

# The Gift of the Church: A More Excellent Form of Life

Turnbull, Ryan

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# The Gift of the Church: A More Excellent Form of Life

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Ryan Turnbull\*

*“Yet I side with the Psalmist, who insists that those who would abide in the Lord’s tent must ‘speak the truth from their heart.’ ‘Because it is true’ is the necessary condition for such speech.”<sup>1</sup>*

Stanley Hauerwas believes that truth matters. But before Hauerwas can ask the age-old question, “What is truth?” he first must inquire into the type of people that are capable of truth. For the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, truth is not knowable apart from the particular community’s life-form that constitutes the language game by which truth claims can be evaluated. Stanley Hauerwas, who has adopted Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy, understands that this insight about truth provides the means by which he can keep theological claims theological. In other words, it is only in the church that Christians come to know what it means for Jesus to be the Truth. Thus Hauerwas writes,

The ‘it’ in ‘because it is true’ is a person. Truth for us is not a principle or system, not a structure of correct insights, not a doctrine. The expression of the truth may use any of these means to say what is true, but as Barth rightly insists, ‘Jesus Christ in the promise of the Spirit as His revelation in the sphere of our time and history is the truth.’<sup>2</sup>

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\* Ryan Turnbull is a graduate of Providence Theological Seminary (M.A., Theological Studies). Ryan’s original paper, now revised for publication, placed first in the Biblical and Theological Studies Department’s 2017 student paper competition.

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology* (New York, NY: Church, 2013), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 125–26.

The claim that truth is a person is a claim that is made by the Christian tradition and only intelligible to those embedded within the practices of that tradition. Hauerwas explicitly rejects the notion that truth is some sort of theory of relation,<sup>3</sup> insisting that the person of Jesus is the truth:

Because [Jesus] is the truth, we can speak the truth. That speaking the truth takes the form of witness means we are confronted with this truth in a manner that does not allow us to distance ourselves from him. Any attempt to sunder truth from this, the true witness, to make truth an idea about the relation between God and man, cannot be the truth. If the truth is thought to be but a symbol, no matter how exalted, it is but a falsehood. The true witness is this man of Gethsemane and Golgotha.<sup>4</sup>

It is in the life-form constituted by the practices of prayer, preaching, baptism, and Eucharist that Christians form the primitive agreements that constitute the rules of use that give meaning to the proposition that Jesus is the Truth. That is one way to describe it, but it does not say everything that must be said, for while this form of life is necessary to teach Christians the language to say what they believe, Christians also believe Jesus is really present in these practices. The practices of the church are simultaneously where Christ is present and where Christians gain the resources necessary to see that Christ

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<sup>3</sup> On descriptivist accounts of language, truth is understood to be the relation of the correspondence of words to their objects of reference in the 'real' world. This understanding of truth, while helpful in certain language-games is unintelligible when it is exposed, as Wittgenstein has shown, that language is not something distinct from the world but is instead constitutive of and coterminous with the world. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 107-115 and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations I*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, 126.

is present.<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas calls this transformation *theosis*, which is his way of showing that Wittgenstein's philosophical account is useful in describing the divine reality that it is only through the in-grafting work of the Holy Spirit that we are transformed to see Jesus rightly.<sup>6</sup> To see Jesus rightly is to recognize that Jesus is Lord, and that he is so because he is true God and true man; it took the church a long time to learn to be able to say this, but it was necessary in order to realize the significance of all that Jesus' Lordship entails. Hauerwas' use of Wittgenstein and MacIntyre is therefore not a retreat into theory, but a reflection of a deep pneuma-participatory ontology of language that is animated by his christological particularism.<sup>7</sup>

Hauerwas often claims that the first task of the church is to be the church, which is ultimately a political claim that defines both the internal goods of the church and the standards of excellence and rules

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<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas' ecclesial focus has been criticized for being insufficiently theological, with the suggestion that a more explicitly pneumatological approach would strengthen his position. See, for example, Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 179. In his most recent work, it appears that Hauerwas has attempted to do precisely that by adopting the language of '*theosis*' from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This focus on *theosis* provides the necessary participatory framework to make Hauerwas' insistence on the formative nature of practices to be a theological claim and not merely a sociological theory. For more on Hauerwas' new pneumatological emphasis, see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, Kindle ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 32-52; "Begotten, Not Made: The Grammar of the Incarnation," *ABC Religion and Ethics* (January 4, 2017), online: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/01/04/4600040.htm> (accessed: January 5, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Hauerwas writes, "Because Jesus is very God and very man, at the Eucharist we are consumed by what we consume. God became human, assumed our nature, so that we might share in God's very life. The Eastern Church has a name for this transformation. It is called *theosis* and it means we only are able to be fully human to the extent we are divinized" (*Without Apology*, 9).

<sup>7</sup> Hauerwas is thus using these philosophical tools to show how his theology follows the Barthian imperative to let ontology precede epistemology. It is interesting to see Hauerwas develop his pneumatology along Eastern conceptual lines, as it reveals some of the deep continuities between his own Methodism and the Eastern tradition, which is itself an area that should be explored further. Hauerwas' recent work on pneumatology should be watched closely in forthcoming work, as it has been long called for from his friendly critics. See most recently Robert J. Dean, *For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 235-36.

for achieving those goods. For Hauerwas, “Christianity is mostly a matter of politics – politics as defined by the gospel. The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a countercultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called the church.”<sup>8</sup> The notion of the church as polis is the bedrock of Hauerwas’ theological politics.<sup>9</sup> In this essay I first examine the contributions of Alasdair MacIntyre to Hauerwas’ conception of traditions and practices before turning to some of the particular liturgical practices of the church that form Christians to see and live in the particular truth of the gospel.

## After MacIntyre

### Overview

Truthfulness is a key virtue for Hauerwas. From the beginning of his career, Hauerwas has sought to recover the virtues as a way of describing Christian belief and practice, and to do so he has relied heavily on the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre, building on the heritage of Wittgenstein, has provided Hauerwas with the thick philosophical descriptions necessary to understand what a tradition is and what role it plays in ordering the meaning conditions for the formation of the virtues that constitute Christian ethics. With the publishing of *After Virtue*,<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre began to develop an alternative to the philosophical moral options of modernity by resurrecting an Aristotelian conception of the virtues. *After Virtue* is seen as the turning point in his philosophy which all of his later work has

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 30.

