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Bradley B. Burroughs Date

Christianity, Politics, and the Predicament of Evil:
A Constructive Theological Ethic of Soulcraft and Statecraft

By

Bradley B. Burroughs
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
Ethics and Society

____

Timothy P. Jackson, Ph.D.
Advisor

____

Elizabeth Bounds, Ph.D.
Committee Member

____

Noel Erskine, Ph.D.
Committee Member

____

Ellen Ott Marshall, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

____

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

____

Date

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By

Bradley B. Burroughs
B.A., Allegheny College, 2002
M.Div., Duke University Divinity School, 2006

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An abstract of
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James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Christianity, Politics, and the Predicament of Evil:
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By Bradley B. Burroughs

The tectonic forces exerted by two contrasting yet highly influential conceptions of politics have decisively shaped the field of Christian political ethics. The first of these conceptions, exemplified in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, construes politics as primarily an exercise in statecraft that seeks to leverage the power of government to secure the greatest possible order and justice for society as a whole. In contrast, a second conception, most prominently articulated by Stanley Hauerwas, maintains that politics properly so called concerns itself with the cultivation of virtue; consequently, it finds not the "well-ordered state" but the church to be the exemplar of politics. Fundamentally at odds over the meaning, ends, and institutional settings of politics, these two conceptions have created a defining divide in the field.

This project seeks to illuminate this divide and to redevelop the conceptual space between politics-as-statecraft and politics-as-soulcraft by reconceiving politics within a theological framework that understands neither the well-ordered state nor the faithful church but the eschatological City of God to be the paradigm of politics. At the same time, it forthrightly argues that the Christian faith demands that we realistically recognize that, in its present state of existence, the world is ensnared in what I call "the predicament of evil." Characterized by the corruption of individual wills and social structures, this predicament precludes human beings from building the City of God in this world. Analyzing, criticizing, and drawing resources from both Niebuhr and Hauerwas, as well as looking beyond to Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and others, this dissertation seeks to specify the respective roles of soulcraft and statecraft in a theological ethic of politics that is capable of guiding Christians as they witness to God's eschatological intention to establish the City of God in a world that is currently mired in the predicament of evil.

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Although the work of writing a dissertation can at times feel lonely, no one does it alone. In my case, I have had the benefit of mentors, colleagues, and companions who have inspired, encouraged, supported, and challenged me as I have moved through the various stages of this project. Most noticeably when I consider the project itself, I am struck by how profoundly it has benefitted from the diligent work of my committee, who have helped me to clarify my thoughts, refine my arguments, and push through the numerous obstacles at which I was tempted to give up.

Dr. Timothy P. Jackson deserves the highest praise I can offer. Not only did he not recoil in horror when I proposed a topic so ambitious, but he helped me to focus it into a coherent argument. His detailed and timely comments on my drafts were tremendous aids both to my argumentation and my diction. Even though he did not always agree with what I was saying, Dr. Jackson continually challenged me to say it better. And when I might have limited myself to exposition, he spurred me to "stand and deliver" that I might speak more clearly in my own normative voice. Those who know Tim's work know that it concentrates above all upon the prime place of *agape* in the Christian life. Knowing Tim as an advisor, I know that *agape* is a virtue that has profoundly shaped not just his writing but his life and his academic practice. He brings both a passion and a compassion that are too often absent in the academy. Unquestionably, all of the vices that remain in this project are my own; but many of its virtues have come as the result of the careful attention that Tim has given to it.

Dr. Elizabeth Bounds is a uniquely gifted human being that brings together two qualities so routinely disjoined—intellectual rigor and practical sensibility. The idea that evolved into this project began in a course that I took with Liz on Twentieth Century Christian Social Ethics. From that point to this, she has continually poked and prodded the argument, helping me to identify its weaknesses. But she has also offered immensely helpful, practical advice about how to address those and strengthen this project in order that I might "get it done."

Dr. Noel Erskine has taught me a great deal about the importance of community in Christian thought and how entering into community with the poor and oppressed should transfigure the way we think and the way we live. It was in extended sessions poring over Dietrich Bonhoeffer's works with him that I began to see that both Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr., exemplified the sort of political ethic I try to elaborate here.

Dr. Ellen Ott Marshall arrived in Atlanta just as I was leaving, which means I never enjoyed the privilege of having her as a teacher. But I have tremendously enjoyed having her as a committee member. Not only did she bring a deep knowledge of the Reinhold Niebuhr and Stanley Hauerwas but she also pushed me to entertain modes of theological and ethical thought that I might not have otherwise.

All of the members of my committee are on faculty in Emory University's Graduate Division of Religion (GDR), to which I also owe a debt of gratitude. The five years of generous funding that the GDR furnished gave me the extraordinary opportunity to study, think, and teach. And the GDR also provided me with an amazingly talented coterie of teachers and colleagues whose gifts are reflected in my work. In addition to my committee members, this project has also been deeply shaped by Dr. Steven Tipton, Dr. Jon Gunnemann, and the late Dr. Nancy Eiseland. Among my fellow students, Matthew Flemming and John Senior merit special mention. Both command a breadth and depth of knowledge of which I stand in awe (and envy). And both complement this with a humility and hospitality that is even more admirable. Conversations with them were vital to clarifying

the argument that I make in these pages and also to assuring me that I had something worth saying. And the hospitality that they and their families offered after I moved from Atlanta eased the burdens of that transition. Thus, in addition to Matt and John, I would like to thank their wives, Mandy Flemming and Raegan Dalbo. Other students in the GDR were also critical conversation partners, especially AnneMarie Mingo, Nikki Young, Letitia Campbell, Darryl Roberts, Amy Levad, Dan Cantey, and Amy DeBaets.

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Perhaps my greatest blessing in Durham was finding Asbury Temple United Methodist Church, which graciously welcomed my wife and me. There I got to know Rev. Shane Benjamin, a passionate and inspiring preacher and a trenchant thinker, and also met a number of others who were passionate about the issues that are at the heart of this dissertation, including Tyler and Crystal Hambley, Derek Kubilus, Toby Bonar, Ryan Parker, and Brandy Daniels. It was also at Asbury Temple that I first encountered Peter Brewton and Jennifer Hayes, who would become wonderful friends.

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No list of acknowledgements would be complete without mention of my parents, Mark and Cindy Burroughs. My father loaded trucks for a living and my mother drives school bus, and from them I learned the kind of hard work without which I would have never completed this dissertation. In addition to teaching me to work hard, my parents both helped to awaken the concerns that are at the core of the argument that I make here. Week in and week out my mother dutifully corralled my brother, sister, and me and brought us to church. And I remember as a young child sitting each night with my father in his chair as he read his newspaper. Together they taught me to be passionate about God and passionate about justice. If my work succeeds in holding the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, it is because my parents taught me to do so.

Finally, my wife Presian has contributed incalculably to this project and to the betterment of my life as a whole. After eight years together, it is rarely easy to separate which thoughts originally belonged to me and which to her. But I know that there is much of her influence in these pages. She has been a constant and sympathetic partner who listened to me talk through my arguments and who endured more complaining and expressions of self-doubt than a person should have to. In all of these ways and in many others that define the rest of our lives together, she has given me great gifts. Yet none is so great or so precious as our son, Justus. It is to him that I dedicate this project.

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INTRODUCTION

POLITICS, THE CITY OF GOD, THE STATE, AND THE SOUL

Despite the frequency with which it is employed and the air of self-evidence that typically attends its invocation, especially in contemporary discourse "politics" is a highly ambiguous word. A major reason for this ambiguity is that it is fundamentally a relative term that can refer to any number of different polities, as displayed, for instance, when people talk about "American politics" in contrast to "Iranian politics" or "local politics" as opposed to "national politics." Making its meaning even more convoluted, we live in a context that since the mid-nineteenth century has experienced what Sheldon Wolin identifies as a "diffusion of the political," in which "politics" has been increasingly used to describe the dynamics of previously "private" organizations, such as corporations, trade unions, and universities.[1] Now even youth soccer teams are "political"!

Perhaps unsurprisingly given this semantic expansion, over the course of the last century it has become commonplace for theologians and ethicists to claim that the Christian faith is political or possesses vital political dimensions. The fact that thinkers from diverse intellectual camps converge on such confessions can create the impression that they share significant common ground; in fact, however, that appearance masks the fact that such

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[1] Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 316.

thinkers diverge greatly over exactly what they believe such claims mean.[2] Appreciating the ambiguity of "politics" thus allows us to perceive that in the field of contemporary Christian political ethics a crucial divide is, at least in part, a dispute about the very meaning of "politics."

Particularly in the United States, the tectonic forces exerted by two contrasting conceptions of politics have decisively shaped the field of Christian political ethics. The first of these conceptions construes politics as primarily an exercise in statecraft that seeks to leverage the power of the government to secure the greatest possible order and justice for society as a whole. In contrast, a second maintains that politics properly so called concerns itself with the cultivation of virtue; consequently, it finds not the "well-ordered state" but the church to be the exemplar of politics. Fundamentally at odds over the meaning, ends, and institutional settings of politics, these two conceptions have created a defining divide in the field. Frequently, the underlying semantic difference goes unacknowledged and advocates of these contrasting conceptions largely talk past one another, perhaps brusquely dismissing the significance of the other along the way by declaring it to be symptomatic of either "sectarianism" or "Constantinianism," as the case may be. More seldom, this difference is forthrightly acknowledged, directing light upon the fractured state of the field and the status of "politics" as a profoundly contested concept. One goal of this project is to shine such a light, exploring the divergences between these two influential conceptions by considering the political thought of their most prominent contemporary representatives, Reinhold Niebuhr and Stanley Hauerwas.

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[2] Whereas describing a disagreement in such semantic terms may, to the general public, appear to minimize its significance, Christian thinkers who commit themselves to the crafts that seek to formulate words to describe God and the Christian life—in short, those dedicated to theo*logy* in a broad sense—ought to recognize that semantics routinely conceal crucial differences. Such, I will attempt to show, is clearly the case in this instance.

This is not, however, the only goal of this project or even its chief one. A merely descriptive analysis of what contemporary Christian thinkers mean when they talk about "politics" can map the current, riven state of Christian political ethics, but this is only of limited help. What is more deeply needed, I am convinced, is a constructive account of what Christians *should* mean by "politics," an account that might redevelop the conceptual space between the dueling conceptions of politics-as-statecraft and politics-as-soulcraft, an area that can appear to be little more than a wide gulf or an inhospitable wasteland. The overarching goal of this dissertation is to offer such a constructive ethic of politics. In seeking to do so, I am motivated not so much by the hope of achieving reconciliation between the proponents of these two conceptions (as much as one might find that desirable), but by the conviction that a political ethic that is most faithful to the Gospel and to Christianity's deepest theological and ethical convictions must situate itself in such a way that it can incorporate vital truths from both.

Reflecting this overarching intent, I have envisioned the three major parts of this project according to a metaphor of construction. Narrated in this manner, the two chapters that comprise Part I focus upon two different aspects of what one might identify as the task of surveying. When preparing for construction, a team must at some point survey the blueprint for the intended structure. In the case of Christian political ethics, a crucial question is just what this might be. Chapter 1 begins by making the case that it is neither the well-ordered state nor the faithful church that are politically paradigmatic. Instead, it contends that within Christian thought "politics" in its fullest sense refers to the eschatological *polis* that Scripture attests God intends to bring forth. Having identified this "City of God" as the truest exemplar of politics, the remainder of the chapter surveys its

social and individual dimensions, investigating the relation between them and highlighting the peace and justice that characterize each.

Of course, in the context of construction, "surveying" more frequently refers to the work through which the topography of a site is plotted. In this project, Chapter 2 serves an analogous function as it analyzes the moral terrain of this world. More specifically, it focuses upon what I call the "predicament of evil," exploring those corruptions of our present individual and social lives that, short of the divinely effected renewal of all things at the eschaton, pose insuperable obstacles to the realization of the City of God. Considering the tension between the nature of God's eschatological city on the one hand and the predicament of evil on the other, the second chapter concludes by arguing that human beings are incapable of establishing the perfectly peaceful and just *polis* in which God intends us to live. Instead, we can at best construct temporary political habitations that approximate the life of that city as much as possible. Together, Chapters 1 and 2 situate this project in a decidedly theological landscape that is defined simultaneously by God's gracious acts of salvation and humanity's multifarious forms of rebellion. An appreciation of the geography of this landscape is, I believe, indispensible if one is to offer an adequate Christian ethic of politics. This conviction thus demands that the current project is not merely a constructive ethic but a theological ethic, as well.

The key question that drives the remainder of the project is thus: how might Christians live faithful political lives in a world that is intended for the perfect political communion of the City of God yet is currently mired in the predicament of evil? Seeking to answer this central question and thus to help us in fashioning a constructive Christian political ethic, Part II turns to the task of gathering resources by scrutinizing two contrasting conceptions of politics. Chapter 3 begins this work by reviewing Niebuhr's understanding of

politics-as-statecraft. Chapter 4 does likewise with Hauerwas's ecclesiocentric vision of politics-as-soulcraft. Since the overriding interest of these chapters is in the way that these two thinkers respectively understand politics, their expository sections are not especially interested in certain questions that typically exercise scholars (such as how the thought of each evolved over time) except inasmuch as they impinge upon that concern. Instead, these chapters draw from various works to render a composite depiction of the political thought of each. Additionally, however, they also seek to evaluate the sufficiency of these conceptions in light of the nature of the City of God and the predicament of evil. To anticipate the findings of these chapters, they successively conclude that both Niebuhr and Hauerwas capture salient truths that any viable Christian political ethic ought to acknowledge and incorporate, and yet each also obscures or omits other, equally significant points. Accordingly, the work of gathering resources reveals that neither statecraft nor soulcraft alone is sufficient to characterize Christians' political vocation and yet that both are essential to it.

In order to integrate the crucial insights of these two conceptions into a single political ethic, however, one must carefully define the terms of their relationship. Part III takes on this task, as it seeks to construct an ethic of both soulcraft and statecraft that is fit to guide contemporary Christian political engagement. In Chapter 5 it does so by, in turn, examining the nature of the modern state, specifying the roles that both soulcraft and statecraft should play in determining Christians' understanding of politics, and then clarifying that argument by formulating an account of Christian citizenship. Ultimately, this political ethic aims to recognize and reinforce the church as a morally formative polity. At the same time, however, it acknowledges the church's sinfulness and limitations and also aspires to do justice to God's call for those who follow Christ to go forth from the church in order to care

for their neighbors and nurture the common good, a vocation that in most contemporary settings will entail at least a limited engagement with the mechanisms of the state. Some may judge that bringing together these contrasting conceptions of politics is, in the final analysis, an inadvisable attempt to mix the immiscible or combine the uncombinable, an attempt doomed to collapse of its own internal contradictions. In contrast, however, I prefer to view it as an effort to create a hybrid that might, as interbreeding often does amongst plants and animals, produce heartier offspring possessed of greater vitality and immunity. Or, to return to a metaphor from the realm of construction, my hope is that constructing from diverse materials, as when one builds from concrete augmented by rebar, might produce a more stable structure that is capable of reaching greater heights.

Understandably, this overview recounts but the broadest strokes of the argument to come. Still, it may be enough to raise some questions that it would be helpful to address at the outset. As some may already perceive, the work of Augustine profoundly influences this project, especially the theological vision unfolded by the first two chapters. Most superficially, this debt is signaled in my use of the term "City of God" (which I also favor for other reasons that I identify in Chapter 1). More substantially, the general arc of the initial chapters is also deeply Augustinian as they posit the City of God as politically paradigmatic and yet wed this inseparably to a general eschatological reservation that is predicated upon an appreciation of evil's grip on this world. In light of Augustine's salience in theologically framing this project, some may wonder about the relation of this work to the Augustinian tradition and to the recent renaissance of Augustine's political thought in the form of "Augustinian liberalism."[3] Given the amount that I have learned from Augustine and his

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[3] Among the notable works that represent this school are R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Revised ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Charles T. Mathewes, *A*

interpreters, it may be that this project finally fits under the broad penumbrae of these movements. Yet, while I do not shy away from such titles, neither do I self-consciously claim them in large part because, despite their numerous convergences, this project also departs from Augustine in significant ways.

To prevent my argument or portions of it from being unduly assimilated to Augustine's, it may be helpful to enumerate a few of these departures, even though each touches on vexed questions and relies upon theological judgments that are too subtle for me to elaborate or defend here. Above all, my conception of the City of God should be distinguished from Augustine's in three crucial respects. First, as he regularly presents it, Augustine's notion of the City of God would demand the existence of a converse, a *civitas terrena*—or even *civitas diaboli*[4]—that is composed of the majority of humanity and which is bound for eternal damnation. "Many more," he declares, "are left under punishment than are redeemed from it, so that what was due to all may be in this way shown" and thus provide reason for the saved "to give most heartfelt thanks to our Redeemer for His free gift in delivering so many from [eternal punishment]."[5] As Chapter 1 argues, I refuse to exclude the eternal punishment of a segment of humanity as a possibility. Yet, while acknowledging that they may tend in that direction, for my part I do not believe that the Bible, the core theological convictions of Christianity, or the nature of eschatological happiness[6] strictly necessitate such a final dispensation of God's salvific grace. Rather, I am convinced that they

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Theology of Public Life (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[4] E.g., Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XXI.1.

[5] Ibid., XXI.12.

[6] Augustine, for instance, argues that the happiness of the blessed is contingent upon the suffering of the reprobate. In this vein he argues that the saints will be aware "not only of their own past suffering, but also of the misery of the damned. For if they were not to know that they had been miserable, how could they, as the psalm says, for ever sing the mercies of God?" See ibid., XXII.30. As I see it, however, knowledge of the suffering of this life and the greatness of salvation would seem sufficient to inspire this chorus even apart from the suffering of the damned.

leave sufficient room for Christians at the very least to hope and pray for the salvation of all human beings. Hence, the City of God as I conceive it ought not to be freighted with Augustine's exclusivist presumptions, for it remains open to the possibility of universal salvation.

