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NEIL ROGERS	3
<i>To Tell You the Truth, I Am Lying, Reflections on Transparency, Deception and Concealment in Covert Missions</i>	
GILLIAN CHU	14
<i>Analysis of Stanley Hauerwas' Theology in Post-Umbrella Movement Hong Kong</i>	
KATHLEEN ROSS	23
<i>Modernity is Hell: Modernity, Poetry and the Divided Brain Through Dante's Comedia</i>	
STEVEN SHETTERLY	36
<i>"Their Eyes Were Opened": Knowing as an Interpersonal, Interpretive Act</i>	
ALEX TREW	44
<i>Of Ethics and Eschatology: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Christological Relativization of Conscience and Alterity</i>	
MIKE EVANSON	52
<i>A Community Without Honour: Glory Language and Honour Culture in John 17:22</i>	

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GILLIAN CHU

Analysis of Stanley Hauerwas' Theology in Post-Umbrella Movement Hong Kong

Gillian grew up in Hong Kong as a Canadian, and graduated from University of Edinburgh with MA (Hons) English Language. In a turn of events, she became a Chartered Accountant after graduation, and has been working as one until her move to Vancouver in June 2015. After completing the Postgraduate Diploma of Theology with Alliance Bible Seminary in Hong Kong, she was thrilled to be accepted by Regent to make a start at the MDiv program.

What began in Hong Kong on March 27, 2013 as the small-scale Occupy Central Movement¹ morphed in the following year into the much larger Umbrella Movement² that lasted from September 28, 2014 until December 15, 2014 and paralyzed strategic areas of Hong Kong for its duration.³ Hong

Kong theologians analyzed these movements primarily by referencing the work of Stanley Hauerwas, a renowned American theologian,⁴ rather than other prominent voices of Christian ethics, such as Oliver and Joan O'Donovan or Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr. Prior to the Occupy Central Movement, Christian circles in Hong Kong were not widely familiar with Hauerwas' work.⁵ In order to explore the Hong Kong theologians' choice of grounding their theology in Hauerwas' thoughts when analyzing these movements, this paper will discuss Hauerwas' views on civil disobedience.

Before beginning an in-depth discussion of Hauerwas' views on civil disobedience, it is helpful to establish a

¹. 'Occupy Central Movement' is shorthand for the Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, a campaign for universal suffrage in Hong Kong that was enacted through acts of civil disobedience, which included the occupation of Central, the central business district of Hong Kong. The movement emerged from its campaigners' belief that a genuinely harmonious society can be built only upon what they consider a just political system. See Occupy Central with Love and Peace Movement, 'Manifesto', *Occupy Central with Love and Peace*, accessed February 26, 2017, http://oclp.hk/index.php?route=occupy/book_detail&book_id=11.

². The Umbrella Movement, also known as the Umbrella Revolution, was a series of independently organised illegal demonstrations in several major districts of Hong Kong. These acts of civil disobedience were intended for the achievement of universal suffrage in Hong Kong, among other goals. The inclusion of 'umbrella' in the movement's name is due to the use of umbrellas by the protestors, who were mainly students, to defend themselves when the Hong Kong police employed pepper spray and tear gas to disperse the crowd. See Daniel R. Russel, 'Evaluating the Impact of the "Umbrella Movement"', *Human Rights*, accessed June 20, 2017, <https://www.humanrights.gov/dyn/2014/12/evaluating-the-impact-of-the-umbrella-movement/>.

³. Pui-lan Kwok, 'Foreword', in *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, ed. Justin K. H. Tse (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), v-vi.

⁴. Stanley Hauerwas, born in the United States in 1940, is a Methodist theologian and ethicist. The Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law was named 'America's Best Theologian' by *Time* magazine in 2001, and he delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectureship at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in the same year. He continues to stand among the most significant shapers of post-liberal theology, addressing the most troubling issues faced in contemporary culture, education, and Christian faith. See J. P. Callahan, 'Hauerwas, Stanley', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 537, and Duke Divinity School, 'Stanley Hauerwas', *Duke Divinity School*, accessed September 29, 2017, <https://divinity.duke.edu/faculty/stanley-hauerwas>.

