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The Witness of the World

Katarina von Kühn Murray

S.T.M. Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

I was an undergraduate biblical studies student at Baylor University when I first encountered the work of Stanley Hauerwas in an introductory course on Christian Ethics in the Fall of 2016. I remember that I did not find it particularly compelling—although I am sure I did not read it carefully—and instead tried to persuade my classmates to see the cogency of Reinhold Niebuhr’s “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist.”¹ Timing matters, and Hauerwas’ work and his claim that the church offers a nonviolent alternative to a violent world came to me during a time when the Christian institution I attended made national news for covering up cases of sexual assault and rape.² Christian institutions, whether universities or churches, seemed to me no more peaceable than the world around them. In fact, they seemed far more violent, because their actions were backed by a commitment to love God and love neighbor.

After graduating, I attended Duke Divinity School for my Master of Divinity, and while Hauerwas no longer had a large presence, his thought and legacy was certainly in the waters. Moreover, the biblical studies department focused heavily on narrative theology. During my time in those halls, I read far more of Hauerwas’ work and soon found myself convinced by certain aspects of his theology, particularly with his emphasis on the need to start with ecclesiology. For all the failures I had seen in my experiences in churches and in my disappointment with Baylor University, I nevertheless yearned for Hauerwas’ vision of the church as a community which enables us to see rightly, trains us in virtue, and offers an alternative way of existing modeled

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Why The Christian Church Is Not Pacifist,” in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

² “Key Dates and Developments in the Baylor Assault Scandal,” AP NEWS, August 11, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/sports-college-football-violence-lawsuits-sexual-assault-9fe035761dc3d1f3d42c714a87c78a10>.

after the life and witness of Jesus. To put matters plainly, I wanted (and still want) the church to matter, and in Hauerwas' theology it does.

Of course, the inescapable question for Hauerwas and those taken with his work is where is this church? This question gains urgency in times of institutional failure, as in the case of Baylor University's sexual assault scandal, or in the case highly discussed by theologians of John Howard Yoder. Yoder's case is particularly troubling because it not only highlights the failure of Christian institutions to hold Yoder accountable in an appropriate and timely manner, but also it spotlights the betrayal and subterfuge of an ordained minister, seminary professor, and acclaimed peace theologian whose work had influenced many. As detailed by historian Rachel Waltner Goosen, it is possible that "more than 100 women experienced unwanted sexual violations by Yoder," many of whom were his students.³ Even more troubling, he framed his abuse as an experiment in Christian sexual ethics, claiming to be a victim himself of society's "respectable culture," from which he sought to create an alternative culture of desexualized familial intimacy between brothers and sisters in Christ.⁴ The revelations about Yoder prompted theologians, especially those deeply influenced by Yoder, to ask whether Yoder's life and violent sexual abuse discounted his work. Some found they could no longer read or assign Yoder; others argued for a continued use of his work, citing the inconsistency between his life and his theology, as well as a method of reading Yoder's own work against him in the rarer cases where it does display a consistency with his actions.⁵

³ Rachel Waltner Goosen, "'Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015), 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ See David Cramer et al., "Scandalizing John Howard Yoder," *The Other Journal*, July 8, 2014, <https://theotherjournal.com/2014/07/scandalizing-john-howard-yoder/>. Arguing for a continued use of Yoder, the authors write, "It is undoubtedly difficult to know how to receive insight from the sinful, but ever since the church settled the Donatist controversy in the early fifth century, the

While Yoder's story is appalling, I did not have the same proximity to him as a thinker to experience the personal sense of betrayal, nor was it pressing for me to engage in pondering the ethical dilemma about whether to discard his work.⁶ What I did have, however, was a deep indebtedness to Hauerwas and a recognition that Yoder influenced much of Hauerwas' thought, and that Hauerwas played a role in the unfolding drama about Yoder. While there may be cause for concern about Hauerwas' personal involvement in seeing Yoder's disciplinary process come to an end and in bringing his work back to a place of prominence, the crux of the matter is that Hauerwas' theology, his commitment to nonviolence, and his ecclesiology in particular, parallels that of Yoder.⁷ In his introduction to *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas writes:

Yoder's account of the church fit almost exactly the kind of community I was beginning to think was required by an ethics of virtue. However, Yoder was a pill I had no desire to swallow. His ecclesiology could not work apart from his understanding of Jesus and the centrality of nonviolence as the hallmark of the Christian life. The last thing I wanted to be was a pacifist, mainly because I longed to do ethics in a way that might be widely influential. Moreover, by disposition I am not much inclined to nonviolence. But the

church has committed itself to believing God's gifts can be mediated by sinners. It would make things easier if reading theology meant cherry-picking between heroes and villains; it is far more difficult and worthwhile we think to sit with the histories that produced those texts and to confront a God who makes use of them."

⁶ For an excellent article exploring the kind of betrayal caused by Yoder's actions, see Karen V. Guth, "Moral Injury, Feminist and Womanist Ethics, and Tainted Legacies," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 38, no. 1 (August 7, 2018): 167–86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sce.2018.0010>. In it, Guth uses the concept of moral injury to discuss the effects of a tainted legacy like that of Yoder. Particularly constructive is Guth's recognition that, like moral injury, tainted legacies involve "venerated authorities, whether individual leaders or institutions, whose harmful actions betray the very moral values they claim to uphold" (169). This sort of betrayal affects the ability of the betrayed to trust in the institution they had admired.

⁷ See Stanley Hauerwas, "In Defense of 'Our Respectable Culture': Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," ABC Religion & Ethics, October 17, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/in-defence-of-our-respectable-culture-trying-to-make-sense-of-jo/10095302>. Hauerwas admits his own inattentiveness in the Yoder proceedings, acknowledging both his failure to see the troubling depth of Yoder's behavior and a too-quick desire to "have John resume his place as one of the crucial theologians of our time."

more I read of Yoder the more I was convinced that the mainlines of his account of Jesus and the correlative ethic of nonviolence were correct.⁸

In first encountering Yoder's work, Hauerwas found his ecclesiology convincing and conducive to his own commitment to the growth of character and virtue in the Christian life. The church as Yoder described it was a community that could make possible the development of character that Hauerwas found integral for the living out of Christian convictions. Hauerwas' attachment to Yoder's ecclesiology is what led him to a reluctant acceptance of Yoder's claim that nonviolence is fundamental to the Christian life. In other words, his primary indebtedness to Yoder centered on ecclesiology. What makes this connection uneasy, is that one can see plainly how Yoder's life directly contradicted his thoughts on nonviolence. His actions were not an outgrowth of his pacifist convictions but a betrayal.⁹ On the other hand, his ecclesiology, or at the very least his own manipulation of it, created an environment that allowed him to sustain his abuse, evade correction, and silence his accusers.

My goal in this paper is to ask whether the same features of Yoder's ecclesiology that allowed for his abuse are present in Hauerwas' ecclesiology. Does Hauerwas' ecclesiology carry the same potential for sexualized violence? In what ways does his ecclesiology differ from that

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, "Introduction," in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xxiv.

⁹ See Laura Schmidt Roberts, "Addressing Sexual Violence in Mennonite Communities: The Case of John Howard Yoder.," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 41 (January 1, 2021): 87–95. While my paper will examine ecclesiology, I should also note the need for examining the way peace theology fails to address all kinds of violence. We can say Yoder both betrayed his pacifist convictions in his actions, and that his pacifist convictions were not imaginative enough to confront different forms of violence. Roberts, writing from the Mennonite perspective, argues that the Mennonite church with its "long-standing commitment to and practice of nonviolence" can be adept at responding to sexualized violence "if peace theology and nonviolence are recast and expanded to address these realities internal to our communities" (Ibid., 91). For Roberts, this means listening and responding to those harmed by sexualized violence in the same way the church has listened to those harmed by armed conflict, social, and political oppression.

of Yoder? Are these differences enough? And finally, where might we desire Hauerwas to have made a greater difference in his ecclesiology? These questions are motivated both by a desire to examine Hauerwas' ecclesiology for potentially violent problems, as well as a desire to form my own ecclesiology with direct attention to the overlooked problem of violence internal to the church.

