



Ethics Is the Business of the Local Church

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas, in his usual forthright style, takes on American business—and argues that Adventist congregations should be doing the hard work of ethics.

by Malcolm B. Russell

IN COMMENTS THAT MOVED FAR FROM HIS PREPARED text on business ethics and the pervasive and harmful influence of Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics*, Stanley Hauerwas shared with a largely Adventist audience his view of what an Adventist ethic might be. While the two hours of lecture and discussion reflected ideas found in more than 150 articles and nine books, Hauerwas commented specifically on Adventists and business.

Hauerwas' formal lecture was provocative enough. Business ethics, Hauerwas implied, perhaps does not exist as a separate subject. Professions like medicine and law possess codes that detail overriding responsibilities to their patients and clients regardless of social cost. Physicians heal condemned murderers, and extend the lives of the diseased at great cost to society. That is their responsibility. But business, despite arguments about commitment to the stockholders, lacks responsibility

to anyone, and thus any claim to being a "moral art." Businessmen, often unable to describe what they do "as a worthy activity, period," hire ethicists, ministers, and social critics to address them in order to perform a ritual. The businessmen know very well that, according to the standard form of such events, the speech will portray the horrible conditions of society, then place blame on business for creating such misery. This will be followed by demands that business play an active role in alleviating the wrongs. The moral critic may even insist on structural change in economic life.

All feel better from the exchange. The critic feels "morally worthy," purified for "letting the business people have it for their moral shortcomings" and enjoys the generous honorarium received. In turn, the audience of business men and women feel cleansed, "by the masochistic guilt they have—or at least should have—for the less-than-ideal behavior they are forced to deal with in day-to-day business." They invited the speaker in the first place, and resolve to be better, as one would at a confessional.

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Thus, typical talks on business ethics relieve guilt with a not-too-painful punishment: a one-hour talk. Moreover,

the critic's moral exhortation to do better through social involvement seems to give us a solution that allows us to think we can do something. . . . This performs the same function as the revivalist's call to do better in the future, for it would indeed be a sorry call to conversion if it did not envision a better way of life from that moment forward.

Consequently, everyone leaves feeling that something has been accomplished.

Unfortunately, argues Hauerwas, while individual efforts to do good should not be faulted, such speeches on business ethics fail to strike at the root of society's problems. Neither he nor economists possess the understanding to prescribe cures to society's deeper economic ills: "Anyone who thinks he can understand our contemporary economy has got to be in deep self-deception." No effective model exists that shows that businesses can do something about the social situation. Philanthropy (to hire more blacks, provide more social services, or recycle) seems platitudinous, though the efforts may not be unimportant. However, such efforts lack a moral direction beyond self-interest. Reforms of the "do good because it is good business" variety appeal not to ethics, but profit. Hauerwas' desired solution is fundamental structural change: He scoffs at the operations of capitalism, and desires a society moved by ethics and a sense of community, not Adam Smith's competition-limiting greed. To take one example, he notes that "entrepreneurial spirit is exactly what you do not want in modern business to be a success, because you would not want to have to make your life dependent on *fortunata*."

Given these circumstances, Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics* appeals to the business community but fails to provide a "morally good" guide. Business people like to think of themselves as rational decision mak-

ers, a role that situation ethics encourages. Such an allure is false, Hauerwas argues, because the moral person *excludes* choices rather than makes them.

In contrast to centuries of argument in favor of "the end justifies the means," or "the greatest good for the greatest number," Hauerwas prefers two types of rules. The first type summarizes current wisdom about the most rewarding alternative: a *rule of thumb*, like "punt on fourth down." The second sort are *constitutive* rules, like "only four downs in football." Rules of thumb can vary according to circumstances, but you don't qualify constitutive rules.

Hauerwas' discussion flows from his concept of community. He has provocative views about what role church communities ought to play, including Adventists. Contemporary society is overcompetitive and too self-reliant, aggrandizing the individual and consequently limiting feelings of community. Thus people seek more freedom and privacy, but become lonely and unhappy—alienated—when they get it. He reasons:

Americans have a strong desire for community. They long for associations in which they can live in trust and fraternal cooperation with one's fellows, and through such communities they wish to come directly to grips with the social and interpersonal problems that they confront. But in America we have created and voluntarily maintain a society that increasingly frustrates . . . this longing for community.

