

Abstract

“THE NARRATIVE THEOLOGY OF STANLEY HAUERWAS”

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Stanley Hauerwas, noted theologian and Christian ethicist, argues throughout his writings for the importance of narrative theology in the Christian life and discourse. Exploring his understanding and use of narrative theology in conversation with other religious scholars, this thesis explores the function of his work in regards to preaching, Christian formation, and pastoral care.

Human communities are formed through narrative. The story of faith provides a history in which an individual discovers who they are. A connection to this history and community help to shape an individual's character and thus their moral identity. Narrative theology is a method for engaging the study of God and talking about God that helps to form and shape Christians in the pattern of Jesus' life. One major critique of narrative theology is that it is too sectarian in nature.

Hauerwas's sermons and understanding of scripture show a deep concern for how the Church is presented in the narrative of faith. The goal of narrative preaching is to take an expectant, imaginative stance before the biblical text in the hopes that the sermon will be a transformative event for the hearers and the preacher. While not known as a narrative preacher per se, Hauerwas often employs the use of narrative preaching with effectiveness. Hauerwas resists what he calls “translation” of scriptural texts and the use of the historical critical method in his preaching to the limitation and effectiveness of his message. Good

Second Adviser

The Narrative Theology of Stanley Hauerwas

by

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“In real life old beggars are almost always old beggars,” I pointed out. “But I know what kind of story you two are thinking about. Those are stories we tell other people to entertain them. This story is different. It’s one we tell each other.”

“Why tell a story if it’s not entertaining?”

“To help us remember. To teach us - ” I made a vague gesture. “Things.”¹

¹ Patrick Rothfuss, *The Wise Man's Fear* (New York: Daw Books, 2011), 286.

Chapter 1 What is Narrative Theology?

“Spirit of Truth, direct our attention to the life of Jesus so that we might see what you would have us be. Make us, like him, teachers of your good law. Make us, like him, performers of miraculous cures. Make us, like him, proclaimers of your kingdom. Make us, like him, loving of the poor, the outcast, children. Make us, like him, silent when the world tempts us to respond in the world’s terms. Make us, like him, ready to suffer. We know we cannot be like Jesus except as Jesus was unlike us, being your Son. Make us cherish that unlikeness, that we may grow into the likeness made possible by Jesus’ resurrection. Amen.”²

I understand Narrative Theology to mean the study of how the stories we tell communicate what we believe about God. Through sharing, these stories also communicate God to other people. In this thesis I will explore how preaching, pastoral care, and Christian formation, as the three primary functions of the priestly ministry,³ are each enriched by a robust understanding and use of narrative theology. How we understand and participate in the narrative of Christianity is of ultimate significance and should inform all aspects of the Christian life.

Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones created a book of essays entitled *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* to explain the concept of narrative theology and to promote its importance in Christian theology and ethics. Examining the use of narrative in other fields they argue,

The category of narrative has been used, among other purposes, to explain human action, to articulate the structures of human consciousness, to depict the identity of agents (whether human or divine), to explain strategies of reading (whether specifically for biblical texts or as a more general hermeneutic), to justify a view of the importance of “story-telling” (often in religious studies through the language of “fables” and “myths”), to account for the historical development of

² Stanley Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 27.

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 531.

traditions, to provide an alternative to foundationalist and/or other scientific epistemologies, and to develop a means for imposing order on what is otherwise chaos.⁴

Because the category of narrative has been used for so many purposes, they intend not only to include it in the moral discourse, but also to grant it the prominence it deserves.

Other theologians have also argued the importance of narrative theology. James Gustafson, for example, identifies narrative as one of four kinds of moral discourse. He summarizes,

Narratives function to sustain the particular moral identity of a religious (or secular) community by rehearsing its history and traditional meanings, as these are portrayed in Scripture and other sources. Narratives shape and sustain the ethos of the community. Through our participation in such a community, the narratives also function to give shape to our moral characters, which in turn deeply affect the way we interpret and construe the world and events and thus affect what we determine to be appropriate action as members of the community. Narratives function to sustain and confirm the religious and moral identity of the Christian community, and evoke and sustain the faithfulness of its members to Jesus Christ.⁵

By retelling the story of the community repetitively, narrative shapes and sustains the community. This is a very helpful summary of how narrative functions in the moral discourse. Gustafson is not, however, fully supportive of the efficaciousness of narrative theology. He does not think that narrative is sufficient in the theological and ethical discourse. We will hear more of his critique later but essentially he believes that those who live by one particular story have a reduced their capacity to communicate and form a moral identity than those who are shaped by multiple communities and stories. Gustafson

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative? Readings on Narrative Theology*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 2.

⁵ James M. Gustafson, "Varieties of Moral Discourse: Prophetic, Narrative, Ethical, and Policy," Calvin College, The Stob Lectures, 1988, pp. 19-20. Here cited as found in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative? Readings on Narrative Theology*, 3.

argues that narrative alone is not sufficient itself for conversing about the moral life, and that other kinds of moral discourse are necessary.

For Hauerwas, though, reclaiming narrative is of utmost importance. Hauerwas is indebted to the work of H. Richard Niebuhr for his formation as a theologian at Yale, first as a student and later as critic. According to Niebuhr,

The standpoint of faith, of a self directed toward gods or God, and the standpoint of practical reason, of a self with values and with a destiny, are not incompatible; they are probably identical. To be a self is to have a god; to have a god is to have history, that is, events connected in a meaningful pattern; to have one god is to have one history. God and the history of selves in community belong together in inseparable union.⁶

For Niebuhr, humans find themselves within the story of faith. This faith then enables an individual to make sense of their existence in the context of that faith's narrative.

Without a narrative, there is no shared history, thus making it near impossible to find meaning in human existence.

Nicholas Lash explores the relationship between narrative and metaphysics.

According to Hauerwas and Jones,

In Lash's view Christian theology is poised between the poles of narrative and metaphysics, and both are required for an adequate theological method. He appeals to narrative in the sense of autobiography, claiming that the paradigmatic forms of Christian discourse are self-involving and, as self-involving, they locate the speaker (or the group of which the speaker is a spokesperson) in a particular cultural, historical tradition. In this sense, the Christian is "the teller of a tale, the narrator of a story which he tells as *his* story, as a story in which we acknowledges himself to be a participant."⁷

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Story of Our Life," from his *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1941), pp. 42-81. Here cited as found in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative? Readings on Narrative Theology*, 39.

⁷ Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative? Readings on Narrative Theology*, 9-10.

Lash's concept of narrative is similar to Niebuhr's but goes beyond by arguing the importance of a particular concept of metaphysics. What is needed for Lash is an account of metaphysics that has some control over the narrative and that addresses confusions within the narrative.

For Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, our moral life cannot simply be defined by the decisions we make; they must be examined in the context of how one's particular narrative shapes their character. They argue,

The standard account, by concentrating on a decision, fails to deal adequately with the formation of a moral self, i.e., the virtues and character we think it important for moral agents to acquire. But the kind of decisions we confront, indeed the very way we describe a situation, is a function of the kind of character we have. And character is not acquired through decisions, though it may be confirmed and qualified there; rather, it is acquired through the beliefs and dispositions we have come to possess.⁸

Hauerwas and Burrell understand that an individual's character is the product of how one acquires beliefs and shared story through a particular community. This character is created and shaped by the narrative one exists within, and acquired through making decisions in response to particular situations and reflecting on those decisions in light of the narrative. They contend,

It is exactly the category of narrative that helps us to see that we are forced to choose between some universal standpoint and the subjectivistic appeals to our own experience. For our experiences always come in the form of narratives that can be checked against themselves as well as against others' experiences. I cannot make my behavior mean anything I want it to mean, for I have learned to understand my life from the stories I have learned from others.⁹

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative? Readings on Narrative Theology*, 166.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

In this essay, Burrell and Hauerwas argue against the idea that appeal to narrative is limited to only an individual's experience. Instead, a person's narrative is to be weighed and measured against the foundation of a community's narrative.

Burrell and Hauerwas go on to claim that our moral capacity depends upon our ability to measure our past against the present. We do this through the process of story telling. For example, I formerly made a certain choice, and because of a particular event, I now make a different choice. Stories themselves have a profound impact on our moral development. According to Hauerwas and Burrell,

It is sufficient for our interests to call attention only to the capacity stories hold for eliciting critical awareness, and how an awareness of story enhances that approach known as scientific by awakening it to its presuppositions. Hence, we have argued for a renewed awareness of stories as an analytic tool, and only especially adopted to our moral existence, since stories are designed to effect critical awareness as well as describe a state of affairs.¹⁰

We have a need for narrative, which gives our lives coherence. They contend, "The truthfulness of our moral life cannot be secured by claims of 'rationality' in itself but rather by the narrative that forms our need to recognize the many claims on our lives without trying to subject them to a false unity of coherence."¹¹

For Hauerwas and Burrell narrative functions to develop an individual's character. The shape of one's character in turn, helps that person to make and adjust moral decisions. For these authors,

Character, of course, is not a theoretical notion, but merely the name we give to the cumulative source of human actions. Stories themselves attempt to probe that

¹⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," 175.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

source and discover its inner structures by trying to display how human actions and passions connect with one another to develop a character.¹²

When one accepts a story as normative it allows that story to shape one's own story and reinforces certain preferences in decision-making. According to Hauerwas and Burrell, "To live morally we need a substantive story that will sustain moral activity in a finite and limited world. Classically, the name we give such stories is tragedy. When a culture loses touch with the tragic, as ours clearly has done, we must redescribe our failures in acceptable terms."¹³ Hauerwas and Burrell understand the stories that Jews and Christians identify with as such substantive stories of tragedy, yet they admit that these are not the only stories that offer "skills for truthfulness in the moral life."¹⁴

In addition to moral development in a descriptive sense, narrative can be extremely useful in theology. In his essay, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," Michael Root examines the centrality of narrative in the Christian understanding of salvation.¹⁵ His central claim about narrative theology within the theological subfield of Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) is that "narrative is not merely ornamental in soteriology, but constitutive. Within soteriology, theologians for centuries have been

¹² Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," 178.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁵ Michael Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," *Modern Theology*, 2,2 (January 1986), pp. 145-157. Here cited as found in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), pp. 263-278.

drawing on narrative skills to explain how Jesus is redemptive.”¹⁶ Root goes on to explain soteriology’s basic premise that there are two states of human existence, deprivation and release from that deprivation, and that an event produces the change from the first state to the second.¹⁷ He claims, “Soteriology is concerned with how humanity has moved or can move from a state of deprivation (however understood) to a state of release from deprivation.”¹⁸ The narrative of soteriology then consists of two different states of being and an event that moves one from the first state into the second state. Root continues, “The task of soteriology is, then, to show how the reader is included in the story and how the story then is or can be the story of that reader’s redemption.”¹⁹

How Christians are included in this story of salvation needs to be unpacked. In the past this transitional event has been discussed in terms of baptism or conversion to the Christian faith. This event has its roots in the biblical narrative itself. According to Root, “Prior to canonizations, interpretation of a biblical story took the form of a retelling of the story.”²⁰ Later, this event of salvation was more fully examined in atonement theories. Roots comments, “Atonement theories imply augmented, expanded forms of the story of Jesus that make clear how it is the story of redemption. It is by the construction of such augmented forms of the story of Jesus that the soteriological task is carried out.”²¹ The

¹⁶ Root, “The Narrative Structure of Soteriology,” 263.

¹⁷ Ibid., 263.

¹⁸ Ibid., 264.

¹⁹ Ibid., 266.

²⁰ Ibid., 267.

²¹ Ibid., 267.

Bible itself needs to be read with a sense of unity. If the Bible is read as a single overarching story, then it possesses the unity that narratives usually have. The Bible then contains the story of humanity, which is created for a destiny it does not yet possess at the beginning of the narrative.²² God's plan of salvation unfolds through the pages of scripture. For Christians, this unfolding culminates in the incarnation and resurrection.

After considering how various theologians have employed narrative in the moral discourse and other theological endeavors, we now turn to how Stanley Hauerwas has reclaimed narrative as a primary method in these conversations. Hauerwas's earliest efforts (1973) at connecting narrative with the moral life were in an essay entitled, "Vision, Stories, and Character." He wrote this essay out of his concern that contemporary ethicists pay little attention to character, story, vision, and metaphor. Hauerwas argues, "Metaphors and stories suggest how we should see and describe the world—that is, how we should 'look-on' ourselves, others, and the world – in ways that rules and principles taken in themselves do not. They do this by providing the narrative accounts of our lives that give them coherence."²³ Hauerwas believes strongly that ethical rules and principles themselves, independent from community narrative formation, have very little influence on people's lives. He is confident that language has power in people's lives, and not just literal language or prose. He comments, "Poetry and literature do not just bolster our moral intentions; they affect how we perceive the world and hence

²² Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," 268.

²³ Stanley Hauerwas, "Vision, Stories, and Character (1973, 2001)," as found in the *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 166.

what the moral life is about.”²⁴ He goes on to argue that our moral language does not just describe what is, but also describes how things ought to be. This language is part of a cohesive narrative that describes our lives and the world in which we live. And for Hauerwas,

Our moral lives are not simply made up of the addition of our separate responses to particular situations. Rather, we exhibit an orientation that gives our life a theme through which the variety of what we do and do not do can be scored. To be agents at all requires a directionality that involves the development of character and virtue. Our character is the result of our sustained attention to the world that gives a coherence to our intentionality. Such attention is formed and given content by the stories through which we have learned to form the story of our lives. To be moral persons is to allow stories to be told through us so that our manifold activities gain a coherence that allows us to claim them for our own.²⁵

Therefore Christianity itself can be understood as a set of metaphors and stories that make up a coherent understanding of the world as it is and as it should be. For Hauerwas this means that, “Christianity involves a claim about how our lives must be centered to correspond to the truth of human existence.”²⁶ He knows that the moral behavior for Christians cannot be assumed to translate to those of other faiths or those with no faith tradition, but also that there may be great areas of agreement.²⁷

For Hauerwas, the narrative of our lives, along with moral principles together create a cohesive whole, important in understanding and crafting a moral life. He maintains,

²⁴ Hauerwas, “Vision, Stories, and Character (1973, 2001),” 167.

²⁵ Ibid., 168-169.

²⁶ Ibid., 169.

²⁷ This might foreshadow Gustafson’s critique of the sectarian nature of narrative theology.

Even though moral principles are not sufficient in themselves for our moral existence, neither are stories sufficient if they do not generate principles that are morally significant. Principles without stories are subject to perverse interpretation (i.e., they can be used in immoral stories), but stories without principles will have no way of concretely specifying the actions and practices consistent with the general orientation expressed by the story.²⁸

Both narrative and moral principles then seem necessary to understand the moral life.

Hauerwas is connecting the stories of our lives as they relate to character and the virtues in an attempt to reclaim the importance of narrative in ethics and theology.

In an essay entitled “A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*,” Hauerwas examines how the different narratives of the various rabbit warrens (a group of underground burrows) in the novel produce different communities. For Hauerwas, Christians depend on a narrative for guidance and rely on a power of which the world knows not, against those who would rule the world with violence. He points out that in the novel the author Richard Adams depicts the various communities in such a way that “they are to be judged primarily by their ability to sustain the narratives that define the very nature of man, or in this case, rabbits.”²⁹ Hauerwas sees in this novel a parallel with man’s own quest for meaning. He notes, “For finally what we seek is not power, or security, or equality, or even dignity, but a sense of worth gained from participation and contribution to a common adventure.”³⁰ The rabbits in the novel become a common group only as they acquire a history through shared adventures, which they interpret through the traditions of El-ahrairah (the mythological rabbit hero figure in

²⁸ Hauerwas, “Vision, Stories, and Character (1973, 2001),” 170.

²⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, “A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down* (1981),” as found in the *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 172.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

their narrative). Hauerwas examines the communities formed by the different narratives of each warren. He notes, “Though we are constantly reminded of the violent and accidental deaths occurring around us every day, most of us live as if we assume our social order is secure and we are safe.”³¹ Like the rabbits, it seems to most people that death happens to others. Hauerwas contends,

Without trying to claim a strong continuity between rabbits and us, I think at least the suggestion that we, no less than rabbits, depend on narratives to guide us has been made. And this is particularly important to Christians, because they also claim that their lives are formed by the story of a prince. Like El-ahrairah, our prince was defenseless against those who would rule the world with violence. He had a power, however, that the world knew not. For he insisted that we could form our lives together by trusting in truth and live to banish the fears that create enmity and discord.³²

All human communities are formed by stories; the community of the Church is formed by the Gospel. Story is used to form those in the church through a truthful witness to Christ.

Narrative is a category for social ethics, meaning we know what we should do when we know what is going on. In the Incarnation, God meets us in our human experience. God’s redeeming work continues through the Spirit and we experience ongoing sanctification. Christ models for us how to be subject to one another; our lives are God dependent. Community is where we learn to live together, to receive one another’s gifts, and where Christians make decisions. Leadership needs to know how to receive gifts and to use them. In community, the narrative produces a code of conduct that governs what is and what is not acceptable and provides the framework to ensure that all members of the community are cared for.

³¹ Hauerwas, “A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down* (1981),” 178.

³² *Ibid.*, 198.

For Hauerwas the warren Watership Down is a utopian idea, the ideal Christian community. Here prophets are listened to, here individuals are formed by stories and virtues, and here the community lives out those stories when necessary. It is important to have access to the right story at the right time. This community narrative is characterized by truthfulness, honoring diverse gifts, dependence upon one another, and living peaceably. Like rabbits, we cannot make our world safe (only God can do this), but we can live in this dangerous world through understanding, participation, and the proper use of narrative.

