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The Strange New World in the Church: A review essay of With the Grain of the Universe by Stanley Hauerwas.¹

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ABSTRACT: Hauerwas's refusal to translate the argument displayed in With the Grain of the Universe (his recent Gifford Lectures) into language that "anyone" can understand is itself part of the argument. Consequently, readers will not understand what Hauerwas is up to until they have attained fluency in the peculiar language that has epitomized three decades of Hauerwas's scholarship. Such fluency is not easily gained. Nevertheless, in this review essay, I situate Hauerwas's baffling language against the backdrop of his corpus to show at least this much: With the Grain of the Universe transforms natural theology into "witness." In the end, my essay may demonstrate what many have feared, that Hauerwas is, in fact, a Christian apologist—though of a very ancient sort.

KEYWORDS: Hauerwas, Barth, Yoder, Narrative, Witness

¹ I am extremely grateful for the insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper made by Stanley Hauerwas and by my wonderful colleagues Terrence Tilley, Therese Lysaught, Michael Barnes, and Kelly Johnson.

Reading Stanley Hauerwas is a head-scratching experience. Consider the following quotation from With the Grain of the Universe: "The truth of Christian convictions can only be known through witnesses because the God Christians worship is triune" (Hauerwas 2001, 211) What sort of claim is this? It begs the question in presuming the very thing at stake in natural theology, namely, the reality of God. It smacks of the genetic fallacy by tying the reliability of knowledge to the means by which a thing is known, namely, "through witnesses." It mystifies by predicating of the thing in question a most specious property: triunity. How does one begin to review this sort of book? I feel like a third-grader who, standing in front of my classmates, the teacher, the principal, and God to make an oral book report, cannot help but resort to the imperative: "Read this book for yourself!"

Of course, there is no substitute for simply reading Hauerwas. Yet sometimes the right sort of tip can cast an author's work in a whole new light. Here's my tip: Hauerwas's refusal to translate the argument displayed in With the Grain of the Universe into language that "anyone" can understand is itself part of the argument. In other words, readers will not understand the argument displayed by With the Grain of the Universe unless they are able to handle sentences like the one just quoted, for it epitomizes in fractal miniature three decades of Hauerwas's scholarship. Yet this very quotation is a useful lens for clarifying the aspects under which With the Grain of the Universe ought to be read. In this review essay, I'll situate this single sentence against the backdrop of Hauerwas's corpus to show how With the Grain of the Universe transforms natural theology into "witness." In the end, my essay may demonstrate what

many have feared, that Hauerwas is, in fact, a Christian apologist—though of a very ancient sort.

1. Truthfulness as reliability rather than correspondence

The course of Hauerwas's conceptual journey was decisively set in his 1971 essay, "Situation Ethics, Moral Notions, and Moral Theology" (Hauerwas 1981b) Adopting as a given Iris Murdoch's simple observation that we can only act in a world that we can see, Hauerwas utilizes Julius Kovesi to show that moral vision is enabled by the development of "moral notions" (Murdoch 1966). Moral notions are the means by which we see the world of human behaviors.

Notions about physical objects are not meant to affect the world they are about. The rules for the proper use of such [physical] notions are rules for the proper use of the notion itself, but the rules for the proper use of our moral notions are also rules for what these notions are about—that is human behavior (Hauerwas 1981b, 19).

Whatever moral notions we employ to bring the world of human behavior into focus inevitably carries with them an ordering of that world.

To know how to use the word "lie" is in effect to know how the word orders that aspect of human behavior which it is about. Thus to learn moral notions is not just to learn about the world, it is to learn how to order the world. To learn moral notions is in effect to act upon the world, as it trains our vision about the world (Hauerwas 1981b, 19).

The only difference between physical notions (such as "tables") and moral notions (such as "lying") is simply that our need for and use of tables is less ambiguous than for lies.

Depending on circumstances, we may hedge, deceive, stall, evade, prevaricate, or "spin."

Yet at the end of the day, the table is still just a table. But in both cases, the meaning of the notion amounts to the use to which it is put by those behaviors that embody an

ordered perception of the world.² Because of the close connection between notions and behavior (the use to which notions are put), the moral life is not in the first place a matter of "What ought I do?" Rather, "the moral life is a struggle and training in how to see" (Hauerwas 1981b, 20).

This claim extends the work that Hauerwas had begun in his doctoral dissertation.³ There he challenged the sufficiency Rudolph Bultmann's "ethics of discontinuity." According to Bultmann, all of one's former moral decisions are inevitably wistful: "If only I knew then what I know now!" Consequently, one's past decisions are necessarily a poor reflection of one's moral agency. What matters instead is what I do now, in this discrete isolated moral choice. But Karl Barth, and an assist from Thomas Aquinas, helped Hauerwas realize that words such as "kindness" more aptly described a trend or pattern against which a single act can be recognized as "kind" than a behavior in isolation (Pinches 2002). Such a trend or pattern means that one's moral agency cannot be divvied into discrete moments but requires a continuity from past to future. Thus Barth's "ethics of continuity" suggested to Hauerwas a moral subject that endured over time, one capable of displaying behavioral patterns (such as "kindness") ordered by an aesthetically-trained moral vision. The training of this moral vision and the extension of the pattern constitute the formation of moral character (Hauerwas 1981e, Hauerwas, 1981a).

