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VIRTUE, CHARACTER AND COMMUNITY: THE PECULIARITIES
OF THEOLOGICAL ETHICS OF STANLEY HAUERWAS

The purpose of this article is to explore the main categories of the theological ethics of Stanley Hauerwas, one of the most influential Protestant scholars in the area of theology and ethics in recent decades. In his work Hauerwas brings to notion the substantial characteristics of Christian moral life that are either pushed to the periphery of the Christian ethical discourse or ignored as non-essential in the contemporary context.

It should be noted that it is a difficult task to systematize Hauerwas' ethical thought or to locate it within the framework of contemporary theological ethics. The majority of his books are collections of essays prepared for specific situations and later collected into book form. Hauerwas' practice of co-authoring essays and co-editing books is another factor that makes a systematic analysis of his thoughts a difficult undertaking[1]. It is important to remember that his works generally are interdisciplinary; they reflect a wide interaction of theology, philosophy, literature and social theory. However, several prominent themes within his work are apparent, including such issues as vision, virtue, character, narrative, community and pacifism.

Though Hauerwas' ethics do not belong to any specific theological school, post-liberal theology could be considered as a theological tradition that most influenced his views.

Hauerwas's view of narrative as a key category along with his non-foundational epistemology and continual criticism of liberalism mark his engagement with post-liberalism. In his introduction to one of his early books, Hauerwas associates himself with those referred to by George Lindbeck as concerned to "renew in a post-traditional and post-liberal mode the ancient practice of absorbing the universe into the biblical world" [9]. Post-liberal theology is a highly differentiated movement that brings together many theologians whose aims, according to James Fodor, are mainly (1) a faithful yet creative retrieval of the Christian tradition; (2) ecumenically open renewal of the church; and (3) compassionate healing and restoration of the world [3,229]. This theological methodology draws close attention to the intra-textual or narrative theology, given its crucial emphasis on biblical narrative.

Post-liberalism accepts a non-foundational epistemological stance, committing itself to offering "pragmatically superior and theologically fructifying conceptual redescriptions of the Christian faith, instead of attempting to ground those claims on purportedly universal principles or structures that can be accessed in a "neutral" and "objective" (i. e., framework-independent) manner" [Ibid., 231]. In opposition to epistemological foundationalism, which affirms that beliefs must be justified by relating to other justified beliefs, non-foundational theology attempts to do theology without such foundations.

Hauerwas does not develop a consistent reasoning for non-foundationalism; however, he proceeds on that basis. Hauerwas admits that his non-foundationalist posture and abandonment of attempts to anchor theology in some general account of human experience, is a result of his engagement with the philosophy of Wittgenstein [8, xxi]. According to Hauerwas, "The attempt to make God knowable separate from how God has made himself known through Scripture makes a world without God thinkable. God could not help but become another 'thing' amid other metaphysical possibilities" [13]. The "Post-liberal mood" in theology, accepted by Hauerwas, does not require the translation of theology into terms of other systems of thought. Christian formation and sanctification are intelligible within the internal justifications of the Christian community. The church has an independent value in relation to other institutions [1, p. 293]. In the discussion of Hauerwas' relations with post-liberalism, Ronald Michener shows that Hauerwas accepted "George Lindbeck's stress on religion not being primarily about true or false propositions, but about skills and practices for living" [20, p. 75]. However, as Michener emphasizes, while Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach laid special emphasis on religious language as a possibility for religious life, Hauerwas considers the Church's narrative as creating possibilities for various expressions of the virtuous life.

Hauerwas' emphasis on the church as a community of moral vision reflects the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre' moral philosophy and that of John Howard Yoder[2]. In his influential "After Virtue" (1984) MacIntyre pessimistically evaluates the contemporary state of moral understanding and explores the potential of virtue for renewal of morality [18]. In his next important book "Whose Justice? Which Rationality?" (1988) MacIntyre, who positions himself as a Thomistic Aristotelian, demonstrates that rational enquiry at all times is embodied in a particular tradition [19]. MacIntyre's accounts of virtue, rationalities, and tradition are inextricably connected with the notion of community. The life of community exemplifies a specific ethical tradition.

