

why did Jesus have to die? an attempt to cross the barrier of age

Stanley Hauerwas is Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University. This talk was given on 15 July 2005 to the Duke Youth Academy of the Duke Divinity School. copyright © 2006 Valparaiso University Press

I lecture and write often, but I am not sure how to write to those our society identifies as the young, or adolescents. I do not know who you are and I am a bit frightened by that unknown. The last band I knew was U2, and I only knew them because they were the last group introduced to me by my son before he “grew up.” I do not know what you read or the movies you see. So I do not know how to “connect” with you.

Moreover, I think it is disgusting for an older guy to try to show he can be “with it.” I do not want to be “with it.” I quit teaching freshmen when I taught at the University of Notre Dame over twenty years ago. I did so because I simply found it demeaning to try to convince eighteen-year-olds that they ought to take God seriously. Eighteen-year-old people in our society simply lack the resources to take God seriously—by a “resource,” I mean having noticed that before you know it you are going to be dead.

Alasdair MacIntyre, a philosopher, has suggested that one of the worst things our society does to the young is to tell them they ought to be happy. MacIntyre thinks if you are happy, particularly when you are young, you are probably deeply self-deceived. Your appropriate stance is to be miserable. What a terrible time to be young. Shorn of any clear account for what it means to grow up, you are forced to make up your own lives. But you know that any life you make up is not a life you will want to live.

I do not necessarily want this lecture to make you miserable, but I hope that at least some of what I say may help illumine why you are miserable. Indeed I do not want this lecture to be “memorable” for you, particularly if “memorable” means you will think the Duke Youth Academy was a “wonderful” experience. I went to church summer camp once when I was growing up in Texas. I remember the highlight of the camp was watching the sun go down on the last night from a mountain—well, a hill (it was Texas)—while we sang “Kumbayah.” This was an attempt to give us a “mountain top experience” that we could identify with being or becoming a Christian. About the last thing I would want is for you to have such an experience here. I do not want to make Christianity easy. I want to make it hard.

I assume most of you are here because you think you are Christians, but it is not at all clear to me that the Christianity that has made you Christians is Christianity. For example:

How many of you worship in a church with an American flag?
I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.

How many worship in a church in which the Fourth of July is celebrated?
I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.

How many of you worship in a church that recognizes Thanksgiving?
I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.

How many of you worship in a church that celebrates January 1 as the “New Year”?
I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.

How many of you worship in a church that recognizes “Mother’s Day”?
I am sorry to tell you your salvation is in doubt.

I am not making these claims because I want to shock you. I do not want you to leave the Youth Academy thinking that you have heard some really strange ideas here that have made you think. It is appropriate that you might believe you are here to make you think, because you have been told that is what universities are supposed to do, that is, to make you think. Universities are places where you are educated to make up your own mind. That is not what I am

trying to do. Indeed, I do not think most of you have minds worth making up. You need to be trained before you can begin thinking. So I have not made the claims above to shock you, but rather to put you in a position to discover how odd being a Christian makes you.

One of the great difficulties with being a Christian in a country like America—allegedly a Christian country—is that our familiarity with “Christianity” has made it difficult for us to read or hear Scripture. For example, consider how “Mother’s Day” makes it hard to comprehend the plain sense of some of the stories of Jesus. In Mark 3:31–35, we find Jesus surrounded by a crowd. His mother and brothers were having trouble getting through the crowd to be with Jesus. Somebody in the crowd tells him that his mom cannot get through the mass of people to be near him. This elicits from Jesus the rhetorical question “Who are my mother and brothers?” which he answered noting, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Even more forcefully Jesus says in Luke 14:26, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” When you celebrate “Mother’s Day” the only thing to do with texts like these is “explain them,” which usually means Jesus could not have meant what he plainly says.

Of course the presumption that Christianity is a family-friendly faith is a small change perversion of the Gospel when compared to the use of faith in God to underwrite American pretensions that we are a Christian nation possessing righteousness other nations lack. Consider, for example, this report from The Washington Times (July 8, 2002):

President Bush joined more than 100 parishioners at a seaside church [in Kennebunkport, Maine] yesterday in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance during services, a defiant dig at a recent San Francisco court ruling on the pledge’s “under God” phrase. In the middle of the morning service at St. Ann’s Episcopal Church, Chaplain M. L. Agnew Jr. departed from the regular program and asked the congregation to stand and say the pledge to the U.S. flag. The pledge has become a constant fixture of Mr. Bush’s public appearances since a panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the phrase “under God” made public-school recitation of the Pledge unconstitutional. He (President Bush) led children in the Pledge during a Fourth of July stop in Ripley, W. Va. in which the reciters all but shouted out “under God.” Mr. Bush, who often talks of his faith in God and the role it plays in his stewardship of the country, has called the court’s decision “ridiculous” and “out of step with the traditions and history of America.” The Pledge of Allegiance is not a part of any Episcopal liturgy, nor is its recitation a common custom, a church theologian [Rev. Kendall Harmon] told The Washington Times.

When you have the President of the United States claiming that the “God” of the Pledge of Allegiance is the God Christians worship, you know you have a problem. The Christian God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not some further specification of the generalized god affirmed in the Pledge, but the Trinity is the only God worthy of worship. The Christian pledge is not the Pledge of Allegiance but rather is called the Apostles Creed. That a church service, that a priest in that service, would include the Pledge of Allegiance is a sure sign that Christians no longer know how to recognize idolatry. The “Christianity” represented by St. Ann’s Episcopal Church in Maine is not in fact Christian.

