

In the Aftermath, edited by James Taylor

reviewed by [Wayne A. Holst](#) in the [September 11, 2002](#) issue

Stanley Hauerwas does not believe that the people who died on September 11 "deserved" their deaths for the sins of greedy, capitalistic America. He does not think that we should see in that horrible event the direct hand of God. He believes, rather, that as Christians we have been lazy in our thinking and teaching. We have not helped each other to name how our lives are caught in modes of living in what St. Augustine identified with the City of Man at the time of the fall of Rome. "We have allowed God to be relegated to the realm of the 'personal,'" he says. "As a result, we have no way to narrate America in the way Augustine narrated Rome."

In other words, we are not yet ready to develop an adequate theological understanding of what happened in New York on that fateful morning a year ago.

Hauerwas is right. But the ten essays in this book are a helpful beginning in coming to terms with what happened on that pivotal day. James Taylor marshals the insights of Canadians Lois Wilson (a senator), Derek Evans (former deputy secretary general of Amnesty International), Bill Phipps (former United Church of Canada moderator) and Nancy Reeves (a psychologist at the University of Victoria). Besides including Hauerwas, Taylor offers contributions by Americans William Willimon, Walter Wink, Jim Wallis and Keith Wright, a pastor and author from Austin, Texas.

Each writer speaks out of her or his perspective, but there are certain shared insights. Coming through frequently is the message that the event demands not scapegoating or handwringing but "Lincolnesque self-examination" in the spirit of the president who called his nation to a deeper understanding of the causes of the crises of his day. "I am coming to believe that this tragedy could either become a doorway to transformation-or could set us back for years," says Wallis, echoing others.

"Who gets to name what is going on, to say what is real?" asks Willimon. "Through what lens do we look at the world?"

Wilson does not believe that September 11 really changed things much. Many know that the world has always been subject to betrayal, despair, terrorism, suffering, violence and death. "What has changed" she says, "is the increased polarization between north and south, and between Christians and Muslims."

"We need pastors, theologians, and informed lay people who are willing to challenge the exclusivity that has dominated [the Christian] faith for centuries," says Wright, who agrees with Muslim journalist Mona Ettahawy that this is a time for across-the-board introspection, not vengefulness, on the part of adherents of all the great religions.