Unfortunately, in these early works Hauerwas tried to have his cake and eat it too. For he described "character" both as the pattern displayed by one's behavior through

² On meaning as use, see (Wittgenstein 1953, §43, etc.).

³ Yale, 1968, subsequently published as (Hauerwas 1975).

time and as something substantial enough to shape and orient one's future behavior. But at least this much is clear: for Hauerwas, a human subject has only as clear a view of "the way this world is" as is permitted by his or her character. Part and parcel of one's character is the struggle to acquire moral notions adequate for seeing the way the world really is, which is to say, adequate for truthful descriptions.

There is a landmine in the last sentence. For Hauerwas, contrary to the general direction taken by modern philosophy, "truthfulness" is not taken to be the correspondence between a description and the thing described. Following Hilary Putnam, when we are faced with two or more competing descriptions we cannot assume that these are rival descriptions of the same world—for in such cases we have no criterion for measuring sameness—but simply rival descriptions.⁴ If descriptions (and the notions they embody) are the means by which human beings see, then evaluating the truthfulness of a description has nothing to do with "objectivity"; it has everything to do with how well moral subjects see. When the myth of objectivity is surrendered, it does not follow (as some fear) that simply any description is a potential candidate. We are already hemmed in by a shared language. Standing in front of a red ball I will deny that it is green. What justifies my denial? Not the fact that I see "objectively," but that I speak English (Wittgenstein 1953, §381). Hauerwas concludes that measuring the truthfulness of moral notions and the descriptions they comprise is a linguistic skill, which is schooled by narratives.

⁴ For Putnam's version of "internal realism," see (Putnam 1987). See also (Putnam 1990).

2. Moral Convictions as stories rather than explanations

In 1982 Hauerwas wrote that

the primary task of Christian ethics involves an attempt to help us see. For we can only act within the world we can see and we can only see the world rightly by being trained to see. We do not come to see just by looking, but by disciplined skills developed through initiation into a narrative (Hauerwas 1982, 65-66).

We set aside novels for a number of reasons. Some fail to engage us because they are poorly written, others because they are unrealistic or because the characters are thin or lack integrity (i.e., they act "out of character"). The skills we use to judge a novel as bad or good are analogous to the skills of moral discernments precisely because our lives have a narrative texture to them.

[O]ur moral lives are not simply made up of the addition of our separate responses to particular situations. Rather we exhibit an orientation that gives our life a theme....To be agents at all requires directionality....Such attention is formed and given content by the stories through which we have learned to form the story of our lives. To be moral persons is to allow stories to be told through us so that our manifold activities gain a coherence that allows us to claim them for our own. The significance of stories is the significance of character for the moral life as our experience itself, if it is to be coherent, is but an incipient story (Hauerwas 1981d, 74).

In Hauerwas's mind, stories are not mere pedagogical devices, rather they epitomize a different mode of rationality. Stories are not "substitute or deficient explanations that we hope someday to supplant with more literal accounts. On the contrary, narratives are necessary exactly for those aspects of our lives that admit of no further explanation—e.g., God, the world, and the self" (Hauerwas 1982, 103).

In another early but decisive essay, Hauerwas, together with David Burrell, argues that Augustine's conversion began when he suspended his craving for general explanation and embraced in its place a narrative mode of rationality, one of searching for a story capable of forming his character.

Any ethical theory that is sufficiently abstract and universal to claim neutrality would not be able to form character. For it would have deprived itself of the notions and convictions which are necessary conditions for character....If truthfulness...is to be found, it will have to occur in and through the stories that tie the contingencies of our life together (Hauerwas 1977, 24).

Augustine's embrace of the Christian story was not simply the next phase in a long history of phases (licentiousness, rhetoric, Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism, etc.). Rather, the Christian story knit the disjointed episodes of his past into a unified narrative. Its plot is the soul's quest for God. Not only had the Christian story made sense of Augustine's past, it oriented him toward the future. It graced him with the ability to extend the gospel narrative both by making his character intelligible in his telling of the Christian story and by making him a character in that ongoing storyline.⁵

Thus stories, not explanations, matter. And a story's truthfulness is not measured by its correspondence with "reality" (for there is no unstoried place to stand). Rather, the truthfulness of a story is its reliability to shape the character of its adherents to be capable of living faithfully to the story.⁶ This last sentence is badly put for two reasons. First, it tempts us to think that "truth" amounts to an inherent property of this or that

⁵ It is central to the plot of the Christian gospel that the story did not end with Jesus' death, his resurrection, or even with the birth of the church. Rather, the final chapter—the eschaton—is yet to be written. Consequently, converts to Christianity such as Augustine see themselves as entering into a story still being told. This outlook is what Hans Frei identifies as the pre-critical reading of Scripture. See (Frei 1974).