Chapter Outline

In order to answer these questions, chapter one will focus on the ways in which Yoder's ecclesiology established a vision of the church with built-in internalized violence and a faulty system of correction. In particular, I examine Yoder's belief that the church can be a site of ethical experimentation capable of risking failure because of its unique ability for reconciliation between the offender and the offended. Internal to his logic is both the idea that risks are worthwhile even if they cause harm, and that the church is more capable than the world of transcending standard ethical norms. Also in chapter one, I review Hauerwas' own assessment of Yoder's ecclesiology and where it differs from his own. Hauerwas locates Yoder's mistake in having far too great a confidence in the church's ability to rise above our sinful nature, creating far too great a separation between the church and the world. His own work, on the other hand, with its attention to virtue, accounts for the process of moral growth and setbacks of those within the church. Moreover, his attention to narrative allows for an exercise in moral imagination sorely lacking in Yoder's account.

Chapter two shifts to examine Hauerwas' own understanding of the separation between the church and the world, and how virtue and narrative function in his account. The goal here is to see whether Hauerwas' dichotomy between the church and the world differs from that of

Yoder and in what ways. I make the argument that while Hauerwas bypasses certain problems Yoder does not—namely, his emphasis is clear that the crucial distinction between the church and the world is not one of moral capability but of interpretive power—he nevertheless leaves little room for witness arising from outside the church. This is a careful claim, as both Hauerwas and Yoder affirm that God works everywhere in the world, even outside the church. It is my belief, however, that Hauerwas fails to attend to the ways in which God uses the world to witness to, and even correct, the church. Hauerwas claims that the task of the church is to be the church, to exist as a community that points to and exhibits and alternate truth to what the world proclaims, but he lacks a robust account of how God can sometimes use the world to witness to that truth better than the church. Although Hauerwas has far greater attention to the failures of the church, particularly because he attends to virtue and narrative, he still creates an ecclesiology in which the church seems to have the moral high ground over the world.

Finally, chapter three bolsters my claim that Hauerwas misses an opportunity to write about God's use of the world to witness to the church as I provide scriptural support for instances of world-witness. As my main critique of Hauerwas centers on his lack of consideration for the times and ways in which the world sees rightly, particularly ignoring the ways the world can correct a church failing to see rightly, it is necessary to show that scripture attests to this interpretive power of the world. To do so, I examine the story of the Roman Centurion found in Matthew 8:5-13 to highlight how it is often those outside the community of faith, even those occupying positions in the world antithetical to the virtues of the community of faith, who know better the truth of who Jesus is and his power over the created world. I then examine the story of Jonah and his anger with God's mercy toward the Ninevites to highlight an odd example from Scripture where God uses the conversion of an entire city known for its wickedness to correct

Jonah and attest to the merciful attributes of God. Afterwards, taking these two stories together, I suggest some concrete ways an account of the witness of the world might change Hauerwas' understanding of the role of the church and the world and their relationship to each other. I conclude that to take seriously the witness of the world means our understanding of the church and its tasks must include the task of actively listening to the world to see where God is at work.

CHAPTER ONE

John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology

In Goosen's chronicle of the Mennonite responses to Yoder's sexual abuse, she presents the history of different groupings of Mennonites who challenged Yoder from within an institutional setting, starting with the "Covenant Group," formed in 1980 by the President of Goshen Biblical Seminary (G.B.S.), Marlin E. Miller.¹⁰ Miller formed this group with a small and secret "cadre of insiders" at the seminary in an attempt at a disciplinary process that would hold Yoder accountable for his actions.¹¹ This first formal attempt to confront Yoder came after a three year period during which Miller had tried to privately confront Yoder about his actions toward women. Established in these early disciplinary processes was a pattern that would continue throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in which Yoder engaged in a theological "tug of words" to argue with his accountability groups about his sexual 'experiment.'¹²

Not only were these disciplinary processes centered around biblical arguments for or against Yoder's sexual ethic, but also they centered on how to faithfully apply the biblical mandate: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother" (Mt. 18:15, RSV).¹³ This mandate, on which Yoder himself wrote extensively, served as the basis for much of the secrecy in Yoder's disciplinary process. As Goosen writes, Miller hoped that the "conflict between Yoder's experimentation and seminary interests might be resolved by a faithful application of Matthew

¹⁰Goosen, "'Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," 14.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Ibid., 12

¹³ Ibid., 11

18.”¹⁴ Yet, while Miller told Yoder about his fault, the day never came where Yoder listened to him. Miller did not abandon the Matthew 18 ethic, however, but turned to its next verse, which called for the gathering of two or three witnesses to confront a brother who does not listen—Miller’s “Covenant Group.” And when the covenant group failed to achieve its goal, Miller turned to the next verse, Matthew 18:17, to tell it to the church if he refuses to listen.¹⁵ For Miller this meant recommending “Yoder’s dismissal to the G.B.S. board of overseers,” which caused Yoder to react with the accusation that the seminary had “violated the letter and spirit of Matthew 18.”¹⁶

Yoder wrote about Matthew 18 and the practice of binding and loosing (a shorthand for the disciplinary process outlined in Matthew 18) several times throughout his career: first in the *Gospel Herald* in 1964, then in the pamphlet *Concern* in 1967, and again in his book *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* in 1992.¹⁷ Isaac Samuel Villegas explains that Yoder used his ethic on Matthew 18 to “demand an audience with the women who had reported their experiences of his abuse,” arguing that the first step in the process of reconciliation was a face to face encounter between the offender and the offended.¹⁸

Yoder used his accusers’ unwillingness to meet with him as a means to stall the disciplinary process. Moreover, as Villegas argues, his later publication on Matthew 18 was revised in a way that weakened the “imperative for communal responsibility” and downplayed

¹⁴ Goosen, “‘Defanging the Beast’: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁷ Isaac Samuel Villegas, “The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder’s Abuse,” *Modern Theology* 37, no. 1 (January 2021): 191, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12623>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

the idea that power dynamics should prevent the offended from confronting the offender.¹⁹

Present in every version of his binding and loosing ethic was a focus on the “restoration of the offender” as opposed to care for or protection of the one offended.²⁰ The outworking of this ethic was seen in Yoder’s own case where, as Goosen writes, “Denominational and congregation resources were being channeled into the rehabilitation of John Howard Yoder, but no comparable endeavor addressed the spiritual and emotional needs of women who had been harmed.”²¹ His binding and loosing ethic favored the restoration of the offender to the community, without careful consideration of the needs of the one offended.

While one could argue, as Hauerwas does, that Yoder simply had a bad interpretation of Matthew 18, Villegas maintains that Yoder’s reading of Matthew 18 is integral to his ecclesiology.²² Yoder envisioned the church “as a site of ethical transcendence,” which, alongside having obvious connections to his ‘experimenting’ with a new sexual ethic, is also what enabled him to see the church as a community that could transcend the violence of the world and practice nonviolence.²³ The disciplinary ethic of Matthew 18 acts as a linchpin for the

¹⁹ Villegas, “The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder’s Abuse,” 207. Villegas draws our attention to a passage in *Body Politics*, where Yoder writes, “The person offended is not excused from the responsibility to reconcile; yet neither is anyone else who knows about it” (John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* [Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992], 4).

²⁰ Villegas, “The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder’s Abuse,” 208.

²¹ Goosen, “‘Defanging the Beast’: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” 65.

²² Hauerwas writes, “Cramer, Howell, Tran and Martens also observe John’s refusal to cooperate with the accountability process was inconsistent with his ecclesiology. As Goosen makes clear, he simply tried to out-argue Miller and the others associated with the process in the seminary. His argument that the process was inherently flawed because he was not allowed to confront his accusers was a reading of Matthew 18 that is, at best, question-begging. He seemed to have positioned himself as above the process” (Hauerwas, “In Defence of ‘Our Respectable Culture’: Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse”).