Second, although displaying a bit of uncertainty, Augustine most frequently suggests that in its eschatological culmination the City of God will exist "in heaven," such as when he writes that the resurrected body of the saint "will then not be earthly, but heavenly … because, by heaven's gift, it will have been made fit to dwell in heaven."[7] To the extent that heaven stands in contradistinction to the earth, however, I maintain a different view according to which the final location of City of God is to be upon an earth that is restored by the grace and judgment of God (suggested especially by Isaiah 11:1-9; Acts 3:21; and Romans 8:19-22).

Third and finally, whereas Augustine's rhetoric can in places equate the City of God with the church,[8] I seek to adhere consistently to his more considered position, which recognizes a clear distinction between the two.[9] The church is thus unequivocally not the City of God. Rather, as I repeatedly express it, the church stands under the judgment of the City of God, not in the sense that the City of God acts as judge—a role reserved for the triune God and possibly Jesus' original disciples (see, for instance, Matthew 19:28)—but that the nature of its fully realized communion is the standard against which other polities, including both the church and the state, is finally judged. This does not entail, however, that the church has no positive relation to the City of God whatsoever. "Church," as I understand it, names the community of disciples throughout time that devotes itself to

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[7] Ibid., XIII.23.

[8] See ibid., VIII.24, XIII.16, XVI.2.

[9] This is evidenced, for instance, in Augustine's proclamation that "many reprobate are mingled in the Church with the good." Ibid., XVIII.49; cf. I.35.

corporately emulating Jesus Christ, who himself embodies the form of the City of God. Despite the sad fact that denominational lines currently divide the church, at its heart stands a shared set of practices—most saliently baptism, eucharist, the reading of scripture, prayer, confession, and service of neighbor—and these constitute a unity that justifies speaking of the church in the singular. Through such practices the church and its individual members seek to grow in holiness, being conformed to the image of Christ and coming to resemble more fully the citizens of the City of God. And yet, as Augustine reminds us, in this world their holiness "consists only in the remission of sin rather than in the perfection of virtue."[10] Still unperfected in virtue, not only can individual members of the church defect from Christ but it is furthermore possible for communities that claim to be part of the church to do so in such a decisive fashion that they are no longer worthy of the name. Identifying the church thus always requires some degree of discernment.

As this way of construing the church hints, the theological grounding out of which this project grows is consciously ecumenical and yet undeniably Protestant. Reflecting my own United Methodist denominational background, this dissertation represents something of a meditation upon what it would mean to heed John Wesley's charge that Christians are to pursue both individual and social holiness. Hoping to mirror Wesley at his best, it engages with a range of interlocutors, from Origen and Gregory of Nyssa to Thomas Aquinas to contemporary feminist theologians. Nevertheless, the major streams from which it draws are deeply Protestant. This theological location explains why it engages in certain conversations and not others. For instance, the vision that it ultimately elaborates possesses deep sympathies with the Roman Catholic notions of the "common good," particularly as developed by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* and more recently by John Paul II in *Veritatis*

[10] Ibid., XIX.27.

Splendor. And yet, growing out of and primarily addressing a Protestant theological world, this project instead approaches such concerns mainly through conversation with prominent Protestant figures such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Another set of issues that will be most efficiently handled here is the meaning of certain concepts that are central to the work ahead, most especially "state" and "soul." Chapter 3 deals in greater depth with the state, utilizing Reinhold Niebuhr's characterization of it as a structure of government that is to be distinguished from the community over which it rules. To express this point somewhat differently, the state is the bearer of governmental authority. While it may in certain cases—whether in fact or pretense—draw this authority from the community that it governs, its most crucial feature is that it rules over that community, structuring its laws and relations. Particularizing the state even further, Chapter 5 depicts the modern state as a distinctive phenomenon in which the ruling power achieves a "legal personality" that is separate not only from the community that is ruled but also from the ruler. Expositing Max Weber's classic definition, I argue that in addition to this bureaucratic existence three further features distinguish the modern state, namely, its monopolization of the licit use of physical force, its possession of authority, and its territoriality. Despite the fact that the state is a multi-layered phenomenon that consists not solely of mechanisms with national jurisdiction but also those that exercise power over more limited communities, this project concentrates chiefly upon larger-scale institutions. This is because such a concentration both aligns with the predominant focus of Niebuhr's political thought[11] and also allows me to treat Hauerwas's allergy to non-local, non-ecclesial politics more directly.

[11] The preponderance of this focus underlies the observation of John Bennett, Niebuhr's colleague and friend, that Niebuhr was always primarily concerned with the policies of the federal government of the United

While these arguments will become clearer in their place, in the meantime one should note that the way in which I construe the state means that it will not be employed in another widely popular sense in which it encompasses the people who live under a particular government, which I will instead refer to as "society." Hence, it is the institutions of government that constitute the state, not the population over whom those institutions wield power. And it is in this light that readers should understand the repeated use of the metaphor of "engagement" to describe Christians' relationship to the state. As I argue more fully in Chapter 5, one should not interpret this trope to connote that I somehow believe that Christians are to be separate from the state in a way that non-Christians are not. Rather, it expresses the reality that, even if they are governed by it and even if a particular state somehow "represents" its population, the bureaucratic nature of modern states means that no one—whether Christian or not—is born connected to them. Instead, people must "go forth" in some sense to engage its structures of power, a reality that underlies political scientists' and sociologists' widespread use of the idiom of "political engagement."

In the lexicon that I will use, "soul" refers to the seat of one's feelings, thoughts, intentions, memories, and beliefs. Accordingly, the soul is an internally differentiated entity that includes the mind, will, and appetites. It is also the logically superordinate category under which falls the "self," which I use at key points to designate the distinctive configuration of the soul's faculties that marks one as an individual. One's ability, for instance, to love, to think, and to formulate aims are endowments of one's soul; the particular directions in which these faculties develop—the things that one loves and the intensity with which one does so, the thoughts that one characteristically has, the extent of one's memory, and the aims that shape one's life—are functions of the soul that compose

States. See *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice in Our Time*, ed. Harold R. Landon (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1962), 88.

and manifest what may be more specifically be called one's "self." Hence, to borrow from Timothy P. Jackson, we might say that "[a]ll human selves have souls, but not all human souls have selves."[12] The first half of this statement conveys that in order to develop a self one must first possess the faculties of the soul; selfhood thus marks an achievement of a soul. The second half is warranted in part because, as I argue in Chapter 2, it is possible that, due to oppression, abuse, or similar hindrances, one might be inhibited from developing a self that is worthy of the name. When this happens, one suffers from what I call the evil of "self-loss." In such cases, the soul itself is not lost, but its capacity for idiosyncratic expression—that is, for the expression of "selfhood"—is, at least for a period, suppressed.

One might insist upon distinguishing rigorously between "soul" and "self," utilizing the latter rather than the former in all cases that deal with the development or growth of the soul's faculties. For my part, however, I make no such scruples. Since the self is an expression of the soul and is thus taxonomically encompassed by it, I believe that one may justifiably speak of the soul's development. In other words, one can legitimately speak not just of "selfcraft" but of "soulcraft." And I will largely favor and foreground the language of "soul," for I believe that it carries a valence of meaning that "self" simply does not in our contemporary *Zeitgeist*, where we tend to believe that everyone has a self but, as Don Marquis once quipped, you don't have to have a soul unless you really want one.[13] The central (albeit at times admittedly problematic) place of the soul in Christian discourse reminds us, as Augustine classically illustrates in Book X of *The Confessions* and Jeffrey Boyd

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[12] Timothy P. Jackson, "The Image of God and the Soul of Humanity: Reflections on Dignity, Sanctity, and Democracy," in *Religion in the Liberal Polity*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 52.

[13] Attributed in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 109-10, n33.

nicely captures, that the "self is intrinsically theological."[14] Seen in this light, the very peculiarity of speaking of the soul is a virtue, providing a reminder that selfhood is not simply solipsistic interiority but a complex of various faculties that are to be rightly configured in regard to God and neighbor. Indeed, it is the language that Jesus uses when he commands us to love God with all of our souls and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27).

The concern with the state of the soul both in this Introduction and throughout the chapters ahead leads to another central category. This is the notion of "character," which denotes a durable orientation of the soul or self that disposes one to think, intend, and act in certain ways, even though other forces, including the body, might ultimately impact and even determine the shape of these functions. I consider the meaning of character in greater depth in Chapter 1. At this point I wish only to note that soulcraft and other matters that influence the condition of the soul or the configuration of the self are fundamentally matters of character.

Although these definitions should go a long way towards elucidating what I mean by "soul," our present intellectual climate, in which the soul is widely regarded as a bugbear, behooves one to go further particularly in order to clarify how the soul relates to the body. Proponents of the soul tend to blame its suspect status upon the materialism of our age or like forces. Although these have surely had an influence, it is also important to recognize that the soul has fallen into disrepute in no small part due to the insistence of a number of strands of Western thought that it is to be understood as dichotomously opposed to and drastically elevated over the body. Many of these strands trace their influence to Plato, who

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[14] Jeffrey H. Boyd, "Self-Concept: In Defense of the Word 'Soul'," in *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology & Theology*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timoth R. Phillips (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 111.

classically described the soul as a prisoner caged within the body and taught that the goal of life was for souls to purify themselves from bodily attachment so that they might finally be liberated, ascending "to their pure abode" where they will "live thereafter altogether without bodies."[15] Such understandings of the soul, which have held wide currency in Christian theology, not only offend materialist sensibilities but, even more significant from the perspective of this project, are also insufficient for appreciating the value of the bodily existence that God has proclaimed to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Furthermore, they can easily legitimate abusive or oppressive arrangements, allowing us to brush aside physical injuries on the grounds that they cannot harm the eternally valuable soul but only the transient, contemptible body. In this way and others, the soul has been pressed into numerous forms of ignominious service.

Despite these offenses, I do not believe that the concept of the soul is itself inherently noxious. Rather, as displayed particularly in Chapters 1, 2, and 4, I am convinced that it is capable of illuminating crucial aspects of human life, especially our ethical experience. Its ability to do so, however, depends at least partially upon a more sophisticated conception of its relationship to the body.

As I construe it, "soul" (as well as "self") denotes that part of the human being that, in the terms of the popular metaphor, is routinely understood to be "inward" or "inner" as contrasted to the "outward" or "external" facet of one's physical body. And it is through the faculties of the soul, but particularly through the will, that the soul or self most immediately (though, as I will argue, by no means singularly) gives shape to our actions.

Of course, even to speak of the soul and body as separate entities, let alone to ascribe such a directive role to the soul, obviously entails at least a partial dualism. But this

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[15] Plato, "Phaedo" in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 114b-c; cf. 82e.

dualism must be understood to be provisional, for both the body and soul are essential, constitutive aspects that inhere in the psychosomatic unity known as a "human being." The nature of this unity entails that, rather than standing in stark opposition to it, the soul should be seen as intricately bound to and deeply dependent upon the body to the extent that, from our human perspective, even the distinctions that I have drawn between them must be regarded as largely heuristic. Expositing Genesis 2, Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes: "The body belongs to a person's essence. The body is not the prison, the shell, the exterior of a human being… A human being does not 'have' a body or 'have' a soul; instead a human being 'is' body and soul."[16] Bonhoeffer's comments reflect and extend the general trajectory of the Old Testament and of Hebrew thought more generally, which "made little of this distinction" between soul and body,[17] a tendency that might be seen as exhibiting a lack of taxonomical sophistication or, as I believe it should, as witnessing to their profound interrelationship. To conceive matters in this way means that even if we accept the traditional Christian belief that it is possible for the soul to exist for a time apart from the body, such a state would by no means represent the realization of the truly human but rather a vitiation of it on account of the estrangement of the two essential components that constitute a being as human. This is further attested by the fact that the final hope of the Christian faith is not for a postmortem continuation of the soul but, as evinced in the Apostle's Creed, for the "resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

Beyond the soul's dependence upon the body, we should also affirm that it is intimately related to, and impacted by, the body. One ought not imagine that the soul's

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[16] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Martin Rüter, Isle Tödt, and John W. De Gruchy, trans., Douglas S. Bax, vol. 3 (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997), 76-7.

[17] "Soul" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1520.

condition is somehow impervious to what happens to the body. Whether they are of the type that we perform, such as voluntary acts, or of the type that we simply witness or passively endure, such as illness, bodily events are rarely, if ever, solely about our bodies. Apart from illness or other forms of dysfunction, when one performs the sort of event that we call an "act," it embodies the disposition of one's soul, even if it is not entirely clear to an observer precisely what is being enacted. And both acts and bodily events of other sorts can shape the soul. Such events can do so for our good. For instance, glorifying God by raising our voices in song or learning to serve our neighbors by feeding the hungry can cultivate within the soul dispositions such as humility or compassion. On the other hand, however, bodily events can redound to our souls' detriment. Participating in, or even witnessing, horrific events can predispose us to respond not only in the moment but even subsequently in ways that are wrathful, violent, vindictive, or paranoid. The comparative prevalence of murders committed by former soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) provides a sad attestation of this potentiality.

One of the great riddles of human existence, however, is that the exact impact that bodily events have upon one's soul is not easily predictable. Horrific experiences may indeed lead one to become unfeeling and ruthless. But they may also make one more sympathetic and determined to rescue others from similar horrors. Conversely, Christians cannot be reminded often enough that in the age of American slavery many of the harshest slave owners, to adapt President Lincoln's phrasing from his Second Inaugural Address, "read the same Bible and pray[ed] to the same God" as northern abolitionists—and as we do today. There exists no sure and direct correlation between what we do with our bodies and the state of our souls, a fact that attests simultaneously to the profound mysteriousness of both divine grace and human free will.

Nevertheless, even while no certain correlation exists, the mutually influencing relationship between body and soul has two implications that will be crucial for this project. First, it entails that a central way of shaping the soul will be through the body itself. This appears to be the deeper, if tacit, logic of the early portions of Romans 12, where the Paul admonishes his readers to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" before encouraging them to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:1-2). Even if it is not effective in every instance, the presentation of our bodies in such acts as worshipping God and aiding the afflicted proves a vital avenue through which we can encounter a grace capable of forming and renewing the soul, which Paul here signals by one of its faculties, namely, the mind.

Given the subtle yet significant influence of the body upon the soul, the term "soulcraft" should be understood as something of a synecdoche, which is a figure of speech in which the part stands in for the whole or vice versa. This is a synecdoche to the extent that Christian soulcraft aims to train not one's soul alone but both body and soul. In a very real sense, then, soulcraft is fundamentally "personcraft." And its goal, subserving that of the Christian life, is not merely that we might be made holy in our souls but in our bodies, as well, as Paul indicates when he prays that the Christians of Thessalonica might be sanctified entirely in "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

A second implication of the body's intimate relation to, and influence upon, the soul is that it adds a further dimension to the concern that Christians should have for the material conditions under which human beings live. The initial impetus for this concern derives from a desire to promote the physical well-being of our neighbors. When Jesus commands, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise" (Luke 3:11), he adverts us not to the spiritual but the physical needs of our

neighbors in their most foundational manifestations. In addition to the desire to promote physical well-being, however, we should also perceive that certain material conditions may contribute to the brutalization of the soul. Although his expression of it was not without its infelicities, Walter Rauschenbusch helped to call greater attention to this truth in his groundbreaking 1907 work *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, where he observed that poverty "creates a character of its own. Constant underfeeding and frequent exhaustion make the physical tissues flabby and the brain prone to depression and vacillation, incapable of holding tenaciously to a distant aim."[18] If the air of necessitation in such passages might seem ready to pave the way to paternalism, we ought to remember, first, that among the poor there are inevitably individuals and groups of tremendous resolve, foresight, and spiritual maturity and, second, that (even if it has at times been predicated upon dubious premises) Christianity has long maintained the possibility that poverty might promote sanctification, a tradition most famously exemplified in the life of St. Francis of Assisi and Jesus' beatitude that proclaims the poor to be blessed (Luke 6:20). Conversely, we should also recognize, as Rauschenbusch did, that it is not just poverty but also opulence and the quest for profit that might have spiritually damaging effects.[19] It is not without reason that the prophets so frequently denounce the rich and that Jesus himself declares, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). Once more, however, this defies simplification into a straightforward formula, for Christ continues by proclaiming the mystery of grace: "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." Nonetheless, the

[18] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke up the Church*, ed. Paul Raushenbusch (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 249.

[19] Ibid., 250, 182.

threat that looms over the rich subtly attests to the profound, though not automatic, connection between the state of our bodies and the state of our souls.

To dwell upon the soul even as much as I have to this point is sure, in the eyes of many, to appear ill-suited to a work on political ethics given the general tendency of modern political thought to conceive of politics as a matter of statecraft and thus to focus above all on questions of social order. Nonetheless, as already suggested, the principal goal of this project is to demonstrate that an adequate Christian ethic of politics must appreciate the significance not only of statecraft but also of soulcraft, as well. To that task we now turn.

PART I

SURVEYING

CHAPTER 1

THE CITY OF GOD: A POLITICAL ESCHATOLOGY

> In the beginning God had planted a garden for humanity to live in (Gen 2:8). In the end he will give them a city.
>
> -Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*

INTRODUCTION

In order most fully to understand politics, its most proper referent, and its present possibilities and limits, I believe that Christians must see it in light of our most profound theological convictions. So illuminated, the terrain of politics specifically and the world more generally are distinguished by two prominent yet opposing realities, the City of God and the predicament of evil. This chapter begins the task of situating us theologically by surveying the City of God, which I contend embodies the ultimate possibilities of political life and thus constitutes the truest referent of "politics." The next provides a necessary complement as it examines the limitations upon our present political accomplishments that are imposed by evil's inescapable grip upon human life.

An appellation that I utilize to encompass the variety of politically charged images that the Bible uses to express God's ultimate purpose for creation, such as the Kingdom of God and the New Jerusalem, "the City of God" refers to the perfect, political communion

for which God has created human beings and which is the eschatological destiny of those who will be saved by God's grace. Section I of this chapter argues that the City of God is the truest possible politics and the paradigm against which Christians ought to measure all other polities. In so doing, this section also seeks to establish the need for an eschatology that reflects the political nature of God's purposes for creation.