⁶ Hauerwas writes against the backdrop of the work done by Alasdair MacIntyre in his own Gifford lectures: the "stories" in question are very large, namely tradition-constitutive (MacIntyre 1990).

story. Rather, what matters on Hauerwas's view of things, is that his readers be developing "the ability to discriminate between true (good) and false (bad) stories."⁷ Moreover, are not bad stories capable of shaping character? For example, missionaries once reported that an Irian Jayan tribe's initial encounter with the Gospel showed them to be delighted by the treachery of Judas's betrayal and mistook Judas as the hero of the account (Richardson 1974). On what grounds can their reading be called "mistaken" if it not only resonates with their culture, but reliably shapes them into similarly treacherous persons as Judas? In other words, are we not in need of some criterion for adjudicating stories?

But Hauerwas complains that such a line of questioning is premature. What we lack is not a criterion that can spell out in advance what makes for a true story, but engagement in practices and with texts that shape our skills of seeing. While there is evidence that Hauerwas's early writing wobbles between notions of truth-as-fidelity and truth-as-superiority (Kallenberg 2001, 238-45), ethics for Hauerwas has never been a theoretical exercise in adjudicating stories, much less solving moral conundrums. Rather, ethics is but a therapeutic discipline in which the moral vision of readers is aesthetically schooled by the use of, and grammatical remarks upon, narrative. For questions of truth cannot be abstracted from questions of skillful judgment.

⁷ (Hauerwas 1979, 97). "Put more directly, we often think that a true story is one that provides an accurate statement, a correct description. However, I am suggesting that a true story must be one that helps me to go on, for, as Wittgenstein suggested, to understand is exactly to know how to go on." (Hauerwas 1976/1977, 80). Emphasis added.

The narrative fabric of human existence is present to human beings on several levels. Stories are not like so many menu items confronting individuals who stand as volitional monads before a smorgasbord of options. That way of situating narratives assumes that it makes sense to ask "On what basis ought I make my selection?" As Hauerwas points out, such a question is itself the product of the story that constitutes modern liberalism.

L(The Synod of Orange)(The Synod of Orange)(The Synod of Orange)beralism can be characterized as the presumption that you should have no story other than the story you chose when you had no story. A society constituted to produce people who get to choose their stories cannot help but be caught in perpetual double-think. For what it cannot acknowledge is that we did not choose the story that we should have no story except the story we chose when we had no story (Hauerwas 1993, 748).

His wry comment is a reminder that in the conflict between master stories the stakes are very, very high because of the political, which is to say polis-forming, nature of stories. Stories are not only crucial for training the moral vision of individuals, but for shaping the corporate personae of entire communities as well.

For example, Christians are trained to recognize misbehavior as "sin" (rather than "mistake") and the appropriate corporate response as "reconciliation" (rather than "conflict resolution"). This difference is not merely semantic. Rather, the story-formed life in the Christian polis is so categorically different than that of modern liberal civil society that, in the words of John Milbank, it cannot help but look "immoral" for its queerness (Milbank 1995). Thus, the breach of the communal covenant, say by an act of adultery, is not a private issue; it is perceived as a real and present danger to the entire community (Martin 1995). Consequently, it must be dealt with publicly, with a public act of admonishment and excommunication or, alternatively, the restoration of koinonia by public confession and forgiveness.

Because Hauerwas believes the Christian story shapes the character and vision of both individual and community, Christian convictions are necessarily embodied in intra-communal acting and speaking. In this way Hauerwas sees the gospel narrative as constituting the material content of Christian convictions to which the weave of relationships in the believing community is internally related (Hauerwas, 1989, 5, 308; Hauerwas 1983, 24-44; Hauerwas 1988a). In other words, a chief measure of the "truthfulness" of the gospel (which is to say its reliability for shaping characters who fit the storyline) is whether the gospel can be read off the interplay of believers' lives. To the extent that it cannot, the Christian polis is in need of prophets.⁸ To the extent it can, the Christian polis can deploy "witnesses."

3. Witnesses, not philosophers, are the means of truth-telling

We are now in a position to understand why Hauerwas thinks that "the truth of Christian convictions can only be known through witnesses" (Hauerwas 2001, 211). In the first place, one measure of the Christian story is its ability to be embodied by a community whose characters live faithfully to the story. It does not count against a story that it fails to compel everyone to live faithfully. For Christians claim to be still in training. Moreover, the capacity of the Christian story to deal with cases of

⁸ "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is among you all (e)n u(mi&n) — unless indeed you fail the test?" 2 Cor. 13:5.

unfaithfulness (via forgiveness) is essential to the story.⁹ Nevertheless, it must enable some to live faithfully, or the story is a fairytale. Those whose lives are faithful comprise living evidence—witnesses—to the story's character-shaping reliability.

