

What is Truth in the Age of CNN?

A response to the Stanley Hauerwas/Jonathan Tran essay “A Sanctuary Politics: The Church in the Time of Trump”

by Steve Hickey, University of Aberdeen, July 7, 2017

Stanley Hauerwas is on a short list of the people I most admire. Of recent it has been my fortune to interact with and come to know personally this ‘leading theologian of our time’ since he served as Chair in Theological Ethics here at the University of Aberdeen (2014-2016). He has been a forerunner in areas I believe to be vital considerations for the contemporary church and his positive and shaping influence on my theological work will long continue. He has been a voice in the wilderness crying. My growing Hauerwas book and essay collection is now well-marked and in him I’d say I have found a kindred spirit. All that said, I intend to be forthright in my assessment of what I deem to be the worst thing I’ve read that he’s written.

Many times those of us who have been in face to face conversation with Stanley have heard him share his thoughts on something theological and then ask the question; *Do you think that’s right?* Hauerwas believes theology is done best in conversation, with friends. My friendship with him is more important to me than what I’ve written here. He knows I see myself as a work in progress and am willing to change my mind. I’ve come around in a major way to his views on war and peace.

Basically I’m responding here to his thoughts in his essay (A Sanctuary Politics: The Church in the Time of Trump¹) and saying, No, *I don’t think that’s right.*

Righteousness and Justice

My pushback on this essay is from my vantage point as one who did vote for Donald Trump. Frankly, it was a no-brainer and I did so without any crisis of conscious, or sense of compromise. However, more importantly, beyond my long-held aspiration to be a Sermon-on-the-Mount-Christian, my vantage point in this response is that of one who has spent better than two decades as a culturally-engaged American pastor and as one who served three terms in elected political office in America. As a Christian in elected office, I voted over 2000 times a year. My Trump vote last fall was in no way the vote that gave me the most heartburn.

Twice I tried to change the statute of limitations for child sex abuse in our state so eighty-seven Native American victims of pedophile Catholic priests (and Church cover-up) could finally have their day in Court and perhaps get a small taste of justice. Strong and embedded Catholic Church and corporate interests probably hoped they’d find a friend in me as both a clergyman and conservative. I was a disappointment to them both. Supporting natives every chance I got put me at odds with Republican ranchers in our state. It was my philosophy that every Christian elected official ought to be willing commit political suicide once a year to champion some measure of justice or righteousness.

In various ways I changed bankruptcy law to be more fair. It was infuriating to me how the taxpayer was made to bail out corporate and bank CEO’s for their gross mismanagement and send them off with seven-digit severance packages. Yet we shame and extract every last dime from the little people of my world who were being crushed under medical bills and harassed by creditors and greedy bankruptcy trustees. I opposed the insurance and pharmaceutical lobbies and spoke against monetised medicine from the House floor. My two efforts to lead a repeal of the death penalty, and ban abortion, and protect religious liberty and hold fast to the traditional definition of marriage, and oppose the Dakota Access and Keystone Pipelines, and co-lead the state-wide

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/03/30/4645538.htm>

coalition that successfully drove the payday lenders out of the state, I hope, demonstrated how I was not beholden to either political party.

It is possible to be a real Christian in public office. Certainly Jesus never said go into all the world except the political world. The leaven of the Kingdom is to permeate the entire loaf of society. However, Hauerwas is right, being a Christian public official may result in making enemies of all the power-players it takes to get one elected resulting in them not being re-elected. But, so be it. In this elaboration of my own political involvements I'm seeking to make the point that a real Christian in public office will sooner or later alienate the principalities and powers on both sides of the political aisle. As a Christian, care must be taken that ones identity is never get caught up in being a Representative or a Senator, or American.

My belief is the foundation of God's throne (the basis of His Rule) is both righteousness and justice (Psalm 89:14) and it has been my contention the Religious Left cares about justice but not righteousness, while the Religious Right cares about righteousness but not justice. I viewed Hillary Clinton as impossibly corrupt and as a step in the direction of more war and more Wall Street, two things I very much opposed.

This extended personal introduction and window into my political theology and philosophy seems necessary so the reader has some context and is not left to wonder or assume that I am just another right-wing, red-neck Christian who puts country before God. And rather than get offended by statements made in the Hauerwas/Tran essay and disregard them, this response is an attempt at interpreting their provocative essay as an invitation to talk about what I'd deem to be the smaller elephant in the room which is how can a real Christian possibly support Trump?

