

Ghetto, Colony, or a Journeying People?

The Baptists' Role in the Croatian Society, with a Special Reference to the Work of Stanley Hauerwas and his Critics

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The article explores possible contributions of Stanley Hauerwas's work to the self-understanding of the Croatian Baptist churches and their role in the society. In spite of some obvious differences between their contexts, it can be argued that both Hauerwas and the Croatian Baptists perceive the societies they live in as specific versions of the Constantinian state. Looking for an answer to the question of what it means to be a church in this particular social setting, Hauerwas relies on virtue ethics. Critical of American liberal society, he suggests that the most essential social function of the church is to be church, separated from the world, yet for the sake of the world. Thus the church, according to him, is supposed to be a gathering of the community that generates people of virtue, faithful to the story of Christian participation in God's dealings with the world. Confronted with the new set of challenges stemming from the development of liberal democracy and capitalism, the Croatian Baptists would do well to consider his emphasis on moral formation within the community as a backbone of social ethics, but would also need to take heed of his critics, who warn against sectarianism and retreating from the use of public language and dialogue, pointing to the absence of constructive elements in his ethics.

Key words: social ethics, virtues, Baptists, Hauerwas, ecclesiology.

(na engl. prev. Enoh Šeba)

Introduction

In order to answer the question from the title, we will structure the text around five points. Firstly, the Croatian Baptist churches and Stanley Hauerwas will be juxtaposed in order to facilitate the understanding of both. This will include reflections on the »ghetto« as a paradigm of the church. Then, secondly, we will explore Hauerwas's view of the role and purpose of the church, especially in relation to the world (Hauerwas's paradigm is the one of »colony«), after which, thirdly, his teaching will be viewed with respect to the considerations of his critics. The fourth point discusses whether some of Hauerwas's ethical opinions and convictions may or may not be suitable for the Baptists in Croatia, and why. The essay concludes with a personal suggestion as to the possibility of a different paradigm for the existence of the church in the world, especially in the Croatian context.

1. The Starting Point: Differences and Similarities

Any serious evaluation of the applicability of Hauerwas's work in defining the role of a particular faith community in a given society must begin with a juxtaposition of the two contexts, with a careful consideration of the differences and similarities between them. This is particularly important because Hauerwas's theological contribution is highly conditioned and bound to his specific and even specialsetting.

To begin with, there is a rather obvious distinction as to the position of the church in the society. In Croatia, the Baptist church emerged in the late 1800s, yet under the communist system it was merely tolerated for the entire latter half of the 20th century. Marxist ideology expected that religion would simply die away and its strategy was to keep the churches isolated from the public realm by forcing them to accept the confinement to their premises in exchange for the right to exist. As a result of this subtle scheme, most Baptist churches adopted the »ghetto« paradigm (although there is no much written evidence that Baptist authors used this specific term) as their prevailing model of survival. The main form of interaction with the »outer« world was evangelism, which was understood as the task of »saving souls« and drawing more people away from the world and to the safety of the church. As such, these churches perfectly fitted into what the distinguished Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has called »the *conversionist* church,«¹ a model that focuses so strongly on in-

¹ John Howard YODER, *A people in the World: Theological Interpretation* in: James LEO GARRET, Jr. (ed.), *The Concept of the Believer's Church*, Scottdale, Herald Press, 1969, 252. Quoted in Stanley HAUERWAS and William H. WILLIMON, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1989, 44-5.

ner change that it becomes incapable of providing a social ethic or a distinctive social structure in its interaction with the world.

Things changed dramatically at the outset of the 1990s, when political pluralism and democratic changes reinstated the prominence of religion and the church (more precisely, the Catholic Church) in the Croatian society and public life. This trend was additionally reinforced during the war, when national identity was generally seen as nurtured successfully only in close identification with the Catholic Church. However, in the years that followed, the abrupt adoption of capitalist economy, liberalization of the political realm, and growing consumerism began to challenge this rather Constantinian model of relationship between the church and the state, which actually brought the Croatian context somewhat closer to the American setting. Briefly, after the markedly turbulent changes during the 1990s, the Baptist churches in Croatia were given the opportunity to investigate the landscape beyond the walls of their ghetto – only to discover that there were again some more influential powers at work. The Catholic Church and the democratic society, backed up by the consumerist-oriented mass media, were only the most prominent examples.

