

of wonder and questioning, thus opening space for protest in the possibility of saying the unspeakable. Such openness bears the vulnerability of memory and longing; "such compassion is a wound, but such a wound is a lure to healing" (16).

Sands sees literature as one of the non-idealizing cultural sites of the practice of compassion, of the negotiation and necessarily messy shaping of meaning. She explores the multicoloured world of the tragic beyond the walls of paradise in four novels: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), and Marilyn Robinson's aforementioned *Housekeeping*. Sands exemplifies the practice of compassion in her evocative writing, in her rigorous argumentation, in the risks she takes by setting her story next to those told by the four novelists, in her attention to the wounds of suffering and evil.

While Sands' book is highly recommended reading, her theology raises some important questions. Sands proposes the obverse of her description of androcentric and feminist theologies. In her theology, the desire for harmony, unity, and wholeness becomes relegated to non-being, to become the shadow of a plurality of goods and values, of elemental dissonance. One might add that perhaps this is a helpful turn of events. Having flooded the metaphysical islands, however, it becomes unclear what foothold might be gained in order to name the tragic. Given the absence of a metaphysical vision of wholeness, how can one say that a tragic event ought to have been otherwise or that it is wrong? Why does any event evoke tragic pathos? We have a tendency to begin with a vision of wholeness, and like Procrustes, cut off parts, or stretch conflicted life experiences, to fit the tidy bed. Sands' theology reminds us of a crucial starting point for creating our visions of metaphysical harmony in the oceanic depths of the tragic with its sublime beauty and chilling pathos.

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Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular. By Stanley Hauerwas. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-8223-1475-4. Pp. 235.

"It is the best of times to be a Christian theologian; it is the best of times to be a Christian theologian" (1). So begins the tale as told by Stanley Hauerwas in his latest offering, *Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular*. The book, however, is not so much concerned with Hauerwas' relative comfort as a theologian. Like the title suggests, these "dispatches" are brief, often random, firsthand accounts of various topics.

Although the book is not exactly a systematic "bombshell in the playground of theologians," Hauerwas does have a knack for lobbing, with impressive accuracy, ethical hand-grenades at a number of issues: from Just War theory to the church and the mentally handicapped, tempered with an enjoyable mix of theol-

ogy, social criticism, and biting wit.

The irony of both the book title and agenda is immediate. The image of Hauerwas, the out-spoken, uncompromising pacifist, on the battle lines is amusing enough. Beyond this, the book's readership will largely consist of students in departments of religion, making one wonder what, if any, engagement is there to be had? Almost winking at us, Hauerwas concedes that "the *secular* I engage is not *out there* in a world that no longer identifies itself as religious, but it is in the souls of most people, including myself, who continue to identify themselves as Christian" (19).

In the opening section, "Positioning," Hauerwas reminds his audience of the vantage point from which he assesses issues concerning both church and university: pacifism. The section, in tone and subject matter, offers the reader an indication of what topics will be addressed in the following two sections. He also begins a discourse on the topic of *honor* which is continued in chapter two by way of comparing Karl Barth to nineteenth-century British author Anthony Trollope—one which is sure to raise eyebrows. Additionally, he has sharp words for religious studies departments: "Religion departments, of course, are more likely to be made up of people who most fear being caught with a religious conviction. Religion professors usually are willing to study a religion if it is dead or they can kill it. They may be 'personally' religious, but they think it would be 'unprofessional' for their students to get a hint that they might actually believe what they teach" (14).

What binds the three essays that make up the book's second section, "Behind the Lines," is the dual theme of *honor* and *forgiveness*. The first two focus on the work of the aforementioned Trollope, while the final is an adaptation of a convocation address given by Hauerwas. The latter essay, in which Hauerwas examines the complex relations between forgiveness and reconciliation, is one of the most engaging in the entire book. He limns the confession of the protagonist in Anne Tyler's novel *Saint Maybe* (1991) to illustrate how the act of confession begins with truthfulness, leads to reparation, and then seeks forgiveness. Hauerwas petitions that forgiveness is "a community process that makes discipleship possible." It is the task of this community of believers to "call those in power to truth" (88).

The opening chapter of the book's final section, "Engagements," probes the correlation between democracy and Protestant Christianity in America: a conviction as longheld as it is problematic. Hauerwas critiques the positions of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr, faulting the former for "not coming to terms with pluralism" (97) and the latter for unconsciously "underwriting the interest of the rising elites and their accompanying intellectual theories" (101). Hauerwas' criticism of Niebuhr is likely to spark much debate.

The chapters that follow are, in part, an extension of the author's previous work, ranging from his writings on pacifism, to those on the church and those on the mentally handicapped. He examines the peculiar rise of the interest in bioethics at universities across North America in his chapter, "Communitarians and Medical Ethicists or Why I am None of the Above." Ever provocative, Hauerwas is likely to draw criticism, not undeservedly, when he writes: "The creation

of a formal discipline called ethics, displayed concretely over medical practice, results in the comforting illusion that this society can sustain an intelligible practice of medicine, even though we have no way of determining what purposes medicine should serve—other than the prolonging of each individual's life" (158).

Dispatches From the Front is an insightful work that will both repel and attract the reader. The random feel of the essay selections, the questionable choice to focus on the writings of Anthony Trollope, and chapter titles that serve to antagonize ("Why Gays [As A Group] are Morally Superior to Christians [As A Group]") will, no doubt, trouble some readers. While the correlation Hauerwas makes in the opening chapters between constancy and forgiveness is an enlightening one and his demonstration of the novel as a school of virtue in keeping with prior projects in narrative theology, his argument is nonetheless marred by the incessant need he feels to quote lengthy passages from the work of Trollope. This not only provokes the reader, it interrupts the flow of the argument.

Hauerwas has a reputation as a writer who, while given to extreme bouts of hyperbole, grabs the reader's attentions with jarring claims and clever turns of phrase. Having said that, *Dispatches From the Front* will satisfy those familiar with the author's work and delight those first-time readers of Hauerwas who are not expecting a work of systematic theology.

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***Gandhi's Responses to Islam.* By Sheila McDonough. New Delhi: D.K. Print-world (P) Ltd., 1994. ISBN 81-246-0035-X. Pp. 133.**

As a result of her interest in and involvement with South Asia, Sheila McDonough has contributed much to this area of research. She has published four works to date, including *The Authority of the Past* (1970) and *Muslim Ethics and Modernity* (1985). *Gandhi's Responses to Islam* is a much welcomed and timely addition, especially in light of the continued tensions between Hindus and Muslims in South Asia. The book is written in memory of Mushir ul-Haq, a graduate of Islamic Studies at McGill University, who was killed in Kashmir in 1990 for espousing and promoting a more liberal understanding of the nature of Islam.

McDonough begins with a strong statement about the respect with which researchers should approach religious phenomena. It is with this kind of respect that she endeavors to combine Gandhi's many observations about Islam and to discern significant patterns and/or changes in his thought. In disentangling religion from politics in Gandhi's life, McDonough is concerned with his use of religious language as a response to the critical events surrounding his life, paying close attention to the different contexts in which he spoke. By discussing the significance of the Qur'an for Gandhi, McDonough highlights Gandhi's use of religious symbols, modes of religious practice, and education as a means of