The goal of Section II, which comprises the chapter's heart, is then to provide a basic account of what I believe are the key facets of such an eschatology. Proceeding from the belief that the Bible is the primary Christian source for understanding the constitution and dynamics of the eschaton, it reads Scripture intra-canonically and synthetically, connecting scriptural themes with larger theoretical and dogmatic issues in order to render a composite sketch of the defining features of the City of God. Such a way of reading the Bible admittedly encounters a number of difficulties, especially deriving from the fact that the Bible lacks a unitary vision of the eschaton. Nevertheless, convinced that the theological and ethical tasks require us to ascend to a higher level of abstraction in order to bring greater coherence to this heterogeneity, Section II attempts to use the palette of Scripture in order to paint an evocative, impressionistic portrait of God's eschatological city.

Despite aspirations to synthesis, this depiction is necessarily fragmentary. For one thing, the limitations of human knowledge mean that the reality of the City of God will finally evade even the most faithful human attempts to describe it. For another, the limitations of space and the dictates of purpose mean that this particular depiction is necessarily selective. Most especially, the portrait that I render focuses upon the way in which the communion of the City of God consists both in the social ordering of the *polis* and in the internal dispositions of its citizens, who emulate Christ in their loving orientation toward God, one another, and all of creation.

Lastly, having considered the content of the City of God, a final subsection then explores its extent, inquiring into its bounds and scope.

I. The Need for a Political Eschatology

Even as the precise images vary, the Bible consistently depicts God's purpose for creation in political terms. In Genesis, God promises to make Abraham "a great nation" in whom all the earth shall be blessed (12:2).[1] Later, acting out of faith to this promise, God liberates Abraham's Hebrew descendants from Egyptian oppression so that they might be "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). The psalmists frequently envision God as a king exercising dominion over the holy city of Zion and ultimately over all the world (as, for instance, in Psalms 9, 48, and 99), an image Isaiah provocatively extends as he prophesies a day when "all the nations" shall willingly stream to God's holy habitation in order that they may receive God's righteous judgment and learn to "walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:3). Elsewhere in the prophets, Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream as foreshadowing the arrival of an eternal kingdom that is formed "not by hands" but by God and that will shatter even the most formidable of human kingdoms (Daniel 2:40-45).

In the New Testament, the use of political imagery continues as Jesus proclaims that the community of his disciples is to be a "*polis* built on a hill" that provides light to the world (Matthew 5:14). Moreover, he gathers together many of the political themes of the Old Testament under the image of the "kingdom of God" or, as Matthew routinely refers to it, the "kingdom of heaven." Much of the rest of the New Testament proceeds from the belief that in his death and resurrection Jesus ascended to the throne of this new political reality, which has yet to come fully but which has already relativized the kingdoms of the earth. For

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations come from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. The main alternative translation that I use is the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

instance, the book of Acts shows Paul and Silas being accused of "turning the world upside down" because they are "acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus" (Acts 17:6-8). In his own letters, Paul describes Jesus as "the head of every ruler and authority," who on the cross "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:8-15; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Deploying similar imagery, the book of Ephesians maintains that God has raised Christ "above all rule and authority and power and dominion" and "put all things in subjection under his feet and has made him head over all things" (Ephesians 1:21-22). The book of Revelation vividly depicts the culmination of this divine conquest of creation as heavenly voices proclaim that "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever" (11:15), a prelude to the crescendo in which the heavenly *polis* descends and God dwells among mortals (21:1-4).

Although these images diverge in key ways, as detailed exegetical study would easily reveal, they nonetheless converge with one another and numerous other elements of Scripture in depicting God's ultimate intention for creation as political in nature. Hence, we might say that politics is essential to God's eschatological purposes. Doing justice to the shape of Christian convictions thus requires a political eschatology, which this chapter seeks to articulate under the rubric of "the City of God," a phrase that I choose for a number of reasons. These include an acknowledgement of my debt to Augustine, as well as the fact that this phrasing avoids the overtones of tyranny that Americans, as well as many from other countries, almost reflexively suspect in the image of "kingdom." Moreover, on a rhetorical level, the word "city" also allows me to specify and extend references to the "City of God" by using its Greek parallel *polis*, the root of words such as "politics" and "political," in a way that can provide continual reminders of the political nature of such statements.

Still, placing this kind of emphasis upon politics is sure to strike many as odd. After all, in general parlance "politics" is routinely a byword that is indissolubly linked with deceit, manipulation, strife, and self-assertion. Foucault neatly captures the essence of this view when he inverts Clausewitz's maxim to suggest that "politics is war pursued by other means."[2] Prevalent though it is in late modernity, such disparagement of politics is not solely a late-modern phenomenon. In the late second or early third century, Tertullian offered a comparable appraisal of politics, flatly proclaiming that "[t]here is nothing more foreign to [Christians]."[3] He came to such an opinion in no small part because he assumed that politics was predicated upon "the pursuit of glory and honor." If politics is fundamentally a matter of such self-aggrandizement pursued through the unscrupulous use of power, then the fulfillment of God's righteous eschatological purposes would indeed seem to require its destruction. Perhaps, then, it would be best simply to abandon the language of politics as irredeemably sullied.

While it is not without reason that politics has gained such a tawdry reputation, to reject the language of politics outright on this account would obscure the more profound critical point that the Bible makes in utilizing it. Politics in the ancient Middle East was often no less corrupt and frequently even more brutal than today, something illustrated vividly by the ruthlessness of Herod the Great, who summarily killed many that he believed to be

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[2] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, trans., Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 93.

[3] Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 38. Here Tertullian writes *nec ulla magis res aliena quam publica*. Sheldon Wolin, whose translation my argument in the body mainly relies upon, translates this as: "There is nothing more foreign to Christians than politics." Clearly, "politics" is not the most literal translation of the phrase *res … publica*. Yet, in light of the prominent place of *res publica* in Roman political thought and the argument Tertullian is making in the surrounding passage, I believe that Wolin nonetheless accurately captures the spirit of the statement. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 102-3.

conspiring against him, including a wife and two of his own sons.[4] And yet, time and again biblical authors invoked political imagery in ways that refused to allow the perversions and savageries of contemporary politics to determine its ultimate meaning. Instead, they established God's politics as the standard that truly defines the term and insisted that all earthly polities stand under the judgment of the holy city that God is bringing forth upon earth. The author of Revelation dramatized this tendency when he portrayed the New Jerusalem as the orienting political center of the world: "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (Revelation 21:24). Here even worldly politics, represented by "the kings of the earth," is not destroyed but transfigured by the radiance of the holy city, which becomes the guiding light that defines politics in this eschatologically renewed world. Seen from this perspective, the problem with the sordid affair that we currently call "politics" is that it is not political enough, for it fails to reflect the genuinely political practices of God's eschatological *polis*.

Few have articulated this point more poignantly or memorably than Augustine in Book XIX, Chapter 21 of *The City of God*, in which he sets out to demonstrate that Rome was never, in fact, a "commonwealth" (*res publica*). Invoking the Ciceronian definition of a commonwealth as "the property of a people" that is "united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest," Augustine then recapitulates the logic of Scipio's argument in *De republica*. According to this line of reasoning, a people necessarily requires justice if it is to exist, since without justice (*iustitia*) there can be no agreement as to what is right (*ius*).[5] Yet, Augustine argues, because it insists upon offering to false gods the worship that is due to the true God alone, Rome shows itself incapable of the

[4] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* in *Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans., William Whiston (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 15.7.4-5. Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* in ibid., 1.27.6.

[5] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIX.21.

discrimination necessary to establish true justice.[6] It thus was never a people and therefore never a commonwealth. Rather, true justice and, by extension, the only true commonwealth exist "where the one supreme God rules an obedient City according to his grace."

The upshot of this chapter of *The City of God*, as Rowan Williams perceives, is that even as he utilizes the classical terms of Roman political thought Augustine is redefining the meaning of politics "to show that it is life outside the Christian community which fails to be truly public, authentically political."[7] While Williams missteps in equating "the Christian community" with the "City of God" and positing the former rather the latter as Augustine's political paradigm, he nonetheless rightly recognizes the overall shape of Augustine's political project in a way that others often obscure, including Robert Markus, the renowned and typically meticulous historian of Late Antiquity. For instance, in *Saeculum*, his magisterial treatment of Augustine's social thought, Markus writes that in Augustine's view "the quest for perfection and happiness through politics is doomed" since "[t]he archetypal society, where alone true human fulfillment can be found, is the society of the angels and the saints in heaven: not a *polis*." [8] In such statements, Markus seems intent upon emptying the term "politics" of any eternal meaning in order to reserve it for the kind of earthly institutions that

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[6] Rowan Williams provides valuable instruction here when he observes that the point for Augustine is that "a society incapable of giving God his due fails to give its citizens their due—as human beings made for the quest and the enjoyment of God. Where there is no *jus* towards God, there is no common sense of what is due to human beings, no *juris consensus*." Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God," *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 59.

[7] Ibid., 58.

[8] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Revised ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103. Though from a somewhat different angle, Sheldon Wolin comes to a similar judgment, suggesting that Augustine is among those Christian thinkers whose thought was predicated upon an understanding of time that "was both unpolitical and anti-political" most especially because it envisioned political society "heading towards a final consummation which would mark the end of politics." Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 112; cf 117. Again much like Markus, however, Wolin fails to appreciate the way in which Augustine would reconceive politics because Wolin himself operates with his own markedly different conception that defines politics in terms of conflict and competitive advantage. (Ibid., 11).

"remedy the conflict, disorder, and tensions of society."[9] Under this earthly definition, the City of God may be a society but it is not political since it does not need to deal with conflict, disorder, and tension. And yet, throughout *The City of God* and especially in Book XIX, Augustine repeatedly characterizes God's eschatological city in political terms—including by presenting it as a *civitas* and a *res publica*[10]—in ways too numerous and calculated to be merely accidental. Rather, such usage appears aimed at achieving a radical reconfiguration of the Roman political vocabulary. Markus is ultimately right in his judgment that Augustine's political project "resists … the divinisation of any form of social arrangement," and especially any earthly political system.[11] But this is not because Augustine empties politics of the possibility of eternal meaning but because, in a way similar to many of the biblical authors, he finds its true referent in the eschaton, establishing the City of God as definitive of politics in its most authentic sense.

Although Tertullian was right to decry the vicious travesty of politics practiced in the Roman Empire, if politics is defined not by its present practice but by its eschatological referent, as suggested both in Scripture and key passages of *The City of God*, then it is not the case that nothing is more foreign to Christians than politics. Rather, when so understood, nothing is more natural not only to Christians but to all human beings.[12] Indeed, we might

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[9] Markus, *Saeculum*, 95. Markus elsewhere makes the similar assertion that "[t]he political community … belongs to fallen nature and is radically infected by sin." Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 58.

[10] Although in Book XIX of *The City of God* Augustine does not flatly claim that the *civitas dei* is a *res publica*, he does so in his earlier treatment of Cicero's understanding of the term, which is found in Book II. "True justice, however, does not exist other than in that commonwealth whose Founder and Ruler is Christ. You may indeed call this a commonwealth if you like, for we cannot deny that it is 'the property of a people.' " Augustine, *City of God*, II.21.

[11] Markus, *Saeculum*, xx.

[12] Here again, I worry that Markus can potentially divert us from the larger arc of Augustine's thought when he suggests that "Augustine never doubted that social life itself was 'natural' to man in a way in which politically organized life was not." Ibid., 95. In such passages, Markus takes "politically organized life" to refer to its earthly practice. Yet, to the extent that this phrase can refer to the City of God, as well, I believe that my argument in this paragraph is finally closer to Augustine's view. Although human beings currently do not embody their true nature on account of their fallen state, the kind of polity represented by the City of God is

even join Plato and Aristotle in the claim that humans are innately political creatures. Unlike for the ancient Greeks, however, for Christians this assertion is warranted not so much by anthropological observation of humans' present behavior so much as by an eschatological vision of our proper end. That is, Christians most properly maintain that human beings are innately political not so much because we haltingly yet continually come together in associations that we call "political" but above all because God has created humanity for, and called us to, a political end in which we are to become citizens of "the city [*polis*] that has foundations, whose builder and architect is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

To be sure, in this world human beings can flatly rebel against their nature by living solipsistic, apolitical lives, just as they can pervert it by acting "politically" in ways that are at odds with their rightful citizenship in God's *polis*. Yet such forms of resistance cannot expunge our political nature but instead only attest to the ways in which we are estranged from it and as yet fail to embody it fully. Although they are not any more innately political than others, as followers of Christ, who himself heralded and embodied the in-breaking of God's politics into human affairs, Christians have committed themselves to witnessing to the reality of that perfectly political communion. They are thus to "lead [lives] worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called" (Ephesians 4:1), testifying to the coming of the City of God not only with their words but with the very shape of their lives.

II. The Defining Features of the City of God

If Christians are called to bear such witness to the City of God, then a crucial step in formulating the kind of constructive political ethic to which this project aspires is to inquire

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indeed what he believes God has created us for. One sees this especially in Augustine's assertion that "even if no one had sinned there would have come into being a number of saints sufficient to fill that most blessed City." Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.23.

into the nature of this *polis* that defines us as political creatures and that exemplifies politics in its most genuine sense. What are the distinguishing marks of this city? What binds it together as a *polis*? Who is to be included among its citizenry? Even though many aspects of these questions remain shrouded in mystery, we can nonetheless venture a basic, fragmentary sketch of the most salient features of the City of God. This will allow us in subsequent chapters to explore how Christians might faithfully witness to such a politics in this world. The remainder of this section thus attempts to render a basic portrait of God's city. In many ways, this depiction represents not only a meditation upon Scripture but also an extended exploration of and enlargement upon Origen's teaching that Christ is the *autobasileia*, the Kingdom of God in his person.[13] Above all, it focuses upon three key features of the City of God: (1) its social dimension, which consists in Christoform peace and justice; (2) its individual dimension, which consists in the Christoform character of its citizens' souls; and (3) its universal hope.

A. The Social Dimension of the City of God: Peace, Justice, and the Christoform Polis

Among the defining features of the City of God, one that we in the twenty-first century will most readily recognize as political is its inauguration of enduring social peace. Somewhat counterintuitively, we today can recognize the political significance of peace in no small part because of the prominence of violence and war in the modern understanding of politics. At the heart of the modern political imaginary stands the institution of the state, which, as we will discuss further in Chapter 5, is routinely defined in terms of its monopoly upon the legitimate use of violence. Max Weber classically evinces this common way of construing the state in his famous and representative characterization of it as "a relation of

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[13] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 14.7.

men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence."[14] And yet, as Augustine so insightfully realized, war and violence are almost never ends in themselves, but are instead tools that human beings use, if often misguidedly, "with the intention of peace."[15] Hence, in the ancient world, the praise for Augustus Caesar as one who helped to "mow[…] down" the "iron ranks of the barbarians" naturally flowed into acclamation that lauded him as the bringer of a *Pax Romana* disturbed by "neither civil rage nor violence."[16] Similarly, in 2002 President George W. Bush could present the United States as the protector of a *Pax Americana* defined by the use of military violence to "defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants."[17] This shows how even those who inhabit a political imaginary predicated upon violence nonetheless routinely, if implicitly, recognize that politics properly aims at peace and that peace is itself of political import.

Unlike the various, broken forms of "peace" imposed upon the world by polities such as Rome and the United States, the peace of the City of God is not maintained through war and violence but finally abolishes them. When God's city arrives in its full glory and God judges the nations, Isaiah tells us, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). Recognizing their uselessness, human beings destroy the weapons of war and instead transform them into instruments that nurture and sustain life. Although affording human beings a less dramatic role, Zechariah similarly depicts the consummation of God's purposes as ending the reign of violence. Following God's future

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[14] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.

[15] Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.12.

[16] Horace, "Odes," in *The Works of Horace*, trans., C. Smart (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), iv.14, 15.

[17] *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 2.

triumph over Israel's oppressors, Zechariah prophesies the coming of a mysterious and unnamed king, who may be none other than God and who "will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). As a commonwealth of such thoroughgoing peace, the eschatological City of God fulfills the promise foreshadowed in the name of the temporal city in which God chose to dwell, Jerusalem, a name that is etymologically connected to the Hebrew word for "peace" and that suggests God's dwelling is to be in a city of peace.[18]

Frequently, however, human beings distort the language of peace in ways that would implicate it in injustice, a tendency that Augustine perceptively diagnoses when he observes that what most desire when they claim to seek "peace" is simply that others should "[live] according to their will."[19] The true peace of God's city exposes the spuriousness of all such haughty truces—which lead us to cry " 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14)—for in it peace is wedded inseparably to justice. When salvation fully and finally arrives and God "speak[s] peace to his people," then "justice and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10, author's translation).[20] The psalmist's intimate metaphor emphasizes that, in its truest sense, peace cannot exist apart from justice. Such a peace stands in stark contrast to

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[18] Augustine makes a similar argument in numerous places, including Augustine, *City of God*, XV.1 and XIX.11. Of course, the derivation and meaning of "Jerusalem" are hotly debated, including whether the name in fact derives from the Hebrew. Nevertheless, whether it historically derived from the Hebrew root for peace or not, at the very least both Augustine and numerous biblical authors not only saw a connection here but played upon it.

[19] Ibid., XIX.12.