<sup>9</sup> The best analysis of Hauerwas’ theological politics has come from Arne Rasmussen. See especially *The Church as Polis*, 191-230. He compares and contrasts Hauerwas’ theological politics with Moltmann’s political theology in order to draw out the strengths and weaknesses of their positions. In my analysis, I focus more on the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre on Hauerwas’ conception of practices and tradition. I undertake an analysis of some of the specific practices that Hauerwas has increasingly written on since the publishing of Rasmussen’s book.

<sup>10</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

sought to clarify, nuance, and extend in the Thomist direction.<sup>11</sup> It is to MacIntyre's description of a moral tradition in *After Virtue* that we now turn.

MacIntyre lays out a three-staged account of the concept of virtue. According to this account, each later stage presupposes the earlier stages but not *vice versa*.<sup>12</sup> The first stage of MacIntyre's account is his definition of what he considers to be a 'practice.' MacIntyre has a technical definition for practice that is more expansive than most ordinary usages of the word:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.<sup>13</sup>

MacIntyre clarifies that on this definition neither throwing a football with skill nor planting turnips count as practices (as more colloquial conceptions of practices might suggest), but that the game of football and farming do.<sup>14</sup> Thus a practice for MacIntyre is a broad term that covers an entire inter-connected set of actions.

To further unpack this definition, MacIntyre makes the distinction between internal and external goods by using the analogy of teaching a young child to play chess.<sup>15</sup> This hypothetical child is exceptionally intelligent but has no desire to learn to play chess, so

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<sup>11</sup> For his more explicitly Thomist development of the ideas of *After Virtue*, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

<sup>15</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188.

MacIntyre bribes the child with a small bag of candy. This bribe is an external good. It is an external good because the candy is not a good that is internal to the practice of playing chess, as it neither achieves the goods constitutive of the game nor does it systematically extend those goods. The internal goods of chess are such things as analytical skill, strategic imagination, competitive intensity, and so on. To gain the external good (i.e., the candy), the child may be motivated to cheat to win. However, if the child at some point desires to play the game for the pleasure of the goods internal to the game itself, and derives some sort of satisfaction in doing so, then cheating to win would no longer be reasonable, as it would destroy those goods, the attainment of which the child is playing for.

This brings us to an observation about the nature of internal versus external goods that MacIntyre makes. External goods are always objects of personal property, be they wealth, fame, power, and so forth.<sup>16</sup> Internal goods, however, are goods for the entire community that participates in the practice to which these goods belong. When new techniques in sport or art are advanced, everyone in the practice benefits, thus we can observe that in many sports the overall level of play today is much higher than in previous generations precisely because of the contributions of those generations.<sup>17</sup>

Further, MacIntyre notes that there are two types of internal goods. The first are goods internally related to the excellence of the practice itself, such as mastery of the art of painting.<sup>18</sup> The second

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<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190–91. For example, in a recent interview with Peter Mansbridge, Wayne Gretzky confessed that he would not be good enough to play in today's league. The internal standards of excellence in the sport of hockey have surpassed even the abilities of 'the Great One' yet it is precisely because of the contributions he made to strategy and various components of the skills that make up the game of hockey that the game has been able to advance to the point that it is today. Simultaneously, Gretzky worries that the external goods of money and fame are distorting the practice of hockey, making access for low-income players more difficult and curbing some of the creativity that was brought to the game by players who previously did not solely focus on hockey. See Wayne Gretzky interview with Peter Mansbridge, *CBC The National* (October 11, 2016), online: <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/hockey/nhl/wayne-gretzky-interview-national-1.3800604> (accessed February 4, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 189.

type of internal good is related to the first good, for as the painter pursues the good of excellence in painting generally, the painter will experience the good of a certain kind of life. The life of a painter qua painter is the second kind of internal good to the practice of painting, as it is primarily as a painter that one achieves the necessary competence in judging the first type of internal goods.<sup>19</sup>

It is at this point that MacIntyre defines what a virtue is: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."<sup>20</sup> Let me extend the painter example even further. To experience the second type of internal good, the good of being a painter, one must be in possession of virtue, for it could very well be the case that one attempts to live as a painter but does so solely as a means to attain external goods, or in some other way that tends to distort or otherwise ignore the first class of internal goods that are, in part, constitutive of the practice of painting. According to MacIntyre, there are at least three virtues that are required in any practice in order to achieve the goods internal to that practice; these virtues are justice, honesty, and courage.<sup>21</sup>

Virtues are carried along and sustained by various institutions. MacIntyre distinguishes practices from institutions by pointing out that while chess, physics, and medicine are practices, chess clubs, laboratories, universities, and hospitals are institutions. It is because of the inextricability of practices from the institutions that bear them that the virtues are necessary in providing the essential function of allowing practices to resist the corrupting influence of institutions.<sup>22</sup> Institutions can easily fall prey to the temptation of external goods that are associated with practices and attempt to distort and destroy

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<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191. MacIntyre seems to suggest that these are three necessary virtues that must be in place for the relations necessary to achieve the internal goods of practices. It is interesting to note that, insofar as Hauerwas will adopt MacIntyre's work, truthfulness remains one of the cardinal virtues for explicitly Christian practice.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194.



the integrity of the practice in order to achieve greater levels of the external good.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that practices can be distinguished, but never wholly separated, from the institutions that sustain them and provide the standards of excellence and rules that determine what the internal goods of that practice are and how they might be achieved, for "...it is always within some particular community with its own specific institutional forms that we learn or fail to learn to exercise the virtues."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, practices require institutions because practices have a history, and that history is remembered within the institutions that bear them.<sup>25</sup>

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice. Practices of course, as I have just noticed, have a history: games, sciences and arts all have histories. Thus the standards are not themselves immune from criticism, but nonetheless we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far... *De gustibus est disputandum*.<sup>26</sup>

Thus far, MacIntyre has been providing an account of the virtues

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<sup>23</sup> This is precisely Gretzky's big complaint against modern hockey. Because of the extraordinary level of money and prestige (i.e., external goods) associated with professional hockey, there is an incentive on the part of the NHL to distort and destroy the internal goods of hockey that have made that practice the great national past time of Canada.