²³ Villegas, “The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder’s Abuse,” 197.

church to be a site of ethical transcendence because it allows the church to try out alternative ways of existing while knowing there is a process of restoration for when a practice fails. In the words of Villegas, “Yoder offered his ‘binding and loosing’ process as a way to unburden Christian communities from the stranglehold of cultural norms, of social structures, of ecclesial recalcitrance.”²⁴ Yoder even compared the risk involved in trying out new ethics to a surgeon risking some failures in order to determine which kinds of patients would benefit from surgery or organ transplant.²⁵ Implicit in the metaphor is the idea that finding and trying out new ways of living in the world was a matter of life and death. If someone is harmed in the process, it was for a good, high-stakes cause. Presumably, churches could handle the risk better than the world because of their ability for reconciliation modeled after Matthew 18.

The binding and loosing ethic, therefore, was a double-edged sword, allowing Yoder to show what enabled churches to reject the cultural norm of violence, while simultaneously creating a space for risky, and ultimately violent, moral experimentation. Underlying it all was a belief that the church was a place that, as a community, had the moral fortitude to transcend cultural norms that the world could not. In short, Yoder’s ecclesiology enabled him to perpetuate his abuse for years.

In her analysis of peace theology and the case of Yoder, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite identifies that peace theologies, which long “for the innocence of paradise in sectarian peace communities,” perpetuate abuse because “the nature of power is not systematically addressed and is assumed to be amenable to ‘person-to-person’ resolution even where there are gross

²⁴ Villegas, “The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder’s Abuse,” 199.

²⁵ Goosen, “‘Defanging the Beast’: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” 37-38.

violations and power inequalities.²⁶ Yoder's description of the church as a sectarian peace community precisely failed to consider power dynamics internal to the church. His peace theology was conducive for abuse because it was very unimaginative about the ways violence can be perpetuated through person-to-person encounters, even ones facilitated within a community of faith. As was clear in the case of Yoder, the community's immediate and primary concern was to restore Yoder no matter how long it took. The women involved in his abuse were often treated as an afterthought.

Hauerwas' Response to Yoder

Where does this leave us with Hauerwas and his ecclesiology? While Hauerwas nowhere approximates anything akin to Yoder's idea that the church could be a site of ethical experimentation, his theology nevertheless rests on the idea that the church offers an alternative witness on how to live that is seen through the character of those who are a part of it. Like Yoder, the church seems to be a place in which human beings can cultivate practices of nonviolence that the world cannot. At face value, Hauerwas indeed seems to share the idea that the church can ethically transcend the world around it. Where is the difference? It is helpful at this juncture to turn to Hauerwas' own words on the matter, in his formal response, "In Defence of 'Our Respectable Culture': Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse."

Hauerwas wrote his article in 2017 as his own attempt at a "small example of Matthew 18," because the writing of the article was in part prompted by the call of many who told him

²⁶ Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Peace and War on Women," in *Women's Bodies as Battlefield* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 159.

that he needed to write it.²⁷ In it, Hauerwas locates the crux of Yoder's theological problem in the fact that he makes "too extreme the duality between the church and the world, particularly when it comes to dealing with our everyday relations with one another."²⁸ Hauerwas is quick to clarify that he is not doing what "many superficial criticisms" do, namely that he is not claiming that Yoder limits God's redemption to the church alone.²⁹ According to Hauerwas, Yoder "was always ready to acknowledge that God was doing a new thing among those who were not church."³⁰ Rather, Hauerwas was concerned that Yoder had too much faith in the moral capabilities of the people of the church. He writes:

The critical question, however, is whether his emphasis on the distinctive behaviour that is constitutive of what it means to be the church presumes we are capable of being more than we are. The question is whether Yoder failed to understand that, when all is said and done, baptism does not make us angels; we remain human beings.³¹

Yoder's failing to understand the sinfulness of the people who constitute the church reflects a larger problem in his theology. He lacks "insight and wisdom about learning to live well as a human being."³² His focus was on the church as a site of nonviolence and he assumed "if you were part of a community of nonviolence, you would simply become what it meant to be nonviolent."³³ Hence, baptism makes us 'angels'—by virtue of baptism into the community we become all the community stands for. There is no account for the learning process, by which we are "*trained* to be Christian."³⁴ For Hauerwas, the problem with Yoder's account did not lie in

²⁷ Hauerwas, "In Defence of 'Our Respectable Culture': Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

what was there, but in what was not there: an attention to the moral and psychological process of becoming Christian.³⁵

In similar vein, J. Alexander Sider critiques Yoder for focusing so heavily on the “task of the community” that he fails to attend to the rational psychology underlying the individuals in the community.³⁶ As a result, he lacks an account of happiness and displays no concern for psychological wellbeing. Sider insightfully notes that a process of forgiveness and reconciliation outlined by Matthew 18 is not simple and involves more than the “restoration of the sister or brother to the community.”³⁷ To forgive and to be forgiven requires a reflection on one’s self, struggling with the effects of guilt and betrayal, and coming to a self-acceptance as well. Yoder’s ecclesiology has a “palpable ‘ought,’” concerning all that a Christian must do to be a disciple of Christ, but he lacks reflection on the psychology of the one engaging in the ‘ought,’ how failures, and the subsequent guilt, as well as successes, impact the individual.³⁸ Sider raises the question of whether Hauerwas, by appropriating Yoder’s ecclesiology, similarly lacks this psychological reflection. He argues, however, that Hauerwas does display the requisite concern in his account of friendship.

³⁵ He writes, “What I have tried to suggest, however, is that it is not what John has written that is the problem. Instead, the problem is what is *not* there. I am not suggesting that if John had a better understanding of our psychology, he would have been less likely to have engaged in his extremely troubling ‘experimentation.’ We have no means to know that. Rather, I am suggesting that if we continue to read and learn from Yoder, we must do so by attending to what is not ‘there.’” (Hauerwas, “In Defence of ‘Our Respectable Culture’: Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse.”). Hauerwas’ comment here suggests that we can still make use of Yoder’s work insofar as we recognize what is lacking. Arguably, this is what Hauerwas’ work does, as it builds on Yoder’s theology with attention to character, virtue, and narrative.

³⁶ J. Alexander Sider, “Friendship, Alienation, Love: Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 438.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 437.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 438.

Reflecting on Sider's comments, Hauerwas assesses two key differences between Yoder's theology and his own. The first is that Hauerwas focuses on character and virtue. He resists the idea that his ecclesiology lacks rational psychology insofar as he has a significant place for the virtues. He notes that Yoder "always thought [his] emphasis on the importance of the virtues was a distraction."³⁹ Second, connected to the first, is the importance Hauerwas places on narrative. For Hauerwas, narrative and novels are an "exercise in the enrichment of the imagination through which we develop the empathy that is crucial for the acquisitions of virtues."⁴⁰ Yoder, who "had no interest in novels," lacked a moral imagination.⁴¹ Without a moral imagination, Yoder's attention to violence was limited in scope. He could not imagine, or chose to ignore, sexualized violence as a key problem the church needed to address.

The key differences between Hauerwas and Yoder's ecclesiology, at least in Hauerwas' estimation, then, are threefold: (1) Yoder has too great a dichotomy between the church and the world, (2), Yoder has no account of the virtues within the life of discipleship, and (3) Yoder has no appreciation of narrative as a means of coming to the truth. Hauerwas, on the other hand, presumably avoids the dangerous dichotomy, accounts for guilt and repentance by including virtue in his ecclesiology, and has an account of narrative that appreciates moral imagination.