[20] This translation renders the Hebrew *tsedeqah* as "justice." While most often translated as "righteousness," *tsedeqah* has social overtones that such a rendering in English can obscure and that in this context I believe are better captured by "justice." As H.-J. Kraus suggests, *tsedeqah* appears in this passage to refer to the divine attribute through which God brings deliverance to the earth as God "helps all who are oppressed, falsely accused, persecuted, or suffering." This far exceeds the highly individual connotations of the English "righteousness." Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans., Keith R. Crim (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 43. See also Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 841.

many of the arrangements we routinely refer to as "peace" but which in point of fact amount to little more than the imposition of the strong upon the weak irrespective of the demands of justice. In view of the profound relationship between peace and justice in the City of God, we might join Augustine in doubting whether "the peace of the unjust is … worthy to be called peace"; though it may reflect it in certain respects, an unjust peace is finally not peace in its genuine sense.[21] In our contemporary era, Martin Luther King, Jr., incisively and eloquently captured the interwoven relationship between peace and justice in his declaration, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension, but it is the presence of justice and brotherhood."[22]

As this suggests, it is not only peace that centrally defines the relations between citizens in the City of God, but also justice. Of all the concepts that shape the respective eschatological visions of the various biblical authors, justice stands as the single most recurrent among them. Scripture thus teaches us to look forward to the day of the Lord in which "justice [will] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24) and when God will lay a new foundation in Zion, making "justice the line and righteousness the plummet" (Isaiah 28:17). The prophets and evangelists also envision God, at times working through angelic and human intermediaries, "execut[ing] justice and righteousness in the land" of Israel (Jeremiah 23:5) and even "bring[ing] forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1), as well as "separat[ing] the evil from the just" (Matthew 13:49, author's translation) and ultimately satisfying the appetites of those who "hunger and thirst for justice" (Matthew 5:6, author's translation). The author of Second Peter succinctly

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[21] Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.12.

[22] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 51.

summarizes the burden of this eschatological hope when he writes that what we await is "a new heaven and a new earth, where justice is at home" (2 Peter 3:13).

While justice figures prominently in Scripture's diverse visions of the eschaton, what does it actually look like in the City of God? Different authors render slightly different accounts of such eschatological justice, each with its own distinctive emphases. There is, however, widespread coincidence on at least two points. Much as one would expect given the classical definition of justice as "rendering to each what is due," one of these is the belief that God's justice centrally involves due recompense. When God executes justice, it brings deserved reward for those who are just and deserved punishment for those who are not, something suggested by the frequent portrayal of God as the consummate Judge.[23] The apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament contains a trove of images that vividly express belief in just recompense, such as Isaiah's image of God incinerating a world of chaff with breath of everlasting fire, a punishment survived only by "those who walk righteously and speak uprightly" (Isaiah 33:15). More mundanely, Ezekiel proclaims a coming time in which God will judge Israel, and those who act justly and follow God's will "shall surely live," whereas those who practice iniquity "shall surely die" (Ezekiel 18:5-13ff).

This expectation of just recompense is similarly made manifest at key points in the New Testament. These include Jesus' description of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-48, which ends with the wicked departing into eternal punishment and the righteous to eternal life, and Revelation 19, where God unleashes upon the world a fearsome rider on a white horse who justly makes war upon the unrighteous. Moreover, even Paul, who doubts that humans are capable of any righteousness deserving of reward from God, nonetheless suggests that the unjust will receive due punishment for evil, for through their iniquities they

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[23] E.g., 1 Samuel 2:10; 1 Chronicles 16:33; Psalm 7; Psalm 50; Psalm 82; Psalm 96; Isaiah 33:22; Ezekiel 34:17ff.; Micah 4:3; Acts 10:42; Romans 3:6; Revelation 6:10.

are "storing up wrath for [themselves] on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Romans 2:5). And yet, along with other aspects of the New Testament corpus, Paul also fundamentally refigures—and perhaps even defies—the notion of just recompense, for not all will receive the punishment they justly deserve. Instead, in the work of Christ, God has "eras[ed] the record that stood against" those who are members of the body of Christ, "nailing it to the cross" and "forgiving [them] all [their] trespasses" (Colossians 2:13-14). Just recompense, then, is not strictly applied but leavened with mercy.

A second point upon which a number of the eschatological visions in Scripture concentrate is the belief that justice entails provision for all, especially for those who are now poor and dispossessed. The God who will reign in the eschatological *polis* is one who, as we are repeatedly told, "executes justice" specifically for the most vulnerable, such as the poor, the oppressed, the orphan, and the widow (Deuteronomy 10:17; see also, e.g., Psalms 10:17; 72:2; 82:2-3; 140:12; Isaiah 11:4). This justice centrally rectifies deprivation and provides human beings with those things necessary to sustain life and promote human flourishing, as indicated by frequent scriptural references that pair justice with images of eating and drinking. Thus, the psalmist links God's execution of justice for the oppressed with the profession that God is one who "gives food to the hungry" (Psalm 146:7). Similarly, the "word of God" that Ezekiel receives regarding the ultimate restoration of Israel records God declaring, "I will feed them with justice" (Ezekiel 34:16). The notion that justice involves provision is also implicit in the image of the eschaton as a feast (Isaiah 25:6-8; Matthew 8:11-12; Luke 14:15ff.). God spreads out a banquet that meets the needs of its guests, a feast in which all can take their fill and none go hungry. To be sure, this conception of justice as provision is not identifiable with pure egalitarianism or any other clearly defined political arrangement. At the very least, however, it far exceeds those modern liberal conceptions that

primarily define justice negatively as non-interference or punitively as due punishment for crimes. The justice of the City of God entails the positive, life-giving provision of the things that human beings require if they are truly to thrive.

Liberated from the banes of violence, oppression, injustice, and deprivation, the citizens of the City of God live in unbroken communion with one another and with God. As Augustine describes it, this communion is "a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God."[24] The saved are not utterly absorbed into the eternal, nor are they separated into atoms who solitarily contemplate God.[25] Rather, even as they retain their own individual integrity, God brings them together as citizens of an eminently peaceful and just city. In this peace and justice, the City of God corporately emulates Christ, the "Just One" (Acts 7:52) who establishes peace (e.g., Ephesians 2:14). Here we find a more social meaning of Origen's ancient proclamation that Christ is the *autobasileia*, for Christ perfectly exemplifies the social form of the virtues that characterize the City of God. Hence, much as we will see in the next section when we discuss the individual dimension of its life, we can say that the social dimension of the City of God is Christoform in nature.

B. The Individual Dimension of the City of God: The Christoform Character of the Soul

No matter how prominently they figure as defining features of the City of God, to treat its peace and justice as exclusively social phenomena would unduly obscure their deeper roots and thereby their true nature. When we trace these towards their source, we find that the Christoform peace and justice of the City of God arise from the graciously cultivated,

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[24] Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.13.

[25] Reinhold Niebuhr and Robert Meagher contrast Augustine's views with the soteriological ideals of Eastern religions and Stoicism, respectively, in ways that help to show the distinctiveness of Augustinian eschatology. This sentence draws upon the contrasts they draw. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume II: Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943; reprint, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 91. Robert Meagher, *Augustine: On the Inner Life of the Mind* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 285.

Christoform character of its individual citizens. Put differently, the form of the social relations that obtain between members of this *polis* does not result from social engineering, the judicious use of force, or any other merely external regime; rather, it is rooted in and generated by the character of those members' very souls. Such, I take it, is the thrust of Isaiah's prophecy of a time when God will say, "Peace, peace, to the far and the near … and I will heal them," for "there is no peace for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:19-21). Like the roiling sea, the wicked cannot keep quiet and thus cannot enjoy peace; such a peace is possible only for those whom the power of God heals. One finds similar implications in Jesus' admonition: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50).[26]

To narrate the individual dimension of the City of God in terms of character may appear to some as an unwarranted interpolation of a Greek philosophical category into Christian discourse. One major reason to doubt the fitness of character as an organizing motif of Christian ethics is that it can appear that the Bible itself has little interest in it. For instance, on a linguistic level, despite their importance in Greek moral and civic literature, the words most often used to speak of character, including *ethos*, *aretē*, and *charaktēr*, hardly occur in the Septuagint or the New Testament.[27] More substantially, as Protestants have frequently contended, one might argue that the moral vision of Scripture focuses us primarily not upon human character or the allied concept of virtue, but upon divine

[26] See also Psalm 119:165

[27] *Ethos* appears five times in the Septuagint, each in books that Protestants deem apocryphal, and 19 times in the New Testament. In nearly every one of these instances, however, it describes not the praiseworthy moral character of an individual but the way of doing something that is customary to a particular people (for a particularly negative example of this usage, see Acts 15:1). The possible exceptions are Luke 22:39, which refers to Jesus' *ethos* of going to the Mount of Olives, and Hebrews 10:25, which uses *ethos* not to praise but to condemn the custom of those who neglect to gather with other Christians. Meanwhile, *aretē* occurs only seven times in the non-apocryphal books of the Old Testament and a scant five times in the New Testament (Philippians 4:8; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3 and 1:5). Moreover, at least two of those New Testament occurrences clearly refer not to human virtue but to divine excellence (1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3), and two of the remaining three come in the same verse (2 Peter 1:5). *Charaktēr* itself is used only in Leviticus 13:28 and Hebrews 1:3, referring in the first instance to a mark made on the skin by a leprous disease and in the second to Christ as the "exact imprint of God's very being" (NRSV). Anticipating my constructive argument, though, it is worth noting that Paul does use another word for character, *dokimē*, in Romans 5:4.

command: God orders or wills human beings to do certain things, and the required response is simple obedience. From this perspective it is obedience to God's commands—or to God's desire that we come to salvation through faith in Christ—that determines the shape of the City of God, for it is "those who do the will of God [that] live forever" (1 John 2:16).

Though in slightly different ways, both of these arguments obscure the contribution that character can make in helping us to understand the moral constitution of the City of God and the shape of the Christian life. We can see this contribution more clearly by beginning with a rudimentary definition of "character," something especially necessary given the various ways in which the term can be employed.

In the sense I am using it here, character refers to a durable, though by no means unalterable, orientation of the soul that disposes one to think, intend, and act in certain ways.[28] When one thinks, intends, or acts consistent with that orientation, such as when a typically courageous person acts courageously, then one behaves "in character," that is, in harmony with the general disposition of one's character. When one thinks, intends, or acts contrary to that orientation, such as when the typically courageous person unexpectedly reacts in a cowardly fashion, one behaves "out of character." Still, even to behave "out of character" is in most instances to act on the basis of character. Although such behavior might contradict one's general orientation, more often than not it is predicated upon

[28] This formulation leans heavily upon Stanley Hauerwas's definition of character as "the qualification of man's self-agency through his beliefs, intentions, and actions, by which a man acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being." Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 1975), 11. Nevertheless, much as Hauerwas himself does later in his career, I seek to downplay the strong emphasis upon self-determination. As I will suggest later, this is in large part because I believe that divine grace can function as a fundamental determinant of one's character. Such an interpretation thus also puts me at odds with Gilbert Meilaender's suggestion that character denotes "a fundamental determination of the self for which the agent is to be praised and for which he can take a certain amount of credit." Even if there were instances where it is singularly God that is to be praised for the shape of one's character, it would remain one's character nonetheless. Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 104.

inconsistent elements *within* one's own character. Particularly on this side of the eschaton, character is nearly always such a heterogeneous thing.

Seen in this way, character by itself is a morally neutral concept: one can have either good character or bad, as well as good or bad character traits, depending upon the constitution of the soul. Of course, most often when we speak generically of someone "having character," we use the phrase with a positive valence, lauding the general orientation and particular traits or strengths that allow her habitually to behave in difficult but morally praiseworthy ways. Expanding our vocabulary, we can call such praiseworthy strengths "virtues." Virtues are essential parts of our respective characters that enable us to think, intend, and act in good ways despite pressures to the contrary.[29] Their opposites, vices, function antithetically, inclining us to behave badly. None of this, however, should be taken to mean that character *compels* us to think, intend, or act in a single way. Rather, it creates propensities for the various ways in which we can and do conduct ourselves. In most, if not all, instances there exists the possibility that one may do so either virtuously or viciously on account of the particular virtues and vices that compose one's soul. Moreover, as we will see momentarily when discussing conformity to Christ and in the next chapter when discussing perversion of the will, neither the course of virtue nor that of vice is singular; both have many paths. Our character, then, does not necessitate how we behave. It does, however,

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[29] To the initiated, it will be clear that this account of character possesses many affinities with the loose school that is generally referred to as "virtue ethics." I see no reason to deny my deep dependence upon virtue theory or my admiration for many of its leading thinkers. Nevertheless, as the arc of my argument in this and subsequent paragraphs suggests, I believe that, at least initially, a Christian ethic is more fittingly framed in terms of character rather than virtue. To be sure, these are allied concepts. Yet I find virtue to be the more restrictive of the two, focusing us more narrowly upon a particular constellation of strengths rather than the overall orientation of the self. This by no means requires that we reject virtue, as I clearly do not, but instead seeks to explain why I posit character as the more fundamental category.

incline us to do so in certain ways; thus our thoughts, intentions, and actions do not simply arise *ex nihilo*.[30]

In the interest of further clarifying this conception of character, it is worth noting that it also stands in contrast with another use of the term, that of "playing a character," such as in a theatrical performance. Character in the sense I am using it is not something we play at—and perhaps not even something we *could* play at. This is because even such playfulness would itself seriously manifest a particular kind of character, one that regards matters of character rather lightly.[31] We may, like Mr. Wickham in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, employ pretense to fool others into believing that our character is of a different ilk than it truly is. Yet, unless the actual orientation of our soul, along with the characteristic shape of its thoughts, intentions, and actions, has also changed, even this subterfuge enacts a particular—and peculiarly treacherous—kind of character. If, on the other hand, the orientation of the self has indeed changed or is in the process of authentically changing, then one is no longer playing a character but in fact has come to possess a slightly altered one. We cannot play at character precisely because it is who we are at a very basic level. Even at this basic level, however, nearly all human beings undergo numerous changes both major and minor—acquiring or reinforcing certain virtues and vices, losing or vanquishing others—over the course of our lives.

To summarize this discussion in less technical language, then, we might simply say that character refers to the kind of person one is and the tendencies that shape oneself. With this general description, we can see that, though it may but sparingly use the precise Greek terms generally associated with it, the Bible is in fact deeply interested in matters of character

[30] This paragraph owes a great debt to Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 121-26.

[31] This helps to explain the suspicion with which Plato, Augustine, and many others have regarded actors, for they supposed (perhaps dubiously) that the very nature of acting involved playing in matters of character.

because it is deeply interested in the kinds of persons that human beings are and are to become. Or, phrased in language slightly more resonant with Scripture's own vocabulary, we might say that it cares about the character of our souls.

Whereas divine commands undeniably occupy a prevalent place in Scripture, this prevalence by no means displaces a concern with the character of human souls. Rather, many Old Testament authors perceived a complementary relationship between divine commands, most paradigmatically represented by the Law, and human character. Such is the case in Deuteronomy, a book that records a second giving of the Law but which concerns itself not simply with the external behavior of Israel but also with its members' respective characters. This concern shines through in Deuteronomy's intense focus upon the heart (Hebrew: *lebab*), to which it refers no less than 46 times. And in 10 of these instances, it pairs reference to the heart with reference to the soul. The most salient of these pairings comes in the *Shema*, the classic summary of the Jewish faith: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Fundamental to Deuteronomy's central confession stands an emphasis upon the heart, "the seat of thought and intention," and the soul, "one's inner self and its desires and emotions."[32] The people of Israel are not simply to obey the Law but to have their character transformed in accord with it. Obedience does not spring spontaneously from discrete decisions but comes forth from one's characteristic orientation, that is, from one's heart and soul. Hence God's lament to Moses: "Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always" (Deuteronomy 5:29, NASB). If they are to obey God's Law, then, the Israelites must "keep [their] soul[s] diligently" (Deuteronomy 4:9, NASB).

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[32] Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 91.

The emphasis upon the heart and soul in Deuteronomy allows us to appreciate more fully the significance of the prophetic oracles that envision God's eschatological transformation of the human heart. Most prominent in the history of Christian thought is Jeremiah's prophecy of a coming day in which God will make a new and different covenant with Israel, one of which God proclaims, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Ezekiel, using similar imagery, orients us to a future in which God will restore Israel by giving them a new, united heart and a new spirit: "I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 11:19-20). In such visions, we find God fundamentally transfiguring human character. God's covenant finally becomes what it was always intended to be, not an external standard imposed upon the individual but a constituent part of her very heart and soul. What God desires, then, is not mere obedience, which could be given grudgingly, but a *polis* of citizens who, like the psalmist, "delight to do [God's] will" because it has shaped their character (Psalm 40:8). In a more philosophical idiom, we might say that this eschatological vision portends for humanity the ultimate unification of our being and doing in which we obey God's will because the character of our souls has itself been transformed.

Such themes are also found repeatedly in the New Testament. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that finally they are to "be perfect … as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). In the larger context of the Sermon, Jesus makes clear that such perfection involves not just acting in a certain way but having particular characteristic attitudes and dispositions, such as purity of heart (5:8), avoiding anger (5:22), and refraining from lust (5:28). Like God, who perfectly unites act and being—something suggested not

only by the likes of Thomas Aquinas but by the Tetragrammaton itself, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14)[33]—Christ calls his followers to become the kind of people who emulate God, characteristically doing God's will not out of fear but because their souls are oriented in such a way that they would desire to do no other.

Although it is not absent in the gospels, a central emphasis of Paul's letters is just how rare it is for one to possess a character so perfectly shaped in accordance with God's will. Manifesting the psalmist's hope for the people of Israel, Paul proclaims that he "delight[s] in the law of God in [his] inmost self" (Romans 7:22; cf. Psalm 1:2; 40:8; 119). Yet even this deep-seated delight is insufficient to root out the incongruous and sinful elements of his character. Thus, he continues, "But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (7:23). Given the difficulty created by sin's inveterateness—a difficulty that is a central aspect of the predicament of evil that we will discuss in the next chapter—Paul concludes that one can never attain righteousness based upon one's works or one's character since sin invariably compromises one's life. Here he returns us to another insight from the Psalms: "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3). Paul's answer is that human beings cannot stand on our own but can do so exclusively in Christ Jesus, for we receive justification only as we participate in Christ's righteousness (e.g., Romans 1:16; 5:1).