Between the Crusades and the Imaginary Kumbaya

My suggestion in what follows is that the larger elephant in the room, the real question facing the Church (and unsatisfactorily treated in the Hauerwas/Tran essay) is not how to deal with Trump, but how best to respond to the present Islamic invasion (numerically speaking) into Western society. Invasion is certainly an inflammatory word, a problematic word, but I use it in its wider range of meaning (when my kids come for a week I feel like my home has been invaded) and I use it because it calls to mind how the last time the Western Church was dealt an (albeit different) Islamic invasion it responded with Crusades.² Certainly the Church should strongly oppose any use of force against Muslim peoples and populations. However, our leading theologians today need to do better than just tell us the Christian thing to do right now is open wide our arms and our borders. For the Church, somewhere between Crusades and some unrealistic and imaginary makes-us-feel-good, arm-and-arm Kumbaya lies a grace to be God's people and witness in the world today.

The juicy, click-bait soundbites from Hauerwas' on Trump that made some headlines served also as red-meat for those on social media who push anti-Trumpism. Some of the comments Hauerwas made are not found in the text of his essay proper but they can be heard in the audio version of the presentation of the essay he gave at St. Mellitus College (London) at the *Theos Think Tank*³ conference in June 2017.⁴

Those additional comments include:

² Hopefully the reader will concede how feelings of being 'invaded', overwhelmed and even threatened, are to be expected when any mass migration occurs; but even moreso when the mass of people suddenly in our midst come with strong religious and cultural expectations/demands. The examples in Paris/London of migrants coming with malicious intent cause concern elsewhere.

³ <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk>

⁴ Audio available here: <https://soundcloud.com/theosthinktank/theos-events-stanley-hauerwas-the-church-in-the-age-of-trump>

- 'Donald Trump is an idiot who wants you to be in his reality show. The challenge is not to let him dominate your life.'
- 'Trump may not be good for America but he may be pretty good for the Church.'
- 'Trump forces Christians to be a people of justice rather than looking for the state to give justice.'
- 'The state is one of God's good creations. It's not called to be a saviour.'
- 'Good Christians get to run for office once. If they do the right thing they won't be re-elected.'

ChristianToday reported:

"Hauerwas describes the present moment as a 'very transitional time, no one is sure what Christianity is going to look like'. But, he says, there's no point getting anxious about it. 'In this time called Trump', as he puts it, Hauerwas calls the Church to remember what it is, who it is about, and to hold on to that costly call – for the sake of the world. He added a line emblematic of his theology: 'The first task of the Church is not to make the world more just but to make the world more the world.' He explained: 'You only know that there is a world, if you know that there is an alternative to the world.' The Church embodies the witness of an alternative reality, the people of God, telling the world to 'come home'."⁵

There is much to agree with in there, including "the state is one of God's good creations. It is not called to be the saviour." Yet the Christian Right (a member of which I do not claim to be) struggled to support Trump because he is so *not* like Jesus and yet when they did support him they faced criticisms like those we see here from Hauerwas/Tran; that they had "every reason not to" vote for Trump and they were only able to do so "having already surrendered more basic Christian convictions."

Truth and Sanctuary Politics

Probably the treatment of women, a concern for the immigrant, and Truth are the main basic Christian convictions Hauerwas/Tran believe Trump-supporting Christians surrendered. The central contribution made in the Hauerwas/Tran essay relates to the Church's Sanctuary Politics. It would seem Hauerwas/Tran deem any Christian supporting Trump to be one who blatantly disregards the Isaiah 25:4 calling to be a refuge for the poor and to the needy in distress. The presenting issue behind the prooftext is the present global refugee crisis and the so-called *Trump travel ban on Muslims*. Hauerwas/Tran state:

"Acting as the church hospitable, Christians welcome those fleeing poverty, violence, and oppression. As the powers threaten this hospitality because it challenges unjust political orders, the church militant responds with the grace and truth expressed in the sanctuary statement, against the grain of a crucifying world and with the grain of the universe. Upending oppressive arrangements, the church as sanctuary, a true international, attests to the absurdity of borders when millions starve and the thievery of states in a world given as a gift. If the Trump administration should follow its brinkmanship logic and begin to forcibly register Muslims, Christians might identify as Muslims, something God in God's extravagance did in identifying with creation for the sake of creation and something Christians in their closefisted self-regard failed to do with Jews under the Third Reich." (page 6-7)

Though there is much in there to evoke hearty amens, also within are some irresponsible fears being sown and total misrepresentations of the Trump travel ban which, in fact, was not a Muslim ban.