Hauerwas's work reveals a continual drawing on MacIntyre's project. Hauerwas and MacIntyre are highly critical of modernism because it forgets that human nature is finite; they share the conviction that the Enlightenment project met with failure, causing ongoing disintegration of Western society.

While Hauerwas' affinity to MacIntyre's thought is substantial, the influence of Mennonite theologian Howard Yoder on his ethics is even more significant. Yoder's research field was very broad; it included ethics, theology, history, and biblical studies. However, Yoder is most famous for the volume "The Politics of Jesus" [23], in which he seeks to recover pacifist implications of the New Testament. Writing from the perspective of "biblical realism", Yoder promotes a reading of the Scripture that takes seriously the biblical view of reality and does not attempt to restrict it to any specific world outlook. Yoder's biblical realism give rise to a renewed attention to ecclesiology, eschatology and ethics. Jesus' vision of the divine order is able to address our age. According to Yoder, the message of Jesus, as well as his life, death and resurrection provide socially and politically relevant patterns for the church. An integral aspect of this vision is "Jesus' messianic pacifism", which calls the church to live in a world in accordance to a peace position. The Church as the special community with its own set of values is called to be distinguished from the world and faithful to God.

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[1] Besides more than forty books and three hundred articles that Hauerwas has written, near thirty books and dissertations have been devoted to his work.

[2] In the introduction to his book Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997) Hauerwas explains that he doesn't include the chapters on MacIntyre and Yoder in this collections of essays on particular philosophers and theologians because he already have written on MacIntyre and Yoder in many other places. Then he acknowledges that that "every chapter in this book is so dependent on what MacIntyre and Yoder have taught me that the book is, from beginning to end, about them" (14).

Hauerwas theological ethics converge with Yoder's work in a number of ways. As Hauerwas admits, his understanding of the church is largely defined by Yoder's ecclesiological perspective. Yoder's influence is evident in Hauerwas' convictions that the church must hold a pacifist stance, that Constantinianism (subsuming of the church by the world) is a very important and long-standing heresy of the Christian faith. The function of the Church, in Hauerwas' view, is to act as an interpretive community. Both thinkers describe themselves primarily through adherence to non-violence, they argue against the use of war to advance state policies, and both are critics of advanced capitalism. Yoder's view of Christianity as a very specific community, formed by ethics and the declaration of Jesus to the coming of the kingdom, is important for understanding Hauerwas' emphasis on pacifist and the non-violent community.

Special attention must be given to the Hauerwas' understanding of vision and moral imagination as essential to morals. He discussed this subject in one of his early works [7]. In this collection of essays, he challenges the notion that the central elements within ethics are decision-making and the formation of general grounds for objectivity in judgment. In his engagement with Joseph Fletcher's work that articulates situational ethics most clearly, Hauerwas rejects the idea that decision plays the central role in ethical theory. He considers as a fundamental error situational ethics' disregard of the importance of a specifically Christian vision that describes reality in a certain way prior to any actions. Hauerwas believes that morality should not concentrate solely on decisions, choices or actions but on learning to perceive the world through the alternative imagination of the order, shaped mainly by symbols and notions. Moral description is prior to moral conduct.

In Hauerwas' view, the true moral life is not just a life of decision but also the life of vision, therefore, "we must learn how the world is to be properly 'seen'" [Ibid., 20]. Our vision of who and where we are determines our moral responses. We can only act in the world we can see [14, p. 611]. "Vision is the necessary prerequisite for ethics" [15, p. 84]. In this regard, Hauerwas points to an erroneous inclination of Christians to see themselves as actors and self-creators. The delusion of human power in conjunction with relegating God to the transcendent realm gives rise to the conviction that earthly life is in the hands of human beings. However, as Christians we should see and interpret reality "under the mode of the divine" [7, p. 45], taking into account fundamental biblical categories of fall, sin and redemption.