It matters greatly to Hauerwas's display that divine revelation came in the genre of "gospel" rather than "argument":

The command to witness is not based on the assumption that we [Christians] are in possession of a universal truth which others must also "implicitly" possess or have sinfully rejected. If such a truth existed, we would not be called upon to be witnesses, but philosophers. Rather the command to be a witness is based upon the presupposition that we only come to the truth through the process of being confronted by the truth (Hauerwas 1981c, 105).

Without such witnesses the good news would simply be unintelligible. Conversely, the intelligibility of the message is possible only because the church is the "foundation of the truth" and not the other way around.¹⁰ If we conclude that Hauerwas thinks that the church is the "plausibility structure" that frames the claims of the gospel, we would say far too little; but this conclusion moves in the right direction (Hauerwas 1988b, 101-10).

In the second place, "witness" is the only mode for displaying the truth of Christian convictions that isn't self-defeating. The gospel tells the story of God's self-emptying in

⁹ Hauerwas complains against Aristotle's account of perfect friendship that those virtuous persons who make the best friends turn out to be those whose virtue makes them self-sufficient and thus very poor friends indeed. The advantage of the gospel story, in Hauerwas's mind, is precisely that the church is comprised of sinners (Hauerwas with Pinches 1997, 31-54).

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 3:15; εὐκκλήσι/α θεοῦ = ζωὴν τοῦ στυλοῦ καὶ εὐδραϊσμοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας.

the incarnation of Jesus. Consequently, "if kenosis is the shape of God's own self-sending, then any strategy of Lordship," whether military force or rhetorical misinformation, "is not only a strategic mistake likely to backfire but a denial of gospel substance" (Yoder 1984). Granted, we hanker after ways to compel assent. And surely natural theology has been co-opted as one such strategy by well intentioned apologists. But as John Howard Yoder has argued, part of the validity of the good news is the very rejectability of the news; if hearers are coerced to believe "news," then it is no longer news but propaganda (Yoder 1992). Thus, Hauerwas's claim that the "truth of Christian convictions can only be known through witnesses" (Hauerwas 2001, 211) is his acknowledgment of the fact that what Christians call revelation came as good news.

Moreover, the peaceable nature of witness stems from what Hauerwas takes to be Christian belief regarding the very nature of God. Prior to Constantine, Christians were much more inclined than we to see the kenosis of God in the cross of Christ as determinative revelation of who God is in God's very nature.¹¹ Irenaeus wrote

He who is the almighty Word, and true man, in redeeming us reasonably by his blood, gave Himself as the ransom for those who had been carried into captivity. And though the apostasy had gained its dominion over us unjustly, and, when we belonged by nature to almighty God, had snatched us away contrary to nature and made us its own disciples, the Word of God, who is mighty in all things, and in nowise lacking in justice which is His, behaved with justice even towards the apostasy itself; and He redeemed that which was His own, not by violence (as the apostasy has by violence gained

¹¹ Constantine figures prominently in Hauerwas's account of theological history, for subsequent to Constantine, Christians got the idea that they were responsible for making history turn out all right. Such a view makes "effectiveness" the final criterion of social policy rather than "faithfulness." The former legitimates war; the latter is in keeping with the peaceable kingdom. See (Hauerwas 1988a). See also (Hauerwas 1983).

dominion over us at the first...), but by persuasion, as it was fitting for God to gain his purpose by persuasion and not by use of violence....¹²

Later theologians came to equate the peaceableness of God with the dance (perichoresis) that constitutes the inner life of the trinity. Consequently, because Christians worship a God whose peaceable perichoresis displays triunity, Christian witness is strongest when the mode of their truth claims about God is isomorphic with the content spoken. Christians must speak peaceably about the Prince of peace. In Hauerwas's view, Christians witness to a triune God by means of their shared form of life. This intra-communal manner of living gestures toward the peaceableness of the God they worship. This can be seen not only in the endless cycles of sin-repentance-reconciliation among sincere though fallen believers, but also by the very language Christians speak. For, this language is only intelligible as it is spoken from out of this fragile yet peaceable form of life in the Christian polis.¹³ Hauerwas thinks that such linguistic practices are every bit

¹² Cited in (Aulén 1969, 26-27). Emphasis added.

¹³ "Christians do not believe in an 'eternal truth or truths' that can be known apart from the existence of the people of Israel and the church. We know that the witness that we are called to make is such exactly because that to which we witness is unavailable apart from its exemplification in the lives of a community of people. That such a witness takes the form of nonviolence is necessary because we believe that the God who makes such a witness necessary is a God who would not be known otherwise.

