

DOI: 10.21847/1728-9343.2021.1(3)243529

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## **THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO STANLEY MARTIN HAUERWAS, WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH AND WALTER BRUEGGEMANN**

In the context of the fragmented and multiple theological discourse of postmodernism, one of the important themes that unites modern theologians and political theologians in particular is the theme of the Church. However, it is not about the Church in general, but about those special features and dimensions that have been forgotten or lost in the modern era. Primarily, it is related to the political dimension of the Christian community, which has become the subject of research by representatives of various theological schools.

This article is devoted to the theological analysis of the ecclesiology of three prominent contemporary theologians: Stanley Hauerwas, William Cavanaugh and Walter Brueggemann. Each of them, despite belonging to different schools, different areas of interest and church affiliation, addresses the topic of the political nature of the Church in search of a constructive response to current challenges. According to Hauerwas, there should be a restoration of the vision of the Christian community as an alternative to the world in which it is located. For Hauerwas, the Church is not only a community, one of many, but a polis, which challenges both modern empires and dominant ideologies. This is exactly what William Cavanaugh is talking about, when he emphasizes that the Church's tragic loss of its own political dimension has led to the "migrations of the Holy" and the sacralization of ideologies and power structures. At the same time, Walter Brueggemann writes Church's prophetic authority and practical capability to resist the "royal consciousness", which manifests itself in the demonstration of strength and power, as an important feature of the Church.

**Key words:** church, polis, ecclesiocentrism, Stanley Hauerwas, William Cavanaugh, Walter Brueggemann.

### **Introduction**

After a long history of domination, the theological discourse of modernism has largely declined in the midst of ruins brought by terrible world wars of the twentieth century. However, the last decades of the past century have demonstrated a real multiplicity of theological discourses. Cyril Hovorun describes the new postmodern paradigm as "recognition of plurality". This paradigm is characterized by a special ecclesiocentrism, which is expressed in the appreciation of community and the emphasis on narrative in discovering one's own authenticity and identity (Hovorun, 2016: 138). He agrees with Gerard Mannion in describing postmodernity as a new openness of the church to the diversity within it and outside of it, epistemic humility, and a commitment to dialogue (Hovorun, 2016: 138). The view of the church as the center forms new motifs that appear in political theology today. At the same time, tangible changes have also affected the realm of political theology, leading to a revision of established ecclesiological descriptions. The shift that has taken place in recent decades in political theology aimed to change the perspective, objectives, and key themes of research that have occupied the attention of many influential theologians of the twentieth century for a long time. Thus, according to the typology proposed by William Cavanaugh

and Peter Scott, we should distinguish three main currents in political theology (Cavanaugh, Scott, 2019: 4).

The first type involves understanding theology and politics as two separate and distinct areas. Thus, the researcher's task is to explore the nature of their connection and to find ways to bring these spheres together, while taking into account their autonomy. The second type presents the vision of theology as a certain superstructure in relation to the material political and economic basis. From this perspective, the theologian's task is to find formulations that allow the transfer of meanings from one sphere to another. The specific feature of the third type, which will be the focus of this study, is the understanding of politics and theology as similar areas that compete in shaping the pictures of the world. The task of theology in this case is to criticize the "false" pictures of the world, as well as to oppose attempts to construct a "secular" politics. Such competition creates a "war of narratives" and the deconstruction of any attempt to sacralize a state or a particular ideology. In this case, the locus of influence is no longer the secular space outside the church, but the church itself. Special significance is given to political dimension of the church. The new political theology associated with theologians such as Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle was concerned with the application of theology to politics. At the same time,

such theologians as John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, William Cavanaugh, Oliver O'Donovan, N. T. Wright and Walter Brueggemann see their task as the return to the political dimension of the church itself.