A harsh judgment to be sure, but one that needs to be made if we are to recover faithful Christian practice. I am not calling into question President Bush’s sincerity. I am convinced he is a very serious Christian. The problem is not his sincerity. The problem is that the Christianity about which he is sincere is not shaped by the Gospel. Unfortunately he is not unique, but rather is one instance of the general failure of the church in America to be the church. That the church has failed to be faithful is, of course, why I suggested that yours as well as my salvation is in doubt.

why love is not the answer

One of the difficulties for anyone trying to figure out what it might mean to be a Christian in America is that our very familiarity with Christianity has made it difficult to hear what is read to us Sunday after Sunday from the Bible. For example, many of you, when you are talking with friends about life, might say that what makes you a Christian is a “personal relationship with Jesus.” Such a relation, you might suggest, is about trying to be a loving person. You might even suggest that Christians are to love one another because our sins have been forgiven.

There is no question that love between the persons of the Trinity is at the very heart of the Christian faith. But I think nothing is more destructive to the Christian faith than the current identification of Christianity with love. If God wants us to be more loving, why do you need Jesus to tell us that? If Christianity is about the forgiveness of our sins, then why did Jesus have to die? If God is all about love, why go through the trouble of being this man, Jesus? Why didn't God simply tell us through an appropriate spokesman (it could have been Jesus) that God wants us to love one another? God, in such a faith, becomes that great OK who tells us we are OK and, therefore, we are taught we should tell one another we are OK. But if Jesus is the proclamation of the great "OK" why would anyone have bothered putting him to death? There must have been some terrible failure in communication.

One of the problems with identifying Christianity with love is how such a view turns out to be anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic. The Jews and Catholics become identified with law and dogma, in contrast to Protestant Christians who are about love. Such a view assumes that any form of faith that creates divisions must be retrograde because such a faith is not about loving. Of course, when love becomes what Christianity is all about, we can make no sense of Jesus' death and resurrection.

For example, consider how the temptation narrative of Jesus in the fourth chapter of Luke must be read if Jesus is all about love. It is as if we think Jesus went out to find himself. We are told that he "was driven out" by the devil no less, but we know such language is "mythical." Such language was used to help us understand the spiritual struggle Jesus must have been going through, that is, he was confronting the existential nothingness of existence which was necessary for his ability to make an authentic choice about how he would live his life.

Returning from this desert, the disciples note that he looks as if he has been through a very rough time. "Man, you look like you have been to hell and back," they might say. (No doubt they must have said something like this, for otherwise how do we explain the language of being tempted by the devil.) In response, Jesus can be imagined to say, "You are right, I have had a rough forty days, but I have come to recognize what God wants from us. So I feel compelled to lay this big insight on you. I have come to realize that God, or whatever we call that which we cannot explain, wants us to love one another. There, I have said it, and I am glad I did."

Ask yourself: If that is what Jesus is all about—getting us to love one another—why did everyone reject him? They did so, I think, because when Jesus was told by the devil he would be given the power to turn stones to bread, he refused; when Jesus was offered authority over all the kingdoms of this world, he refused; when he was offered the possibility he would not die, he refused. Note that Jesus was offered the means to feed the hungry, the authority to end war between peoples, and even the defeat of death itself. But he refused these goods. He did so because Jesus knows God's kingdom cannot be forced into existence with the devil's means.

But note that Jesus' refusal to play the devil's game does not mean the kingdom he proclaims is not political. Jesus' work is political, but the kingdom politics he represents is one that comes through the transformation of the world's understanding of how to achieve good results. Jesus refuses to use the violence of the world to achieve "peace." But that does not mean he is any less political or that he is not about the securing of peace. It is, therefore, not accidental that after the temptation narrative we see Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath reading from the scroll of Isaiah. The passage he reads says,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18–19).

After reading this Jesus sat down and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The offense is not that Jesus wanted his followers to be loving; the offense is Jesus. Jesus is the politics of the new age. He is about the establishment of a kingdom. He is the one who has created a new time that gives us time not only to care for the poor but to be poor. Jesus is the one who makes it possible to be nonviolent in a violent world. We should not be surprised that Jesus is the embodiment of such politics. After all, Mary's song promised that the proud would have their imaginations "scattered," the powerful would be brought down from their thrones, the rich would be sent away empty, the lowly would be lifted up, and the hungry would be filled with good things. Is it any wonder that the world was not prepared to welcome this savior?

the politics of Jesus

Jesus was put to death because he embodied a politics that threatened all worldly regimes based on the fear of death. It is quite instructive to read any of the crucifixion narratives from this point of view, but the account of Jesus' trial and crucifixion in the Gospel of John makes the political character of Jesus' work unavoidable. Consider, for example, how the arrest of Jesus makes clear the political character of Jesus' ministry. His arrest is often thought to represent Jesus' apolitical character because he commands Peter to put away the sword he had used to cut off the ear of the priest's slave. To be sure, Jesus rebukes Peter, but he does so because that is not the "cup" the father has given him. But the cup from which Jesus must drink is no less political for being nonviolent. Indeed, Jesus' command to Peter is one of the clearest indications that Jesus' challenge to the powers of this age is not only political but also a transformation of what most mean by "politics."

Jesus' politics is manifested in his response to the high priest who questions Jesus about his teachings in John 18:19–24. That he is questioned by the high priest may suggest that his mission was "religious" rather than political, but such an account cannot be sustained considering Jesus' answer: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." Politics is speech and Jesus is at once the speech, the word of the Father, and the speaker. Nothing is hidden because the kingdom Jesus brings in his person is open to all.

