

scholarship across a wide range of theological disciplines. For some, doubtless the sheer pace of the book will be something of a difficulty: complicated, nuanced issues are dealt with decisively and briefly; strong views are expressed pithily, and opposing views dismissed; those looking for an elaborate, patient exploration of disputed matters may be disappointed. But to measure this book by the criteria of, say, an academic monograph would be to risk missing the point. Avis' theology is first and foremost a *church* theology. Its audience is not only scholars but, in the rather woolly argot favoured in church circles today, 'practitioners', that is, church leaders, those involved in church life at local level, those who have the capacity to influence and shape the church of the future. This is the case for the prosecution aimed against those who complacently assume division is acceptable and ecumenism an unaffordable luxury. It is almost as if one could imagine Avis speaking to an audience of church leaders who think they know something of modern theology and modern church history: he wants them to come away changed from the encounter. This is theology for practice.

Avis' style of writing may not be explicitly polemical, but it is engaged, passionate and opinionated. At the same time, he is always careful to lay out opposing positions, and sensitive to the relevance of history to ecclesiology. Even those who do not agree with his overall position will undoubtedly learn a great deal from his discussion of authors. For that reason, in this reviewer's opinion there could hardly be a better introduction to the theological complexities of the movement for Christian unity.

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Stanley Hauerwas, *Fully Alive: The Apocalyptic Humanism of Karl Barth*

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Winston Dwarka Graham Persaud

New American Pathways, Atlanta, GA, USA (w.persaud@newamericanpathways.org)

Stanley Hauerwas' *Fully Alive: The Apocalyptic Humanism of Karl Barth* is the latest contribution of the prolific American theologian and ethicist to debates over the ethical and political legacy of Karl Barth, as well as a development of Hauerwas' own position regarding the relationship between Christ, the church and the world. Hauerwas states that he seeks to show how Barth's engagements with the challenges of his day can illuminate for us what it means to be a human being. In part, this is to counter the claim that Barth's strongly christologically focused thought is anti-humanist. But it is arguably even more about Hauerwas' own attempt to link himself to a christologically grounded Barth in order to push back against a critique levelled at his own work: that he over-emphasises the distinctive character of the church, downplaying Christ and denigrating worldly engagement by Christians.

Central to Hauerwas' argument is his claim that for Barth the church can 'no longer depend on the societal and cultural status it enjoyed in the past' (p. 18). This is a theme

heard often in Hauerwas writings, and he says that 'it warms my anti-Constantinian heart' (p. 18). The question, of course, is whether this reading of Barth is used by Hauerwas to justify what his critics see as his sectarianism, a retreat of the church into itself, premised on a strong boundary between an ecclesial space of redemption on the one hand, and a worldly space bereft of redemption on the other. At first, it seems like this is where the argument might be leading. Hauerwas points to comments by Barth in which the Swiss theologian states that he was inclined more towards the free church than a state church. One can anticipate this statement being used to justify a strong church-against-the-world fortress mentality. But Hauerwas does not go there. Instead, he reminds the reader that, notwithstanding these comments about a free versus state church, the Swiss theologian argues that, under Christ's lordship, the state belongs to the sphere of redemption. Thus, Hauerwas rightly notes, what was most important to Barth was a confessing, or faithful, church, the sign of which is action. Christian action that is grounded in faithfulness to Christ, in turn, can lead to engagement in the civil sphere in a manner that analogises Christ's true kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Of course, it is true Hauerwas feels that the analogies are at times strained, gesturing towards the affirmation of democratic practices, institutions and Christian engagement more because of their normative presence in Barth's world than because of a deep resonance with the gospel. Even so, these analogies justifying Christian engagement with the world outside the church are 'not, as often was alleged, arbitrary' (p. 41). They are to be seen as contingently held, but nevertheless not wholly inadequate responses to a particular context. What is important, Hauerwas emphasises, is 'not the particular analogies Barth develops' so much as the 'Christological presumptions that make such analogies possible' (p. 50). Every age will have to engage in a similar exercise, although the conclusions following from this christologically rooted reasoning may change in different contexts. Hauerwas thinks that a greater tension between church and world would have made the analogies stronger, at least for the contemporary American situation. Nevertheless, he concludes by stating, 'there is much wisdom in Barth's analogies. I would not change any' (p. 52).

