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## Review: Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony, by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon

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## Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony, by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon

Review by Dylan Parson

It may seem unusual, two and a half decades on, to review a book written in 1989. Perhaps so. But *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon's seminal work, directly and poignantly corresponds to themes that have emerged in present-day theological dialogue. Particularly, Hauerwas and Willimon paint an ecclesiology that both agrees with and dissents from contemporary theologies of Empire. For this reason, the book should absolutely be revisited today. Pushing back against a deeply entrenched Constantinian Christianity, Hauerwas and Willimon have crafted, without using these terms, a counter-imperial theology that they consider to accurately reflect the historical Jesus Christ. They sharply critique the American church, which has utterly failed to be the prophetic alternative and reflects the world at large rather than transforming it.

They call on the church to not simply be countercultural, but to exist as a counterculture in itself, in the midst of and in direct opposition to what would, by today's theologians, be called the totalizing force of empire. The church in America today is "the dull exponent of conventional secular political ideas with a vaguely religious tint," a product of a Christendom that is losing momentum, allowing Christianity to take on its insurgent character again. To "be the church," a phrase the authors write over and over again, requires the church to tell and live the story of Jesus Christ, and they emphasize this with a zeal similar to that of James Cone or Richard Horsley. Though Hauerwas and Willimon are obviously not popularly considered radicals- the former a professor at Duke Divinity and the latter a bishop in the thoroughly mainline United Methodist Church- they posit a revolutionary stance for the church, which dispenses with "bourgeois virtues such as tolerance, open-mindedness, and inclusiveness (which the revolutionary knows are usually cover-ups that allow the powerful to maintain social equilibrium)."

*Resident Aliens*, a quarter-century on, remains a powerful book for those who grapple with the purpose of the Christian community amidst society at large, and it speaks just as powerfully to our time as to 1989. Though written for a popular audience, it cannot be overlooked. Hauerwas and Willimon face head-on the apostasy of Christendom and church grafted into empire, and chart a truer way forward to the radical way of Jesus Christ and those who followed him: a revolutionary community of love and hope.