Hauerwas draws close attention to the category of virtue in Christian ethics. He comprehensively explains his view on virtue in a collection of essays, coauthored with Charles Pinches [17]. In this book, he explores Aristotelian notion of virtue and develops contemporary treatments of Christian virtue as well as its examples. In this work, Hauerwas does not offer one clear definition of virtue employing instead its various descriptions.

Hauerwas develops his virtue ethics as contrasting to duty-oriented ethical platform that accentuates the importance of action and decision, and principle-oriented ethic, which emphasizes the role of principles directing our actions and choices. Unlike these latter approaches, virtue ethics pays attention to the person, and sets the goal to promote a specifically Christian way of being and character. As Hauerwas states, "An ethic of virtue centers on the claim that an agent's being is prior to doing" [6, p. 113] Hauerwas connects virtue to vision, demonstrating that virtue determines how we see reality. Nevertheless, connection between vision and virtue is not always clear in Hauerwas' writings because of the complex nature of their interrelations.

The notion of character, closely connected with the notion of virtue, is also an important category of Hauerwas' project. Exploring the difference between virtues and virtue, he refers to virtue as "a general stance of the self that has more remote normative significance than do the individual virtues". Therefore a "person of virtue or character", for Hauerwas, describes a self "formed in a more fundamental and substantive manner than the individual virtues seem to denote" [Ibid., p. 112]. Hauerwas also draws distinction between virtue and character. For instance, in his interpretation of happiness he considers virtue as a substance that is available to a person's character [17, p. 12]. In «Vision and Virtue», he defines character as the "qualification of our self-agency, formed by our having certain intention (and beliefs) rather than others" and "reality of who we are as self-determining agents" [7, p. 59]. The character has a "capacity to determine himself beyond momentary excitations in the acts" [Ibid., p. 54].

Hauerwas defines ethics as "a form of reflection in service to a community" [6, p. 54] that derives its character from the nature of that community's convictions. The virtue finds its content and motivation in the community's practices and traditions accumulated in the particular narrative that provides a specific identity to the community. As he affirms, "all significant moral claims are historically derived and require narrative display... Appeal to the narrative dependence and structure of moral rationality is... an attempt to illuminate, in a formal manner, the character of our moral existence as historic beings" [6, p. 99]. For the first time Hauerwas turns his attention to the notion of narrative in "Truthfulness and Tragedy" (1977). He continued to conceptualize the key role of narrative in his next books "Community of Character" and "The Peaceable Kingdom" (1983). Even though the notion of narrative is not the definitive theme of his more recent work, it remains important.

Hauerwas contends that the importance of Jesus for the development of Christian ethics does not consist in traditional Christological formulations of God becoming human in the person of Jesus, but precisely in the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaims the kingdom of God and makes present its reality. The Kingdom, which Jesus makes known, is the peaceable kingdom of God that is both present and eschatological reality.

The Church is a central constituent of Hauerwas' proposal for Christian ethics. According to him, "our capacity to be virtuous depends on the existence of communities which have been formed by narratives faithful to the character of reality" [6, p. 116]. Theological ethics requires a community of people with common habits and a shared belief in the story of God revealed in the people of Israel and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the true source for moral formation. The only location for Christian ethics is the Christian community. The truth of Christianity is communicated by the community and cannot be "translated" into non-Christian language. Therefore, the development of the character of a person cannot be separated from the community. The individual who develops a Christian character within the believing community not only obtains a new vision, but also develops the virtues particular for that community. Consequently, it is not possible to judge the action of a Christian, right or wrong, apart from the believing community that bears witness of the story of God.