Frustrated by Jesus' response, the priests take Jesus to Pilate. There can be no ambiguity about the political challenge Jesus represents before Pilate. Pilate is Roman authority. He is an authority who has the power to determine whether those who appear before Roman governors live or die. Pilate obviously does not like the position in which he has been placed by those who bring Jesus before him. Jesus' accusers, however, indicate that Jesus is obviously guilty—otherwise, why would they have Jesus appear before Pilate? But Pilate refuses to be bullied, so he examines Jesus.

He begins in an inquiring fashion. "They tell me that you are the King of the Jews. Is that true?" Pilate's question is obviously meant to see if Jesus is "political." Jesus responds by asking if Pilate came up with such a view on his own or if others told him such was the case. "I am not a Jew, am I?" replies Pilate. To which Jesus responds, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." This response is often used to deny that Jesus was political.

But note that Pilate understood what Jesus was saying. "So you are a king?" Pilate rightly saw that Jesus' denial of worldly kingship is not the denial that Jesus is king. Jesus denied that his kingdom was just another form of Rome. Jesus' kingdom is not like other kingdoms of this world, but is rather an alternative to the kingdoms of this world. Jesus does not deny he is a king, but says, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (John 18: 37). Pilate responds the way the world must respond when so confronted, that is, with worldly cynicism: "What is truth?"

The truth, of course, is that the Father has sent his Son so that we—the church—might be an alternative politics, a politics of truth, to that of the world. The world's politics is based on violence justified by the absence of truth. It is kill or be killed. This politics has been overwhelmed in Christ's death and resurrection. A people have been created through the work of the Spirit to be an alternative politics to a politics of lies—lies so blatant that they must be true lest they be utterly absurd; lies that lead us to believe that "peace" can be achieved through war.

In *The Original Revolution*, John Howard Yoder helps us understand the political character of the salvation wrought in Christ.

"The kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the good news!" To repent is not to feel bad but to think differently. Protestantism, and perhaps especially evangelical Protestantism, in its concern for helping every individual to make his own authentic choice in full awareness and sincerity, is in constant danger of confusing the kingdom itself with the benefits of the kingdom. If anyone repents, if anyone turns around to follow Jesus in his new way of life, this will do something for the aimlessness of his life. It will do something for his loneliness by giving him fellowship. It will do something for his anxiety and guilt by

giving him a good conscience. So the Bultmanns and the Grahams whose “evangelism” is to proclaim the offer of restored selfhood, liberation from anxiety and guilt, are not wrong. If anyone repents, it will do something for his intellectual confusion by giving him doctrinal meat to digest, a heritage to appreciate, and conscience about telling it all as it is: So “evangelicalism” with its concern for hallowed truth and reasoned communication is not wrong; it is right. If a man repents it will do something for his moral weakness by giving him the focus for wholesome self-discipline, it will keep him from immorality and get him to work on time. So the Peales and the Robertses who promise that God cares about helping me squeeze through the tight spots of life are not wrong; they have their place. But all this is not the Gospel (31–32).

The Gospel is the proclamation of a new age begun through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Gospel, moreover, has a form, a political form. It is embodied in a church which is required always to give hospitality to the stranger. The Gospel is a society in which difference is not denied but used for the discovery of goods in common. It is, as Yoder observes, a society called into being by Jesus who gave them a new way to live.

He gave them a new way to deal with offenders—by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence—by suffering. He gave them a new way to deal with money—by sharing it. He gave them a new way to deal with problems of leadership—by drawing on the gift of every member, even the most humble. He gave them a new way to deal with a corrupt society—by building a new order, not making the old. He gave them a new pattern of relationships between man and woman, between parent and child, between master and slave, in which was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person. He gave them a new attitude toward the state and toward the “enemy nation.” (29)

That is the politics begun in Christ. That is the “good news.” We have been freed from the presumed necessities that we inflict on ourselves in the name of “peace,” a peace that too often turns out to be an order established and continued through violence. Is it any wonder that Jesus was despised and rejected? Is it any wonder when the Church is faithful to Christ that she finds herself persecuted and condemned? Yet if such a church does not exist, the world has no alternative to the violence hidden in our fear of one another.

resurrection

Some may say that with all the talk above about death I seem to have forgotten the resurrection. The Father raised Jesus from the dead. Surely that is what Christianity is about—securing eternal life. All the talk about the “Politics of Jesus” fails to recognize that the work Jesus did made it possible for us to enjoy God forever. I certainly have no reason to deny that we have an eternal destiny made possible by Jesus’ good work, but too often I fear that the stress on “eternal life” spiritualizes the work of Christ. As a result, the political character of Jesus’ resurrection is lost.

Too often I think Christians think about the resurrection in terms of a story told by Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard’s story begins with a Prince who one day is riding through his fields. The Prince sees a peasant girl gathering the crops. She is beautiful and the Prince falls instantly in love with her. However, he is noble prince does not want to overwhelm her with his power and riches. So he dresses in peasant clothes and goes to work side by side with her. Kierkegaard notes that what holds our attention as such a story is told is our curiosity about when the Prince will show his true identity. We know the Prince and the peasant girl will fall in love. After all, she is beautiful and he is noble. But we want to know when and how the Prince will reveal to his beloved that she has fallen in love with the Prince himself.