<sup>24</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194–95.

<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193–94.

<sup>26</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190. The Latin quote is a refutation of the traditional maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum* or "in matters of taste there can be no disputes." MacIntyre's description of the rules and norms which govern practices points towards the conclusion that matters of taste may in fact be disputed, precisely on the grounds of the standards of excellence that are intrinsic to the practices to which standards of taste refer.

in terms of practices. To complement this account, MacIntyre also insists that to achieve further clarity as to the nature of the virtues, there must be some telos which provides a narrative unity to a whole human life.<sup>27</sup> For MacIntyre, this narrative unity to a life is necessary both to avoid moral arbitrariness and to specify the context of particular virtues.<sup>28</sup>

Narrative is a category that has received a great deal of consideration in recent scholarship.<sup>29</sup> For MacIntyre, narratives are necessary in order to distinguish between intelligible and unintelligible actions. According to MacIntyre, “the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action as such.”<sup>30</sup> Unintelligible actions are but failed candidates for the status of intelligible action and so should not be conceptually lumped together as a single class of action. Intelligibility is of crucial importance here, because it points to the necessity of narrative; we know what type of action is occurring because of the narrative context of that action. Therefore, mere phenomenological descriptions of action *qua* action are inadequate. As it turns out, two persons could be engaged, phenomenologically, in the same activity, but because of the organizing principle of intelligibility, turn out to be performing radically different actions as defined by their respective narratives.

To demonstrate this, MacIntyre provides the example of a man doing some sort of activity in front of his house.<sup>31</sup> The observer must ask the question, “What is he doing?” This question is a question regarding the intelligibility of the actions that the agent is performing. To answer the question, it is necessary to provide some sort of narrative context that can make intelligible the series of otherwise isolated actions the man seems to be performing. Thus the man may be digging, doing yard-work, exercising, or pleasing his wife. He may in fact be doing a combination of these things, but what is crucial to

<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 202–3.

<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> For an excellent overview of the relevant discussion on narrative, see Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 209.

<sup>31</sup> What follows is a summary of the argument as presented in Alasdair MacIntyre, “Virtues, Unity of a Human Life, and Tradition,” in *Why Narrative*, 89–110, 91f.

note is that without some sort of narrative context, it is not possible to correctly judge the activity of that man. Indeed, it may be the case that his neighbour is performing similar actions from a third-person perspective, but the narrative context may be such that he is, in fact, preparing for a party or pleasing his children. Thus, the particular types of action being performed by both men are not necessarily identical types of action, even if they may appear so externally. What is most determinative for the intelligibility of the action is its narrative context, which, though it is best known to the agent, may also be observable by any who are privy to the particularities of the context.

While the narrative unity of a human life provides an intelligible unity to actions, it is not enough to say that narratives are only knowable to individuals – otherwise it would be very difficult to communicate, never mind form the kinds of communities necessary to engage in many practices. The exercise of virtue is therefore never sought individualistically.<sup>32</sup> MacIntyre acknowledges the strangeness of such a claim to those who have been formed in the tradition of modern individualism. “From the standpoint of individualism I am what I myself choose to be.”<sup>33</sup> According to this ideology, it is we individuals who get to supply the narratives to determine the types of actions we are taking. This is what allows so many Canadians to deny their part in the genocide of Indigenous peoples, failing to recognize that the larger narrative their entire lives are embedded in requires each individual to engage with and take responsibility for the legacy of failed treaties and residential schools that blight our collective history. As a farmer on Treaty Two lands, I have a shared responsibility of care for the land and the people that are indigenous to the land that must be taken into account as I perform the other actions that constitute the practice of agriculture in western Manitoba.

Upon recognizing the communal narratives that we share, we recognize that we are part of various traditions. We inherit particular histories and modes of reasoning that are partially determinative

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<sup>32</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220.

<sup>33</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220.

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this is what is meant by the psalmist’s confession, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105, KJV). The narrative of the Word is the particular tradition that shows us the way forward.

for how we proceed in the world.<sup>34</sup> MacIntyre further notes that all “reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention.”<sup>35</sup> Traditions are not static, nor do they imply an inability to know the world as defenders of modern rationality are wont to imply.<sup>36</sup> A living tradition is best described as a “socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition.”<sup>37</sup> I find it amazing, given this definition of tradition that Hauerwas has basically wholly adopted from MacIntyre, that he continues to be accused of reading Christianity as a monolithic tradition.<sup>38</sup> A tradition does not imply uniform agreement about the goods internal to its practices; it sets the rules for the debate about precisely what goods are internal to its practices. Disagreement is encouraged, frequent, and necessary if the tradition is to continue as a living tradition.

Nicholas Healy has argued that Hauerwas’ adoption of MacIntyre’s account of traditions is theologically thin. Healy suggests that there is an important difference between the Christian tradition and all other traditions. For Healy, it is axiomatic that “we need to make ongoing efforts to convert if we are to be a good Christian.”<sup>39</sup> His point is that we do not simply inhabit the Christian tradition like we may inhabit liberalism or socialism – “we have to *think* about being a Christian.”<sup>40</sup> I am not so sure that the same kind of determining that is required to figure out what Christianity is and how it may be lived out is not, in fact, present in other traditions. But ultimately, for Healy, the more serious charge is that following Jesus is “*always* beyond the ‘human powers’ of MacIntyre’s definition.”<sup>41</sup> This is an important observation, as it points to the relative lack of pneuma-

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<sup>35</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 261-79.

<sup>37</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

<sup>38</sup> This is why I find Healy’s demand for an empirical example of the church Hauerwas describes to be wrong-headed. Hauerwas’ demand that the church be distinctive is not as much an empirical issue as it is just part of the definition of church as a ‘tradition.’ See Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 80-94.

<sup>39</sup> Healy, *Hauerwas*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> Healy, *Hauerwas*, 106.