The Protestant church in the United States has, on the contrary, enjoyed various levels of protection and support throughout its history.² Not only that the church has not been prevented from taking part in the affairs of the state – it has even been expected to actively contribute to the society's well being. However, in Hauerwas's eyes, the premises of such contribution of the American churches are highly dubious.³ The liberal society has readily acknowledged the importance of the church's social role, but by assuming the conformity to the prevalent social patterns of liberalism as a parameter of its relevance and adequacy.

There is another important aspect to consider. Hauerwas is not a Baptist. Moreover, to define his church affiliation is a somewhat ambiguous task. As to his origin and membership, he is a Methodist, and that classifies him under the category of mainline Protestantism. Nevertheless, in his own words, he has an »... ecclesial preference to be a high-church Mennonite.«⁴ Such a position can be ascribed with certainty to the long years he has spent teaching at the Catholic University of Notre Dame, where he has also been influenced by the fruitful exchange with John Howard Yoder. In the conclusion to his lengthy analysis

² Of course, the intensity of that support was not the same for all strands of Protestantism. However, for the sake of my argument, this generalization may prove rather practical.

³ »The church should participate in public life, but only on terms set by currently dominant polity and culture... The liberal society (in our modern Western context) and its self-understanding becomes the norm for Christian social responsibility. The effect is the marginalization and privatization of Christian faith and practice.« Arne RASMUSSEN, *Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas*, *Studia Theologica Lundensia* 49, Lund, Lund University Press, 1994, 241.

⁴ Stanley HAUERWAS, *A Community of Character*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 44.

of Hauerwas's work, Arne Rasmusson has labelled him a Radical Reformation theologian who is more Catholic-oriented on certain issues.⁵

Still, it is possible to perceive some points of similarity. On the one hand, both the Croatian Baptists and Hauerwas feel that they live in societies where »the diluted Constantinian model«⁶ is at work, and neither of them is entirely comfortable with this habitat. Their expressions of such uneasiness have brought on them accusations of sectarianism in relation »... to the 'world', that is, the cultures and societies, in which the church lives, and then especially in relation to the nation-state and the cultural and political elites.«⁷ On the other hand, the Croatian Baptists cannot divert their eyes from the glaring promises of capitalist democracy, which Hauerwas, despite admitting its seductiveness, has delineated as a promise of »... a society in which each citizen is free to create his or her own meaning - meaning which, for most of us, becomes little more than the freedom to consume at ever higher levels.«⁸

Having established these critical points of encounter and divergence, we may now focus on the central issue: How should the church act out its role in the surrounding society, according to Hauerwas?

2. *The Reflection Point: How Is Church to Be a Church?*

Hauerwas has remarked that »what we call church is often a conspiracy of cordiality.«⁹ But behind this rather subversive and ironic sentence, there is a firm persuasion about the pivotal place that the church must have in Christian ethics. Hauerwas has recognized the fact that Christians often fail to live by their proclaimed standard. At the same time, he unequivocally claims that the most essential social function of the church is to be church.¹⁰ And in his conception of ethics, the utmost fulfilment of this function is to offer noteworthy and manifest examples of Christian living.¹¹

⁵ RASMUSSON, 378.

⁶ This model »... survives in more attenuated forms where civil governments and church leaders have formal or informal arrangements on issues like education or church taxes, on social welfare or health, on particular offices like chaplaincies to Parliament or to the army, or on laws restricting specific 'immoral' activities as crimes.« Edna MCDONAGH, *Prophecy or Politics? The Role of the Churches in Society* in: Mark THIESSENNATION and Samuel WELLS (eds.), *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 2000, 287-312: 293.

⁷ RASMUSSON, 233-4.

