Faculty Forum with Stanley Hauerwas

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James Reimer: The theme will not so much be Bonhoeffer as Hauerwas, on this occasion. I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your life, how you began in Texas, how you grew up, how you got to know John Howard Yoder, and how you became a pacifist.

Stanley Hauerwas: Well, I think I'm a theologian because I couldn't get myself saved! I was raised in an evangelical Methodist church in the South where you joined the church on Sunday mornings but everyone knew that didn't have anything to do with being a Christian — you had to get saved on Sunday night. And you'd go and you'd sing hymns for almost an hour and then you'd listen to the sermon, which had to be forty-five minutes — I mean, no one could get saved in a thirty-minute sermon — and I wanted to get saved but it just did not happen. I didn't think you should fake it, and finally, I was about fourteen or so and there had been some life dedications to the ministry in the church and I thought, "Well, hell, if God isn't going to save me, I'll dedicate my life to the ministry and that will mean he'll have to pay some attention!" So that's what I did. We were singing "I Surrender All" for the twenty-third time and I thought, "This is going to last all night!" so I went up and dedicated my life to the ministry.

We'd gotten an associate pastor in the church who actually read books and he'd gone to seminary — his name was Raymond Butts — and I'd started asking Raymond what I should read. I read David Makier's *From Faith to Faith* and discovered the Bible wasn't true. We weren't fundamentalists, we weren't that smart. I mean, you've got to be real smart to be a fundamentalist, and we weren't up that high. We just thought you ought to take the Bible seriously, and I discovered it wasn't true.

And then I read a book by Nels F.S. Ferré called *The Sun and the Umbrella*. He was an early Barthian from Sweden and he suggested that

religion probably did as much to hide God as it did to reveal God, and I thought, "That's true!" and I gave it up. So I went to Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. We thought of it as Texas's oldest Sunday school, a little Methodist school with 435 students when I was there. I majored in philosophy. I was the only philosophy major at Southwestern. There was this terrific guy there named John Score who had just come from Duke, working on his Ph.D. He was basically a theologian but he taught me — and there would be a few others in the class. We read Copleston's *History of Philosophy* and read the primaries as we went through. I did that for six semesters. What a terrific education! I slowly began to understand that I didn't know enough to say God didn't exist, and so I decided to go to Yale Divinity School to discover, or to continue to think about, whether this stuff was true.

I left Southwestern thinking that if I was going to be a Christian I'd be a liberal Christian because I figured it must be the best way to go, more or less. But I'd also become convinced that — I'd read a lot of Nietzsche — the crucial issue about Christian truthfulness is that Christians don't look very much like Christians. Particularly the Holocaust was a peculiar horror that stood in the way for me to be a Christian.

When I got to Yale I was stunned to discover that it was the liberals that had given the Jews up and it was Karl Barth that had stood against them. I started reading Barth and the rest is history! I'm a Barthian. I've always one way or the other been within the Barthian framework . . . . Philosophy for the Germans always meant Kant and I don't think Barth really knew Aristotle existed in that [same] way, so partly I'm a kind of Aristotelianizing Barth in terms of the way I work.

When I left Yale the only job I could get was at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I'd never been around the Lutherans and I was the first non-Lutheran to ever teach theology there; that was an ecumenical excess that they would not soon repeat. I went there and said, "Listen, you know, you've got to understand as someone that is a committed theologian, I must destroy the law/gospel distinction!" I discovered they didn't care much about the law/gospel distinction, but they cared a lot about manners, and I didn't have those and I got into a lot of trouble. I was going to be fired, but I got this job at Notre Dame as a "visiting assistant instructor," if you want to know how doubtful my standing was. I took it, and it was a wonderful, wonderful time for me.

I had read John Howard Yoder's *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* — if some of you remember, it was a little 11 by 12 inch peace pamphlet originally. It was in the Yale Divinity School bookstore and it cost a dollar. I still have my copy. I read it, and I thought, "That's the best critique of Barth I've ever read, but you'd have to be crazy to buy that ecclesiology!" Then, when I went to Notre Dame, I drove out to Goshen because I thought he was at the College. I discovered he was in Elkhart, but I did buy some of his other pamphlets, "Capital Punishment," the one on Reinhold Niebuhr, and I think there was another one on Barth that were at the back of the College Church. Then I went and met him in Elkhart.