For proof, he submits the large number of people "attracted to medicine and the law today because they still seem to require morally coherent training." Likewise, many people can hardly wait to get to the office, "because it is morally ordered and coherent, often providing a code of language, dress, and behavior."

Hauerwas stresses the similarity between the responsibility owed to a client by business and the ministry. Like business, the clergy, Hauerwas thinks, lack an overriding commitment to specific clients. Instead, their overrid-

ing loyalty belongs to a community. The Christian community charges its ministers to help orient the community to God. However, business, like the ministry and unlike medicine or law, lacks a specific sense of what knowledge is required to perform its tasks.

To use Hauerwas' example, a seminary student can decide "I'm just not into Christology this year. I'm really into relating, and after all, that's what the ministry is all about, isn't it?" To which the seminary responds, "Right on, kid; why don't you get your head straight, take some more courses in Clinical Pastoral Education?"

At medical school, however, if a student decides "I'm really not into anatomy this year. I'm really into relating and I'd like to take a few more courses in psychology," the medical school responds: "Who do you think you are, kid? We don't care what your interests are! You are being trained to care for people, and you are going to take anatomy and like it. Tough!"

Thus, concludes Hauerwas,

No one believes an ineffectual minister can affect his eternal salvation, but we do believe doctors can hurt us. . . . That's why we hold medical schools to be a much more determinative context for moral training than seminaries.

The sense of community reaches far into affairs of state and the military, Hauerwas says, and here Adventists hold a distinctive position.

One example is dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is wonderful that Adventists are such missionaries, because that means that you know that you are not only, merely

Americans and that you have Adventist brothers and sisters who live in Japan. This means that you couldn't have dropped the bomb. Who could believe that Christians are really God's people if we're ready to murder the very people we share God's table with? Who would believe we really celebrate God if we did that? That's why I say it is so wonderful that we defy national boundaries—and why, therefore, the United States of America is right to distrust Christians, since we're not loyal citizens. We're loyal to our Japanese and Russian and Iraqi brothers and sisters. Thus, we defy the kind of logic that would have us morally do the wrong that good may come in the name of the United States.

To allow 18- to 22-year-olds in this society to make up their own minds is only to confirm them into a capitalistic economy that makes them understand ideas are just another consumer item that they get to buy. That's the worst possible thing you can do to an undergraduate.

Arguing the need for a moral structure, in contrast to the pervasive influence of situation ethics, Hauerwas extends his remarks to education. "Many of you saw the *Dead Poets Society*" (a film reviewed, incidentally, by an Andrews University undergraduate in a recent issue of *Spectrum*), "and you really liked that movie—especially, I suspect, Ad-

ventists who are always reacting a little against authoritarian rules." Morally, however, Hauerwas thinks the movie was rotten, with its theme of education that serves to provide the introduction to human experiences that will allow students to make up their own minds.

I think that's a very bad idea. To allow 18- to 22-year-olds in this society to make up their own minds is to only confirm them into a capitalistic economy that makes them understand that ideas are just another consumer item that they get to buy out of their own subjective wants. That's the worst possible thing you can do to an undergraduate. I tell my undergraduates that they don't have minds worth making up. I'm actually seri-

ous about this: the first task of an education that's any good is about the formation of people into wants that they did not know they had.

Hauerwas plunged on into another aspect of education.

Andrews probably sells itself as a kind of consumer product, rather than saying, "Come to Andrews and let us shape you into the kind of people Adventists should be." But Andrews couldn't stand that drop in enrollment.

So instead, Andrews, like the rest of us in American education, reinforces students, through the cafeteria curriculums we give them, into being good capitalists, thinking that ideas are simply something else that they can buy. In such a situation we all think our only choice is to create our own morality, and our own morality is what we value the most, namely our own self-fulfillment.

