

A RESPONSE TO STANLEY HAUERWAS

That was a *very* thought-provoking paper, Stanley. Thank you.

First, let me say that I agree completely with you and D'Costa on the need for prayer—not only for doing theology and ethics, but for all who aspire to navigating the world with a religious perspective. Communication with the divine allows us visions of what might and should be. This communication is the foundation of conscience, of the ability to resist many of the unchristian values of surrounding culture.

As for natural law: I am traditional enough to see natural law as one important source of revelation, but I see its interpretation as being as problematic as scriptural interpretation—and see the sciences, both natural and social, as important tools for interpreting both of them.

My teaching experience in some ways parallels that in Stanley's presentation, though I have interpreted the difference between Catholic and secular institutions as emanating more from students than administration. Thirteen years ago I left Xavier University's Theology Department for the Religious Studies Department of the state university in Miami, Florida. I retrained, taught ethics in world religions, women in world religions, modern analysis of religion, research methods in religious studies. The closest I came to my former courses at Xavier were courses in Modern Catholicism and Christianity II: Saints, Witches and Cathedrals, both of which were basically history courses with smatterings of theology. I enjoyed the intellectual challenge of this shift, but realized after only a few years that the needs and desires of these students were for more, not less, help in personal moral and spiritual formation than at Xavier. One graduate class read Dorothee Soelle's *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, and exploded with a clamor to "feed our souls." They wanted moral and spiritual formation; they wanted challenge that is more than intellectual. They do not shy away from critique of the social landscape, but welcome it, having already grasped intuitively the moral and spiritual inadequacy of the world represented to them by popular, commercial culture.

Nevertheless, I am not attracted to Stanley's insistence that Christians should live in a parallel time—unless that parallelism is much further developed to eliminate abuses. I have too many memories of a preaching tradition that urged Catholics to more or less ignore the material social world and live in a spiritual world, that taught that real birth was not from one's mother's womb, but from the hands of the baptizing priest, that real food was not the meal one's parents worked to put on the table, but the papery host placed on one's tongue at mass—that the material world did not matter. For all the regrettable re-clericalization that Vatican II represented at the level of worship, I still think that its shift to place the church in the world, at

the service of the world, was a good one. There were gains and losses in this shift, but on balance it seems to me that recognizing church as a divinely inspired but human institution allows the church to be more humble and its members to realize that the church, too, like the universities that Stanley points to as minions of the state, sometimes becomes captive to values not her own.

I would encourage Stanley to push a little further concerning the source of danger in the secular world. He points to the state. There is no doubt that nation-states are powerful, and therefore potentially dangerous. As many of the lifelong ties that bond human groups together in the past become eroded in the late modern move to anonymous urban environments, mobile workers, and separated families, opposing or limiting the power of states over individuals by interposing intermediate institutions becomes more important but more difficult. Intermediate institutions are increasingly both more voluntary and more temporary in the lives of individuals; this weakens institutions by weakening the links between members. At the same time, states are becoming, and many would say have become, the minions of corporations and corporate interests, and these same corporate interests also control larger and larger parts of the mass media, which further increases their control over citizens and states. Technology has pushed human culture from the days of the first handheld tools, but now technology itself is increasingly controlled by corporate interests. In short, I suggest that states are often but minions of larger corporate institutions, just as universities are often minions of the state.

I agree that ending Constantinianism, and all forms of establishment of religion, is a good, in that it frees the church for service. I was not always clear about how Stanley was using the term "church," though I decided he was not using church to refer to Catholic church as is common at CTSA. Perhaps this was the source of my unease with his use of church, that it was more theological than historical. Stanley referred to the secular sciences (history) as not teaching their own histories and ideological development. This is largely true, and important to note. But until recently the historians of Christianity, and certainly of Catholicism, wrote and taught with equal ignorance of their own ideological blinders. We have merely to go back and read Catholic encyclopedias before 1960 to realize that there is some value to stepping into secular time and the multiple critical perspectives it contains.

And this is perhaps the heart of my unease with Stanley's stance. For many Catholic theologians and particularly ethicists of my generation, we have almost as much suspicion of the church as institution as we do of the state of which Stanley warns. We have lived or are living through the harassment of theologians, the hounding of religious from their orders, millions denied sacraments, children taught in Catholic schools that their divorced remarried parents were going to hell, priests dismissed for participating in civil rights marches, years of episcopal support for the Vietnam war, not to mention the many, many casualties in the gender/sexuality/reproduction battles.