As noted, Hauerwas seeks to pursue ethical issues in the light of the Christian church. For a long time, the church as a moral category was ignored, so Hauerwas attempts to address this deficiency by arguing that the church does not have an ethic, but rather is an ethic. Developing the connection between the church and virtue, Hauerwas contends that the Church must publicly display and embody virtue. He explains that "if the Church, which after all is a public institution, can be the kind of community which manifests the political significance of virtue, then the Church may well have a political function not often realized" [10, p. 195]. However, as Hauerwas claims, the purpose of the Church is not to effect change in the world but to proclaim to this violent and fractured world that Jesus Christ has made possible a new social order, through the reality of the kingdom of God.

According to Hauerwas, the ethical category drawn out from the life of Jesus Christ is the peaceableness of the kingdom of God. Hauerwas points out that the Church is the only true polity of people who live the truthfulness of the story of God. Therefore, the Church is the real peaceable kingdom, con-

firming the trueness of the story that gives to the community the vision of peace. Hauerwas insists that the responsibility of the Christian is not to bring peace to the world. This had already become possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the fundamental source for Christian moral development. In the light of the narrative of Jesus Christ, the Christian's obligation is to live faithfully to the kingdom of peace, maintaining the eschatological perspective.

Hauerwas' focus on the Church as the truthfulness of the peaceable kingdom provoked criticism, seen as retreating into intellectual and moral sectarianism (James M. Gustafson) and promoting isolationism (Richard McCormick). Indeed, emphasis on specific Christian ethics and disregard of universal ethical principles may lead to neglect of the wider world of science and culture. However, in my estimation, Hauerwas' theological ethics is not sectarian. It appears that he develops an interesting and fruitful approach of engaging society in a responsible Christian way. I would express agreement with Hauerwas on his claim that the world, while still God's creation, is a realm that knows not God and is characterized by fears that constantly fuel the fires of violence [6, p. 109].

Hauerwas sees the church calling as living in the world and for the world, but without becoming the world. Only as clearly distinct from the world, the church is able to show the world that it is the world. Hauerwas asserts that the church as separate from the world functions as a transnational, transcultural, and global political community, always surrounded by the world.

Hauerwas is well known as a consistent pacifist. For him peace, particularly understood as nonviolence, is the foundation stone of Christianity. His earliest emphasis on the importance of nonviolence as the hallmark of Christian life comes in "The Peaceable Kingdom". Then he returns to this issue in numerous other texts. Hauerwas constantly emphasizes that the kingdom of God is the peaceable kingdom. Therefore, kingdom ethics requires from the believing community, formed by the story of Jesus, to be the community of nonviolence. Hauerwas maintains that the truthfulness of the Christian story is the peaceableness of the kingdom. The Christian community is the form of existence, which reveals the kingdom of God to the world. By founding and perpetuating a community based on non-violence, the Church reveals to the world that violence is not necessary [5, p. 413]. Through pacifism and non-violent life, the church displays the way toward the peaceable kingdom. This is not some idealistic belief that in some way by living non-violently the world will turn from its evil ways. It is rather the recognition that God's rule, embodied by Christ and expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, cannot take place any other way than non-violently [15, p. 84].

Hauerwas claims that non-violence is the path to truth: "There is, therefore, an inherent relation between truthfulness and peacefulness because peace comes only as we are transformed by a truth that gives us the confidence to rely on nothing else than its witness. A 'truth' that must use violence to secure its existence cannot be truth" [8]. Consequently, only those who live the pacifist life and resist the violence of the world are faithful to the narrative of God. All others live in the illusion and fragmentation of a world in which violence continues the fear and sinfulness that does not recognize its need for forgiveness.

Those people in the Christian community who do not follow the pacifist tradition are not living according to the truthfulness of the story of Jesus Christ, because they are misinterpreting the story according to their own erroneous understandings. By accepting or legitimizing violence the Christian community acts against its fundamental beliefs.

