Global Citizens:

The Perspective of a Christian Citizen

My portrait is considerably blurrier than it was at the beginning of the semester. It hasn’t been defaced – I’m not having a crisis of faith or major epistemological doubt. I am simply looking for tools of refinement; I’m mulling. I know God is both love and mighty, universal and personal, relational and incomprehensible. I know I want to serve like God and bring glory to His name. I don’t know exactly how that looks in a practical way.

This semester I’ve been introduced to ideas I’ve never had to consider before. Being a Christian doesn’t involve something as extreme as pacifism, does it? I was struck by Stanley Hauerwas’ comment, “I would not be a pacifist if I were not Christian, and I find it hard to understand how one can be a Christian without being a pacifist” (425). I know there’s a dichotomy, or at least a tension, between being a Christian citizen and a worldly citizen. But Christians, nevertheless, live in the world and are thus somewhat bound by its standards and realities. At the same time, Christians are called to the “unattainable,” to what Hauerwas defines as “holiness” (432). As Jesus commands during the Sermon on the Mount, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5.48). It seems I’m on a perpetual search to find out how all these concepts work together.
I think Hauerwas, however, hit the nail on the head when he identified holiness as the key to a Christian’s calling. I believe holiness is necessary for building a more peaceful world. It is important to note that holiness will not eradicate wickedness in this current world. Hauerwas explains, “Christian nonviolence is not a strategy to rid the world of violence, but rather the way Christians must live in a world of violence” (427). Christians are called to trust that, ultimately, God will reign supreme over sin and violence on this earth, but for now, we are to be holy and *set apart.* The Bible places peacefulness and holiness side by side. “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord,” reveals Hebrews 12.14. Holiness is vital because, through holiness, we are reflections of Jesus Christ.

Holiness is further necessary as a contrast to worldliness. From the readings, it is evident that the ways of the world are simply not working. Rowan Williams describes how all too often the people of the world speak to each other in the language of violence. Hauerwas speaks of how war has become a “normalizing discourse” (426). Each reading also contains a desire for change. Williams implores, “It is about trying to act so that something might possibly change, as opposed to acting so as to persuade ourselves we’re not powerless” (270). Wendell Berry calls for a total transformation of the global economy. Peter Ochs describes how September 11\textsuperscript{th}, as an “event,” cannot “be mended without significant changes or reforms in our fundamental institutions” (393). If Mahatma Gandhi’s mantra, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world,” is true, then Christians are called to be holy.

The question still remains of what holiness looks like in practice. As humans, holiness will not be practiced perfectly. As Hauerwas points out, “Christians are acutely
aware that we seldom are faithful to the gifts God has given us, but we hope the
collection of our sins is a sign of hope in a world without hope” (432). But however
difficult, holiness involves a negation of our sinful and human desires. If our inclination
is to be proud, be humble. If we first think of revenge, think instead of reconciliation. If
we find ourselves dwelling on our own suffering, instead reach out to others in
compassion. Even small acts of holiness will stand out in a violent, sinful world. My
prayer is that the Lord will help me to recognize my worldly impulses and teach me how
to be holy. I cannot be holy on my own.

As a student, being holy will involve a radical change. It could entail carefully
watching the words I choose. It could necessitate befriending people I would normally
choose as friends. It could mean spending more time on an assignment to truly reflect on
what God is teaching me. Ultimately, it involves purposeful, compassionate living.
Thus, my portrait, in which I find my identity in Christ, has not really changed. The
concept that God’s been instilling within me this semester is patience, and the ability to
wait. My portrait is blurry, but I fully trust the One in whom I shape my identity.