The above-mentioned researchers have offered the important concepts such as the Church as the people of God, the political dimension of the Christian community, which is embedded in the concept of ecclesia, as well as the concept of polis, used for the description of the critically important attributes of the Church. According to the proponents of this approach, today we see not simply an ecclesiological resentment in response to the challenge of post-secular society, but the return of an important dimension of the Early Church that was lost in the modern era due to dramatic shifts in the past. However, the movement in this direction provokes mixed reactions and responses from biblical exegetes, who criticize the excessive and even unbiblical, in their opinion, emphasis on understanding the Church as a polis, as well as the consequences of this new wave of politicization of the Church and its growing role in modern political context.

### Methods

In the light of the above-mentioned perspective we will analyze key works of three contemporary theologians, who, at first glance, belong to diametrically opposed camps, given their church affiliation and the area of theological interest. We will look at the works of Walter Brueggemann, William Cavanaugh and Stanley Hauerwas. The return to the political dimension of the church has become an important research topic for foreign and Ukrainian scholars such as S. Larson, R. Bell, S. Grenz and R. Olson, as well as R. Soloviy, C. Hovorun, M. Cherenkov, Y. Chornomorets, A. Denisenko, P. Shevchuk and others.

The goal of this article is to review and analyze the key statements of these theologians regarding the political dimension of the Church, as well as to examine how the visions of Brueggemann, Cavanaugh and Hauerwas complement each other constituting a new image of the church, offer space for imagination and invite to cooperation.

### Results and Discussions

#### Stanley Hauerwas: Church as polis.

One of the first studies of the concept of the church as a polis, in particular in the theology of Stanley Hauerwas, belongs to the Swedish author Arne Rasmusson, who made a comparative study of key ideas of Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas. Political theology for Rasmusson is an "attempt to positively meet the challenges of modernity, characterized by industrialization, urbanization, science, technology, market economy and a growing state and its various ideological backbones in liberalism and socialism, with their common beliefs in progress and in politics as a mean for consciously forming the future" (Rasmusson, 1995: 11). Thus, political theology acts as a mediator between the Christian tradition and modern society. Carrying out the comparative analysis, Rasmusson points to the commonalities as well as to the contrasts of ideas of two prominent theologians. While he calls Moltmann's approach "political theology", Hauerwas' work he views as theological politics. Theological politics studies the Church as a polis, or civitas, constituted by "a new reality of the Kingdom of God that reveals itself in the life of Jesus. This approach makes the history of the church a

counter-history, where the primary locus of politics is the church itself, and it requires a great understanding of the nature of politics" (Rasmusson, 1995: 187-188).

Stanley Hauerwas' works attract their reader through offering ideas about an important ecclesiological problem, namely, what it means to be the Church in the post-secular space. In his work *Resident Aliens* the author emphasizes the otherness of the Church since the Church and its narrative create a unique foundation on which Christian life and ministry are built. Thus, Hauerwas calls for a rethinking of the Church, which is not just a community with its special interests or a community separated from the world. On the contrary, the Church today is a visible, different and full of life community, which is the embodiment and fulfilment of God's story. The political dimension is an inseparable dimension of the Church. Yet, Christian community's fulfillment of its own mission does not take place in a vacuum. The theologian states the inevitability of a conflict (though the author affiliates himself with the proponents of pacifism) in light of constant clashes of competing ideologies.

Thus, the goals of Hauerwas' research correspond to the greatest challenge for the Church today, which is the liberal political ideology dominant in the West. However, the actual threat is not so much the ideology itself, but its influence on the Church. Christian communities were not prepared to face such a challenge. The Church has not shown resilience in being an alternative community that fosters unity. Instead, it has become a space of battle of different political ideologies. The mistakenness of this path is confirmed by the loss of unity and the decrease of Church's influence in the public space.

Another set of problems is related to the perception of the Church by the society. A pluralistic liberal society views the Church as a particular community devoid of universality, the very existence of which does not correspond to the context defined by globalization and multiculturalism. However, due to the impossibility of complete elimination of religion, a society emphasizes the need to reduce the role of religion to personal beliefs and convictions. Apparently, in such circumstances the Church loses its own political agenda, becoming dependent on the politics of the state, while its initial task was to become an alternative community in civil society. There is a danger of losing Church's mission by paying too much attention to the prevailing concepts and trends in the general culture.