If we are to take Hauerwas at his word that we should judge Yoder's work by what is missing, then it is important to ask whether what is present in Hauerwas' work—that is missing from Yoder's work—creates a markedly different ecclesiology devoid of the problems found in Yoder. In other words, does Hauerwas' understanding of the church's relationship to the world,

³⁹ Hauerwas, "In Defence of 'Our Respectable Culture': Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse."

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

does his account of virtue, and does his account of narrative save his ecclesiology? Or, is the same potential for abuse present in Hauerwas' account? Moreover, it is important to ask the same question that Hauerwas asks of Yoder: what is missing? We turn toward answering these questions in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Stanley Hauerwas' Ecclesiology

In order to answer whether Hauerwas' ecclesiology is markedly different than that of Yoder, we will need to review in depth Hauerwas' views on what the church is and how it is different from the world. Hauerwas distinguishes his ecclesiology as one that focuses heavily on the cultivation of virtues and the interpretative power of the church. Indeed, it would be impossible to describe Hauerwas' view of the church without discussing virtue or narrative. In the previous chapter, we saw that Hauerwas believes that Yoder makes too strong a dichotomy between the church and the world, failing to account for the moral struggle that church members undergo as they learn to be the church. The presumption underlying Hauerwas' critique is that his distinction between the church and the world does not fall into this error. As we will see, Hauerwas often recognizes the failure of the church to live up to its call, voicing the concerns of his potential critics that no virtuous community as he has described exists.

However, while Hauerwas consistently accounts for the sins of the church, he nevertheless relies on a church and world dichotomy similar to that of Yoder. The world exists simply to receive aid from the church, but it can offer no aid back to the church. This means that the only source of witness and correction for the church is internal. Fortunately, when we consider the church as Hauerwas does as extending back into the past and forward in the future, including the biblical narrative and our tradition(s), there are many resources for internal correction. Unfortunately, it overlooks a key component of the biblical story and tradition: God often works through the world to witness to the church—a point that I will return to in the final chapter. In leaving this idea out of his account, Hauerwas creates some potential problems for himself.

The Church and the World

In order to understand Hauerwas' view of the church, it is important to contextualize why the church serves such a fundamental role in his theology. Hauerwas' emphasis on the church is his response to a problem he identified in liberal Protestantism, and in the social gospel movement in particular. These strands of Christian ethics failed to distinguish the church from the world at all. They used concepts like the "kingdom of God" abstracted from the community that teaches us about these concepts. Concerning the social gospel movement, Hauerwas writes:

The question of the role of the church did arise. Clearly the church served as model and as forward flank in the social gospel's call to action. Yet, an ecclesiology which clarified the differing character of the social relation in which the individual stood in the church and over against the world receded from focus. Church and world alike stood under the identical challenge to create a Christian social order through political democracy and fraternal socialism.⁴²

While the church had a role as serving as a model or exemplar on how to act in the world, there was no sense in which it differed from the world. Both the task of the world and the task of the church was the same, to inaugurate the kingdom of heaven on earth, and both the people of the world and the people of the church were equally capable of such a task. The church used the same means and language as the world to seek out the justice characteristic of the kingdom of God.

Hauerwas felt that the church had to be something more than this. Moreover, he was concerned that the appeals to justice were abstract and that the concept of justice makes little sense without the "societal practices that make [it] intelligible."⁴³ The social gospel movement

⁴² Stanley Hauerwas and Mark Sherwindt, "The Reality of the Kingdom: An Ecclesial Space for Peace," in *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 109.

⁴³ Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of Justice: Why Justice Is a Bad Idea for Christians," in *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 49.

understood justice in relation to the practices of liberal democracy. Hauerwas, on the other hand, believed that a Christian's understanding of justice must derive from the tradition and practices of the church. Justice had to be understood in relationship to the story of Jesus, and the story of Jesus could only be understood from within the community of the church.⁴⁴ Apart from the community, appeals to the 'kingdom of God' could be "used to underwrite any conception of the just society," even ones that directly contradicted Jesus' story.⁴⁵

For Hauerwas, Jesus' story exposed the violence and divisions of the world as a false way to live. Jesus' life, marked by nonviolence, forgiveness, and love, showed "alternatives to the coercion the world thinks necessary for existence."⁴⁶ And God, by raising Jesus from the dead, confirmed that "the character of Jesus' life prior to the resurrection is perfectly faithful to his vocation to proclaim and make present God's kingdom."⁴⁷ In other words, in raising Jesus from the dead, God established that the way Jesus lived was consistent with his claims about the kingdom. Jesus' life, therefore, defines our understanding of what the kingdom of God looks like, and concepts such as "justice" are only made intelligible in and through Jesus' life. Because Jesus rejected the use of violence and the use of coercion, he showed that true justice cannot be had "from the barrel of a gun."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Similarly, Hauerwas writes in regards to 'peace': "It is not that we have a prior definition of peace and then think of Christ as the great exemplar of that peace. Rather what Jesus has done enables us to know and embody God's peace in our lives by finding peace with God, with ourselves, and with one another" (Stanley Hauerwas, "The Presence of the Peaceable Kingdom," in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], 93).

⁴⁵ Hauerwas and Sherwindt, "The Reality of the Kingdom: An Ecclesial Space for Peace," 113.

⁴⁶ Hauerwas, "The Presence of the Peaceable Kingdom," 87.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 104.

The posture towards Jesus' story is the distinguishing mark between those in the church and those in the world. Those in the church confess that Jesus' way of life is true, whereas those outside the church do not.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the church witnesses to Jesus' way of life as true by conforming their actions to it. The church in this sense is a "foretaste of the kingdom" because it makes the "kingdom visible" through its actions.⁵⁰ This distinction between church and world, however, is not so clearcut as our actions do not always conform nearly to what we confess to believe. Even individuals in the church can have the world in them: "The world is those aspects of our individual and social lives where we live untruthfully by continuing to rely on violence to bring order."⁵¹ That is to say, the world can be seen in Christians insofar as their actions betray the narrative they profess.

Nevertheless, even if the lines between the church and the world can easily blur, Hauerwas is clear that there are particular marks of the church. There is, therefore, no equivalent idea that the church can be seen in those in the world insofar as their actions conform to the Christian narrative. The church is indeed a community, but it is a particular community "where the sacraments are celebrated, the word is preached, and upright lives are encouraged and lived."⁵² Additionally, the church remains an institution with "budgets, buildings, parking lots, potluck dinners," and Hauerwas maintains that appeals to an invisible, universal, or ideal church are misleading.⁵³ Attempts to exonerate the church by pointing away from the reality of parking lots and budgets, take us away from the reality of the church as a community that is a sinful but

⁴⁹ Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," 100. Here, Hauerwas affirms Yoder's position that the difference between the church and the world is that those in the church confess Jesus as Lord.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

redeemed people. It is clear in Hauerwas' description of the church, that he does not envision the church as a community of saints, but rather as a community that despite its failures and sins can correctly interpret reality. He is not guilty of the charge he makes toward Yoder of thinking that baptism makes us angels.

Already, it is may be clear how narrative and virtue inform Hauerwas' definition of the church. The church is the community that witnesses to the story of Jesus through its actions. Belief in the truthfulness of the story precedes the formation of character. Christians pattern their lives after Christ not because they think Christ is the ideal example of a prior concept of a just or virtuous person, but rather because they believe in the truthfulness of Christ's narrative. Hauerwas explains that the virtues Christians develop are not simply any virtues, "but the virtues necessary for remembering and telling the story of a crucified savior."⁵⁴ And, in a world that constantly turns to violence and coercion, it can be difficult to follow a crucified savior whose politics reject the way of the world. Hauerwas writes:

The difficulty is that following a crucified Lord entails embodying a politics that cannot resort to coercion and violence; it is a politics of persuasion all the way down. It is a tiring business that is slow and time-consuming, but then we, that is, Christians, believe that by redeeming time Christ has given us all the time we need to pursue peace. Christ, through the Holy Spirit, bestows upon his disciples the long-suffering patience necessary to resist any politics whose impatience makes coercion and violence the only and inevitable response to conflict.⁵⁵

Because Jesus' story is one in which coercion and violence are rejected, and the only viable option for change is persuasion, an important virtue for Christians is long-suffering patience.