⁵ *Trump Wants You To Be His Reality Show: US Theologian Stanley Hauerwas Challenges the Church*, by Joseph Hartropp, June 23, 2017, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/trump.is.an.idiot.who.wants.you.to.be.in.his.reality.show.us.theologian.stanley.hauerwas.challenges.the.church/110162.htm>

Thirty-three Muslim nations were not included in the temporary ban, including Iraq, and only seven (now six) were included in the ban because they are countries known to be “sources of terror.” The ban is temporary, expressly stated to be put in place until better vetting systems could be assured. Trump’s travel ban was no different or worse than measures by previous Presidents and many other Western nations. If we are going to call Trump out on speaking untruths, and Hauerwas/Tran suggest to speak “the truth of Trump, including [speaking] the truth of Trump *to* Trump” we need to be careful that we are not spinning tales of our own out of any malice toward him. It is grievous to see America, the most generous and hospitable country in the world to be maligned as something other. Christians can hold the Press accountable for making matters worse than they already are for Muslims everywhere by spinning false tales. There *are* Trump supporters who hate Muslims. There are Clinton supporters who hate Christians. And there *are* Muslims who hate America. Christians need to be careful they in no way exacerbate the animosities that already exist by repeating claims that are not true.

The Spirit of Fear

Hauerwas/Tran write of the climate of fear they sense “operating around Trump’s presidency” (page 4). In a personal note to Hauerwas about this essay I wrote about how fear is hardly a Trump thing alone:

“...fears of nationalism, fears of globalism, fears of Islam’s radicals, of immigrants, and now Mexicans are afraid to cross the border. There is the new Russophobia and there is homophobia and now transphobia... (both sides now afraid of what might happen if they suddenly have to go to the bathroom while shopping in Target), fears of all things Trump, even hysteric and irrational fears that manifest in violent anger demonstrated on the streets, etc, etc.. Oh, and climate fears. I saw yesterday in the news that Stephan Hawking just said... ‘Trump will push earth over the brink and turn the planet into another 250 degree Venus.’ When Obama was elected in ’08 there were many doom, fear-based forecasts and end-of-America alarmism and those proved ill-founded so perhaps these days we should take the most of these types of hysterics in stride.”

Hauerwas/Tran are right to raise the issue of fear but to tag Trumpers as the source of it is quite myopic. Some of us support the travel ban because it is responsible, not because we are afraid. We lock our door at night not because we are unChristian, inhospitable, xenophobic and fearful. We lock our doors at night because we love and are responsible. And we will open our doors to the one at night who we can see comes looking for bread.

Certainly a distinctive of Christians in any uncertain age is in how they have *not* succumb to the spirit of fear possessing those around them. Christians rest in a sense of security the world does not know. This election did not surprise or disappoint God, or frustrate all things good and right. Christians should not feed fears of Trump conjured up by a media that has been proven to be in collusion with the Obama Administration and the Clinton Campaign. Neither should they join in demonstrations orchestrated and financed by the radical political left.

More will be forthcoming below about the possibility and probability of Providence in this election but for now, my assessment is there has been a long prayed-for shift in the dark principalities, a casting out and displacement of ruling spiritual powers over America. The hysterics and shrills in the streets against Trump remind me of an exorcism of sorts the likes of which are commonly seen in deliverance ministry. Christians should not turn against each other right now for our political differences. Our enemy is not flesh and blood. Enemy love is what we are called to and the enemy isn’t across the political aisle. Christians would be wise to distance themselves from the politics of fear and hate.

Responsibility and National Security

Whether or not it is indeed the first duty of government, those of us once elected to public office sit under a sense of responsibility that protecting life and the vulnerable in our midst is our greatest consideration in setting public policy. Hauerwas/Tran assert the temporary travel ban is driven by an entirely unChristian concern to keep us safe;

“Shockingly there remain to this day Christians who support Trump’s anti-migration policies because they believe his policies will ‘keep us safe.’ Surely one could not wish for a more misleading understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Christians worship at the church of martyrs; they seek fellowship with the crucified Lord. Being a Christian is not about being safe but about challenging the status quo in ways that cannot but put you in danger...”