While liberal theologians try to connect Christian teaching with the task of shaping modern culture (R. Niebuhr), Hauerwas remains skeptical regarding such a possibility. Such a task is impossible without "demythologization" of the Christian faith and adaptation of the Church to modern cultural patterns. Isn't this a reason why liberal theology pays so little attention to ecclesiology since the concept of the Church becomes superfluous in the midst of the "transcendent" and modern culture?

The rejection of liberalism in the church, where worship is associated with social reform or "improvement of society" on the one hand, and criticism of the conversionism of the contemporary church, especially among Evangelicals, prompts Hauerwas to pay considerable attention to building his own ecclesiastical vision.

The type of church that is close to the theologian's vision is the Confessional church, which is not just a synthesis of "all the best," nor a successful compromise, but rather is a radical alternative to modern society. Such a church demonstrates fidelity to Christ, values community,

and pays considerable attention to shaping the character and skills necessary for an authentic Christian life. Therefore, in the context of postmodern fragmentation, Hauerwas suggests focusing on the call for Christian authenticity, which in turn promotes the visibility of the community in public arena. He views rejection of falsehood to be the most important task of Christian ethics.

The purpose of the Church as a community is to worship Christ. The Confessional church calls people not only to conversion, but also to participation in adventure of building an alternative polis, a countercultural social "organism" called the Church. Such a community influences society just by being the Church, by being what the world is not and is not able to become. Only under such conditions does the Church act as a *koinonia*, a polis, and a sacrament at the same time. Such dynamics is described more in the works of William Cavanaugh.

#### **William T. Cavanaugh: Church and Theopolitical Imagination.**

William Cavanaugh addresses the theme of the Church in several of his key works. One of the important presuppositions of this Catholic theologian is that today the state can no longer act as a guarantor of the common good, which is the goal and center of any politics. Thus, according to Cavanaugh, the modern concept of the nation-state is the result of modern political thought, which in turn is based on the myth of religious violence and the need to have an "independent" and universal arbiter for sake of future peace.

Because of such dramatic changes, there was a significant shift, which the author aptly calls "migrations of the holy." By this he means the endowment of political power with sacred attributes. Thus, according to William Cavanaugh, the challenge to the contemporary church is not the loss of public authority or the growth of distrust, but the transfer of the sacred in favor of the state.

The modern state, according to Cavanaugh, is sacralized in many ways, including war and the heroization of its victims, the myth of religious violence and the need for state intervention as a universal arbiter, etc. At the same time, arguments that strengthen the sanctity of power are, perhaps, part of the greatest falsification of modern times.

The task of the Church at all times is to be an eschatological community that proclaims the end of any kingdom and the beginning of God's rule as the only one that has no limits. Because of these things, it is easy to see that the task of the church becomes political, since it expresses itself in the imagination of a common future, which is radically different from the painful delusions of modern empires. The political imagination becomes part of the ecclesiological space, whose ultimate goal is the rule of God, not of man. However, according to the author, today some churches only occasionally dare to oppose secular politics, which increasingly resemble a pseudo-religious cult that attracts more and more attention to itself, promising a bright future.

According to William Cavanaugh, such "migration of the holy" can be explained by the understanding of secular and ecclesiastical history as two distinct processes. While the politics of the nation-state is perceived as universal and is applied to all citizens regardless of their race, religion, etc., the Church acts as an association, one of many, which consists only of citizens loyal to her. Thus, to consider the Church as the primary locus of politics means to build it on particular, sectarian presupposi-

tions. The problem is that the Church does not perceive itself as a political community, although together with other organizations and communities, it does contribute to the common political life.

Such an understanding, however, pushes the Church to the margins in the formation of the current agenda and leaves political theology in the realm of abstract ideas. Therefore, according to Cavanaugh, the new theological understanding should put an end to the political marginalization of the Church. To do this, we must recognize the narrative nature of the Christian faith, because there is no politics separate from the history of salvation, and the Church, in turn, is inseparable from this history.