⁵. Andres Tang, 'Foreword', in *Cobb, Pannenberg, Hauerwas and Contemporary Chinese Context* (Hong Kong: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1999), v-vi.

working definition of the term. While civil disobedience can suggest both non-violent and violent resistance—depending on the context and the interpretation of the term—it broadly refers to deliberate disobedience of the law designed to bring attention to injustice. People who engage in civil disobedience are often motivated to resist a law or policy that directly contradicts their religious and spiritual values and principles.⁶ In the Christian tradition, protesters bear the onus of proof in demonstrating the conflict between God’s law and human law.⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., an American Baptist minister and civil rights leader, determines that acts of civil disobedience must satisfy the following qualities: collection of facts of an injustice, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action.⁸ While the definition of civil disobedience varies across individuals and schools of thought, this working

definition suffices for the purpose of this analysis.

In his work, Hauerwas does not engage directly in critiquing the efficiency or morality of civil disobedience.⁹ Instead, he reframes the concept of civil disobedience by directing his readers’ attention away from the question of whether civil disobedience is ethical, and toward the issue of how Christians should act in faithful compliance with the narrative of Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection. Hauerwas understands that through the narrative, members of the church must communally contemplate who they are and whether their church community embodies God’s kingdom. In this light, they must contextually address whether the church can take action against an instance of social or political injustice, including through civil disobedience.¹⁰

For Hauerwas, the church is first and foremost a beacon that influences the wider non-church community to contemplate and potentially live in the narrative of Christ, and its weight in the world is exemplified in the radical shift in language and narrative through which Christians and the church

⁶. Acts of civil disobedience committed by non-Christians are beyond the scope of this paper because, as Hauerwas argues, there is no universal definition of civil disobedience or ethics; rather, all ethical acts are qualified and situated particularly. Christian ethics, including its approach to civil disobedience, is fundamentally a search to understand the rationale for the choices and conduct of Christians.

⁷. Peter L. Jones, ‘Civil Disobedience’, in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 140–1.

⁸. ‘Collection of facts of injustice’ is self-explanatory, while ‘negotiation’ refers to holding negotiating sessions with those in power to obtain their promise to alleviate the situation. ‘Self-purification’, which includes workshops on nonviolence, requires self-reflection on whether one can accept the consequences of conducting civil disobedience, including incarceration. ‘Direct action’ means acts that seek to create such a nonviolent crisis and establish such a creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront an issue. See Martin Luther King Jr., ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’, *The Atlantic Monthly* 212:2 (August 1963): 77–87.

⁹. Though he seeks to frame the question, rather than to propose straightforwardly his views on civil disobedience, Hauerwas states that he had been sympathetic to the civil rights struggle in the United States regarding racial discrimination. Nonetheless, he confesses that he is not an activist by nature, no matter how much he sympathises with the cause. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), Location 1063–1367, Kindle edition.

¹⁰. John Berkman, ‘An Introduction to the Hauerwas Reader’, in *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001): Location 346–623, Kindle edition.

model after Christ's teachings.¹¹ The task of Christ's church, Hauerwas argues, is to exercise non-violent, non-coercive witnessing through long-term communal relations between the Christian community and the community at large.¹² Hauerwas maintains that the church community effects change in the world not through a direct, intentional strategy of social justice but through the very essence of being Christ's church. In other words, Christian ethics, or the understanding of the way that the church community acts, cannot be divorced from theology, the way that the church community thinks.¹³ To explore this further, this paper will engage with Hauerwas' perspectives on Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

Before considering the topic of ethics, which includes civil disobedience, it is important to note that Hauerwas argues that the church community must evidence utmost clarity with respect to the relationship between humans and Christ's narrative of incarnation, death, and resurrection.¹⁴ In his view, a confessional Christian who is detached from a commitment to living as a disciple insufficiently represents this narrative.¹⁵ The church community can emphasise its public witness of Christ through the church, as it is

Christian conviction that forms and illuminates the lives of believers and non-believers.¹⁶ Hauerwas proposes that Christian responsibility requires the positive promotion of peace and justice, as these conditions are the very essence of the Christian life, both individually and in the church. Hauerwas affirms the argument made by St. Augustine: 'Justice is love serving God only, and therefore ruling well all else, as subject to man.'¹⁷ Christians cannot understand justice apart from Christian theological convictions and practices.

Civil disobedience is often regarded as a public witness of Christian ideals, as it is meant to win over those who hate by showing them love as one would to a friend rather than by defeating or coercing an opponent. If the end goal is simply to change the system, then it is likely that violent means will be required to work directly against the structure, but the Christian aim is to love, which means embracing all, even the oppressor, as demanded by Christ.¹⁸ Yet explicit narratives about acts of civil disobedience often emphasize the struggle for freedom and justice rather than the action of witnessing Christ.¹⁹ If the Christian imagination is captured by the concept of justice determined by the presuppositions of liberal societies, Christians may lose their unique voice and, paradoxically, become less capable of contributing to the societal cause of justice.²⁰ According to Hauerwas,

¹¹. Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2012): Location 2103–2339, Kindle edition.