"For many, that seems to be an invitation to relativism and, correlatively, war and violence. If we lack a standpoint that at least promises to secure agreement between people who otherwise share nothing in common, what chance do we have of making war less likely? Yet from my perspective, just such theories have made war likely. Christians

as powerful, and more so, for creating the conditions for its own felicity as is individual faith in James's Will to Believe. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, from whom Hauerwas has learned much, "How do I know God is real? It would be an answer to say, 'I speak Christian'."

4. Persuasion involves language acquisition

The "argument" of With the Grain of the Universe resists easy summary because Hauerwas writes not as a philosopher but as a language instructor. Hauerwas thinks readers are as unlikely to understand notions such as "triunity" and "witness" by means of substitute vocabulary as English speakers are to learn Chinese by reading translations of Confucius. So there is method in his madness. Hauerwas writes in the mode of first-order religious language as means of resisting the hegemony of Lord Gifford's project, namely the doing of theology "naturally," which is to say, employing no language in particular. What is up for debate is not the existence of God, but the grammar of the word "exists." The manner in which natural theologians speak is determinative for who it is they are talking about. Thus, "if we could have the kind of evidence of God the evidentialist desires, then we would have evidence that the God Christians worship does not exist" (Hauerwas 2001, 29). But as Kierkegaard pointed out, it is improper to speak of God's existence, for "God does not exist, He is eternal" (Kierkegaard 1968, 296). At

do not promise the world a theory of truth that will resolve conflict. Rather, we promise the world a witness that we think is the truth of our existence. That witness requires the existence of a body of people who provide an alternative so that we may be able to see the violence that so grips our lives" (Hauerwas 1994, 135).

stake in Hauerwas's resistance is the sufficiency of two incommensurable conceptual languages. Natural theology in Enlightenment fashion claims supremacy over positive theology on the assumption that everything can be explained without reference to first-order religious language. But Hauerwas avers that while natural theology may (or may not) explain a great deal, it cannot explain one thing, namely, the intelligibility of first-order Christian language.

5. The witness of Stanley Hauerwas

We can now see that the compressed claim of page 211 embodies in miniature the entirety of Hauerwas's project. The "argument" of With the Grain of the Universe runs something like this: If God is not real, then Christian witness is necessarily babbling. (Or, if God is not real, then Karl Barth can be reduced without remainder to Reinhold Niebuhr.) But Christian witness is intelligible on its own terms to those who seriously seek to know (i.e., Barth does not reduce to Niebuhr.) Therefore, there is a reality outside the purview of natural theology as well as outside all other anthropocentric disciplines, and "this everyone understands to be God."¹⁴

Of course, by "intelligible" Hauerwas cannot mean what the natural theologians mean or he has already given the game away. Rather, Hauerwas displays his argument

¹⁴ Hauerwas employs Aquinas's "little coda" on page 26 of With the Grain.

However, it should be clear by now that for Hauerwas's Aquinas, the term "everyone" referred to ordinary Christian believers but certainly not to the *unstoried* and *traditionless* modern individual.

by parading three Gifford lecturers—William James, Niebuhr and Barth—to tell a story whose plot culminates in the primacy of witness.

Hauerwas owes a great deal to James's radical empiricism. First, human knowledge is contingent all the way down. "Certainty" and "proof" are categories that are unavailable to radical empiricists. Rather, judgment admits of a sliding scale, and whether one judges well or poorly depends upon the prior cultivation of the skills of practical reasoning fitting for the claim in question. Second, James showed convincingly that lived belief (religious "geniuses") is a legitimate candidate for datum in arguments of philosophy of religion. Third, sometimes belief creates the conditions for its own felicity. (As when Jane, believing John loves her though in fact he does not, acts in such a way to win John's heart after all.)

But in the end, James fails to be radical enough for Hauerwas. In the first place, he is still an empiricist. As Quine would demonstrate fifty years after James (Quine 1951), one of empiricism's intractable dogmas is the view that the believing subject (and the language he or she employs) is one thing and that the reality being described is another. In addition to making empiricism subject to perennial skepticism, this bifurcation of subject and object, and thus of language and world, meant that James could never quite escape conceiving of religion as the private (subconscious) experience of a reality "out there" that was only subsequently labeled by the individual as experience "of God" or whatever. The privilege James unwittingly grants to individual subjects results in his being simply unable to treat as data the distinctive life and language that constitutes the communal life of religious believers.

Hauerwas recognizes that Niebuhr is a step forward from James in that Niebuhr acknowledges the corporate nature of human life and even convincingly employs

theological terms (most notably Augustine's doctrine of sin) for diagnosing the corporate human condition. But in the end, Niebuhr is but a pragmatist in religious clothing. For Niebuhr, the strength of the Christian story boils down to its provisional utility for describing what all must concede, namely, that institutions are susceptible to corruption by the will to power precisely because human beings are more evil together than they are in isolation.