Referring to the narrative of Scripture, Cavanaugh argues that Israel and the Church are political entities in the general sense of the term, who "give order through law and ritual to the social life and everyday practices of a distinctive community of people" (Cavanaugh, 2011: 124). The unwillingness to see the Church as something more than a gathering of individuals for obtaining salvation destroys the theological foundation of the political nature of God's people.

However, Cavanaugh notes, "in the biblical witness, however, salvation is inherently social" (Cavanaugh, 2011: 124). At the same time, the deliverance of God's people has a history that unfolds in historical time before the eyes of other nations as public event. The "story of salvation takes flesh on a public stage and interacts with pharaohs, kings, and ceasars".

This understanding of the history of salvation relates not only to the past but also to the eschatological future. The narrative of Scripture demonstrates that the promise of a new heaven and a new earth does not limit our understanding of salvation to the salvation of individuals. The future is presented as the Kingdom and as a new city, Jerusalem. The center of this history is the people of God embodying the drama of the Fall and salvation in the world.

Such perspective, according to Cavanaugh, contributes to a more holistic view of Scripture and tradition, and includes the witness of both Old and New Testaments. The political significance of the church should not be dictated by sociology, for this is first and foremost a theological concept revealed in Scripture. The central concepts of the political life of God's people, according to Cavanaugh, are the concepts of covenant, liturgy and law, which regulate social life and daily practices.

Thus, the Church having adopted such a model from the synagogue, began to use the term *ekklesia* to denote the special political status of God's people. This term referred to the gathering of all who had citizenship rights in a Greek polis. Therefore, the Church is something more than a *koinonia*. It is not just a part of the whole, but it is the whole. Its interests are not particular, but universal. Such Church accepts and contains in itself the destiny of the whole world.

Moreover, in the New Testament, especially in the epistles of apostle Paul, we see how the concept of citizenship is used to describe membership (Eph. 2.19, Phil. 3.20). Such citizenship is available to those who are excluded from such status in a polis, namely, women, children and slaves. In this context, baptism and the Eucharist became the fulfillment of a ritual law, and the liturgy is a reminder of the opposition of Christ and the powers of this world. Therefore, according to Cavanaugh, it is

not surprising that the empire viewed the church as a political threat, because such practices undermined the system and the order of Rome.

Indeed, historical research shows that in the worldview of the early Christians, their loyalty to Christ conflicted with loyalty to Caesar. Thus, N. T. Wright notes that Christians did not try to protect themselves from persecution by stating that they were only a private club that expressed certain private interests. They continued to proclaim the kingdom of Christ, even when it contradicted the kingdom of Caesar. Although such a kingdom is not of this world, it is deeply connected with it.

#### **Walter Brueggemann: The Church and the Prophetic Imagination.**

Among works of modern theologians and Old Testament scholars, a special place is occupied by the political theology of Walter Brueggemann. In his work *Prophetic Imagination*, the author explores special relationship between the sacred and the political, the opposition of political power and prophetic authority, using example of kings and prophets. According to the key statement of the scholar, the royal power realizes itself in the pursuit of its own totality and absolutization as it promises stability and prosperity, which inevitably creates conflicts with the imagination of the prophets, who proclaimed fidelity to the One God and called people to repentance.

According to Brueggemann, the study of the Old Testament political theology is difficult due to the problem of historicity and the presence of ideological constructs in Scripture narratives. Brueggemann argues that Israel's political life was not unique among other political communities in the Ancient Near East. Ancient Israel shared a common historical space with its neighbors, borrowing, influencing, and at the same time developing its own institutions. However, it is possible to identify three specific political challenges of Israel expressed in controversy and struggle.

First, these was a long-term struggle between the central political power, the monarchy, and the local power of princes and elders. Secondly, these was a problematic issue of access to resources and public goods by the urban elite (the wealthy) and politically marginalized peasants, which reached its highest point during the reign of King Solomon. Thirdly, we see the desperate struggle for state autonomy in the face of growing pressure from empires, in order to avoid occupation and complete destruction.