The great truth in that passage is grossly misappropriated and entirely unhelpful to those trying to sort through the complexities of what is underway in the refugee crisis today. Sweden is shutting down public events because they can not stop their refugees from raping Swedish women. The painful truth is lost in the politically correct reporting of the international media. Some of us thank God for airport security and pray that plots of darkness will be exposed (detected and dealt with early). Is it unChristian to be thankful for airport security? Was it unChristian when we temporarily banned flights from certain West African nations during the Ebola outbreak? Why is it unChristian when Trump bans these nations, but not when Obama, B. Clinton and Carter did it before him?

Missing in the Hauerwas/Tran essay is any treatment of the legitimate concerns fuelling the travel ban in the first place? If one wades past politically correct reporting they will soon face the realities of what is presently happening in the Islamisation of Europe. The realities of Shari'ah law and its rapid encroachment on the West should be of great concern to Christians who care about the treatment of women, and gays. In place of simplistic sentimentalities about opening our church doors to refugees, what do our theologians have to say about the Church’s response to what some describe as an invasion (at least numerically) of Europe by Islamic populations (some extremely hostile)? The last time the Church responded with Crusades. Is it enough in our day for our leading theologians to tell us to simply open our hearts and our arms, and our borders and our sanctuaries? Hauerwas/Tran worry about Trump creating a Muslim registry and make a case for Christians to register as Muslims out of solidarity. Regardless of the fact that Trump is *not* creating a Muslim registry, and even invoking the failure of German Christians to identify with the Jews, suggesting Christians in the West register as Muslims is something no doubt inconceivable to Christians presently living in hostile Muslim nations who are being slaughtered for *not* renouncing Christ and identifying as Muslim.

The Need for Political Imagination

The first point in the Hauerwas/Tran essay was about a lack of political imagination in the myth, as they effectually regard it, in Christian voters believing they only had two undesirable choices on the ballot, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. The point on political imagination is an important point, especially in the refugee crisis. It is not in any way helpful for Christian leaders to suggest there are only two options; be a real Christian, or be against open borders. A significant lack of political imagination is behind the notion that open borders is the only Christian option. There are other options like in-region safe zones, and refugee relief efforts. Imagine the leverage of multi-national corporations over Muslim nations and business interests in the West if they do not open their doors to their neighbours.

Saudi Arabia has an empty tent-city that can house three million people. The tents are even air-conditioned! The sprawling city of tents was built to house the annual holy Hajj pilgrims. Yet it sits empty eleven months of the year. Google Hajj and this is what you will learn;

The Hajj is the fifth and final Pillar of Islam. It is for Allah’s pilgrims. The Hajj makes Muslims feel real importance of life, and the afterlife, by stripping away all markers of social status, wealth and pride. In the Hajj, all are truly equal. Hajj is the annual pilgrim when Muslims stand before

the Kaaba praising Allah. The ritual is designed to promote the bonds of Islamic brotherhood and sisterhood by showing that everyone is equal in the eyes of Allah.⁶

Very little political imagination is needed to envision how this tent-city for Allah's pilgrims could be opened for Syrian refugees. Yet, a measure of guilt and shame is tossed at American evangelicals who think there are better options than open borders.

Included in a broader political imagination toward these challenges would be to stage mass demonstrations to stop drone bombing which only multiples our enemies in the world and radicalises more against the West. Hauerwas/Tran succumb here to a sentimentalism that may make Christians feel like better Christians but their paragraphs in this section of the essay are deeply flawed and hardly representative of the Biblical material we have to help us navigate these matters. Walled cities and discerning gatekeepers played an essential role in Biblical times and each have their modern-day equivalencies. Eschatologically the New Jerusalem has gates and walls and perhaps these types of passages can help inform Church Sanctuary Politics and guide responsible and compassionate policies of national security.

In no way is a temporary ban on travel from a few of the many Muslim countries unreasonable or unChristian. Neither are those who support it racist or xenophobic. Part of the frustrating complexity in sorting through these issues as an elected official responsible to set public policy is that radical Islam is intermixed and hard to weed away from moderate Islam. It is as outrageous to suggest Trump wants a Muslim registry as it is to say Obama had a conservative Christian one.