¹². Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983): Location 2980–3115, Kindle edition.

¹³. Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 2351–2624.

¹⁴. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014): Location 310–376, 700–1054, Kindle edition.

¹⁵. Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, Location 1063–1367.

¹⁶. Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 9–30.

¹⁷. Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, Location 954.

¹⁸. Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 1560–1771.

¹⁹. *Ibid.*, Location 221–412.

²⁰. Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and*

Christians can make a difference as aliens in the world because they see something that others cannot see, as others do not see the world through Christ,²¹ and he urges Christians to be vigilant and to always question whether their idea of justice is in line with God's idea of justice and to prioritize the integrity of their Christian witness.²²

Hauerwas stresses that church communities can focus on bringing about the kingdom of God by envisioning the world through the lens of Christ's narrative.²³

As such, Hauerwas finds that Christians are called to participate in a story that is not of their own making or choosing, but rather, one that challenges the underlying concept of individualism in the social order, built on the assumption that humans write their own stories.²⁴ In order for Christians to live better into Christ's narrative, Hauerwas asks that they view themselves foremost as forgiven sinners. Hauerwas argues that the church community's relationship to God and to His mercy can constitute the foundation for Christian understanding of social ethics, which includes issues such as civil disobedience.²⁵ Justice attains its end by enacting mercy so as to overcome sin, which establishes the right relationship between people and God.²⁶ Through the church community's understanding of Christ's

narrative and of the Christian communities' position as forgiven sinners, Christians can find the language to articulate their commitment to nonviolence, which is an integral tenet of civil disobedience. Hauerwas argues that 'Christians are not called to nonviolence because we believe nonviolence is a way to rid the world of war; but rather, in a world of war, as faithful followers of Jesus, we cannot imagine being anything other than nonviolent.'²⁷ When Christians understand Christ's narrative and participate in it, they can most fully be who they were meant to be.

In addition, Hauerwas suggests that the process of understanding the relationship between Christ's narrative and Christian ethics needs to be undertaken communally in a church context, supported by theology and ethics.²⁸ For Hauerwas, the church's aim is to focus on the internal and distinctive practices of its community rather than on direct social engagement designed to change the world.²⁹ The church is a place for believers of Christ to form a community, intentionally creating kingdom-minded Christians who will then conduct their daily lives and relationships in such a way that they witness a foretaste of the kingdom.³⁰ Therefore, Christian ethics are embodied by Christians, who are learning how to follow Jesus through their relationship with their church community.³¹ However, in today's consumerist world, in which voluntary church attendance is considered the norm, asking congregants to submit to the teaching of the church as a disciplined community is

Life (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 67–86.

²¹ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Location 310–376.

²² Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 2534–2610.

²³ *Ibid.*, Location 859–1044.

²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), Location 74–114, Kindle edition.

²⁵ Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 859–1044.

²⁶ Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 1777–2099.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Location 768–1057.

²⁸ Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, Location 118–429.

²⁹ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Location 388–440.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Location 259–298.

³¹ David B. Burrell, 'Foreword', in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 73–107.

no easy feat.³² Society views moral convictions as personal desires that should not impinge on one's freedom. To this phenomenon, Hauerwas responds that if Christian beliefs are worthy to act upon, they must be something for which Christians are willing to sacrifice themselves.³³ The church community's attempt to bring forth God's kingdom through a widespread understanding of Christ's narrative is a worthy cause for which Christians need to be willing to sacrifice their freedom.

