹ Here as elsewhere, Barth's idea of reality is not some force of destiny impinging on us from outside, but a person, a decision, a history.⁷² Jesus is not a faceless concept of grace that intellectually removes the antithesis between the confusion we see in the world and our belief in God's new order, but a concrete life, death and resurrection.⁷³ That God is God-for-the-world in the person of Christ means the church must be for-the-world, too, and must approach the world as it really is, that is the object of God's love and grace.⁷⁴ The church's mission is to proclaim the knowledge of the reconciliation achieved in Christ such that it provokes a crisis and demands a decision of faith as a response to God's decision in Christ.⁷⁵

allows the church to carry on in confidence despite its frailty and manifest imperfection. However, the church's invisible principle is *not* to be identified with Christ. (IV/3.2 729)

⁶⁷ IV/1 645, 686, *DO* 132-3.

⁶⁸ IV/1 667.

⁶⁹ IV/1 664. The covenant with humanity is the basis, meaning and goal of creation *DO* 67.

⁷⁰ IV/2 678, 686.

⁷¹ *DO* 79-80.

⁷² *DO* 80-1. The church's confession of Christ is not a historical fate to which we are exposed, but a power which lies in the ordering of wisdom.

⁷³ This appears in Barth's discussion of *hominum confusion et Dei providentia regitur* at the start of *CD* IV/3.2 §72 (693ff) and also in 'Fate and Idea in Theology', where Jesus is the person who transcends, encompasses and resolves the antithesis between realism and idealism because he is not the given, but the God who comes (FI 51-60).

⁷⁴ *DO* 84, IV/3.2 717, 762, 774.

⁷⁵ IV/3.2 813-4.

When Barth talks about the non-necessity of the church for God's purposes, it is in this context of talking about how God, Jesus, the church and the world relate in terms of 'being-for'. The church is for the world only in the sense that God is for the world in Jesus.⁷⁶ Humanity, the church included, is not *for* anything, it is the object of the dynamic, so the church can only participate in Jesus' being-for.⁷⁷ When Barth talks about the church as necessary it is usually related to the *analogia fidei*: God's concrete decision about us in the person of Christ means *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has its place in the doctrine of predestination. For Barth, the church is not strictly necessary, because God could accomplish our salvation without it, but nevertheless *it has happened*.⁷⁸ I would like to argue that this understanding of the church as a historical event, a has-happened, is an important aspect of Barth's ecclesiology, and one which relates closely to Barth's view of history. I would like to draw out a little in order to see how Hauerwas's work might be instructed by it, first by outlining how the church relates to history, and secondly by seeing how that fits into Barth's wider view of history as the revelation of God's will.

The church takes place in history. Its gathering by the Holy Spirit is a historical, observable event.⁷⁹ The church *is* when it takes place.⁸⁰ Though it is observable and historical, its true (3D) nature is only observable in the Holy Spirit, just as the

⁷⁶ Samuel Wells suggests that Hauerwas's theological ethics might be ameliorated by placing an similar eschatological view at the basis of engagements with the world, asking the question "Would you like to be going where we are going?", rather than, "Would you like to come from where we are coming from?". See Samuel Wells, 'Stanley Hauerwas' Theological Ethics in Eschatological Perspective', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, (53:3), 2000, 431-48, (436).

⁷⁷ CD IV/3.2 786ff, 803-4. This is rather different from the impression Hauerwas gives in *WGU* 144-5. It also obviously relates to Barth's insistence in 'Fate and Idea' that the church taken as a whole, active and passive, is subordinate to God's superior action. (FI 50)

⁷⁸ For Barth's relocation of the possibility of proof within the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, see Rosato, *The Spirit As Lord*, 38-9.

⁷⁹ IV/1 649-53.

⁸⁰ IV/1 650-2, 719-21.

truth of the resurrection on which the church is founded can only be revealed to us through the witness of the Spirit.⁸¹ God could have accomplished his purposes without the church, so the witness of the church is not epistemologically necessary. However, God chose to give the church time in which people can freely choose to respond to his grace in Christ: we *can* only follow God, but God gives us grace that we *may* follow him.⁸² God chose to raise Jesus from the dead as a provisional witness to reconciliation, and so Jesus' resurrection is necessary and its witness will be made complete at the end of time. Likewise, the church's provisional representation of the sanctification of all humanity, though provisional, is necessary, because God has decided that it should happen.⁸³

This contingent-but-necessary dynamic in Barth's theology relates primarily to the person of Christ. Jesus, God and man, is the archetypal "unheard-of yet also"; his life is accidental but also willed from all eternity.⁸⁴ So our election in Christ is not a destiny, but God's choice about a specific person.⁸⁵ Jesus was not some concept of reconciliation or a faceless negotiation between *confusio hominum* and *Dei providentia regitur*, but a particular person with a home-town, a name and a lifespan.⁸⁶ Now Jesus' particular history, in all its shocking specificity and ordinariness of manhood, resides in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and it

⁸¹ IV/1 728-9. "In attempting to understand both the root of the mystery of reconciliation within the history of the triune God and its fruit within salvation history, Barth is compelled to a new stress on the Holy Spirit as the material "coincidence" between these two histories..." Rosato, *The Spirit As Lord*, 109.

⁸² IV/3.2 234.

⁸³ IV/2 620-1.

⁸⁴ DO 74-5. 'Accidental' in Barth's theology needs to be treated with some care. Jesus is not accidental in that he was not one possible historical event among others, because he was willed and elected from all eternity. (DO 60) However, in that Jesus' life on earth was subject to the verdict of Pontius Pilate, "God's history is indeed an accidental truth of history, like this petty commandant. God was not ashamed to exist in this accidental state." (DO 100).

⁸⁵ DO 80.

⁸⁶ DO 81. See also 'Fate and Idea in Theology' and the beginning of IV/3.2 §72.

is revealed as being a particular history of universal significance.⁸⁷ The church must correspond to this particularity of its Lord:

“...if it [the church] does not correspond to the particularity of its Head Jesus Christ and of His history, it does not attest the concrete, unique and limited actuality of this history, nor does it attest Him as the One who exists individually as this man and not another. In its representation of His history there is lacking the offence and the glory of the fact that it is “a contingent fact of history”. ”⁸⁸

Hopefully what is coming out already in terms of how Barth thinks of necessity is something that relates to the will of God as revealed in Christ, and thus a concept that can flicker between provisionality, contingency and necessity without contradiction. This is well illustrated by Barth’s use of thought experiments, which he quite often sets out as one of his variations on a theological theme.⁸⁹ These take the form of speculation as to what God could have done, followed by a Pauline ‘by no means!’ and some conclusions or inferences drawn from the way things really are. Two examples from his ecclesiology in CD IV are his speculating as to what it would have been like had God not chosen to raise Jesus from the dead (IV/1 pp.306-9) and what it would have been like had God chosen to end history on Easter Day (IV/1 p.734). Barth cannot always provide reasons why events necessarily had to take place as they did –that God could have accomplished our salvation *and* ended history on Easter Day is quite conceivable and unproblematic for him. Rather, Barth relocates ‘necessity’ in general within the divine will in particular (and the event of revelation) so that really the question of necessity becomes immaterial, because God has simply willed that it should be so.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ DO 74-5, 81.

⁸⁸ IV/2 697.