However, while Hauerwas admires James, he is much less charitable in his estimation of Niebuhr on account of the "extraordinary 'thinness' of his theology" (138). As a theologian, Niebuhr simply ought to have known better than to treat Christianity as mere mythos, as a story that is overlaid on "reality" and deemed valuable merely for its pragmatic help in diagnosing social conditions. For Hauerwas's Niebuhr, while Christian diagnosis seems today to be corroborated by other analyses (say, that of Nietzsche), it remained logically possible that Christian description tomorrow be supplanted by some other wholesale story, because descriptions are merely glosses on a world knowable by other means.

Not so for Hauerwas's Karl Barth. Barth's thunderous "Nein!" to the possibility of natural theology grew out of what he took to be the sheer givenness of divine revelation. Unlike Niebuhr, for whom theology was an ornamental gloss on the real world, Hauerwas's Barth insisted that revelation—if it be revelation of God—is categorically different than anything else encountered in the hurly-burly of human existence. Consequently, the Christian scriptures must be read on their own terms, or according to the "rule of faith" (analogia fidei).

When theologians engaged Lord Gifford's project, they assumed that the Thomistic notion of an analogy of being (analogia entis) made it possible to extrapolate from the

creation to its Creator. But Barth argues that the brute fact of God's self-revelation (in the incarnation of Christ and in the Scriptures that witness to the incarnation) means that natural theology was an enterprise that was bound to fail. God is so completely other, so transcendent so as to lie outside human ken, that only if revelation dropped in like a stone might human beings know who and that God is. (Thus famously, "the biblical theologian proves that God exists by means of the fact that He has spoken in the Bible."¹⁵) On the grounds that divine revelation is possible and that its content (e.g., the peaceableness of God) is categorically different than any conclusions we might draw by reasoning about nature, then we must read Scripture on its own terms. When the readers subject themselves to interrogation by the text rather than becoming interrogators of the text, then they are reading rightly, which is to say, according to the rule of faith (analogia fidei).

There is a river in the Bible that carries us away, once we have entrusted our destiny to it—away from ourselves to the sea. The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations. We need only dare follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow beyond ourselves toward the highest answer. This daring is faith; and we must read the Bible rightly, not when we do so with false modesty, restraint, and attempted sobriety, for these are passive qualities, but when we read it in faith (Barth 1957, 34).

If one point of James's radical empiricism was to secure a proper place for practical reasoning in matters of religion, then Barth appears justified in his construction of theology as a science whose criteria for evaluation are internal to the practice of theology.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cited in (MacDonald 2000)

¹⁶ Barth's move to make the norm of revelation internal to revelation is analogous to the advance of Heinrich Hertz over Ernst Mach in philosophy of science. Mach's

Neil MacDonald rightly concludes that Barth's use of the term analogia fidei originated in the Reformers' notion that the theological meaning of the whole of Scripture governs the sense of the parts. But Barth goes beyond the Reformers. As MacDonald summarizes, for Barth, "God's self-revelation is a sui generis historical event, an event therefore whose only means of measurement is itself" (cited in MacDonald 2000, 125). For example, when we doubt the existence of unicorns, we have at hand a ready conception of unicorns. But this is precisely what we lack when it comes to consideration of "God." The very concept upon which the question of God's existence turns, has its entrance into our conceptual life through the biblical narratives. God's self-revelation

comes to us as a Novum which, when it becomes an object for us, we cannot incorporate in the series of our other objects, cannot compare with them, cannot deduce from their context, cannot regard as analogous to them. It comes to us as a datum with no point of connexion with any other previous datum (MacDonald 2000, 209).

Consequently, if there is any hope that the revelation is not simply inane, the criterion for assessing revelation must be internally related to the content of that revelation. What does this internal relation amount to?

In an important passage, Barth explains

Talk about God has true content when it conforms to the being of the church, i.e., when it conforms to Jesus Christ... ei#te profhti&an , kata_ th_n

version of empiricism offered criteria that were external to the hypotheses proposed.

Bereft of meta-criteria for evaluating the criteria, Mach's version regresses infinitely. In contrast, Hertz's notion of theoretical models (*Darstellungen*) offered criteria that were internally related to the model itself. For an account of this history see (Janik and Toulmin 1973).

'analogi&an th=v pi&stewv (Rom 12:6). It is in terms of such conformity that dogmatics investigates Christian utterance. Hence it does not have to begin by finding or inventing the standard by which it measures. It sees and recognizes that this is given with the Church. It is given in its own peculiar way, as Jesus Christ is given, as God in His revelation gives Himself to faith. But it is given (Barth 1975, 12).

Here Barth is intimating that the norm against which the revelation of God is measured is embodied in the speech of those who have become fluent in the Christian language by their engagement with biblical narratives (especially that of Jesus' resurrection). So in Barth's mind, theology is not a criterionless discipline. Yet both the measure and the measurer are internal to that community whose form of life and speech are defined in conformity to the pattern of Jesus Christ.