In his 1980 essay, “Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life,” Hauerwas writes about how one’s character is shaped by one’s narrative. He argues that a coherent sense of the self comes from integrating one’s past with one’s present. For Hauerwas the narrative of a community provides the structure and assistance for personal development. He notes,

Every community has to provide some account and means to initiate their young into their moral traditions and activities, and it seems every community finds some way to encourage its members to move from the less good to the better, and from the good to the excellent.³³

Specifically for the Christian community, Hauerwas understands this development of character, or moral growth, to be dependent upon the conversation between an individual’s narrative and the community’s narrative of faith. He argues,

“Character” is but a reminder that it is the self that is the subject of growth. But the kind of character the Christian seeks to develop is a correlative of a narrative that trains the self to be sufficient to negotiate existence without illusion or deception. For our character is not the result of any one narrative; the self is constituted by many different roles and stories. Moral growth involves a constant

³³ Stanley Hauerwas, “Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life (1980),” as found in the *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 222.

conversation – between our stories – that allows us to live in a way appropriate to the character of our existence. By learning to make their lives conform to God’s way, Christians claim that they are provided with a self that is a story that enables the conversation to continue in a truthful manner.³⁴

Christian character is developed through the community and an individual’s ability to tell the truth, in reading and retelling the story of faith found in scripture, and by examining the lives of the saints. In this context conversion and transformation can occur. When an individual learns to imitate another person’s good behavior and is rewarded, this leads generally to transformation of the self through the guidance of one who is developmentally further along. Additionally, this environment is one in which freedom can be learned as dependence upon God, and thus a conversion of the self is realized.

“Christians learn to describe their lives as a gift rather than an achievement.”³⁵ Hauerwas goes on to say,

I am suggesting that descriptively the self is best understood as a narrative, and normatively we require a narrative that will provide the skills appropriate to the conflicting loyalties and roles we necessarily confront in our existence. The unity of the self is therefore more like the unity that is exhibited in a good novel – namely, with many subplots and characters that we at times do not closely relate to the primary dramatic action of the novel. But ironically, without such subplots we cannot achieve the kind of unity necessary to claim our actions as our own.³⁶

If the community successfully communicates the truthfulness of the narrative of faith, then it helps give one the skills and awareness to take responsibility for their own character. For Hauerwas the challenge today is that as a society we have no compelling story. He notes, “For our primary story is that we have no story, or that the stories that we

³⁴ Hauerwas, “Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life (1980),” 228.

³⁵ Ibid., 224.

³⁶ Ibid., 245.

have must be overcome if we are to be free.”³⁷ The idea of having no story is itself a story (identified by Hauerwas with liberalism) that prevents moral growth. The solution is to not abandon narrative but to admit that we require a true story. He argues,

Christians believe Scripture offers such a story. There we find many accounts of a struggle of God with his creation. The story of God does not offer a resolution of life’s difficulties, but it offers us something better than adventure and struggles, for we are possessors of the happy news that God has called people together to live faithfully to the reality that he is the Lord of this world.³⁸

Hauerwas is not arguing for a universal narrative for all of human society. Instead he notes that particular stories, such as the story of Scripture, “enable us to know and face the truth of our existence.”³⁹ Within the story itself is the realization that we cannot simply know the story through hearing it. Internally possessing the story includes learning to imitate those who have come before, by which Christians realize that they are the continuation of the story itself.

In critique of Hauerwas’s use of narrative, James M. Gustafson argues that it is too sectarian in nature, isolating Christianity from a larger conversation about ethics. Gustafson see sectarianism is a temptation, but one that should be avoided. He comments about this isolation caused by narrative:

Religiously and theologically it provides Christians with a clear distinctiveness from others in belief; morally it provides distinctiveness in behavior. It ensures a clear identity which frees persons from ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also isolates Christianity from taking seriously the wider world of science and culture

³⁷ Hauerwas, “Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life (1980),” 250.

³⁸ Ibid., 251.

³⁹ Ibid., 251.

and limits the participation of Christians in the ambiguities of moral and social life in the patterns of interdependence in the world.⁴⁰

Gustafson resists accepting any text or particular narrative, including Scripture, as that which is to be interpreted independent from other texts or stories in order to understand the world. He goes on to comment specifically about narrative theology:

It is for reasons like this that I think what is called “narrative theology,” something Lindbeck and many others applaud, is also in the end sectarian theology. Stanley Hauerwas, whose impact in Christian ethics in North America and the United Kingdom is considerable, is an example of this theology as it is expressed in ethics. The general shape of his work is this: we grow up in communities in which we share the narratives, the stories of community. This, I would agree, is partially true in a descriptive sense. The narratives and our participating in the community, in his case the “Church” (very abstractly), give shape to our characters. Our characters are expressed in our deeds and actions. Further, the narratives of the community give shape to the way in which we interpret life in the world.⁴¹

In a descriptive sense, Gustafson sees the usefulness of narrative, although it still leads to sectarianism. He notes,

Since we belong to the Christian community its narratives *ought* to shape the lives of its members. In Hauerwas’s case, for example, this means that Christian morality is not based on a concern to be responsible participants in the ambiguities of public choices. It is rather based on its fidelity to the biblical narratives, and particularly to the gospel narratives. Thus the principle criterion for judging Christian behavior is its conformity to the stories of Jesus.⁴²

Gustafson is concerned that narrative alone limits Christians in their moral development to simply conform to the stories about Jesus. He would rather all people, Christians included, be shaped morally in concern to be responsible people in all areas of public life.

⁴⁰ James M. Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University” in *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life*, eds. Theo A. Boer and Paul E. Capetz, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 144.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 148.

For Gustafson this cannot happen by character being shaped through narrative independent of a broader moral discourse.

Gustafson understands the outcome of Hauerwas's thinking about narrative to mean that all Christians, in imitation of Jesus, should be pacifists. He is concerned that this ethical position needs to be worked out with more than the narrative of the New Testament involved. He notes about narrative:

For Hauerwas this means, for example, that Christian morality must be pacifist because he reads the gospel narrative as pacifist. In this example, we have wedded a way of doing theology – narratives – to an ecclesiology – classically sectarian – and to an ethic which is also classically sectarian. Among the things that get omitted is the doctrine of creation as in any way a basis for ethics.⁴³

Gustafson is concerned that narratives become self-justifying and therefore ethics and theology cannot be corrected or redirected from any voices outside of the community itself. He does think that narrative would have a strong claim if it were backed by a more profound sense of biblical revelation, which he finds lacking in Hauerwas. He notes, “A powerful defense of biblical revelation could provide a backing for such theological proposals that I would find respectable even if I did not fully agree with it. Without such a backing theology seems to become the task of preservation of a tradition for the sake of preserving a tradition.”⁴⁴ Gustafson questions whether narrative offers more than simply a tradition that preserves itself through its stories.

At stake for Gustafson is an ability for Christianity to be in conversation with other religious and secular traditions to find common ground in the moral life. He critiques Hauerwas's resistance to the broader conversation, saying,

⁴³ Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University,” 148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

Stanley Hauerwas, who has argued that any effort to move beyond the particularistic historical tradition (as defined, in the end by him) either to justify it or to criticize and possibly alter it, is a move to what he calls “universalism.” But apart from either a powerfully defended doctrine of revelation in the Bible and its accounts, as the particular history in which God chose to reveal himself, or part from some confirmation for the revelatory power of the biblical material in human experience and what it discloses about life in the world, sectarian theologies become defensive efforts to sustain the historical identity of the Christian tradition virtually for its own sake... The marginalization of Christian faith is accepted and even praised.⁴⁵

Gustafson expresses his concern that Christianity not isolate itself from broader conversations about the moral life. He disagrees with Hauerwas that moving beyond a particular historical tradition leads to universalism. Gustafson does not here address that scripture itself contains this concept of marginalizing the community from those outside itself. The particular community of Israel is chosen by God and blessed and set apart, ultimately for the sake of the whole world.

Gustafson continues his criticism of narrative by employing the use of various scholarly resources. Hauerwas is not likely to embrace the historical critical method in his use of narrative theology or in his scriptural interpretation. Gustafson critiques Hauerwas’s resistance to a few scholarly methods and resources. He comments,

My point is this: In modern culture few persons with average education any longer believe that biological death is caused by the sins of Adam and Eve, including few who write theology or participate in the Church. A persuasive alternative way of explaining why we die exists. Neither theologians nor people in the churches can avoid it. The tradition, on this point, simply has to be revised because Christian theology and Christian churches are informed by the culture of which they are parts.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University,” 149.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

While Gustafson makes a strong point about the biblical narrative around death in Genesis, he does so in a flawed way. While arguing that Christianity is informed by the culture in which it belongs, he neglects to mention that it also has internal critique, a natural resistance to the prevalent culture (i.e. 1 Cor 5:9 which references Paul's earlier letter in critique of "gentile" behavior that was the prevalent culture of his day). Also absent from Gustafson's critique is an acknowledgement that Jewish and Christian interpretation and reimagining of tradition around biblical stories happens continually and is an internal as well as an external process. This process is not entirely directed (though likely still influenced) by outside culture. Today, scientifically and culturally aware Christians might understand the story of biological death caused by Adam and Eve as a truthful (though not factual) explanation. This story communicates that God's intent in creation was that people live in community with God, and once humans rejected this relationship, separation (and thus death) is an outcome of this decision.

Gustafson goes on to critique the type of knowledge narrative theology claims to possess. He argues that nature, science, and other sources speak about God and thus must be taken into account when we talk about God. He notes,

But if God is the source of how things really and ultimately are.... if God is sovereign over all things, then knowledge of nature, and so forth, as informed by investigations proper to nature, have to be taken into account in order to say something about God.... Thus knowledge of nature contributes to, but does not finally determine, what can be said about God.⁴⁷

Hauerwas himself is not concerned about knowledge in this sense, but more about the wisdom that comes from prayer. Gustafson argues that Christians must be open to revision and correction in the face of alternative views. He goes on to claim that,

⁴⁷ Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University," 152.

faithful witness to Jesus is not a sufficient theological and moral basis for addressing the moral and social problems of the twentieth century. The theologian addressing many issues – nuclear, social justice, ecology, and so forth – must do so as an outcome of a theology that develops God’s relations to all aspects of life in the world, and develops those relations in terms which are not exclusively Christian in a sectarian form. Jesus is not God.⁴⁸

Here I believe that Gustafson goes too far in his critique. He maintains that being a faithful witness to Jesus is not sufficient enough in modern times to address the issues of this century. Yet perhaps being able to address contemporary moral issues is not the point of being faithful to Jesus. Perhaps being a faithful witness to Jesus means not addressing moral and societal problems at all. Perhaps being faithful to Jesus means trusting that God will work these particular issues out, if only the church would focus on being the church.

Gustafson concludes his arguments against narrative in this essay by again stipulating that those who discourse about the moral life must take all sources into consideration, not only the biblical narrative. He is sure that,

it is God with whom humankind has to reckon; God who is the source of all life, whose powers have brought it into being, sustain it, bear down upon it, create conditions of possibility within it and will determine its ultimate destiny. Theology has to be open to all the sources that help us to construe God’s relations to the world; ethics has to deal with the interdependence of *all* things in relation to God. This, for me, necessarily relativizes the significance of the Christian tradition, though it is the tradition in which our theologies develop. God is the God of Christians, but God is not a Christian God for Christians only.⁴⁹

I worry, based on this limited reading, that Gustafson does not have a well-developed Christology. His claim that Jesus is not God is true in the sense that the one true God is greater than the expression of God Christians know in the incarnate Christ. However, if

⁴⁸ Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University,” 153.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

the God in whom Christians believe is pleased to fully dwell bodily in Jesus,⁵⁰ then in this sense Jesus is God. The Nicene Creed proclaims that Jesus is “God from God” and Orthodox Christianity understands Mary as the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer. Ultimately, Gustafson wants Christians to be in conversation with other faith narratives and those of a non-faith tradition to develop strategies for the moral discourse together.

Julian Hartt also has concerns about the isolating tendencies of narrative theology. He sees that the Christian faith is in competition with other theologies. He believes that the story itself cannot be the whole substance of the theological conversation. In response to this criticism from Hartt about his use of narrative, Hauerwas invokes John Wesley’s writings. Hauerwas admits that by using Wesley to support his view of narrative he runs the risk of confirming suspicions about his pietistic presumptions. Hauerwas claims

That the Gospels have such a character or that they involve “foundational metaphysical beliefs,” I have never sought to deny or avoid. Rather, my concern has been to insist, along the lines suggested by Wesley, that the kind of truth entailed by the Gospels, the kind of demands placed on reality, cannot be separated from the way in which the story of God we claim as revealed in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection forces a repositioning of the self vis-à-vis reality.⁵¹

The truthfulness of the Gospels from which metaphysical beliefs are developed (i.e. Jesus is fully human and fully divine, God is Trinity, questions around determinism and free will) is intimately connected with the narrative of Jesus. This truth, when claimed as one’s own narrative, positions the self in an ongoing story of transformation. Hartt argues,

⁵⁰ Colossians 2:9

⁵¹ Stanley Hauerwas, “Why the Truth Demands Truthfulness: An Imperious Engagement with Hartt,” as found in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 304.

The New Testament faith is not just a story. It is also a strenuous effort to show how the import of the story must be made out: not only understood but, above all, appropriated. That requires theological work. Moreover, both as story and as theology the Christian faith has now, and has always had, to compete with other stories and other theologies. So I think it is a fundamental and far-reaching mistake to suppose that telling the story is the whole thing. What one makes of the world and of one's own existence on the strength of the story: that is the pay-off.⁵²

Hauerwas could not agree more, as long as this pay-off does not become an independent criterion separate from the concrete story of Jesus. For Hauerwas the story itself places metaphysical claims on our lives. Central to the story is the ontological claim that we are captives to sin. Hauerwas believes,

To face the character of our sinfulness is to engage actuality in its most imperious form. If in fact the world and ourselves do not answer to that description, which admittedly requires further depiction, then the story Christians tell can at best be regarded as a harmless fiction. But because the story takes out that kind of ontological draft, it is impossible to separate its metaphysical claims from the demands the story places on our lives. The "internal" evidence requires that the "external" have a certain character, the truth of the story requires that we be truthful if we are to see rightly the way the world is.⁵³

For Hauerwas the narrative itself makes these claims on our lives. By accepting the Gospels as truth, Christians do insist that certain facts of the story be true. For the Christian story to make these ontological claims on our lives, facts such as Jesus did call disciples, did go to Jerusalem, was tried, and his body was missing from the tomb,⁵⁴ need to be true.

⁵² Julian Hartt, *Theological Method and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 245. Here cited as found in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 305.

⁵³ Hauerwas, "Why the Truth Demands Truthfulness: An Imperious Engagement with Hartt," 305.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

Hauerwas responds to Hartt's criticism by asking an interesting question. Can the claims of Christian theology be made independently from the narrative of the Bible? Hauerwas ponders, "What I have doubts about, ... is whether those ontological claims can be so isolated that they can be metaphysically constructed separately from the story."⁵⁵ Hauerwas is not trying to replace metaphysics, rather, he understands his very refusal to engage in metaphysics as a classical metaphysical claim itself. He comments, "My emphasis on the narrative character of Christian convictions has not been an attempt to avoid truth claims but to understand better how claims about God entail fundamental assumptions about the narrability of the world and our lives."⁵⁶ Hauerwas believes that the world we live is a contingent reality and not does exist out of necessity. Because of its contingent nature, the world requires a narrative. This does not mean that Christians are required to provide a supernarrative that encompasses all theologies but does require an understanding of the finality of the world in the second coming of Christ.

The narrative of Christianity, springing forth from the narrative of Judaism, is particular in its focus but universal in outcome. God chose the Hebrew people to bless and to be a blessing to the world. God also chose the particular death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to bring about the resurrection of all. For Hauerwas,

We are capable of agency, of having character, only to the extent we are given the means to locate our lives within God's ongoing story. God, at least the God we believe is revealed through Israel and Jesus, is an agent in a manner we cannot be, since our agency, our ability to display the "vectorial structures" teleologically, is dependent on God's willingness to redeem.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Hauerwas, "Why the Truth Demands Truthfulness: An Imperious Engagement with Hartt," 307.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 309.

Hauerwas understands the importance of telling this narrative in such a way that it shapes who Christians are, in community. He does not readily admit the best way to teach this narrative to children, but suggests that baseball is a good sport for children to learn, and that learning the game of baseball has great parallels with learning and being shaped by the narrative of Christianity⁵⁸.

Developing one's character and being shaped by the narrative of Christianity happen in the community of the local church. It is through worship and our experience of the sacraments that the narrative of Jesus transforms people. Hauerwas contends,

God wants for his people to worship him, to be his friends, and to eat with him: in short, to be his companions. The Eucharist offers a model of this companionship. Disciples gather and greet; are reconciled with God and one another; hear and share their common story; offer their needs and resources; remember Jesus and invoke his Spirit; and then share communion, before being sent out. Through worship – preparation, performance, repetition – God gives his people the resources they need to live in his presence.⁵⁹

It is not only hearing the narrative of Christianity that shapes believers in the moral life, it is also participation in that narrative through worship. Hauerwas has come to understand this participation in worship in a liturgical way and in experiencing the sacraments. In baptism, one joins the narrative of Christianity. Jesus' own baptism is the foundation of Christian ethics. Here Jesus speaks his first words (in the Gospel of Mark). For Hauerwas, "Here is revealed the source of Christian ethics, which lies in the interrelationship between the members of the Trinity: the Father who opens heaven and speaks, the incarnate Son who goes down, rises, and fulfills all righteousness, the Holy

⁵⁸ As heard in a class Hauerwas visited for questions on his writings at the School of Theology, Sewanee, TN June, 2013.

⁵⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 13.

Spirit who descends and rests upon.”⁶⁰ In the story of the baptism, we see the relationship of community within God as Trinity. Our theological understanding itself comes from engaging the narrative of scripture and the Christian faith. Hauerwas contends,

What we call Christian doctrine is crucial for helping us see the connections necessary for the story of the faith to be told in all its complexity. Learning to see the connections between the affirmation of the Trinity and the incarnation helps us better understand not only how the story works, but also how the story works to help us see all that is as God’s good creation. This is a never-ending task because God’s good creation is not finished.⁶¹

Narrative theology as a method for engaging the study of God and talking about God that helps form and shape Christians in the pattern of Jesus’ life. The Christian story is ongoing, though it has a known ending at some unknown time in the future. The methods of pastoral care and Christian formation are both furthered by a robust understanding of narrative theology. Additionally, the narrative of faith informs how Christian preachers engage the Bible in their preaching. It is in using narrative theology in preaching that we turn next.

⁶⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 14.

⁶¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 17.

Chapter 2 Preaching with Narrative Theology

“Word of all Words, source of all worth knowing, make us attentive to your words. We thank you for making us people of the book, a people who know that insofar as we live, we live by memory, in your memory. Never let us forget the saints who have died that we may live. Through them we hear and live your Word and thus are graced. How wonderful it is to be your servants. Amen.”⁶²

All people have a narrative, even those who claim to function in a more episodic manner. These stories are important. The sharing of one’s narrative and the participating in a community’s narrative affirm the value of an individual. Hauerwas has actively worked against the liberal concept (as he sees it) that the self can be understood only once free from narrative. Christian people are shaped by their personal narrative (e.g. family history, education, vocation), and (primarily) through the narrative of the Church.