In Yoder and Hauerwas' view, pacifism is the only appropriate stance, because it comes from the very heart of the Christian understanding of God. Any interpretation of the kingdom of God that rejects the necessity of nonviolent life is a priori a repudiation of the narrative of God. The Church's calling is to be holy in the way of Jesus. Christians should resist any temptation to control the wider world, since any attempts to establish such control results in creating some norm other than offered by Jesus. The use of violence is always evidence of a lack of faith in God and his ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ.

In accordance with his emphasis on pacifist, and the nature of the Church, Hauerwas does not accept the truthfulness in the lives of nonviolent people that do not belong to the Christian community. Their story is not coming from the narrative of Jesus Christ that is focused on the peaceable kingdom. The exceptionality of Jesus consists in his acceptance of the cross as the way of disarming the powers that repress us, and in the justification of his nonviolent witness in the resurrection. For this reason, Hauerwas does not considers as true disciples of Jesus those who live in accordance with the just war tradition.

This article has presented the context and basic characteristics of Stanley Hauerwas' theological ethics. First, it examined the influence of post-liberal theological tradition on Hauerwas' ethics. Then we explored Hauerwas' dialogue with MacIntyre's regarding the failure of the Enlightenment project because of its rejection of human nature's finitude, ongoing fragmentation of Western society; focus on the virtue as the necessary aspect of moral life, and the stress on tradition and community. An attempt was made to prove that Hauerwas is following Yoder's nonviolent kingdom ethic in such areas as ecclesiology, the conviction that pacifism is the cornerstone of Christianity, the rejection of Constantinianism, and understanding Church as an interpretive community. Further the main categories of Hauerwas theological ethics were examined; his views on vision and moral imagination; the role of character and virtues in the moral life, on narrative as a radical new vision of the world, and on the believing community as ethics together with pacifism as the cornerstone of Christianity.

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Summary

Soloviy R. P. **Virtue, Character and Community: The Peculiarities of Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas.** – Article.

The context and basic characteristics of Stanley Hauerwas' theological ethics is investigated. The influence of post-liberal theological tradition on Hauerwas' ethics is examined. Then we explored Hauerwas' dialogue with MacIntyre's regarding the failure of the Enlightenment project. The main categories of Hauerwas theological ethics were examined; his views on vision and moral imagination; the role of character and virtues in the moral life, on narrative as a radical new vision of the world, and on the believing community as ethics together with pacifism as the cornerstone of Christianity.

Key words: Stanley Hauerwas, theological ethics, virtues, person, vision, character, moral imagination, pacifism.

Анотація

Соловій Р. П. **Чеснота, характер і спільнота: особливості теологічної етики Стенлі Хауерваса.** – Стаття.

У статті досліджено основні характеристики й контекст теологічної етики Стенлі Хауерваса. Розглянуто вплив постліберальної теологічої традиції на етику С. Хауерваса. Розкрито діалог С. Хауерваса з Макінтайром про провал проекту Просвітництва. Розглянуто основні категорії богословської етики С. Хауерваса: його погляди на бачення та моральну уяву; на роль і характер чеснот у моральному житті, на наратив як радикальне нове бачення світу, на спільноту віруючих як етичну разом із пацифізмом сутність християнства.

Ключові слова: Стенлі Хауервас, теологічна етика, чесноти, особа, бачення, характер, моральна уява, пацифізм.

Аннотация

Соловий Р. П. **Добродетель, характер и община: особенности теологической этика Стэнли Хауерваса.** – Статья.

В статье исследованы основные характеристики и контекст теологической этики Стэнли Хауерваса. Рассмотрено влияние постлиберальной теологической традиции на этику С. Хауерваса. Раскрыт диалог С. Хауерваса с Макинтайром о провале проекта Просвещения. Рассмотрены основные категории богословской этики С. Хауерваса: его взгляды на представление и моральное воображение; на роль и характер добродетелей в нравственной жизни, на нарратив как радикальное новое видение мира, на общину верующих как этическую вместе с пацифизмом сущность христианства.

Ключевые слова: Стенли Хауервас, теологическая этика, добродетели, личность, представление, характер, нравственное воображение, пацифизм.