The answer to such challenges, according to Brueggemann, was the formation of a specific theological imagination of Israel, which aimed to reform and, above all, to describe the political reality in new terms. The concepts of the Law, covenant and worship have become important political concepts. Thus, according to Walter Brueggemann: "Deuteronomy offers covenant as a radical and systemic alternative to the politics of autonomy, the economics of exploitation, and the theology of self-indulgence" (Budde, 2000: 48). The desecularization and secularization of the political system is an urgent task. In other words, the community of God's people should not passively occupy the allotted place in the public space, but remain visible in the political and economic spheres.

The revision of political ideals and the need for reform led to new practices, especially in the ministry of the prophets. For example, in the preaching of the prophets, in response to the guarantees of royal power, such practices as lament, repentance, and prayer take on political

significance. The power of force must give way to acknowledging one's own weakness and vulnerability. Thus, the words of kings and prophets reveal their deep inner irreconcilability.

According to Brueggemann, the Church even today stands before the choice of "either-or". The Christian community must recognize that we live in a time when the imperial language of power, stability, and prosperity is incompatible with the need to acknowledge own guilt and weakness. However, such tasks require determination, courage and a willingness to take responsibility. Today the courage of the Christian community should be manifested in the proclamation of the vision for the socio-political problems of our time, as we see it in the ministry of the prophets.

#### **Conclusions**

Having considered the political ecclesiology of Hauerwas, Cavanaugh and Brueggemann, we can note the common contours that constitute their new vision of the church. First of all, this understanding of the church has a holistic character that overcomes modern and popular ecclesiological reductions. The church in this perspective contains various dimensions: sacred, koinonic, economic and political.

While Hauerwas offers a vision of the church as an alternative community, and Brueggemann emphasizes its prophetic authority, Cavanaugh calls on the Christian community to return the political to the sacred space, pointing to the danger of sacralization of power and secular politics.

The task of these scholars is not to demonstrate the most optimal model of the church. It is also a mistake to think that such ecclesiocentrism is endowing the church with a special attribute of infallibility. Rather, they say that any assimilation to the dominant culture leads to the loss of visibility of the church, and hence the loss of its authenticity.

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### **ПОЛІТИЧНА ПРИРОДА ЦЕРКВИ ЗА СТЕНЛІ ГАУЕРВАСОМ, ВІЛЬЯМОМ КАВАНО ТА ВОЛТЕРОМ БРЮГГЕМАНОМ**

У контексті фрагментованого та множинного богословського дискурсу постмодерності однією з важливих тем, що об'єднує сучасних богословів та політичних теологів зокрема, є тема церкви. Однак йдеться не про церкву взагалі, але про ті особливі риси та виміри, які було забуто, або ж втрачено в епоху модерну. Насамперед це стосується політичного виміру християнської спільноти, що стало предметом дослідження представниками різноманітних богословських напрямів та конфесій.

Ця стаття присвячена теологічному аналізу еклезіології трьох видатних богословів сучасності: С. Гауерваса, В. Кавано та В. Брюггемана. Усі вони, попри належність до різних шкіл, сфер інтересів та церков звертаються до теми політичної природи церкви у пошуку конструктивної відповіді на актуальні виклики сьогодення. Так, на думку С. Гауерваса слід відновити бачення християнської спільноти як альтернативи до світу, в якому вона знаходиться. Церква для Гауерваса не лише становить собою громаду, одну із багатьох, але поліс, який є викликом і сучасним імперіям, і панівним ідеологіям. Саме про це йдеться у роботі В. Кавано, який наголошує на тому, що трагічна втрата церквою власного політичного виміру призвела до "міграції священного" та сакралізації ідеологій та владних структур. Водночас В. Брюггеман вбачає важливою особливістю церкви її пророчий авторитет та практичну здатність протистояти "царській свідомості", що проявляє себе у демонстрації сили та влади, та пропонує нездійсненні обітниці миру, стабільності та безпеки.

*Ключові слова:* церква, поліс, еклезіоцентризм, С. Гауервас, В. Кавано, В. Брюггеман.

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Надійшла до редакції: 27.09.2021

Прийнята до друку: 12.10.2021