<sup>41</sup> Healy, *Hauerwas*, 106.

tology that has been explicitly stated in Hauerwas' work. As I have already argued however, Hauerwas has been operating with an assumed pneumatology that he has made most explicit in a number of recent publications, most notably, the book he co-authored with Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*.<sup>42</sup> In this discussion of the Holy Spirit that is framed largely in the Methodist language of 'sanctification' (what he elsewhere refers to as *theosis*), Hauerwas shows it is indeed possible to maintain a basically MacIntyrean account of traditions by positing a synergistic relationship between the gift that is the Holy Spirit, and the very human effort on display in the practices of the Church.<sup>43</sup>

One final point that should be clarified regarding MacIntyre is the issue of inter-tradition dialogue, if only for the reason that it is where both he and Hauerwas have received criticism for being sectarian. If all rationality is tradition-located then how do disputes between traditions get resolved? MacIntyre takes up this challenge in his follow-up volume, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* In a chapter entitled "Overcoming a Conflict of Traditions," MacIntyre puts forth Thomas Aquinas as the example par-excellence of how one might go about overcoming such a dispute.<sup>44</sup> According to MacIntyre, Aquinas had the great fortune of being formed in both Aristotelian metaphysics and Augustinian theology. As such, he learned two 'first languages' which allowed him to perform a synthesis of the traditions that faithfully extended the rationality of both traditions, providing a way forward through crises that both traditions had previously been unable to overcome. What was essential, however, was a certain imagination on the part of Aquinas to learn both traditions on their own terms before any synthesis or translation of concepts was able to occur. The contemporaries of Aquinas failed where Aquinas succeeded precisely because they did not do the necessary work of fully entering into the opposing tradition, but instead forced a pre-

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<sup>42</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*.

<sup>43</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon point to the posture required by the prayer "Come Holy Spirit" as being the key to understanding how the life of worship in the church is made possible and meaningful only by the Spirit's indwelling presence as divine Gift (see *Ibid.*, loc. 54).

<sup>44</sup> For a much fuller account of the crises in the two traditions that Aquinas was able to overcome, see MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 164–82.

mature translation of concepts that proved to be antithetical to established norms within their own original traditions.<sup>45</sup> It is this refusal to translate concepts prematurely that has earned both Hauerwas and MacIntyre the reputation of sectarianism. Ultimately, it would seem they are only doing what is minimally required to respect the particularity and integrity of moral traditions and are perhaps saved from charges of sectarian habits of thought.<sup>46</sup>

### *The Gift of the Church*

MacIntyre's philosophy has proven especially helpful to Hauerwas in helping him conceptually clarify his ecclesiology. The church is the institution that bears the practices of the tradition named Christianity and provides the narrative context that makes various moral actions intelligible for Christians. In what follows, I examine several of those practices in light of the borrowed MacIntyrian framework to tease out the particularist bent that Hauerwas demonstrates.

For Hauerwas, the tradition that Christians must be part of to know what is true is called 'church.' The church is "where Jesus is," which is to say, "where the Eucharist is."<sup>47</sup> The celebration of the Eucharist gathers and thus makes visible the people of God. It reconciles and thus brings unity in Christ rather than the generic 'common humanity' of the contemporary liberal social order. The Eucharist makes us listen and respond to the story of scripture, which reinforces the shared tradition. It remembers God's action in Israel (Exodus 16; 2 Kings 4), and by invoking the presence of the Spirit, makes Christ present. Finally, it sends us out into the world to witness and serve and thus shapes the life of the Christian at work by providing a sense of time.<sup>48</sup> For Christians, the tradition, or life-form, we inhabit is a Eucharistic one, because we give thanks that through this tradi-

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<sup>45</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 170.

<sup>46</sup> For a succinct summary of Hauerwas' various attempts to avoid the charge of sectarianism, see Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 133–34.

<sup>47</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 23.

<sup>48</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 23.

tion called church, God has given us everything we need to follow him.<sup>49</sup> The Eucharist is the ‘gifts of God for the people of God’ and thus reminds us that everything that is, exists not by necessity but as gift.<sup>50</sup> This Eucharistic story is precisely the story necessary if the lives of those who call themselves Christian are to possess the narrative unity that MacIntyre insists is necessary if the life Christians live is in fact, intelligible.

## Worship: The Language of the Church

The significance of worship for Christian theology and ethics has increased dramatically for Hauerwas over his career. The turn of the century marked a general liturgical shift in the focus of Hauerwas’ publishing efforts, though he had begun to develop many of these ideas in the preceding decades.<sup>51</sup> To say that worship has ‘significance’ for Christian theology and ethics, as I put it above, is precisely the sort of abstraction that Hauerwas’ work has rejected.<sup>52</sup> Instead, for Hauerwas, worship is ethics.<sup>53</sup> At Duke, Hauerwas took to teaching Christian ethics through the liturgical practices of the church, which has helped him better articulate that there is no ‘litur-

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<sup>49</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 40. The Eucharist forms the church as a community of witness that is engaged in the careful task of describing all that is as God’s good work.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, several of the essays in Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995); and the beginnings of an emphasis on preaching in the sermonic exhibits of *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Hauerwas routinely rejects the fragmenting of various parts of the Christian life into isolatable categories of activity. He does so regarding worship and ethics in Stanley M. Hauerwas, “Worship, Evangelism, Ethics: On Eliminating the ‘And,’” in *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God*, ed. E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 95–106.

<sup>53</sup> After teaching Christian ethics through the liturgical life of the church for many years at Duke, Hauerwas teamed up with Sam Wells to edit the ‘big book’ on ethics as worship that he has gotten his friends to write for him. See Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*.

gy and ethics,' rather, the liturgical practices of the church constitute the ethics of the church.<sup>54</sup>

There are four assumptions that Hauerwas identifies as having separated worship from ethics in modern ethical discourse. First, "Ethics is about the real, worship is about the unreal."<sup>55</sup> This assumption stands in the Kantian tradition that divides what is knowable into the realm of the phenomena and the unknowable into the realm of the noumena. This divide effectively makes worship, which is, allegedly, a merely 'spiritual' exercise, about things that are not knowable and therefore irrelevant for how the 'real' world operates. In protest to this assumption, Hauerwas ambitiously asserts that "life is in fact a rehearsal for worship – that, within an eschatological perspective, it is worship for which humanity and the creation were made, and it is worship that will make up the greater part of eternity, within which what is called 'life' and 'the real' will appear to be a tiny blip."<sup>56</sup> The second assumption is that "worship is about beauty, ethics is about the good."<sup>57</sup> Worship is conceived primarily as an aesthetic activity that is reducible to mere subjectivity, while ethics represents that which is objective. Hauerwas rejects the objectivity/subjectivity divide as part of his larger contention that there are no disinterested observers, for everyone stands in a particular tradition (à la MacIntyre).<sup>58</sup> In a related manner, the third assumption is that "worship is about the internal, ethics is about the external."<sup>59</sup> Of course, this way of dividing the two reflects the presumptions of a liberal politics that construes the political as a matter of distributing scarce resources, guaranteeing personal liberties and rights, and the exaltation of

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<sup>54</sup> For a description of this course, see Stanley Hauerwas, "The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship," in *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 153-68.

