

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Hauerwas Reader: Stanley Hauerwas*. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

Stanley Hauerwas is a provocative, prolific Christian ethicist whose dozens of books and hundreds of scholarly articles range over a variety of topics. Most of his published work is in the form of the occasional essay, in which he tries to argue for and display a new language for the church and for Christian ethics. The ad hoc character of much of his work is indicative of his view that theology is an ongoing practice of the church, explicating what the church thinks and does, and is thus of a piece with the messiness of actual church life. By contrast, a desire for comprehensiveness is the legacy of a Christian ethics that mistakenly thinks itself responsible for American society. The nature of Hauerwas's project and the volume of his work make the "reader" format especially welcome.

The first of this book's three main parts, "Editorial Introductions," contains an engaging biographical essay by William Cavanaugh. This "Thoroughly Biased Account of a Completely Unobjective Person" offers a starting point for gaining a sense of the accent in which Hauerwas's essays speak.

The second section, "Reframing Theological Ethics," includes eighteen essays organized under the categories of the Christian story, the nature of Christian discipleship, and examples of Christian discipleship. The story in need of reframing is that of a Christian faith that seeks to provide a general account of ethics which any reasonable nonreligious person can accept and thus form a basis for American political life. Hauerwas's reframing, drawing from John Howard Yoder, begins with the church as the community formed by the story of God's saving action and marked by distinct practices. The life of this community is a new language which forms people to hear God's word rightly, be truthful, negotiate specific social issues, and display a real Christian difference.

The third section, "New Intersections in Theological Ethics," explores what this ecclesial reframing means for social ethics or "public theology" and medical ethics. Eight essays address topics such as war, American democracy, and sex. In one fascinating essay, "Should War Be Eliminated? A Thought Experiment," Hauerwas considers the ambivalence towards both just war and

pacifism displayed in a statement by U.S. Catholic bishops. Since a particular morality is already implied by naming some violence “war,” Hauerwas presents a strong case for war based on cooperation in pursuit of social goals over individual ones which is nearly incompatible with the bishops’ simultaneous assertion of peace and nonviolence as the ideal form of human relations. This serious interrogation of common but inconsistent moral assumptions juxtaposed with the radical social-political dimensions of the Christian faith — in this case that the elimination of war is a false issue because “war has been eliminated for those who participate in God’s history” (424) — is typical of essays collected here. The final five essays suggest that “given the particular demands put on those who care for the ill, something very much like a church is necessary to sustain that care” (548). This provides a way of talking Christianly about suffering, abortion, and euthanasia, and about how to be a patient in ways that a mechanized view of medicine as purely instrumental or as a new savior fails to do.

This exceptionally well-organized book makes good use of the “reader” format, such as a selected annotated bibliography and a “how to read the author” essay. The lamentable but necessary exclusion of frequent Hauerwas topics, such as the university, friendship, post-modernity, race, gender, John H. Yoder, and Alasdair MacIntyre, preserves the book’s thematic unity. The reader also sees how Hauerwas’s thought has changed over thirty years, moving from categories of narrative, character, and virtue to more particular reflection on church practice. Demonstrating the perpetually unfinished nature of this project, some essays have been clarified, shortened or consist in the author’s conversation with earlier work. As “an entryway into Hauerwas’s thought for theologians and graduate students in theology and ethics” (6) with special attention to undergraduates and seminarians without extensive theological training, this volume will serve its intended audience admirably. I recommend it also for serious study groups, although its length (729 pages) may call for occasional rather than comprehensive use.

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Timothy J. Geddert. *Mark. Believers Church Bible Commentary*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001.