We let our imaginations run. Perhaps one day they share a lunch during which he tells her of his love. She confesses she also loves him and suddenly he rips back the peasant clothes and reveals the purple. Or, perhaps he will wait until the wedding itself. They exchange vows at the end of which he tears away his rough clothes to reveal that through this marriage she has become the queen of the land. If we really let our imaginations run, perhaps he waits until the wedding night itself.

Kierkegaard claims that the resurrection must be like a prince who has been hiding the purple under his rough clothes. The resurrection reveals the purple. However, Kierkegaard notes the only problem with this thinking: Jesus has no purple under his flesh. He is peasant clothes, flesh, all the way down. He is not playing at being a human. He is human. The resurrected Christ is the crucified Christ.

Only such a Christ, moreover, can save us. Jesus Christ is a particular man making possible a particular way of life that is an alternative to the world's fear of one like Jesus. Christians have no fantasy that we may get out of life alive. Instead we have a savior who was in every way like us yet also fully God. Jesus is not fifty percent God and fifty percent man. He is one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man. He is the incarnation making possible a way to live that constitutes an alternative to all politics, which are little less than conspiracies to deny death.

Such a savior does not promise safety to his followers. This savior offers freedom from our self-inflicted fears and anxieties. Jesus does so not by making our lives "more meaningful," though we may discover our lives have renewed purpose, but by making us members of his body and blood so that we can share in the goods of a community that is an alternative to the world. Do not be surprised that as followers of Christ you are hated and rejected, but you have been given such wonderful work I suspect you will hardly notice that you are so.

a final word to the young

I have no way of knowing how you will hear my words today. In some ways, what you have heard is, as one of my graduate students once observed, a "completely different Christianity." This is not difference for difference's sake. I hope you will find this account of the Gospel compelling. People are dying to be part of an adventure that will give us a worthy task. The Gospel is such an adventure. I hope what I have said at least gives you a glimpse of what a wonderful life you have been given through your baptism.

Christological Pacifism by Stanley Hauerwas

Duke Divinity School

John Howard Yoder is the great representative of Christological pacifism. He developed his account of Christian nonviolence in his great book *The Politics of Jesus*, but his account of the distinctiveness of Christological pacifism is perhaps best found in his book *Nevertheless*. In that book he outlined over twenty types of pacifism each of which he describes for their virtues as well as their limits.

Most forms of pacifism in modernity developed after World War I. The assumption was that war, given the experience of WWI, was simply irrational. So pacifism named the rejection of war because war could not accomplish its declared purpose, that is, peace. Yoder, like Reinhold Niebuhr, was a relentless critic of that kind of pacifism. He was so because such an account of nonviolence was too easily defeated by showing the necessity of violence in this or that circumstances to produce limited ends.

In contrast, Yoder developed an account of Christian nonviolence which depends on the doctrine of God. Yoder certainly thought that there are numerous New Testament texts that require Christians to live nonviolently. We are expected to forgive our enemies, and Paul requires in Romans 12 that Christians do not retaliate. But Yoder's account of Christian nonviolence does not turn on any one text. Rather Christian nonviolence is made possible by the Son of God suffering on the cross, thereby revealing that the Father refuses to save the world through violence. Rather the Father in the Son takes upon himself our violence so that violence might be forever ended.

That is why in *Nevertheless* Yoder observes that his account of nonviolence is:

"The only position for which the person of Jesus is indispensable. It's the only one of these positions which would lose its substance if Jesus were not the Christ and lose its foundation if Jesus Christ were not the Lord.

"Since Jesus is seen in his full humanity as responding to the needs and temptations of a social character, the problems for our obedience to him are not problems in the interpretation of texts. Nor is the question of our fidelity one of moralism, a stuffy preoccupation with never making a mistake.

"The question put to us as we follow Jesus is not whether we have successfully refrained from breaking any rules. Instead we are asked whether we have been participants in that human experience, that peculiar way of living for God in the world and being used as instruments of the living God in the world, which the Bible calls agape or cross."

Therefore, Yoder speaks of the pacifism of the messianic community. Nonviolence names not just a response to the violence of the state, but rather a way of life of a community that lives through practices of reconciliation and forgiveness. So Matthew 18 becomes crucial for this account of nonviolence because Christians must be willing to expose and have exposed their sins to one another in a way that their community can live in peace.

The nonviolence that is Christologically displayed is also an ecclesiological position. Christians are called to a community of nonviolence in a world of war thereby creating the division between Church and world. Therefore, Christian nonviolence is not a strategy to end war, though of course it certainly wants to make war less likely. Rather Christians are called to nonviolence in a world of war because they can do nothing less as faithful followers of Christ. Christian nonviolence is an eschatological position that reminds Christians that we live in a new age begun by Christ yet not yet consummated. Accordingly, Christian nonviolence is the exemplification of God's patience as found in the cross to redeem us so that we might be for the world his promised people.

This article is part of a project on "The Theology of Peace and War". For further information, go to <http://www.mupwj.org/theologyofpeaceandwar.htm>. Or contact Methodists United for Peace with Justice at 1500 16th Street, NW, Washington, D.C.20036 or at mupwj@mupwj.org.

Hauerwas Applied:

Recently a student asked Stanley Hauerwas what Christians should do about Darfur and Hauerwas replied:

I'm ready to send you as a missionary... We need, as a matter of fact, to have Christian Peacemaker Teams all over Darfur. I'm absolutely serious about that. The problem is that we think as Christians today that the way we do something about Darfur is to have the State Department act on our behalf because we can't get Christians to do what Christians need to do about Darfur. Now that is exactly what has gone wrong... If Christians are serious about who we are we don't want the government to become the way we're supposed to act. So, I'm really serious about that.