<sup>55</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 6.



‘tolerance’ as the highest virtue.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the fourth presumption Hauerwas seeks to confront is that “worship is about words, ethics is about action.”<sup>61</sup> While it may be the case that some Christians have described their worship as being fundamentally about the propriety of the words used in their songs and the content of their sermons, Hauerwas points to the fact that worship is a combination of words and actions. It is not for nothing that the words of Christian worship are characterized by phrases of action: “‘Baptise them...,’ ‘Do this...,’ ‘Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,’ ‘When two or three are gathered.’”<sup>62</sup>

Liturgy is not a sufficient condition to create virtuous formation in the lives of Christians, but it is at least a necessary one.<sup>63</sup> “Liturgy is quite literally where we learn to suffer God’s beauty and so suffering discover we are made in God’s image. Through worship we discover the truth about ourselves, making possible lives of goodness otherwise impossible.”<sup>64</sup> We discover the truth about ourselves in worship, because we are engaged in the types of practices that require of us certain virtues intrinsic to the internal goods of those practices. Perhaps the two most significant virtues for Hauerwas are truthfulness and peacefulness; he has surely written more on these two virtues than any other.<sup>65</sup> I began this chapter by drawing attention to Hauerwas’ sermon, “Because it is True.” In what follows, I return to the virtue of truthfulness and the practices of praying and preaching that are required for it. For it is only by becoming people who can speak the truth that Christians can put forth an alternative to the lie that to be ‘morally serious,’ one must sometimes be prepared to kill.

<sup>60</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 6. While it may be possible to take issue with the details of Hauerwas’ summing up of the liberal political order in this instance, this characterization should be read against the more sustained criticism of liberalism that Hauerwas has made over the course of his entire career.

<sup>61</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion*, 7.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), 160.

<sup>64</sup> Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 164.

<sup>65</sup> Patience is another important virtue for Hauerwas, but I understand it to be an outworking of a commitment to peacefulness. For a discussion of the kind of moral patience that peace requires see, Paul Doerksen, “The Politics of Moral Patience,” *Political Theology* 15, no. 5 (September 2014): 454–67.

## Praying

For Hauerwas, prayer is a practice that creates truthful people. Prayer is a practice of truthful speech because it demands that we submit our prayers to the prayers of the church. For Christians who have been formed in the extemporaneous prayers of the revivalist and pietist traditions of Protestantism, the idea that we must submit our prayers to the discipline of the church may sound like the opposite of honest speech.<sup>66</sup> This is because, too often, Christians have accepted the liberal assumption that truthful speech is a product of achieving freedom from such discipline in order to express our ‘authentic self.’ If MacIntyre’s arguments concerning the narrative embeddedness and unity of human lives are at all correct, and Hauerwas seemingly accepts that they are, then this conception of the ‘authentic self’ or ‘sovereign self’ (as Hauerwas calls it) is fundamentally flawed. We can only give truthful descriptions of ourselves when we acknowledge the narrative unity of our existence; in the same way, prayer, as a practice that is embedded in the institution of the church, must be disciplined by the standards and narratives that are constitutive of it as a practice. Therefore, the most truthful prayers are the prayers that have been subjected to the disciplining force of the psalms of Israel and the liturgical prayers of the church.

Hauerwas recalls that his father had always been the designated prayer leader at various family gatherings through the years and that his father had been quite good at it. The trouble arose, however, when the Hauerwas family decided that Stanley must have inherited

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<sup>66</sup> To be fair, pietist traditions have produced great people of prayer, but this is often a result of a very rigorous community of practice that encourages them to regularly attend prayer meetings or prayer floors. There is real power in these prayers, but even in these traditions, submission to the prayers of Scripture can be incredibly beneficial in disciplining language and rooting out possible idolatrous prayers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer characterizes this well when he writes, “In the language of the Father in heaven God’s children learn to speak with God. Repeating God’s own words, we begin to pray to God. We ought to speak to God, and God wishes to hear us, not in the false and confused language of our heart but in the clear and pure language that God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ.... God’s speech in Jesus Christ meets us in the Holy Scriptures.” *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, vol. 5 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtress, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 156.

his father's gift.<sup>67</sup> As Hauerwas tells it, "I was no good at it. I just could not get the hang of praying...I could not pray off the cuff...I could not, so to speak, 'pray on my own.'"<sup>68</sup> Even after he had completed his formal theological education, he found that he had a hard time praying anything but the formal prayers of the church. Perhaps this could be written off as a personality quirk, and no doubt, personality plays a part in it, but I suspect it also has to do with Hauerwas' deeply held conviction that he must be honest with God. Too often, prayers that are 'off the cuff' are sloppy, inelegant, and worst of all, dishonest. These prayers can too often reflect the appetites and distractions of the moment that presume a cosmic vending machine as their object of address and thus fail to recognize God as the God who saved Israel from Egypt and later raised Jesus.

As Hauerwas puts it,

The language of prayer is exacting, an exactness that fosters over time – elegance. The prayers of the church, unlike our prayers, have been honed to say no more and no less than what must be said to confess sin, to praise God, to respond with thanksgiving to the gift of Eucharist. Liturgy is the source of the word-care necessary for our lives to be beautiful and good – beautiful and good because by constant repetition we have learned the habits necessary to speak truthfully. To learn to speak truthfully is a skill never finished if we are to resist the lies of the languages that speak us. To be free, therefore, from the lies of the world requires that we be pulled into a community that submits our speaking to the discipline of prayer.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 11–12.

<sup>68</sup> Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 163.