Hauerwas warns that popular business ethics may become an excuse for Christians to avoid subjecting their lives to one another for examination. Business ethics may only continue to underwrite the presuppositions about personal and social morality in society. By contrast,

the most appropriate biblical passage to help us deal with business ethics is the Pauline analysis of the powers. We really are constantly captured by powers we don't know how to name, and that's when they really get a hold of us. Therefore it is not an issue of ethics—"If I've got the right principles, I'll get it right." Instead, it is an ongoing interpretive task to help me know when, while in the name of doing good, almost always I've been captured by powers which are fundamentally misdirecting what I care about.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with Andrews having a business school," Hauerwas said. "But," he continued,

in many schools—business or liberal arts schools—we are embarrassed about being Christian, so we professors have students read Samuelson on economics and then say we're concerned about values. Then it is too late. You have already let the paradigm of explanation that society wants you to believe determine how you think about these matters. So one of the interesting things about what a business school at

Andrews University would be is how you are not just concerned about ethics courses in the curriculum. Rather, every course is suffused with the question of how this is helping us be better able to live in a community as Christians.

Asked to advise Christians who feel called to service in professions like business and politics, given that they call for so much compromising in order to be "successful," Hauerwas responded:

Well, first of all you can never try to be successful. Of course, you don't look for failure. We are not called to be dumb. But our first task is to be faithful.

I don't assume that being a businessman is a bit more compromising than being a full professor at a modern university. My own hunch is that business may be a good deal more honest and open than those of us that are in the modern universities.

I think that one of the crucial questions and words that makes it very hard in business today is *service*. As Christians we are called to be in service to one another. I want the people that pick up my garbage to understand how important that is to me. I wouldn't know what to do with the stuff. It would take me two or three hours a week to deal with my garbage.

That's who universities ought to be giving honorary degrees to, by the way. I'm not against big corporations or anything like that. I want to know how the ethos is set that helps people understand that the corporation is about service. That's what I want to know.

Hauerwas' conviction that humanities shape moral behavior leads him to root business ethics in the life of congregations.

If you want a place to start thinking about business ethics as Adventists, I suggest that before you let anyone join an Adventist congregation, have them tell the whole church how much . . . [he or she] earns. Now that's a place to start.

Don't start trying to think about whether capitalism or socialism is the correct alternative. Don't start thinking about whether businessman A under situation B should make this decision or that decision in terms of whether they're using deontological or teleological kinds of normative justifications.

Start in your churches and ask anyone who is

going to join the church to tell the whole church before they join what they earn. Most people would be more prepared to talk about what they do in their bedrooms than to tell the church what they make. We're not ready to have our economic lives examined by our brothers and sisters in Christ. But that's just the place to start . . . if you're serious about being an Adventist community.

Adventists are a disciplined community. Think about how you stood against the wider Christian society about the Sabbath. You stood against the wider Christian society about how you should eat. You stood against the wider Christian society also about the easy acceptance of war. Now you can help us as Christians in society understand why it is that what we earn is not a private matter. In the U.S., nothing is more private than our income. That is the denial of "when Christians come together we are baptized into the body and blood of Christ."

Christians do not believe in individual rights. The church tells individuals, "We're going to tell you what to do with your genitals. That's not for you to make up your mind about: No, you don't

have sexual intercourse before marriage." However, Christians are not libertarians. We in the church say to couples that they can say, "We're so much in love. We want to be married." The church can say, "So what? We don't think that you have the moral character to sustain marriage. We're not going to marry you."

The church doesn't believe in rights. We don't believe in freedom of the individual. When you're a baptized member in Jesus Christ you have made your body available to the whole community. That's the reason Paul says, "Don't go to a prostitute." You're defaming the whole body.

I suppose most business schools do not often read the story of Ananias and Sapphira. These are not popular texts but they're there. And the reason they're there is because we are people who believe that God has made us members of one another through the body and blood of Jesus.

We Christians do not believe in the right to privacy. We believe in something completely different—the protection of the personal that gives space for the development of intimacy.