"The Peaceable Kingdom" by Stanley Hauerwas - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2004/5/25 17:13
"The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics" by Stanley Hauerwas

2 out of 5 stars.

This book is not designed really as an introduction of Christian ethics (though some basic ideas are talked about). Rather it is a book designed as an introduction to the Christian ethical system of Stanley Hauerwas, who is currently a professor of theology at Duke University in Durham, NC.

Hauerwas is like many theologians out there who say a lot about something without really saying much at all.

While there is much to commend this book on, most of it is surrounded by fluffy long sayings that don't actually mean very much.

Hauerwas does well to point out as Christians we should not attempt to do ethics without qualifying our ethic as distinctively Christian, and that our ethic is built upon the foundations of the narrative of Scripture as well the community that is to embody that narrative - the Church. Also, I like how Hauerwas stresses that deciding what actions are ethical can only be properly understood based on our understanding of "being" a Christian.

As commendable as all this is, Hauerwas does not deal too much with what the Scriptures actually say. He tends to make assumptions that sound like they are Biblical. For example, Hauerwas tends to put a virtue such as peace on top of his hierarchy of virtue. Yet, he doesn't really attempt to explore what the Scriptures say on peace. He eventually comes to understand peace as non-violence/war. However, is such Biblical? However, if that is so, then why did Jesus tell his disciples to carry around a sword? If Jesus was against violence, then why did He affirm the use of violence as a means of establishing justice, by dying on the cross? Scripturally speaking, there is a time when justice must choose violence in order for justice to be established. Scripturally speaking, there is a time for war (Eccl 3:8).

It is ironic that while Hauerwas has much to say for Christians being faithful to the narrative of Scripture, that Hauerwas turns so little attention to what the Scriptures say. He consistently is vague in dealing with the Scriptures, and really does not interact with them throughout this book. He simply pays mere lip service to them. He seems much more interested in interacting with Barth, MacIntyre, McCormick, Niebuhr, and Yoder, than with Jesus or Paul.

I am not totally against the pacifist position, and it has much appeal to me. I believe that Christians should not participate in war that is ultimately selfish in nature. I believe if Christians partake in war, then it should only be for the purpose of defending the nation, or protecting another nation that is completely innocent. I believe such can be justified from the fact that Romans 13 teaches that the government has been given the sword by God.

It does not take much of a leap in logic to say that if Christians are part of that government that has been given the sword, then Christians have the right and duty to, when is warranted, to participate in war in the name of justice. Even Hauer was himself admits that he has sympathy for this position, and admits that it cannot be discounted as a possibility for Christians (p. 114-115). However, he refuses to really even dialogue with this position and simply says that most the time that justice is not really the underlying issue of why a war is waged. Then he goes on to say that true justice is never established through violence; in spite of the fact that justice was established through the violence of the cross.

Ultimately the position Hauerwas takes up is that the Christian should rely on providence as the only option instead of taking up arms, and being patient enough to do so. This isn't exactly earth-shattering theology. All that Hauerwas does is a lot of tap dancing throughout this book, with the occasionally impressive maneuver that impresses the crowd.