⁸⁹ See W. Werpehowski, ‘Narrative and Ethics in Barth’, *Theology Today*, 43:3, (1986), 334-53. “The theological necessity of any claim is established by tracing back from it to an understanding

In view of this relocation of necessity within the divine will, how Barth conceives of history is becoming clearer. I will explore this a little further, and then briefly look at how it relates to reality (or actuality) and how that might inform Hauerwas's epistemology. For Barth, there is no general concept of history in which God's revelation is available, like water in a glass.⁹⁰ History is God's action, the stage of God's self interpretation in revelation. However, history is not the story of God's givenness; it is not the story of a God who impinges on our reality, and whom we experience as most real when his actions *become* real for us.⁹¹ That is not what God's being in act means, that we only know God exists when he makes some mark on the canvas of 'history'; to repeat, God's givenness in act is not God's being in history. After all, human sin means we do not have any natural capacity to experience God in this way, nor can we tell what is or is not revelation by any external criteria. We experience God as the contradiction of grace, and the Holy Spirit in revelation convinces us of its truth. No concept of history is necessary to corroborate God's story in revelation, therefore, because God only corresponds to himself.⁹² Werpehowski argues that, for Barth, "The rational basis for considering God's life with us and our life with God as *historical* is that these histories [biblical narratives] correspond to that triune history."⁹³ So

of how its content refers to that gracious being [of God]. In this way, the integrity of divine revelation as God's self-interpretation is preserved." (336) Saying, then, as Mangina does, that such thought experiments point to a problematic *tendenz* in Barth's theology, seems rather tendentious, because Barth explicitly rejects the posited scenario and, while he may not be able to give reasons why things are the way they are, he receives as supremely meaningful what God has actually chosen to do and revealed to humanity.

⁹⁰ FI 42.

⁹¹ FI 34-5.

⁹² Werpehowski, 'Narrative and Ethics', 336.

⁹³ Werpehowski, 'Narrative and Ethics', 337. This relates to Barth's idea in II/1 158 that a being's history is the story of its interaction with others and its reciprocal transcendence in entering into relation with other beings. Thus, the coincidence of God's being and act form a history of a sort. (Werpehowski, 'Narrative and Ethics', 337)

Barth sees God in history as the One who comes, in startling momentary grace.⁹⁴

God is not given, but repeatedly self-giving.⁹⁵

So, for Barth, the church is not necessary, but history. I suppose, *a priori*, one would have to say that the church was contingent, but for Barth that is something of a non-category in this context: the church has happened, because God willed it to exist. In that sense, the church is *actual*. Hunsinger's analysis of the relation between the principles of actualism, particularism, objectivism and personalism in Barth's theology is particularly incisive.⁹⁶ Actualism relates to God's being as act, working in history, establishing relationships out of love and freedom:

"The church, the inspiration of scripture, faith, and all other creaturely realities in their relationship to God are always understood as events...they have not only their being but also their possibility only as they are continually established anew according to the divine good pleasure. Their have their being only in act – in the act of God which elicits from the creature the otherwise impossible act of free response."⁹⁷

Barth explores the concept of actuality in *Fate and Idea in Theology*, which examines the theological cases for realism and idealism. Realism's aspiration, taking God seriously as real, existent and acting, is an honourable one, and Barth asks, "Shouldn't 'realist' be synonymous with 'Christian' to the extent that Christ and the Holy Spirit doubtlessly signify for us the reality of God and the

⁹⁴ FI 39-40. In *CD IV/2* §64 Barth's presentation of Jesus as a radically free, revolutionary figure is another challenge to those who construct Christ in their own image through a general anthropology underlying their theology, which does not have its source in the particular person of Christ. See Werpehowski, 'Narrative and Ethics', 338-40.

⁹⁵ FI 40-2.

⁹⁶ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 27-42. Particularism is Barth's tendency to move from the particular to the general rather than the other way about, objectivism is Barth's conviction that things are in eternity as they are revealed in time, and that 'reality' is a theocentric concept, and personalism balances objectivism with a certainty that we personally encounter God in Christ through grace alone.

⁹⁷ *How to Read Karl Barth*, 31. Hütter argues that Barth's actualism slips dangerously towards spiritualistic individualism. *Suffering Divine Things*, 113. Thomson makes a similar observation about how Hauerwas views Barth's ethics as finally anarchic and individualist, for which see Chapter 2 fn.84 above and Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 103-4. I will address this further in Chapter 4, below.

world?”⁹⁸ However, Barth holds that realism rests on the fallacy that we can experience God by some natural capacity, and that its confidence ignores the only conclusion we can draw from the fact of human sin: that it is grace, contradictory, momentary grace alone that we encounter in God.⁹⁹ Rejecting the theological empiricism that springs from overconfident realism, Barth turns his attention to ideologically chastened, critically aware idealism.¹⁰⁰ Idealism links reason and truth, and its ambition to look beyond the given and question the availability of truth is admirable.¹⁰¹ Again, Barth asks, “Isn’t all theology necessarily idealist to the extent that thinking about God’s given reality always involves referring to its non-given truth?”¹⁰² But idealism can shy away from the realist’s particular truths of history, so however keen an enthusiastic idealist may be on revelation, they must acknowledge that God’s revelation is specific, particular and historical.¹⁰³ Idealism fails to take into account the passivity of our reason’s activeness in relation to God’s truth.¹⁰⁴

One might expect from Barth’s qualified acceptance of realism and idealism that some kind of helpful synthesis is afoot with regard to what *actuality* is. Not so - Barth is suspicious of Hegel, too, and theology is not to be “a humanly proposed *tertium* beyond truth and reality”.¹⁰⁵ Barth sums up the difference between realists and idealists thus: “Truth will be a predicate of reality for the one, while

⁹⁸ FI 37.

⁹⁹ FI 39-40. Barth also links anthropologies based on the *analogia entis* with his suspicion of those who see history as a neutral concept. (FI 41) For Barth, nature is a Christological category, for which see John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 214-30, (214).

¹⁰⁰ FI 42-3.

¹⁰¹ FI 44-7.

¹⁰² FI 45.

¹⁰³ FI 24-5.

¹⁰⁴ FI 48-9.

¹⁰⁵ FI 54-60, (56).

for the other, reality will be a predicate of truth.”¹⁰⁶ For Barth, truth and reality are predicates of Jesus Christ. Sin reminds us of our nature and God’s radical otherness.¹⁰⁷ Christ reminds us that God is not given, but that he comes, and that he is both historical particularity and Truth itself. God himself in Christ is the *tertium*.¹⁰⁸ So, it has become evident that God’s self revelation in election is at the heart of actuality for Barth, and that God is all-sufficient here. Because God’s action is not in competition with ours, God alone is real and actual and true, and we can really know it as God gives us the grace to see him revealing himself to us in Christ.¹⁰⁹ The transcendence of God made evident in Christ gives us freedom to witness: “In itself and as such how could my God-concept ever be a witness to God? It can, however, please God to make it be that and to use it in that way.”¹¹⁰

Werpehowski argues that Barth’s use of scripture reinforces this principle:

“...biblical narrative is used to show how the God who transcends us in Jesus Christ remains free from us, so that our corresponding self-transcendence in relation may be a genuinely revolutionary discipleship. Secondly, biblical narrative depicts the way in which the God who relates to us in Jesus Christ remains, in and as the basis of transcendence, free for us. Our corresponding response may, therefore, be a discipleship that is genuinely faithful service.”¹¹¹

Hauerwas’s theological realism, though less systematically constructed, is nonetheless very evident in his ecclesiology. We have already seen it take shape in his concern for concrete community and Christian practice, and his insistence that it is the story of God in Christ that really ‘goes all the way down’.¹¹² Where

¹⁰⁶ FI 52.

¹⁰⁷ FI 54, 58.

¹⁰⁸ This obviously relates to Barth’s insistence that Christ is the third way between *confusio hominum et Dei providentia regitur* in IV/3.2 §72.

¹⁰⁹ FI 59.

¹¹⁰ FI 59.

¹¹¹ Werpehowski, ‘Narrative and Ethics’, 337-8.

¹¹² The phrase is Gerard Loughlin’s: “It is the love of God that goes all the way down, really.” *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.