Some of the most intense theological battles have been waged over what exactly Paul's understanding of justification means. One thing that has often been lost in the fog of these wars, particularly by Protestant interpreters, is that, whatever Paul means, it need not entail that Christians abandon concern for character entirely. And Paul himself refuses to do so. Notably, however, he indicates that human beings are not the only ones who forge

[33] See Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), I.6.iii.

human character. Hence, we find him extolling the divinely inculcated "fruit of the Spirit," characteristic qualities such as love, joy, patience, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Even more significantly, the exemplary and archetypal role that Christ plays in his thought further attests to Paul's concern with Christian character. Exhibiting traits of character such as the fruit of the Spirit is part of a larger metamorphosis in which Paul believes that Christians, through the work of the Holy Spirit, "are being transformed into the same image [of Christ] from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18), such that they have "the same mind … that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5) and that they themselves are "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Romans 8:29). Christians, then, are not simply to change their outward behavior; rather, they are to open themselves to the power of the Spirit, which recasts their very souls and their most basic orientations in the pattern of Christ. Being so remade, we become fitting members of the body of Christ (see especially Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

This Pauline image of the body of Christ is especially significant for our purposes. One reason for this significance is that it plays upon the metaphor of the body politic, a central motif in Western political thought, one utilized by Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, as well as many since.[34] Even though Paul's resonance with this metaphor is likely unintentional, it again recalls us to the political import of our discussion. Moreover, although Paul uses this image to characterize the church per se, it provides an opening for us to investigate the political dynamics of the City of God, the ultimate political reality in which those who

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[34] See, for instance, Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 368e-369a; 435a ff. Aristotle, *Politics* in Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1253a. Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), III.5.

belong to the church aspire to be citizens (Philippians 3:20 and 1:27; cf. Ephesians 2:19), an argument that I develop more fully in Chapter 5.[35]

Especially in light of contemporary concerns, one of the valuable contributions of the body of Christ imagery is that it helps to fill out the notion of conformity to Christ in a way that allows for both unity and diversity. The body is an internally diverse entity composed of various organs with differentiated purposes that all nonetheless serve the good of the whole (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7). Diversity is thus necessary because members must perform different tasks: "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?" (1 Corinthians 12:17). The upshot of this is that conformity to Christ need not demand an oppressive homogeneity in which each does exactly the same thing as Christ in exactly the same way. There are numerous, diverse ways to be a member of Christ's body. Yet even in the midst of such diversity there is a unity. This unity comes in part because it is the same grace of God that incorporates each member into the body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4ff.). But we might recognize that it also derives from the fact that all members possess the distinctive kind of character that marks them as fitting parts of the body of which Christ is the head (Colossians 1:18; cf. Ephesians 4:15).

Having argued *that* Christ-like character is central to the City of God, we still must ask, in just *what* does that character consist? Such a question is profoundly complex, for as Augustine illustrates by his own example, it is exceedingly common for one to be a mystery not only to others but even to oneself.[36] And the matter grows even more fraught with difficulty when sinful human beings attempt to consider the character of the sinless Christ,

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[35] Here and in other places in this paragraph I make additional references to the letter to the Ephesians, though many doubt that Paul was in fact its author. While I find many of these arguments convincing, I nonetheless believe that even if Paul did not write the letter, whoever did deeply inhabited a distinctively Pauline logic. Thus, even while my argument builds solely upon letters whose authorship is generally undisputed, I find the additional references fitting, even if Paul was not their actual author.

[36] Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans., Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), IV.4.9 and X.33.50.

an arrangement that tempts us to foist all variety of our own soiled baggage upon the one whom we ought to emulate. In my view, the path of least danger and greatest faithfulness through this minefield is not to define a catalogue of specific characteristics or virtues, but instead to speak of larger orientations of the soul.

Specifically, I believe that the most outstanding feature of Christ's character is his loving orientation towards God and neighbor. There can be none more steadfastly oriented toward God, none who loves God with more of one's heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27), than the incarnate member of the Trinity, who is forever united with God in perichoretic harmony. The steadfastness of Christ's orientation to God vividly evinces itself in the Incarnation by which he came into the world to do the will of the Father who sent him (John 5:30), "empt[ying] himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Philippians 2:7). This kenotic act manifests not just Christ's orientation towards God, but also his loving orientation towards his creaturely neighbors, for it is "for us and for our salvation" that he became incarnate.[37] During his earthly life, Jesus demonstrated that his love for neighbor extends to all people, not just the powerful or glamorous. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate with sinners, and even went so far as to identify himself with "the least of these"—the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-48). And so steadfastly devoted was Christ to the love of neighbor that he loved us to the end (John 13:1), even though that meant that his earthly life would end on the cross. Yet the resurrection, as Karl Barth teaches, marks God's "divine confirmation of this life" of Jesus and attests not merely that his life effects salvation but that it demonstrates the very form of salvation, the very shape of the City of God.[38]

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[37] This quote, of course, comes from the Nicene Creed.
[38] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 95.

Likeness to Christ is the quintessential form of individual peace and justice and the fount of the social peace and justice that reign in the City of God. Scripture suggests such a connection between the individual and the social in a number of places, such as in the passages from Isaiah and Mark that I referred to in the opening of this section. Yet, for the most part, the logic of this relationship remains implicit. Augustine, however, trenchantly articulates it in *The City of God*, a work that is above all concerned with peace. In slight contrast to Peter Brown's influential conclusion that "*The City of God* is a book about 'glory,' "[39] I would suggest that, though they are deeply related, if there is a single overriding leitmotif that defines this work it is not glory but peace. To be sure, Augustine begins his *magnum opus et arduum* by exalting, *Gloriosissimam civitatem Dei*, "most glorious is the City of God," something that could strongly commend Brown's judgment.[40] And yet, while the City of God is certainly most glorious in Augustine's eyes, in the very same sentence he indicates that this glory is most authentically manifested by its ultimate possession of "perfect peace."

The account that Augustine offers over the subsequent twenty-two books securely roots this perfect peace of the City of God in the divinely formed character of its citizens' souls. We can bring this point into clearest relief by comparing the lesser forms of peace that humans enjoy in this world with the perfect peace of God's city in its full eschatological realization. For Augustine, peace is essentially a matter of proper order: "The peace of all things lies in the tranquility of order; and order is the disposition of equal and unequal things in such a way as to give to each its proper place."[41] In this world, and particularly in human relations, however, peace is invariably precarious because sinful inclinations and ignoble desires dispose all people—even the pilgrim members of the City of God—towards

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[39] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 310.
[40] Augustine, *City of God*, I.Praef.
[41] Ibid., XIX.13.

disorder; indeed, "vice is never not present."[42] To attain even a degree of peace, then, human beings require the virtues necessary to do battle with such vices. Chief among these virtues is justice, which maintains the "order of nature" by "giv[ing] to each what is due."[43] Peace on this side of the eschaton is thus the fruit of virtues, especially justice, without which human beings would implacably impose their viciousness upon one another and thereby disturb the order of nature that is at the core of peace.[44] In this light, we can perceive the deeply Augustinian character of Pope Paul VI's famous dictum, "If you want peace, work for justice," as well as the limitations of those interpretations of it that construe justice simply as a predicate of social relations rather than as also naming a virtue that shapes the quality of the soul. As Augustine notes, "without … justice in a man, there is no justice in a collection of men of this kind."[45] And even less can there be peace.

In contrast to the uncertainty of peace in this world, the peace of the City of God is perfect and perpetual precisely because the very characters of those who share it are finally themselves at peace. Healed by God in body and soul and remade in the image of Christ, the lust and vice that here below perennially plunge individuals into war with themselves and with others will no longer afflict the saints. Augustine, who in the opening of *The Confessions* so famously expresses his ardent desire finally to rest in God,[46] eagerly anticipates such undisturbed blessedness. Hence, he exults, "How wonderful will the condition of [the human] spirit be then, when it no longer has any vice at all: when it is neither subject to any nor yields to any, and when it no longer has to strive against any, however laudably, but is

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[42] Ibid., XIX.4.

[43] Ibid.

[44] In addition to the nature of Augustine's definition of peace, this is also suggested by his remark that the City of God is one in which "no one will be a servant." Ibid., IV.34.

[45] Ibid., XIX.21.

[46] Augustine, *The Confessions*, I.1.1.

perfected in unalloyed peace and virtue."[47] Possessed of such peace and virtue, fully and graciously transformed in the image of Jesus, the citizens of God's city will "enjoy without end the most high God in the company of angels and free from every evil."[48] The politics of the consummated City of God is thus, as John von Heyking describes Eden in Augustine's thought, "a perfect compliance scenario": all enjoy perfect peace and justice because the soul of each has been transformed so that it is itself perfectly peaceful and just.[49]

Ultimately, then, the City of God is not defined simply by the external relations between citizens but by the character of those citizens' souls. Within God's city there is a unity and congruence between the two: the Christoform shape of its social relations derives from the Christoform virtues of its citizens' souls, which are directed in love towards God and each other. Those shaped by the most influential modern conceptions of politics, which envision the external, coercive power of the state as the paradigm of politics can here begin to perceive the radical revision of our political sensibilities required if Christians accept the claim that the City of God exemplifies politics in its truest sense. For the politics of God is not simply about the external order of society but also the internal character of the soul.

For all of the merits it displays in exhibiting the connection between the individual and the social, I nonetheless find Augustine's description of the beatific vision lacking in a key respect. These misgivings provide an important opportunity to clarify a final aspect of the individual dimension of the City of God. Most saliently, I worry that, in the end, Augustine's depiction of God's holy city in its eschatological fullness is overly static. This is suggested especially by his fondness for describing the eschaton using metaphors of rest and vision, such as when he writes that the City of God itself will be the seventh day, the

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[47] Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.24. Cf. Ibid., XIX.27.

[48] Ibid., XI.13.

[49] John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 59. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.24.

Sabbath rest. As such, its members "shall be still for all eternity" as they "will always see God in the Spirit."[50] Together the metaphors of rest and vision conjure the image of an eschaton wherein the healing power of God's grace brings the saints to a state of perfection, whereupon they repose and simply behold the awesome marvel that is the Trinitarian God. For members of stereotypical White, mainline churches whose weekly services consist largely in reverently yet passively beholding the spectacle of worship, Augustine's City of God would seem a very familiar place. Human beings appear as something like an eternal audience. Were we to take it as exemplifying politics in its truest sense, such a vision would translate politics from the *vita activa* and locate it singularly within the *vita contemplativa*.[51]

Augustine's vision, however, appears predicated upon the dubious assumption that perfection is necessarily static, and thus he unwarrantedly conflates humans' rest from the scourge of vice with a spectatorial stillness in relation to God and others. A more adequate political eschatology would, I believe, combine action and contemplation. One resource that recommends such a combination is the repeated scriptural depictions of the eschaton as one in which various nations continually stream to the holy city, whether it is named as Zion or the New Jerusalem (see, for instance, Isaiah 2:3; Revelation 21:24). Even as they are set in an eschatologically renewed world, such images suggest that the action of life is not extinguished but instead carried on within the light of God's glory.

We also find further, powerful resources for such a vision of the City of God within the very nature of the Trinity. Although operating with many of the same Greek philosophical assumptions as Augustine, Eastern theologians have often exhibited greater boldness in bending those categories in theologically illuminating ways, particularly when it

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[50] Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.29-30.

[51] Although by no means originating with her, Hannah Arendt offers one of the most influential modern formulations of the distinctions between these terms. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14-17.

comes to the matter of divine perfection.[52] One such instance is in their characterization the interrelationship of the three Persons of the Godhead as one of *perichoresis*, which involves not simply perfect rest but also perfect movement. Verna Harrison aptly summarizes the meaning of the term in Eastern Trinitarian thought: "[I]n the eternal generation, the Father gives all that he is to the Son. In return, the Son gives all that he is to the Father, and the Holy Spirit, too, is united to the others in mutual self-giving. This relationship among the persons is an eternal rest in each other but also an eternal movement of love, though without change or process."[53] The image of divine perfection that is conjured by this image is not simply static but involves the three hypostases of the Trinity united with one another in one *ousia*, eternally giving and receiving in a restful yet vivacious dance of love.[54]

Moreover, God invites human beings not merely to stand as wallflowers beholding this spectacle but to join in the dancing themselves. Many Eastern Orthodox theologians have understood this invitation in a very strong sense as involving participation in the very perichoretic dance of the Godhead itself, such that the saints are "wholly taken up into the

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[52] One of the most notable cases of the bending of Greek categories, and one which helps to set the conceptual basis for the conception of *perichoresis* that I articulate here, is Cyril's contention that on the cross the Divine Logos "suffered impassibly." Cyril of Alexandria, "Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten," in *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy, Its History, Theology, and Texts*, ed. John McGuckin (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 332.

[53] Verna E. F. Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1991): 64. Jürgen Moltmann makes a similar point when he writes, "What is meant … is that in the Trinity there is simultaneously absolute rest and complete movement." Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2000), 318.

[54] Edith Humphrey is right to warn us that etymologically "*perichoresis* does not mean 'a round dance,' no matter how many would-be Greek specialists say so on the Internet." This is because, unlike the ostensibly similar term *perichoreuo*, its etymology lies not in the "root noun *choros* (meaning 'chorus,' as in Greek tragedy, or 'dance') but *chōrus* (meaning 'place')." Edith Humphrey, "The Gift of the Father," in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 95. Nevertheless, while it is certainly erroneous to advance such an etymological claim, we need not assume that the literal meaning of the term exhausts its semantic range. In this section, then, I use the metaphor of dance not because it expresses the etymology of *perichoresis* but because I believe it is a fitting metaphor to characterize the relationship of harmonious movement and rest that *perichoresis* describes. As for Humphrey's contention that "the term does not evoke anything so frivolous as a dance," I can only wonder whether she has witnessed the beauty and gravity of a well-choreographed liturgical dance. Not every dance is frivolous, a point Ruth Duck makes well with her descriptions of the Trinity in her essay "Praising a Mystery." Ruth C. Duck, "Praising a Mystery," in *Praising God: The Trinity in Christian Worship*, ed. Ruth C. Duck and Patricia Wilson-Kastner (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 35-6. See also Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 381 n27.

circle of love that exists within God."[55] This, they would say, is the meaning of Jesus' high priestly intercession, in which he prays that his followers "may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (John 17:21). Even should metaphysical and theological scruples prevent us from going quite so far as to hold that human beings join in the Trinity's own dance of love, we might nonetheless recognize that the call to imitate God's perfection (Matthew 5:48) would suggest that the destiny of the saints is to share in some such loving, harmonious dance of action and rest carried on in the continual praise of God. Augustine is right to call this "rest" to the extent that such a dance is effortless rather than toilsome. It is, however, far from mere stillness. In the eschatological *polis* of the City of God, human beings will enjoy God and one another not simply in rest but in the perfect, joyful movement of shared love.

C. The Universal Hope of the City of God

Having examined the social and individual characteristics that define the City of God, in this final subsection we turn to consider its extent. Who is to be included in the peaceful, just, Christoform life of the City of God? More than any of the issues treated so far, this question pushes us deep into the most profound mysteries of the divine economy. We see how much this is the case when we recognize that all human beings—ourselves included and perhaps foremost—stand under God's judgment. Indeed, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "there is no one who does good, no, not one" (Psalms 14:3 and 53:3). It is not human merit, then, but divine mercy that is the sole source of human salvation. Yet, as Moses learned on Mount Sinai, God's mercy is eminently mysterious, a point that God makes emphatically by proclaiming, "I will be gracious to

[55] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Revised ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladamir's Seminary Press, 1979), 28.

whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19). As Robert Alter puts it, the point here is that "God's goodness is not amenable to human prediction, calculation, or manipulation: It is God's untrammeled choice to bestow grace and compassion on whom He sees fit."[56] Although it is not capricious since it will invariably manifest God's goodness, God's mercy remains a recondite matter of divine prerogative. It is not without reason that the biblical authors so frequently characterize God's ways as "unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 11:33).

This does not mean, however, that we are without any indication of how God will allocate the divine mercy through which the elect are made citizens of the holy city. Whereas Scripture in a number of places adumbrates the pattern of this allocation through explicit promises of mercy, it is their obverse, prophecies of judgment, that have often loomed larger in the Christian imagination. Such prophecies routinely portend horrendous fates for the unrighteous that are barred from the City of God. They are to be consigned to hell (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:5), tormented in Hades (Luke 16:23), thrown into eternal fire (Matthew 18:8; 13:40ff; 25:41; John 15:6; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and Revelation 19:20), cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), or utterly destroyed (Matthew 10:28; 22:7; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9). And this is to assemble only some of the most haunting images that Jesus employs in the gospels. To these we could add countless more, especially were we to turn to the book of Revelation and the works of the prophets.

There is little need for such addition here, however. In view of our guiding concerns, the significant point is that these prophecies suggest that citizenship in God's city is an exclusive matter. Albeit that the size of these respective groups is not precisely defined—

[56] Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 505.

thus leaving us to speculate about precisely how exclusive citizenship is—what is clear from the perspective of such passages is that there is a group of human beings that God will include in God's city and another that is to be excluded and that will thus meet with the damnation justly deserved by those who defy God and despise neighbor.

In our fascination with these passages, however, we can overlook another set that offers something of a "minority report" and that depicts citizenship in the City of God in drastically—and even universally—inclusive terms. In the gospel of John, Jesus proclaims that God has "authority over all flesh" (John 17:2, NASB) and has granted the same to Jesus himself. Moreover, he tells us that when he is lifted up on the cross, "I will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Elsewhere in the Johannine corpus, we learn that Christ "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). While by no means unwilling to speak of condemnation (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:34; 1 Timothy 3:6), the apostle Paul also repeatedly suggests a salvation that is universal in scope and extends not only to all human beings but even to the entirety of creation. In this vein, he describes Christ's sacrifice as an "act of righteousness" that supersedes the sin of Adam and "leads to justification and life for all" (Romans 5:18), and later in the same letter tells the Romans that it was God's providential plan to "[imprison] all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Romans 11:32). With even grander language, in Colossians he declares that Christ was the creator of all things and "through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). Paul elsewhere celebrates Christ's sacrifice as "a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6) and ultimately envisions the final fulfillment of the divine plan as God being "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

There exists, then, a tension between exclusive and inclusive visions of the eschaton. What we are to make of it? In the history of Western theology, nearly all of the most influential Christian thinkers have concluded that it should be resolved in favor of the exclusive. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas offer two representative arguments in favor of such a resolution.