Violence and coercion are acts of impatience by those seeking to see the change they want

⁵⁴ Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," 103.

⁵⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, "Church Matters: On Faith and Politics," in *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflection on Church, Politics, and Life* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2014), 82, ProQuest eBook Central.

happen swiftly. A Christian, however, cannot seek the kingdom of God through means antithetical to that kingdom. While persuasion might be seen as less effective, it is the only option. Patience is a necessary virtue in telling the story of Christ.⁵⁶

The Task of the Church and the World

Having already described what the church and the world are for Hauerwas, we should turn to the tasks he assigns to the church and the world. In provocative fashion, Hauerwas often writes that the first task of the church is to be the church.⁵⁷ Broken down, his claim is no tautology, but reflects a commitment to the interpretive power of the church:

Christians must again understand that their first task is not to make the world better or more just, but to recognize what the world is and why it is that it understands the political task as it does. The first social task of the church is to provide the space and time necessary for developing skills of interpretation and discrimination sufficient to help us recognize the possibilities and limits of our society.⁵⁸

The church's primary task is one remembering, telling, and living out a story—one that challenges the dominant stories of our society. Contrary to frequent criticism, this task does not constitute the withdrawal of the church from society.⁵⁹ Rather, this task is primarily for the sake

⁵⁶ See Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," 104. Hauerwas writes, "As Christians, therefore, we seek not so much to be effective as to be faithful—we, thus, cannot do that which promises 'results' when the means are unjust."

⁵⁷ See for example: "Put starkly, the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church—the servant community...As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic" (Ibid., 99).

⁵⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, "The Church and Liberal Democracy: The Moral Limits of a Secular Polity," in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 74.

⁵⁹ See Russell P. Johnson, "Doing Justice to Difference: Stanley Hauerwas and Public Theology," *Modern Theology* 36, no. 3 (July 1, 2020): 448–61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12602>. Johnson argues that Hauerwas' theology is best understood not as a rejection of the world, but as a corrective and caution to public theologians to "pay attention to what gets lost, neglected, or confused when [Christians] speak the moral language of the political cultures they inhabit" (Ibid., 449). In other words, Hauerwas does not oppose the

of the world. The church is the community that learns to interpret the world correctly, and in doing so, it can show the world the truth and “help the world understand itself as the world.”⁶⁰ Hauerwas never conceives of the world as separate from God—the world is indeed “God’s good creation”—but the world is the place that refuses to recognize itself as God’s good creation.⁶¹ It is the church, by being the church, that “serves the world” by giving it the truthful interpretation that “we are a sinful yet redeemed people.”⁶² It is important to note that the church for Hauerwas does not only engage in the task of interpretation but engages this task primarily. The task of interpretation “does not preclude action” but actions can only be effective insofar as they conform to the truth.⁶³ What this means in concrete terms, is unclear.⁶⁴

The church shows the truthfulness of the story told through their actions. Narrative and virtue are intrinsically connected as it is only through the character of the people of the church that we can assess whether the story they profess is true. Another way of describing the first task, therefore, is in terms of character. The first task of the church is to exhibit the “kind of

task of public theology or engaging in the world, but has concerns over the readiness of Christians to adopt the world’s terminology. See also D. Stephen Long, *Augustinian and Ecclesial Christian Ethics: On Loving Enemies* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018). In this comprehensive review of the differences between, similarities between, and challenges posed by the neoAugustinians and neoAnabaptists to one another, Long explores and rejects the idea that the neoAnabaptists, including Hauerwas, advocate for a withdrawal from the world.

⁶⁰ Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” 100.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Stanley Hauerwas, “The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story,” in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 109.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Jeffrey Stout, “Virtue and the Way of the World,” in *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 159. Stout writes, ““To my knowledge, he has advocated neither the withholding of taxes that finance the military, nor participation in costly acts of civil disobedience, nor refusal of communion to soldiers and their commanders.”

community possible when trust, and not fear, rule our lives.”⁶⁵ As opposed to an existence offered by the nation-states in which justice and safety can only be achieved through violence, the church offers a viable alternative by refusing to turn to violence in order to secure itself.⁶⁶ If the people of the church lack character, if they resort to the same violence and coercion offered by the world, Hauerwas believes that “the world rightly draws the conclusion that the God we worship is in fact a false God.”⁶⁷ This statement is weighty, as many might conclude that the church’s character, as especially exemplified in the case of John Howard Yoder, suggests that the Christian narrative is indeed a false one—a problem that we will return to shortly.

Hauerwas does not seem to assign any interpretative task to the world. The world, in its failures to recognize itself as belonging to God, can only receive help from the church. The world simply interprets wrongly. Indeed, even those in the world who are not Christian but “manifest God’s peace better than we ourselves” do not have an interpretative task.⁶⁸ There is no sense in which these peaceable people witness to the church. Rather, they can be of service to the church by providing the “conditions for our ability to cooperate with others for securing justice in the world.” In other words, the virtuous people of the world have a bridging task. They can provide a gateway through which the church can seek to change the world through persuasion.

⁶⁵ Hauerwas, “The Church and Liberal Democracy: The Moral Limits of a Secular Polity,” 85. See also Gloria H. Albrecht, “Myself and Other Characters: A Feminist Liberationist Critique of Hauerwas’s Ethics of Christian Character,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 12 (1992): 97–114. Albrecht criticizes Hauerwas for mistaking his particular interpretation of the Christian narrative as universal. His description of the church as a place mark by trust derives from his understanding of the Christian story in which “fear of the other, is universalized so that a specific human sin, a defensive pride, becomes the universal human condition” (Ibid., 110). Because Hauerwas identifies fear of the other as universal sin, he makes non-resistance “the unchanging, redemptive core of Christian character” (Ibid., 111). His depiction of the first task of the church, is born out of his particular social location to the exclusion of other voices.

⁶⁶ Hauerwas, *The Church and Liberal Democracy*,” 86.

⁶⁷ Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” 109.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 101.

Hauerwas sees the existence of such people as a testament that “God’s kingdom is wide indeed.”⁶⁹ While the church “helps the world understand what it means to be the world,” the virtuous people of the world are not tasked with helping the church understand what it means to be the church, even when the church fails to live up to its task. Given that many would argue that the church more often than not fails to live up to its task, Hauerwas’ description of the church as a community able to discern and live out a narrative truth feels like a dishonest assessment of the historical and empirical church. Moreover, it problematizes his depiction of the world as existing to merely learn the truth from the church. How does he handle the problem of the church’s failure to be the church?

Failures of the Church

Hauerwas anticipates this critique, writing, “Of course it may be objected that such a church simply does not exist.”⁷⁰ After all, the church often “becomes a mirror of one cultural option” and too often fails at its task of witnessing to the truth.⁷¹ While sympathetic to the ways in which the church fails to be the church, Hauerwas nevertheless rejects this critique for a number of reasons. First, he posits that views of the church as ‘failing’ often “employ a far too restricted sense of ‘church,’” thinking of the church in terms of denominational institutions rather than the community where people carry out the task of witnessing to God’s kingdom.⁷² Indeed, Hauerwas believes that we can find examples of the church as he described as existing, especially when we consider the past of what the church has been and the future of what the

⁶⁹ Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” 101.

⁷⁰ Hauerwas, “The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story,” 108.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 108.

church can be. For example, when people speak of the church failing in the south for its complicity in slavery and racism, Hauerwas contends that they employ a myopic idea of church that forgets that “black congregations continued to do the patient work of preparation necessary to create a people sufficient for the coming struggle.”⁷³ Speaking about the church requires precision, as the church is found in many different forms and many particular communities.