Of particular interest is how Hauerwas understands “church.” He is concerned with how people experience the narrative of Christianity through community and how this community in turn informs an individual’s personal narrative. Fascinating and challenging is Hauerwas’s own story of churchmanship. Hauerwas was raised in a conservative evangelical Methodist Church, has deep empathy for the Mennonite tradition, worshiped for many years among Roman Catholics, and has found a home (and occasional pulpit) in the Episcopal Church.

“Church” for Hauerwas also fits into a particular mold. It is not the mega-church, nor is it dominated by an ecclesial figure (though his close friendship with retired Methodist Bishop Will Willimon and association with the Episcopal Church suggests his openness to a more formal authority structure in the church). Church can best be

⁶² Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 68.

experienced according to Hauerwas in the context of a medium-sized community with good leadership, which is not focused on growth for the sake of growth, but on examining the narrative of the community as it is informed by the narrative of scripture and Church tradition. This community of faith matures through good preaching and though participation in the Eucharist. The narrative of Christianity has its foundation in the history of Israel and is built upon the complex and rich history of the early church. Yet the narrative of Christianity is best experienced, examined and lived out in the context of the local church.

Hauerwas's sermons and understanding of scripture show a deep concern for how the Church is presented in the narrative of faith. His sermons are not especially full of stories, so we must be clear on what is meant by narrative preaching. Hauerwas does employ the use of story in some of his preaching with great success; however, primarily he is a didactic preacher. He is disapproving of the historical-critical method being deployed in sermons and wants preachers to stick with the texts themselves. More than pithy quips or comical anecdotes, Hauerwas holds communicating the story of scripture as of primary importance. After examining how Hauerwas employs the use of narrative in preaching I will show how well respected homiletical theorist and preacher Thomas Long offers a nuanced critique of Hauerwas's position on narrative preaching. Long will argue the importance of the use of narrative in preaching and also include justification for translation, the use of the historical critical method, and any means necessary in order to communicate the transformational power of the Gospel.

Narrative preaching refers to a particular style of a sermon, and many sermons of this type do not contain any stories.⁶³ This style of preaching is a break from the traditional rhetorical style of preaching dating back to Augustine of Hippo. While the traditional sermon was based on reasoning, using a thesis followed by proofs in the hopes that the hearers would be led to a particular conclusion, narrative preaching is based on reasoning in which particular details of the sermon lead both the preacher and hearers to new ways of thinking and understanding. The goal of narrative preaching is to take an expectant, imaginative stance before the biblical text in the hopes that the sermon will be a transformative event. The preacher does not say, “Here is what I want you to get out of the sermon” and then set about to deliver that message. Instead the preacher carefully uses language to produce the desired effect of transformation of the hearers and hopefully the preacher herself. Stories and metaphors are themselves the points in narrative preaching, as opposed to classical preaching in which stories and metaphors help to illustrate points. In narrative preaching the sermon is composed to grab the hearer’s attention, perhaps even to shake them up a bit, before offering some resolution at the end of the sermon.

Stories are not required in narrative preaching and yet stories can function as the structure of the sermon. Hauerwas believes that narrative helps people to think about how the stories they have been told work to shape them. How individuals understand and communicate their own stories directly relates to how they think and act in the world. The

⁶³ For a more detailed description of narrative preaching see the entry in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press), 1995, pp. 342-344.

narrative sermon can help shape the individual as well as the Christian community to reflect the faith as presented in the Bible.

In the introduction to his newest book on sermons, *Without Apology: Sermons for Christ's Church*, Hauerwas sets about to explain how he approaches sermon writing and critiques the use of employing the historical-critical method in sermon preparation. He feels strongly that the text speaks for itself and that preachers ought to stick to what the text actually says. Hauerwas notes,

Though often criticized for not attending sufficiently to scripture, I use the sermons in *Unleashing the Scripture*, as well as the other books of sermons, to exemplify the argument I make in *Unleashing the Scripture* for why the historical-critical method cannot and should not determine *the* meaning of the text.⁶⁴

Hauerwas is concerned that preachers spend too much time and effort worrying about how modern people hear the Word of God. Preachers have regularly used the historical-critical method in sermons to unpack the culture and context from which scriptural texts come. Hauerwas rejects this approach and instead simply wants to speak as a Christian to Christians, without apology.

Hauerwas continues his critique of the popular preaching styles that emphasize the hearers' contexts and experiences over and above what the text of scripture actually says. He comments,

I call attention to Tillich's position because I think he represents a widespread understanding of the challenge that must be met by anyone who would take up the task of preaching. It is assumed, interestingly enough by those who are often self-identified as theologically conservative as well as those who think of themselves as liberals, that those to whom they preach must find what is said in a sermon to be intelligible or relevant without challenging the hearer's "experience." From such a perspective a good sermon is thought to be one in which some "meaning"

⁶⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, (New York: Seabury Books, 2013), footnote on previous books of sermons from p. xii of the introduction.

can be derived from what has been said that confirms what I thought prior to hearing the sermon.⁶⁵

What is at stake for Hauerwas is the concern that preachers are trying to “save” scripture from itself. For Hauerwas this is anathema, and as a preacher he tries to avoid preaching from a place of historical-criticism or a place of consideration for how his sermons might engage the experience of the hearers. He goes on to comment about modern people’s ability (or lack thereof) to be Christians because they are modern. For Hauerwas the challenge of being and living life as Christian has little or nothing to do with being modern, instead the challenges are more about the limitations of being a human being.

For these arguments I wonder how much Hauerwas is musing on his own frustration with sermons he has heard and read, rather than trying to set about a new type of preaching. I find his argument about experience and his rejection of tools such as historical-criticism to be unconvincing. He attempts to adopt a humble posture in his argument, while making extreme claims that he does not (at least not in *Without Apology*) defend. Such is the prerogative of one as prolific as Hauerwas. He does not fully unpack or defeat Tillich’s argument in favor of appealing to “human experience” as a lens through which to understand the narrative of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Preaching is an art and when most successfully deployed, it speaks not only to “Christians like us” but also tugs on the hearts of all hearers to see themselves in the narrative of God’s love. From this preacher’s perspective, it is not about what “modern people” can or should be able to hear either, but as a pastor who preaches in a particular

⁶⁵ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xv.

context, if I do not pay attention to whom my hearers are, then I discount their experience, level of faith, and intelligence to the peril of the sermon's success.

In other words, while Hauerwas wants to draw a clear line and say that the preacher should focus only on putting forth the narrative of scripture, doing so without considering the place and state of the congregation seems to me a grave mistake. I believe that even a well crafted and well intentioned sermon can and at times should be jettisoned when the situation (pastoral, political or otherwise) arises even during the worship service itself, and preachers cannot be so attached to their text (sermon or a lectionary passage) as to miss the movement of the Holy Spirit and the opportunity to proclaim the good news, even if it is a different message than the one originally prepared for delivery.

For Hauerwas, preaching is not about translating the Word of God, but rather speaking the truth, come what may. For him (borrowing from Samuel Wells) this means

perceiving how the transformation accomplished in Christ has permeated and overturned every detail of human existence. To speak the truth does not require translation but rather a confidence that what we say when we say God was in Christ makes a difference for how our lives and the world is rightly understood. Preaching is the gift God has given the church so that our lives can be located within God's life by having our existence storied by the Gospel.⁶⁶

Hauerwas understands preaching to be a gift that locates our lives in the context of the Gospel, a Gospel that does not require translation as Christ is found within every detail of human existence. This kind of preaching suggests that sermons be serious, though also incorporating humor. Hauerwas even contends that preachers can and should be entertaining. His argument then is, "rather than trying to translate the Gospel into a different but allegedly more accessible language, I seek to help us learn again the odd grammar of Christian speech and how that grammar helps us see the sheer contingency of

⁶⁶ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

our existence.”⁶⁷ Hauerwas understands sermons as arguments of the truth of our dependence upon God alone, a truth that he feels no need to translate for the sake of those who don’t understand Christian language. He goes on to say later in this introduction,

Christians simply cannot afford to use lazy speech and employ sloppy thinking. The church is privileged and charged Sunday after Sunday to proclaim the Word of God. That Word should force us to think hard and to use words with care. What an extraordinary opportunity we have been given as Christians to stand under the Word of God so that we might learn to speak the truth to one another and to the world.⁶⁸

I believe, however, that the preacher’s task is more than speaking the truth; it is to speak the truth in love.⁶⁹ Good preaching includes many of the attributes Hauerwas articulates: seriousness, humor, entertainment, and arguments, but his resistance to translation for the sake of cultural understanding is, I think, a mistake. Let me use an analogy to explain. I was raised in the United States and grew up learning English as my primary language. The idiomatic use of English in America is distinctive, and at times confusing to those who learn English as a second language or even to those who grew up with English as their primary language in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. I believe that a similar challenge exists for the preacher with “Christian” vocabulary, and especially in the narrative of scripture. Many people today learn the modern secular culture as their primary language. For them, translation is needed to help discover meaning in their experience within God’s narrative.

Hauerwas continues his rigidity in preaching by admonishing preachers to “never explain.” He says, “If you begin with the presumption that the texts of scripture are

⁶⁷ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xviii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxi.

⁶⁹ Ephesians 4:15

obscure because they are historically dated, e.g., they are irredeemably sexist, you will subject the text to a narrative that subordinates the text to an external standard that is not scriptural.”⁷⁰ Then supporting this argument with words from his friend, coauthor, and well-respected preacher, Hauerwas notes, “Willimon understands his task is to show how the scripture narrates us so that we are freed from the temptation to think it our task to try and resurrect some meaning from what is essentially a dead text.”⁷¹ It is almost as if Hauerwas is claiming that if scripture needs to be translated to a modern audience, then it is a dead text. He goes on to say, “In my sermons I often try to anticipate how I, as well as those to whom I am preaching, am tempted to explain scripture in a manner that makes the explanation more determinative than the text itself.”⁷² It seems then, that Hauerwas’s biggest concern is that preachers explain away the text of scripture in their sermons.

While I appreciate Hauerwas’s concern that preachers stick to the text, his rejection of the historical-critical method and his refusal to help seekers in the vocabulary of the church (many of whom are actually in the church) unfortunately comes across as a rather unrealistic and rigid system of preaching. This type of unapologetic preaching leaves many in the church frustrated at the preacher and can leave a sour taste in the mouth of those who have not yet made their commitment to follow Jesus. Hauerwas claims,

It would never occur to me that I should try to “dumb down” a sermon. God has given us what is necessary for the Gospel to be understood by any congregation. The name of that gift is the Holy Spirit who enlivens the words we use. I am convinced nothing is more important for the recovery of preaching as a central act

⁷⁰ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

⁷² *Ibid.*, xxiii.

of the church than that those who preach trust that God is going to show up when the Word is rightly proclaimed.⁷³

While I dislike his flippant description of cultural transition or contextual theology as “dumbing down” scripture, I do agree that the Holy Spirit’s work is the primary method by which good sermons are written, preached, and received. It is a stretch to buy into the Hauerwas method as the only way the Word is “rightly proclaimed.” I have heard Hauerwas preach and also heard vast criticism from other hearers that his verbose and lengthy arguments leave much to be desired in the communication of God’s love and the finding our ourselves within God’s narrative.

Hauerwas would justify his criticism of other preachers by saying, “Too often those who preach fear those to whom they preach when in fact we ought to fear God. If God is rightly expected to show up, if God is rightly feared, then those who preach and those who hear will understand no explanation is required.”⁷⁴ His point, taken at face value, has merit. It is true that often preachers worry about what someone or a group of hearers will think and what to do if they respond critically. But another story about preaching is also true. As preachers, we must believe that God can and does show up not only through what we say, but also in what we do not say (people hear things in sermons all of the time that were never written or said) or in opposition of what we preachers say, thanks be to God! The most successful preachers seem to understand that they are to prepare the best they can and be as faithful to the text as best they can, trusting that God will show up and that the hearers of God’s word are just as likely to offer transformation to the preacher as the preacher is to offer transformation to the hearers.

⁷³ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxiv.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xxv.

After his critique of “modern” methods of preaching, Hauerwas goes on to use narrative very effectively in his own sermons. In a sermon titled “Glory,” he tells the story of the start of Karl Barth’s distinguished writing career with engaging details and precision. He notes about Barth’s commentary on Romans, “The book would later be described as a bomb tossed into the playground of theologians.”⁷⁵ This narrative hook engages the reader and hearer knowing that Hauerwas will incorporate his own understanding of Romans with what Barth had to say in 1922. Hauerwas uses the story about Karl Barth losing his academic chair because of his refusal to take the oath of obedience to Hitler, to show that while Romans 8:26-39 is a familiar passage to many of us, it is a text that is meant to unsettle us. Hauerwas proclaims about Paul’s words in Romans 8:26-29 that they are

words rightly used to comfort us while facing the death of those we love. But these words can tempt us to forget that it is not just death that threatens to separate us from the God who has found us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rather these other things we take to be goods, i.e., life, angels, rulers, and powers, can also threaten to come between Christ and his church.⁷⁶

While this passage from Romans is often used to comfort us in times of grief or trouble, in the narrative of Barth’s life, and Hauerwas hopes in our own, this text has the power of shaking us out of comfort to inspire greater discipleship.

Then reflecting on Paul’s own narrative, Hauerwas challenges the idea that the “good” promised in Romans 8:26-39 might be the kind of good for which we would usually hope. He preaches,

But Paul says all things work for the good for those who love God. Paul then observes that such a good may mean that those who enjoy that good might suffer

⁷⁵ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or the sword. That list should probably make us think twice about wanting the good made possible by all things working together. Is it any wonder that Paul suggests that we do not know how to pray as we ought?⁷⁷

Hauerwas is not using historical-critical work, nor is he contemporizing the text; rather he is using the narrative of the text and of Paul's life itself to communicate his conviction that we have a soft definition of "the good" and that as Christians we need a broader understanding of God's promise of "the good." While not a comforting argument, Hauerwas is effective in delivering this message. This sermon causes the hearers and readers to rethink their understanding of not only this passage of scripture, but also their understanding of God's promise of "the good."

In another sermon, entitled "Tenderness" from Maundy Thursday, Hauerwas uses story to emphasize the importance of foot washing in Christian community. He first examines and explores Jesus' own teaching, expresses his personal reservation about this practice, and then explores Jean Vanier's reflections on the foot washing from his book *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*.⁷⁸ Hauerwas notes,

By washing the feet of his disciples, Vanier suggests, Jesus enacts a new community not determined by hierarchy but by the body. That is, just as our individual body needs its particular parts, so we as the body of Christ need one another. We are a bodily community in which every person has a place, whatever our abilities or disabilities, and by which we accordingly depend on one another.⁷⁹

Hauerwas goes on to tell the a story of the L'Arche community and a sixteen year old Eric, who came to the community broken in spirit after a difficult life being blind, deaf,

⁷⁷ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 13-14.

⁷⁸ Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press), 2004.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

and not wanting to speak. Through touch, the way he was gently held and washed, Eric learned that he was precious, and began the transformation that comes from the experience of love. Washing feet and having your feet washed by someone with a disability are the ultimate acts of tenderness, and these stories about real life application of the narrative of scripture make them real and help drive out our culture's resistance to Jesus' teaching. By connecting the narrative of scripture with his own story and especially with the story of Eric, Hauerwas effectively preaches the good news of the new bodily community of Christ, in which all persons matter and have value.

We have seen how Hauerwas does, when it suits him, use narrative to good effect in his mostly didactic sermons. While Hauerwas argues firmly against utilizing the historical-critical method or any form of translation in preaching, Thomas Long has a different point of view. In his book, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, preacher and author Thomas Long argues that narrative preaching continues to have an important role in American Christianity. Walking through the recent history of preaching in America, Long notes that before 1950, Protestant sermons were highly didactic. He says,

Sermons were viewed as instruments of instruction about the great themes of the Christian faith. Sermons were often taken up with big principles and doctrinal propositions, and they were built to carry the freight. Almost all of the major preaching textbooks recommended that sermons be, like term papers and academic lectures, logical, orderly, balanced, and symmetrical, with clearly demarcated points and subpoints.⁸⁰

In these sermons, a preacher would often present his thesis and the five points to prove the thesis. The preacher would tell you what they are going to tell, then tell you, and then tell you what they had just told you.

⁸⁰ Thomas G. Long, *From Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 2.

Explaining the breaking away from this style of propositional preaching, Long introduces H. Grady Davis's 1958 preaching textbook *Design for Preaching*, which ushered in a new way of thinking about sermons. This new type of sermon was no longer a didactic argument. Sermons should be, he notes, "as living organisms, moving, dynamic, growing; in other words, a preacher should imagine a sermon more like a short story than a legal brief."⁸¹ Long goes on to describe Fred B. Craddock's 1971 book *As One without Authority* as likely the most influential book on preaching for an entire generation of preachers. According to Long, "Craddock called for preachers to abandon the top down, deductive, 'my thesis for this morning' approach to sermons in favor of suspenseful, inductive, narratives of discovery."⁸² Through Craddock, Davis, and others, narrative preaching has become more of the norm in the American pulpit. Long reminds his readers that preachers with a big personality and a three-point talk are less attractive to church members than they once were. Yet, he notes, this is not a new phenomenon. Long ago Augustine declared that the purpose of a sermon was "to teach, to delight, and to persuade." Augustine taught, according to Long, "The first responsibility of a preacher, ..., is to teach the content of the gospel, but the content needs to be taught not pedantically but delightfully, taught in such a way that it excites the imagination and inflames the heart."⁸³ Augustine's hope in his preaching was not to be thanked for his message, but rather to know that the hearers learned something, that they were moved,

⁸¹ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

that they intended to do something about what they had heard. He wanted his sermons to enlighten, to inspire, and to motivate.

