

church for peoples seeking to be faithful through the journey of life. Wesley emphasised the importance of the prudential means of grace including through community events such as the love feast but especially through the ongoing meetings in classes designed to bring people to maturity in their faith.

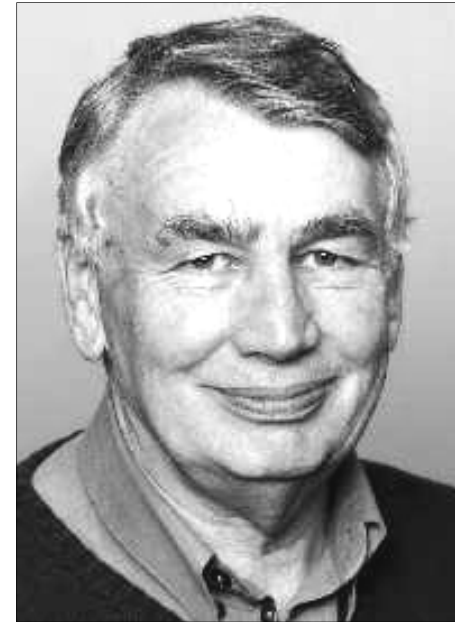
Wesley affirmed that justification was the gift of God but he was aware of the danger that Bonhoeffer referred to in his phrase ‘cheap grace’ Wesley brought justification together with ongoing journey that people shared within the life of the church. This doctrine was important as a counter to the individualism present in Luther ‘missing the social, eschatological and practical nature of God’s righteousness and saving work’ Wesley placed enormous weight on the importance of ‘ecclesiolae in ecclesia’ i.e., the class meetings or groups within the church which were at work helping people to deepen their faith as well as expressing their faith in their commitment within society. Historically the Wesleyans were able to take their faith out into the struggles in the factories and mines in the north of England in ways, which were seen as being transformative.

The tendency in our society is on the one hand to decry the materialism, consumerism and increasingly individualistic nature of the society with its ignorance and intolerance of those that do not wear the marks of success. On the other hand members of the church often do not have the confidence in the alternative to argue for a faith-based approach that might resonate with people aware of many of things wrong with society as it is today. It is this community-based approach that may offer the way forward.

The issues of faith in politics

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This issue is often posed as an issue of personal integrity, personal faith, but politics much more about social choices, policy options and choices. The decisions made in politics are made within an institutional context i.e. through defined processes. Strong stands of individualism present in modern society especially in markets but in politics institutional processes tend to minimize a focus on individuals.

Parliament, parliamentary committees, cabinet govt, political parties, prevailing ideologies that help translate belief systems into political alternative political choices. Of course politics is fundamentally about power and power is shared in various ways in modern governance, Governments enter various forms of public-private partnerships with the non-government sector. As we can see in Victorian utilities in power, transport and water. Government increasingly regulates the non-government sector rather than essential functions through government owned and controlled agencies. In health, education and welfare the government many fund not for profit even for profit agencies to perform services funded by government.

In a pluralistic society governments do not have a monopoly of power: Various forms of power financial, technology and knowledge, communications.

The influence of Christians in politics tends to be subtle and mostly indirect. Of course there are outstanding Christian individuals such Rev Tim Costello, Fr Frank Brennan but for the most part influence that Christians make is simply not recognised.

Churches and Church agencies function some times as pressure groups seeking to protect their interests (Uniting Church on aged care, Catholic Church on education). Churches or communities of faith may form or support pressure groups on so called moral issues such as the treatment of refugees or on issues where there may be a conscience vote such as sexual reproduction issues.

Churches and other communities of faith may establish agencies that enter into partnerships with government to perform various services such as in the case of Uniting Care Connexions, Wesley Mission, St Vincent DePaul, Aged Care Services on behalf of various churches. The majority of funding for most of these agencies comes from government despite the support of churches and fund raising efforts. Despite partnership language the government and churches are not equal partners. This is a very important consideration.

Christians have supported so called Christian or faith based political parties Fred Nile in NSW, Steve Fielding, Senator for Victoria MP representing Family Party (Pentecostalism), The National Civic Council helped to create the DLP a Catholic Action Party. These efforts are controversial and have not

faith, theology.

The issue is not so much he would argue about principles such as liberty and justice as it is about an alternative way of being, of living in the world which challenges the culture to recognize that much of what it values is after all transitory and ephemeral. Hauerwas is more in tune with the thinking of Karl Barth who emphasises the humanity of God and incarnational theology. The challenge of modern theology is to break down the sacred secular divide by creating through the church's life people of integrity, people of character, people of virtue.