John certainly never won any convert through charm. I came bopping into his office over at Associated Mennonite Bible Seminary, and I'm sure he thought I was another Yale wiseacre, and I said, "What are you working on now?" He gave me a whole list of stuff, including the manuscript of *The Politics of Jesus*. I took those pages home, read them, and the rest is history. I dedicated *Against the Nations* to Paul Ramsay and John Howard Yoder. I really do believe that it was the serious engagement with Ramsay's attempt to reconstitute just war reflection that made it possible for me to begin to appreciate just what an extraordinary set of reflections Yoder had developed.

I didn't want to be a pacifist. I remember I was riding over to Notre Dame with Robert Wilken, who was then a Lutheran but is now a Roman Catholic, a historical theologian who had gone to Chicago . . . . (By that time, John was on the faculty at Notre Dame; John MacKenzie, the year before, had gotten John teaching a course at Notre Dame. MacKenzie was a great Jesuit New Testament scholar who was also a pacifist. I had been leaning on David Burrell and I said, "Listen, this guy is one of the major minds of our time, and we need to get him on the faculty here," and that's how we did, only John insisted that he be appointed in peace studies. That was part of what he was to do.) I was driving over to Notre Dame with Robert, who said, "What do you think of this guy Yoder?" I said, "Well, I'm really very impressed. I've been deeply influenced by him." He said, "Well, surely you can't believe any of this stuff about the early church. That's just golden age stuff." I said, "No, I think that's a really crude reading of what he's about, and as a matter of fact, I find him very persuasive. I'm a pacifist. He's convinced me to be a pacifist."

That was the first time I'd ever said that, and I really didn't like it. Of

course, no one knows what you mean when you say you are committed to non-violence. No one can anticipate what the implications are for your life when you so declare that yourself. It's an ongoing negotiation that one is never finished, because it's not like we know what violence is. One of the problems with pacifism is it too often sounds too sure of itself, like it really knows what non-violence is. This is where I'm Augustinian. You cannot know what it means to be non-violent by being against violence, because sin is always parasitical on the truth. So unless we actually have the embodiment in our lives of Christ's peace, we will not be able to locate the violences that lie within our lives and that we do not know how to name.

It's very important that we always be ready to be challenged about where our violences may lie, often by people who are violent. One of the great accomplishments, I think, is the awareness by women of how certain presumptions [have] provided men with protection from having to ever get to know a woman. I think any man that thinks that he's ever gotten to know a woman is crazy as hell, because Freud was right to ask, "What do women want?" I'm not sure that women know, but they sure as hell keep us guessing. I think that's part of the kind of negotiations we have to do with non-violence.

I never know how to characterize the kind of work I've done. Like Yoder, most of the writing I've done has always been under assignment. That was very important, that is, John always understood he was writing under assignment; it meant that he wasn't an intellectual because none of his work was self-generated. It's very interesting to watch how he worked; John would absolutely go crazy when he didn't know what you wanted him to do. That's why so many of his essays start, "My assignment is . . ." and he would delineate it and then try to respond to it. That's why his work is not dialectical, it's always part of an ongoing conversation. It's always unfinished. It's very important that it be unfinished.

I hope my work has some of that sense to it. I don't have much use for the notion of systematic theology. You learn from it, but you don't want to do it, because systematic theology for me is just the other side of empire — you're trying to put everything in its place. I think that people forget — this is MacIntyre's argument in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, about the form of Aquinas's Summa Theologica being important because it is intrinsically unfinished — there can always be another question to which you need another

response. So when the summa gets turned into system in neo-scholasticism, it's dead, and you get over-reifications of nature, grace, and that kind of thing.

It was really Calvin's *Institutes*, which after all was a catechism, that started the process we call systematic theology. People began to mimic the *Institutes* by making this or that locus of the faith "fundamental" to try to make [theology] systematic in that way. Hopefully, as German theology fades into the dusk, we will be through with [that] idea — where every German theologian has to overcome the last generation by having their own "doctrine" and "theology" identified by its difference from the previous generation's. I mean, that's state theology. German theology was able to be redone year after year because [theologians] were paid by the state and weren't responsive to the necessity of the actual living church. Of course, right now, as far as I can tell, the actual living church in Germany is pretty well gone. At least, my German friends tell me that's the case.

That's the reason why I like places like Conrad Grebel College — because you're dependent on actual congregations. I was once giving lectures at Bethel College when it was still in Oak Brook . . . and I said, "This is terrific!" Bethel being the only seminary of the Brethren in Christ, I said, "You guys can really see within ten years the results of your curriculum . . . . I mean, what's really happening out there in the churches? Doesn't that frighten you? It makes you realize this is not a game."