Long continues exploring the positive aspects of narrative preaching by looking at the Bible itself. He notes, “The Scriptures begin not with a set of principles or proverbs but with the voice of a narrator, a storyteller.”⁸⁴ The Bible, he says, is made up of different literary forms, but each of these forms is contained within the great narrative beginning and end, from “In the beginning, . . . to Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”⁸⁵ Since the Bible itself is narrative from start to end, Christians see their identity wrapped up in this story of faith. According to Long, “We are given a story about ourselves we could not have crafted on our own, but this story also discloses the truth about us that may have been hidden from our eyes, namely, that we have been created in the image of God, and have always been a part of God’s story.”⁸⁶ Long then wonders whether or not people understand themselves as part of this grand narrative. This is an important question for the preacher to ponder. If our people do not understand themselves as part of the ongoing story of God’s people, then it is very difficult for them to identify with the people in the stories of scripture. The task of the narrative preacher is to help the hearers of sermons locate themselves within God’s story. Long also notes that, “To be human is to love a story; to be an ethical human is to be gathered up into a good story.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 10-11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

There are, of course, dangers in over-subscribing to narrative preaching. While the narrative genre is flexible and “can move beyond simply evocation to education and formation,”⁸⁸ there are some negative effects of cumulative narrative preaching. Without taking a step back from stories to ask the questions they present, i.e. what does this story tell us about God and about ourselves, successive narrative sermons can create a glut of unexamined questions. For Long, “If we tell stories in sermons – biblical and otherwise – we will need also to step away from those stories and think them through in nonnarrative ways, drawing out explicitly the ideas and ethical implications of the stories.”⁸⁹ In other words, preachers probably need to allow for time between narrative sermons in order for the unpacking of the stories they have told.

Long next begins to explore the idea of a sermon as a sacrament. After critiquing bad (sentimental) story telling in sermons in order to keep listeners amused, Long reaches for what is at the heart of effective narrative preaching. He says,

at its best the narrative impulse in preaching grows out of a deep sense of the character, shape, and epistemology of the gospel. If preaching is a sacramental meeting place between the church and the world, the hearers and the gospel, then the substance of preaching is shaped by scripture and by human experience under the sign of grace, and both of these aspects call for narration.⁹⁰

Long then explores the similarities of narrative preaching and the Eucharist. We bring our uncertain and broken self to the Table, encountering there an incredibly generous God, and leave that place fed and transformed, having new vision for the world. Like in the liturgy of the table, in an effective narrative sermon, God’s promises are announced and

⁸⁸ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

reflected upon, allowing the hearer to be transformed. As Christians are fed in the Eucharist that they might go forth and feed others, so too in the “audible sacrament” of preaching are people prepared to go into the world and proclaim the good news.

While Hauerwas is critical and suspicious of using the historical-critical method in sermons, and resists translating the language of scripture for modern people, Long has a different perspective entirely. He identifies with other preachers by commenting, “Will I use every method I know? You can be sure I will. I will pry it with the crowbar of historical criticism. I will entreat it with rhetorical categories and sociology and feminism and liberation thought. I will get down on my knees and beg.”⁹¹ The “translation” of the scriptures to make them relevant is important and is an ancient method. Long recalls that Paul was in a cultural situation not unlike our own today:

Paul instead held the Jewish apocalyptic gospel like a lens to the eye of his imagination and looked through it toward his culture... He saw God at work in the cross-resurrection ways in their present-tense circumstances, and he told them what he saw. God is present; God is at work in your world. Can you see it?⁹²

For Long, and for others, in order to understand scripture we need to view it through several different lenses, not just the master lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Long is interested in using narrative not just to teach the biblical story, but also to invite the hearers into the world within the Bible through the use of narrative preaching. When the biblical world and our world come together through the power of good narrative preaching, transformation can occur. According to Long, “Sermon stories don’t just inspire and move people. Rather, they come into discordant and fragmented configurations of life and provide a temporary house of meaning and structure through

⁹¹ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 43.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 43-44.

which hearers potentially move to new configurations.”⁹³ These configurations are what the Apostle Paul invites his hearers into, the new creation where everything has become transformed (2 Cor. 5:17).

Paul is a great inspiration and model for preachers. Long understands that preaching comes as a gift, not through any accomplishment. Long comments about good preaching,

It comes through prayer and the expectant study of scripture, not as the by-product of some system of theology that has God’s ways and will figured out. This is also why Paul says of his own preaching that, on the one hand, he proclaimed “the mystery of God” and that is was accompanied by “a demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” but that, on the other hand, Paul himself came to them in “weakness and in fear and in much trembling,” and his sermons were not woven out of “plausible words of wisdom.”⁹⁴

Long argues that successful preaching comes as a gift from the Lord, not from an individual’s power or prestige. Either God is with us, or we are to be pitied. He notes, “To put it in preaching terms, either God is present and active in our preaching, or we are poseurs and pathetic fools. We preachers are either fools for Christ or just damned fools: two awesome and awe-ful possibilities, and we just have to take the risk.”⁹⁵

Preachers need to trust that the sermon does not rest upon them alone. Yes, preparation is important, but trust that God will show up – “that something powerful and holy is about to happen in the event of preaching”⁹⁶ – is even more important. Long’s hope is that preachers would gain a deeper appreciation for the sermon as an event they

⁹³ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 49.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

are participating in with God. He notes, “True biblical wisdom is less about life skills and the management of problems than it is a seeking of the shape of faithful living that results from an encounter with the living God.”⁹⁷ Sermons then should be full of expectation about God showing up in the lives of the preacher and hearers to do incredible things, and less about the five steps to have a happier marriage.

Both Long and Hauerwas occupy the eschatological pulpit. Long identifies three characteristics of eschatological preaching. First, it participates in the promise that God is drawing God’s finished work unto an unfinished world. He notes, “Eschatological preaching promises a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ and invites people to participate in a coming future that, while it is not dependent upon their success, is open to the labors of their hands.”⁹⁸ God’s work of reconciliation and restoration is already complete and we are called to live into this truth. Second, Long maintains, that we know that this world has an end, and this knowledge should influence our lives today. He comments,

What is true about all narratives in the small sense is true of the gospel story in the largest sense: they all reverse the flow of time. Everything is read from the end backwards, and events in the middle of things take their significance not just in themselves but in how they are related to the end.⁹⁹

We, who know the great end, have faith in the midst of tragedy to know that life cannot be defined by death and that we must live in the confidence of hope in our heavenly home and consummation. Third, Long argues, that eschatological preaching today is about helping people to understand that the language of the Bible is not about future

⁹⁷ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 37-38.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

predictions, but about a way to see the present in the light of hope.¹⁰⁰ There exists a dangerous temptation for some preachers to parse out biblical verses in such a way that provides drama and expectations at the imminent return of Christ. Hauerwas contends, “I try to use sermons to develop imaginative skills to help us see the world as judged and redeemed by Christ. For I believe that story has not come to an end, but rather it is a story that makes possible our ability to live lives we do understand.”¹⁰¹ Both Hauerwas and Long affirm that eschatological preaching is about living correctly in the present time with hope and faith, rather than trying to predict when Christ will come again.

In addition to being an eschatological preacher, in his more recent sermons Hauerwas often incorporates aspects of the worship liturgy. References to the Eucharist abound. In his sermon “Incarnation” Hauerwas brings together the life of Jesus and the sacrament of the Eucharist in the act of preaching. He says,

For what we do know is that if Jesus is not fully God and fully human, then we can make no sense of the Eucharist. This wine and this bread is the food we need to sustain human life. Just as God joined God’s life with the life of Jesus without ceasing to be God, so we receive now the very body and blood of Christ without this bread and wine ceasing to be bread and wine.¹⁰²

This of course is a particular understanding of the “real presence” in the Eucharist, one that does not fit with Roman Catholic teachings, but fits Anglican and some Protestant understandings. For Hauerwas, weekly participation in the Eucharist is of utmost importance in his Christian practice. While he does not claim to have a fully developed Christology, here is a great place to begin.

¹⁰⁰ Long, *From Memory to Hope*, 129.

¹⁰¹ Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 16.

¹⁰² Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 9.

In a sermon entitled “Glory,” after referencing the liturgical praise we call the Gloria, Hauerwas goes onto preach about God’s glory. He notes, “The glory of God entails a politics with death at its center. It is a politics well diagnosed by Augustine, who contrasted the Christian understanding of what it means for us to reflect the glory of God with the Roman desire for glory.”¹⁰³ For Hauerwas, the early Christian martyrs teach us about the true meaning of glory. They knew that the Romans could take their lives, but they could not determine the meaning of their deaths. Hauerwas notes, “God is God and we are not, but the God that we are not is the God who would glorify us through his Son.”¹⁰⁴ Just as Rome had an obscured understanding of glory, so does American culture today. God’s glory is found in God’s love on the cross.

In another sermon Hauerwas connects the season of Lent with our desperate desire to be in control. He knows that this desire is destructive and we need to repent, to turn away from this desire. He preaches,

We are possessed by cleverly devised myths that are so constitutive of our lives we are unable to acknowledge their power over us. We do not live, we cannot imagine what it would mean to live, as if the Son of Man has come transfigured and thus transfigures our lives so that we might glow in the glory of the Lord.¹⁰⁵

Hauerwas is glad that the season of Lent calls us to repentance. If we as Christians do not turn away from living as if the Lord has not come, then there is no way that the world can witness the light to see that all is not darkness.

Hauerwas’s use of narrative is mostly limited to fitting in the human story within the story of scripture and the story of the church. His sermon, “Christ’s Gentleman,”

¹⁰³ Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

preached on the occasion of his father's funeral, captures how his father's narrative fits into the narrative of scripture and the church. His father's gentleness helps us to understand the beatitudes. Hauerwas contends, "As ideals, they can become formulas for power rather than descriptions of the kind of people characteristic of the new age brought by Christ."¹⁰⁶ His father lived in such a way to communicate God's gentleness. Hauerwas reflects, "Gentleness is given to those who have learned that God will not have his kingdom triumph through the violence of the world, for such a triumph came through the meekness of the cross."¹⁰⁷ He notes they are at the funeral to celebrate a life well lived, and only there to mourn to the extent that they remember his father's gentleness as a gift made possible by Christ. Hauerwas continues,

The great good news of this day is that my father's life made sense, that his life was possible, only because our gentle savior could not be defeated by the powers of hate and violence. My father's life is intelligible only as we see in his gentleness the gentleness of our Lord.¹⁰⁸

Another aspect of his father's life that was so meaningful to Hauerwas was his sense of craft. He remembers, "My father was incapable of laying brick rough, just as he was incapable of being cruel. It literally hurt him to look at badly done brick work, just as it hurt him to see cruelty."¹⁰⁹ This sense of craft has a profound aspect on his son and his professional life. Hauerwas also learned from his father a deep commitment to family – he never failed to have time for them. Hauerwas recalls,

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 38.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

He never thought that in doing so he was sacrificing his own interest, as his love for us was his interest. The tender love my mother and father embodied in their marriage reached out and gave me a brother. That they did so is not surprising, since their love was one in which there was no fear of the stranger.¹¹⁰

This is a profound sermon that weaves together a son's tribute to his father in the context of the narrative of scripture.

In a more recent sermon, entitled "Silence," Hauerwas uses narrative to address questions about unity, equality and differences in the Church. He is concerned that "For Paul, our unity in Christ seems to trump equality."¹¹¹ Hauerwas resists this interpretation, "because one of the problems with strong egalitarianism is how it can wash out difference." And differences are important; they reflect the ways in which Christians have worked out how to be in their particular contexts. Hauerwas is convinced and comments here and elsewhere, "I think being a Texan is one the determinative ontological categories of existence. I would never say I just happen to be a Texan because being a Texan is a difference I am not about to give up in the hope of being treated fairly."¹¹² Here to me is Hauerwas critiquing his own words. He does not think that the scriptures need to be translated for a modern audience in the context of preaching, yet he acknowledges the need to do theology in context in the sense that Christians figure out how to be together with their differences in diverse settings.

¹¹⁰ Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 43.

¹¹¹ Stanley Hauerwas, "Silence" in *Trinity Episcopal News* Fall 2013 vol. 60 no. 2, 15. (Hauerwas says he originally preached on June 23, 2013 at The Church of the Holy Family in Chapel Hill, NC, but he also delivered this sermon as part of a lecture in the Chapel of the Apostles, Sewanee, TN on June 20th, 2013.)

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

In another book of sermons he comments, “Scripture is not self-interpreting. Much of the work of theology involves helping us to develop and remember the reading skills necessary to avoid isolating one part of Scripture from the rest.”¹¹³ God’s narrative may be constant and unchanging, but depending upon the time and context, that narrative seems best received through particular translation. There is a common story, modernity’s project of a metanarrative. For Hauerwas this means,

For us to be one in Christ is to be a people who have been given a new story. We are the children of Abraham, which means the kind of struggle against idolatry Elijah faced is now part of our history. We are one with our Jewish brothers and sisters because together we face a world that knows not the God who refuses to let Elijah accept defeat.¹¹⁴

This sermon effectively uses narrative theology to make Hauerwas’s point about being part of God’s ongoing story in the world.

In a sermon entitled, “Blinded by the Light,” Hauerwas argues that in America we grow up learning that we are the high point so far in civilization, that we have inherited all that is good from previous civilizations. This is a story of progress, the story of the Enlightenment project, the story of modernity. He continues, “As Americans we are aware that we have yet to be all we should like to be, but we are confident that if any people deserve the description ‘enlightened,’ it is the American people.”¹¹⁵ Even in his personal narrative he wrestles with the competing stories of the Church and secular culture. Hauerwas muses, “Even though I am a theologian many assume my task is to show that what we believe as Christians is not incompatible with the story of the

¹¹³ Hauerwas, *Cross- Shattered Church*, 17.

¹¹⁴ Hauerwas, “Silence,” 16.

¹¹⁵ Hauerwas, “Blinded by the Light,” *Cross-Shattered Church*, 34.

Enlightenment.”¹¹⁶ But for Hauerwas, the Enlightenment is incompatible, because it offers false promises, a never-ending progress, and an independence from all narrative. He notes that in the Gospel, there are passages that make us “enlightened” Christians uncomfortable. The story in which Jesus says the man was born blind, and reduced to begging so that Jesus might heal is embarrassing to us. This challenges our Enlightenment convictions about truth. As Christian we must relearn to see Jesus in the proper light, his own light. Hauerwas contends,

Learning to see Jesus entails a training that challenges our presumption that we are already in the light. The man born blind is able to see Jesus because he had the advantage of being born blind. We fail to see Jesus because we have the disadvantage of being enlightened... We must be confronted by a light so brilliant that we are able to see the darkness our pride mistakes as light.¹¹⁷

Darkness does not know itself until it encounters the light. We must undergo training as those who have seen the light. The man born blind, not only believes, but he acts. He seeks out Jesus and worships him. In response to the Pharisees’ question, Hauerwas notes, “Jesus responds that because they think they see, because they assume they are already in the light, they remain blinded by the light.”¹¹⁸ Then picking up on these references of light and the Epistle for this particular Sunday, Hauerwas notes that Paul address the church in Ephesus by saying, “in the Lord, you are the light.” Then Paul urges them to find what is pleasing to the Lord by doing nothing that cannot be made visible to the whole church. Hauerwas preaches,

Such a process, such a training, is required if we are to discern what is good, what is right, what is true about our story of enlightenment. I am not suggesting that

¹¹⁶ Hauerwas, “Blinded by the Light,” *Cross-Shattered Church*, 34.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

everything about that story is evil, wrong, or false. Rather, I am suggesting that, as people shaped by that story, we are going to need all the help we can get if we are to discern, as Paul argues we must, what it means to live in the light of Jesus and to be that light for the world.¹¹⁹

In this sermon Hauerwas points out how the story of the Enlightenment is judged by Jesus. Those who are blinded by the light of the Enlightenment project have a very difficult time seeing and worshipping Jesus. The true vision requires training. It is not only about right belief, but also about right action.

Hauerwas is an effective preacher. His success as a preacher, however, does not (in many cases) come from the use of narrative sermons. Hauerwas very intentionally sticks to the text, rarely offering contextual statements about the text. The mythology around his mistrust of narrative preaching is a bit exaggerated.

As a preacher he is not entrusted, as most pastors are, with the spiritual care of a congregation. In congregational preaching, often a visiting preacher can say things, or say them in a way, that the regular pastor of the church cannot. This is not always out of fear for losing one's job (as Hauerwas suspects), but also out of a sense of pastoral sensitivity. If Bob and Sue are living with cancer and their love of their sports team gives them great hope, it is likely not pastorally sensitive to compare cheering for their sports team as idolatry – even if this is a truth. I am not suggesting that preachers should be soft on sin, or avoid any subject, only that those called to be preachers, teachers, and pastors have a different role in preaching than those without professional pastoral responsibilities. Those who are preachers in a pastoral setting can effectively use narrative theology and narrative preaching to share the gospel, in truth and love, to those to whom they minister.

¹¹⁹ Hauerwas, "Blinded by the Light," *Cross-Shattered Church*, 38.

Chapter 3 Pastoral Care and Suffering

“Blessed Trinity, you gather us so that we will not be alone. You will us to enjoy one another, to rejoice in one another’s existence. Just as you can be three, perfectly sharing but without loss of difference, so you make us capable of love without fear that in our love we will be lost. Yet we do find ways to be alone, to be in hell. Caught up in fantasies that we can create ourselves, we become frozen in our self-imposed smiles of self-satisfaction. Because we can fool others into believing we are in control, we even come to believe it ourselves. Great and powerful Lord, shake us free of such loneliness that we may cry for help and be surprised by the willingness of your people to share. How happy we are to be your people. Amen.”¹²⁰

Stanley Hauerwas reframes the common questions of suffering and theodicy in pastoral care and also within the academic discipline of theology through his essays on the mentally handicapped and personhood, and in the book *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (previously published as *Naming the Silences*).¹²¹ In these writings he explores how narrative can be employed in pastoral situations. Hauerwas contends that we can only ask the questions of theodicy in relationship to the context in which we find ourselves: our friends, our community, and our story. This is because we are not so much interested in the theoretical nature of the questions of suffering but rather are deeply concerned when those we care about suffer. Stories enable us to frame the challenge of suffering and to address this challenge. Hauerwas notes that in the early church the question of suffering “did not create a metaphysical problem needing solution; rather, it was a practical

¹²⁰ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 93.

¹²¹ An earlier version of this chapter was originally submitted for a course entitled "The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas," The School of Theology of the University of the South, June 2013.

challenge requiring a communal response.”¹²² Hauerwas wants to reframe the questions of suffering away from the “why” it happens, towards the “how” we support one another in the midst of suffering and find meaning in community and in the Church.