Second, Hauerwas argues that it is irresponsible for theologians to “accept as normative the limits of the current church.”⁷⁴ The task of Christians, and specifically theologians, is not to mistake what Christians think or do as normative, but to answer what Christians *ought* to think in light of the beliefs they profess.⁷⁵ Speaking about what the church is should be done in light of basic Christian convictions, regardless of whether the church lives up to its task. In fact, the church’s failures are only rightly understood as failures, and take on an acute sense of pain, because of how far they fall from what the church ought to be. Hauerwas identifies the “scandal of disunity” as one of these acutely painful failures precisely for this reason.⁷⁶ A church divided fails at its task to provide a “foretaste of the peaceable kingdom” in which the community remains united despite differences.⁷⁷ Of course, the case of John Howard Yoder is an obvious and concrete example of the church’s painful failures because of what we expect from the church.

Although I am sympathetic to Hauerwas’ counterargument that the church is found in many different forms—past, present, and future—and that the task of theology is to speak about

⁷³ Hauerwas, “The Church in a Divided World: The Interpretative Power of the Christian Story,” 109.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁶ Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” 100.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Here, Hauerwas is less concerned with divisions based on doctrine or practice—he is far more concerned about church divisions based on class, race and nationality.

what the church should be in light of its convictions, I fear that he is too quick to dismiss the failures of the church. Church history, and the particular case of John Howard Yoder, show that Hauerwas is indeed correct that the church too often fails to live up to its task. What I want to suggest is that Hauerwas, while fully aware of the real, sinful church, does not adequately incorporate this awareness into his theology and ecclesiology. In this sense, Hauerwas avoids Yoder's mistake of ignoring the sinfulness of the people of the church, but his awareness of the problem does little to change his view of the church and the world. The church remains the place with the eyes to see, whereas the world is left hopeless, unable to see correctly and shorthanded by the church failing at its interpretative task.

Speaking about the church's failures does not need to change our normative description of the church. Rather, speaking about the church's failures invites us to see the world as having a task of its own. Scriptures is filled with examples of God using outsiders of Israel, and outsiders of the church, to witness to those on the inside. This idea is not foreign to Hauerwas' thought. As already shown, Hauerwas believes that God at work in the world is a testament to the wideness of God's kingdom. Hauerwas' account, however, does not focus on the world's ability, let alone task, of witnessing to the church. In Hauerwas' account, those in the world who act virtuously are conduits for the task of the church. They help the church witness to the world. But what would it look like for Hauerwas to more fully explore the positive effect that world has on the church? Because Hauerwas so completely identifies the church with narrative and virtue—as the witnessing community—he downplays the extent to which God uses the world to witness to the truth, especially in times when the church fails to do so.

The following chapter turns to providing a biblical basis for this idea, that God often uses the world to witness to the church. After exploring biblical support for a theology of the witness

of the world, the chapter concludes by suggesting how an appreciation of the world's witnessing capabilities could transform Hauerwas' ecclesiology in ways that would make his understanding of the church/world dichotomy less susceptible to the problem of violence internal to the church community.

CHAPTER THREE

The Witness of the World

In the previous chapter, I argued that Hauerwas fails to provide a robust understanding of the interpretive power of the world. Hauerwas identifies the world as existing to receive the witness of the church, but does not consider the ways in which the world witnesses to the church. It is my suggestion that those outside the church often better recognize the truth than those inside the church, and that the Bible, moreover, provides ample stories where outsiders to the faith have greater interpretive power than those inside the faith. It is the purpose of this chapter to provide this biblical account of the witness of the world by looking at two biblical stories: the healing of the Roman centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) and Jonah's indignation at God sparing the Ninevites (Jonah 3:1-4:4). Each of these stories reveals different ways in which God uses the world to correct or admonish the faith community. After providing my biblical support, I return to Hauerwas' dichotomy between the church and the world and suggest how his theology might differ when accounting for this biblical motif.

The Roman Centurion

⁵ When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him ⁶ and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." ⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸ The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and will take their places at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour. (Matthew 8:5-13, NRSV).

This passage serves as a paradigmatic example of witness at work outside the community of faith. The central characters are Jesus, a centurion, and his servant. As a centurion, the man coming to Jesus is both a Gentile, outside of the community of faith, and a commander of Roman soldiers. Yet, despite his status as both outside the faith and a commander within a system of violence, the centurion recognizes Jesus as Lord. Naming Jesus as Lord is the first remarkable indicator of the centurion's faith, as he shows that either he is addressing a "socially insignificant member of the subject race" with deference, or more likely that he sees Jesus as someone who possesses unique authority and could offer "something beyond normal help."⁷⁸

While most English translations render Jesus' words in v. 7 as a statement, many commentators agree that it is best translated as a question: You want *me* to come heal him? or Am *I* to come and heal him?⁷⁹ Jesus' response is not the enthusiastic and unhesitant "I will come and cure him" found in the translation above. Instead, Jesus pushes back against the centurion by emphasizing the oddity of the request, that a centurion would turn to *him*. Moreover, Jesus gestures to the importance of the law and its prohibition for Jews to enter the company of Gentiles.⁸⁰ In translating v. 7 as a question, it becomes all the more apparent the parallels between this story and the later story of Jesus' exchange with the Canaanite woman. In both stories, a Gentile approaches Jesus asking for help, Jesus conveys "initial reluctance," the Gentile responds with a statement of faith, and this prompts Jesus to admire the greatness of their faith.⁸¹

⁷⁸ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁷⁹ See Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009). 90, and France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 310-313.

⁸⁰ Ulrich Luz, Helmut Koester, and James E. Crouch, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001), <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/261/monograph/book/45974>, 10.

⁸¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 309.

The centurion's response to Jesus' question continues to show an awareness of who Jesus is and a respect for the authority of Jesus. In v. 8 the centurion again addresses Jesus as Lord, and states that he is unworthy to have Jesus come to his house, portraying a humility before Jesus born out of either feelings of personal iniquity or out of an awareness that Jesus has come for Israel.⁸² Moreover, he recognizes the authority of Jesus' word, comparing it to the authority of his own word. As a centurion in command, his word alone is authoritative to make his soldiers go, come, or do whatever task he sets before them. He knows the power of words, and he identifies Jesus as someone whose words have power beyond those of ordinary human beings. His words can heal. In extolling the power of Jesus' words, the centurion does more than proclaim a belief in Jesus' ability to heal—he “attributes to him a special authority, the authority to issue commands on God's behalf.”⁸³ He identifies Jesus as someone intimately connected to God. And by identifying Jesus as someone under authority, he hints at a Messianic claim that Jesus is the son of God.

Jesus responds with amazement and the declaration that “in no one in Israel have I found such faith” (v. 10). The centurion's faith surpasses that of those within the community of faith. What characterizes the centurion's faith is a confidence in Jesus and the identity of Jesus as one who has authority and power over the created world. While many within the faith cannot see it, the centurion sees Jesus in his messianic role. His “instinctive recognition of authority” shows a “level of response to Jesus which no Jew has yet been able to match.”⁸⁴ In fact, the only character in Matthew who similarly matches the centurion's faith is the Canaanite woman, another outsider to the community of faith (Matthew 15: 21-28). In vv. 11-12, Jesus offers a

⁸² Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 10.

⁸³ Hare, *Matthew*, 91.

⁸⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 316.

prophetic word that many from east and west will have a seat at the heavenly banquet, while heirs of the kingdom, those within the faith, will find themselves on the outside.⁸⁵ Finally, in v. 13, Jesus directs his attention back to the centurion and his faith, claiming the healing of the servant, which is confirmed within the hour.