Eventually, Stanley Hauerwas learned to pray.<sup>70</sup> He learned that he did not need to become especially pious or holy in order to pray, but that it was enough to be truthful and to speak plainly to God. To read the prayers Hauerwas has written, however, is to read the prayers of a man who has been disciplined by the exacting language of the church in order to know how he, in all of his plain-spoken particularity, can speak to the particular God who is known to Christians as Father, Son, and Spirit. Prayer is the language of particularity, for as Hauerwas learned, “a vague god vaguely prayed to serves no one well.”<sup>71</sup>

Hauerwas was once asked to pray to a ‘vague god’ at one of the ceremonies of civil religion that have come to dominate political life in America. His prayer, in part, was as follows:

God, you alone know how we are to pray to you on occasions like this. We do not fear you, since we prefer to fear one another. Accordingly, our prayers are not to you but to some ‘ultimate vagueness.’ You have, of course, tried to scare the hell out of some of us through the creation of your people Israel and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But we are subtle, crafty and stiff-necked people who prefer to be damned into vagueness.<sup>72</sup>

Hauerwas subverts the expectations of the vagueness of American civil religion by rehearsing the story of God’s ever more particular redemptive work in creation, Israel, and Jesus in order to critique and reject the vagueness of praying to a God of our own creation. To pray is to dare to speak to God, and in this prayer, Hauerwas demonstrates that if one is to do so successfully, then one must be disciplined by

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<sup>70</sup> Hauerwas credits (or perhaps blames?) the question of his wife, Paula Gilbert, whether he ever prayed before class. He realized that he had no good excuse as to why he did not, and so began preparing a prayer to read before class every day. I find that on this point, Hauerwas and I share something in common, for I too find it difficult to pray, and it is often only the questioning voice of my wife Rachel that makes me remember the importance of prayer. Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 47–48.

the stories of the church to pray to the God who is God and not just some ‘ultimate vagueness.’ The honest prayer is therefore the prayer that has been shaped by the particular vocabulary of the church, not the vague assertions of a poorly defined liberal conception of ‘authenticity.’ The honest prayer is the disciplined prayer plainly prayed.<sup>73</sup>

Many of the prayers of Hauerwas are not just the truthful product of such discipline, but are in themselves a disciplined practice in truthfulness. In a prayer entitled “Lies We Wrap in Love,” Hauerwas invokes the transforming power of God to make us truthful as we faithfully rehearse the characteristic ways biblical poets and prophets have talked to God:

Dear God, we often ask you to invade our lives, to plumb the secrets of our hearts unknown even to ourselves. But in fact we do not desire that. What we really want to scream, if only to ourselves, is ‘Do not reveal to us who we are!’ We think we are better people if you leave us to our illusions. Yes, we know another word for a life of illusion is hell. But we are surrounded by many caught up in such a hell – people too deficient of soul even to be capable of lying, but only of self-deceit. Dear God, we ask your mercy on all those so caught, particularly if we are among them. The loneliness of such a life is terrifying. Remind us, compel us to be truthful, painful as that is. For without the truth, without you, we die. Save us from the pleasantness which too often is but a name for ambition. Save us from the temptation to say to another what we think she wants to hear rather than what we both need to hear.

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<sup>73</sup> Kelly Johnson has observed that at times, Hauerwas’ prayers verge on the overly idiosyncratic, calling more attention to himself than God. This may be true, though I would prefer not to comment on Hauerwas’ motive. I take up some of Johnson’s more serious charges below. Kelly S. Johnson, “Worshipping in Spirit and Truth,” in *Unsettling Arguments: A Festschrift on the Occasion of Stanley Hauerwas’s 70th Birthday*, Charles R. Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson, and Charles M. Collier, eds., 300-314 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 314.

The regimen of living your truth is hard, but help us remember that any love but truthful love is cursed. The lie wrapped in love is just another word for violence. For God's sake, for the world's sake, give us the courage and the love to speak truthfully, so that we might be at peace with one another and with you. Amen.<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately, Hauerwas sees prayer as true theology. If theology is, as Hauerwas has repeatedly asserted, a disciplining in grammar in order to 'speak Christian' well, then prayer is one of the practices that must put all theology to the test. "Any theology, therefore, that is finally not about helping us to pray cannot be Christian. In an odd way, then, this book represents the most important testing of my theological work."<sup>75</sup> Theology must lead to prayer, and insofar as Hauerwas' theology has been able to do that, it is a positive witness to its usefulness for Christian life and practice.

Kelly Johnson has challenged Hauerwas' understanding of prayer as an exercise in truthfulness. Johnson suggests that Hauerwas has allowed his interest in liturgy as a way of forming truthfulness to over-determine his account of the significance of liturgy for the Christian life.<sup>76</sup> Later in the same essay, however, Johnson notes that Hauerwas often uses the curious phrase, 'God's prayers' as a way to refer to Jesus, the church, and particular people.<sup>77</sup> This formulation points to the deep Trinitarian theology that undergirds Hauerwas' understanding of the liturgy. Again, relying on the doctrine of *theosis*, Hauerwas suggests that the Holy Spirit, as a particularizing agent, rests on the body of Jesus and so, the spiritual mysteries of the liturgy are always tied up in the particular and concrete elements that involve bodies, water, bread, and wine.<sup>78</sup> While Hauerwas is interested in the way prayers can discipline Christian speech in truthfulness,

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<sup>74</sup> Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 39–40.

<sup>75</sup> Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, "Worshiping in Spirit and Truth," 303.

<sup>77</sup> Johnson, "Worshiping in Spirit and Truth," 308. For example, Hauerwas uses this phrase frequently in *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 23, 26, 29.

<sup>78</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, loc. 223.

the fact that it often fails to do so is not ultimately a problem.<sup>79</sup> The efficacy of the liturgy is not the issue, it is the Spirit that is efficacious, but it is precisely because of the particularizing nature of the Spirit that our language *can* be made truthful through the discipline of prayer.

### *Preaching*

If prayer is the practice that tests theology for its truthfulness, preaching is the practice that disciplines our prayers by the narrative witness of Scripture. Hauerwas has now published several collections of his sermons, his hope being that people take his sermons as seriously as his more ‘academic’ work.<sup>80</sup> He himself understands that the work he does in his sermons is as, or more, important than the many scholarly contributions he has made in his long career.<sup>81</sup>

What makes the practice of preaching significant in Hauerwas’ work is how it exposes his approach to the Bible.<sup>82</sup> For Hauerwas “... the sermon is not just an exposition of the text. Rather it is a re-narration of the text which assumes that no account of any text is truthful that is not about God’s care of God’s creation through Israel and the

<sup>79</sup> Contrary to the suggestion that the ‘real problem’ with Hauerwas’ understanding of the liturgy is that it often does not work. See Johnson, “Worshipping in Spirit and Truth,” 311.