In his essay entitled “Should Suffering Be Eliminated?,” Hauerwas challenges the idea that all suffering can and should be eliminated. He puts forth this challenge by examining what we think we mean and what we think we know about suffering and shifting the questions about suffering itself to questions that explore how those who suffer are supported through community.

Inspired to write in response to a short film created by the American Association of Retarded Citizens (now known as the ARC), Hauerwas critiques the film’s implicit narrative that the worst thing in the world is for a child to be born with a mental handicap. He reflects,

The film gives the impression that there is nothing more disastrous, nothing more destructive, than for a child to be born retarded, but the sponsoring organization for the film maintains that the retarded are not significantly different from the so-called normal. Indeed, the Association for Retarded Citizens believes that with appropriate training most retarded people can become contributing members of a society even as complex as our own.¹²³

Hauerwas is interested in understanding how those with mental handicap can help shape our society and our understanding and response to suffering. He is adamant that medicine sees both the person and the disease. In the case of mental disability, the person cannot be separated from the disease, as may be the case in with other diseases. Hauerwas contends

¹²² Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 85.

¹²³ Stanley Hauerwas, “Should Suffering Be Eliminated? What the Retarded Have to Teach Us (1984),” as found in the *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, 558.

that, “To eliminate retardation may sometimes mean to eliminate the subject.”¹²⁴ For Hauerwas, this simply is not acceptable, and he argues against the notion that all suffering can be eliminated.

The mentally handicapped provide an opportunity for our society to reflect on suffering: what we assume about those who suffer, whether it is necessary, and how we wrestle with the issues suffering raises. Hauerwas notes, “That suffering should be avoided is a belief as deep as any we have... If we believe we ought to prevent suffering, it seems we ought to prevent retardation.”¹²⁵ He goes on to note that suffering is actually much more complex and elusive a subject. Some people actually find meaning and experience relief upon a cancer diagnosis, their new knowledge now allowing them to assign meaning to their pain and suffering and to formulate a plan. While suffering should not be inflicted upon people to usher in a new sense of meaning and purpose, those who experience disease and suffering can experience an awakening of their identity.¹²⁶

Hauerwas then shifts the focus of the conversation from the elimination of suffering to how human suffering itself can shape our moral life and how our society functions. He carefully maintains that not all suffering can offer this opportunity, stating, “Our refusal to accept certain kinds of suffering, or to try to interpret them as serving

¹²⁴ Hauerwas, “Should Suffering Be Eliminated? What the Retarded Have to Teach Us (1984),” 557.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 561.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 564.

some human purpose, is essential for our moral health.”¹²⁷ He also affirms that there are still outstanding questions regarding what types of suffering are acceptable and how suffering might best be integrated into our lives.¹²⁸ At stake, rather, is how we can be the type of people, parents, community, and churches that can welcome those who suffer, especially the mentally handicapped, into our lives.

As a Christian theologian, Hauerwas is interested in how the questions of suffering remind us that we are creatures with needs. He claims, “we suffer because we are incomplete beings who depend on one another for our existence...Suffering is built into our condition because it is literally true that we exist only to the extent that we sustain, or ‘suffer,’ the existence of others, and the others include not just others like us, but mountains, trees, animals, and so on.”¹²⁹ Our suffering, while a limitation of our created nature, provides the opportunity to share with one another, and all of creation, the gifts and challenges of the created order. This sharing is also the source of our strength, “for our need requires the cooperation and love of others from which derives our ability not only to live but to flourish.”¹³⁰ Hauerwas contends that it is through our suffering that we realize our need and dependence upon God and upon each other. This recognition brings about the sharing of suffering with others and allows for the possibility of true community.

¹²⁷ Hauerwas, “Should Suffering Be Eliminated? What the Retarded Have to Teach Us (1984),” 564.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 565.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 565.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 566.

While theologically and logically his argument is sound, I would not offer this line of thinking to a hurting parishioner in a time of pastoral need. I am not saying that he is advocating for offering his argument in a real life pastoral situation, only pointing out its limits in comforting a deeply troubled spirit. Yes, suffering reminds us that we are creatures who have needs, and unfortunately some people are only willing to admit this truth in time of personal crisis. Yes, suffering helps foster a community of fellow sufferers in which people can best survive and flourish in the midst of difficult circumstances. These truths, though, do not usually offer much comfort at the moment of a cancer diagnosis, nor help support the mother who has given birth to a stillborn child.

Hauerwas concludes his critique of the attempt to do away with suffering by noting that this is a problem with the failure of imagination. He notes, “unable to see like the retarded, to hear like the retarded, we attribute to them our suffering. We thus rob them of the opportunity to do what each of us must do: learn to bear and live with our individual sufferings.”¹³¹ Being with the mentally handicapped offers others the possibility of rethinking how we understand suffering. This opportunity helps us to properly and prayerfully contemplate our relationship with God. Hauerwas asserts,

Quite simply, the challenge of learning to know, to be with, and to care for the retarded is nothing less than learning to know, be with, and love God. God’s face is the face of the retarded; God’s body is the body of the retarded; God’s being is that of the retarded. For the God we Christians must learn to worship is not a god of self-sufficient power, a god who in self-possession needs no one; rather, ours is a God who needs a people, who needs a son.¹³²

¹³¹ Hauerwas, “Should Suffering Be Eliminated? What the Retarded Have to Teach Us (1984),” 571.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 575.

Here Hauerwas is invoking Athanasius who sees the dependent derived Son as a mode of perfection of God's divinity. Love and giving are the qualities that mark God's divinity.¹³³

I find Hauerwas' assertion that we need the mentally handicapped to help us "normal" folk extremely compelling. While some might interpret his comments of God having needs to be heretical, I think his point very much aligns with Christian Orthodoxy. Narrative theology offers us the story of God as Trinity, God in community, and difference within that unity. Those who are differently gifted, who see and experience the world in seemingly strange ways, call our attention to the wonder of God, who is beyond our comprehension and certainly outside of any category of "normal."

In his essay, "Must a Patient be a Person to be a Patient?," Hauerwas continues his exploration of the moral questions around identity and suffering and offers his critique of what he understands is the ultimate purpose of a liberal society. Hauerwas wants to reclaim the importance of a shared narrative: that we exist by the grace of God and that our lives find meaning and purpose not as autonomous individuals but in the community of shared story.

Hauerwas is suspicious that the notion of "personhood" is the be-all and end-all, and of the Enlightenment notion that we can be free from all narratives except the ones we create ourselves. He muses, "it is only seldom that we have occasion to think of ourselves as 'persons'; when asked to identify myself, I do not think that I am a person,

¹³³ Hauerwas, "Should Suffering Be Eliminated? What the Retarded Have to Teach Us (1984)," 575.

but that I am Stanley Hauerwas, teacher, husband, father, or, ultimately, a Texan.”¹³⁴

Hauerwas does not self identify as a “person” but rather in terms of the narrative that shapes his life and the relationships in which he participates – his “personhood” is hardly a factor in his self-identification.

In the context of medicine, the notion of “person” was implemented as a way to help doctors treat patients rather than simply attack diseases. According to Hauerwas, “it is only on this basis that doctors rightly see that their task is not to cure diseases, but rather to cure the person who happens to be subject to a disease.”¹³⁵ He goes on to note that while this concept of “person” initially was a helpful corrective in the medical field, in other literature dealing with medical ethics “person” at times is not used in a protective way but, “rather as a permissive notion that takes the moral heat off certain quandaries raised by modern medicine. It is felt that if we can say with some assuredness that x, y, or z is not a person, then our responsibility is not the same as it is to those who bear this august title.”¹³⁶ This for Hauerwas is a source of concern. His thesis in this essay is that medical ethics has attempted to “put forward ‘person’ as a regulative notion to direct our health care as a substitute for what only a substantive community and story can do.”¹³⁷ For Hauerwas, then, the notion of “person” is appropriate when it offers a protective role such as in a doctor treating a person rather than just a disease. In contrast he views

¹³⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, “Must a Patient Be a Person to Be a Patient? Or, My Uncle Charlie Is Not Much of a Person, But He is Still My Uncle Charlie (1975),” as found in the *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, 599.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 597.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 598.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 597.

“person” as a dangerous notion when used to dismiss an individual in the case of modern medical questions such as terminating life support.

This language of “personhood” is confounded further in the cases of abortion, death, and those newly born with complications.¹³⁸ In the case of children, Hauerwas contends that identity, which previously seemed so natural, is now being questioned. For example some people no longer understand a child born to them as “their child.”¹³⁹ This can happen in the case of predetermined adoption, unwanted children, or the increasingly common situation of surrogate gestational mothers.

Hauerwas understands why many want to use the language of “person” but questions how we can make moral claims about “personhood,” its rights and privileges, when there is no consensus on the morals of our society. We tend to think that the guiding medical ethos of preventing suffering, prolonging life, and doing no harm are contained in a singular guiding morality of medicine. Hauerwas, however, challenges the possibility of a unified medical ethos if our society does not have a shared narrative to guide the morality. He suggests,

We will be much better off to simply admit that morally there are many different ways to practice medicine. We should, in other words, be willing to have our medicine as fragmented as our moral lives.... For the story that determines how the virtues of medicine are to be displayed for us is quite different from the one claimed by the language of “person.”¹⁴⁰

While a fragmented medical ethic would complicate our current systems of treatment and prevention, it would at least be a way to combat the Enlightenment project that says our

¹³⁸ Hauerwas, “Must a Patient Be a Person to Be a Patient? Or, My Uncle Charlie Is Not Much of a Person, But He is Still My Uncle Charlie (1975),” 599.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 600.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 601.

lives have no meaning or purpose other than the ones we “persons” assign to them. For Hauerwas, the ultimate survival of an individual is of less value (since as creature there is no “ultimate survival”) than how we choose morally to live out the time we are given.

I find this critique of personhood very compelling. We do seem as a society to have lost almost all sense of a shared story. From our religious convictions, to our political conversations, to our medical ethics, the good of the individual has in many respects superseded any sense of group or societal good. Hauerwas articulates in these and other essays how and why this is problematic in ethics. We also see this problem in the “spiritual but not religious” trend where people do not see any need for community or shared experience in their faith practice. Hauerwas argues that as a society we need to reclaim our shared narrative and find meaning and purpose through community.

The book *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (previously published with the title *Naming the Silences*) is an attempt by Hauerwas to use narrative to explore the theology of suffering. The book does not address the question of why God allows evil and suffering, but asks why the very question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?,” is being asked now about children we cannot save from suffering and death. Again Hauerwas contends that the questions of theodicy cannot be asked objectively but only in the context in which we find ourselves in relation to these friends and this community. He notes, “We are, quite rightly, not interested in the theoretical issue of suffering and evil; rather, we are torn apart by what is happening to real people, to those we know and love.”¹⁴¹ His contention, worked out through the course of the book, is that stories

¹⁴¹ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 2.

provide the space to consider the questions of suffering and even a way to respond to the challenge of those questions.

According to Hauerwas, “it is only as we are able to locate our lives in relation to those lives which manifest God’s glory that we are graced with the resources necessary to live with our silences.”¹⁴² He is deeply suspicious of any who suppose we can answer the basic question of theodicy, “why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?” Hauerwas instead assumes that solidarity in silence provides a better theological response to the question than inadequate answers that offer no real comfort at all. Hauerwas is clear that his book is not an attempt to solve the problem of theodicy, and goes so far as to note that he might not be successful in offering readers who have experienced tragedy any consolation at all. This book is instead, he remarks, “as honest an account as I can give why we cannot afford to give ourselves explanations for evil when what is required is a community capable of absorbing grief.”¹⁴³ For Hauerwas the grief process, and indeed all of life, is properly lived out in the context of Christian community. It is only through relationship with God and with others who share our faith that we can bear our sufferings and find meaning in our common narrative.

To explore how story can communicate meaning in the midst of suffering, Hauerwas retells the story of Peter DeVries’s novel, *The Blood of the Lamb*.¹⁴⁴ Hauerwas uses the fictional narrative to examine the real world problems of illness and death, especially of children. The novel is about a character named Don Wanderhope: his life,

¹⁴² Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, xii.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁴⁴ Peter DeVries, *The Blood of the Lamb* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1969).

his skepticism, the tragedies he experiences, and the illness and death of his daughter Carol. Through an exploration of Wanderhope's faith and of the faith of those around him, Hauerwas set the stage for his assertion that silence in the face of tragedy when shared with a suffering person can offer more comfort than the quest for the answer, "Why my daughter?" Hauerwas notes, "What is interesting about Wanderhope is not whether he explicitly believes or not, but what he does. Like his father, Wanderhope swims in the sea of faith – that is, he is surrounded by the storied habits of a people whose way of life is so God-determined that even their unbelief is a form of faithfulness."¹⁴⁵ Yet the faith of those around him does not protect Wanderhope from the very serious crisis of faith that comes when he is confronted with Carol's illness and death.

Hauerwas appreciates the author's honest approach to the story and the characters. This is perhaps why he chose to use this novel as example of how narrative can help those in the midst of personal tragedy and pastoral crisis. He notes,

DeVries does not resolve Wanderhope's pain before God. He does not say – and I think he is right in so refraining – that Wanderhope through Carol's suffering has learned to see the beauty in the olive drab of the hawthorn in autumn. DeVries is too wise for that, sensing as he does the dishonesty in those who would have a child like Carol suffer and die from leukemia so that a father like Wanderhope could learn to see the particular beauty of the everyday.¹⁴⁶

Careless literature cannot provide the framework to ask the questions of pain and suffering. It is only when a novel is well written, its characters believable, and their experience one that seems common and real to the reader that narrative can be employed in this way at all. This is a theology of narrative that can be used with good works of

¹⁴⁵ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

fiction and with origin stories in different cultures that help people understand creation, the world, and God.

Narrative theology, the story of God's relationship with creation and especially in the incarnation, places individuals within the larger story of salvation history and helps people to endure the suffering they experience. It is most profoundly through the suffering of Christ that we can relate to God, who understands suffering and suffers with us. Hauerwas notes, "Of course, we see that Wanderhope ends up at the foot of the cross under a Jesus crying tears of cake frosting. The suggestion is that Wanderhope is comforted by a God who suffers with us, who can share our agonies – who has, in short, become like us."¹⁴⁷ While Wanderhope is struggling with his fate, wrestling with the difficult questions, he feels that being in the presence of another who has suffered profoundly helps him to endure his pain. Hauerwas continues this line of thought, "...our only hope lies in whether we can place alongside the story of pointless suffering of a child like Carol a story of suffering that helps us know we are not thereby abandoned. This, I think, is to get the question of 'theodicy' right..."¹⁴⁸ Finding ourselves within the narrative of God's salvation helps to put in perspective, not the "why" suffering happens, but how God is present with us in the midst of the suffering.

Amid loss, pain and suffering, the character Wanderhope never loses hope.

Hauerwas wonders,

Why is it that Wanderhope, in spite of a life that is filled with disaster, never ceases to hope? Why, in short, does he have hope sufficient to have a child in a world where at best he is only a wanderer... If belief in God has nothing to do

¹⁴⁷ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 34.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

with such questions, then surely it makes little difference whether anyone believes or not – or worse, any belief we have cannot help but be an illusion that provides comfort that can only be false, self-deceptive, and serve oppressive powers.¹⁴⁹

This challenge is offered to the rhetoric of those in our world who see no shared narrative and naively think that through technological advances we will be able to do away with all suffering. Hauerwas contends, “our questions about suffering are asked from a world determined by a hope schooled by medicine – a world that promises to ‘solve’ suffering by eliminating its causes.”¹⁵⁰ This promise to solve all suffering is empty. Medicine will continue making strides to eliminate disease, though it is unlikely that all of the answers to disease, illness, suffering and pain lie within the capacity of human beings because we are limited. While the world asks questions about suffering from the flawed perspective that we can solve all of these problems, the Church can and should reframe these questions, not to seek answers of impossible questions, but to ask the questions and then remember that God, and hopefully others in the community of faith, will sit with us in silence, as these questions are offered as prayers.

Hauerwas continues his critique of the Enlightenment theodicy project by asking why questions about suffering lead some to atheism. Hauerwas ponders, “The crucial question for us is what system of power is operating in our assumption that suffering makes God’s existence qua existence doubtful, and how does that system shake the world of Don and Carol Wanderhope?”¹⁵¹ When faced with incredible suffering and loss, it is important to consider what system of beliefs society proclaims and how that system

¹⁴⁹ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 35.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

allows certain questions to be asked. In a system with no shared story, a system in which individuals define their own meaning, it seems more likely that a set back or loss would cause one to question God's very existence. Yet within a faith community, one's losses and questions are shared with others within the larger narrative that shapes both the individual and the community.

Hauerwas goes on to make this point by looking at a common modern interpretation of the book of Job. He states, "To make the book of Job, and especially God's answer to Job out of the whirlwind, an answer to the problem of evil is to try to make the book answer a question it was not asking."¹⁵² Hauerwas is critical of attempts to use scripture to make claims scripture is not making or to ask of it questions that do not fit into the narrative of particular passages or books. While Job suffers loss, pain and grief, his friends do not offer support nor do they sit with him in his silence. Job's friends primarily are the ones who ask the questions about why he suffers. Hauerwas notes that in scripture, the novel, and especially in real life, the person asking the questions is extremely important. He insists, "it makes all the difference in the world whether the question of suffering is asked by those who are actually suffering – those who are dying from hunger, those who have watched their children die from diseases easily cured in developed countries."¹⁵³

If the questions of theodicy cannot be answered, as Hauerwas argues, then he instead suggests they provide for Christians the opportunity to examine our basic understandings of the world and call us to action. He offers a clear critique of the

¹⁵² Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 45-46.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 46.

Enlightenment and points out, “That Christians now think that the problem of suffering renders their faith in God unintelligible indicates that they now are determined by ways of life that are at odds with their fundamental convictions.”¹⁵⁴ For Hauerwas, the Enlightenment has given the problem of suffering more ammunition than it needed to have. He understands that ultimately the project has severe flaws, a major one being that faith has taken a back seat to the unsettling unanswered questions of suffering. Borrowing from Walter Brueggemann, Hauerwas goes so far as to claim that theodicy has become “a legitimation for the way in which society is organized.”¹⁵⁵ For Hauerwas, this puts the cart before the horse. He wants to rethink modernity’s quest to individuate every truth and to loosen theodicy’s strangle hold on faith.