In Book XXI of *The City of God*, wherein he treats the suffering of the damned, Augustine uses one of his standard hermeneutical strategies, interpreting less clear parts of Scripture in light of the purportedly more clear. This enables him effectively to discount more inclusive passages by virtue of their alleged lack of clarity, brushing aside the contentions of those who argue that God's mercy will ultimately prevail universally by saying simply that "[t]he Divine Scriptures make no mention of it."[57] Instead, Augustine sets great store by what he takes to be Jesus' crystalline prophecy that in the end the Son of Man will proclaim to the accursed, "depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).[58] Such a fate, Augustine believes, most fittingly exhibits both God's mercy and God's justice, "for if all were to remain under the penalty of just damnation, the mercy of redeeming grace would appear in no one," but "many more are left under punishment … so that what was due to all may in this way be shown."[59] The members of the reprobate thus depart into a punishment that is not merely purgatorial and corrective, such that it might prepare one for eventual citizenship in the City of God. Instead, Augustine teaches that their punishment must be punitive and eternal at least in part because (as he

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[57] Augustine, *City of God*, XXI.18.
[58] See especially ibid., XXI.23.
[59] Ibid., XXI.12.

more clearly states elsewhere but often assumes) “there is no space to reform character except in this life.”[60]

Although generally in line with Augustine’s conclusions, in his *Disputed Questions on Truth*, Thomas Aquinas offers a more sophisticated logic for resolving this scriptural tension in favor of exclusivity. Drawing upon John of Damascus’s contention that “God wills all to be saved by His antecedent will,” Thomas distinguishes between God’s antecedent and consequent will. God’s antecedent will, according to Thomas, refers to God’s primary intention prior to a failure on the part of the recipient of that will. “Because, then, God has made all [people] for happiness, He is said to will the salvation of all by His antecedent will.”[61] Although foreknown by God, contrary to God’s antecedent will, human beings have failed and fallen into sin, leading some to work against their own salvation. Hence, God’s consequent will “fulfills in them in another way the demands of His goodness, damning them out of justice.”[62] Thomas insists, however, that none of this disrupts the order of God’s absolute will, which refers to the fate of each “particular one … in the order of predestination.”[63] Scriptural statements that suggest a universal salvation thus represent God’s antecedent will, but not God’s absolute will. Hence, by themselves they do not accurately reflect human beings’ eschatological destiny in which Thomas believes that some are to be saved and others damned.

Of course, not all have resolved the tension between exclusive and inclusive visions of the eschaton in favor of exclusion. Particularly in the East, more inclusive ways of reconciling this tension have had great influence. Although Origen is the thinker most

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[60] Augustine, *ep*. 153.3, in *Augustine: Political Writings*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Robert Dodaro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[61] Thomas Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, trans., Robert W. Schmidt, vol. III (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), XXIII.2.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

prominently identified with the inclusive view, I believe it is Gregory of Nyssa that offers the most cogent account, one that generally follows Origen even as it wisely leaves behind some of the his more ladened metaphysical presuppositions.

To be sure, Gregory brings along with him no shortage of his own metaphysical baggage. Fundamentally, however, he grounds his view in a profound appreciation of the power of God's love, by which God will draw God's "own out from the irrational and material debris" of misguided attachment that has buried human beings in this world.[64] Yet it is not just those who are holy in this world that are God's own, but all whom God has made in God's image. Moreover, in direct contrast to Augustine's assumption that it is only in this world that one's character can be improved, Gregory believes that "in the life to come" God will heal the wounds of the soul that remain at death. Thus, enlarging upon the image of Christ as the divine physician, he maintains that "at the time of judgment," Christ will "cut off and [remove]" "whatever material excrescences have hardened on the surface of our souls."[65] This sort of excision, Gregory believes, is what the images of eternal fire and punishment truly signify, and although such restoration of the soul is painful, it is not solely punitive. Rather, through such operations God purges the soul, restoring its original grace so that it can properly pursue its end, which is to proceed ever further into the mystery and love of God. In this way, Gregory subsumes the exclusive passages of Scripture under the inclusive.

Each of these attempts to resolve the tension between the exclusive and inclusive visions of the eschaton has no small degree of merit; yet, in the final analysis, I find each unacceptable for much the same reason. Despite their vast differences, each exhibits an

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[64] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans., Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 83.

[65] Gregory of Nyssa, "Address on Religious Instruction," in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press, 1977), 284.

excessive knowingness that would presumptuously establish the scope of God's mysterious mercy. God will be merciful to whom God will be merciful. And particularly as those who stand not as judges but ones under judgment, we human beings have insufficient grounds to determine just who that "whom" is. Although the boldness that seeks to resolve such difficulties often constitutes a virtue in theology, in this case I fear that it finally devolves into the vice of pride as it tempts us to offer a God's-eye answer to a question that God has declared to be not only beyond human ken but a matter of divine freedom. We can attempt to extrapolate what the covenant God has made through Jesus Christ suggests for the extent of God's mercy. But I believe that that merely returns us to the diametrically opposed visions of the eschaton. For, to adapt the language of Karl Barth, in Christ we confront both God's "Yes" to humanity, as well as God's "No" to sin and evil. So long as we "see in a mirror, dimly" and "know only in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12), we can neither resolve the dialectic these create nor establish on which side human beings shall ultimately stand. Rather, we must keep God's Yes and No ever before us.

The most appropriate way of maintaining this dialectic, I believe, is to retain the language of universal salvation, but to couch it not in terms of certainty but of hope. Few have developed an account that does this more eloquently or compellingly than Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved?"*[66] One of the central pillars upon which von Balthasar builds his argument is the observation that in the New Testament threats of eternal punishment tend to come from the pre-Easter Jesus, whereas it is those seeking to express the redemption that Christ has wrought (especially Paul and John) who

[66] The fact that I turn to von Balthasar rather than Barth here is an indication that I agree with von Balthasar's judgment that Barth finally comes closer than warranted to resolving the eschatological tension in favor of an all-inclusive *apokatastasis panton*. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"? With a Short Discourse on Hell* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 44-45.

more typically cast salvation in universalistic terms.[67] This observation and what von Balthasar does with it contrast with the arguments of Augustine and Thomas in interesting ways. First, rather than subsuming the New Testament's inclusive statements under its exclusive ones, as both Augustine and Thomas do, von Balthasar argues that the former must be placed in the context of (though not subsumed by) the latter. This does not devalue the words and deeds of Jesus, he argues, but instead attempts to ensure that "they are given their proper place within the totality and unity of the Word of God," for it is only in the Passion and Resurrection that God will have spoken that Word in its fullness.[68] Second, while Thomas identifies something of a logical (though not temporal or absolute) progression in God's will that moves from inclusivity to exclusivity (and thus from God's antecedent to God's consequent will), von Balthasar finds within the New Testament a progression in precisely the opposite direction. Again, he does not believe this allows us to resolve the dialectic between exclusivity and inclusivity, but it creates the possibility for us to hope and pray that the scope of the salvation that Christ brings will be universal. In a crucial passage, he turns to Louis Lochet, who enunciates the character of this hope:

> If someone asks us, "Will all [people] be saved?" we answer in line with the Gospel: I do not know. I have no certainty whatsoever. That means just as well that I have no certainty whatsoever that all [people] will not be saved. The whole of Scripture is full of the proclamation of a salvation that binds all [people] by a Redeemer who gathers together and reconciles the whole universe. That is quite sufficient to enable us to hope for the salvation of all [people] without thereby coming into contradiction with the Word of God.[69]

I believe that this hope is essential to any account of the City of God that we articulate from within this world. From our perspective here, God's city appears like a net stretched forth towards all corners of creation, reaching out to encompass all (cf. Matthew 13:47f.). Thus we find Jesus, the *autobasileia*, commanding his disciples to go forth and "make

[67] Ibid., 21; see also 29-45.
[68] Ibid., 22.
[69] Cited in ibid., 113.

disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20) and even to "proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). This good news of forgiveness seeks universality, desiring to incorporate not only all human beings but the whole of creation into the loving communion of the City of God. And those who proclaim the gospel of God's city and attempt to live in its light must do so with the hope that some mystery of the divine economy might bring even those who currently declare themselves to be enemies of that city into its fellowship. Accordingly, Christians ought not only to love one another and pray for each other's forgiveness; rather, they are to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:44), for they must view even the most inveterate of persecutors as members of God's city *in potentia*.[70]

Of course, to use the language of hope in this matter is to speak in a tongue that will one day cease. "Hope that is seen is not hope" (Romans 8:24), but in the eschaton the members of the City of God will see the scope of God's mercy and salvation. Hope will then be transmuted into knowledge. In this sense, our talk of the universal hope of the City of God is necessarily even more limited in its ability to portray the final reality of that city than is the language of Christoformity that we have used in the previous two subsections. To be sure, in the full glory of its coming that holy city will belie elements of even humanity's most faithful depictions of it; yet, we have every reason to believe that this will be because it will manifest the form of Christ even more perfectly than we can imagine given the obscuring power of human sin and finitude. But unlike its Christoform shape, in its final form the City of God will not have hope at all. It will have knowledge of the extent of God's mercy. So long as we see in a mirror dimly, however, we can only hope that it will encompass all of

[70] For this concept of members *in potentia*, I am indebted to the thought of Bartolome de Las Casas. See especially Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 177.

God's beloved creatures, even as we never let pass from our vision the threat that looms for those—ourselves most of all—who insist upon resisting the mercy that God extends in Jesus Christ.

Finally, it is worth addressing an apparent contradiction within the position I have articulated, and perhaps among the Bible's various eschatological visions, namely, the hope of universal salvation would seem at odds with the conception of the eschaton as entailing just recompense. Dostoevsky's famous atheist, Ivan Karamazov, gives poignant voice to this objection in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In a conversation with his brother Alyosha, a novice monk, Ivan among other things develops a strenuous objection to universal reconciliation. At the core of his case is the suffering of children, of which he adduces numerous horrifying examples, including that of a serf boy whose master hunted and killed him in front of the boy's mother after he injured one of the master's favorite hounds and the story of a small girl severely abused by her parents and locked in an outhouse. Ivan acknowledges that if he lives to see the moment when all in heaven and earth will praise God and the mother will embrace her son's torturer, he too may cry out, "Just art thou, O Lord." Yet he sees this as itself abhorrent. Thus, he continues, "I absolutely renounce all higher harmony. It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed to 'dear God' in a stinking outhouse with her unredeemed tears… [T]hey have put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket."[71] Even as he doubts that any vengeance *ex post facto* can redeem such suffering—"what do I care if the tormentors are in hell, what can hell set right here, if the ones have already been tormented?"[72]—Ivan calls for retribution.[73] In such

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[71] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans., Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 245.

[72] Ibid.

light, a central difficulty with universal salvation is its moral repugnance as it leaves such calls forever unanswered, failing to deliver just recompense and thus to manifest God's justice. Should this not render it beyond the pale even of hope?

There are no easy answers to such objections. Yet in countenancing them we cannot ignore the way in which Jesus Christ has already transfigured the notion of just recompense. Although all stand under judgment, those whom Christ claims as his own are to be spared the full brunt of the punishment they justly deserve. Such grace is patently unjust from a human perspective; yet it is at the heart of the gospel. Does this contradict God's justice? Not necessarily if we remember that God's justice is not characterized simply by retribution but also by the provision that sustains and nurtures life. God's mercy is not simple exoneration, but also involves transformation, remaking human beings in the image of Christ. The thought of a mother embracing a man who tortured and killed her son may—and perhaps should—still abhor us. But what if when she does so, neither she nor her accuser is the same as in that horrific moment but, having retained their respective identities, are now perfectly conformed to Jesus Christ, who prayed for the forgiveness even of those who crucified him as he reached out to draw all people to himself? Could reconciliation in the light of such transformation exhibit God's justice even more spectacularly than the ultimate damnation of the killer? Or, as Gregory might suggest, what if the tormentor had himself endured torment in order that Christ might so heal him? Although the threat of eternal punishment never passes, it is here—in Christ's redeeming work and God's mysterious and just mercy—that we find the basis to hope that, when the City of God comes in its fullness, it will be a polity that manifests God's justice in some currently inscrutable yet ultimately

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[73] Ibid., 244.

undeniable way. Thus we pray that, when the Sun of Righteousness rises to its zenith and the City of God descends, none may be found in the shadows of outer darkness.

CHAPTER 2

THE PREDICAMENT OF EVIL

INTRODUCTION

The last chapter began the task of theologically situating a Christian approach to politics by surveying the City of God, which I argued ought to stand for Christians as the paradigmatic *polis* that defines politics in its fullest sense. Although such a vision of the eschaton is extremely helpful, it is not alone sufficient to guide the construction of a Christian political ethic. Even as the City of God represents the ultimate referent of politics, on this side of the eschaton, human beings confront ineradicable obstacles which inhibit us from fully embodying such a politics and yet which are intricately woven through the warp and woof of human existence in its present, fallen state.

This chapter surveys the most significant of these obstacles, which collectively create what I refer to as "the predicament of evil." One of the contemporary thinkers most attentive to this predicament, Reinhold Niebuhr, has persuasively argued that without an appreciation for such obstacles, the high ideals of the City of God can, and historically have,

fueled destructive fanaticisms.[1] The present chapter thus serves as an indispensible companion to the first. Together they provide the theological basis for a Christian political ethic predicated both upon the conviction that the City of God provides the true norm for our political lives and the recognition that the predicament of evil means that in this world the full realization of such a perfect politics will remain beyond our reach.

Our work here begins in Section I, which sets the bounds of this inquiry by specifying what I mean and do not mean by the "predicament of evil." Most especially, I utilize this term to refer to an account of evil that proceeds phenomenologically. Hence, this section contrasts the predicament of evil with the classically defined "problem of evil," at least so far as the latter in its purest form tends to give way to speculation about evil's ultimate purpose. Rather than attempting to explain why evil exists, this account of the predicament of evil concentrates upon identifying how and where it is manifested in the world.

Having established the meaning of the predicament of evil, Section II explores its contours, characterizing this predicament as twofold. In one aspect, evil arises from our individual souls as we forsake the communion for which God has created us; in another, it finds a foothold in social life, most especially as it turns institutions and social groups into perpetrators of oppression, deprivation, and psychological abuse that are not reducible to their individual components and that further alienate human beings from God, each other, and creation. Other conditions, such as human ignorance and scarcity of resources, could be isolated as factors that aggravate the predicament of evil, and this section will touch upon them in limited ways. These do not receive separate treatment, however, in part because of the constraints of space, and also because the true severity of the predicament of evil appears

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932; reprint, 1960), 277.

to arise from the fact that evil is not just something that human beings suffer on account of the non-intentional "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" but something that we commit and inflict.

Section III concludes the chapter by reflecting upon what the stark contrast between this chapter and the previous one means for the shape of the Christian life. Above all, it argues that Christians ought to hold the City of God and the predicament of evil in a dialectical tension and proposes a number of metaphors for characterizing the nature of Christian existence in this world.

I. Defining the "Predicament of Evil"

If we are to plot the places in which evil most typically manifests itself in this world, it would be helpful to begin with at least a general characterization of what evil is. In highly formal terms that receive wide support from various streams of Christian thought, we might say that evil is that which fundamentally opposes God's will. The last chapter argued that God's ultimate will is to bring human beings into the perfect political life of the peaceful and just City of God. This allows us to specify the highly formal characterization of evil in more relational terms by saying that evil refers to those defects that constitute serious ruptures in our proper communion with God and with our neighbors, both those who are human and those who are part of creation writ large.[2] The centrality of "serious ruptures" in this specification means that "evil" is not a description properly applied to all defects whatsoever,

[2] Although drawing from various influences, this characterization of evil is most substantially indebted to Gustavo Gutierrez's assertion that sin is a historical reality that "constitutes a break with God" and "a breach of the communion of men with each other." Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 152.

regardless of how minor.[3] And yet, neither should we reserve it solely for the utterly horrific.[4] Such a formulation allows us to appreciate that there are gradations of evil, which can range from comparatively prosaic forms of intense selfishness to the most atrocious acts of mass murder and beyond. Finally, although this project deals with the category of "sin" significantly less, when I use it constructively it will refer to evil acts or conditions of the soul that one can rightly be said to bear the responsibility of restraining or remediating.

Despite the fact that God intends for human beings to share in the perfectly harmonious political life of the City of God, our present existence is profoundly racked and riven by evils. Pride, hatred, oppression, violence, and many other forces severely rupture human beings' relationships with God, others, and creation, relationships that define the life of the City of God. Consequently, we inhabit a world in which evil—and especially our own ingrained tendency to produce it—places us in a dangerous situation. It is this situation that I refer to as the "predicament of evil." The current chapter attempts to provide an account of that predicament, displaying the ways in which evil menaces our world and particularly human affairs. Hence, despite the prominent place of such questions in the history of Christian theology, our concern will not be to ask why evil exists, where it came from, or even how the divine economy encompasses it.

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[3] This marks a contrast, for instance, with Thomas Aquinas's definition of evil as "the privation of form or right order or due measure in anything, whether subject or act." Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, ed. Richard Regan and Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), II.3.

[4] J. Peter Euben provides an example of such restrictive usage. Thus, he writes, "Evil is not an ordinary word even if ordinary people can be evil or do evil deeds. The word and idea are the heavy artillery of moral condemnation, kept in reserve to name and do battle against ethical and political atrocities whose depravity, cruelty, and viciousness seem inexplicable and inhuman, if not mad." In fact, I am quite sympathetic with his argument since I believe that in general discourse we ought to be considerably more restrained in using the term "evil," for it is often employed in ways that fail to recognize that we ourselves are deeply complicit in it or implicated in similarly terrible forms of evil. When used in a more careful manner, however, I believe that it is both theologically correct and instructive to ascribe the term to even lesser acts that rupture human beings' intended communion with God and neighbor. Moreover, utilizing it in such a way can help to overcome the tendency that invoking the category of evil has to shut down thought. J. Peter Euben, "The Butler Did It," in *Naming Evil, Judging Evil*, ed. Ruth W. Grant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 103. For a similarly extreme characterization of "evil," see also Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 141.