Interpretations of this passage, and the counterpart found in the story of the Canaanite woman, center on its indication of the “post-resurrection mission to the pagan world.”⁸⁶ They are glimpses of Gentile inclusion in the promises to Israel and receiving of the kingdom of heaven: “From the point of view of the community that is familiar with the end of the story of Jesus and that knows about the coming gentile mission, the centurion becomes the first member of the gentile church.”⁸⁷ In their essence, these stories anticipate the universality of the Gospel message. While I agree with this interpretation being the primary thrust of the passage, there is a further meaning alongside an anticipation of the Gentile inclusion in the kingdom of heaven. Namely, those *outside* the community of the faith not only had eyes to see who Jesus is, but also saw more clearly than those *inside* the community of faith. To return to the language found in Hauerwas, the interpretive power to know the truth, and to have a respectful posture toward the truth, is found in the world.

In Hauerwas’ own interpretation of the passage, found in his theological commentary on Matthew, he arrives at the same conclusion. Of the Roman centurion, he writes, “Again it seems that an outsider is better able to recognize Jesus than those who think they know what the Lord

⁸⁵ David L. Turner (*Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], writes, “Jesus’ prediction is reminiscent of biblical teaching on the gathering of Israel from all over the earth and the future worship of God by Gentiles all over the earth, often portrayed as occurring in Jerusalem” (232-233).

⁸⁶ Hare, *Matthew*, 90.

⁸⁷ Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 11.

of Israel should look like and how he should act.”⁸⁸ Moreover, he writes that it is unsurprising that the centurion, a commander of Roman soldiers, should be able to recognize Jesus clearly: “Who better than those who know war to recognize the one who is peace?”⁸⁹ Reflecting on the story of the Canaanite woman, Hauerwas repeats his claim that “outsiders” unlike many of the Israelites, recognize Jesus as someone with unique authority.⁹⁰ Even more extraordinary, it is a Canaanite woman—a woman whose nation has been the recipient of Israel’s warring—who can identify Jesus in his messianic role as the son of David.⁹¹ Hauerwas’ commentary on Matthew makes frequent reference to the witness of those outside the faith community, which is not found in his theological works on ecclesiology and the ethics of the church.

The story of the Roman centurion, and the counterpart story of the Canaanite woman, display that the wideness of God’s kingdom is not just that there may be virtuous people in the world—to be sure, neither the centurion or the Canaanite woman is described as virtuous outside of their great faith. That God’s kingdom is wide is shown by the people outside the church who have the skills of interpretation to know who God is and who they are in relationship to God. While they are outsiders to the community of faith, and may not speak with the same language as the community of faith, they can nevertheless see rightly. Moreover, their witness provides an example for the community of faith. Jesus’ proclamations about the faith of the centurion and the Canaanite woman are public to the faith community. He highlights their faith as a model to follow.

⁸⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 94-95.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁹⁰ Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 144.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Jonah and the Ninevites

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. (Jonah 3:1-5)

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. ³And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴And the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. (Jonah 3:10-4:4)

In the book of Jonah, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah and tasks him with prophesying against the city of Nineveh because of their great wickedness. Upon hearing the word, for reasons not revealed to the reader, Jonah flees to Tarshish to get away from the presence of the Lord. Jonah voyages to Tarshish by ship and finds out very quickly that he has not escaped the presence of the Lord, as the Lord causes it to storm, Jonah is tossed into the sea, and the Lord causes a large fish to swallow up Jonah (1:1-17). Jonah prays, the Lord speaks to the fish, and the fish vomits Jonah out onto land (2:1-10).

The story picks up in the passage above, where the word of the Lord comes to Jonah for a second time and Jonah is yet again tasked with witnessing to the city. We are not told the content of the message. All we are given is Jonah’s proclamation—a one-sentence prophecy that Nineveh will be overthrown in forty days. No mention is made of who will be overthrowing Nineveh, and yet the Ninevites believed God and repented with the outward signs of fasting and wearing sackcloth. We can gather from Jonah’s brief prophecy and failure to mention God that,

“it is clearly not Jonah but the word of God that converts Nineveh.”⁹² As becomes clear in chapter 4, Jonah had no desire or intention of converting Nineveh.

In response to their repentance, God spares Nineveh and this act of mercy causes Jonah to become very angry. Jonah’s anger reveals the real reason he fled to Tarshish. Jonah knew God to be gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. He fled precisely because he knew who God was and did not want God to be gracious to the Ninevites. That God spares Nineveh is not shocking to Jonah. Whether Jonah was angry with God’s mercy because he hated the Ninevites, or because he believed God’s mercy would make him into a false prophet because Nineveh would not be overturned, or a combination of the two, Jonah’s reluctance to prophesy to Nineveh and his anger at their conversion stems from his knowledge of who God is: “It was not simply the case that Jonah could not bring himself to appreciate Nineveh. Rather, to a shocking extent, he could not stand God!”⁹³

The story of Jonah may be an odd one to highlight in order to argue that God uses the nations to witness to the community of faith. After all, the story revolves around Jonah’s witness to the Ninevites, which against his desires, results in them coming to embrace God. On the surface, the story affirms that God uses the community of faith, in this case the office of the prophet, to witness to the world regardless of the community’s own wishes or reluctance to be obedient to God’s word.

However, what is compelling about this story for the purposes of responding to Hauerwas’ view of the church and world is that Jonah does indeed know the true story of who

⁹² Phillip Cary, *Jonah*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 111.

⁹³ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, vol. 31, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 503.

God is. He had a correct interpretation of reality. To “take 4:2 seriously” is to view Jonah as “lacking obedience to a particular directive from God *but not as lacking faith in God or compassion for Gentiles.*”⁹⁴ Jonah’s issue is not lack of faith, nor a lack of knowledge of who God is—Jonah’s issue is that he has immense faith in who God is and he does not like it.

His anger and his lack of obedience show that knowledge of the truth and having faith in God have an ambiguous relationship to one’s character. Jonah’s faith in God as merciful and slow to anger results in his disobedience and anger. Meanwhile, the Ninevites have very little knowledge—if any—on who the God of Israel is and yet they conform their actions to be in align with the truth. They believed, they fasted, they put on sackcloth, and the king of Nineveh calls for everyone to give up their evil ways and violence (3:8). While they are not direct agents in witnessing to Jonah, God nevertheless witnesses through them to Jonah to deliver the message that God’s mercy is boundless and being gracious to others is more important than securing yourself. As Jerome writes, “Jonah was indignant because, at God’s command, he had spoken falsely; but his sorrow was proved to be ill founded, since he would rather speak truth and have a countless multitude perish than speak falsely and have them saved.”⁹⁵ Knowledge of God did not result in an imitation of God.⁹⁶ Jonah desired to be a true prophet more than he desired the salvation of an entire city of people.

⁹⁴ Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey C. Warner, “Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26421446>.

⁹⁵ Alberto Ferreiro and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *The Twelve Prophets*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 14 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 147.

⁹⁶ In Chapman and Warner, “Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament,” the authors argue that the story of Jonah teaches us the need for the imitation of God in the practice of evangelism. They write, “In fact, the entire book shows how God moves Jonah beyond viewing his role as one of verbal proclamation to something more than that. Jonah can only respond to God’s commission fully to the extent that he is willing to pattern himself after God and imitate God in graciousness rather than anger” (61).

What do we make of a story where narrative and virtue are so disconnected from one another? What do we make of a story where an entire city known for its wickedness is more obedient to God than a prophet known for his faith? Again, this story attests to the wideness of God's kingdom that looks beyond the presence of virtuous people of the world. The Ninevites are not virtuous—they are wicked. The drive behind the story is not the need to convert the Ninevites—that their conversion happens instantaneously shows that their conversion was no great task. The drive behind the story is the need to convert Jonah, and God uses the conversion of an entire city to show Jonah the extent of his mercy and the importance of mercy in judgment. The Ninevites indirectly witness to Jonah the truth from which he tried to flee. The Ninevites, the people of the world, catch on far more quickly than Jonah about the graciousness of God.