Timothy Geddert has contributed an outstanding commentary to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series. He begins with a brief introduction discussing the nature of the gospel of Mark, questions of authorship, date, provenance, basic theology, reception of the gospel in the church, and his own approach to the gospel's interpretation. While acknowledging the usefulness of a wide variety of critical methodologies, he sees Mark as a highly creative, carefully constructed narrative employing various literary devices (chiasm, intercalation, etc.), and suggests that "literary criticism and reader-response criticism contribute most directly in helping readers interpret the message of Mark" (23). He reminds readers of things Mark presumed his audience would understand, highlighting Old Testament and first-century Greco-Roman backgrounds and customs, and explaining the meaning of Greek words and grammar.

Geddert sees the gospel divided into two main sections: "Ministry In and Around Galilee" (1:1-8:26) and "Journey to Jerusalem, the Cross, and Beyond" (8:27-16:8). An overview at the beginning of each section is followed by a detailed treatment of individual units found there. For example, Geddert's treatment of Mark 13 begins with a preview recalling the development of the narrative so far and significant thematic emphases, and setting forth his understanding of the unit now under consideration. Geddert argues that this chapter is not about "signs and timetables" but "about discernment, not being fooled by people with timetables and signs" (300). It is about the familiar Markan themes of discernment, discipleship, Christology, passion, and the temple. If these themes are kept central, the chapter appears to be "an integral part of Mark's good news and of his challenge to follow Jesus" (300).

An outline of the section under examination is followed by explanatory notes. Noting that chapter 13 is filled with ambiguities (e.g., "the desolating sacrilege") that have "proved extremely difficult" for interpreters, Geddert suggests that "Mark has deliberately created or incorporated virtually all the ambiguities that many interpreters are aiming to eliminate," so that faithful interpretation "does not mean getting rid of the ambiguity but understanding why it is there and what roles it plays" (302). He gives attention to major exegetical and interpretive issues, acknowledges interpretive options, and sets

forth his own conclusions (301-20). Geddert's conclusions will not satisfy everyone, but they are well-reasoned and make sense in the developing Markan narrative.

"The Text in the Biblical Context" presents succinct, suggestive discussions of issues such as "The Prophetic Perspective" and "The Four Watches of the Passion Night," an often overlooked feature which dramatically contrasts Jesus' faithfulness and the disciples' unfaithfulness. Finally, "The Text in the Life of the Church" discusses significant issues for the church today (e.g., "Mark 13 and Popular Eschatology"). A full outline is followed by helpful essays ("Kingdom of God in Mark," etc.), an extensive and cosmopolitan bibliography, and an annotated list of selective resources.

Geddert notes connections often overlooked, is quick to point out popular interpretations that go beyond the text, and highlights contributions of the believers church tradition to the understanding of the text, while recognizing shortcomings in this tradition suggested by others. Geddert has immersed himself in the Markan text. His approach is refreshing and revealing, a skillful and effective blending of the scholarly (in a non-technical way) and the devotional. He approaches the text with humility, inviting the reader to join him in listening carefully to Mark's message. I recommend this commentary highly to pastors and teachers and to anyone wanting to engage in a serious, compelling study of Mark's gospel.

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Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: A History of North American Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

The author's aim is "to provide a broad outline of the major events, developments, and occurrences in the history of the Christian churches" and "to highlight some of the most important interpretive issues in the transfer of the hereditary religion of Europe to the 'New World.'" This volume, prepared initially for European readers, may be seen as an abridged version of Noll's

larger work, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Eerdmans, 1992). While much smaller than the earlier one, this work has a wider scope in that Mexico is added to the United States and Canada as part of North America.

Chapters 1-3, 5-8, and 10 constitute a brief, very readable narrative of the transformation of the old Christianity of Europe into a new distinctly different mutation in the New World. Chapters 4, 9, 11, and 12 are topical, dealing with the separation of church and state, and with theology, and they offer an interesting chapter on the spiritual life of Christians, including ethics, Christian literature, hymns, and especially the place and use of the Bible.