To clarify the distinctiveness of this chapter's concerns, we might distinguish what I am referring to as the "predicament of evil" from the "problem of evil" as it has been classically formulated. As I understand it, the problem of evil in its purest form asks us to reconcile abstract theological claims about the omnipotence and goodness of God with the existence of evil.[5] As formulated by Epicurus and restated by David Hume, this problem presents us with a series of dilemmas: "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"[6] Theological speculation that seeks to probe such mysteries and de-horn such dilemmas is a vital exercise in articulating the Christian faith and forming Christian imagination, and my intention is by no means to disparage such projects.

Nevertheless, the predicament of evil focuses not upon the havoc that evil wreaks on our systems of thought but the havoc that it wreaks upon our lives. Accordingly, the central question here is not, whence is evil?, but something more like, where is evil? In what places and forms does evil characteristically arise in our world? To borrow a phrase from Ivone Gebara, this account of the predicament of evil attempts to survey what one might call the

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[5] The superlative "purest" in this sentence is crucial, for there are many treatments of the problem of evil that are concerned also with the predicament as they seek to elaborate the way in which evil actually afflicts human affairs. Though he does not use such terms, one of the things that Kenneth Surin demonstrates in his book *Theology and the Problem of Evil* is that prior to modernity the problem of evil was only rarely addressed in this purest, most intellectualized of forms. Rather, the direction of address changed in relation to the practical needs of the church and the inflection of the difficulties it faced. Hence, to take an example, Augustine's response to the problem of evil attempts to underwrite a theology of conversion and thus a particular way of life in a context where the most pressing threats to Christians were no longer outside but inside their own souls. In post-Leibnizian theodicy, however, the problem of evil becomes essentially a rational or theoretical enterprise that betrays little immediate interest in the actual manifestations of evil in the world. Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 12-3. This post-Leibnizian approach, in my view, exemplifies the problem of evil in its purest form. Nevertheless, I think it is helpful to make at least a provisional distinction between the theoretical and practical even in treatments that do not scrupulously abide by this distinction. I trust that this chapter and subsequent ones will make clear that my project is actually in deep sympathy with those like Dorothy Soelle, Jürgen Moltmann, Wendy Farley, and Kenneth Surin who do not scrupulously adhere to this distinction and instead attend to the concrete, pernicious effects of evil as they respond to the problem of evil.

[6] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. H. D. Aiken (New York: Harper, 1948), Part X, 66.

"geography of evil."[7] Hence, this chapter does not speculate about what evil is ontologically, what purpose it serves, how it was originally capable of intruding into human affairs, or where it finds its primal origin. Instead, it takes a more directly phenomenological approach that emulates Scripture as it focuses upon revealing to us those sites from which the vitiating bane of evil tends to issue and the forms that it takes when it does so. Admittedly the distinction that I posit between the problem of evil and the predicament is slightly idiosyncratic; moreover, many would understand the latter to be a component of the former. Nonetheless, even if it is only provisional, I believe that this distinction is an illuminating one that draws into relief two different, though by no means mutually exclusive, sets of concerns that animate how thinkers treat the subject of evil. The ultimate goal of approaching the matter in the way that I will is that—having charted the predicament of evil and mapped the most prominent of evil's locations and contours—I might be able in the following chapters to articulate a political ethic possessed of the most powerful possible resources for helping us both to recognize evil and, even more significantly, to resist its corruptions.[8]

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[7] Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2002), 12.

[8] Some may object that in order to resist evil most effectively, we must understand its ontological status. This seems an implication of Charles Mathewes's argument in *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, in which he attempts to develop a therapy for evil based upon what he identifies as the two conceptual mechanisms through which the Augustinian tradition interprets evil, one of them being the understanding of evil as ontologically a privation of the good. See especially Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5 and 42. Although I do not wish to dismiss such attempts at explaining the ontology of evil, I nevertheless do not believe that they are necessary to underwrite faithful resistance to evil. Not only might one note the slightly Gnostic edge of the suggestion that they are, but moreover, the authors of Scripture certainly do not presume that we need to know evil's essence before we will be able to resist it effectively. Thus what they provide is not an ontology of evil but, particularly in the prophets, something more along the lines of phenomenological descriptions of the way in which evil corrupts individual souls and social structures. What we fundamentally need to grasp, I would say, is where and how evil is at work and the ways in which we are responsible for it.

II. Plotting the Predicament of Evil

Evil, as Karl Barth has cogently argued, is most clearly revealed to humanity in light of God's judgment of it in Jesus Christ.[9] In the first chapter I attempted to display how Jesus, the *autobasileia*, perfectly exemplifies and thus elucidates the individual and social aspects of the City of God. It is not coincidental, then, that we should find that it is at these illuminated sites—within the individual soul and within social relations—that we discover evil's most salient corruptions. At its core, the predicament of evil is a twofold mire in which evil perverts our individual wills and vitiates social forms in ways that corrupt the constitutive dynamics of the City of God. It is a predicament in which Christians acknowledge that if we say we have no sin, then we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8), while at the same time recognizing that evil is also found in interpersonal relationships and social forms, such as those represented by "the kings of the earth … and the rulers [who] take counsel together against the Lord and his Messiah" (Psalm 2:1; cf. Acts 4:26). In certain cases, the word "predicament" may connote a dangerous or perplexing state that one has not made but in which one finds oneself, for instance, "the human predicament." When considered from the perspective of the individual, the predicament of evil is partially one that we have not made, for each of us was born into a world already corrupted by evil. And yet this is a predicament in which we are not entirely passive since we each make vicious or unwise choices that promote evil's hold in this world.

This section will examine these individual and social manifestations in turn. In contrast to the order of their treatment in the first chapter, which examined the social features of the City of God first in large part because it sought to foreground those elements that contemporary readers would most readily recognize as political, this chapter begins by

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[9] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume III.3*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 302.

treating the individual dimension since I find it to be closer to the heart of the predicament of evil. Nevertheless, particularly in view of the abilities of social institutions to shape individual consciousness, the individual and social manifestations are tightly interlocked such that distinctions between them are often artificial. Even as I seek to demonstrate their interrelatedness, I treat them separately for the sake of clarity. Still, it is best to bear in mind that the distinctions between the individual and social manifestations of evil suggested by that arrangement are not hard and fast but heuristic and provisional.

A. Evil as Perversion of the Will

There is something profoundly dangerous in the very act of speaking about evil. For it is here that we most acutely encounter, in Barth's words, "the necessary brokenness of all theological thought and utterance."[10] Embedded in a world already fractured by evil, our thoughts and words are insufficient to comprehend their intended subject and thus they routinely delude us. Such is the case especially when we speak about "evil" because the very existence and employment of such a title creates space for the false consolation of imagining evil somehow to be a distinct and isolable entity, one in which we ourselves are not implicated.

For his part, however, the Apostle Paul will allow us no such delusions of innocence. Not only does he shatter them with his straightforward proclamation that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), but he forces us to confront our own ingrained predisposition towards evil by the way that he depicts the role of "the flesh" (*sarx*) in human life, especially in his letter to the Galatians. In a crucial passage, Paul lays out the fundamental antagonism between the flesh and the Spirit: "the flesh lusts against the Spirit,

[10] Ibid., 293.

and the Spirit against the flesh … so that you do not do the things that you will" (Galatians 5:17, based on NKJV). Accordingly, he admonishes Christians to "crucif[y] the flesh with its passions and desires" in order that they might "be guided by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). Contrary to the fears of those who conclude that Paul is here advancing a hard psychosomatic duality that would have Christians renounce all concern with bodily matters,[11] this crucifixion is no simple flight from the flesh. Rather, as James Dunn observes, Paul believes that human beings necessarily live life, including the life of faith, "in the flesh" (see Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:22; 2 Corinthians 4:11; 10:3).[12] Even as we must bring its base impulses under the control of the Spirit, the flesh is a part of who we are as human beings. Thus, the implication is that it is not something accidental but essential to human identity that gives rise to evil as it opposes the guidance of the Spirit and prevents us from doing as we will.

Certainly in the West, Augustine has provided the most influential development of these Pauline teachings, concurring with Paul's opinion that it is possible for human beings to suffer from what one might describe as a particularly virulent form of *akrasia*[13] in which it is possible for one not only to know the good but even to will it and yet to have one's will

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[11] We should note that in Galatians 5:22 the Greek *ho pneuma* is ambiguous since it could refer either to the Holy Spirit or the spiritual aspect of a human being. If it refers to the latter, then this would lend credence to those who fear that Paul is flatly calling for a renunciation of concern with the body. In the larger scope of Paul's thought, however, I am convinced, as most contemporary commentators agree, that this refers to the Holy Spirit. This becomes particularly clear when we consider that Paul credits *ho pneuma* as the source of the good works that he enumerates in verses 22 and 23. For illuminative treatments of the referent of this term see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990), 245ff. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33a (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 493ff.

[12] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 68.

[13] Although his precise assessment of the possibility of *akrasia* is notoriously difficult to determine, none has given a more widely influential characterization of the phenomenon than Aristotle with his statement that the person suffering from *akrasia* "does not do what he wishes, for being uncontrolled means acting against what one thinks to be best owing to desire." Aristotle, "Eudemian Ethics," in *Aristotle: Athenian Constitution, Eudemian Ethics, Virtues and Vices*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), 1223b. Perhaps the most influential contemporary treatment of the topic is Donald Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 21-42.

somehow overpowered by forces contrary to it.[14] Rather more forthrightly than Paul, however, Augustine diagnoses the human inclination to evil as more commonly resulting not from the will's weakness but its very disorientation. For most, the problem is not that the will wills the good but is simply too feeble to enforce its dictates. Rather, left to its own devices, the will moves us in all the wrong ways. The will itself is the fundamental problem because it has lost its proper orientation and thus no longer directs us towards God but towards the things of this world. Augustine's comments on evil thus frequently trade upon metaphors of orientation, especially those embedded in words like "perverse" and "convert" that build on the Latin *vers-* or *vert-*, roots which denote turning.

Although we are not specifically interested in Augustine's account of how evil originally invaded human affairs, it is in re-telling the primeval history that he most fully explicates the disfigurement and disorientation of the human will that sets the pattern for all subsequent history. In the beginning, Augustine tells us, God created human beings in God's own image such that they were "upright (*rectus*), and therefore of good will."[15] So long as they remained properly ordered upward to the Lord above in whose image they were made, humans enjoyed "a faithful and sincere fellowship" defined by their undisturbed love of God and one another, and into this fellowship "no evil of any kind intruded, from any source."[16] Yet in a most fateful moment, human beings succumbed to the wiles of the devil. Emulating his own Fall, they gave way to pride, the "appetite for a perverse kind of elevation" wherein one "forsake[s] the foundation upon which the mind should rest and become[s] … one's

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[14] In this vein, Augustine writes: "He, therefore, who wishes to do God's commandment, but is unable, already possesses a good will, but as yet a small and weak one; he will, however, become able when he shall have acquired a great and robust will." Augustine, "On Grace and Free Will" in Augustine, *Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, trans., Peter Holmes and Benjamin B. Warfield, vol. 5 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), xxxiii.

[15] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIV.11.

[16] Ibid., XIV.10.

own foundation."[17] Thus, human beings "turn[ed] away [*conversus*] from God,"[18] losing their proper, upright orientation as their wills became twisted and perverted.

It is here that evil entered: "For when the will relinquishes that which is superior to itself and turns to [*convertit*] that which is inferior, it becomes evil [*malum*] not because that towards which it turns is evil, but because the turning itself is perverse [*sed quia perversa est ipsa conversio*]."[19] Though often elided by translators, Augustine's use of evil (*malum*) and perversity (*perversa*) as conceptual synonyms in this passage is far from a coincidence and goes to the heart of his understanding of evil. In his thought it is the perverse, rebellious defection from God that constitutes evil's essential and defining dynamic. He highlights this relationship between evil and perversion repeatedly throughout his career, including in a crucial passage in *The Confessions* where he offers the findings of his inquiry into the nature of evil, proclaiming that what he found was "only the perversity of a will [*voluntatis perversitatem*] twisted away from you, God … a will that throws away its life within and swells with vanity abroad."[20]

If Augustine's account of human history featured a Pandora's box, the primordial defection in which human beings perversely turned away from God would be the act that decisively threw it open.[21] Nothing could be more calamitous. And one of the chief calamities that Augustine believes it brings is a change in human nature itself as the will becomes deformed and enslaved to its own evil orientation. "[W]hen man by his own free-will sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will is lost… And hence

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[17] Ibid., XIV.13.

[18] Ibid., XIV.11.

[19] Translation based on ibid., XII.7.

[20] Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans., Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), VII.15.21.

[21] Perhaps one could make the case that the Fall of the angels is of greater significance, particularly since it is the fallen angel Satan whom Augustine believes inveigles humanity. And yet, even after this, Augustine asserts that human beings for a time continued to enjoy unbroken communion with God. Moreover, he never suggests that humanity's Fall was inevitable even after Satan determined to seduce them into sin.

he will not be free to do right."[22] Adam and Eve, Augustine teaches, ultimately disseminate this sinfully servile will to their descendants, who justly receive the blot of "original sin" on account of their seminal presence in Adam.[23] And yet, although humans were the ones who brought about this decisive change in our nature, we do not possess the power to free ourselves and restore our wills to the proper, upright orientation. Instead, human nature "wants a Physician, because it is not sound."[24] Only when Christ graciously heals the soul can we overcome our perversity.

Contemporary thinkers routinely look skeptically upon much of Augustine's primeval history and its conception of evil—and often with good reason. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, from the perspective of this project his account makes at least two points of abiding significance, first of all in the connection it establishes between evil and perversion and secondly in its assertion of the ubiquity of human beings' implication in evil. The next two subsections consider these contributions by elaborating, interrogating, and augmenting Augustine's insights.

(1) The Connection Between Evil and Perversion

The first point of abiding significance pertains to the tight conceptual relationship that Augustine establishes between evil and perversion of the will. Employing these terms as nearly synonymous, Augustine pushes us to recognize that evil is not an ascription attributable only, or even primarily, to discrete acts. On the contrary, evil's vitiated presence lays its deepest roots in the very disfigurement of one's soul. Charles Mathewes captures this point neatly when he argues that the conception of evil as perversion of the will is part of the Augustinian strategy of internalizing the language of evil, a move that forces us to face the

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[22] Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, trans., J. B. Shaw (Washington, D.C: Regnery Publishing, 1996), XXX.

[23] Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.3.

[24] Augustine, "On Nature and Grace" in Augustine, *Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, iv.

fact that evil "goes deeper than our explicit choices: it is not most basically that we produce sinful acts from a fundamentally good character, but rather, we ourselves are corrupted."[25] Although it cannot expunge our identity as God's beloved creatures, evil is not just something we do accidentally or episodically, but something that mars our very selves at their deepest levels. In the first chapter, I argued that the political communion for which God has created human beings consists not just in the maintenance of a particular form of social relations defined by external acts but also in the Christoform shape of its citizens' souls. Although it adverts us specifically to one of the soul's faculties (namely, the will), Augustine's conception of evil as perversion gives us powerful tools for identifying the evil defectively present in the corruption of the soul, for such turning of the will denotes a vicious state of character in which one perversely, if often invisibly, defects from the proper communion with God and neighbor.

The evil that mars human character is not only evil in itself; it is also the seedbed of evil actions. Vicious acts, as Augustine reminds us, do not arise *ex nihilo* but generally spring from souls that are characteristically shaped around perverted wills, something he makes clear in his refutation of the Platonic suggestion that the body itself is evil because it causes destructive emotions. What determines the quality of such emotions, Augustine maintains, is not the body but "the quality of a man's will. For if the will is perverse, the emotions will be perverse; but if it is righteous, the emotions will be not only blameless but praiseworthy. The will is engaged in all of them; indeed, they are all no more than acts of the will."[26] It is important to note here that, although we may assume that emotions are largely passive experiences that arise in response to external stimuli, within Augustine's anthropology emotions are in fact acts. The larger point, then, is that acts receive their direction, even if

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[25] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 81; see also 46.
[26] Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.6.

unconsciously, from the shape of the will. The notion of evil as perversion of the will thus helps to expose the deeper roots of evil and the radicality of our implication in it.

Despite its success in revealing the connection between character and action, Augustine's account nonetheless frequently overdraws this connection in a way that morally conflates the two and thus stands in need of refinement. Most especially, this need results from Augustine's tendency to depict the acts of those whom God's grace has not restored solely in the dark tones of evil. This strategy became increasingly common as his career progressed and his anti-Pelagian polemic grew ever more determinative in shaping his thought. Especially in his later writings, Augustine can make it sound as if those who have perverted wills can do only evil. Such people have free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), but owing to their perversion, it "avails for nothing except to sin,"[27] for "an evil will [*voluntas mala*] cannot produce good works."[28] Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "There is always within us a free will [*voluntas libera*],—but it is not always good; for it is either free from righteousness when it serves sin,—and then it is evil,—or else it is free from sin when it serves righteousness,—and then it is good."[29] Such bald statements suggest that we ought to represent all acts of the unreformed as evil solely because they spring from perverted wills. Even if all sins are not equal,[30] the character of the perverse is such that it leaves them apparently incapable of any sort of good. As we shall see, there are hints of a somewhat different vision of human moral agency in Augustine's writings, but to the extent that this one determines his thought, Calvinists are not without basis in claiming his authority for the doctrine of total depravity, so long as this depravity is construed in regard to acts (such that those who have not—or

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[27] Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," in Augustine, *Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, v.

[28] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XV.

[29] Augustine, "On Grace and Free Will," in Augustine, *Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, xxxi.

[30] See, for instance, Augustine, *Ep.* 104.14 in *Augustine: Political Writings*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Robert Dodaro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

have not yet—been reoriented by grace can *do* no good) rather than in regard to being (which would suggest that they *are* ontologically evil).