Dale Brown said, "Yeah, it's pretty frightening." I say this because I'm not convinced that we know what we're doing in seminaries today in terms of the curriculum that was set primarily by Schleiermacher. Why is it that we teach Old Testament — of course we don't often teach Old Testament at Duke, we teach "Hebrew Bible," which makes sure that the seminarians that come through our courses in Hebrew Bible never preach on the Old Testament again. Why don't we just teach Christian scriptures? And why do we separate the study of Scripture from the Fathers? Why wouldn't a good way to learn Scripture be by reading Origen's commentary on Genesis? Why do we keep replicating these disciplinary divisions? Because that's how our Ph.D.s got structured. Whether that's good for the church or not is another matter, it seems to me, and those are the kinds of questions that we're trying to press at Duke.

For example, think about the very notion of "Christian ethics." Why

"Christian ethics"? We have Christian ethics because of the development of protestant liberalism that didn't want to take Jesus that seriously but still wanted to talk about peace and justice. So we end up with various versions of Reinhold Niebuhr being taught as "Christian ethics." It's time to give those projects up as far as I'm concerned. Indeed, I think that we're at a point where it's very important that we teach a certain mode of forgetting. Every education depends upon forgetting, and we need to forget Reinhold Niebuhr. What is the most destructive book that has been written, the one that makes it very hard for Anabaptists to understand their own tradition? *Christ and Culture.* It ought to be burned! And of course I assume you're for censorship, since I can't imagine any serious intellectual tradition that doesn't believe in censorship. Jews won't let you read certain prophetic books when you're too young, because it might invite mystical tendencies. I think those are exactly the kinds of decisions we need to make. You shouldn't be able to read this book because you're not ready to read it yet.

Theology is not a discipline that is for the training of people for the ministry. Theology is a discipline of the church, for all people in the church, for the formation of holy community. That seminaries have now been determined primarily as training people for the ministry seems to me to be a kind of overdetermination of what we should be about for the building of the church. For example, who do you write for? I try to write books that I think of as Sunday school literature for the laity of the Methodist church, God help them. Books like *Resident Aliens*. Will Willimon said he was going to make me famous, and he did when he and I wrote that little book together. He and I have also written a book on the Lord's Prayer, and a book on the Ten Commandments. . . . Ministers in the Methodist church hate *Resident Aliens*, but the laity find it interesting. They say, for instance, "No one ever told us Christians were odd!" That's terrific!

That also involves how you think about the genre of theology today. What genre should it take? Academic articles, of which I've written my fair share, are written mainly for other academics. It's appropriate that we test our reflections among people who know what we know, because we can get away with murder if we don't try to do that. But how to recover — for the church — the work we do as theologians whether in New Testament, Old Testament, or church history is one of the big challenges before us.

Questioner: I was thinking about what you said last night, imagining how that would be received — about the centrality of Christ and the distinctiveness of the church, the epistemological priority of the church, the onus being on the present age to justify itself to the church rather than the church justify itself to the present age — those kinds of remarks, politics being first about the church and secondly about the world. In the ideology of religious pluralism or religious relativism that we live in, we're encouraged to think theocentrically, not christocentrically, we're encouraged to think about the good of all humanity, common humanity. So the kind of statements that you're making would be unthinkably presumptuous and elitist and imperialistic — all that stuff. How do you respond to that kind of reaction?

Hauerwas: Yeah. You can't be arrogant enough today, is my opinion. Christian humility cannot help but appear — Christian humility which is the recognition of our sinfulness in the light of the cross — arrogant in the world in which we find ourselves, and what that means is that Christians today are in a constant battle of disciplining our speech in a manner that lets us locate the lies that speak us. Take, for example, the notion you just used of "common humanity." I don't believe in common humanity. I don't know what people are talking about when they talk about common humanity. The only notion that Christians have that we share a life in common is the life we share with God. That is, eschatologically, common humanity is the humanism of modernity that presupposes that we're all the same from a biological or evolutionary perspective. Common humanity from the Christian perspective is only known in the light of the eschatological hope of the kingdom of God.

How Christians can resist being seduced into the subtle humanisms of modernity is a constant battle. You take a word like "pluralism." America is always described as pluralistic. Pluralism is always the ideology of people who have won. It is the speech of those at Harvard or Chicago — "Well, we live in a pluralist world. We Christians can't go out there and talk about Jesus because we'll offend people." And I always say, "Oh. I thought you said it was pluralism. Why do Christians have to keep their mouths shut about Jesus if the Jews get to talk about the Torah, the Muslims get to talk about Allah?" Well, I'll tell you why. It's because pluralism is the ideology of those who think they're still winning and therefore keep their mouths shut about their particularities as a

way of controlling everyone else. If you go to Harvard, remember you're still being educated to run an empire. That's true of the Harvard Divinity School too. And so of course they want to be pluralist! What we live in is a world of, in MacIntyre's understanding, "fragments."