Barth's theological realism locates actuality within the will of God, the revelation of which is an 'event' brought about by the Holy Spirit, Hauerwas locates actuality more squarely within the Christian community. It is the church that displays the politics God desires for humanity as material reality.¹¹³ And where, for Barth, the event of Christian witness is left at a fairly intense pitch of uncertainty, for Hauerwas it certainly does occur: more than that, it *must* do so by the very nature of the Trinity, for this is how God chooses to be known:

"That the truth of Christian convictions requires witnesses is but the "pragmatic" display of the fact that the God who has created and redeemed the world has done so from the love that constitutes the life of the Trinity. That is what it means to say that witness and argument are the work of the Spirit, and that truth involves the heart as well as the mind. The truth of Christian convictions can be known only through witnesses because the God Christians worship is triune."¹¹⁴

We have also seen that Hauerwas's use of narrative tends to link the ontological particularity of God in revelation rather too closely to the social distinctiveness of the Christian community. As a challenge for the church, this call to *be* the kingdom is certainly valuable, and Hauerwas's rhetoric of real transformation of Christian lives is about taking that challenge seriously. Katangole writes:

"In fact, we can look to a different kind of realism, one that acknowledges that the world, as it is, is the product of stories...It is this realism that Hauerwas' work has been inviting Christians to take seriously as the task for Christian social imagination...this form of realism is itself concrete. As Stanley Hauerwas has shown, this realism exists in the form of concrete communities – churches – capable of forming visions, habits, and lives that betray the imagination of a God bent on creating and re-creating the world in a new fashion through the death and resurrection of his own son."¹¹⁵

However, the danger with Hauerwas's realism, his turn to narrative and practices, is that without the kind of safeguards put in place by Barth, it can tend (through

¹¹³ 'The Truth About God', *STT* 57.

¹¹⁴ *WGU* 211.

¹¹⁵ Emmanuel M. Katangole, 'Hauerwasian Hooks and the Christian Social Imagination', *God, Truth and Witness*, 152. The point is echoed by Hans Reinders in the same volume, see Hans S. Reinders, 'The Virtue of Writing Appropriately', 58.

enthusiastic rhetoric) toward what Barth identifies in 'Fate and Idea' as theological empiricism. Hauerwas certainly takes the gospel challenge of repentance and conversion of life seriously, but does not, I think, take sufficient account of the fact that it is *grace* that encounters us as *sinners*. More accurately, though Hauerwas has a fairly well developed account of sanctification as it applies to individuals or ideal communities, Hauerwas does not sufficiently allow for the ways in which this 'grace encountering sinners' dynamic takes systemic shape in the life of the church. Nor, I suspect, does his ecclesiology take sufficient account of the systemic shape that sin can take in the church, and how that must affect the way we *do* ecclesiology, by opening spaces for discernment of practices and conversation with the world. It is this tendency towards theological empiricism, I think, that many criticisms about Hauerwas's conception of truth in relation to practices are getting at: if 'what you see is what you get' in terms of the kingdom, this can make truth appear immanent to practices.¹¹⁶ What can appear as Barth's frustrating failure to cash out his systematics in terms of concrete communities and practices can be useful in gently holding back accounts of church witness from the dangers of theological empiricism: a problem of pastoral as well as systematic importance, as I have already indicated.

So, what theological lessons might Hauerwas receive from Barth? I picked up two related problems at the end of the second chapter: the need to prise apart the Spirit's witness and the action of the church, and the need to allow the kingdom of God to have judging as well as confirming significance for the church's life. It should have become evident from exploring Barth's ecclesiology in relation to its

¹¹⁶ For a Wittgensteinian critique of this, see Christopher J. Insole, 'The Truth Behind Practices', forthcoming *Studies in Christian Ethics*.

various doctrinal settings that such a broadly delineated doctrinal context might ease some of the tensions in Hauerwas's own theology. There are two points to take from Barth here, one regarding the church's call to *be* the church, and one relating to the church's call to let the world know it is the world. First, Barth's systematic reticence about too readily associating the witness of the Spirit with the church's action could balance out Hauerwas's rhetorical challenge. By relativising the church's practices in this way and subjecting them more thoroughly to the eschatological judgement of Christ, a space would be opened up for discernment of the church's practices. Such a space should not give way to ecclesial indecision or inaction, but should open practices to disputation and argument, questioning them continually for their orientation to Christ.¹¹⁷ It should be a space in which we explore practices for the ways in which they have been and continue to be shaped by the sin and frailty manifest in the concrete church. As I have shown by outlining Barth's ecclesiology in relation to its context, the way Barth creates such space is by discussing the church as proceeding from the resurrection. This is the key to the second point – how Barth's ecclesiology might inform Hauerwas's view of how the church is known by the world.

Saying that the church is as real as Christ's resurrection is not like saying that the church is as real as Christ's cross. The latter is available to historical observance, for it can be seen and interpreted as the death of a troublemaker or the sacrifice of the Son of God. The resurrection is different: visible only in the Spirit, it is part of the 'third dimension' of the life of the Church. Surely the Spirit is as involved in

¹¹⁷ The *Inter Insigniores* line taken by the Vatican on women's ordination, that the church does not have the authority to make the decision about the eligibility of women for the priesthood seems to me a good example of such faux-eschatological indecision. See *Inter Insigniores (Declaration on the Ordination of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood)*, (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976).

convincing us of the truth of Jesus' death just as much as the truth of the resurrection? Yes, certainly, knowledge of the truth of cross and resurrection are dependent wholly on the work of the Spirit in us. But where encyclopaedias can accompany us as far along the road as the crucifixion, they part company at the resurrection, and (if at all) the language is then, "Jesus' followers later claimed that he rose from the dead." If as far as the crucifixion the life of Jesus is public, after the resurrection our knowledge of events is private, surrendered utterly to the work of the Spirit and the life of the community.¹¹⁸ Here let me qualify my use of the word 'historical': I am not proposing a neutral notion of history in which God's revelation is available like water in a glass.¹¹⁹ The Spirit is as involved in our truthful knowledge of 'historical' events as 'unhistorical' ones: what I am doing is marking off those events visible as real *only* in the Spirit from those visible as real in competing, if not incommensurable, ways.¹²⁰ This distinction is necessary for reinforcing the point of Barth's that I raised earlier: God's being in act is *not* God's givenness in history. The resurrection is the doctrinal locus where this point can be usefully reinforced for Hauerwas's theology and for any theology making a turn to the concrete practices of the church. The point is particularly pertinent as a cautionary note for any proponents of the ill-advised uses of Wittgenstein that lurk around some concrete ecclesiology. Yes, we do know God's being through God's act, but this does not mean God is 'real' only to the extent that we experience God as impinging on our reality, nudging us into

¹¹⁸ Hauerwas is more forthcoming on the communal nature of our knowledge of the life of Christ. For example, he talks about natural epistemological division of labour in terms of communities relying on authoritative members grounding referring expression. See 'The Church as God's New Language', *HR*, 159. See also 'Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom', *HR*, 119-20.

¹¹⁹ The phrase is Barth's, FI 42.

¹²⁰ Obviously, that some events are visible as real only in the Spirit DOES NOT imply a hermeneutical vacuum, as though the Spirit's involvement permitted only one interpretation of events. See my comments in Chapter 4 below.

belief in God's existence. If we maintain a doctrinal conversation with the resurrection, we much diminish the imminent danger of subjecting our experience of God to the same critical criteria and epistemological categories as our experience of other real things. Making Christ's resurrection the epistemological centre of discussions of Christian witness allows us to mark off those ways of knowing which are singularly Spirit-dependent and distinctively belonging to the order of Christian belief from those general epistemological principles applicable to any complex human belief. When we are brought to knowledge of the reality of Christ's resurrection, it is grace upon grace enacted through the work of the Holy Spirit alone – even though we are borne into knowledge of the resurrection by its proclamation in the church, it is still thoroughly grace in a way different from our conviction of the truth of other complex beliefs.

To make this turn to the resurrection is to acknowledge that epistemological claims regarding the witness and the understanding given by the Spirit are internal to the life of the church. To repeat, the resurrection is gift, that we have eyes to see and ears to hear its reality is gift, and it is gift that we can come to know it as promised. If the resurrection is established as the primary doctrinal locus for considering the life of the concrete church, the first claim we should make is not a general one which could apply to any religion or complex human activity – that we can only know people hold certain things as true by the way they act. Rather, proceeding from the resurrection and from the acknowledgement of the Spirit as the 'third dimension' of the church's life means that it is only possible to see the

full reality of the church by the working of the Holy Spirit.¹²¹ The only Christian claim for the fruitfulness of its way of life is that it too is gift upon gift, springing from Christ's resurrection and visible only by understanding given by the Spirit. To say that it is only possible to see the true reality of the church 'from inside' is not to set an epistemological abyss between those inside the church and those outside, because thankfully the Holy Spirit does not respect what we think of as the boundaries of the church. Rather, the power of the Holy Spirit, though it takes particular shape in God's promise to the church, rests on all creation, giving eyes to see and ears to hear wherever God decides that it shall be so. Moreover, the reality of the church may be concealed at times from those within the scope of its practices, and may be pointed out to us by those whom we count as 'other'.