Many of us have learned to separate the ecclesial community from the governing institution, and have done so in order to be able to remain within the ecclesial community. This is not a new occurrence within the history of Christian-

ity, though I suspect that the broad spread of this phenomenon beyond the ranks of clergy and religious is relatively new.

I have no doubt that the divorce of the teaching office from community worship in the lives of many Catholics and other Christians, and the growing irrelevancy of the teaching office in those lives, contributes to the privatization of faith, and thus to increasing secularization of the world. It is easy to bemoan this trend, but difficult to resolve the basic problem, which is diversity among Christians within denominations. That diversity is not only the result of a false consciousness perpetrated by corporate interests and their political and media minions, but also of a diversity among Christian consciences. Both false consciousness and diversity of conscience contribute to significant numbers of the faithful sometimes either seeing the church institution as participating in the powers and principalities of which the gospel warns, or at least seeing the church institution as oblivious to many moral challenges experienced by the laity.

Thus I am forced to agree with social theorists who believe that the only viable model for dealing with diversity is liberalism's proceduralism. Respect for difference has certainly not been a strong point of religions, especially the western religions of the book. Racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups, women and sexual minorities have all fared better in terms of respect and rights under liberalism, despite its real failures and errors in these areas, than at the hands of religions. To accept that social decisions will be made under certain procedural rules in which all views are equally weighted need not require accepting the truth of any or all of these views. Democratic elections sometimes produce tyrants—liberal procedures are procedures for producing decisions supported by the majority, but not necessarily just ones. In most parts of the world this is apparent, but in the United States, we have tended to elevate democratic procedures to the status of infallible revelation. Religious communities need not accept these decisions. Conscience should have the final say. But there will be a price to be paid for such refusal.

Much earlier in my career, I thought that my task as an ethicist was to teach people to develop individual conscience in all areas of their lives, utilizing the resources of the Christian tradition. What has changed with age and experience is my expectation that even a small minority of people can develop individual conscience in more than a very few areas of their lives. The moral challenges in modern life are simply too numerous and overwhelming for any of us to sensitize our consciences to all. If original sin means anything, it is this, that we cannot fully develop conscience—moral sensitivity—in all areas, that our moral blindness in the end makes us all dependent upon God's mercy.

One of my sisters began adopting abused, addicted, and neglected children thirty years ago—sixteen of them when I stopped counting a few years ago. She has a few—at most five or six—success stories, but not many. The one- and three-year-old grandchildren of the first child she adopted, a boy, twelve, lame and deaf from beatings, are now in her care. The beaten boy was a neglectful father, whose neglect eventually allowed his preschool daughter to be repeatedly sexually abused by a neighbor. My sister discovered and reported the abuse to the authorities, who

removed Angie and placed her with my sister. Despite many years of love and therapy, Angie grew up to have two out-of-wedlock children, both born with serious drug-related birth defects. Both were recently placed with my sister when Angie and her lover were sent to jail for running a meth lab. My sister is raising the third generation of abused children from this original boy and one other, has eight children still at home, at the same time she is caring for a husband with Alzheimers and running their farm and manufacturing plant. She is angry at the world for not caring, at the police, judges, and social workers who want her to love, support, and ultimately fix all the broken children in her rural county but who only give her children after the damage is done; and she is angry at all the good people in her church and community who commend her saintliness but do nothing to help.

We all know people who have poured themselves heart and soul into caring for one or another group of these poor of the gospels. These people may well be saints, but such saints are not comfortable people. My sister is not concerned about the war in Iraq, or the ethics of immigration. She has few interests beyond the needs and growth of her children and the protection of at-risk children in her county and state.

Stanley and many of you might respond that one role of church is to alert us to the moral challenges outside our immediate vision. Yes, but there are limits to how effective this effort can be. It is shameful, but understandable, that so many priests and ministers hesitate to preach and teach on moral problems in our world. They hesitate because every congregation is full of people sensitized to only a few of the moral challenges that surround them, and complicit in others. If my sister were to preach, there would be immediate objections—defenses of the court system, the social services department, the police, etc, by congregants who work in these systems and even struggle to make those systems responsive.

Faith must always yearn for a community to support and guide it, to offer models—a variety of models—of virtue, to forgive its failures, in short, to represent the divine socially. We are lucky if we have had experience of such a guiding, supportive community, and few if any of us have had it continuously, for it is a fragile, fragile thing.

To have had a hand in creating such a community, even temporarily, is a precious gift. But ultimately resisting the powers and principalities is, I think, primarily the work of individuals, who must try to create communities of resistance, but must be ready, like my sister, to take on some powers and principalities single-handedly.

That is the cost of discipleship, the risk of the cross.

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