6. The point is the ongoing conversation

There are some objections to Hauerwas's project. However, let me dispel the notion that his project is somehow flawed because he failed to translate it into terms that "anyone" can understand. Some of us who teach in the university setting are fortunate enough to have our merit judged by a chair or dean who has undergone training similar enough to ours that he or she can perceive the significance of our work. Others are not so lucky; a wanna-be tenured philosopher may have to fight an uphill battle with a dean whose degree is in ceramics.¹⁷ In such a case, the dean may be ever suspicious of the competence of the young scholar. Nothing short of re-training the dean will fill this gap. Hauerwas argues that Barth is separated from his detractors by a similar gap. Thus the Church Dogmatics is a "training manual" that "requires both intellectual and moral transformation" of its readers (Hauerwas 2001, 179-183). So too

¹⁷ This illustration originally found in (Wykstra 1990).

for Hauerwas. And insofar as the difficulty is not logical but linguistic, the training undertaken by With the Grain of the Universe is grammatical in nature.

J.R. Tolkien was surprised by the popularity of his Lord of the Rings trilogy. But he was dismayed when eager fans sent him mail composed entirely in elvish!¹⁸ Does this make elvish a living language? No. For it requires more than speakers to make a language. Tolkien did not invent a private language (Wittgenstein 1953, §§243-315). Rather, he invented a private code. The base of elvish is some combination of the dozen or so languages that Tolkien and others already spoke. His code could thus be broken by diligent fans who already inhabit the same conceptual universe as these other speakers. In contrast, Hauerwas insists Christian theology is not simply a code to be cracked. It is a sui generis peculiar language, and not one "invented" in private, but one that emerged in the midst of some first-century Jews who were bending their lives in imitation of Jesus. To the extent that their lives, and thus their language, is unique, it cannot count against them that their speech cannot be translated into something else or stripped down into common parlance.¹⁹ It is simply the case that outsiders sometimes have trouble "finding their feet" with native speakers. The temptation to see all distinctive

¹⁸ I have yet to track down whether this story is apocryphal. Yet it has a ring of truth to it (no pun intended).

¹⁹ To assume that it can be so translated would entail the same order of *hubris* as displayed by Frazer when he concluded that aboriginal cultures were "primitive" because he so naturally assumed that their concerns *must* be the same as those of modern Europeans though *proto*-scientific by comparison. For discussion of Sir James George Frazer's work, see (Wittgenstein 1993).

theological vocabulary as mere metaphysical ornamentation may help explain why Wittgenstein himself could make neither heads nor tails out of Barth:

A theology which insists on the use of certain particular words and phrases, and outlaws others, does not make anything clearer (Karl Barth). It gesticulates with words, one might say, because it wants to say something and does not know how to express it (Wittgenstein 1980, 85e).

But if we grant that Christianity may be constituted by a language that may be only roughly decoded for sake of the novice, but never fully "translated" from the vantage of fluent speaker, then it cannot count against Hauerwas's work, nor against Hauerwas's Barth, that each are trying to engage Christian speech on its own terms. In fact, it may be a mark of their respective genius that they did so.

One of the most trenchant problems in epistemology is that of justification. Not only must truth claims be justified, the means by which they are justified must themselves be justified. Let us call this the problem of meta-justification. It is well known that early twentieth-century logical positivism ran aground on its own inability to justify the principle of verifiability; for, the principle of verifiability could not itself be verified by appeal to the five senses. Consequently, the justification of verifiability, if one could be devised, would necessarily be of a different shape than the principle itself. If the meta-justification is of a different shape than its object, then either meta-justification regresses infinitely; or there follows a brute pluralism of justifications; or all meta-justifications converge into a single totalizing scheme, a sort of Hegelian absolutism.

When we set about to justify first-order claims ("The cat is on the mat") by employing a second-order claim ("True claims are those verified by the five senses"), then the problem of meta-justification is raised precisely when second-order claims

differ in shape from first-order claims. It was the genius of Wittgenstein to do philosophy of language (a second-order enterprise) by means of the very ordinary language he was scrutinizing (first-order), thus obviating the need for meta-justification. And given the fact that no clear winner has emerged in the three-century debate surrounding meta-justification, perhaps carrying out a second-order discipline in a manner isomorphic with its first-order object is the best that can be done.²⁰ To the extent that Hauerwas employs a first-order language to do a second-order discipline, he deserves praise more than criticism.

Nevertheless, there are a few unresolved issues. (Not that these are defeaters of Hauerwas's project. I'm quite certain that Hauerwas assumes the point of his project to be the ongoing conversation rather than the status of any theses he has proposed along the way.²¹) First, if Hauerwas intends to follow Barth's claim that to be wrong about Christ is to be wrong everywhere else and that to be right about Christ means that one can never go completely wrong,²² then why does Hauerwas—unlike John Howard Yoder and Pope John Paul II, the heroes of chapter eight—spend so little time writing about Jesus? Hauerwas cannot defer on ground that he is not a biblical scholar without capitulating to the division of disciplines that he is set to overcome (Hauerwas 1997). Second, a growing number of thinkers are arguing convincingly that the Christian language or the Christian community or the Christian story is a misnomer. There may

²⁰ For a fuller discussion of this argument see (Murphy 1993).