There is more work to be done here than such a brief systematic excursus on the epistemological significance of the resurrection will allow. I will return to outlining why such a systematic task might be important for concrete ecclesiology in the final chapter. Apart from the constructive systematics briefly sketched out in this chapter, the point of the chapter has also been one of concrete ecclesiological method. Identifying a need for Hauerwas to reinforce his eschatology is not a question of asking him to produce a system, which request he regularly defies. Saying that the theological problems inherent in his work could be eased by a fuller doctrinal context is not asking him to produce a systematic theology, it is simply pointing out that rhetorical challenges need theological crash barriers, be they enunciated through liturgy, pastoral care, theological writing, social action or choir practice. For example, if we hold that the truth of Christian

¹²¹ I hope my epistemological work so far makes it evident that this is not a simple dichotomy between those inside and those outside, but a simplified presentation of the same (vaguely) asymptotic epistemological model which applies to human knowledge of God.

practices is visible only in the power of the Spirit, and that the Spirit is the only ‘active ingredient’ in Christian witness, we are using a theological ‘crash barrier’ of a phrase. It has two vectors. The first is to protect the church by gently relativising the authority of the church to pronounce on the whereabouts of the Spirit in its practices. This function protects against more ominous manifestations of the idea behind the old joke that Catholics never bother smartening themselves up for Mass because they know that Jesus will turn up regardless. The second use is to call attention back to the fact that the Spirit’s presence in the Church’s practices is always thorough, pure promised gift – it cannot be *guaranteed*, or certainly not by us. As Tanner wryly remarks, God’s final victory over sin does not depend on human enforcement.¹²² Both vectors are necessary, not just for balanced theology, but for healthy church life.

At the beginning of *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, Hauerwas relates a conversation one of his students had regarding him, where the student was told, “Hauerwas will never be able to establish a school because after he is gone it will never hold together. The only reason the contradictions in his position are not more apparent than they are is because they are part of the same body.”¹²³ Hauerwas’s theology is very much part of ‘one body,’ partly because it is so bound up with his personality: he is homiletical, urgent, exhortative, energetic. This means that saying Hauerwas might receive lessons from Barth, as I have done here, is saying that any supplement or correction must come from without, from another body. This engagement in constant argument directed towards the glory of God is a crucial point for an exercise in concrete ecclesiology. I have also argued

¹²² Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 119.

¹²³ *STT* 7. Having said this, Hauerwas has at least contributed towards what looks to be a growing theological fashion.

throughout that engaging with Hauerwas's ecclesiology as concrete ecclesiology means making constructive proposals practical. The next chapter is given over to giving these systematic proposals for Hauerwas's ecclesiology practical force. First, the systematic proposals I made for Hauerwas's ecclesiology will be given practical force in terms of how we should *do* concrete ecclesiology, and how practising concrete ecclesiology in that way might better serve the church. Second, they will be given practical force by discussing how best Hauerwas's challenge might be taken seriously as a gift for the church, or how his vision for the church might best be preserved as well as rendered more careful. In particular, practices of the church that allow it to grow as a community of loving negotiation will be discussed as a means of opening up space for discernment. These will be particularly brought to bear on questions of authority and experience in concrete ecclesiological reflection.

5. Conclusion

I started this study of Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesiology by placing his work within the wider context of concrete approaches to ecclesiological reflection. After briefly surveying the development and current form of concrete ecclesiology, I identified four marks of theological reflection on the concrete church: a turn to considering the practices of the church as central to what the church is, pastoral-mindedness in attending to the complexity of church life, the use of narrative as a theological resource for skirting modernity's presuppositions, and a concern for how the church interacts with the world. By sketching out the current context and state of the church, I argued that these four characteristics were a valuable practical response to the church's current difficulties. In outlining these pastoral concerns and the rationale of concrete ecclesiology generally, I made clear that I was engaging in a concrete ecclesiological study of Hauerwas as concrete ecclesiologist. The aim throughout has been to engage with Hauerwas practically on his own terms, that is, in conversation with the challenge of the gospel and the contemporary situation of the church. This has meant, firstly, identifying difficulties or tensions in Hauerwas's theology on the basis of how they affect or describe the life of the concrete church. Secondly, it has meant making systematic suggestions for Hauerwas's theology practically relevant. Thirdly, it has meant that I have also raised methodological points about how we continue concrete ecclesiology 'after Hauerwas', or how we take his challenge seriously for the way we think about reflecting on the concrete church.

We saw in the first chapter that Hauerwas not only addresses the concrete church, but also presents it with a challenging vision of radical faithfulness to the gospel,

lived distinctively in community. I outlined Hauerwas's ecclesiology in terms of how it related to the church as a marked and marking body. This meant engaging with his claim that the first task of the church is to *be* the church, and to show how he conceives of the church as formed and revealed as such. It became evident in exploring Hauerwas's thought in more depth that this discussion of how the church is called to *be* the church is resourced by a turn to considering distinctive Christian practices as central to theological reflection on what it means to be church, and also by a strong sense of how the church fits into the narrative of God's involvement with the world. I examined not just how Christians were called to be distinctive, but why they should be so, and what significance Hauerwas attached to Christian distinctiveness. The extent to which Hauerwas's vision is a rhetorical challenge began to become clear, and also the ways in which the force of his rhetoric began to pull his focus away from the concrete church, or cause some confusion as to the precise nature of his substantive theological claims. A significant focus in exploring Hauerwas's view of the church as a *marked* and *marking* body was to explore how we might know the church as marked. First, I considered through Hauerwas's theology how Christians might discern the church as marked, and how, and what kind of claim that has on Christians. Secondly, I explored how the world might know the church as marked, and how, and what involvement the Holy Spirit has in Hauerwas's 'epistemology'. The other significant focus of my discussion of Hauerwas's ecclesiology was on the church as *marking*, or how the church acts as witness. I began to delineate what the church's witness consisted in, and what claims it had on both the church and the world.

In the second chapter, I initiated an appraisal of Hauerwas's ecclesiology as concrete ecclesiology, holding it up to the four characteristic concerns of concrete ecclesiology that I outlined at the start, and seeing where the tensions and difficulties lay. In particular, I focussed on the resources we saw Hauerwas use for his theology in the first chapter: narrative and practices. By seeing how Hauerwas's use of narrative and practices fared when tested in the church's current context, it became apparent that his theology did not have the necessary resources to make sufficient sense of the church's sin, nor to provide a careful enough account of church witness in a church of uncertainty. On the first point, by examining what practices are in an anthropological context, and by reflecting on the practices of the church as we most often encounter them, it seemed that Hauerwas simplified and idealised the practices of the church. I argued that Christian practices not only could not bear the theological weight to which Hauerwas was subjecting them, but that it was theologically important that they should not bear such weight. While Hauerwas's challenge to the church rightly encourages the development of witnessing Christian practices, I argued that his theology lacked the resources to make sense out of failure. On the second point, I examined Hauerwas's use of narrative and questioned the role it plays in his theology. Though Hauerwas's use of narrative is sometimes very astute and careful in terms of claiming only descriptive significance, I argued that the momentum of his theological rhetoric made 'narrative' as a concept do more work than it should. This had the consequence of equating the kingdom of God too strongly with the practical achievements of an idealised church, and thereby associating the work of the Holy Spirit too strongly with Christian practice. In a church context characterised by uncertainty and difficulties about authority,

weakening the necessary work of discerning Christian practices by tying the Holy Spirit too closely to the church's witness constitutes a pastoral problem as well as a purely theological one.

