ABSTRACT
Gary Dorrien, Stanley Hauerwas, Rowan Williams, and the Theological Transformations of Sovereignties

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Christianity’s political voice in US society is often situated within a simplistic binary of social justice versus faithfulness. Gary Dorrien and Stanley Hauerwas, respectively, represent the two sides of the binary in their work. Although the justice-faithfulness narrative is an important point of disagreement, it has also created a categorical impasse that does not reflect the full depth and complexity of either Dorrien’s or Hauerwas’s work. Their concerns for both justice and faithfulness differ only in part because of their different responses to liberalism and liberal theology. Under all those issues are rival accounts of relational truth that indicate divergent understandings of reality. At the heart of Dorrien’s and Hauerwas’s theologies and differences are the issues of God’s sovereign agency and humanity’s subjectivity and agency. Dorrien emphasizes love, divine Spirit, human spirit, and freedom for flourishing. Hauerwas stresses gift, triune creator, human creaturehood, and flourishing in friendship. Those divergent positions issue forth in rival responses to political sovereignty. Dorrien’s panentheistic monism is integrated with the modern nation-state’s sovereignty. Hauerwas rejects the state’s hegemonic sovereignty as an attempt at autonomy that aspires to rival God’s sovereignty and reject God’s gifts.

While Dorrien’s and Hauerwas’s discussion might then appear at an impasse, it can be opened and developed in reference to Rowan Williams’s horizon. Although his political work overlaps with much in Dorrien’s and Hauerwas’s positions, Williams goes beyond them by calling for the transformation of the modern nation-state’s sovereignty and by supplying a vision of it transformed. Williams’s advance opens Dorrien’s and Hauerwas’s disagreement by freeing them from their common assumption, the permanence of state sovereignty. Williams’s political horizon is underwritten by his theological horizon, which fuses love and gift within triune mutuality and plenitude. This account offers critical help to issues that Dorrien and Hauerwas find problematic in each other’s position. Such development thereby opens the possibility of a fresh and fruitful discussion. Therefore, Williams’s work offers important help for Dorrien and Hauerwas to address the heart of their disagreement over divine and political sovereignty, and human subjectivity and agency.