

Book reviews

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Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. xvii + 251. \$24.00/£16.99 (pbk).

In this essay collection, Stanley Hauerwas presents himself as primarily a teacher and local churchman. Despite ‘ecclesial promiscuity’ (p. 99), his denominational identity is Methodist – non-Conference, of course. It is pure coincidence, we must presume, that he has met the Pope.

This, in its author’s own terms, is more a work of witness than of research, being grounded in the personal instantiation of a message rather than in reasoned argument and defence (p. 50). The prose is in places hyper-reflective, including extended ruminations on past works, reviews of engagements with other thinkers and occasional self-congratulation. It also contains a lot of description of the ideas of figures with whom Hauerwas has associated himself or who have sought to associate themselves with him.

Part I, on theology, opens with a largely descriptive account of creation and apocalyptic which draws heavily on Karl Barth’s doctrine of creation and Jean Porter’s account of natural law. The main constructive proposal is that creation’s eschatological character is expressed in the command to observe the Sabbath (p. 18). Apocalyptic is then related to sacrifice, with the modern liberal state viewed as having transgressed the Constantinian ban on animal offerings via the sacralisation it enacts in the blood sacrifice of war. This univocal identification of sacrifice with war seems simplistic, however: what about the more straightforward comparison with animal slaughter for meat? Lastly, witness is portrayed as a new politics of speech-act which culminates in martyrdom, as exemplified in the grammar of the Cross of Christ.

The book’s second and perhaps weakest part, on the church and politics, remains with speech, this time in the ecclesial context of preaching rather than as the rational self-legitimation of belief. After recognising the probable terminal decline of mainline US Protestantism and arguing that church unity is best pursued locally, Hauerwas offers reflections on war and peace, which draw heavily on the work of other authors.

Part III, on life and death, comprises essays about grasping reality and the embodiment of virtue. Two engaging pieces follow: the first situating doctor–patient relations within a suffering community of care, and the second, on cloning, convincingly favouring the reproduction of the ecclesial body

through baptismal incorporation above merely biological genetic replication. A thought-provoking comparison of Aristotle's view of contemplation as a godlike activity continuing across a life with Barth's depiction of joy as interruption, then precedes a final chapter on disability and the L'Arche movement in environmental and narrative contexts. These final four chapters bring sparks of theological insight to bear on multiple aspects of material life and are the most exciting.

By the end of the book, however, the reader is little closer to any systematic understanding of Hauerwas' eschatology than at the beginning. Hauerwas states that eschatology pervades every aspect of the Christian faith and associates it with the unfinished nature of the theological enterprise (p. xii). Yet fundamental questions, such as whether Christian eschatology is primarily about consummation or annihilation, are unanswered. Because of this, the cumulative product of the collection becomes an over-realised ecclesial eschatology, with Hauerwas repeating well-worn views such as that the church knows better than the state what the state is to do, and that the church does not have a social ethic but is that ethic (p. ix). Although his failure to accept the proper secularity of state authority under God heightens the immanent eschatological tension in his project, Hauerwas' reluctance to acknowledge that the earthly church might be living under divine judgement has the effect of relaxing the doctrinally more significant eschatological tension between the church in this world and the next.

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Jeremy Begbie *Music, Modernity and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), pp 272. £35.00.

With the publication of *Theology, Music and Time* in 2000, Jeremy Begbie showed that musicological and theological expertise can be illuminatingly combined. He thereby established himself as a major contributor to explorations at the intersection of theology and music. In this new book, he adds historical expertise and thereby extends the relevance of this interface to a much wider cultural context. His hope is to 'show that music' is capable of providing a kind of 'theological performance of some of modernity's most characteristic dynamics', while at the same time 'yielding highly effective ways of addressing and moving beyond some of the intractable theological aporias that modernity has bequeathed to us'. He acknowledges that 'these