I closed the second chapter by beginning to outline a constructive systematic agenda. Through two brief studies of two elements in Hauerwas's work, witness and narrative, I suggested ways in which Hauerwas's ecclesiology might be made more genuinely concrete. In examining what it means for the church to have named and celebrated witnesses, or saints, I started to prise apart the action of the church and the witness of the Holy Spirit, in order to preserve the position of church witness and practice relative to the eschaton, with the intention of making Hauerwas's account of church witness more pastorally conscientious. This also began to open up an eschatological space for discernment of the church's practices. The second study was an examination of Hauerwas's use of narrative. Hauerwas's use of narrative is part of his project to think around the legacy of the Enlightenment about what it means to know God through Jesus and his following church. While it is an important descriptive conceptual resource for theological reflection on the concrete church, I argued that Hauerwas's use of narrative overreached itself. This caused problems with how we come to know the church, and God through it, by linking the epistemological particularity of God in revelation too closely to Christian distinctiveness: by making God's being in act correspond too closely to a pragmatic principle of Christian fruitfulness. Here I started to make clearer why it was the case that Christian practices *should* not bear the theological weight Hauerwas asks of them, and why a genuinely concrete ecclesiology should be careful to separate out the ways in which we know God,

the church and the world. Only by so doing can the church ensure that it takes sufficient account of the systemic ways in which sin can take shape in its life, and engage in a process of discernment which allows its practices to be thoroughly ordered to the glory of God.

The third chapter opened a conversation with Karl Barth. Hauerwas's theology depends significantly on Barth's theological legacy, particularly as developed by Hans Frei. While indebted to Barth for his 'non-foundational' account of Christian witness, Hauerwas is critical of Barth's ecclesiology and departs from him in focussing more intently on the concrete church. In the first two chapters, it began to become evident that some of Hauerwas's theological difficulties sprang from his occasionalistic and rhetorical style. While not suggesting that Hauerwas should produce a systematic ecclesiology, I argued that the way in which Barth related his ecclesiology to different doctrinal contexts might show a way of easing some of the tensions in Hauerwas's own theological project. By presenting Barth's ecclesiology in relation to its doctrinal settings, particularly the resurrection and ascension, I drew out the ways in which those settings mitigated against the difficulties Hauerwas identifies in Barth's theology, and in the end makes Barth's ecclesiology more habitable than Hauerwas's. In so doing, I also aimed to show how Barth's ecclesiology might evade some of Hauerwas's more swingeing criticisms. I then engaged with Hauerwas's ecclesiology, first by suggesting that Barth's view of history and actuality might check the theologically empiricist momentum established by Hauerwas's use of narrative, and secondly by showing how Jesus' resurrection could provide a useful context in which to maintain the challenge of Hauerwas's account of Christian witness while relieving

its more difficult aspects. Using Christ's resurrection as the doctrinal setting for accounts of the significance of church witness allows us to clarify the role of the Holy Spirit in how we come to recognise Christian witness. This not only reinforces the fact that Christian witness, where it happens, is a contingent gift of God – thereby relativising the significance of Christian distinctiveness within an eschatological horizon – but also allows us to order properly the kinds of epistemological claims we can make about the significance of Christian practice inside and outside the church.

In the introduction, I said that where my criticisms of Hauerwas in particular had ramifications for concrete ecclesiology in general, I would make these clear and suggest that others modified their approach. There is one major point to make here about systematic ecclesiology as a wider trend, a point which arises from this study of Hauerwas, but is of significance for concrete ecclesiology in general. As I explained at the start, concrete ecclesiology is more a set of background presuppositions than it is an explicit doctrine of church – it operates in much current theology as a kind of common sense, in much the same way as many Wittgensteinian insights have been assimilated into theological discourse. Concrete ecclesiology is more a certain way of talking about the church than it is a set of propositions. Essentially, it is a method that has become a theological virtue.¹ One outworking of this seems to be that 'systematics', or systematic theological approaches, are regarded as inherently problematic by a number of people working within the bounds of concrete ecclesiology. Doubtless they are so, but that is because they are human and fallible rather than systematic *per se*.

¹ I am grateful to Chris Insole for describing my suspicion in this way.

From a concrete ecclesiological perspective, casting distinctions between practical and systematic theology, or method and theology proper, is a naïve, if not dishonest endeavour. Hauerwas argues that systems are open to distortion; I would argue that any theological exercise is open to distortion (or simply feels the effects of human sin and shortsightedness), it is just more pronounced or, as I think more likely to be the case, simply more easily spotted in systematic theology.² It is part of concrete ecclesiology's *raison d'être* to move away from abstractly systematic discussions of the church's life, and it is a valuable move. However, being overly suspicious of systematic approaches runs the risk of making the practical, concrete approach problematic in precisely the same way as systematic methods can be.

Hauerwas argues that theology's preoccupation with methodology betrays the mistaken belief that positive doctrinal propositions are expressions of a prior content.³ The danger for concrete ecclesiology is that, in affirming the inseparability of doctrine and practice, method and theology, it occludes the necessary dialectical relationship between the two. In attempting to eschew the division and yet focus on the concrete church, there is a risk of trading on the same dichotomy between systematic and practical approaches to ecclesiology and merely opting for the latter.⁴ Certainly, to say that systematic and practical theology are inseparable is not to say that they are the same thing, and to highlight the fuzzy relationship between method and theology is not say that they are

² *PK* xvi.

³ *STT* 4, n.6.

⁴ Brad Hinze suggests that Healy may make such a move: see Bradford Hinze, Review of *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), by Nicholas M. Healy, in *Journal of Religion*, 83:2, (2002), 299-301 (300). See my comments on systematic/practical divisions below.

identical either. This is the methodological correlate of Hauerwas's tying the Spirit too closely to the church's practices: if we equate method with theology, or systematic with practical theology, we simply make them too proximate for the necessary dialectical relationship between them to function properly. To make the point as I do necessarily means using the same dichotomy I am trying to confuse, albeit in a qualified way. The point is the methodological equivalent of the distinctions I began to cast at the end of the second chapter and in my explication of Barth's ecclesiology: there is good reason to put dialectical distance between what might be called the practical and systematic poles of concrete ecclesiological reflection.

In his defence of Barth's ethics from Hauerwas's criticisms, Nigel Biggar writes,

"...we know of one reason of principle why Barth would have deliberately eschewed depicting the Christian life in detail: his methodological axiom that, since Christian life has no independent existence, it should not become an independent object of thought. The motive behind Barth's espousal of this principle is the belief that even to think of the Christian life apart from the dynamic relationship with God that constitutes it is bound to lead to the supposition that such life is ontically absolute."⁵

Hauerwas would, of course, deny the ontological independence of the church: his emphasis on narrative squarely locates the church within the story of God's intimate involvement with humanity. However, as I hope I have shown, his occasionalism simply entails the occupational hazard of tending toward focus on the concrete church in abstraction from its doctrinal context, a focus which, as we have seen, ends up being deleterious to his theology.

⁵ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 140.

Where to go from here? There is substantial work to be done on how we might best engage in ‘systematic’ concrete ecclesiology. How might we really engage concrete ecclesiology with the doctrinal contexts I have mentioned (e.g. resurrection, ascension, incarnation), such that the contexts hold the ecclesiological pronouncements in proper tension and can have critical bearing on the practices of the church, without having recourse to a fictitious doctrinal ‘view from nowhere’, or an unhealthy division between the practical and systematic modes of concrete ecclesiological reflection? Or how might we engage theologically with doctrinal motifs as they occur liturgically and practically in the church’s life without abstracting and idealising the practices of the concrete church?⁶ My study of Hauerwas’s ecclesiology has suggested that if doctrinal surveys distort or obscure the concrete church for theological reflection, then idealised accounts of church practice are equally problematic. How to move forward?

