

With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology, Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001
By: Stanley Hauerwas.
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Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.

Stanley Hauerwas, professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University, an ardent pacifist, was named "America's best theologian" by *Time* magazine only two days prior to the September 11 terrorist attacks. But judging by his latest book, I doubt that Hauerwas will change his mind on his pacifist stance. The writings of the pacifist John Howard Yoder, Mennonite theologian, educator, and ethicist, provided Hauerwas the very title of his Gifford lectures *With the Grain of the Universe*. The title indicates his indebtedness to Yoder's work. Yoder gave alternative service as conscientious objector during the Korean war. He studied with Karl Barth and signs of Barth's influence appear throughout Yoder's work.

Hauerwas believes that pacifism is increasingly accepted by many Christians - not the least being John Paul II. He argues that any honest reading of the Pope's encyclicals suggest that he has been moving in direction of pacifism.

In his Gifford Lecture Series, Hauerwas expounds his thesis that natural theology divorced from the full doctrine of God cannot help but distort the character of God and, accordingly, of the world in which we find ourselves. The God who moves the sun and the stars is the same God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ. The God we worship and the world God created cannot be truthfully known without the cross. Hauerwas explains his view by discussing the lives and works of three of the greatest Gifford lecturers - William James, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Barth.

William James (1842-1910), American philosopher and psychologist, and Professor of Psychology at Harvard, turned natural theology - the discovery of God in creation - into religious psychology. James was a humanist, who created the discipline called "psychology of religion."

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), arguably the most important American-born Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, gave his Gifford Lectures in 1939, in which he developed the most systematic presentation of his theological views, later published as *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941-1943). Hauerwas claims that the God Niebuhr discovered is the ultimate fulfilment of human needs. He also notes the absence of the doctrine of the church in Niebuhr's theology and ethics. And he points to the extraordinary "thinness" of Niebuhr's theology.

Karl Barth (1886-1968), probably the most important theologian of twentieth century's Western Christianity, found that liberalism was inadequate to the pastor's task. His significance rests primarily on his devastating critique of nineteenth-century liberalism, which inaugurated a theological revolution. He sought to provide a positive theology that gave central importance to Christ as the Word of God. Evangelical and Reformed scholars confine his importance to his eloquent critique of liberalism. They argue that Barth himself

did not escape fully its influence. In his theology Barth does not begin with reason or religious experience or scientific discoveries, but by insisting that God is the subject of theology - natural or otherwise. He describes himself as a sworn enemy of all forms of natural theology. Hauerwas claims that Barth helps to us see why "natural theology" is unintelligible when abstracted from a full doctrine of God. And he mentions that Barth once summarized his theology in this simple statement - "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Hauerwas's brilliant interaction with these three twentieth century important thinkers ought to stir serious debate about the meaning of natural theology among evangelical and Reformed ethicists and theologians.