First exploring how the church handled these types of questions in earlier times and then calling Christians to act to address suffering, Hauerwas offers a much different response to theodicy than the atheist’s solution. Hauerwas rejects the deistic god that fits the idea of humanity’s control over its own destiny: “If god cannot eliminate suffering, even though god may have the power to do so, then we will have to do god’s task to insure that god can remain god.”¹⁵⁶ Instead, Hauerwas notes, the challenges of suffering and evil were overcome in the early church, not through profound theological answers but through facing the challenges within community and through a shared sense of identity. Hauerwas contends, “For the early Christians, suffering and evil, which for present purposes I do not need to distinguish, did not have to be ‘explained.’ Rather, what

¹⁵⁴ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 49.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

was required was the means to go on even if the evil could not be ‘explained.’”¹⁵⁷

Continuing to reflect on the early Christians he notes,

Their suffering did not make them question their belief in God, much less God’s goodness; their suffering only confirmed their belief that they were part of Christ’s church through baptism into his death. Their faith gave them a way to go on in the face of specific persecution and general misfortune. Suffering, even their suffering from evil and injustice, did not create a metaphysical problem needing solution; rather, it was a practical challenge requiring a communal response.¹⁵⁸

In Augustinian theology, evil can only be overcome through conversion and the acceptance of the gift of grace, which enables us to enjoy life as creatures. No account outside of salvation can make sense of suffering. Thus, says Hauerwas, “For Christians, suffering – even the suffering of a child – cannot be separated from their calling to be a new people by conversion.”¹⁵⁹ This conversion to a shared story and to a community that supports each other in the midst of suffering, loss, and pain provides the means to endure life’s great tragedies. According to Hauerwas in this view of history, “Christians have not had a ‘solution’ to the problem of evil. Rather, they have had a community of care that has made it possible for them to absorb the destructive terror of evil that constantly threatens to destroy all human relations.”¹⁶⁰ One concern Hauerwas has about contemporary theodicy questions and attempts by the Enlightenment to displace community in favor of the individual is that that both ignore the history of how the church has addressed the questions of suffering in the past.

¹⁵⁷ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 49.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

Hauerwas concludes his critique of liberal society and its search to eliminate suffering by exploring how people understand death, and how they perceive they would like to die. He notes that our fundamental desire is to be in control and that death threatens this desire. He explains, “For our desire to ‘cure’ cancer springs not only from the large number of people who actually get cancer but also from the fact that cancer challenges our very conceptions of how we would like to die.”¹⁶¹ Commenting about society’s lack of shared story and shared values, Hauerwas sees that we do share a sense of isolation, and because of this isolation, death is extremely concerning. He says, “There are few things on which we as a society agree, but almost everyone agrees that death is a very unfortunate aspect of the human condition which should be avoided at all costs. We have no communal sense of a good death, and as a result death threatens us, since it represents our absolute loneliness.”¹⁶² The lack of a sense of a good or meaningful death, or even an appropriate passing is confounded by individual uncertainty about their legacy, family guilt around the illness of an individual, and by those in medicine who see their role as to prolong life as long as possible. Hauerwas thinks this situation is particularly troubling as we seem to have agreed to live our lives in such a way as to try and avoid death at any cost.¹⁶³

In his critique of modern medical ethics and its philosophy stemming from the Enlightenment, Hauerwas raises the concern that we are being fed the lie that there is no

¹⁶¹ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 99.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 100.

limit to medical care. Borrowing from Daniel Callahan¹⁶⁴ Hauerwas muses that our way of life has become such that all serious questions about death and faith have been relegated to the private life, that medicine is perhaps the last hold out of the Enlightenment.¹⁶⁵ Hauerwas goes on to say,

In a way, modern medicine exemplifies the predicament of the Enlightenment project, which hopes to make society a collection of individuals free from the bonds of necessity other than those we choose... only now have we discovered that the very freedom we sought has, ironically, become a kind of bondage... We now suffer from the means we tried to use to eliminate suffering... If medicine is to serve our needs rather than determine our needs, then we must recover a sense of how even our illnesses fit within an ongoing narrative. The crucial question concerns what such a narrative is to be, so that we can learn to live with our illnesses without giving them false meaning.¹⁶⁶

In order to break free from the binding of a system which cannot eliminate suffering, we must reclaim a larger narrative in order to find meaning and comfort.

Hauerwas wants to offer a different set of social and political presumptions than the concepts of “natural life span” and “tolerable death.” He claims that his use of narrative “is an attempt to remind us that there is no ‘solution’ to the problem of ‘setting limits’ to medicine as long as the primary presumptions of liberalism are accepted... The recognition that our lives are narratively determined is a reminder that insofar as we live well, we more nearly discover rather than create our lives.”¹⁶⁷ By recognizing our place within a larger narrative we are reminded that though suffering and death occur, they are

¹⁶⁴ Daniel Callahan, *Setting Limits: Medical Goals in an Aging Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

¹⁶⁵ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 106.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

part of something larger, and this recognition helps us to assign meaning to these experiences and offers purpose for life.¹⁶⁸

Because our society says we share no narrative other than the one stating we are all going to die alone, we find death the only reason for cooperation. Hauerwas notes, “Our medical technologies have outrun the spiritual resources of our society, which lacks all sense of how life might properly end.”¹⁶⁹ Hauerwas works out this critique by considering the death of children. He notes that in our society where we expect individuals to carve out their own meaning by themselves, sick children have not had enough time to create their own narrative, so we do all we can to buy them time. He continues, “Such is the only alternative as long as we refuse to believe that we are all, adults and children alike, born into a narrative not of our own making – that is, we are creatures of a gracious God who discover that precisely because we are such we do not have to ‘make up’ our lives.”¹⁷⁰ Dying children cannot fulfill this basic task; they are unable fulfill the primary objective of American children, which is to grow up.¹⁷¹ To require of them to create their own meaning is an unfortunate and unrealistic request.

In response to these criticisms Hauerwas offers the alternate of narrative. He notes, “The primary human mechanism for attaching meaning to particular experiences is to tell stories about them.”¹⁷² Those who experience illness often find meaning when they

¹⁶⁸ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 112.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 113.

receive a diagnosis, because then they can begin to shape stories about their condition and assign meaning to all that they are going through. The death of children breaks our hearts and leaves us with many unanswered questions. Hauerwas contends, “What we lack is the wisdom and skills of a community constituted by a truthful narrative that can comprehend such deaths without denying their pointlessness.”¹⁷³ Trying to reason out why children suffer and die from leukemia leaves us broken and distraught, but telling the story of the child’s life in relationship with others, their fight and their passing, provides an honest chance to grieve and to share the burden of loss with others.

Throughout the final chapter in *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, Hauerwas reflects upon a non-fiction book about children with leukemia. He notes that at the end of this book (much of which takes place in the form of a play), all the author can do is to tell a story. A sick child asks to hear the tale of *Charlotte’s Web*. Hearing the account brings comfort to a child who is in the process of dying. Hauerwas offers this most insightful observation,

But a child’s death should not imitate a spider’s. It may be that spiders are meant to live a little while and die, but we who are created for friendship with one another and with God cannot believe that this is “all there is.” It may be that spiders are destined to die alone, but as those who believe that we are destined to enjoy one another and God, we cannot allow ourselves and our loved ones to so die. We have no theodicy that can soften the pain of our death and the death of our children, but we believe that we share a common story which makes it possible for us to be with one another especially when we die. There can be no one to remove the loneliness of the death of leukemic children unless they see witnessed in the lives of those who care for them a confidence rooted in

¹⁷³ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 147.

friendship with God and with one another. That, finally, is the only response we have to “the problem” of the death of our children.¹⁷⁴

Hauerwas attempts to replace the emptiness of isolation in the face of great tragedy with the narrative of God that encompasses all of life and promises meaning and hope. He summarizes his fear of our lack of a meaning narrative in this context of the suffering of children:

I think childhood suffering bothers us so deeply because we assume that children lack a life story which potentially gives their illness some meaning. In that respect I suspect we often fail to appreciate the richness of their young world as well as their toughness and resilience. But I suspect that what bothers us even more about childhood suffering is that it makes us face our deepest suspicions that all of us lack a life story which would make us capable of responding to illness in a manner that would enable us to go on as individuals, as friends, as parents, and as a community. I suspect that if Christian convictions have any guidance to give us about how we are to understand as well as respond to suffering, it is by helping us discover that our lives are located in God’s narrative – the God who has not abandoned us even when we or someone we care deeply about it ill.¹⁷⁵

Through the power of shared narrative and community, we do not prevent, eliminate or overcome suffering, but we endure pain and loss together. Hauerwas also considers Nicholas Wolterstorff’s profound book *Lament for a Son*, and the knowledge that living without the answer to theodicy’s questions is a precarious task. And because we love, like God, we suffer.¹⁷⁶ Finally, what we have is God’s love and each other. We sit beside each other, comforting one another, holding our collective pain, grief, fear and frustration out

¹⁷⁴ Myra Bluebond-Langner, *The Private Worlds of Dying Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), as cited in Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 148.

¹⁷⁵ Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 67.

¹⁷⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), as cited in Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 150.

to God as a communal offering in silence. We trust that within our shared story, God's purposes are good, and that we are never abandoned, never alone.

While I am very much in favor of Hauerwas's project in terms of questioning the unrealized or unhelpful goals of the Enlightenment project, I question how effective or relevant his arguments are to those in the midst of tragedy. I do think that listening to the suffering, sharing relevant parallel narratives and looking for the grace and comfort in the narrative of Christianity are each helpful in pastoral ministry. However, reminding people that they are creatures with needs and that they can best endure their sufferings in community may not be helpful to people in the midst of crisis. At other times when considering theodicy, and especially for theologians and pastors wrestling with the questions of suffering, Hauerwas offers a compelling case for meaning to be found in the narrative of faith and in community.

In his book, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, Charles V. Gerkin explores different methods used to approach pastoral care in the twentieth century, ultimately conceding that George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model is best. After examining several models of pastoral theology (psychotherapeutic, propositional, and experiential) and roles that clergy play in pastoral care (physician of the soul, shepherd, mediator, reconciler, etc.), Gerkin concludes that a cultural-linguistic model for pastoral care "has the unique ability to provide people with a storied context of ultimate meaning for their lives. To the degree that this storied context maintains its connection with all the varied stories of individual, family, and community life in the world, it can provide a meaning-

filled nesting place and thus provide the most elementary context of care.”¹⁷⁷ Gerkin goes on to discuss the task of practical theology (pastoral care) to be making connections between the individual and the Christian community. He notes, “Pastoral care becomes the community of faith’s living expression of that grounding story.”¹⁷⁸ Pastoral care occupies the space between the story of the Christian community and its traditions and the particularity of life stories of an individual.

For Gerkin then, the role of the pastor in this model of care that that of interpretive guide. The pastor makes connections between the narrative of Christianity and the stories of an individual. According to Gerkin, “the pastor seeks to facilitate a serious, open dialogue between the two side of the equation, a dialogue that will include the sharing of feelings, stories of past experiences, mutual questioning, and search for authentic connections between the two poles. Such facilitation virtually always involves the pastor in a degree of tension.”¹⁷⁹ The pastor helps to connect the narrative of the Christian faith with the narrative of an individual’s experience. This usually involves some tension between the narratives that the pastor helps to sort through. For instance, belief in an all-loving God is difficult to maintain in the face of a cancer diagnosis. This role of interpretive guide, according to Gerkin, is one of narrative facilitator. Gerkin concludes,

By interpretive guidance I mean not simply interpretation of the Christian tradition and its implications for communal, moral, individual, and societal life, important as that is for the role of pastoral leadership and relational practice. I

¹⁷⁷ Charles V. Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 110.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

mean also the role of interpreting the conflicts and pressures, the contradictions and pitfalls, the lures and tendencies toward fragmentation of contemporary life. In short, I mean the role of interpretive guidance as it relates to facilitation the dialogical process between life stories and the Christian story of how life is to be lived.¹⁸⁰

Therefore, in the context of pastoral care, narrative theology has much to offer, including how pastors are to function within the Christian community.

Narrative theology is a helpful alternative to the unfulfilled promise of Enlightenment theology, though it seems to limit any objective claims of theology. In consideration of theodicy and pastoral care, narrative theology and the theology that is developed from narrative in general is, as claimed by Hauerwas, dependent upon context. The framing of suffering through sharing of stories and the understanding of the Christian narrative happens in different ways in urban centers in the United States than it does in the rural African village. This is not a new challenge to the discipline of theology as theology always depends upon context. I am simply pointing out one limitation of narrative theology in relationship to pastoral care. The western “enlightened” notion of personhood does not directly translate to South African Christians who understand their identity more profoundly through the other (Ubuntu). Hauerwas, in this example, sides with the personhood concept of Ubuntu.

A need for clarification is what Hauerwas means by community. As seen in much of his writing, Hauerwas is hesitant to define Christian community in terms of the present day local church, but this is most likely what he means. It is difficult, though not impossible, to sit in solidarity with one who is suffering if there is no prior or will be no future relationship. Additionally, because interpretation of the narrative of faith is

¹⁸⁰ Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, 114.

dependent upon context, how each local community responds to the questions of theodicy will undoubtedly differ. Some will claim suffering is a response to unfaithfulness (like Job's "friends"), some communities will assume that God is completely removed from any cause of suffering (claiming free will and a broken world), while others will prefer to resist the questions of "why" and continually insist upon God's presence in the midst of suffering. In my context I will sit in solidarity with those who suffer, proclaim the story of God's presence and salvation to our community of faith, and continue to wrestle with the questions of suffering.

Chapter 4
The Narrative Theology of Hauerwas's Life

“Lord of all life, we come before you not knowing who we are. We strut our stuff, trying to impress others with our self-confidence. In the process we hope to be what we pretend. Save us from such pretense, that we might learn who we are through trust in you to make us more than we can imagine. Help us, Augustine-like, to reread our lives as confessions of sin made possible by your love. Bind up our wounds and our joys so that our lives finally make sense only as a prayer to you. Amen.”¹⁸¹

In his theological memoir, *Hannah's Child*, Hauerwas tells his life's story in order to show how his personal character and ethics have been shaped through the converging narratives of Christianity, academia, his family and friends. He has tried to live his life in such a way that it makes sense only if the God whom Christians worship does exist¹⁸² and yet his faith has not come easy. It is through his writing that Hauerwas works out his faith, noting, “I believe what I write, or rather, by writing I learn to believe.”¹⁸³

Contemplating his faith and the current status of Christianity in the Western world, Hauerwas notes, “Prayer never comes easy for me. I am not complaining. I assume this to be God's gift to help me think hard about what it means to worship God in a world where God is no longer simply ‘there.’”¹⁸⁴ Instead of a traditionally understood contemplative life, Hauerwas's faith has been shaped by his academic writing and through the care of his friends. In reflecting upon why he was written this book, Hauerwas explains,

I have written this memoir in an attempt to understand myself, something that would be impossible without my friends. I have had a wonderful life because I have had wonderful friends. So this attempt to understand myself is not just about

¹⁸¹ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 29.

¹⁸² Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, x.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

“me” but about the friends who have made me who I am. It is also about God – the God who has forced me to be who I am.¹⁸⁵

This memoir is in many ways a story about how his friends have shaped him. Throughout this book, we experience Hauerwas reflecting on these narratives, their influences on him, and how he understands the usefulness of narrative theology in the Christian life.

Hauerwas locates his life within a narrative of Christianity that requires salvation to be included in God’s story. I think this is a significant motivator for him. If you are formed by a particular narrative, but do not understand yourself as part of this story unless you fulfill a particular duty, then you will wrestle with your identity until you can either cross this threshold, or find a new narrative that you fit into. Hauerwas speculates, “I became a theologian because I could not be saved.”¹⁸⁶ The whole trajectory of his life is rooted in the knowledge that he needed to be saved from sin in order to participate in an altar call. Once he started dating he was sure he was even more in sin. So one night Hauerwas went to meet with his local pastor and told Brother Zimmerman he felt God calling him to ministry.

Stanley Hauerwas’s mother told him that before he was conceived, she prayed a prayer like Hannah did before the Hebrew prophet Samuel was born. Hauerwas feels she should not have told him. He does not self-identify as a prophet, but hopes his work has been honest. So not only does Hauerwas struggle to understand himself within the narrative of those who are saved, but now also must wrestle with the story of the prophet Samuel, whose mother promises God a servant if only she might be blessed with a son.

¹⁸⁵ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, xi.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

In order to square his desire to be saved and his perceived call to ministry, Hauerwas does a lot of reading and growing at Southwestern University in Georgetown, TX. The questions around salvation are not resolved while in college, however. Hauerwas remarks, “But if I could not be saved at Pleasant Mound, I sure as hell was not going to be saved at the Faith and Life Community in Austin, Texas.”¹⁸⁷ What does occur during college is an exposure to culture, books, and philosophy. During this time he met Anne Hardy, who after college lived with his parents in Dallas when Hauerwas moved off to New Haven for graduate school. They were married after his first semester at Yale.

Growing up the son, grandson, and nephew of bricklayers, at an early age Hauerwas develops a profound work ethic and pride in doing good work. He also develops a deep appreciation for the aesthetics of construction. The work of good, disciplined theology has much in common with bricklaying. According to Hauerwas,

Like stonecutters and bricklayers, theologians must come to terms with the material upon which they work. In particular, they must learn to respect the simple complexity of the language of the faith, so that they might reflect the radical character of orthodoxy. I think one of the reasons I was never drawn to liberal Protestant theology was that it felt too much like an attempt to avoid the training required of apprentices.¹⁸⁸

Hauerwas identifies with Barth because his work was like that of a master bricklayer, no shortcuts allowed.

Hauerwas writes a very moving narrative sermon on the occasion of his father’s death. He remembers his father as one who enjoyed children for their innocence and wonder. Both of his parents loved so freely and immensely that no one stayed a stranger for long. As cited in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Hauerwas locates his father in the narrative

¹⁸⁷ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 13.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

of Jesus' life and remarks, "Gentleness is given to those who have learned that God will not have his kingdom triumph through the violence of the world, for such a triumph came through the meekness of a cross."¹⁸⁹ The gift of preaching such a sermon on the occasion of his father's death came about because of the gift his parents gave him of letting him go. They gave permission and blessing for Stanley to go away to college, to Yale and then beyond. Hauerwas reflects that it took all fifty-two years of his life and the distance away from his hometown to be able to eloquently preach the narrative of his father's life and ministry.