Hauerwas' emphasis on Barth's christological grounding even extends to his attitude towards his own work. The central place of repentance in the believer's relationship to Christ is mirrored by Hauerwas' own critical language towards what he sees as his own failings when writing on race in his essay, 'Race: Fifty Years Later'. In essence, Hauerwas' practice reflects his argumentation. A similar point could be made about his use of Jean Vanier, in the chapter on disability entitled 'To Be Befriended: A Meditation on Friendship and the Disabled'. Hauerwas maintains that, while 'significant aspects of Jean Vanier's life and thought remain insightful and substantive, what we learned about his behavior was a kick in the gut. There is no excuse for what he and his mentor were about. Their spiritual justifications only make matters worse' (p. 7). So problematic, in fact, are the allegations against Vanier, today 'there are complex questions' regarding the use of his work, such that this is 'a subject that will not nor should not go away' (p. 7).

While Hauerwas emphasises the importance of Christology for Barth (and, by extension, his own work), he could have done more to draw attention to the arguably undeveloped nature of Barth's christologically rooted engagements with the world, as, for example, the relationship between Christ and Barth's critical comments regarding capitalism. Furthermore, the discussion of Barth, while popping up here and there in the later essays, wanes as the book progresses, especially when Hauerwas turns to the

aforementioned topics of race and disability. Barth's christocentric humanism may indeed have much to say to these issues, but they are, at best, unevenly developed in relationship to the Swiss theologian's own thought.

Nevertheless, Hauerwas helpfully pushes back against the view that Barth's critique of the liberal tradition, including liberal theology, meant that he was an anti-humanist. Barth wanted to promote a more radical humanism rooted in who God is in Jesus Christ, and thus who human beings are called to be, and Hauerwas certainly draws out aspects of this dimension of Barth's thought. Even if this has become a well-worn counter-argument by those sympathetic to Barth, it is gratifying to see how one of the most influential and provocative theological voices of the last forty years is able to work in the spirit of a giant of twentieth-century Protestant thought, to not only illuminate that figure, but to offer an arguably more nuanced, christologically explicit account of Christian engagement with the world.

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Oda Wischmeyer, *Love as Agape: The Early Christian Concept and Modern Discourse*

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Susan E. Hylen

Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA (susan.hylen@emory.edu)

Oda Wischmeyer, Professor emerita for New Testament Studies at the Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, sets out 'to present anew the New Testament concept of love', which 'has its own, indispensable contribution to make' to contemporary debates on the meaning of love (pp. 2–3). Originally published in 2015, her work is now available in an English translation by Wayne Coppins. Although for many theologians and ethicists, her subject may bring to mind Anders Nygren's classic twentieth-century work, *Agape and Eros*, she states elsewhere that her book is not in direct conversation with Nygren.¹

Following an introduction that sets out the basic premise of the work, chapter 1 argues that the earliest form of Christian teaching on love was the double commandment to love God and neighbour (e.g. Mark 12:28–34). While these commandments have their basis in the Torah, Wischmeyer asserts that their combination is distinctly Christian. The two commandments appear in separate places in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, Luke's version of the saying (Luke 10:25–37) clarifies that the 'neighbour' includes non-Israelites, something Wischmeyer also understands as an innovation of the New Testament.

Chapter 2 provides historical context for the New Testament. Wischmeyer is not tracing a developmental history of the New Testament concept, but comparing other texts

¹See Oda Wischmeyer, 'Anders Nygren and the "Babylonian Captivity of Agape" Once and Now', *Svensk Teologisk Kvarlaskrift* 91 (2015), pp. 164–72.