European Christians are almost universally puzzled by Christianity in North America, especially the Christianity of the United States. Noll brilliantly identifies what is specifically non-European about Christianity in the New World. The four aspects of the North American religious environment which made for a new “mutation of Christianity” (words borrowed by the reviewer from Arthur Mirgeler) were: space — the simple geographical vastness of North America; race and ethnicity — North America is a conglomerate of immigrants; pluralism — a variety of religious forms arising from the plural origins of the immigrants, and from the absence of confessional conservatism, caused largely by the forces of democratic individualism. In this connection Noll quotes George Grant’s words from *Lament for a Nation*: “The United States is the only society on earth that has no traditions before the age of progress.”

The main problem with Noll’s book is that despite its title, it is about Christianity in the U.S., and the story of Christianity in Mexico and Canada is tacked on but not integral to the main narrative. (In this respect Robert T. Handy’s *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* [1976] is much more successful.) Noll mentions Canada occasionally, e.g., pages 20 and 32, in addition to chapter 10, which deals exclusively with Mexico and Canada. The Afterword refers only to the U.S., with not a word about Canada and Mexico. Of the list of six factors that have differentiated Christian history in North America from that of Europe, only three apply to Canada and perhaps none to Mexico.

What is obvious is not only a failure to present a North American picture, but the extent of this failure. Perhaps it would be more accurate to acknowledge

that Canada and Mexico are at least peripheral to the United States of America, a sentiment not unknown among Americans. This failure could be used as proof that a single history of Christianity in North America including Canada America, the U.S. America, and Mexico America is not possible, since neither Canada nor Mexico share the politico-cum-religious ethos of U.S. Christianity. Neither country has had, for example, the religio-political messianism that still characterizes much American Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant.

But why should such a comprehensive history be impossible? Could not a serious attempt be made to compare and contrast on an equitable basis, chronologically, the ways in which Christianity has taken different forms in the three countries so politically and socially different from each other? Professor Noll did, after all, do it by comparison with Europe. Why not among the three Americas, especially since there have been and continue to be numerous ties, especially between the churches of Canada and the United States? Noll's Appendix B offers a brief discussion with statistical tables comparing regional distribution of denominations in the U.S. and Canada. This does point to some major differences.

As to what the author has actually done in his description of the transmutation of European Christianity in the United States, Noll's book deserves all the high praise it has received. It is a brilliant achievement. His description in chapter 1 what the transplantation of Christianity from Europe to the New World meant to nine men, coming to North America with Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity, is very illuminating. Some of them saw emigration as a way of preserving European forms of Christianity; other saw it as a way of renewing the old faith.

However, "The old religion in a New World: a history of Christianity in North America" has still to be written.

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John Howard Yoder. *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002.

In many ways, John Howard Yoder's *Preface to Theology* is completely out-of-date. Even though Brazos Press published it only recently, this introduction intended for first-year seminarians has been available for over thirty years in mimeographed form. As a result, the assumptions of 1960s New Testament scholarship that were dominant at that time can be found throughout. How useful can such a book be as an introduction for theology students today?

The very fact that it is out-of-date is one of the book's strengths and a reason for its continuing relevance. Only a book like this can challenge, critique, and inform theology that is up-to-date—theology as it is practiced today. This was typical of Yoder's approach. By combining the Anabaptist vision of his own heritage with the highest level of academic rigor, Yoder was known for doing theology in a way that questioned dominant assumptions long before the rejection of modern theology's assumptions became widespread.

Today's readers will benefit from how Yoder models theological education. The book is based on classroom lectures that he delivered to new seminary students. Each chapter contains preparatory questions, suggested reading lists, and so forth. Yoder's method in preparing these students is not to talk *about* theology, but to *do* theology alongside them. To accomplish this (and also to be faithful to traditional Anabaptism), Yoder approaches theology historically. He begins with the apostles' message and the gospel, showing how theology is the ongoing task of responding to new questions. Even Yoder's detailed attention to the "threefold office" of Christ (king, priest, prophet) is done with an eye to historical development rather than dogmatic declaration.