⁸ HAUERWAS, *Resident Aliens*, 77-78.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 138

¹⁰ Such statement can be found in many different places in his writings. See, for example, *Vision and Virtue*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 240.

¹¹ HAUERWAS, *Resident Aliens*, 97.

2.1. *The Community of Virtue*

It would be wrong, however, to assume that this understanding entails some individualistic or pietistic form of holiness. When considering the ethical problems of an individual believer, Hauerwas raises the discussion onto a higher level and the real issue becomes the ecclesial one: what kind of church must we be in order to help an individual to be a proper disciple?¹² In order to answer this question properly, we must have a closer look at two crucial concepts: »community« and »virtue«.

According to Hauerwas, ethical life is not primarily determined by decisions, laws, or rules, or even by discernment between right and wrong, but by our perception of the world around us. For him, situational ethics is a misplaced and reductive effort to define ethical behaviour, since it fails to account for the development of character. He maintains: »As persons of character we do not confront situations as mud puddles into which we have to step; rather the kind of 'situations' we confront and how we understand them are a function of the kind of people we are.«¹³ Thus, we should not understand Christian faith as a collection of beliefs or propositions, but as »a medium« through which we become capable of seeing and understanding the reality, or as a collection of »skills« that enable us to live out our lives.¹⁴ These skills, interpreted in an ethical sense, are the virtues constitutive of a person's character.

Hauerwas believes that virtues are so important because the definition of moral formation that corresponds to Christian convictions has been historically highly problematic. As a result, specific behaviours have often been encouraged merely on the ground of being the way in which Christians »do things«. The link between belief and behaviour has been taken for granted rather than submitted to an investigation.¹⁵ Hauerwas is sure that the truth of these convictions must be evident in the transformation of the self.¹⁶ According to him, there is no abstract truth in Christian beliefs; rather, the truth is there only insofar as there are people who are changed by these beliefs and who come to embody concrete virtue in a life of sanctification.¹⁷ The gathering of a community that generates people of virtue is, in turn, »the most important political service the church does for any society.«¹⁸

¹² Ibid., 81-82.

¹³ HAUERWAS, *Community*, 114-115.

¹⁴ RASMUSSEN, 203.

¹⁵ HAUERWAS, *Community*, 131-132.

¹⁶ Stanley HAUERWAS, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between*, Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2001, 10.

¹⁷ It could be argued that Hauerwas considers patience, courage, hope, and charity to be the most essential virtues for the church. See *Community*, 68.

¹⁸ HAUERWAS, *Christian Existence*, 13.

Virtuous community is always specifically related to and explicated by the story of Christian participation in God's dealings with the world. Only this concrete story justifies its existence, and to use Hauerwas's own wording, »... requires the formation of a corresponding community which has learned to live in a way that makes it possible for them to hear that story«.¹⁹ The pinnacle of the story is obviously the narrative of Jesus' life and death, which opened up a possibility of an utterly different way of life. Vocation of the church should thus be that of a »colony«,²⁰ a »sign« that this way of life, so distinct from the ways of the world, is indeed possible and real! Faithfulness to this vocation will not establish any decisive argument against relativism, Rasmusson notes, but it can offer an alternative narrative, lived out by an alternative community, and thus confront the others with what Hauerwas has termed »the real options.«²¹

If my reading of Hauerwas is correct, then there are at least two good reasons why it is essential for the church to remain faithful to its own story rather than be preoccupied with how to adapt to the dominant moral values in the contemporary society. The first reason may be tentatively called »apologetic«: if the church is ultimately perceived through the character of its members, and if they fail to have that character, then the world cannot but conclude that God in which that church believes is a false God.²² Faithfulness to the story gives birth to holiness and authenticity. The second reason is that when church adheres to its own story in a way that turns it into a »counter story«, it obtains power to interpret the world's politics. Rasmusson understands this to be Hauerwas' theological politics, but also points out that such faithfulness is expressed in everyday activities and actions of common life, which are rarely understood as politically relevant.²³

The view of the church and its role, as presented above, becomes liable to the criticism that it pictures the church as entirely self-referential. Hauerwas has recognized this himself, and partially agreed, but also countered it by saying that »... the reference is not to propositions but to lives.«²⁴ Still, the main thrust of his critics always revolves around the issue of the specific relationship between the church and the world, and it is to this problem that we will now turn our attention.