Extra article: Hauerwas on Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer: The Truthful Witness

Stanley Hauerwas is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University Divinity School.

Professor Hauerwas has sought to recover the significance of the virtues for understanding the nature of the Christian life. This search has led him to emphasize the importance of the church, as well as narrative for understanding Christian existence. His work cuts across disciplinary lines as he is in conversation with systematic theology, philosophical theology and ethics, political theory, as well as the philosophy of social science and medical ethics.

Dr. Hauerwas delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectureship at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, in 2001. He was named "America's Best Theologian" by Time in 2001. His book, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, was selected as one of the 100 most important books on religion of the 20th century. He holds a joint appointment in Duke Law School. He has two books forthcoming for preachers, one of which contains series of meditation on the seven last words of Jesus.

However, it was his recent book *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* that caught our attention as we prepared this issue of *Homiletics* with Bonhoeffer in mind.

We met on a beautiful autumn morning in his second-floor office in Old Divinity, and we began our discussion with a reference to his theological notoriety.

HOMILETICS: Jeff Stout, in his book *Democracy and Tradition*, says that “no theologian has done more to inflame Christian resentment of secular political culture” than you. First, I didn’t know that Christians resented secular political culture, and second, what does he mean, and three, do you agree that no theologian has caused this resentment more than you?

HAUERWAS: What was the first part of that question again? [laughter].

HOMILETICS: Do Christians resent secular political culture?

HAUERWAS: I find Jeff’s estimate of my influence vastly overrated. I had no idea any theologian could have that effect, particularly among other Christians! [laughter]. So, I don’t know what he means, really, by suggesting that I’ve convinced Christians to give up on a democracy, which is his main charge.

I have argued that Christians’ first political responsibility is to be the church, and by being the church they should understand that their first political loyalty is to God, and the God we worship as Christians, in a manner that understands that we are not first and foremost about making democracy work, but about the truthful worship of the true God.

I would like to think that I could make a contribution to any social order, but it has to be done one witness at a time. Jeff doesn’t get how influential Yoder’s influence has been on me, in the sense that John Yoder never thought that Christians withdrew from society, even Christians committed to nonviolence as he was and as I am, but we think that the kind of truthfulness that nonviolence requires should be of service to any political order anywhere. So that led into what I was doing with Bonhoeffer, namely Bonhoeffer’s discovery that one of the greatest political contributions Christians can make to any social order in which they find themselves is to tell the truth and to be capable of receiving the truth!

When I wrote the Bonhoeffer essay, Jeff’s book hadn’t appeared yet. So I wasn’t writing in response to that book, but I think the essays are in a certain sense a response to his book. I should say, as I’ve said in the epilogue in *Performing the Faith* where I respond to Jeff — I think Jeff’s book is a great opportunity for Christians. Jeff obviously is not a Christian, but he is theologically musical, and he is taking Christians seriously, and I think that is a great gift, and I really admire what he’s about in the book. I would hope that this would be a part of a constructive conversation that we’ve really been desperately needing to have.

What Jeff has done is — he’s left behind some of the weighty secular thinkers such as Rawls and Rorty and says that they are wrong to exclude strong convictions from political debate, and I think he’s right about that. So it’s really an opportunity that he’s offered for Christians to say, “We have something to give.”

HOMILETICS: Your recent book on Bonhoeffer, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* — I thought “performing” was an interesting word. Faith as performance.

HAUERWAS: That was very intentional. One of the things that liberal democratic society has encouraged Christians to believe about what they believe is that what it means to be a Christian is primarily belief! [laughter]. So you hold to these 26 absurd propositions before breakfast, you know.

This is a deep misunderstanding about how Christianity works. Of course we believe that God is God and we are not and that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit but that this is not a set of propositions — but is rather embedded in a community of practices that make those beliefs themselves work and give us a community by which we are shaped. Religious belief is not just some kind of primitive metaphysics, but in fact it is a performance just like you’d perform Lear. What people think Christianity is, is that it’s like the text of Lear, rather than the actual production of

Lear. It has to be performed for you to understand what Lear is — a drama. You can read it, but unfortunately Christians so often want to make Christianity a text rather than a performance.

The crucial chapter in the book is the chapter “Performing the Faith” in which James Fodor and I try to display what it means for Christians to see the practice of the faith.

I could have started the book with that chapter, but I didn’t want to do that because I wanted to pull you in by attending to the “performance” of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a performer of Christianity.

HOMILETICS: We typically view Bonhoeffer not as a pacifist, don’t we, but as a person who aggressively attempted to stop the wheel from crushing the oppressed — are you saying he became a pacifist?

HAUERWAS: There’s no question that he was a pacifist. He had been strongly influenced at Union by a Calvinist, Jean Lasserre, who wrote *The Cross and the Sword*, who was a Huguenot originally, and he had decided that Christian nonviolence was necessary to be a Christian. So he was not a just war person.

Bonhoeffer remained deeply committed to nonviolence. People think that his commitment was decisively changed because of his involvement with the Abwehr plot against Hitler. Certainly, Bonhoeffer toward the end, thought that Hitler should be assassinated. This was a very complicated matter because when he first joined the plot against Hitler they didn’t want to kill Hitler. They were afraid if they killed Hitler it would make Hitler a martyr and make German reconstruction even more difficult than it was going to be anyway.