Yoder wants us to understand that, without the study of history, theology is simply unintelligible. Not only does history help us understand the theology of past times, theological reflection is the work of God's people embodied in specific times and places. As such, theology witnesses to the action of God through time. Jesus is Lord over history, and thus the historical development of doctrine is not incidental to the life of God. Moreover, the implication of that lordship is that "the management of history is not the business of the church" (237). Instead, Christians have been given eyes to see God at work in history without being given the sword to ensure that it "comes out right."

For today's readers, this approach presents a number of challenges. The first relates to the nature of theology itself. For Yoder, theology is the activity of the church responding to new questions in ways that are both relevant and faithful to its own heritage and authority. Therefore, theologians must learn *how* to serve the church before they can start doing so. A second challenge is the way that Yoder teaches this method by practice. The theologian-in-training must enter into the activity of theology by learning from theologians who have served the church throughout its history and by imitating their approach in situations the church is currently facing. This is particularly helpful because it provides a model for Protestants to grasp the development of their own doctrine, overcoming the ahistorical way they have reacted against tradition in Roman Catholicism.

Yoder's work challenges and informs today's theological discourse also through his disavowal of the distinctions within theology as an academic discipline. He prefers to call the work to which he invites us "dogmatics" rather than "systematic theology." Yoder questions a view of theology that rigidly distinguishes systematic theology from teaching, preaching, and ethics. For example, the theology practiced in the New Testament is almost entirely "narrative or recitative" and almost never "systematic" (377). Furthermore, "the very concept of a split between belief and action is itself a doctrinal error" (390). All of theology, properly understood, has ethical implications and resists the compromises inherent in systematizing.

In the recent publication of *Preface to Theology*, we find Yoder's words to be even more meaningful now than when he wrote them, a compliment not always paid to someone who so explicitly did not attempt to write for the ages. That a book so thoroughly out-of-date could be so relevant for today is just one of the wonderful ironies of God's Kingdom that Yoder has taught us to expect.

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Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice*. Scottdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2001.

This is a book that music and worship planning committees in Mennonite churches need to read, sing, and discuss. It stands alongside the *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, published in 1992 for Mennonite and Brethren Churches in North America. As a result of their work in helping to produce this hymnal, the authors began a two-year research project in which they asked people in the church, “What happens when you sing?” This book reports these interviews. *Singing: A Mennonite Voice* effectively crafts anecdotal stories with insightful interpretation. That it is designed and illustrated by Gwen M. Stamm, who also designed *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, adds a significant artistic beauty and integrity to it.

Part One and Two report and organize interviews with people involved in the worship life of Mennonite congregations in North America. Part Two, “What Happens When We Sing?,” covers spiritual areas of our lives that are impacted by singing hymns: singing creates the body of Christ; unveils an inner landscape of the worshiper; reveals a path to God; becomes our best way to pray; and heals and transforms us in our time of need.

Part Three is the heart of the book. There the authors probe the importance of hymn singing in a postmodern landscape that desires to integrate the heart and the mind, transcendence and immanence. It is claimed that the interviews in this project show that hymn singing is the one sure way such integration happens for Mennonites. If faith is to grow in our congregations, people need to sing (104). This growth of faith takes place in three ways: Our vision of God is formed; we are formed into Christian community; our life is formed as people of the Spirit. Part Three develops these in detail. This is very helpful for those planning worship services.

The Epilogue sums up six learnings that the authors gained from their interviews and stories about hymn singing. The sixth one is likely the most obvious, but it is increasingly hard to do: we need to care for how much time we spend singing together. Mary Oyer is quoted as saying, “Keep singing. Sing. Sing. Sing. Sing before church. Sing during church. Sing after church. Just do it” (161).

It is my impression that a majority of the interviews and stories come

from Mennonites in the Swiss Mennonite tradition. I suspect that stories from Church of the Brethren and Mennonites from the German and Russian experience would convey similar themes and learnings, but it would interesting to test this assumption a little wider.

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