¹⁹ Ibid., 101.

²⁰ The »colony« paradigm is especially dominant and clarified in details in *Resident Aliens*.

²¹ RASMUSSON, 267.

²² John BERKMAN and Michael CARTWRIGHT(eds.), *Hauerwas Reader: Stanley Hauerwas*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2001, 385.

²³ RASMUSSON, 188, 219.

²⁴ HAUERWAS, *Christian Existence*, 10.

2.2. Church and the World – Separation or Split?

A proper understanding of Hauerwasian ethics and ecclesiology must grasp the preliminary notion that is expressed succinctly in one of Hauerwas's most frequently quoted sentences, »The church doesn't have a social strategy, the church *is* a social strategy.«²⁵ What follows is that the entire Christian ethics is inevitably social ethics, since it stems from the church as its starting point. He has no doubts about the need of Christians to contribute in a positive manner to the surrounding society they happen to live in, but he is firmly convinced that the church should be the primary medium of such contributions and his concern is that »[t]oo often church becomes but a mirror of one cultural option rather than a mirror to which each culture should compare itself.«²⁶

This is precisely why he is so determined to persuade Christians to get rid of what he considers to be Constantinian thinking, according to which the existence and function of the church is justified and/or tolerated insofar as it serves the benefit of the world. The correlative of this notion is when Christians wonder about the best form of the society, as it presupposes that these very Christians should have or do have the political power to tailor the social ethical standards. The major difficulty with this approach can be summed up in this vivid observation, »It leads Christians to judge their ethical positions, *not on the basis of what is faithful to our peculiar tradition*, but rather on the basis of how much Christian ethics Caesar can be induced to swallow without choking.«²⁷

Actually, Hauerwas maintains that in that case the church's preaching, worship, and mission do not shape a genuine community with an impact on a wider society. Instead, the church opts for a social change that is brought about as the politically engaged Christians transform the social structure. In practice, however, this means that they only develop attitudes for which they are trying to gain wider support and approval (for example, through influencing the public opinion), while the state remains the key player in accomplishing social change, in which the church ends up reduced to a »pressure group«.²⁸

Of course, Hauerwas's critique is primarily directed at liberal societies, such as the American one, where certain »procedural virtues« (like tolerance or fairness) are promoted and sought for, while others, more noteworthy, are not welcome at the social level as they would be dangerous for personal freedom (for example, charity or unselfishness), which is why they remain limited to individual lives.²⁹ Christian believers then gradually cease to struggle with the particularity of their faith and tradition, and silently begin to presume that

²⁵ HAUERWAS, *Resident Aliens*, 43.

²⁶ HAUERWAS, *Community*, 105-6.

²⁷ HAUERWAS, *Resident Aliens*, 72. (italics mine)

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁹ RASMUSSEN, 261.

their beliefs more or less overlap with those of their non-Christian co-citizens, which is why they agree with the incontestable givenness of the prevalent ethics or politics. At their best, they ask questions about how to translate the propositions of the Bible or accommodate the regulations of their tradition to the world they inhabit.

At this point, Hauerwas expresses a considerable amount of suspicion towards the »translatability« of the Christian message into »pagan terms«. Although he does not specify his reasons in any detail, he claims that a significant amount of what is usually considered to be adequate translation is actually another, different message.³⁰ He prefers turning this argument upside down: the world needs to be translated; it is a world that must become credible to the story of Jesus Christ. The church should not worry about the obsolescence of its beliefs, but concentrate on being what it is and on how to live as a community in its given social context. A matter of relevance thereby becomes a political matter.