Note Biggar’s exact wording of Barth’s dictum: “...to think of the Christian life apart from the *dynamic relationship with God* [my emphasis] that constitutes it is bound to lead to the supposition that such life is ontically absolute.”⁷ Barth’s point in the passage Biggar cites is a methodological one – and perhaps there is a

⁶ Healy suggests that the church might engage in ‘ecclesiological ethnography’ as a mode of reflection on the church, from its general shape to its particular parishes; he also argues that such exercises in self reflection ought to be ongoing, rather than interventions at critical junctures. (*Church, World and the Christian Life*, 154-85). While ecclesiological ethnography could be very valuable indeed, I confess to some itchy misgivings about it as a method. There seems to be a danger of separating the way we *describe* ecclesial dissonance from the way we address it, when the two ought to share a common biblical, doctrinal language. To the extent that it might fall prey in practice to this description/solution problem, it seems to lean towards juridical intervention, and the ‘measureable/identifiable is manageable’ approach to ecclesial discernment downplays the ways in which communities exist in an ongoing *and sometimes conscious* ethic of care (including appropriate reticence about the presence and absence of the Holy Spirit in church practice), already discerning responsibility, complexity and compassion through simply living alongside one another. Ecclesiological ethnography might be more useful as intervention than as ongoing reflection, if in the latter case (as I suspect) it is surplus to requirements.

⁷ Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits*, 140.

way of negotiating the impasse in concrete ecclesiological reflection here.⁸ At the end of the third chapter I suggested that starting with the resurrection might be a helpful way of separating out the epistemological claims relating to the church and to the world. What does it mean to ‘start’ with the resurrection in this context? Is this not a return to blueprint ecclesiology, or at least a return to getting one’s thinking right about Christian practices before considering the concrete church? No: when I say ‘start with the resurrection’, I mean maintaining a doctrinal conversation with the resurrection insofar as it represents a gradual realisation on the part of the church about the character of God, and thus as it represents the nucleus of a family of arguments about what Jesus’ rising from the dead might mean. Insofar as we treat ‘starting with the resurrection’ as a methodological and epistemological point, it can become a helpful way of looking at that dynamic relationship that Barth, via Biggar, considers to be at the heart of theological reflection, and can introduce doctrinal reflection as a regulative mode of concrete ecclesiology.

So, to start with the resurrection: as the first disciples’ certainty that Jesus was alive – that surprise of all surprises - grew into confident knowledge, it began to dawn on them that the surprise was almost familiar and, if not expected, then utterly fitting, such that it could not have been any other way. That is, surprise of the resurrection turns out to be the will of God. The early church’s post-

⁸ Barth is referring to an infelicitous division between doctrine and ethics, and his wording is as follows: “Appealing to the supposed consequences of dogmatics as the revelation or work of God to man, in ethics we suddenly allow ourselves to open a new book: the book of the holy man which is the sequel to that of the holy God. But in theology we can never have to do with the consequences of God’s revelation, or work to man, but only with the revelation and work itself. What theology has to learn and teach with regard to the holy man can be derived from the one book. In this book it is, of course, very emphatically a question of the holy man as well. But in this book the holy man has no independent existence. Therefore he never becomes an independent object of thought. He exists only in the course of the existence of the holy God and of the study of His speech and action.” *CD* I/2 790.

resurrection growth into understanding as we read about it in the New Testament is characterised by the discovery over and over again that these surprises of grace are manifestations of the familiar promises of God. This realisation reaches a climax as they find that the person of Jesus himself is the supreme archetype of this surprise and promise. Barth's relocation of necessity in general within the divine will in particular is almost a distillation of this dawning of understanding through the working of the Holy Spirit. So, to 'start with the resurrection' is shorthand for starting with the event of the resurrection as we come to know it, as the Holy Spirit makes it understood. It is to start with doctrine as it represents the understanding of a pre-eschatological community, perhaps imperfect, as it is a vision gained through eyes made weak by sin, but nonetheless learned in the Spirit and therefore given and received as grace.

Thus, systematic theological reflection on the concrete church should start with *the understanding of the church*. This is not to be confused with taking Barth's 'holy man' as the singular object of doctrinal reflection. Rather, it is acknowledging that to start with particular doctrines or practices as pristine divine interventions, somehow absolving them of their contested pasts, would be to remove revelation from the church's dynamic relationship with God, and make it a given rather than an always renewed gift. Naïve wholesale equation of Barth's 'holy God' with particular church practice, doctrine or interpretation of scripture would obscure the fact that revelation is grace that encounters us as sinners. At the same time, to start with doctrines and practices as a purely two-dimensional bricolage would be to remove them altogether from the church's dynamic relationship with God. This is, of course, fairly obvious, but picking through a

few conspicuous related points will help clarify a few issues about what ‘systematic theology’ is in this context, and how it squares with reflection on the concrete church. Starting with the resurrection as the nucleus of a discussion is not simply a descriptive claim about what we are doing. That is, it is not just addressing the difficulty we encountered in the second chapter where Hauerwas oversimplified practices and neglected the ways in which they were contested and negotiable, or could be placed within different narrations of church history – though it does that as well. It also means a prescriptive claim about the way systematic theology should be done concretely. Doctrine does not enter into concrete ecclesiological reflection as *deus ex machina*, hermeneutically sealed and static, nor does it enter as the antithesis to the concrete church, to be followed by a practical synthesis. Doctrine should enter into concrete ecclesiological reflection as shorthand for arguments, and therefore as a certain way of going on in dynamic relationship: the point is not *what* we say, but what *work* it is doing.

Here an example will help. If we foreground doctrine as argument, we are occupied theologically not with a proposition (what we are saying), but with what kinds of question we are asking. Take the confessional example ‘Jesus is Lord’. For Hauerwas, if we say we believe that Jesus is Lord, it will mean we will behave in certain sorts of ways – lovingly and non-violently being the most prominent. If the statement ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to be rendered intelligible or truthful coming from our lips, we have to behave in commensurable ways. For Barth, Jesus has been revealed as Lord in his death and resurrection, and his Lordship will be fully revealed in his glorification at the end of time; therefore, whether the church’s behaviour makes intelligible its claim that Jesus is its Lord is quite

immaterial: Jesus simply *is* Lord. I have argued that there are unhappy theological consequences to adopting Hauerwas's position, and yet neither can concrete ecclesiology adopt a stance quite as stark as Barth's: simply to assert doctrinally (either in writing, preaching or worship) that 'Jesus is Lord' is not sufficient to hold the church back from frightening distances opening up between belief and practice. Where does 'Jesus is Lord' fit into this dynamic relationship I am proposing as key to systematic reflection on the concrete church? If 'Jesus is Lord' is a methodological point insofar as it is shorthand for the ways in which the church has come to understand Jesus as Lord, if we treat it as the hub of an argument, then the key to how 'Jesus is Lord' works is not what kind of behaviour we have (though by the grace of God we may have it), but how we go on. If Jesus is Lord, then the kinds of conversations we will have will be about who is in charge, and how we can tell, and what kind of difference we are looking for. We will ask questions about what power might be, and who has it, and questions about what kind of power we are claiming for Jesus when we call him 'Lord', and what that entails. The dialectical relationship between method and theology and between systematic and practical approaches is the correlate of the dynamic relationship between God and the church, and reflection on the latter must be the source of reflection on the former.

What is the point of such systematic reflection on the concrete church? The point is that systematic reflection is not anathema to concrete ecclesiology, and indeed *should* be undertaken as a form of self-examination. This does not mean that all concrete ecclesiology need start with an explication of the Trinity, followed by the incarnation, and so on: systematic form is dispensable, though I have noted that

occasionalism is not devoid of peril either. It means that thinking about the concrete church needs to be held against creedal contexts as a matter of course, in order to examine and correct its orientation to the greater glory of God. There is another distinction to negotiate here between the concrete church and what I have called the ‘creedal context’, in terms of the degree to which concrete ecclesiology should address each. Concrete ecclesiology takes the faith of the concrete church as normative for ecclesiological reflection and, as I have argued, should take the understanding of the church as its departure point for systematic theological reflection. Concrete ecclesiology must strike a balance between calling the church to change, and addressing its calls for change to the church *where it is*, concretely and theologically.⁹ It should question and attend to areas of ecclesial dissonance, the gaps between church teaching and church practice that I identified as concerns in the introduction. If we engage in visionary theological rhetoric, we must also have the theological resources to cope with reality.¹⁰ In his 1981 essay “What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe”, Karl Rahner suggests that the normative influences of the magisterium and the faith of the people must be *mutually conditioning*.¹¹ Though Rahner seems to have the sticking points of governance, authority and the *sensus fidelium* in mind, the point stands more generally: concrete ecclesiology’s mode of reflection must work on the basis of a *mutually conditioning* relationship between the faith and practice of the concrete church on one hand, and its creedal context on the other; it

⁹ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 85.