But once the British had turned down any possibility that if they had overthrown Hitler there might be something less than unconditional surrender, once the British had rejected that and they wanted complete capitulation and they wouldn’t stand for a German government to be established, then Bonhoeffer and his colleagues thought that they had to kill Hitler.

We simply do not know how Bonhoeffer thought about that decision. I have no doubt, however, that Bonhoeffer thought clearly that what they were going to have to do was sin. It was sin —

HOMILETICS: And sin boldly [laughter].

HAUERWAS: And sin boldly.

HOMILETICS: And suppose he had succeeded and that he indeed had pulled the trigger, how would that have affected our evaluation of him now?

HAUERWAS: That’s really an interesting question. Bethge reports that one time Bonhoeffer volunteered to pull the trigger, and they said, “You wouldn’t know which end of the gun to point!” [laughter]. So they said, “You’re not the man.” If they had been successful and Bonhoeffer would have lived, people would have been very surprised by his conservative theological position — and by conservative I mean only that he was thoroughly orthodox in his convictions and Barthian all the way down — they would be surprised by that, and secondly they would be very surprised by his conservative politics. He distrusted “the people.” We forget that Hitler had support from the German people. Bonhoeffer did not think that after the defeat of Germany, trying to erect an English or an American democracy was the future for Germany. So I suspect that people would have found him remarkably critical of some of the assumptions that we would just make Germany democratic. He thought the rule of law was very important, and he thought that the rule of law was unintelligible without the acknowledgement of God.

HOMILETICS: So we can’t live as Barth suggested, “*Et si deus non daretur*,” as if God does not exist.

HAUERWAS: That’s true. In *Letters and Papers* we get this idea that we have to let the secular be secular. What he meant by that is that we have to get over Constantinian Christianity. The church’s presumption was that it would have to rule a society, or at least have one favorably established by the government and social habits. This, Bonhoeffer thought, we had to get over. Now, how that was consistent with his own view, too, that the rule of law required an acknowledgement of the “commandment” as he put it, and by “commandment” he meant the first commandment — I don’t know. I don’t know how he would straighten that out. Bonhoeffer, as early as *Sanctorum*

Communio, really was beginning to understand that the day of established Christianity was over and that intellectual positions that presupposed established Christianity were simply no longer in the works.

HOMILETICS: You say that you want to show that “from the very beginning Bonhoeffer was attempting to develop a theological politics from which we still have very much to learn.” How does theological politics differ from a political theology?

HAUERWAS: The distinction comes from a book by Arne Rasmussen. Arne understands political theology to be exemplified by someone like Jorgen Moltmann, who wants to theologize over a politics that already exists, so therefore theology comes as a handmaiden to understand —

HOMILETICS: — a politics that’s already in place.

HAUERWAS: A theological politics refuses to do that. It asks, “What kind of community do you need to understand how these claims should be embodied.”

HOMILETICS: So Bonhoeffer was doing the latter.

HAUERWAS: Absolutely.

HOMILETICS: Developing a theological politics that would suggest a different approach to —

HAUERWAS: Absolutely. I certainly think that is right. That was true all the way through his extraordinary work from beginning to end. In fact, the kind of community he was trying to establish at Finkenwald was an attempt at theological politics. In many ways, during that time at Finkenwald, Bonhoeffer was becoming an “abbot” trying to establish forms of life for the formation of these people going into the ministry that would provide an alternative to the politics of the world.

HOMILETICS: And part of his developing theological politics involved recovering or reclaiming the visibility of the church.

HAUERWAS: Absolutely crucial was the notion of reclaiming the visibility of the church. John Yoder says that before Constantine, Christians knew God was in the church, but they had to believe that God was also in the world because the world was beating the hell out of them! [laughter]. But after Constantine, Christians now knew that God was in the world, because the world favored them, but they had to believe that God was in the church! [laughter]. Because it was very clear that the church was no longer being informed in terms of what constitutes a holy community. That’s what I mean by Bonhoeffer’s reclaiming the visibility of the church. It becomes very complicated.

If you believe as I do that the development of the modern state — and it starts as early as the 14th century — had to create the privatization of Christianity, it’s because you want people shaped by the presumption that what Christianity is about is fundamentally forming subjectivity, rather than forming bodies that will be resistant to the formation of bodies by states. So what Bonhoeffer was about was really reclaiming the formation of Christian bodies that would be able to resist nation states, and that’s what I mean by the recovery of the visibility of the church. His criticisms of Troeltsch in *Sanctorum Communio* were exactly an attempt to reclaim from the thought forms of Protestant liberalism exactly that kind of privatization.

HOMILETICS: And truth-telling was a critical aspect of this. He believed, as you show, that the gift of the church to any politics is the truthful proclamation of the gospel.

HAUERWAS: That’s what Barth thought also. Barth thought that you had an indication of the totalitarian character of the Nazis as soon as a law was passed prohibiting Christians from preaching to Jews. Because it was outlawed for a Jew to become a Christian. Barth said, you don’t have the free preaching of the gospel. Bonhoeffer saw clearly in a way that Barth did not — and Barth later said, to Bonhoeffer’s credit, that he saw that the free preaching of the gospel had been abrogated to the extent that Christians did not see the Jews as God’s chosen people. Therefore it was anti-semitism at the very heart of the Nazi project, and Bonhoeffer saw clearly that Christian preaching had to

be against it, which of course would get the church into a lot of trouble. And you have to remember that you're in Lutheran Germany where there is a strong distinction between the order of creation and the order of redemption and the church did not engage in issues in the order of creation, because that was God just maintaining order. And so Bonhoeffer's critique of that dualism meant he was going to give you a quite different understanding of what preaching looked like.