The political imagination Hauerwas/Tran suggest was missing in the two main choices at the ballot might be technically true. I could have voted, as Hauerwas/Tran suggest, for independent Evan McMullen. If that helps ease and soothe a troubled Christian's conscience so they feel better about not having to make a hard choice between two problematic candidates they certainly have a right to vote their conscience. Drawing again on my experience in only having problematic choices before me (and no option in our state to simply vote "present") I'd point out there is no vote for a human being that is pure. Even not voting can be construed as a sin of omission passing up a chance to influence as salt and light. Frequently I would remind myself when I'd rather not vote at all that someone's worldview will prevail in the public policy that will effect our grandchildren. It motivated me to not miss my chance for my worldview to shine.

More particular to the two main options last November facing the American Christian, and the reason I can say my vote for a Trump was a no-brainer and caused me no heartburn is because 60 million living biological human beings have, without anaesthesia, been dismembered to death in their mothers wombs in what many evangelicals believe to be a great holocaust. It might make some feel like a Christian purist to not defile themselves with a Trump vote but in doing so they, I'd think, have a measure of blood on their hands helping Hillary become the one to choose (probably) three new justices for the Supreme Court. In both the Old and New Testament we find a theology of bloodguilt. The Supreme Court has reversed itself 233 times before, including overturning their earlier decision judging some biological human beings to be more human than other biological human beings. Modern science now confirms what we weren't sure of in 1973 when Roe v. Wade was decided: In that womb is a separate and unique, living, human being.

A Swing and a Miss; Misogyny and the Exploitation of Women

Particularly insulting in the Hauerwas/Tran essay were statements that evangelical opposition to Hillary was based in some misogyny:

"The 2016 election would see matters play out as Trump supporters demonised Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton's campaign, making her gender a frontline issue in an ongoing and,

⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/hajj_1.shtml

should we say, imagined culture war. This deeply shameful tactic and the embarrassing special that followed demonstrated how many Christians remain unable to separate their pro-life stance from their misogyny and how willing they are to abdicate Christian witness in order to win a culture war no one else seems to be fighting.” (Page 3)

This is so far from reality it feels like Hauerwas/Tran are referring to an American election I didn't live through. But I did, and I'd think in making these comments Hauerwas/Tran betray a vast distance between where they watched this unfold and what was actually going on among those they are seeking to describe here. Since the Bill Clinton White House indiscretions in the 1990's I've spoken crassly and publicly about how I was going to vote a straight no-penis-platform for a few years because I was so sick of the philandering. Trump was not my choice in the Republican primary, my friends and I were behind Carly Fiorina. I made public comments that I wished the Democrats would dump Hillary and pick someone respectable like Caroline Kennedy. Knowing hundreds of Christian Trump supporters, no one comes to mind who has an issue with a woman President. At this point, borrowing from my and Hauerwas' love of baseball, I'd have to say: swing and a miss.

Hillary Clinton was a horrible candidate, we believed, for women. She was callous toward women who said abortion hurt them. For years she has dealt viciously and cruelly with the women her husband sexually exploited. To say evangelical Christian angst against Hillary was misogynistic (and to say as others have that evangelical Christian opposition to Barack Obama in 2008 was racist), is a wild miscalculation and betrays a sadly unfair and shallow analysis. It's just bullshit. (Both Stanley and I like to use that word.)

Trump's disgusting comments about women, as bad as they were, are not much different than the vulgarity and vile Beyoncé and Jay-Z brought into the Obama White House. Some of the very people all up in a self-righteous twist about by Trump's comments can dance the night away to P.Diddy. Have you ever read the lyrics to his song *Rape*?⁷ We could ignore these celebrities more easily if they weren't frequent guests in the Lincoln Bedroom. That they were undermines the sincerity of those on the left so horrified by Trump. I'd suspect there are millions of women in America who watched the pink-vagina-hat women's marches against Trump knowing it was really about only one thing... abortion on demand, abortion as back-up birth control.

Ivanka Trump was more believable when she responded to news of her dad's comments with:

“My father's comments were clearly inappropriate and offensive, and I'm glad that he acknowledged this fact with an immediate apology to my family and the American people. The greatest comfort I have is the fact that I know my father. Most of the people who write about him don't. I do.... The tape was over a decade old. I'm sure he didn't remember this conversation but was very embarrassed by it.... That's not language that is consistent with any conversation I've ever had with him or with any conversation that I've overheard, so it was a bit jarring for me to hear, and he was very sincere in his apology. So, you know, I have the good fortune of knowing my father so well, not only as a parent, and he's been an amazing parent to me.”