¹⁰ Herbert McCabe has an interesting discussion on what preaching or envisioning ‘revolution’ might mean in Christian theological reflection in ‘Transubstantiation and the Real Presence’, *God Matters* (London: Continuum, 1987), 116-29, (124-26).

¹¹ See Karl Rahner ‘What the Church Teaches and What the People Actually Believe’, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22, reprinted in Gerard Mannion, Richard Gaillardetz, Jan Kerkhofs and Kenneth Wilson (eds.), *Readings in Church Authority: Gifts and Challenges for Contemporary Catholicism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 304-310. Rahner adds that “These two influences [actual faith of Christians and the faith of the magisterium] *mutually* condition each other, although we must add that mutual does not mean equal.” (307).

should proceed from questioning the dissonance between and within the two, and work towards holding them in closer conversation. This is not straightforward: we have already seen this relationship run into difficulty in Hauerwas's ecclesiology, as his rhetorical challenge began to idealise practices and failed to deal adequately with the reality of the concrete church. How do we establish such a mutually conditioning relationship? How do we deploy theological crash barriers here?

The case study in establishing a mutually conditioning relationship will be Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesiology as I have explored it in the thesis thus far. This is not just a matter of balancing visionary homiletics against deflating realities, or toning down rhetoric to suit what the church can manage. Rather, establishing the mutually conditioning relationship is a question of forming a certain way of going on, or asking a certain set of questions.¹² At the end of this study of Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesiology in relation to the concrete church, I suggest that two things can be concluded: while Hauerwas's vision for the church is valuable and compelling, his ecclesiology is too concrete in some respects, and not concrete enough in others. More accurately, his ecclesiology is too concrete in that his occasionalist, practical approach is insufficiently tied to the specific doctrinal contexts that would help balance out his difficulties; his ecclesiology is not concrete enough in that he relies on an idealised picture of the church and has insufficient theological resources to cope with the realities of sin and confusion

¹² This is linked to the comments I made about the demands of sainthood at the end of the second chapter: the question is not whether a particular doctrine (say, the sanctity of life) is rendered intelligible by being 'cashed out' in particular ways (say, the demands of *Humanae Vitae*), because we may or not be given the grace to live our belief in God's creation in this particular way. Establishing the mutually conditioning relationship between the doctrine (God's creation) and the lived reality of faith is a matter of asking certain sorts of questions.

within the church. Having considered how systematic modes of concrete ecclesiological reflection might proceed in the light of the dynamic relationship between God and the church, I will now suggest what Rahner's *mutually conditioning relationship* might look like by addressing the ways in which it might operate between the ways in which Hauerwas is too concrete, and the ways in which he is not concrete enough.

First to address the point that Hauerwas's ecclesiology is too concrete. I have discussed Hauerwas's method at various points in the study, and have consistently highlighted its occasionalist and rhetorical character. The tensions I pulled out in the second chapter and the systematic context of Barth's ecclesiology in the third chapter showed the ways in which this occasionalist method causes theological difficulties for Hauerwas's ecclesiology. While Hauerwas argues that having an occasionalist method does not mean that there are no links between what he says in various contexts, I have argued that his thought is still insufficiently joined up.¹³ In particular, I have pointed out the ways in which the momentum established by his rhetorical style is not adequately reined in by his theological content, leading to difficulties with eschatology and epistemology. I argued at the end of chapter three that I do not think it fruitful to demand a system of Hauerwas – nobody has been successful yet, and to do so would be asking him not to be Stanley Hauerwas. Making theology careful, or putting in theological crash barriers for rhetorical challenge, is not necessarily a case of producing a 'systematic ecclesiology', but a case of going on in a way that encourages constant discernment and examination.

¹³ *STT* 8.

First, a concrete systematic ecclesiology is about systematically examining, discerning and correcting our hidden agendas in the light of the gospel. In his discussion with Albrecht, Hauerwas claims in response to her criticisms that he *does not have an epistemology* – he only has ecclesiology.¹⁴ This is a problematic claim. However we order the importance of these categories in our theological reflection and, surely, for concrete ecclesiology the category ‘church’ must come before ‘knowledge’ abstractly considered, we *do* have beliefs about how we know things. However we have come by such beliefs, and to whatever end we order them, there is a sense in which we *do* have an epistemology. Likewise, concrete ecclesiology has ‘an anthropology’ – if only in the sense that works on some assumptions about what humans are, what they are for, and how they fit into the realities of church and world. To deny that we have these beliefs is dangerous, because it allows them to operate as hidden agendas: however we name them, we need to do so. Asking that concrete ecclesiology be more systematic is not asking its proponents to take a step back into liberal modern theology and *start* with such categories, it is arguing that it is a matter of grave pastoral and theological importance that concrete ecclesiological method includes such systematic self-examination. The point for ecclesiological method here, that of Hauerwas and that of others, is that systematic approaches, practically conceived, should be about *accountability*. Not just accountability to abstract doctrinal positions, but accountability to living communities. If we deny we have a theological anthropology and continue to hammer out inappropriately *ad hoc* ecclesiological proposals, we may be quietly cultivating a destructive or exclusive view of what

¹⁴ ‘Uncomprehending Feminism’, 229-30.

humans are, and not just allowing it to run unchecked, but depriving ourselves of the resources to identify and correct it.

The second area in which Rahner's mutually conditioning relationship could mitigate Hauerwas's lack of concreteness is by paying attention to experience. I have deliberately not made any statements about the danger of concrete ecclesiology harbouring, say, an anthropology that runs counter to the experience of 'women' or 'elderly people' or 'black people': homogenising the experience of groups that are usually somewhat arbitrary to begin with rarely does anyone any favours, theological or otherwise. I have, however, suggested that systematic concrete ecclesiology might be about *accountability*. In the same debate with Albrecht, Hauerwas picks up on her use of the category 'experience', arguing that she is giving it epistemic status - she is using it to describe something prior to ethics.¹⁵ Hauerwas certainly has his finger on a central point of concrete ecclesiological method here – the learned ways in which we think of and name our experiences are neither prior to nor separate from the experiences themselves. Perhaps more helpfully, Linda Woodhead has argued that the role of 'experience' in ethical critique does not need to be some higher, unquestionable authority, or some means of trumping Christian belief with the moral high ground of the oppressed.¹⁶ Where concrete ecclesiology, in an attempt to be more pastorally careful, looks to 'experience', it means holding conversations between the gospel narrative in scripture and the good news as people encounter, describe and experience it in lives of community and discipleship. As with denying that we have 'epistemology' or 'anthropology', if we dismiss the value of something

¹⁵ Albrecht, Review of *In Good Company*, 221. Hauerwas, 'Uncomprehending Feminism', 230, 234-5.

¹⁶ Woodhead, 'Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas?', 163.

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¹⁵ Albrecht, Review of *In Good Company*, 221. Hauerwas, 'Uncomprehending Feminism', 230, 234-5.

¹⁶ Woodhead, 'Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas?', 163.

called 'experience' out of hand, we risk silencing the stories of those whose words the church most needs to hear.¹⁷

Again, there is much work to be done here in terms of the role of 'experience' in concrete ecclesiology. Conceiving of the role of 'experience' in terms of conversations and accountability squares much better with Kathryn Tanner's theologically fruitful and anthropologically astute description of Christian communities as places of argument around key loci of belief and practice.¹⁸ Such arguments cannot be carried out in splendid isolation, and so there are limits to the helpfulness of contrast ecclesiology, or an 'us and them' approach to otherness.¹⁹ I concluded at the end of the second chapter that Hauerwas's ecclesiology could be improved by a reinforced eschatology, and by increased attention to the movement of the Spirit outside the church. Experience as discernment and accountability, as watching over one another in love, not only opens a space where our ecclesial and theological practices are actively submitted to the Lordship of Christ within the church, but also opens up a space for conversation with the world as the object of God's care in Christ. In a church of uncertainty, where our lives are dominated and described by competing or incommensurable stories, attending to experience and holding conversations between these stories is indispensable to an ecclesiology that would be truly concrete and truly open to the working of the Holy Spirit in the world as well as in the church.