HOMILETICS: So what was Bonhoeffer's view of the role of the state?

HAUERWAS: It was to keep as nonviolent order as possible in the process of caring for the orphans, widows and so on. In that sense, he had a relatively traditional view of what the state can do.

HOMILETICS: So would you vote for a pacifist candidate for president?

HAUERWAS: I would, but my hunch is that he wouldn't stand much of a chance of being elected [laughter].

HOMILETICS: But what if we had a president who was a pacifist?

HAUERWAS: Well, as Christians we would have to be ready to support him in all kinds of risky possibilities. For example, the way I try to help people think about this — when people talk to people committed to Christian nonviolence, they often feel threatened and they give you questions like “What would you do if — ?”

My way of deflecting those kinds of questions which often assume a kind of mechanistic account of the necessity of violence that doesn't create an alternative — I would be more than happy to enter into a discussion with just war people about what kinds of social arrangements do we need that people can be called to the police function in a way that they're not brutalized by performing that office? Right now, policemen often come from classes just above criminal classes, and then we throw them into some of the most complex situations anyone can imagine.

How often do you walk into domestic disputes and as soon as you get there, the two people who've been fighting one another turn on you! [laughter]. And police are not supposed to become cynical or brutal. So it's hard. So I am more than ready to enter into those discussions as someone committed to Christian nonviolence because that has partly to do with my way of understanding ethics because I think ethics too often assumes that the only possibilities you have are those created by our unfaithfulness. But I think that Christian faithfulness creates the possibility of miracle.

Think about the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe. Who could have anticipated that? It was fundamentally also a nonviolent revolution. The Soviets' duplicity simply couldn't be maintained.

HOMILETICS: But Reagan bled them dry with Star Wars.

HAUERWAS: Yes, I'm sure that was part of it. I don't know how effective that was. But that doesn't explain why Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic were able to gain independence from the Soviet Union. In Hungary it was reformed pastors that led, and then they were installed in government and people asked “Why?” And the answer was, “They don't lie. They believe in telling the truth” [laughter].

HOMILETICS: Is it possible for a politician not to tell a lie?

HAUERWAS: The difficulty about becoming a public official in America is that the training necessary for being a politician makes you the kind of person that can't distinguish a lie from the truth anymore.

HOMILETICS: So politicians should not go to law school, they should go through seminary.

HAUERWAS: That would be a really good idea — a way of formation. But then, you see, one of the things that bothers me deeply about the situation we're in is how seldom preachers tell their congregations the truth! That's where you've got to start in a genuine politics.

What would it mean to preach truthfully today? Seldom do congregations hear sermons on dying. You're going to die! Seldom are we told that and what it means to respond Christianly to that. Seldom are we told how Christians should understand war. What possesses the souls of mainline Christians in America? Greed! Everyone concentrates on sex, but greed is what's tearing us up. We concentrate on sex because we think we can figure out when we've done that wrong, but people can't figure out when they're greedy. What would they say? Owning two SUVs [laughter] may be an indication of greed? What would it mean for us to acknowledge the fact that we're really possessed by greed. And it goes without saying that in America we're possessed by greed.

After 9/11, what were we asked to do? Shop! I mean, what an extraordinary thing — that we're supposed to shop as a way to resist terrorism. Christians all over the country should have said, "Hey, that sounds pretty silly to us."

There's this extraordinary claim that September 11, 2001 changed the world. False. Christians should be saying, "No, A.D. 33 changed the world." We need to narrate 9/11 in the light of A.D. 33 and not vice versa. Nothing is more important for Christians than to demand the truth from our ministers.

Most American politicians don't lie because they're venal. The American people don't want to know the truth. Do you want to know you're a slave nation? Do you want to know you're a genocidal nation?

One of the examples I give is what George Bush senior said when he appointed Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court: "This is the most qualified candidate I could find." Everyone knew that was wrong. He needed to appoint an African-American to the Supreme Court, and rightly so, because African-Americans need to be appointed to positions where they can protect other African-Americans. You need to say that you need to do that because we're a racist society in which African-Americans still need that kind of protection.

So what if he had said, "I'm appointing Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court because we're a racist society and we need to have African-Americans in positions of power where they can protect other African-Americans"? Would the American people have wanted to hear that? I don't think so. So I don't necessarily blame the politicians.

How can the church create zones for truth-telling for the kind of world in which we find ourselves? It would be an extraordinary contribution to our wider political life.

HOMILETICS: How can pastors preach Bonhoeffer as we come up on the 60th anniversary of his death?

HAUERWAS: Well, first, they need to read him! You can't preach him without reading him. I think they don't read. Part of the problem is that so many of the clergy don't read anything at all anymore.

HOMILETICS: So when we read Bonhoeffer we read Discipleship, and Letters and Papers. Maybe we should read the Ethics.

HAUERWAS: Oh, you should definitely read the Ethics — though the Ethics is a very confusing and confused book because we don't know how he meant it to go together. You can't read Discipleship often enough. I think Life Together is also an absolutely beautiful book. And I would certainly go back to Sanctorum Communio. These new editions that Fortress is putting out are just absolutely wonderful. Extraordinary. I've just read the manuscript of Ethics that's coming out soon. And they've done a superb job. So there are ample resources.