Hauerwas further develops this by drawing from Yoder's distinction between the activist and the confessing church. The latter, as he puts it, »... seeks to influence the world by being something the world is not and can never be... [and] ... moves from the activist church's acceptance of the culture with a few qualifications, to rejection of the culture with a few exceptions.«³¹ This strong statement is backed up by insisting that the church has the purpose of showing God's intention for the world and demonstrating how the world is meant to be. At the same time, the world has no other available options of getting to know it is the »world«, apart from watching the church being the church. This sharp distinction has urged many among Hauerwas's critics to accuse him of sectarianism;³² nevertheless, we must admit that he is ready to recognize the mutual intertwinement, »The world is those aspects of our individual and social lives where we live untruthfully by continuing to rely on violence to bring order.«³³

Over the years, Hauerwas has begun to place more emphasis on the fact that the church's task of being herself does not entail rejection or withdrawal from the world, and to underline the more positive facet of that responsibility. Thus, he maintains that this posture »... is a reminder that the church must serve the world on her own terms«³⁴ even if the world perceives that as disloyalty. It is not some sort of egotistic self-realization or assertion of distinctive identity, but rather being in the society in order to ensure the presence of something that would be missing otherwise. The bottom line is that »[s]eparateness of the church is *for the sake* of the world.«³⁵

³⁰ Stanley HAUERWAS, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth Century Theology and Philosophy*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1997, 3.

³¹ HAUERWAS, *Resident Aliens*, 46-7.

³² We will deal with some of these charges later on.

³³ *Hauerwas Reader*, 376.

³⁴ HAUERWAS, *Community*, 85.

³⁵ RASMUSSEN, 212.

Also, it is advisable to take note of the fact that Hauerwas does not offer a universal or all-encompassing model for the church's relation to the world. He does occasionally remark that the concrete form of the church's social ethics must be setting-sensitive and that »... the contingent, manifold and non-homogenous forms societies and states take make it impossible to describe the church's relation to the world in static and ahistorical terms.«³⁶ Hauerwas's argument almost exclusively deals with the church in the American liberal state and society, and every attempt of dialoguing with his thought should be done with that in mind.

3. *The Point of Dialogue – What Do the Others Say?*

Before we turn to evaluating Hauerwas's ethics from the perspective of the Croatian Baptist churches, it will be useful to hear the voices of his critics. Their observations and objections may helpfully point out the moments in which his work may be inadequate, underdeveloped, or far-fetched.³⁷

The most frequent and most obvious charge against Hauerwas is the one of sectarianism. Of course, there is a problematic linguistic side of this accusation. Rasmusson is right when he observes that the word »sect« has, throughout the history of its use, acquired a pejorative sense, which bears strong and mostly negative connotations in its contemporary usage. It is also generally seen as opposite to the term »church«.³⁸ Anyhow, Hauerwas' understanding of the relationship between the church and the society is easily viewed as an invitation to Christians to retreat from all public responsibility, withdraw to some form of private spirituality, and let the world mind its own business.

This sectarian stance correlates to at least three different and highly problematic attitudes. Firstly, to borrow from Terrence Reynolds, who analysed James Gustafson's critique of Hauerwas³⁹, since »sectarianism mistakenly assumes that religious ways of knowing are so 'radically distinct' from other ways of knowing... Christianity becomes 'a separate cultural-linguistic enterprise.'«⁴⁰ Gustafson claims that the only possible result is turning Christianity into something unintelligible in a world in which the number of people shaped by the »Christian language« is ever decreasing.⁴¹ What follows next is distancing from public language and responsibility, which makes meaningful communication between the church

³⁶ Ibid., 202.

³⁷ Although Hauerwas's work has been criticised by many, the scope of this essay does not allow for an extensive analysis. We will try to narrow ourselves down to those criticisms that may, in one way or another, correspond to the relevant concerns of the Croatian Baptists.

³⁸ RASMUSSON, 233.

³⁹ Prior to becoming one of the most vehement critics of Hauerwas's, Gustafson was his teacher at Yale University.

⁴⁰ Terrence P. REYNOLDS, A Conversation worth having, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 28 Issue 3 (Sep 2000), 395-421: 399.