¹⁷ In 'Uncomprehending Feminism', Hauerwas argues that despite the magisterium's abuse of its office, at least resources are present to name those transgressions as abuses (235-6, 238). He does not countenance, however, that some account of 'experience' might be one of those resources.

¹⁸ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 124-55.

¹⁹ Healy has a good theological account of how the church should approach otherness in general; his particular proposals are slightly less rigorous: practical-prophetic ecclesiological reflection at parish level seems to be based on self-reflected sameness and selected conversational otherness. See *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 103-28, 154-85, particularly 180-3.

Considering the work of the Holy Spirit in the world is also, I think, the key to addressing the ways in which Hauerwas's ecclesiology is not concrete enough. As we have seen, Hauerwas's rhetorical challenge lacks some of the necessary theological safeguards to stop it coming unstuck from the reality of the concrete church. This results in idealisation of the church's practices and an inadequate theological account of sin in the life of the church, particularly with regard the systemic shape sin can take in church structures and practices. I have already offered some doctrinal resources in order to open a space for better discerning the church's practices, and I have also just described a way of doing systematic concrete ecclesiology that might helpfully resource general as well as particular reflection on sin as we encounter it in the concrete church. So, how might Hauerwas's theology be made more pastorally careful with regard to human sin and frailty, and the messy reality of life in the concrete church? How might Rahner's mutually conditioning relationship operate between Hauerwas's challenge for the church, the visionary-prophetic nature of which I wish to preserve, and the sinful, confused reality of the church he calls to action?

Where Hauerwas seeks to draw attention to the material conditions of Christian speech, pastorally careful concrete ecclesiology must also draw attention to Christian speech's graceful conditions.²⁰ I have already delineated something of the theological resources I think pertinent in this area by discussing the pedagogical function of sainthood and by returning to Barth's conception of church witness as event. The way Barth situates this event within the broader narrative of God's involvement in human history, particularly through the election

²⁰ *STT* 5.

of Christ, his life, death and resurrection, should also have become clear. Werpehowski has argued persuasively that this narrative setting prevents Barth's command ethics descending into intuitionist anarchy; I have argued that the narrative doctrinal setting also preserves Barth's account of church witness as contingent event from the theological problems Hauerwas identifies.²¹ Hauerwas's worry about church witness as event is, I think, inseparable from his discomfort with Barth's ethics. I have suggested that leaning towards an account of church witness as 'event', duly mitigated by narrative doctrinal context, might be central to negotiating the gap between the messy nature of Christian practice and Hauerwas's vision for the church.

The church's Easter realisation after the event of Christ's resurrection, which I have argued should be at the heart of systematic reflection on the concrete church, is not confined to the early centuries of the church's life, culminating in Chalcedon. As the disciples' eyes only slowly became accustomed to the dawn of the resurrection, so our recognition and surprise at Christian fruitfulness. Christian fruitfulness, as grace upon grace, *should* come as a surprise to us, out of always-renewed wonder at the work of the Holy Spirit as God's decision for the life of the church. It is event, but we can also know it as promised through the Holy Spirit. Our belief in the possibility of transformation rests solely on the belief that God has decided that some lives will become a new creation and that the Spirit will give us eyes to see it. Like the disciples, we have to recognise that sin and frailty impair our vision, so we end up peering towards the shore, or talking to strangers on the road, or demanding things of the gardener. Because we are so often as

²¹ Werpehowski, 'Command and History', 298-304.

habituated in sin as in virtue, we are slow to see God's work, and sometimes miss it, and sometimes we see God's work where it is not. How can this be made a theological safeguard, a positive point about discernment as well as a negative point about uncertainty?

I have spoken of the Holy Spirit as the invisible 'third dimension' of the church's life, and therefore of church witness as a mystery of the church's life. Christ's incarnation, the Word's becoming flesh, means that Christian faith has to be public; as the Holy Spirit unites Christ's human and divine natures, and his existence at the right hand of the Father with his existence on earth in the church, so the Holy Spirit holds together our action as a prayer for holiness with the witness of the Holy Spirit as God's decision for the life of the church. Kathryn Tanner writes, "The second person of the Trinity's assumption of the human is as invisible as God's acting to create and uphold the world: it transpires silently, behind the scenes; it makes no appearance in itself but is identifiable only in and from its effects. Rather than being a matter of direct perception, the divinity of Jesus becomes an inference from the character of Jesus' life and its effects...The human shape of Jesus' life is not something alongside Jesus' divinity but the manifestation of that divinity as a human whole."²² Because church witness is an event, because we only participate by grace in what Christ has by nature, our actions work the other way round – rather than being a manifestation of 'hidden' divinity, they are a prayer for the holiness given by the Spirit.²³ Perhaps rather than having recourse to notions of agential intention in order to moor the meaning of Christian practices, Hauerwas's ecclesiology might be made more concrete by

²² Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 17-9.

²³ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 46-7, 55.

considering notions of desire for holiness as the third dimension to Christian practice.

If desire for holiness is our prayer in Christian practice, then the fact of Christian distinctiveness from the world is significant as a gift made visible in the Spirit. However, as we have seen, calling attention to the ways in which our knowledge is utterly dependent on the Spirit's action is not the same as saying that there are no ways in which we can hold Christian practices up to the light of the resurrection and check them for flaws. It merely says that sin and human frailty impair our vision, and that finally only the working of the Holy Spirit can show us the Holy Spirit's working in the church and in the world. The momentary, 'event' nature of grace and faithful Christian living means that the church's naming fruitfulness should not be a once-for-all decision about a practice, but an ongoing process of discernment whose focus is Christ. Our action is never 'guaranteed' as fruitful, but should always be a prayer for consonance with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our tools of discernment are also momentary, sometimes truthful, always fallible, yet open to the disruption of grace. Discernment of practices must be an ongoing exercise. Emphasising Christian fruitfulness as event opens church practice to immediate scrutiny, there should be no faux-eschatological indecision about matters of urgent pastoral need in the church's life. At the same time, placing the Easter realisation at the heart of Christian efforts at discernment acknowledges that only time, retrospective distance and living the arguments will tell on some things.

Much work remains to be done on concrete ecclesiology, particularly if it is to subject its practical recommendations and working presuppositions to rigorous doctrinal examination. In particular, work needs to be done in rendering more concrete and more robust the theologies of the Holy Spirit that lie beneath the surface much of the new ecclesiology. Stanley Hauerwas provides a wonderful example of the promise of concrete ecclesiology and its potential resources for nurturing a faithful church; he also provides a good example both of the potential weaknesses of concrete ecclesiology as a theological virtue and the ways in which these weaknesses might be addressed. I have tried to draw out here the ways in which his ecclesiology might be opened out towards the Holy Spirit in the world, and how the church might reflect on its own life more fruitfully through conversation with the world. Much of my argument has been dedicated to opening a space for discernment of the church's practices, and I have also briefly explored accountability and experience as necessary operators in such a space. I have also suggested ways in which concrete ecclesiology as a practical discipline might be helpfully held in continuing conversation with doctrine, in order to examine its own visions and desires for the church.

It is the church's understanding that God has graciously given it the space and time to exist, waiting and hurrying from the empty tomb towards Jesus, who has gone ahead, and promises to come again in power. It is gathered from and given to exist alongside the world that God is for in Christ. In this space, the church grows, fails, witnesses, argues, prays, hopes and worships. Between the ascension and the second coming, the church is engaged in an ongoing task of witness and transformation, and a constant conversion of life, from each single believer in

Christ to the whole church on earth. Theological reflection on this given existence of the church is directed towards admonishing, healing, recalling hope and, above all, in submitting all things to Christ, orienting the church's life to the greater glory of God. Such theological reflection, undertaken throughout the entire church and thoroughly focussed on the whole space of its concrete life from resurrection to eschaton, is a vital part of that constant conversion of life to which the whole church is called.

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