To read someone like Bonhoeffer or Barth, what you need to see is that they're about helping us reclaim Christian grammar. Most of us don't speak Christian grammar. We speak American, and we kind of fit the Christian into that. The question is, how can we learn to speak as Christians in a manner that our language is not overtaken by the presumption that Christianity is not about sustaining the freedom of the individual? In fact, Christianity is not at all about sustaining the freedom of the individual. It's about the triumph of the Son of God through the cross and the resurrection.

HOMILETICS: Well, even Bonhoeffer when he got to Union was surprised at our American inability to articulate theologically.

HAUERWAS: He was shocked. He thought that Reinhold Neibuhr would be a theological resource. And he liked Neibuhr very much. I think Neibuhr was a thoroughly impressive man. But he had no use for his theology, because he saw it very clearly as a form of Protestant liberalism that he had little use for. He had left that behind at the University of Berlin, and he saw so much of it here in America. He didn't think that was the way to go. He loved going with Frank Fisher to Adam Clayton Powell's church in Harlem. What he liked so much about that was the unapologetic use of Christian speech. They talked about Jesus! That resonated deeply with him.

HOMILETICS: So what is the enduring relevance of Bonhoeffer for us today?

HAUERWAS: What a truthful witness looks like. It's very hard for us to imagine. Bonhoeffer combined extraordinary acuity with a life faithfully lived. As such, it's a gift he's given us to contemplate his life and work in the hope that in some small way we may be worthy of witnessing to that kind of witness. His importance will only continue to grow.

HOMILETICS: Two more questions. Is there a sense in which we are different today after 9/11? You say in your book that our first reaction, or perhaps yours, was: "Let's kill the bastards."

HAUERWAS: We are a country mesmerized by fear. Death was brought to the American shore. It's a reality Americans do not want to confront.

There's a connection between the amount of money Americans spend on medicine and our reaction to 9/11. Both are attempts to deny that we're not going to get out of life alive.

America has become a much more repressive society after 9/11. If Americans have to choose between security and freedom, it's very clear that Americans are going to choose security.

And we are so powerful. Americans don't realize how powerful we are in the world. We're going to make the rest of the world pay for frightening us to death. It's a very dark time. It's a very dark time.

The worst thing that happened was the words, "We are at war." September 11 was not war, it was murder. You want to arrest murderers. As soon as the words "We are at war" were said, it gave Bin Laden what he wanted. It made him a warrior. Before that, he was a murderer. Islamic people also abhor murder. And if we had kept the language within that range we would have had a better chance at securing the cooperation we needed from people who could actually do something.

Once you got war against terrorism as a metaphor, then it easily migrated to war in Afghanistan and then to war in Iraq — all under the cover of war against terrorism. I think it's just a disaster. God knows what's going to happen. I have nothing but the deepest sympathy for those young people in our armed forces who are in Iraq, who are thinking that every person coming on the street might try to kill them. What a terrible, terrible situation to be in.

HOMILETICS: You've decided to speak to preachers.

HAUERWAS: I have two books coming out. The first is called *Cross-shattered Christ*. It's a meditation on the seven last words of Jesus. I found this to be one of the most demanding things I've done. I've tried to write the meditations reminding people, "This is about God."

HOMILETICS: So are they sermons?

HAUERWAS: Meditations. It's hard to know whether you can preach a sermon on the seven last words of Jesus, so I offered them as meditations.

What's at the heart of them is an attempt to reclaim "This is God's action on our behalf" in a way that avoids satisfaction accounts of the atonement. I think I've done that pretty well, as a matter of fact.

The other book is called *Disquieting Time* — a book of sermons and prayers and what I call "sundries" of short pieces I've written on people and preaching. There's an essay in there on why Will Willimon never explains

[laughter]. It's a tribute to my friend's preaching and shows how Will has an ingenious way of proclamation that never explains and why sermons that try to explain are dead.

HOMILETICS: Which reminds me of what you say in *Performing the Faith* in a chapter called "Explaining Nonviolence," and the penultimate sentence of the chapter says that "contrary to the title of this essay, nonviolence cannot be explained."

HAUERWAS: Right! Explanations are attempts to domesticate the wildness of God's Spirit in a cause-and-effect model. You can't explain God. If you think an explanation is possible, then you think that there's some principle that is more determinative than God to explain God. One way to put it: People say, "Well how do I know that Jesus was raised from the dead?" I say, "If you need a theory of truth to explain that Jesus was raised from the dead, worship that theory, don't worship Jesus!" It's an attempt to avoid theological reductionistic accounts. And there are a lot of those out there. So both of these books are my attempt to exhibit how I think Christian preaching should look today.

I don't regard myself as a great preacher in any way. I love to preach. Indeed, I always feel theologically freer when I preach than any time when I am doing my theological work exactly because I am under the obedience of the text.

HOMILETICS: You describe yourself as a reluctant pacifist. Is this because it took a lot to overcome your Texan machismo?

HAUERWAS: That's part of it. Also, to be committed to Christian nonviolence changes everything. It makes life at once more challenging and more interesting, but also you're not sure you want to have to think through all of that [laughs], and it also means you always have to remember the life of nonviolence is impossible if you are not willing to depend on other people to make your life a reality. It creates a vulnerability that no one likes to have. But it's exactly what salvation is: vulnerability.

So I am a reluctant pacifist, as anyone should be. It doesn't come naturally to anyone. We always find ourselves in violences we hardly know how to name. That's why I don't like the language of pacifism because it's so passive. Nonviolence commits you to a very aggressive stance toward the world. I don't like nonviolence because it makes it sound like whatever is peace is not violence. Part of the argument is that you never know how to recognize violence unless you're already embedded in practices of peace.