<sup>80</sup> The following are books, in order of publishing, containing collections of his sermons, though the odd sermon will show up in works beyond these: Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture; Disrupting Time: Sermons, Prayers, and Sundries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words* (Brazos, 2005); *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Brazos, 2009); *Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011); *Without Apology*.

<sup>81</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xi-xiii. Indeed, Hauerwas sees his sermons as being among his most important theological work, a point he made in criticizing Nicholas Healy’s charge that Hauerwas’ project is insufficiently theological. See Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 274.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Hays argues that while Hauerwas does not perform careful exegesis, he frustratingly manages to come up with conclusions about the text that seem to capture the spirit of the Scriptures. Hays does not want to go so far in rejecting critical methods as Hauerwas has, but he is left at a loss as to how Hauerwas is able to interpret the text so well without them. See *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996), 259-61.

church. A sermon is scriptural when it inscribes a community into an ongoing Christian narrative.”<sup>83</sup> So in preaching, the community receives the narrative that makes all their other actions intelligible.

For Hauerwas, preaching is not a matter of getting to the ‘meaning’ of the text. For Hauerwas, “the ‘meaning’ is the use to which I put these texts for the upbuilding of the church.”<sup>84</sup> In an analysis of Hauerwas’ account of preaching, Robert Dean has suggested that this claim by Hauerwas “fails to live up to his best theological convictions... stressing that the meaning of the texts is found in the uses to which ‘I’ put the texts remains far too anthropologically and preacherly-centered.”<sup>85</sup> Dean’s point is well taken, but perhaps this is a place where Hauerwasian therapeutic hyperbole may apply.<sup>86</sup> Far from being a claim reflective of hyper-subjective or pragmatic readings, if we read the sentence closely, it seems that the focus is not actually on the individual preacher, but on the relationship between preacher, text, and congregation. The way that Hauerwas ties meaning to the up-building of the church is suggestive for the way the preacher must be operating in the Spirit in order to accomplish that edification. Dean recognizes that how Hauerwas has chosen to word this sentence does not sit comfortably with the rest of how Hauerwas talks about preaching, as the rest of his essay admirably demonstrates. It is precisely this dissonance in the exaggerated claim that Hauerwas is making that should alert us to the way this sentence is not a claim about preacherly-centeredness but is a claim about how the text is meaningful in the context of preaching.

Hauerwas’ rhetorical flourishes are often dismissed or met with frustration by his commentators. Unfortunately, this misses the genius of a great deal of Hauerwas’ theological method. Readers of Hauerwas need to work to understand how these flourishes

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<sup>83</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 42.

<sup>84</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Robert J. Dean, “Unapologetically (A)Political: Stanley Hauerwas and the Practice of Preaching,” *Didaskalia* 25 (Fall 2015): 152.

<sup>86</sup> By ‘therapeutic’ I am referring to Hauerwas oft unacknowledged methodological dependence on Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy. See, Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), for an engagement of the relationship between Hauerwas and Wittgenstein.



are not mere overstatements but are the means by which Hauerwas is disrupting the conversation. Given that preaching is a practice embedded in a MacIntyrean understanding of practice, it would be odd to understand this as a retreat into an individualistic account of preaching. Once the connection is drawn between Hauerwas' MacIntyrean conception of practices and the practice of preaching, it becomes clear that Hauerwas is drawing our attention to the way the practice of preaching for a congregation helps draw 'a' meaning from the superabundance of meaning in the text. Thus, while Hauerwas begins with a sentence that looks strikingly modern and pragmatic, it leads away from modernist epistemological concerns and introduces a pre-modern conception of meaning. The polemic that is *Unleashing the Scripture* is thus best read as an application of post-modern philosophy to a modern problem in order to arrive at a pre-modern solution.

It seems, given the context, that Hauerwas is not advocating a radical anti-realism concerning meaning, rather, he is pointing towards the more pre-modern notion of the super-abundance of meaning in Scripture. From this super-abundance, a particular meaning is then brought forth by the preacher for that particular preaching occasion. Hauerwas is thus best understood here as denying the *singularity* of meaning in a text, not meaning as such.<sup>87</sup> Hauerwas suspects that most attempts to get at the (singular) 'meaning' of the text are in fact attempts to dismiss the text.<sup>88</sup> As a result, Hauerwas tries to never explain the text, for to do so would be to subject the text to criteria of meaning external to scripture.<sup>89</sup> Hauerwas believes that both fundamentalists and biblical critics have fallen prey to the

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<sup>87</sup> I am here indebted to Dean's discussion of Augustine's nuanced affirmation and relativization of meaning in the same article, see Dean, "Unapologetically (A) Political: Stanley Hauerwas and the Practice of Preaching," 155–56. Nevertheless, I resist the notion that Hauerwas is not at his best here, as I want to allow the therapeutic, disruptive force of such a statement to stand, especially given the kind of disruptive polemic that *Unleashing the Scripture* represents.

<sup>88</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxii.

<sup>89</sup> In an essay entitled, "Explaining Why Willimon Never Explains," Hauerwas suggests that his friend Will Willimon is such a great preacher precisely because he never tries to explain away the text in a way that makes it unnecessary for the congregation to receive the political demands the text makes on our lives. See Hauerwas, *Disrupting Time*, 224–33.

same modern epistemology that assumes some sort of descriptivist account of meaning.<sup>90</sup> This Enlightenment notion presumes that all truth can be known by any rational individual (the fictive agent of the Enlightenment story) without first requiring the transformation of the individual into and through the community of belief. This assumption continues to underwrite the liberal politics of the Enlightenment tradition and does not allow the politics of the church to be the determinative tradition in forming the standards and rules that allow the practice of preaching to reach the internal good of encountering the living Christ in our midst.