'Christianity is mostly a matter of politics, politics as defined by the gospel. The call to be a part of the gospel, the call to be part of this gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a counter cultural phenomenon, a new polis, called the Church'. 'The Church is a concrete form of Christ's continuing presence through the spirit'

For Hauerwas a key issue for the church is its attitude to violence and coercion. It is not difficult in modern society to think of examples of where people are coerced into co-operating against what they would prefer to do. Violence is often present in relationships between men and women an important issue in our culture. Developing participatory structures of decision-making within the church is one way of flagging a very different approach. The core issue of relationships is very much the churches business within congregations as well as in all other communities in which Christians participate.

Hauerwas's ideas draw on a Christian tradition which has its roots both in Luther 's doctrine of justification by faith as well as in Wesley's doctrine of sanctification emphasising the importance of growth and development of development, of life taking the form of journey in which through God's grace one grows in wisdom and understanding of God's love. In Wesley's view it was not only justification the moment of coming to faith that should be understood as the gift of God but together with justification the life long process of living in faith.

The church is at its best Hauerwas argued when people are helping each other to grow in a deeper understanding of Christian faith and the possibility of an alternative way of being in the world. Like Wesley with his class meetings Hauerwas argues for the importance of building the skills in the

their theological perspective. Kung has written on global ethics, which he has pursued through forums such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace or the Parliament of Religions meeting in Melbourne this year.

The Church from time to time makes statements on contemporary issues, which might be grounded in a rigorous interpretative process. It has often been suggested e.g. by John Howard when he was PM that statements made by the Churches on issues such as the 'boat people' issue have little support from lay people in the church. It is important that statements that have been made by the church have been subject to a rigorous process including consultation with church members. However in this broader approach there is an appeal to common understandings present in our culture such as the sense in Australia that disadvantaged people should be given a 'fair go' that is have some call on the support of the general community.

American theologian Stanley Hauerwas has very different approach that understands the church as an alternative polis' or 'political community'. Hauerwas argues that the church is unlikely to achieve very much in influencing society by way of public statements and will do much better if it embodies in its own life the gospel it proclaims. Hauerwas, a pacifist, sees the issue of peace and war as being at the heart of the gospel and by implication all forms of violence as antithetical to a message of peace. However importantly he recognises the challenge the church faces in translating its language and belief into contemporary discourse. In a culture which is increasingly materialist and individualistic, and utilitarian in temper how can you talk about a faith based on very different values. This is for Hauerwas a fundamental challenge for the church to demonstrate in its own life alternative values that reflect the possibility of a society that is very different I ethos to the dominant society and its values. That is unlike the theologians emphasizing correlation Hauerwas does not assume that he can appeal to common understandings already present in the culture. He must appeal much more directly to the core beliefs of the church. In a sense the church itself is important in making it possible to believe in the possibility of an alternative ethic. In a sense Hauerwas tends to see Christian faith as offering a radical alternative, it speaks a very different language. In our discussion at Canterbury the issue was raised of justice for indigenous people. As a member of the congregation made clear to me indigenous people in Australia have a coherent set of beliefs that are reflected in their language thus the importance of bilingual education. Christians in Hauerwas's view similarly have very distinctive views that are reflected in the language of

been enduring in Australia. (Germany has Christian Democrats a Catholic party much more enduring)

Mostly though the influence of faith communities present in people who engage in politics not necessarily parliamentary politics to achieve a particular end. For example the 'peace parsons' of the 1950's (Alf Dickie, Frank Hartley etc) who were opposed to war especially the threat of nuclear war during the so-called cold war. Some times Pacifists nuclear pacifists or possibly just war advocates. Later opposition to the Vietnam War tended to be on just war grounds. Opposition to the second Iraq war largely on 'just war' grounds i.e. the use of disproportionate force.

Christian theologians have grappled with the issue of how to translate Christian principles into political action. An important method used by a number of theologians has been that of 'correlation'. Using this approach involving looking for common ground between the ethical presuppositions we may make as Christians and language being used in the community such as the language of social justice or social inclusion. In Liberation theology an effort is made to link theological insights with the language of freedom, liberation often with links to Marxist theory.

The necessity of using mediating language in secular societies reflects the sense that we are no longer a Christian society. Nevertheless one should not underestimate the extent in which Christianity even in these days of secularisations has been responsible for establishing ethical standards. However politicians often use buzzwords to indentify themselves with values supported by churches such as justice, responsibility, freedom etc. It is important to be more precise.

Ann Wansborough and the 'hermeneutical circle'. Ann a former adviser in the social justice office of the Uniting Church in Sydney gave much attention to the issue of how social justice statements are formed in the Uniting Church. Ann works through a process by which an issue can be analysed taking account of the bible and its contemporary interpretation, theological discussion within the church, as well as empirical evidence to determine the churches approach to a policy or political issue. That is a process the church might go through to formulate a position on a complex policy issue. Reflects the approach of theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Jurgen Moltman, and Hans Kung who work to ground from scripture and tradition the basis of universal ethic that they will interpret on the basis of