⁴¹ HAUERWAS, *Christian Existence*, 5.

and the world almost impossible. Gustafson is ready to go even a step further and declare that the church, as envisioned by Hauerwas, eschews all theological exchange and dialogue, creating »a modern and trivial form of gnosticism.«⁴² He also explains the core of Hauerwas's fallacy – an »uncontroversial sociological fact« that the narratives of our communities form us, and our ways of interpreting the world around us, is given a normative status.⁴³ When explaining the nature of the relationship between these basic traditions and the contexts we come from, Max Stackhouse agrees with Gustafson: »Not only can we critically reflect on the faith and morals handed down to us, but we can convert or transform what we inherit – and offer a reasonable account of why we do so.«⁴⁴

Secondly, the church as a primary community, wholly independent of other communities that may have formative influence on the believers, is in Gustafson's terminology a form of »sociological tribalism«. In Rasmusson's view, such position regarding the church is untenable and, sociologically speaking, indefensible. He points to the absence of a doctrine of creation and to the extremely christological nature of Hauerwas's theology as responsible for this fault.⁴⁵ This fallacy, in turn, paves the way for an extreme, almost dualistic depiction of the world as a realm outside of God's domain.

In view of all that, the third attitude is hardly surprising. Hauerwas writes from a vantage point of almost perfect discernment as to the position of the church and the world. In most of his writings, one can observe a strong demarcation line between »us« and »them«. Stackhouse comments that »Hauerwas views those who use violence as 'them', while the church is composed of those who are opposed to 'them'.«⁴⁶ The trouble is that this does not correspond to the reality we live in. In his outstanding critique, »Virtue and the Way of the World«, Jeffrey Stout notes that Hauerwas not only leaves the world outside of the church, but also deprives the world of the possibility of possessing virtues. He goes on comparing Hauerwas's understanding to Yoder's and spots a significant difference: »Notice ... that Yoder intended his historical narrative as a criticism of the church, not as a criticism of the world.«⁴⁷

And there is the last criticism. Hauerwas's critics may or may not agree with his polemical style, but none of them finds it easy to overlook the fact that much of his argumentation is set in negative terms. Too much of his »us«-identity is built on the negation of »them«, too much of »our« way relies on withdrawing from or renouncing at »their« practices. At the bottom line, the question remains: How constructive can such social ethics be?

⁴² James GUSTAFSON, *The Sectarian Temptation, Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 40 (1985), 83-94: 91. Cited in REYNOLDS, 399.

⁴³ REYNOLDS, 398.

⁴⁴ Max L. STACKHOUSE, In the Company of Hauerwas, *Journal for Christian Theological Research*, <http://www2.luthersem.edu/ctrf/JCTR/Vol02/Stackhouse.htm> (22.03.2012).

⁴⁵ RASMUSSON, 231-232.

⁴⁶ STACKHOUSE. Cf. above, n. 33.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey STOUT, *Democracy & Tradition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, 154.

4. *The Point of Encounter – When the Croatian Baptists Meet Hauerwas*

The Croatian Baptists do not need Stanley Hauerwas to tell them that the church does not equal the world – since they are ignored or at best tolerated within their own boundaries, they have never found themselves tempted to identify the church with the society. They used to be a minority under the Communist regime, which denied religion altogether, and today they are a minority in a democratic state where by far the most influential church is the Roman Catholic Church. Stanley Hauerwas has not experienced either of these two situations.

Nevertheless, a dialogue with Hauerwas could prove profitable for Baptists in Croatia. After a period of confinement to a ghetto, churches are now presented with a great number of alternatives. And if the church's first task is to be church (which is a thesis that would be very well received among the Croatian Baptists), what is a proper mode of relating to the society and the world? Besides other similarities mentioned in the first section of this essay, Hauerwas has dealt with questions and issues (for example: How can the church remain faithful to its narrative in liberal democracy and still retain the awareness of its social responsibility? What is distinctive for Christian morality in a world of relativism and a variety of religious options where »tolerance« is the dominant virtue?) that the Croatian Baptists may be forced to face in a rather near future and Hauerwas's insights and theological postulates may serve as landmarks in their pursuit of a more defined identity.