If you want to talk about pluralism, that's rabbis arguing Torah. That's real pluralism. Everything else is just shouting at one another. Of course, as Christians recover who we are, it will sound offensive to people. So what?

Yesterday in Toronto, [Donald] Wiebe — I've had several run-ins with him — asked about Christianity's relationship with other faiths, and I said, "Well, you know Judaism is really different, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is really different. The relationship between Christianity and Islam is really different. I don't know what to make of Hinduism. It's different." And so Wiebe suddenly thought, "Oh, this is terrible. He's dumping on Hindus." No. I mean, what do I know about Hindus? It is a Constantinian project to presuppose that Christianity has to have a theory in which it will determine how to place all other faiths.

I gave the example of when I was down in Conway, Arkansas, a number of years ago, lecturing at Hendrix College, which is a little Methodist school down there, a very good school. After I finished my lecture, Jay MacDonald, who is a student of John Cobb, thought that what I had said was the worst thing he'd ever heard, and said to me, "Well, your problem, Hauerwas, is that you don't give us any theory in order to be able to talk with Buddhists." And I said, "Well, gee, Jay, I'm sorry. How many of them do you have here in Conway? And by the way, if you have some of them around here, what good would a theory do you? I'd just assume you'd go talk to them! [You'd ask,] 'What do you guys believe?'"

At Harvard, they say you can't go into the public arena without a theory of rights, a universal language that will give us translation possibilities away from particularities in a way that we can have some kind of co-operative arrangements. Have you ever tried to talk to a Muslim about rights? They don't know rights. They know Jesus, and they really know Mary. You can talk to a Muslim about Jesus and Mary, but they're not too high on rights. They understand that it's just the imperialistic ideology that the west wants to impose on them. We Christians have just got to get over this idea that somehow we're in control. We're not in control! What the Mennonites have been telling

us all of these years is true. We're not in control. We finally lost. We're free. This is terrific! Of course, there is appropriate etiquette of speech when you are trying to begin conversations with people with whom you're not familiar. Of course, and you don't want to just be stupid.

Questioner: Last night, you identified yourself very much as a Barthian, and you've also talked about the fact that you learned a great deal from John Yoder. A week ago, there was a symposium on the legacy of John Yoder at Notre Dame, and one of the papers presented there talked in appreciative terms about how Yoder's thought is very much apologetic, in that it takes its cue from the conversation. On the other hand, Barth — at least if I can remember from my reading of Barth, and especially his argument with people like Brunner and so on — believes that apologetics is the worst thing going. Sometimes, when I hear you talking now, you sound very much like you want to say, "Nein, nein, nein" all the time to anybody who wants to let the conversation partner determine the conversation. If you're still speaking on this basic point, can you tell us a little bit about where you come down on this? How missionary are you?

Hauerwas: I don't know. Yoder's "apologetics of conversation" was constitutive of his understanding of peace witness. It wasn't that he thought that he needed to, as the apologists thought, accept the questions of his interlocutor in order to have a conversation. It was rather he never knew where God and Christ would show up. So you need to listen. I think Barth's arguments against apologetics were basically arguments against Protestant liberalism that wanted to let the world determine the questions of which Jesus gets to be the answer. The Bonhoeffer quote that I gave last night that I like so much — that the resurrection is not an answer to the problem of death — that's anti-apologetics of the sort that Barth would encourage.

I think that Barth's enemies did not give him space, given the task before him, to say in what way the work he was doing might help the kind of response John was engaged in. But I don't think it would exclude it. Anyone who reads Barth's *Church Dogmatics* knows that when Barth gives you a paragraph on Nietzsche, which of course is forty pages long, there are few people more sympathetic and better interpreters of Nietzsche than Barth. That's

a kind of apologetics. Barth was often — and I engage in this, oftentimes — in what might be called "negative" apologetics. Namely, "If you go this route, let me show you where you're going to end up." Barth would do that. In terms of the kind of listening in which John was always involved, no one could be more vicious about Mennonite farm Constantinianism than John, but I think that he had a generosity of listening . . . that is really admirable.