In his commentary on Jonah, Phillip Cary compares Jonah's anger to that of a theologian:

His is the wrath of a theologian whose theology does not pan out. Jonah had been convinced he had the word of God interpreted accurately and precisely (not to say narrowly and restrictively) and all to his satisfaction, but then God turns around and undermines Jonah's whole theological project by fulfilling his word in an astonishingly unexpected way, as if its meaning were far broader and happier than anything Jonah had conceived.⁹⁷

Cary's comments depict Jonah as someone who was convinced that he had the correct interpretation of the word of God. After all, the word of God came directly to Jonah and tasked him with witnessing. Jonah, like a theologian, believed in his interpretation only to have his certainty undermined by God. The book of Jonah is a testament to the fact that the story told by those in the faith community is incomplete and does not capture the full breadth of who God is. Often God works through the world to tell more of the story, whether indirectly through the God's relationship to the Ninevites, or directly through the witness of the centurion and the

⁹⁷ Cary, *Jonah*, 128.

Canaanite woman whose great faith in the person of Christ provided exemplars for the community of faith.

Revisiting the Church and the World

The biblical account of the witness of the world shows that there is not such a neat line between the church and the world, where the church knows the truth and the world does not. The church is not the only place where we find virtuous people, and the church is not the only place where the true narrative is proclaimed. The centurion and the Canaanite woman witnessed that Jesus is Lord, and God used their witness to correct those in the faith community. God used the Ninevites, and his merciful exchange with them, to admonish Jonah. Throughout Scripture, the world offers a witness to the church that acts as a corrective for the church's failure. The world has eyes to see when the church does not. The world is obedient to God when the church is not.

Of course, this is not to suggest that the world as a whole or in general is known for its allegiance to God. As Hauerwas writes and the majority of Scripture attests, the world most often lives untruthfully and violently, rejecting Jesus as Lord and remaining steadfast in its ignorance of its place in God's story as a sinful yet redeemed people. Nevertheless, as explored in this chapter, individuals and even whole nations in the world act as exceptions and provide a service to the community of faith. If we take seriously the times when the people of the world witness to the church, we might reconsider Hauerwas' church/world dichotomy in three ways.

First, we might assign a positive function to the task of the world as one of serving the church. Rather than simply viewing the world as existing to receive witness from the church, we can appreciate that at times God stirs up the world when the church is in need of correction. As Hauerwas understands the church to be a "foretaste of the peaceable kingdom," we should add

that the witness of the world can be a foretaste of the gathering of the nations.⁹⁸ Scripture points to the day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11), where “many will come from east and west and will take their places at the banquet (Matthew 5:11). It should not surprise us that, just as the kingdom of God is both present and yet to come, the gathering of the nations in confession of Jesus as Lord is both present and yet to come. The witness of the Roman centurion is in proleptic anticipation of all of creation recognizing the true narrative.

Second, we might maintain a posture of humility towards the church’s interpretive power. While the church ought to be the community whose primary task is to remember, tell, and live out a story, it can be at risk of pride from an assumption that it alone knows the truth. Hauerwas’ understanding of the task of the church can create an environment where the church assumes it is right and assumes the world has nothing to offer it. In the case of John Howard Yoder, the church horribly mishandled the problem of sexual violence and was slow to turn to help from outside the church for guidance. For example, the recommendation by several Mennonite mental health professionals that Yoder enter an out-of-state treatment center for sexual addiction was rejected by the Indiana Michigan conference because of “distance and expense.”⁹⁹ Moreover, as “Yoder remained steadfast in his position that his error had lain in misunderstanding the women’s consent, Accountability and Support group members expressed regret that the conference had not pursued residential, group-therapy treatment options.”¹⁰⁰ The story of the

⁹⁸ Hauerwas, “The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics,” 100.

⁹⁹ Goosen, “‘Defanging the Beast’: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” 68.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

church's handling of John Howard Yoder would be a different one had the church sooner and more readily turned to the resources found in the world.

Finally, if we view the world as having moments of proleptic participation in the worshipping of God, and if we hold a greater humility about the church's ability to recognize and live out the truth, then we can assign another task to the church of *actively listening* to the world to see where God is at work. The church's task, therefore, would not be to merely tell a story to the world but to listen to the world and see where the world is telling the same story. This posture of active listening is not a passive or uncritical reception of the world's witness as true—in the vein of approaching John Howard Yoder's work with a hermeneutic of suspicion, the church might similarly approach the world with suspicion. And yet, while critically listening, the church must hold that the world may from time to time tell the truth, and even tell it better than the church. While Hauerwas differs from Yoder in his greater awareness that the church is full of sinners, he nevertheless implies that the church's sinners see better than the world's sinners. His work instills a great distrust of the world. It is comforting and secure to think that the church alone is the community entrusted with the work of telling God's story, but the Spirit of God is not so neat. God is at work *everywhere*, and witness often happens from places and people the church least expects. The task of witnessing is not confined to the church community.

CONCLUSION

The driving question behind this paper was whether Hauerwas' ecclesiology carried the same potential for abuse as that of Yoder. Connected to this question was whether Hauerwas' ecclesiology was markedly different, in what ways, and whether these differences absolved his ecclesiology. In order to answer these questions, I first examined Yoder's ecclesiology in chapter one in order to identify the ways in which his ecclesiology sustained an environment in which he could perpetuate his abuse and evade disciplinary action from the church. I argued, using the work of Isaac Samuel Villegas, that Yoder's actions were consistent with his ecclesiology, and I highlighted Hauerwas' dissection of where Yoder went wrong: Yoder had too extreme a duality between the church and the world and believed that the people of the church were capable of transcending the ethical norms of the world. I took Hauerwas' claim about Yoder's church/world distinction to be a good analysis of the problem within Yoder's ecclesiology and used this criticism as a launching point for investigating Hauerwas's own ecclesiology.

Chapter two turned to providing an overview of Hauerwas' church/world distinction and the role virtue and narrative play in his understanding of the tasks of the church and the world. This chapter argued that Hauerwas, while avoiding the duality between the church and the world as one of saints and sinners, nevertheless fails to provide a positive account of the world. The world exists to receive witness from the church, and the church exists to interpret the world as God's good creation that is sinful yet redeemed. The task of the church is to witness to an alternate reality where the peace embodied in the life of Jesus rules the day. The truth of this reality is supported by the character of the community, which cultivate the virtues necessary for remembering and telling the biblical story.

While Hauerwas makes a few remarks about there being virtuous people in the world, he describes these people as providing a bridge between the church and the world. They are receptive to the church's witness and can help bring about changes in the world that the church would like to see. There is no sense in his account, however, where people of the world can witness to the true reality or witness to the church. This becomes a greater issue for his account because he downplays the distance between the normative church and the empirical church, lacking a robust understanding of how frequently the church fails to live up to its task as showcased in the example of John Howard Yoder. I suggest that Hauerwas, like Yoder, provides an unhelpful dichotomy between the church and the world in which the church is described at its best while the world is described at its worst. Hauerwas overemphasizes the waywardness and violence of the world so much so that he gives little weight to the ways in which God is at work in the world. I argue that Hauerwas' account of the church and the world would benefit from incorporating greater attention to how God often uses the world to witness to the church, especially when the church is failing at its task.

Chapter three provided a biblical support for the claim that God uses the world to witness to the church by looking at two stories from Scripture, the story of the Roman centurion who asks Jesus to heal his servant and the story of Jonah's indignation at God's mercy toward the Ninevites. Together these stories showed that the ability to interpret the true narrative is not confined to the faith community and that God uses those outside the faith community to teach those within it. Moreover, they showed that the line between the church and the world is not as neat as Hauerwas' account presents it to be.

Finally, I argue that a biblical account of the witness of the world could reform Hauerwas' account in three ways: it would assign a positive task to the world, it would stress the

need for the church to have humility regarding its interpretive power and ability to follow its task faithfully, and it would provide the church with the crucial task of actively listening to the world to see where God is at work outside of the church. With this posture of active listening, the church avoids the temptation to withdraw from the world and instead becomes amenable to the witness the world offers. It allows the church to embrace the truly widespread, and unexpected, nature of the peaceable kingdom.

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