Through his studies with very accomplished biblical and theological scholars at Yale, Hauerwas was deeply influenced by Karl Barth and Kierkegaard. Still working out his own understanding of Christianity, and relationship with the faith, he begins to make connections between his upbringing, his studies, and the theological work he undertakes. Hauerwas notes, "It became clear to me that questions surrounding how to understand the person and work of Christ are integrally related to our understanding of what it means to be human."¹⁹⁰ What it means to be human, and what it means to be a Christian were (are) difficult questions in the wake of the Second World War. Hauerwas remembers, "Before Yale, in college, I had become convinced that one of the decisive challenges concerning the truthfulness of Christianity was the failure of Christians to stand against the Shoah."¹⁹¹ He is attracted to Barth, partly because of his rejection of the Nazi regime, but also because in his writing Barth cuts no corners. According to Hauerwas, Barth "tried to

¹⁸⁹ Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 39.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

show how the language works by showing how the language works.”¹⁹² Through Barth and others, Hauerwas begins to make the connection between Christian thought and Christian worship. Remembering his dissertation he notes, “my work even then was to demonstrate the link between the truth of what we say we believe and the shape of the lives we live.”¹⁹³ Connecting his studies, writing, and wrestling with the Christian faith, Hauerwas struggles in his personal life with a difficult marriage. He forms a close bond with his son from an early age. Sharing these parts of his personal life in this narrative is clearly emotional and done with honesty.

After finishing his Ph.D., Hauerwas’s first teaching job is at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. In his interview for the position the president asks Hauerwas what he will teach. This is a profound moment of realization. Hauerwas recalls, “Just as I had gone from divinity school not realizing that you usually go to divinity school to study for the ministry, it had not occurred to me that I was doing a Ph.D. to become a teacher.”¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, he ends up becoming a very good and important teacher.

During this time in the late 1960’s, students everywhere stood up for what they thought mattered. There was no room for being a well-informed bystander. Hauerwas confesses that he did not always play nice with other faculty. While beginning to attend a Lutheran church, and encountering the movement within the Christian church towards racial equality during the Civil Rights movement, Hauerwas more and more puts emphasis on how to live out the Christian life. He remembers, “I had begun to think that

¹⁹² Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 59.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

believing in God was not all that interesting”¹⁹⁵ – meaning that just believing in God is a not a sufficient description for what it means to be a Christian. Through his encounters with Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), Hauerwas embraces pacifism as the way to be Christian. He reflects,

The way things are is not the way things have to be. That thought began to shape my understanding of what it might mean to be a Christian – namely, Christianity is the ongoing training necessary to see that we are not fated. We can even imagine a world without war.¹⁹⁶

For Hauerwas the narrative of intellectual Christianity he inherited begins to break down even as his increased participation in Christianity begins to take on new importance.

After leaving Augustana, Hauerwas spends the next fourteen years of his life at the University of Notre Dame. Here he begins the process that makes him into a Christian. Notre Dame at that time wanted to diversify, rather than be an exclusive Roman Catholic school full of Roman Catholic thinkers for Roman Catholic students, and so Hauerwas fit in well. Through his friendship with David Burrell, Hauerwas began attending mass regularly in Grace Hall with his son Adam where he experienced good preaching and the Eucharist. Meanwhile, Anne’s mental health continued to worsen.

While teaching at Notre Dame, Hauerwas gets involved in the Logan Center (a school for the mentally disabled) with his friend the geneticist Harvey Bender. He remembers, “I soon began to think that learning to live with the mentally disabled might be paradigmatic for learning what it might mean to face God.”¹⁹⁷ His experience with differently-abled people profoundly influences Hauerwas and his teaching of students

¹⁹⁵ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 87.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

preparing for ministry. Through his reflections on those with mental disabilities he begins working on medical ethics. Hauerwas recalls,

I was fascinated by the way physicians learn to see their patients, because I thought they often exemplified the way practical reason is supposed to work. It turns out, just as Ramsey argues in *The Patient as Person*, that doctors treat patients – not diseases. Moreover, every patient is different, requiring doctors to attend to the concrete particular. It occurred to me that the way we train doctors might be a model for moral training. I have often wished that we could train those going into the ministry not unlike how doctors are trained.¹⁹⁸

In response to his interactions with differently-abled people and his work in medical ethics, Hauerwas writes what he considers among his best work, *Naming the Silences*. He understands the complexity of life and the need to have the eyes of a novelist to see the world as it is. Hauerwas notes, “We must be taught to see our pain and the pain we cause in others without trying to excuse ourselves by offering explanations. I think ‘ethics’ depends on developing the eye of a novelist.”¹⁹⁹ The novelist, the ethicist, and the theologian can all help us see the complexity of human life without giving everything a simple, comforting explanation. Hauerwas boldly proclaims, “But if God is the God of Jesus Christ, then God does not need our protection. What God demands is not protection, but truth.”²⁰⁰ Hauerwas believes this means that we cannot separate ethics from theology. It cannot be that “Love of some other fundamental principle is identified as *the* source of the moral life,” Hauerwas explains.²⁰¹ Since God is the source of the moral life, and as Christians we have a particular understanding of who God is through

¹⁹⁸ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 113-114.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

the incarnation, this has real implications for how we live a moral life. For Hauerwas this results in a strong conviction about pacifism. Reflecting on a paper Hauerwas delivered about Yoder he comments, “I began by noting I was a Methodist with a doubtful theological background...representing the most Catholic department of theology in the nation, speaking to a bunch of Lutheran theologians, to argue that the Anabaptists had been right all along.”²⁰² Hauerwas comes to the conclusion that “nonviolence is constitutive of God’s refusal to redeem coercively.”²⁰³

While Hauerwas is doing well professionally, his personal life remains difficult in caring for a mentally ill wife. Anne grows seriously ill during this time: having visions, being obsessive and claiming to fall in love with other men. Doctors and friends try to help with this difficult situation. For Hauerwas, this painful narrative has implication for his faith. He recalls, “Learning to live out of control, learning to live without trying to force contingency into conformity because of our desperate need for security, I take to be a resource for discovering alternatives that would not otherwise be present.”²⁰⁴ Living with Anne and reading Yoder teaches him that following Jesus means you cannot anticipate or ensure results. Jogging becomes very important to him while working at Notre Dame. As Anne grows worse, he runs more.

While at Notre Dame, the family finds a home at Broadway United Methodist Church. Because there was Eucharist every Sunday and the whole community participates in the decision making process, Broadway is a good fit for Hauerwas. For the

²⁰² Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 118.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

invitation to officially join the church, Hauerwas remembers, “John [the pastor] suggested to them that just as Israel’s covenant had to be renewed so did their covenant with God, the church, and with one another. It was his way of stressing the importance of their decision to be a member of the church.”²⁰⁵ Hauerwas’s son Adam felt he could not do everything that people expected of him, that he could not be a Christian alone. Hauerwas remembers, “By becoming a member of the church, he was asking for and receiving help. By learning to receive, he would be able to give. Thank God for a wise pastor.”²⁰⁶ Through Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church and Broadway United Methodist Church, Adam and Stanley figure out that they are friends. For Hauerwas, “What it means for me to be a Christian and to be a friend has become so intertwined that I cannot untangle one from the other, nor do I wish to.”²⁰⁷ It is through their friendship that Stanley and Adam are able to endure Anne’s illness and support each other in their lives of faith.

In the middle of the memoir, Hauerwas reflects about the nature of narrative theology itself. He is concerned about reading too much into this own story as directing how he does theology. He notes,

It may seem odd, given my stress on narrative as the necessary grammar of Christian convictions, that I want to disassociate my own story from how I do theology. It may seem even odder that I am making this argument in a theological memoir. But the emphasis on narrative is not an invitation to use whatever we take to be our “experience” to test or determine the meaning of the language of

²⁰⁵ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 143.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

the faith. Rather, claims for the significance of narrative entail a robust set of metaphysical claims required by our conviction that God creates ex nihilo.²⁰⁸

This particular reflection on experience and narrative foreshadows an important critique of the book. For Hauerwas, because we are creatures and do not exist by necessity, we need a creation story and this is an important theological claim. He argues, “Stories are important, but that our lives can and finally must be narrated is a confirmation, a witness, to the contingent character of all that is.”²⁰⁹ Hauerwas understands his task as a theologian to make the connection between what we say that we believe as Christians and the truth of the world. He comes to realize that, “To speak of narrative as the necessary grammar of Christianity convictions is to name this eschatological character of existence.”²¹⁰ The Christian story has a known and yet to be realized end, and this knowledge sets the parameters for a Christian moral life.

Hauerwas has come to learn the importance of worship for learning the truth of the world and of humanity. He believes that his life itself depends upon learning to worship God. In a humorous reflection he notes, “Most people do not have to become a theologian to become a Christian, but I probably did.”²¹¹ And as he learns to become a Christian through his theology and through worship, Hauerwas learns that the church has a particular politics, a politics of peace. He is formed into a Christian while at Notre Dame, and a Protestant Christian at that! Unfortunately Anne is having a terrible time,

²⁰⁸ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 156-57.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

she falls in unrequited love with one of their friends (a celibate Roman Catholic priest), and there is conflict within the department at Notre Dame. This is a time of transition.

Moving to Durham, NC to teach at Duke Divinity School provides the occasion for several important transitions in Hauerwas's life. He notices many differences between Notre Dame and Duke, and between Texans and Southerners. He expresses concern that Catholicism does not exist at Duke, just as Protestantism did not at Notre Dame. At Duke, working in the Divinity School, he recalls, "Coming to Duke forced me to read the Bible, which I had not read closely since teaching Bible courses at Augustana."²¹²

Hauerwas also begins preaching at the divinity school worship services. It is a struggle feeling the separation between the university and the divinity school. Hauerwas wonders,

Seminaries rightly have specific responsibilities, but I saw no reason why those tasks should be intellectually limiting. Indeed, I thought the opposite to be the case. Given the demands before the church, I thought it all the more important for theology to avoid being identified as a discipline of a profession.²¹³

As he begins thinking more and more about how to train people for ministry, the liturgy becomes more important. For Hauerwas, "The very fact that a people must be gathered to worship God not only is significant for how one thinks about 'ethics' but also provides the appropriate context for considering what it means to be a human being."²¹⁴ He recalls again the importance of good friendships in his theological work as well as in his

²¹² Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 192.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 189.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

personal growth in faith, commenting, “I assume it is obvious by now that I cannot separate what I think from who I know. People make all the difference.”²¹⁵

He sets about to find a new church, and instead finds the Durham Bulls baseball team. For Hauerwas baseball is one of the best ways to teach children about faith and the church. There are rules that must be followed, a particular way of doing things. For him baseball and theology are inseparable. Eventually, he does find Aldersgate United Methodist Church.

As his relationship with Anne draws to a close he remembers,

I was in pain, but I could see no alternatives. One of the reasons I could see no alternatives was, interestingly enough, rather self-interested. I worried that if I found a way to “escape” from the marriage, I might lose the critical edge that seemed to make my work compelling. I wondered if my pain was necessary to avoid the superficial character of so much contemporary theological ethics.²¹⁶

For Hauerwas, living with Anne teaches him to live without answers and to live knowing that ultimately we are not in control. These are profound theological convictions. He begins to argue that we do not and cannot have all of the answers. Some time after their divorce, which she initiated, Anne attempts suicide, and Hauerwas does not return to try and save her. She survived, but dies several years later from congestive heart failure.

After she died, reflecting upon her life Hauerwas comments,

What can possibly be said about a life so lived? I am a Christian theologian. People assume I am supposed to be able to answer that question. I have no idea how to answer that question. If anything, what I have learned over the years as a Christian theologian is that none of us should try to answer such questions. Our humanity demands that we ask them, but if we are wise we should then remain silent. I do think I was writing autobiographically when I wrote *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering*. The argument of that book against theodicies was hard learned. When Christianity is assumed to be an

²¹⁵ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 196.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

“answer” that makes the world intelligible, it reflects an accommodated church committed to assuring Christians that the way things are is the way things have to be.²¹⁷

As their marriage ends and Adam goes off to college, Hauerwas becomes lonely. His counselor suggests he asks someone out on a date. Paula Gilbert not only worked at Duke Divinity School but also attends the same church. He notices, “When Paula celebrates you know that you are in the presence of a person who knows God is going to show up. I sensed that God was just ‘there’ for Paula. That God was so present for her at once frightened and intrigued me. It still does.”²¹⁸ Hauerwas enters into a romantic relationship with Paula and is finally happy. He notes, “Love, particularly in its early stages, is intoxicating and isolating. You are so absorbed in the sheer wonder of the one you love that it seems unnecessary for anyone else to exist.”²¹⁹ Both Paula and Hauerwas know the importance of staying grounded with friends in the midst of romantic love. He recalls,

When you are in love, and I was deeply in love, it is difficult to see clearly the one you love. We are opaque mysteries to ourselves and one another. I do not know if I saw clearly who Paula was, but I knew she was good for me. And I hoped I was good for her. A single life can fold in on itself. I had no doubt that I was complicating Paula’s life. I had no doubt that I continue to complicate her life. My life is noisy. Her life is quiet. My gift to her is a life filled with people. Her gift to me is stillness.²²⁰

He knows the importance of friends in shaping their lives together. For Hauerwas, “To be a Christian is not something you do alone. Our lives are possible only because of what

²¹⁷ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 207.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

others make of them.”²²¹ While Paula and Stanley are happy together, their relationship with Aldersgate ends, and their relationship with Duke becomes strained.

In commenting about the writing of this book, Hauerwas acknowledges he is not an introspective person. He works hard and seldom takes the time to think about his own life and happiness. Through this writing he had come to appreciate that he is indeed Hannah’s child. He notes,

I had not thought of my life in terms of Samuel’s until I began this memoir. Having made the connection, it is quite fascinating to realize that, like Samuel, my life has been shaped by a time of transition. Samuel was caught between the judges and kingship. I am caught between a church that once assumed a kingly role and a church that now awaits an uncertain future.²²²

Being caught in the in-between time means for Hauerwas the importance of speaking truth to the church about the church and the world. He is working to help us understand what it means to be a Christian in a world in which the church no longer has control. He is not trying to tear down the establishment of the church as he has been accused. Rather, in his words,

I was trying to help Christians begin to develop the habits necessary to sustain the church when most people assumed that “being religious” was a good thing only if you did not take it too seriously. I was trying to suggest that Christianity is a good thing only if you take it seriously, which means, at the least, that Christians should raise their children to understand that they are part of a people who have a problem with war.²²³

To take Christianity seriously means learning to speak honestly about the complexities of life in such a way that requires us to talk about God. Hauerwas understands that the task

²²¹ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 247.

²²² *Ibid.*, 234.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 209.

of developing proper habits and speaking about God begins with worship. He notes that learning the story of God takes time. He argues,

Christians believe that we learn to use the word “God” only through worship and prayer to the One we address as Father, Son, and Spirit. Such a God is identified by a story that takes time, often a lifetime, to learn. Theology is the ongoing and never-ending attempt to learn this story and to locate the contexts that make speech about God work.²²⁴

Hauerwas knows that learning to speak about God is a difficult and important task. This learning, or training as he calls it, requires us to be honest about the world in which we live, and the nature of our finite existence. He notes, “We are creatures destined to die. We fear ourselves and one another, sensing that we are more than willing to sacrifice the lives of others to sustain the fantasy that we will not have to die.”²²⁵ Hauerwas has written against the promise that medicine will somehow, someday “cure” death. This avoidance of death is a lie the accommodated church seems to believe. The corrective to this belief is acknowledgement that we live in a world we do not ultimately control.

With his lifetime of work come several important recognitions, through which Hauerwas continues teaching these theological convictions. In 2000, he had the honor of presenting the Gifford Lectures and in 2001 was named “Americas best theologian” by *Time Magazine*. In the lectures Hauerwas connects Barth’s recovery of the apocalyptic character of Christian convictions and how we are to live in the world rightly.²²⁶

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, Hauerwas is forced into a more public role in the conversation about the response to the attacks and his commitment to

²²⁴ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 236.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

nonviolence. Remembering that time he reflects, “I argued that the Christian understanding of the cross required the church to be a counter-community capable of challenging the presumption that ‘we are at war.’ The ‘we’ in ‘we are at war’ could not be the Christian ‘we.’”²²⁷ For Hauerwas this is about human beings acknowledging to God that God is God and that we are not. Jesus did not come to make us safe; he came to make us disciples. Hauerwas wants people to understand that their commitment to Jesus is much more important than their commitment to America. He remembers,

Yoder desired a world free of war. But he also saw quite clearly that Christians are committed to nonviolence not because nonviolence is a strategy to free the world of war. Rather, in a world of war, faithful followers of Christ cannot be anything other than nonviolent. An appeal to abolish war might suggest that nonviolence can be translated into public policy based on grounds that do not require the cross and resurrection of Jesus.²²⁸

His position of non-violence after September 11th costs him several important friendships. While these friendships had been very dear to the man, his convictions about non-violence learned from Yoder were more important.

Hauerwas very succinctly connects his life’s work through worship and nonviolence. He says,

The worship of Jesus is the central act that makes Christians Christian. It is that center that connects everything together. My work is about such connections. I have tried to show that how we live together in marriage, how and why we have children, how we learn to be friends, and how we care for the mentally disabled are the ways a people must live if we are to be an alternate to war. To find alternatives to war will take time. The effort to abolish war presumes that we have all the time we need to persuade others that war can be abolished. War is impatient. Christians believe that through cross and resurrection we have been given the time to be patient in a world of impatience.²²⁹

²²⁷ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 266.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

Hauerwas is grateful for a surprising and wonderful life spent in the church and thinking about God. He knows that each minute is a gift from God and thus not to be squandered living lies. He claims to have never grown accustomed to being a Christian, which he sees as gift as it has helped him to argue against the accommodating church.

As the book comes to an end, Hauerwas returns to some familiar and important themes. He recognizes that his identity as a Christian is dependent upon his mother's hearing of the story of Hannah and Samuel. The narrative of scripture is the foundation of his life. He notes, "My life has been determined by people who know how to pray."²³⁰ Yet prayer has never come easy for Hauerwas himself. He proposes, "I have spent a lifetime learning how to pray. Yet I did not become a theologian to learn how to pray. I became a theologian because I found the work of theology so compelling. Along the way, I discovered that the work of theology is the work of prayer."²³¹ He believes that God has made his life possible, a life working on theology, and ultimately on prayer.