Additionally and importantly, is a fact that Donald Trump has a strong record of empowering women in the marketplace. These defences are repeated here because the accusation that Christians voting for Trump surrendered their moral standards to support him are not accurate.

Speaking for myself, Trump's apology was important to hear (“Anyone who knows me knows these words don't reflect who I am ... I said it, I was wrong, and I apologise.”). Christian leader Lance Wallnau in his book *God's Chaos Candidate* argued Christians need to look at Trump's life as

⁷ “She had the nerve to take the case to court, knowin I rape for sport. Took the stand cryin denying her whole involvement lying. ...Ain't fuckin it right, they ain't fuckin it right.... Sniff that, sat her ass all over my face to taste it... Verbally dickin the 12 down, sound shitty. I knew she used to be gritty. Consider this (what?) Loops are similar to clitorises exposed. On your miss is a hole, a vicious cycle of SIN! That doesn't end 'til I stop fuckin...”

having three chapters so far and these shameful episodes were in the second chapter of his life which Wallnau says ended in 2005-2006. Whether this assessment is accurate or not, people like myself have been able to look past the indiscretions of Martin Luther King Jr. and we were able to let Trump be forgiven— hopeful this fourth chapter of his life as President will be a noble one.

The Truth according to Wikileaks

A case can be made that the 24/7 news cycle is a reality show crafted to draw us all in. As I write this CNN is in a credibility freefall after months of getting caught many times in collusion with the Clinton Campaign, and now getting caught pushing the Russia/Trump “nothing-burger” to boost ratings.⁸ The one organisation which, to date, has not been shown to have released any information subsequently proven false is *Wikileaks* and they report the Podesta emails reveal “65 US Journalists had private group dinners with Hillary Clinton and John Podesta.”⁹ Thirty-eight of them were top national main stream media reporters the largest group of whom work for CNN.

Alongside questions about Christians supporting Trump we need to also ask what is Truth in an age of CNN? The Trump reality show, as Hauerwas dubs it, can be construed the counter-narrative evangelical Christians were not afforded in previous elections. Hauerwas dubs Trump an idiot seeking to draw us in his reality show. It probably is true Trump is an idiot for his tweeting. It is also true the CNN reality show is comprised of a bunch of idiot talking heads who spew bullshit of their own.

One of the reasons I was attracted to Trump was I liked his ability and willingness to do an end-run around the media. Over the last few election cycles I’ve come to believe two powerful and ungodly structures in American politics need to be toppled. In my circles we have prayed specifically for this to occur. Those two ungodly structures which have previously decided for Americans who to put in the White House are 1) the media and 2) the big money players out of sight and underneath the American political scene (i.e. Soros and Koch Bros.). Despite the distasteful antics of Trump, Christian Trump supporters like myself saw Trump as a person who did not need either of those ungodly structures to win the election. That he was able to be successful despite them may partially explain the vicious establishment backlash and retaliation against him.

Christians like me have long prayed for our nation that what is done in secret would be exposed. As I and others around me prayed through the weeks leading up to the election, we were grateful for Wikileaks to unveil the grievous sins of the DNC against Sanders supporters and the criminal donation scandals of the Clinton Foundation during Hillary’s time as Secretary of State. The Trump sins also came to light as he was given the vetting Bible-belters felt Obama never was given. And so Christians had to sort through his decade-old pussy grabbing comments as well as the news that Clinton’s campaign manager was having secret Satanic spirit-cooking dinners. As scary as Stephen Bannon may seem (Saturday Night Live depicts him as the Grim Reaper), John Podesta was the one we viewed as being in league with real evil.

Thank Providence for Donald Trump

Missing in the Hauerwas/Tran essay is any consideration that Providence had any part to play in the election outcome. To miss this point is to miss the main issues motivating Trump supporting Christians like myself. Many of us have been praying intensely, even in sacred assemblies with thousands of radical Christian young people, some of us wearing red LIFE tape praying in silence before the Supreme Court for the last decade, that God would have mercy on America, forgive her

⁸ James O’Keefe of Project Veritas caught CNN’s Van Jones on video saying “the whole Russia thing is a big nothing-burger.” He also captured Jimmy Carr, the associate producer of CNN’s morning show, saying the CEO of CNN insists they push the Russia/Trump story even though it’s “mostly bullshit” because it drives ratings.