²¹ Thus the occasional nature of all Hauerwas's works. Most recently see his conversation with and response to Peter Ochs and Gene Outka (Hauerwas 2003).

²² For discussion of this section of the *Church Dogmatics*, see (Colwell 2001, 131).

be a family resemblance, but there is certainly neither diachronic nor synchronic uniformity to the notion of "Christian."²³

Hauerwas may have two responses to this complaint. In the first place, Hauerwas is likely to respond that the question "What is it to be 'Christian'?" is at the very heart of the "historically extended, socially embodied argument" that itself constitutes the Christian tradition (MacIntyre 1984, 222)! But more importantly, the point is not to define "Christian" so as to make the definition normative in some disengaged way. Rather, the point is for readers to engage various Christianities in order to gain the eyes necessary for discerning the very family resemblance in question.

Okay. Then why has Hauerwas written so rarely (if ever?) about the practice of Christianity in non-European and non-North American contexts? If the western church is in as much trouble as he claims, ought he not take his cues from nonwestern churches, especially those presently enduring great persecution?

My third objection is related to the second.²⁴ Hauerwas holds that the Holy Spirit is met not so much in the behavior of individual believers as in the corporate practices of the church so that descriptions of the Spirit's presence are best thought of as

²³ See (Gill 1995). For a similar charge leveled against George Lindbeck see (Tilley 2003).

²⁴ I am indebted to Reinhard Hütter for this point. Hütter argues that Barth's theology loses the ontic reality of the Holy Spirit when he separates God (and, it might be added, God's communication) from any trace in human witness. Hütter argues that the Holy Spirit's presence is recognizable in churchly practices such as baptism, catechesis, prayer, and discipleship (Hütter 2001).

supervening on the descriptions of the Christian form of life (Kallenberg 2002). As part of this form of life—in fact, the most important part as Hauerwas has argued on a number of occasions (Hauerwas 1995)—is the corporate identity, I'm puzzled that With the Grain of the Universe speaks of individual witnesses (such as Dorothy Day) but fails to detail examples of corporate witness (such the Catholic Worker movement).

7. An Apologist of an Ancient Sort?

Given the particularities of With the Grain of the Universe, I'm inclined to conclude that Hauerwas might be best understood as an apologist. Of course, this perfectly good term has fallen on hard times. Today, Christian apologetics is associated with a very combative enterprise championed, in the main, by evidentialists for whom "What counts as evidence?" is not problematic, only that they amass more of it.

But there is an ancient form of apologetics whose labor turned on two tasks. First, transformation. When the author of 1 Peter instructed believers to "be prepared to give a defense," what is to be understood is not the preparation of answers, but the preparation of the answerers.²⁵ The early ascetics led the way in this respect, for they considered their "excesses" to be part and parcel of their witness (martus); they understood themselves to be martyrs-in-training (Tilley 1991). Second, the grammarian's task. When confusion arose over Christian practice—early martyrs died under charges of

²⁵ 1 Peter 3:15. It is interesting that the author of 2 Peter seems to understand that virtue must be acquired prior to the acquisition of knowledge. See 2 Peter 1:5-8.

atheism, incest, and cannibalism²⁶—the apologists strove to clear away the misunderstanding. Typically, they responded by doing more of the very theology that was misunderstood in the first place!²⁷ (Such is the lot of those whose goal is a shift in the aspect under which the other sees.²⁸) The trouble with this, of course, is that repeating oneself may not clarify anything. This is why early apologists also took pains to point out the splendid peculiarities of Christian behavior. The first-century Epistle to Diognetus shows that despite the ordinary manner of Christian eating and dress,

[t]hey dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not needlessly destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives....They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred (Mathetes 1885, 26-7).

²⁶ For Christians worshipped no visible idols, married their siblings in the Lord, and ate the body and drank the blood of Eucharist.

²⁷ E.g., who can separate Irenaeus's theology from his apologetics?

²⁸ Hauerwas made this point by juxtaposing Barth's statement "We can only repeat ourselves" with Wittgenstein's observation that "the limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which ...is the translation of a... sentence, without simply repeating the sentence." Cited in (Hauerwas 2001, 173).

At the end of the day, the apologist's trump card was to point to the Christian community while describing it in Christian terms. For the truth of Christian speech supervenes on descriptions of their practices. This interplay of speech and practice makes possible communication with outsiders.

The transformative and grammatical work done by With the Grain of the Universe puts Hauerwas in the camp of ancient apologists. Consequently, we can expect a mixed response from his readers. When St. Paul proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus to the Athenians on Mars Hill, some sneered, some believed, while others said "we will hear you again about this" (Acts 17:32-34). We can be certain Hauerwas will be happy to be heard again.

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