This memoir is not in anticipation of his death; Hauerwas acknowledges there is much work left to do. He comments, "I do not speculate about what life with God after death might be. I am quite content to leave that up to God."²³² Finally, Hauerwas hopes that this book, shortcomings that it may have, is read in such a way to see how God has made his life possible. He notes, "Son of my father, I have no capacity for cruelty, though at times I may be stupid. I hope the descriptions of my life and those who have made my life possible are determined by love, but I will have to trust the reader to tell me where I

²³⁰ Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 281.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

²³² *Ibid.*, 283.

have been stupid.”²³³ This memoir has indeed produced much reaction and opportunities for Hauerwas to continue his work, even in retirement.

After the first edition of this book was published, it was widely read and commented upon. There are dozens of scholarly reviews of *Hannah’s Child*, the most responses to any book he has written, and the conversation about this work of theology continues today. Hauerwas himself wrote an extra chapter, which appears in the paperback edition, to address some of the comments and criticism.

C.C. Pecknold offers an Augustinian reading of *Hannah’s Child* and sees the memoir as the story of the three main women in Hauerwas’s life. Pecknold is complementary of the narrative theology accomplished in the book and notes,

Hannah’s Child is a work of narrative theology unlike any other. The title of the memoir reveals a theologian who has understood the personal implications of the postliberal dictum: “scripture absorbing the world.” It could have been called *A Bricklayer’s Son*, and that would have been true enough. Yet by calling the book *Hannah’s Child*, Hauerwas has chosen to describe his life in the light of Israel’s story, which is the story of God’s intentions for humanity.²³⁴

Although Hauerwas comments repeatedly in the memoir that it is a story for and about his friends, Pecknold maintains a different reading. He claims that the memoir is, “the asymmetrical juxtaposition of the three central women of *Hannah’s Child*: Mother, Anne, and Paula.”²³⁵ These women trace what the book finally has to say about God. Pecknold first points out that, “Like Augustine, Hauerwas is aware that his own ‘decision’ to become a Christian was indebted to his mother’s prayer, to Hannah’s prayer,

²³³ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 288.

²³⁴ C.C. Pecknold “Beyond Our Intentions: An Augustinian Reading of *Hannah’s Child*,” *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. XX, No. 3 2011, 298.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 299.

to the prayers of Israel and the church, that is, indebted to intentions that were prior to his own intentional acts.”²³⁶ Because of this acknowledgement by Hauerwas, we as readers cannot help but to examine his life in the light of the scriptural narrative. Pecknold argues that Hauerwas sees his own life primarily as constituted by his mother’s prayer - by Hannah’s prayer, a prayer for God’s grace.²³⁷

Pecknold then moves on to examining the memoir through the lens of the two main romantic relationships in Hauerwas’s life. Because of Anne’s illness, Pecknold points out, “Hauerwas describes his (and Adam’s) survival largely through teaching and writing, through friendships, and, most suggestively, through his growing participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist.”²³⁸ Though the relationship with Anne is painful, it leads to important theological understandings, writings, and prayer. Pecknold articulates,

Following Jesus leads us to the Garden of Gethsemane, and to the cross, where we ultimately are called to say with Jesus, “not my will, but your will be done.” This prayer considers the theme of intention under a different description. It is a prayer that describes how he thinks Christians can survive and endure the world – it is a prayer that makes it possible to survive in a world whose contingencies can produce Anne Hauerwas.²³⁹

God can redeem even the most tragic for the good, and for use in God’s kingdom.

Pecknold connects the importance of Paula in Hauerwas’s life to his relationship and understanding of the church. In Hauerwas and Paula’s wedding, Pecknold notes, “They celebrated the Eucharist as that sacrament of communion which was not simply in excess of their marriage vows but constituted their internal coherence. Hauerwas locates

²³⁶ Pecknold “Beyond Our Intentions,” 300.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 301.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

his marriage to Paula within the church; he describes his marriage as an ecclesial practice, as an ecclesial intention.”²⁴⁰ Pecknold shares Hauerwas’s hope that his life and work bear witness to the Church and points out that while Hauerwas sees God in all stories, his early work seldom mentions God. In relationship to these three important women, Pecknold notes,

The church has always understood Hannah as a figure of Mary, which is to say, as mother of the church. Read in this Marian way, Hauerwas’s one intention is to be counted as a faithful son of the church, a person who is the result of the prayers and intentions of a people who bear witness to the grace and activity of the triune God.²⁴¹

Finally, Pecknold connects Hauerwas’s narrative to a way of life that embraces a proper Christian understanding of time. He comments about the gratitude of Hauerwas, “It is clear that all that gratitude flows from the constitutive patterns of the Eucharist in his life. His gratitude flows from his hope that Christ’s presence in the pattern that constitutes a unity for the whole of humanity redeemed in God’s time. It is a profoundly hopeful vision.”²⁴²

Hauerwas appreciates this particular review as it provides him with the opportunity to clarify a few things about the memoir. Hauerwas resists the Augustinian *Confessions* comparisons, though in some ways they are unavoidable for a Christian memoir. He notes, “I think I can honestly say that I did not write *Hannah’s Child* to try better to understand myself. Nor did I write the book to try to be better understood by others. I wrote the book because I was asked to do so by friends and I thought the story I

²⁴⁰ Pecknold “Beyond Our Intentions,” 306.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 308.

²⁴² Ibid., 309.

had to tell was about friendship.”²⁴³ For Hauerwas, this book is more about his friendships than it is a direct connection to the women in his life (another critical review will point out the lack of female characters and feminine awareness). Reflecting on Pecknold’s review, Hauerwas notes, “He is suggesting why the story I have to tell is not about my ‘self-consciousness’ but rather exhibits my conviction that the story of my life is rightly told by the story told by another.”²⁴⁴ For Hauerwas, the project of his memoir is an exercise in narrative theology. It is his attempt to do theology by indirection.²⁴⁵

Louis Ruprecht writes an interesting reflection on *Hannah’s Child* exploring Hauerwas in relationship to the radical changes of the 1960’s, modernity, and racial and gender awareness. Ruprecht claims that Hauerwas resisted the ethos of a Sixties-style intellectual, preferring instead to adopt the mode of a pre-modern traditionalist.²⁴⁶ With this mentality Hauerwas then writes in the first person; however, he prefers to speak about his life from the vantage points of narrative selfhood and the story of the Cross.²⁴⁷ The connection to pre-modern Christians is for Ruprecht an attempt by Hauerwas to reclaim orthopraxy. Commenting on Hauerwas’s Christianity, Ruprecht notes, “He admits quite candidly that, to this day, he does not know what he believes, not even about God. So what Stanley Hauerwas does is *practice*, he practices Christianity, religiously.

²⁴³ Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 290.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

²⁴⁶ Louis A. Ruprecht, Jr. “What Child is This? Christian Love and Christian Loss in the 1960’s. Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir*,” in *Soundings* Vol. XCIV, No. 3-4 Fall/Winter 2011, 279.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

He goes to church, every Sunday. And that practical knowledge seems to be knowledge enough for him.”²⁴⁸

Ruprecht’s assessment of Hauerwas’s lack of engagement in the racial and gender changes in the 1960’s and beyond seems to be directly related to his upbringing. He argues that for Hauerwas, “Class matters, period. Not race matters. Not gender matters. Not body matters. *Class matters.*”²⁴⁹ Hauerwas identifies three things that arguably define him personally, and form him theologically to this day. First he is a working-class son of a bricklayer from Texas who, second, was destined to his own Christian calling because of his mother’s prayer, and third spent the first half of his career in an unhappy marriage.²⁵⁰ Because of his apprenticeship as a bricklayer, Hauerwas masters the metaphors of apprenticeship and craft in his more recent work. Ruprecht points out,

It is an artful literary way to make a point for which Hauerwas is well known. Using the Johannine distinction between “the church” and “the world,” Hauerwas casts his family, and his lot, *against* the world and the world’s way of doing business. The loss of crafts like stonecutting and bricklaying – or theology – become potent symbols of modernization and modernity, the corrosive quality of market rationality and the loss of grace.²⁵¹

There is an interesting connection in the narrative of Hauerwas’s life and that of the biblical prophets and their critique of society.

While Ruprecht is complimentary of Hauerwas linkage of education and prophetic critique, he is concerned about the omission of women’s voices in this memoir. He comments, “The reduction of women to character-types in this memoir is relevant to

²⁴⁸ Ruprecht, “What Child is This?,” 283.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 290.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 283-284.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 289.

some of the most problematic aspects of Hauerwas's work."²⁵² Ruprecht notes of Anne, "She is another trope, a literary figure, a decidedly non-feminist character-type, but she serves no clear theological purpose apart from symbolizing the alleged limits of human control."²⁵³ I think that Ruprecht goes too far here. While Hauerwas is making theological claims in the sections about Anne, he is also remembering a particularly difficult relationship. Ruprecht goes on to comment on "Stan's law" that you always marry the wrong person. He says,

Unless one is very careful, what is missing from formulation of such a "law" is any notion that we may bear some responsibility for loading a marriage with burdens that may cause it to fail, or an acknowledgement of the fact that marriage is also a craft that requires long apprenticeship, careful attention to detail, and time. It is most strange that *this* theologian does not say that.²⁵⁴

Ruprecht is very critical of Hauerwas's failure to understand marriage the same way he understands work, and other types of craft. I also think that while Hauerwas lacks a presentation of either of his marriage in the context of craft, he does present his relationship with Paula in a very positive and important light. Ruprecht himself reflects, "Paula Gilbert is contemplative, quiet, solitary, secure in her Christian convictions – almost point-for-point everything that Stanley Hauerwas tells us he is not. She was his saving angel."²⁵⁵ Hauerwas does treat Paula differently in the memoir than almost every other woman.

²⁵² Ruprecht, "What Child is This?," 283.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 295.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 296.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 297.

Of concern for Ruprecht is the selective narrative presenting by Hauerwas. While Hauerwas presents the narrative of his life in the context of the prophet Samuel's story, it seems his name, Stanley, actually comes from a film, *Stanley and Livingston*, his mother watched just prior to his birth. Ruprecht argues,

So there is more than one story circulating around this child, as presumably there are around any child. Pluralism is a fact of the narrative life; we choose to focus on the details we want, and to ignore what does not fit so well. Such issues of selective narration (and memory) factor significantly in the writing of a memoir, as they do in the writing of a gospel and theology.²⁵⁶

He goes on to point out that for Hauerwas, at least in this memoir, only parts of Samuel's story are connected. Ruprecht notes, "The positive lessons that Hauerwas derives from this biblical era emerge only because he is willing to overlook some inconvenient and important details. There is nothing here of the horrific *violence* sponsored, and in some cases even authored, by Samuel."²⁵⁷ The stories about Samuel ordering killings, etc. are ignored in Hauerwas's narrative. The stories about Hannah's prayer, his birth, the transitional place Samuel occupied in Israel's history between judges and kings, and his briefly reported death are the only Samuel stories that make it into Hauerwas's narrative. For Ruprecht, "It is thus what remains hidden by such selective story-telling – attention to the stories not told, the voices not heard, and attention to some of the souls of the Sixties shattered"²⁵⁸ that need to be unpacked to better understand the theological narrative of Hauerwas.

²⁵⁶ Ruprecht, "What Child is This?," 292.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 294.

Hauerwas fails to submit to authority several times during his life. In telling the story of the new pastor at Aldersgate UMC, Hauerwas leaves out his own responsibility in the decision process. Ruprecht argues, “The contradiction between his snide comment about Southern Methodists’ obedience (they assumed they should do what their pastor wanted) and what he had lionized in a fundamentalist community in Boston could not be clearer, nor more confusing. In short, Hauerwas *refuses* to submit.”²⁵⁹ And while Hauerwas as a person makes no sense apart from the settings of the university and the church, he has also struggled to submit to the powers in the university. Ruprecht points out, “Universities are very hierarchical places, and power can be very easily abused. For this reason, the paradox of his own refusal to submit to authority will come to define much of his subsequent career.”²⁶⁰ This refusal to submit is connected to Hauerwas’s writings about recognizing we are not in control of our lives the way we want to be. For Ruprecht this dichotomy is a real concern. He notes,

Hauerwas attempts to link autobiography and theology with artful subtlety in this book. The real danger in setting up his story as a matter of “living out of control” is the tempting invitation to conclude that we are less in control of ourselves than in fact we are – and thus, under the aegis of a too-convenient fate, to fail to take full responsibility for ourselves, to miss how controlling we can be.²⁶¹

Ruprecht points out that by casting responsibility for all of life’s tragedies and graces on God is in many ways failing to claim our own responsibility for what happens to us. He goes on to say, “One might just as reasonably conclude from what we have been told that God made Hauerwas a Methodist, but that he has devoted his life to resisting that fateful

²⁵⁹ Ruprecht, “What Child is This?,” 301.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 311.

fact. He refuses to submit to God's authority, trying to maintain control of his own life, and his own self."²⁶² This is a dangerous line of thinking as it raises objectionable questions such as, is God responsible for Anne's illness, for their divorce? Hauerwas does not go into the further theological implications of this way of understanding divine activity; perhaps he is not even aware of his narrative making these implications.

²⁶² Ruprecht, "What Child is This?," 312.

Conclusion

“Sustainer of all life, infuse our lives with the joy of your Spirit. We know only as we are known. Illumine our lives with knowledge of you, that we may see that our endings are beginnings. Wrench our closings open so that we will not fear suffering, and so learn that it is only through our suffering that you make us your agents. Compel us, make us free so that we manifest the joy of friendship with you and one another. Amen.”²⁶³

Hauerwas spends much of his writing effort on communicating the importance of reclaiming narrative as foundational in the Christian life. Rather than ethical rules or principles, narrative shapes and sustains the moral identity of the Christian community. Narrative enables people to make sense of the world and of their existence. Narrative explains how we are included in the story of salvation. Hauerwas describes Christianity as a set of metaphors and stories that create a coherent understanding of “the world as it should be.” Narrative provides us a sense of worth garnered from participation and contribution to a common adventure. Narrative shapes character and invites the community to be the continuation of the stories in which we find ourselves.

The concerns about the sectarian nature of narrative seem justified. However, within the narrative of Christianity are found authentic theological and moral conversations with those from other groups. Because the narrative of Christianity embraces Christ in the presence of the stranger or the other, sectarianism cannot be a defeating critique of narrative theology. The world in which we live is contingent, and thus it requires a narrative.

Narrative theology helps to reframe the questions about theodicy and suffering into a community effort to be present with those who suffer. Meaning can be found in the midst of suffering through participation in the narrative of faith. Suffering is not the end

²⁶³ Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 132.

of the story, as we know in the resurrection. In some cases, suffering can be redeeming. Suffering reminds us that we are dependent creatures who have needs.

Narrative theology helps us to see those who are differently gifted, those who we might assume suffer because of their differentness, call our attention to the wonder of God who is beyond “normal” expectations. Narrative theology reminds us of the importance of community, that we are not autonomous individuals. Personhood is not a foundational factor, rather one’s identity is found within a community narrative. As a society we need to reclaim a shared narrative and a shared sense of community.

Hauerwas locates himself within the narrative of the Christian faith; this is how he makes sense of his life. His life is about relationships; the different but connected communities of family, friends, academia, and church provide the structure needed for growth and development, to survive pain and suffering, and to celebrate joys and successes. Hauerwas also believes that our lives are not fully under our control, we cannot always anticipate and ensure the results we want.

Hauerwas is not trying to tear down the structures of the institutional church as he has been accused. Instead, he is trying to speak the truth about the church and the world. We need to take our faith seriously; we need to take our worship seriously. For Hauerwas, the truth of what we say we believe and the shape of the lives we live must be consistent. Christian thought and worship go together, they cannot be isolated from one another.

As an Episcopal priest and pastor I find Hauerwas’s writings on narrative both helpful and challenging. The use of narrative is not an excuse to take our experiences to test or define the meaning of the faith. Additionally, there is a danger of focusing only on

the details of our personal narrative that we like (selective narrative and memory). There are actually many stories that fit together in our personal narrative, which all need to be considered in order to properly place our narrative within the narrative of faith.

In my preaching ministry I find that context is very important, as is pastoral sensitivity. Translation for the sake of context is vital in effective preaching. Hauerwas is limited in his embrace of narrative preaching for fear of “translating” the biblical text. This is to his detriment. I agree with Thomas Long who contends that preachers should use all means necessary to communicate the transformative power of the Gospel. Narrative preaching is about creating a transformational event for the preacher and the hearers of a sermon. Sermons are to enlighten, to inspire, and to motivate. They help people see themselves in the grand narrative of faith, the ongoing story of the people of God. I do, however, side with Hauerwas that preachers need to do a better job of sticking with the text instead of explaining the meaning away.

I am particularly interested in the parallels between good narrative preaching and the Eucharist. Both lead to transformation, both are a gift from God. Sermons should be full of expectation about God showing up in all of our lives, that incredible things are about to happen. The community of faith matures through good leadership, preaching, and participation in the Eucharist.

I see limits of the use of narrative in pastoral care but also the importance of solidarity in silence. This is a better theological response than inadequate answers. Solidarity in silence does not resolve our pain before God, but does place it in the proper context, surrounded by community and before God.

Hauerwas does not believe that through advances in medical technology suffering can completely be eliminated – it is part of our nature. Here I am in complete agreement with him. One of the challenges with modern medicine and pastoral care are the question around the promise of medicine and the reality of our finitude. I appreciate his critique of the idea that we must create our own narrative. Instead we must find ourselves within the narrative of God – the God who has not abandoned us, even when we, or someone we love, is deeply ill. Through the suffering of Christ we have knowledge that we can relate to God, who understands suffering and suffers with us. Through the faith community we endure pain and loss together. Being in the presence of another who has suffered helps us to know we are not alone, not abandoned. The pastor’s role is to connect the narrative of faith with the individual’s narrative.

Ultimately, I find Hauerwas’s writing on narrative theology to be instructive and helpful in my context and for the contemporary Church. He speaks the truth (as he sees it), and as a pastor, my role is to speak that same truth with love. I believe that a robust understanding and incorporation of narrative theology into the pews can have a profound influence on Christianity. The narrative places us in the proper context of being part of God’s eternal, unfolding story, of which we know the end. My preaching, teaching, and pastoral care have each been influenced and grown through a deeper understanding of narrative theology.

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