What this means for civil disobedience and other such social demonstrations is that, without theological reflection and conviction, the church can neither join civil disobedience movements nor condemn those who do so. Instead, the church can strive to model the kingdom of God, as the outcome of faithfulness to Christ is the church witnessing God's justice to the world. Hauerwas turns the concept of *justice* upside down, arguing that it has been affected by liberalism. Therefore, the church community cannot use concepts derived from liberalism to understand its own stance. For this reason, Hauerwas argues, the Christian understanding of justice needs to begin with Christ's story as its basis.³⁴ The church witnesses to the world, whether or not this witness leads to acts of civil disobedience, and this witness is a work of peace that is slow, painful, and difficult precisely because it requires long-term perseverance and constant discernment.³⁵ In a way, the church community demonstrates its public commitment not for the purpose of

claiming virtue, but so that others from the secular world might hold Christians accountable, motivating Christians to remain faithful under their watch.³⁶ For Hauerwas, Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is important for examining the church's role in a society in which Christians, acting consciously and truly to God, may be offered no alternative other than to refuse to cooperate with an evil system.³⁷

For the church to be a community that brings forth God's kingdom, Hauerwas argues that it must remain distinct from worldly political regimes. To exist without the institutional support of Christendom, or of attempts to appease the world of post-Christendom by political responsibility, is itself an inherently political mission that challenges how the world thinks.³⁸ In societies that practice freedom of religion, the church might be tempted to see the state as friendly to the church and, as a result, might be tempted to support the constitution of their society rather than to allow the Gospel to dominate the ethos of the Christian community.³⁹ According to Hauerwas, democratic societies have a subtle and seductive effect on Christians in that the latter may be tempted to believe that they are free to act according to their will when that is not necessarily the case, a situation that can cause Christians to lose their visibility in the world that is necessary for them to serve as God's witnesses.⁴⁰

In Hauerwas' view, people too often assume that Protestantism means having

³² Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 67–86.

³³ Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 413–606.

³⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 45.

³⁵ Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, Location 3311–3696.

³⁶ William Cavanaugh, 'An Introduction to the Hauerwas Reader', in *The Hauerwas Reader*, Location 636–925.

³⁷ Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, Location 1063–1367.

³⁸ Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 59–249.

³⁹ Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 69–91.

⁴⁰ Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 2638–2889.

faith in human reason and in the establishment of a democratic republic that domesticates religious convictions in the interest of societal peace.⁴¹ For many, Christian politics has come to mean Christian social activism.⁴² However, for Hauerwas, Christian convictions regarding morality and politics cannot be addressed until Christians accept the church as a political community—that is, as a collection of people with specific convictions and a specific agenda, which is to enact the change in the world that is necessary for its salvation.⁴³ Christians need to see the church as an alternative to the world's reality, and an alternative to violence.⁴⁴ By learning to live as a community in diaspora, Christians better understand the political form of God's restorative justice in the Scriptures, which is to bless all people through diaspora. Therefore, in Hauerwas' thinking, any constructive social ethic must be understood in the identity and integrity of the church within Christ's narrative, rather than viewing the church as an institution designed to supplement or even enhance democracies.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the church needs to be a place where Christians consider how theology and Christian ethics can be lived faithfully in the world, rather than a place of withdrawal that Christians might falsely perceive the church as if they incorrectly understand the meaning of the church as an inward-looking sanctuary.⁴⁶

⁴¹. Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 67–86.

⁴². Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Location 543–622.

⁴³. Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 23–43.

⁴⁴. Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 87–97.

⁴⁵. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 164–233.

⁴⁶. Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, Location 118–429. Having read several of Hauerwas' books, I have observed that many have a strong ecclesial element, with an emphasis on constancy and constitutive community and focusing specifically on Christians

In order to decide on any potential involvement in civil disobedience, the church first and foremost must determine whether a particular act of civil disobedience effectively witnesses the kingdom of God, rather than monitoring whether the government, against which the act of disobedience is aimed, functions democratically or otherwise. If the discernment of the community grounded in biblical faith and communal correction decides that an act of civil disobedience is indeed a true witness for the kingdom of God, Hauerwas proposes that the church's main political task is the formation of people who see clearly the cost of discipleship and who are willing to pay the price when participating in civil disobedience actions.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Hauerwas emphasises the significance of eschatology to a Christian negotiation of the world.⁴⁸ Eschatology is the hope that defies present frustration to define a position regarding an as-yet-unseen goal that gives present suffering its meaning. Eschatological convictions shape Christian nonviolence because of the Christian assumption that this world is God's good work and that this corrupted, earthly world will not exist

becoming the church community and the church's role in disciple formation. This emphasis is perplexing coming from someone who, for the majority of his life, had difficulty deciding in which church, denomination, or tradition he could take part. He proclaims that he is not sure of what he believes, but that he is interested instead in what the church believes. Perhaps it is this struggle that causes him to be so inquisitive in this regard. See Cavanaugh, 'An Introduction to the Hauerwas Reader', in *The Hauerwas Reader*, Location 636–925; also see Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 98–119, and Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, Location 3311–3696.

⁴⁷. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Location 635–703.