The liberal politics that underwrite the hermeneutical assumptions Hauerwas seeks to resist are the politics of choice. The fundamental story in the liberal tradition is that there are no stories except the stories that individuals choose for themselves. This has led to a fragmentation of the Bible in the hands of both fundamentalists and text-critics. For the fundamentalists, pervasive interpretive pluralism is a massive problem that threatens to undo the assertion of certainty that is characteristic of their biblicism.<sup>91</sup> Liberal text-critics, on the other hand, have faced a similar fragmentation through endless debates over composition, historiography, and the overall unity of the text. With the loss of allegorical and typological approaches to biblical interpretation, it has become increasingly easy to fail to hear the entire Word of God.<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas is able to use the text to edify the church because he has been transformed and is guided by the traditions of the church – his choices are not wholly arbitrary.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> For an excellent account of the problems facing the biblicist approach of fundamentalist and evangelical interpreters of the Bible, see Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011).

<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 36. It should be noted that the rhetoric of *Unleashing the Scripture* is among Hauerwas' most hyperbolic. There has been a promising renewal in the area of theological interpretation of scripture in the last couple decades. For an excellent introduction into this recovery of ancient methods in the postmodern context, see Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>93</sup> Origen argues that a certain amount of spiritual maturity (a type of Christian pronesis perhaps?) is required for the right reading of scripture. For a good exposition of Origen's hermeneutical 'method' see Nadia Delicata, "Padeia tou Kyriou: From Origen to Medieval Exegesis," *Didaskalia*, vol. 27 (Fall 2016): 31-64.

Hauerwas notes that within the Christian tradition, the church discovers the connections of the text through the use of allegorical reading, which reflects the conviction that the Bible represents a unified narrative.<sup>94</sup> This work of ‘discovering connections’ affirms the best of the traditional Christian affirmation that God speaks, and recognizes the chastening of post-modernity that has served to abolish any notion that there could be a ‘once for all’ interpretation of a text.<sup>95</sup> Allegorical readings open up new horizons of meaning, and in surprising ways, many of the so-called ‘close readings’ of contemporary critical scholarship can also be used to open up new senses of meaning.<sup>96</sup> The observation of certain syntactical relations in discourse analysis, for example, does not actually get you any closer to some sort of objective ‘meaning’ that the text possesses as a property of itself. Instead, the careful observation of these kinds of relations draw the imagination of the interpreter to notice a certain emphasis of the text that in turn opens up a level of meaning that can be used for the benefit of the church.<sup>97</sup> “Such readings are not simply attempts to get the text ‘right’ but rather invitations, suggestions, and recommendations to help us get ourselves right – that is, they are meant to tell us what to do as Christians.”<sup>98</sup>

Scripture, therefore, is only intelligible as the book of the Church.<sup>99</sup> In *Without Apology* (a fitting title for pretty much any book by Hauerwas), Hauerwas takes this claim further by not only arguing

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<sup>94</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 36; 40.

<sup>95</sup> This is by no means the only attempt that has been made to accomplish these two tasks, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998). I appreciate Vanhoozer’s challenge to make explicit the theologies that are implicit in our hermeneutics (457). Hauerwas’ reliance on the philosophical structures of MacIntyre and Wittgenstein (and numerous others) is more *ad hoc* pillaging of Babylon in service of Christ than a new theoretical construct.

<sup>96</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

<sup>97</sup> Hauerwas’ contribution in *Unleashing the Scripture* comes as a prophetic provocation at the beginning of the resurgence of theological hermeneutics. For a more recent and highly nuanced treatment of figural reading see Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

<sup>98</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 41.

that the Bible is intelligible only as a book for the church, but that it is intelligible only within the church. He challenges the modern assumption that the work of the preacher is to ‘translate’ the message of the Bible into generally intelligible terms that the congregation can understand. Hauerwas questions Tillich’s remark that he “was obliged to seek a language which expresses in other terms the human experience to which the Biblical and ecclesiastical terminology point,”<sup>100</sup> wondering where the assumption that ‘human experience’ is an intelligible concept comes from. In MacIntyrean terms, why is the liberal concept of human experience a relevant or even necessary criterion to satisfy within the Christian tradition? Hauerwas worries that by hastily translating the message of the gospel, too much is lost and we lose the benefit of the formation that the peculiarly Christian practices provide in making us into the type of people who can identify that “within the church, *truth* means Christ, the image of the invisible God.”<sup>101</sup> Ultimately, “to speak the truth does not require translation but rather a confidence that what we say when we say God was in Christ makes a difference for how our lives and the world is rightly understood. Preaching is the gift God has given the church so that our lives can be located within God’s life by having our existence storied by the Gospel.”<sup>102</sup>

For Hauerwas, then, the task of the preacher is both to refuse to over-explain the text, and to refuse to translate into the vague idiom of ‘general experience’ the message of the gospel. In so doing, the preacher thus trains Christians in the “odd grammar of Christian speech and [in] how that grammar helps us see the sheer contingency of our existence.”<sup>103</sup> Hauerwas’ account of the practice of preaching is sacramental because he believes that in the activity of preaching, the Holy Spirit is at work to make our words efficacious.

It would never occur to me that I should try to ‘dumb down’ a sermon. God has given us what is necessary for the Gospel to be understood by any congregation.

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<sup>100</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xiv.

<sup>101</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

<sup>102</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xvii.

<sup>103</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xviii.

The name of that gift is the Holy Spirit who enlivens the words we use. I am convinced nothing is more important for the recovery of preaching as a central act of the church than that those who preach trust that God is going to show up when the Word is rightly proclaimed. Too often those who preach fear those to whom they preach when in fact we ought to fear God. If God is rightly expected to show up, if God is rightly feared, then those who preach and those who hear will understand no explanation is required.<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion

In the practices of the church, Hauerwas' theological particularism reveals itself as a confidence in the work of the Spirit to reveal Jesus as the truth to those who have been rightly formed by the practices of the church. The Spirit's work does not become subordinated to this formation in the church, for the church is established by Christ and, understood through *theosis*, functions as the very life-form of God. This formation requires effort, but it is a gift of grace that assumes the divinizing work of the Holy Spirit to make our practices efficacious. Christians gain the virtue of truthfulness by being transformed by contact with the one who is the Truth. As Christians consume the Eucharist they are consumed by it and are given all the resources needed to do the careful and exacting work of learning to pray honestly and plainly according to the formative narrative of Scripture.

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<sup>104</sup> Hauerwas, *Without Apology*, xxv.

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