In addition, emphasis on the character development as embedded in virtue ethics could be extremely fruitful if adopted by the Croatian Baptists. There is a strong reason for that. Baptists have always been suspicious towards any consistent preaching on moral development, and even more towards any elaborate system of moral edification. Why? Because in their understanding, it resembled and evoked the notion of works righteousness or justification by works (supposedly a prominent feature of Catholic theology). As a result, »Christian« behaviour among the Baptists has always served as an outward identity marker, rather than the natural outcome of a life-long process of sanctification. Even when a language of discipleship is introduced, things do not necessarily change, because the focus can still be placed on *what* must be done, and not on *how* it is done. Within the same train of thought one finds the supposition that there is only one ideal to follow – although impossible to reach – the one of Jesus. That entails a denial of value to any human examples or role models among the community members, which in turn makes discipleship (or character development) a rather individualistic, tiresome, and impossible procedure, frequently depending on the rational appropriation of a certain set of propositions. A community of virtue, such as advocated by Hau-

erwas, allows for a more holistic moral growth, where the character is shaped within the narrative of a community rather than by works or by the continuous struggle to realize an ideal. Certainly, to cite Rasmusson, it »... shows that it is not something spontaneous, something that comes 'naturally'. Neither is its content 'self-evident' in the sense that sufficient intellectual effort would made it available for anyone.«⁴⁸ Still, this community is concerned more about what kind of people the believers will become, and less with what they will do or how they will be looked upon by others.⁴⁹

Hauerwas's suggestions and the reaction of his critics, taken together, also issue a warning against a twofold danger. On the one hand, labelling the church as a »colony« would be misleading and potentially very harmful for the Croatian Baptists. It may once again inform the static notion of the church as something to be protected, something with a firmly located position and alien to the outer world. It may also easily nullify the modest, but honest attempts of some Baptist churches to explore and define their social responsibility. And if there should be new efforts at building a community of virtue, it is also difficult to see how a humbler and more sensitive definition of the distinction between »us« (in the church) and »them« (in the world) can be designed and applied in the life of a church that possesses such »colonial« mentality.

On the other hand, as the Baptist churches are opening up and launching their socially responsible activities, as they are finding their way into the social arena, they are discovering that they can influence public opinion (although to a very limited degree), and sign contracts with the government that guarantee a certain amount of annual support from the national budget, which is why it would be wise to take Hauerwas's words about the liberal society seriously. Striving for relevance within a liberal society brings the church to the point of separating the ethical from the religious, since that is one of the very foundations of the liberal society. What often follows is the loss of intelligibility of both elements.⁵⁰ Social ethics must not mean denying particularity to Christian or Baptist convictions and faith. Instead, it should spring out of them.

In his critique of Hauerwas, Stout has put forward an apprehensive thought, which may be very adequate as a final word on this twofold danger (regardless of whether he is right in his judgment of Hauerwas's work): »Reducing the gospel to democracy and reducing it to the ecclesiology are hardly the only alternatives.«⁵¹ And they should not be!

⁴⁸ RASMUSSON, 194.

⁴⁹ The more comprehensive account of character development is provided in *Community of Character* and Stanley HAUERWAS and Charles PINCHES, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997, esp. 113-228.

⁵⁰ RASMUSSON, 300.

⁵¹ STOUT, 158.

5. *The Point of Departure – Can Hauerwas Journey with Us?*

There are only two more remarks to be made. One concerns the title of the essay. Until now we have been arguing that both »ghetto« and »colony« are inadequate paradigms. At the very close, I would like to offer the paradigm of a »journeying people« as a better alternative. Not only does it correspond more closely to the understanding of faith and spirituality in the postmodern era, providing a more dynamic notion of the church in relation to the society and the world, but also it is very well attested in the Christian tradition.⁵²

The second remark is actually a question: Can we learn from Stanley Hauerwas in any substantial way? At the end of the day, I believe that the answer is affirmative. The Baptist churches in Croatia would do well to come to grips with his theology. We need to keep the critical spirit as we explore his provocative language and style, and we need to make a special effort to be more constructive than he himself sometimes is. Baptists in Croatia have been defining themselves in negative terms for too long, and it is time to move on. Therefore, we should say farewell to the ghetto, greet a colony, but embark on a journey. And we can invite Stanley, too! Why not?