⁹ <https://twitter.com/wikileaks/status/790635169174720512?lang=en>

idolatries and shedding of innocent blood, and that the nation would shift away from secularism and consumerism and hedonism and that a Third Great Awakening would come to America.

The meta-narrative widely embraced by the Christians Hauerwas/Tran criticise is a meta-narrative that God still sets up and tears down kings. It is a narrative that one day the kings of the earth and the nations of the earth will be separated like sheep separated from goats. Hauerwas/Tran insinuate Trump is a “new King Herod.” It’s doubtful they would say all kings are Herods. Admitting at the beginning of their essay they see Trump differently; “There are no doubt worrisome things about any presidential administration, but this one scares us more.” Ironically, the Christians Hauerwas/Tran critique in their essay widely viewed President Obama as a Haman of sorts in issuing the death decree, and as a Herod in voting four times against the Born-Alive Protection Act and the slaughter of innocents. And interestingly, there was widespread chatter on Christian TV and a book written and much on the Internet about Christians seeing Trump as a Cyrus, not one of God’s people per se, but certainly one God raised up to accomplish His purposes.

To criticise Christians for voting for Trump one should be sure they really understand them. Speaking again for myself, it was conceivable to me that Trump was positioned to be able to really shake the two structures, mentioned above, that have held American politics captive for too long. In this last election many Christian Americans were enraged to see the intelligence community, the Justice Department, the media and the Clinton campaign working together to get Hillary Clinton elected. There was empathy for the little guy in America and dismay that the Clintons were too big to jail. Trump had a reputation of firing people and using the courts to sort out issues of justice.

Shocking to people who only get a steady diet of whatever the main stream media wants them to think, Trump supporters got their news from the new alternative media - and, fake news was spewed from both sides. But, Trump supporters read Trump’s books and his daughter’s book, and loved the stories of all the needy people Trump privately helped. They took note Trump has been called the “people’s billionaire” because he “gets along better with the construction workers and the cab drivers than people like Donahue who don’t get it.”¹⁰ They noticed Hillary treated her Secret Service like dogs to be cursed and kicked.¹¹ For Christian Trump supporters including myself, these were character revealing differences to note. It was conceivable that Trump filthy rich but personally generous, while Hillary and Bill personally made millions off money given to Haiti relief. We noticed Trump has a growing following of black pastors who were saying the first black President did nothing for their communities. Maybe some of this will help those who scratch their heads at the Christian support for Trump to better understand.

My son Caleb, an Asbury Seminary M.Div. graduate, is not fan of Trump and did not vote for he or Hillary Clinton. Weary of my persistence to not renounce all-things-Trump his question to me was “Dad, do you see any Christian case for opposing Trump?” My answer was “There is a time for everything and I don’t think this is a time to oppose Trump, except to stay vocal against these American aggressions internationally. Trump is not even six months out of the starting gate. Of course Christians should not cheer on Trump’s petty tweeting which draws him into various unnecessary sideshows and skirmishes.”

Hauerwas/Tran end their essay with a very Hauerwasian prayer:

“Furious Lord, make us, your lost unfaithful frightened people, possessed by your Spirit. Thusly possessed, may we be forced by the courage so unleashed to be your imaginative alternative in a world that seems devoid of alternatives. Make us a people who trust in your miracles. May we even pray for the soul of Donald Trump. May he catch a glimpse of what justice looks like in a world not ruled by deal makers. Above all, save us from the self-righteousness that comes from our not being part of Trump’s people. Help us remember that many of his people are like us. In

¹⁰ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-03-12/features/8903260256_1_ivana-trump-donald-trump-hard-work

¹¹ <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/hillary-bill-clinton-secret-service-224578>

this time, a time out of joint, give us patience so that we might be capable of being forgiven and thus able to forgive such that peace may be a reality. Amen.” (page 8)

I pray for President Trump the same way I prayed each day for President Obama; “Give him wisdom from on high and may he walk this day with a strong sense of the fear of the Lord.” My thought is that if that prayer gets answered, everything will be alright.

Intentionally I didn’t work through the Hauerwas/Tran essay paragraph by paragraph. The section on Sanctuary Politics, in my estimation, raises a conversation that needs to be ongoing. My challenge there is to have, as they suggest, more political imagination as to how Christians and the Church can create safe places for the harassed and helpless in our world. Moving masses of people without (responsible) discrimination half way around the world (to make ourselves feel more Christian) may not be the only Christian thing we can do.