I do apologetics. You take a book like *Suffering Presence*, where I say, in the Preface — but no one ever pays attention — that this is my form of natural law reasoning. What I do in that book is explore why we think we ought to be around people when they're sick. Why do you think you ought to set aside a whole group of people, nurses and doctors, to do nothing but to be present to the ill when they can't really do very much for them? Where do you get that? Now, I think it comes from the Christian commitment to provide hospitality to the dying. Just because you're dying, we're not going to let you die alone. We're committed to being present to the dying. I think that gets corrupted in modernity to think the only way that we can be around the ill is to try to cure them, and then that absolutely destroys everyone. That's a kind of apologetic argument, to say, "You know, I think you should take seriously Christian convictions constitutive of the practice to be around the dying, where we will be present to one another as we die." I think that people who are not Christian will recognize themselves in those depictions because God created us to be that kind of people, not to abandon one another in death. That's natural all the way down. *The Grain of the Universe* is an argument that is a kind of apologetic. . . . Those who work with the cross work with the grain of the universe. There is nothing more natural than that. That's why people when they see it embodied in lives say, "That's God!"

Questioner: I heard you mention several times what freedom is not. I would like your interpretation of what freedom is.

Hauerwas: Perfect obedience. Freedom is being made part of a way of life that makes it possible for me to finally claim my life as my own. The project of modernity is to produce people who believe they should have no story except the story they chose when they had no story. They call that freedom: producing people who believe they should have no story except the story they

chose when they had no story. And you can see how deeply that story has embedded itself in our lives if I asked you, "Do you think you ought to hold people responsible for decisions they made when they did not know what they were doing?" Most people do not think you ought to hold people responsible for decisions they made when they did not know what they were doing.

Of course, what that does is make marriage unintelligible. Because how would you ever know what you were doing when you got married? Even more, it makes unintelligible having children — you never get the ones you want. It's those aspects of our lives that I'm trying to help us recognize. We Christians do not believe that we should have no story except the story we chose when we had no story. We're creatures. We don't get to make up our lives. We get to be people who discover the story that makes our lives intelligible. God's creatures. And that is a hard and painful discipline, such rediscovery. That's why we only become what we are to the extent that we recognize our lives are not our own, but are given. And that's freedom.

Questioner: I wondered if when we criticize modernity, especially in anglophone North America, when we criticize the world, are we not really also criticizing ourselves?

Hauerwas: There is a book by Ephraim Radner — he is an Episcopal clergyman who did his work at Yale and is a convert from Judaism — which argues that almost all the arguments secularists use against Christians were first used by Catholics and Protestants against one another. It is a stunning book. It's very hard to read; his style is convoluted. Even though I am an unapologetic Enlightenment and liberal basher, I actually believe that God gave us the Enlightenment as a judgment on the failure of Constantinian Christianity, and that this is a great new opportunity for us to recover the gift that is the church, to make us happy. I think Christians should be happy. I can't imagine anything more wonderful than discovering that our lives matter to God.

I don't bemoan our current malaise. I regard it as a great opportunity, and part of the great opportunity is this rediscovery. I said at the Yoder conference, God knows why God made some of us ecclesially homeless. When I call myself "a high-church Mennonite," I really mean that I'm a Methodist, because I think that Methodism at its best is a free-church Catholic

tradition. I hope that what that means is at least God has made some of us ecclesially homeless today. I said at Notre Dame that I distrust the ecumenical movement because it ends up being denominational executives having negotiations about how to join headquarters without anyone losing their job. I don't find that terribly interesting. Of course, churches are able to discover they are quite similar because past differences, in the face of the challenges of the present, no longer matter. Think about "Free Will Baptist": you've got to make something out of "free will" as a mode of distinctiveness? So now churches emphasize their distinctiveness just enough to get their appropriate market shares in the buyer's market.

Hopefully, one of the things that God is using in this time is a rediscovery of the unity of the church, which I think comes by us getting to know one another, and for us to be locating one another. I don't have any right to claim Mennonites for my life, but I've been gratified to have Mennonites claim my life, and I hope what that also means is that you have to deal with the David Burells and the Mike Baxters, Roman Catholic priests, who were at the Yoder conference, who have been deeply shaped by your life. You have to be deeply shaped by their lives, and what that means as we go forward. There's no going back. People always ask me, "Why aren't you a Roman Catholic?" I do think that's a serious question. My own view is you need to stay with the people that harmed you. It's not easy if you're a Methodist.

In the last chapter of my Gifford Lectures, I hold up two witnesses — John Paul II and John Howard Yoder. I try to Yoderize the Pope, which is trying to show that John Paul II's Papacy has an extraordinary Christocentric character and that the Pope should be a pacifist. I then indicate that most people do not think the Pope and John Howard Yoder can get in the same body, but I can name a body that embodies them both, and that's Dorothy Day. Those are the kinds of hopeful judgments that I hope we can live into. I think God wants us to live into that kind of unity as Christians who will not kill one another.