⁴⁸. Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, Location 59–249.

indefinitely.⁴⁹ As faithful followers of Christ, the willingness to accept suffering without retaliation must be based on the conviction that justice will reign.⁵⁰ Hauerwas urges Christians to have patience and to believe in the providence of God in the face of injustice. Christians must cede their own control with the knowledge that God will use their faithfulness to make His kingdom a reality in the world.⁵¹ To live faithfully means that Christians must not view nonviolence as a strategy, but rather, must view it as the fundamental nature of faithful followers of Christ.⁵²

In acts of civil disobedience, Hauerwas emphasizes that the means is as important, if not more important, than the ends. Hauerwas argues that the Christian cannot perform an unjust act in service of a perceived just result, as the act could distort the character of his or her Christian witness.⁵³

Christians can plan to conduct civil disobedience, but it has to remain non-violent in order to assure Christian witness.⁵⁴ Therefore, Christians are not to seek foremost to do what is realistic, as their purpose is not to seek justice as the world defines it but as Christ defines it. When Christians seek other sacrificial behaviors that justify violence, they undermine the sacrifice of Christ.⁵⁵ Instead, the church community aims to change language in order to change the world—by narrating the

secular world on Christian terms instead of on the world's terms. This is because nonviolence in Christ's narrative is deeper than the worldly violence that currently possesses Christians' speech and imagination.⁵⁶ As Hauerwas discusses, language is a resource for communication and relationship. The church, whose role is to give its members the interpretive skills to truthfully understand the world as it is, cannot be complicit with the language by which society discusses politics simply because the church wishes to remain a dominant voice in society.⁵⁷ In the secular world, politics are associated with interest groups who aim to secure resources for themselves, rather than to seek the common good. For this reason, Christians frame politics in terms of Christian rhetoric, not secular rhetoric.⁵⁸ Christian conviction constitutes a narrative and a language that requires the transformation of the church community, and that transformation illuminates the world.⁵⁹

In conclusion, Hauerwas advises the church community to consider what it means to live as disciples of Christ—that is, living in Christ's narrative and seeking to bring forth the kingdom of God—before considering whether an act of civil disobedience is right or wrong. Through this consideration, Christians can come to a more profound understanding of what it means to follow Christ, which will inform their every action, including the decision to take part in acts of civil disobedience.⁶⁰

⁴⁹. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Location 1214–1305.

⁵⁰. Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 1560–1771.

⁵¹. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 2368–2441.

⁵². Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 84–218.

⁵³. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 2534–2610.

⁵⁴. Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 1560–1771.

⁵⁵. *Ibid.*, Location 555–759.

⁵⁶. Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 9–30.

⁵⁷. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Location 543–622; Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 4–12, 45–68.

⁵⁸. Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 4–12, 23–43.

⁵⁹. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 859–1044.

⁶⁰. Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 1560–1771.

Hauerwas believes that through the faithful and long-term witness of those living in Christ's narrative, the language of the world will be transformed and, in turn, social relations will be transformed.

Though this conclusion does not directly answer whether Hauerwas would affirm or reject acts of civil disobedience, I argue that this is the answer he would give if pressed. With regard to the acts of civil disobedience committed by the Umbrella Movement and the Occupy Central Movement, he would likely hesitate to speak as an authority in a context that is not his, as his work emphasizes that ethics are particular to each place and time, and must be contextualized within a community's language and history.⁶¹ I suggest that Hauerwas would argue that the Hong Kong church community must discern the meaning of civil disobedience in its own particular context, and that it should reflect upon whether these acts of civil disobedience take part in Christ's narrative, working to further the advent of the kingdom of God on earth.

To be sure, Hauerwas' perspective inevitably triggers criticism of its alleged passivity, especially in the context of what some have considered a near-totalitarian regime that must be actively resisted. However, Hauerwas advises that the church community cannot hold democracy or any other political regime as an ideal to achieve. Regardless of its intentions, a government is still a part of the secular world rather than of the kingdom of God. In this regard, Hauerwas' argument raises the following question: How can the Christian understanding of the world function in the post-Christendom era, that is, in a context in which Christianity has never been, and

seems unlikely to ever become, a pervasive part of the social fabric?⁶² How have Hong Kong theologians, in relation to Hong Kong's pseudo-democratic institutions, wrestled with Hauerwas' endurance of injustice? These questions can be answered through a separate investigation.

⁶¹. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Location 386–409.

⁶². Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, Location 2103–2349.

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