⁵² The scope of this essay does not allow for a more extensive list, but as an example we may mention the patristic tradition where an apophatic way meant journeying towards a personal God. See Ivana NOBLE, Apophatic Aspects of Theological Conversation, in: Peter DEMEY and Jacques HAERS (eds.), *Theology and Conversation*, Leuven, Paris, Steerling, Peeters, 2003, 163-175 (especially the discussion on the expression *epektasis* in Phil 3,13) and Ivana NOBLE, The Apophatic Way in Gregory of Nissa in: P. POKORNÝ and J. ROSKOVEC (eds.) *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2002, 323-339.

Enoh Šeba

Geto, kolonija ili narod na putu?

Uloga baptista u hrvatskom društvu s posebnim osvrtom na radove Stanleya Hauerwasa i njegovih kritičara

Sažetak

Mogući doprinosi Stanleya Hauerwasa samorazumijevanju baptističkih crkava u Hrvatskoj tema je ovoga rada. Najprije se identificiraju različitosti i sličnosti između ta dva društvena konteksta. Baptističke crkve su tijekom dugoga razdoblja komunizma bile oblikovane paradigmom »geta«, dok Hauerwas, progovaraajući iz društvenoga okruženja u kojemu protestantske crkve uživaju značajnu razinu zaštite i potpore, sugerira da bi uloga i svrha crkve trebali biti definirane paradigmom »kolonije«. Unatoč tomu, moguće je tvrditi da i Hauerwas i hrvatski baptisti društva u kojima žive percipiraju kao specifične varijante konstantinovske države. Stoga se Hauerwas, tragajući za odgovorom na pitanje: Što znači biti crkva u takvom društvenom okruženju?, utječe etici vrline. Njegova argumentacija polazi od toga da okupljanje zajednice koja stvara ljude vrlinā, ljude vjerne pripovijesti kršćanskoga sudjelovanja u Božjem ophođenju prema svijetu jest za crkvu njezin poziv. On konstatira da se crkva ne treba zamarati »prevođenjem« svoje poruke i uvjerenja; svijet je taj koji treba steći kredibilitet u odnosu na pripovijest Isusa Krista. U tom smislu, uloga crkve jest prije svega biti crkva, odvojena od svijeta, ali odvojena radi svijeta. Hauerwasovi kritičari ističu da je njegova ovako izložena ekleziologija izložena optužbama za sektaštvo, da je neodrživo zastupati mišljenje da je za vjernike crkva jedina formativna zajednica te da se njegova kruta i jasna diferencijacija između »nas« i »njih«, između »crkve« i »svijeta« naprosto ne podudara sa stvarnošću. U promišljanju svojega identiteta i svoje uloge u društvu baptistima u Hrvatskoj može biti korisno razmatranje Hauerwasove etike. U stvaranju okosnice socijalne etike koristan im može biti njegov naglasak na moralnoj formaciji unutar zajednice vrlinā, a istodobno trebaju imati na umu i njegova ozbiljna promišljanja o crkvama u liberalnim društvima. Međutim, u obzir treba uzeti i njegove kritičare koji istupaju protiv sektaštva i suzdržanosti u dijalogu te ukazuju na odsutnost konstruktivnih, pozitivnih elemenata u Hauerwasovoj etici. U trenutnoj situaciji, nakon dugog razdoblja boravka u paradigmi »geta«, umjesto prihvaćanja Hauerwasove paradigme »kolonije«, baptisti bi u Hrvatskoj trebali usvojiti neku za njih prikladniju paradigmu, poput one »naroda na putu«.

Ključne riječi: društvena etika, vrline, baptisti, Hauerwas, ekleziologija.