There is perhaps a perspective that warrants such a stark portrait of the human moral landscape, namely, one that looks upon acts *sub specie aeternitatis* from the promontory of salvation.[31] Standing there, the acts of the perverse may be exclusively evil because they can by no means bring one to the true good of salvation, which is received only through the grace of God that reforms individuals and ultimately incorporates them into the communion of God's city. Consequently, even the virtues that the unreformed might seem to possess "are really themselves vices, and not virtues at all, if they do not have reference to God" since such persons remain perversely directed towards the things of this world.[32] Thus, it is possible that a soteriological perspective could justify the conflation between character and act that leads Augustine to portray all such acts as definitively evil.

And yet, granting acceptance of Augustine's anthropological assumptions for the moment, could we really maintain *simpliciter* that those whose wills God has not reoriented are incapable of even limited goods, even if those goods do not finally refer to God as the Supreme Good? More simply, is every act of the perverse necessarily evil? To take an example, mothers and fathers routinely give self-sacrificially in order to care for their children. Many, however, will do so for reasons that have nothing to do with God, presumably because they are fated to be among the "majority" of humanity whose wills, Augustine believes, will remain unreconstructed and whom God will ultimately consign to

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[31] Meilaender makes a similar perspectival distinction in analyzing the exchange between Martin Luther and Jacobus Latomus. See Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 110-14.

[32] Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.25. Similarly, Augustine elsewhere writes that "no virtue is truly such unless it is directed towards that end in which man's good—the good than which nothing better exists—is found." Ibid., V.12.

hell.[33] But are such acts of care themselves not good in some respect, certainly when seen from our perspective within the *saeculum* and perhaps even from the promontory of salvation? Even if such an act ultimately constitutes or continues a rupture in that parent's relationship with God, it would seem that any account of human agency is seriously lacking if it cannot allow us to recognize that the care itself comprises a limited good to the extent that it sustains and edifies at least a form of the proper relationships that God intends for human beings to have with one another.

If we are to capture such nuanced features of the human moral landscape, we must paint with a more complex palette. And, notably, Augustine's thought is not without some of the hues we need. In fact, his stark, soteriologically-determined depiction of the unreconstructed as inextricably bound to evil fits rather oddly with his own ontology of being, which holds that anything wholly evil would cease to exist. Even corrupted beings, such as fallen humans, continue to be good in some degree, and Augustine insists that we should acknowledge that good and predicate it of them.[34] In judging the goodness of being, then, Augustine suggests that we should use a gradual scale that ranges from God as the ultimate good even to Satan, who still remains good in some respect though he has decisively defected from God. This seems very different from the standard by which he would judge the goodness of acts, which are good or bad solely based upon their reference to God. Hence, even if he does not always use it, a gradual construal of goodness is not alien to Augustine's thought. Moreover, although Augustine may believe that it is possible for a being to continue in existence even though it is incapable of doing the good—a possibility

[33] On the scope of salvation, see Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XCVII. And also Augustine, *City of God*, XXI.12.

[34] Augustine, in fact, allows that a being can be both good and evil simultaneously: "Accordingly, in the case of these contraries which we call good and evil, the rule of the logicians, that two contraries cannot be predicated at the same time of the same thing does not hold… And these two contraries are so far co-existent, that if good did not exist in what is evil, neither could evil exist; because corruption could not have either a place to dwell in or a source to spring from, if there were nothing that could be corrupted." Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XIV.

he believes is realized in the continued existence of Satan—can we really hold that this in fact describes the "majority" of human beings whom Augustine believes are not to be among the blessed?

Augustine's soteriological depiction of human agency also seems at odds with other, more generous elements of his thought, such as the admission that the Roman civic virtues have "a certain uprightness [*probitatem*] of their own."[35] Indeed, it is the dissonance between these generous elements, on the one hand, and his stark portrayal of human moral agency, on the other, that is at the heart of many of the disagreements between Augustine's liberal and Radical Orthodox interpreters.[36] These skirmishes continue to rage in no small part because Augustine never fully integrated these divergent aspects of his thought into a single depiction of the moral life that simultaneously and comprehensively displays both the limited goods of which even the unreformed are capable and the ultimate limitations upon those goods.

In the quest to bring these divergent aspects of Augustine's thought into a more coherent portrait of our moral existence, there have been two major paths that Christian thinkers in the West have followed. The first was most famously traveled by Thomas Aquinas and identifies within human nature a grace that endures after the Fall and that

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[35] Augustine, *Ep*. 138.3.7. The translation comes from John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 172. On the general topic of pagan virtue, see ibid., 168-73.

[36] To take just one example of this contrast, one might compare the starkly different ways in which Robert Markus and John Milbank interpret Augustine's assessment of earthly politics. Markus, for his part, claims that Augustine believed that "[t]he realities of the *saeculum* must be spoken of in historical or political, not in theological, terms." Milbank, on the other hand, sees Augustine as leveling a thoroughgoing theological critique of the *saeculum* writ large and Rome in particular. Thus, he believes that for Augustine salvation from sin even in this world "must mean 'liberation' from political economic and psychic *dominum*, and therefore from all structures belonging to the *saeculum*." James Wetzel neatly summarizes the upshot of this position, arguing that Milbank claims Augustine in support of the thesis that "no realm of social fact that can be observed and studied independently of theological (or anti-theological) commitment." Markus and Milbank thus disagree markedly and fundamentally over whether or not the political and social goods of the *saeculum* are in fact true goods, limited though they may be. See R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Revised ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 104. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 391. James Wetzel, "Splendid Vices and Secular Virtues: Variations on Milbank's Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2004): 274.

allows humans to accomplish certain goods. Thus, "because human nature is not altogether corrupted by sin, so as to be shorn of every natural good, even in the state of corrupted nature it can, by virtue of its natural endowments, work some particular good," including technical achievements like building and even limited moral goods, such as friendship.[37] A second path, one articulated by John Wesley, locates the possibility for human beings to perform limited goods not in the endurance of a grace inherent in creation but in the profusion of God's prevenient grace after the Fall. "No man," Wesley tells us, "is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called 'natural conscience.' But this is not natural; it is more properly termed 'preventing grace.' Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man."[38]

The theological differences between these paths are not insignificant. As a Methodist, I tend to side with Wesley on such matters; furthermore, I believe that Augustinians who wish to maintain Augustine's understanding of the severity of the Fall can only accept Wesley's resolution here, for Wesley similarly understands the Fall as utterly catastrophic, but asserts that God responds to this catastrophe with a effluence of grace. Nevertheless, though proceeding by different routes, phenomenologically Thomas and Wesley bring us to a rather similar vantage point. From here we can see both that evil acts typically issue from vicious states of character but also that few, if any, human beings are ever so perverse or godforsaken as to be incapable not only of being ontologically good but of acting, at least occasionally, in ways that realize limited goods.

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[37] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), I-II, 109.2. For Thomas's comments on friendship in this regard, see ibid., I-II, 109.5. Moreover, these may be seen as specifications of Thomas's earlier claim that human beings are capable of a happiness "proportionate to human nature … which man can obtain by means of the principles of his nature." Ibid., I-II.62.1.

[38] John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in John Wesley, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1991), III.4.

(2) The Ubiquity of Implication

Even as we need a way to depict human beings' potential for limited goods in more sanguine tones, I nonetheless believe that we find a second point of abiding significance embedded within one of Augustine's most pessimistic doctrines, his doctrine of original sin. To be sure, there are compelling reasons to reject Augustine's exact construal of this doctrine and particularly his account of its contraction and mode of transmission, which are increasingly untenable in light of the findings of modern science and especially the growing consensus that human beings could not have descended from a single couple.[39] Moreover, the theory of moral responsibility and the soteriology that Augustine predicates upon his account of original sin raise a bevy of further ethical and theological questions—not the least being how one can be held responsible for a deed one did not directly commit and how God could justly damn one for that deed—that must stand beyond the ambit of this present chapter but that nonetheless create problems for Augustine's teachings on the matter.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the key phenomenological point of the doctrine of original sin is the ubiquity of humanity's implication in evil. Augustine illustrates this in ways that shatter some of the most powerful and precious illusions that possess American popular culture, most of all its widespread romanticization of children. Thus, many contemporary readers find themselves taken aback when he confesses the characteristic sins of infancy, including his greed for food and anger at those who would "not immediately fall into [one's] wishes and obey [one's] commands,"[40] and when he flatly proclaims, "If anyone were offered the choice of suffering death or becoming a child again, who would not recoil from the

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[39] Although now somewhat dated, Francisco Ayala offers a succinct account of the genetic case against monogenism. Francisco Ayala, "The Myth of Eve: Molecular Biology and Human Origins," *Science* 270, no. 5244 (1995): 1930-36. See also *Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in Light of Evolution*, eds. Daryl Domning and Monica Hellwig (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 71-4.

[40] Augustine, *The Confessions*, I.7.11.

second alternative and choose to die?"[41] For Augustine, we are all implicated in evil from our earliest moments upon the earth; not even infancy is a state of innocence, which is why he finds the thought of returning to it, and thus beginning over again the struggle against sin, to be repellent.

Whereas they have often come by different, less literal and less extreme roads, this point about the ubiquity of human beings' implication in sin is one upon which many Western theologians have converged. This includes a number of thinkers influenced by Søren Kierkegaard and his claim that "[j]ust as Adam lost innocence by guilt, so *everyone* loses it in the same way,"[42] a group comprised in part of Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And, though they tend to give a far more socialized construal, it also includes certain feminist theologians, like Rosemary Radford Ruether, who claims that the original sin of sexism "distorts the whole human enterprise,"[43] as well as process thinkers like Marjorie Suchocki.[44]

Interestingly, even as science problematizes a literal appropriation of Augustine's crudely biologized interpretation of original sin with one hand, it seems with the other to offer a different avenue for maintaining the phenomenological thrust of the doctrine in a slightly inflected form. One sees this possibility displayed, for instance, in the very title of Richard Dawkins's 1976 bestseller, *The Selfish Gene*. Although Dawkins intends the title to be as much provocative as descriptive, the book centrally argues that a "predominant quality" of many of the genes we inherit is "ruthless selfishness," which "will usually give rise to

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[41] Augustine, *City of God*, XXI.14.

[42] This rendering is based on Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. Reidar with Albert Anderson Thomte (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 35. Emphasis added.

[43] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983; reprint, 1993), 178.

[44] For a concise statement of Suchocki's proposal, see Marjorie Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," *Process Studies* 20, no. 4 (1991): 233-43. See also Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995), especially 84-5.

selfishness in individual behaviour."[45] Even for those evolutionary biologists who are more optimistic about human nature, such as Frans de Waal, our genetic inheritance remains at the very least profoundly ambiguous, a "Janus head" defined by "both cruel and compassionate sides."[46] The upshot is that, though they are by no means compelled to act selfishly, human beings come biologically inscribed with tendencies to act in self-centered ways that rupture their proper communion, especially with other humans. On account of these ingrained biological tendencies, evil seems to be, as Reinhold Niebuhr believed it was, "inevitable but not necessary."[47]

Such scientific findings have even led some to attempt a more secularized rehabilitation of the doctrine of original sin.[48] Marxist literary theorist Terry Eagleton offers a particularly intriguing reinterpretation, the crux of which is worth quoting at length.

> Original sin … is not about being born either saintly or wicked. It is about being born in the first place. Birth is the moment when, without anyone having had the decency to consult us on the matter, we enter into a preexistent web of needs, interests, and desires—an inextricable tangle to which the mere brute fact of our existence will contribute, and which will shape our identity to the core… [Babies] have already drastically reordered the universe without being aware of it. If psychoanalytic theory is to be believed, they are already imprinted with an invisible network of drives which bind their bodies to those of others, and which will prove a constant source of affliction to them.
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> Original sin is not the legacy of our first parents but of our parents, who in turn inherited it from their own. The past is what we are made of. Throngs of ghostly ancestors lurk within our most casual gestures, preprogramming our desires and flicking our actions mischievously awry.[49]

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[45] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; reprint, 2006), 2.

[46] Frans de Waal, *Our Inner Ape: A Leading Primatologist Explains Why We Are Who We Are* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 5.

[47] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I: Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941; reprint, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 150; see also 263.

[48] While the account in this paragraph focuses mainly upon genetic science, as I point out in the next section, Iris Murdoch also finds resources for a similar notion of original sin in Freudian psychology. See her essay "On 'God' and 'Good' " in Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[49] Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 35-6.

Thus Eagleton's reinterpretation of original sin into the terms of contemporary biological science suggests that all human beings become enmeshed in evil on account of congenital impulses that prompt us to act in ways that violate our relationships with others.

To identify the original source or first cause of humanity's propensity for evil may be finally impossible, especially given the complexity of human life and its interlocking layers of relationship. Similarly, one may never be able to prove conclusively the ubiquity of humanity's implication in evil. Nonetheless, such diverse attestations provide us with solid ground for accepting this core concept of Augustine's doctrine of original sin.

When combined with the notion of evil as perversion of the will, the belief that human beings are ubiquitously implicated in evil confronts us with the fact that evil is not something that we can ever fully externalize. If we are honest, when we seek to find the sources of evil in this world we must locate them in our own lives, as well. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn so hauntingly observed, "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."[50] As I will argue in the next subsection when we turn to social forms of evil, this does not mean that everyone is guilty of evil in the same way. Nor does it mean that everyone is equally guilty. But it does mean that no one is completely innocent. No human being does only evil, but none is completely innocent of evil either. Each of us has at least at some time in our lives given rise to evil and unleashed it upon the world, seriously rupturing communion with God, others, or creation. We have been those "evil person[s]" who "out of [the] evil treasure [of our hearts] produce[…] evil" (Luke 6:45). And, regardless of how profoundly the Holy Spirit remolds our character, in this life we remain capable of doing so again, for we can never eliminate our capacities for, and even tendencies towards,

[50] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans., Harry Willetts, vol. 1 (New York: WestviewPress, 1991), 168.

evil. So long as we remain in this life, Augustine reminds us, "we cannot do the things that we would, and rid ourselves entirely of evil desires."[51]

Hence, Christians continually confess our sins, ask for forgiveness, and pray for God's grace, for that grace is the only thing that can keep even the holiest people from returning to the mindless generation of evil's destructive bane, the only thing that keeps human wills properly oriented towards God and neighbor. We can never simply step outside the predicament of evil, and we can never isolate evil as something "out there" that we could somehow vanquish by destroying. Mathewes rightly reminds us that such an externalized account of evil cannot "comprehend how evil infects our very essence, dividing *us* at our core, making us its principle agents, but also, and thereby, crippling our own capacity to overcome it."[52] Were we seriously to attempt to destroy evil, we would have to lay waste to ourselves and to all human beings created in the image of God and called to the communion of God's city. If there is a consummate evil, a *summum malum*, there could hardly be a more succinct definition of it. Since evil is not a predicament that we can resolve by eradicating its source, we can only respond to its bane in the midst of the world and in view of our implication in it, seeking to lessen its grip upon our lives and those of others. Finding ways to do so faithfully will be the task of Parts II and III of this project.

(3) The Variable Dynamics of Perversion

As mentioned above, the description of evil as perversion of the will trades upon a metaphor of orientation. In its most literal sense, perversion etymologically denotes a turning away, especially when that turning is somehow destructive. Talking about evil as perversion of the will thus leads us to ask whether there is a particular object towards which perverted wills necessarily turn themselves.

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[51] Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.23.

[52] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 74. Emphasis original.

Quite commonly, we think of those who are perversely disoriented as being selfish, directed towards themselves and their own interests to the neglect of others. Walter Rauschenbusch gave expression to this general tendency in *A Theology for the Social Gospel* when, in support of his own construal of sin, he declared, "Theology with remarkable unanimity has discerned that sin is essentially selfishness."[53] And, in a different field, philosopher Iris Murdoch has found this truth similarly expressed by Freudian psychology, which she believes offers a "thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature" according to which the psyche is "an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy" not naturally capable of objectivity and unselfishness. Hence, for Murdoch, Freud leads us to a vision of the moral life where "the enemy is the fat relentless ego."[54]

There is also much in Augustine's thought that would validate the judgment that such a turning to the self is the essential movement of a perverse will. After all, it is the dynamic that characterized humanity's original sin: "For [Adam and Eve] would not have arrived at the evil act had an evil will not preceded it. Moreover, what but pride can have been the beginning of their evil will? … And what is pride but an appetite for a perverse kind of elevation? … This occurs when a man is too well pleased with himself; and he is too well pleased with himself when he falls away from that immutable good which he ought rather to have been pleased than with himself." Thus, what precipitated the first evil act is that "man" "turned towards himself [*inclinatus ad se*]."[55] Not only does the turn towards self engender humanity's primeval sin, according to Augustine, but it is also the defining principle of the perverse collocation of human beings known as the *civitas terrena*, which he believes is ultimately bound for perdition. "Two cities, then, have been created by two loves,

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[53] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917; reprint, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 47.

[54] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 50-1.

[55] Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

that is, the earthly city by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self."[56] It is such excessive self-love that typifies the earthly city and defines it as a city. And it is by living according to self that its members "become like the devil."[57]

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, feminist theologians in particular began to question the account of evil as a turning exclusively towards oneself. Valerie Saiving articulated one of the earliest and most influential critiques of the egocentric construal of evil as perversion in her landmark 1960 article, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," which centrally criticizes the mutually dependent interpretations of sin and love advanced by thinkers such as Anders Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr. These interpretations, Saiving argues, identify sin almost entirely with "the unjustified concern of the self for its own power and prestige," which drives one to "reduc[e] … others to the status of mere objects which can then be treated as appendages of the self and manipulated accordingly."[58] Casting love as the proper remedy for this prideful sin, Nygren and Niebuhr define it in diametrically opposed terms. True love is thus utterly self-sacrificing, "giv[ing] itself freely, fully, and without calculation."[59] Saiving's fundamental objection is that such definitions of sin and love represent a canonization of male experience. Whereas men are far more prone to the sin of prideful self-assertion, she argues that the typical sins of women, particularly in patriarchal societies, are things such as "triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition … in short underdevelopment or negation of the self."[60] To prescribe self-sacrificial love as the single

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[56] See ibid., XIV.28.
[57] Ibid., XIV.3.
[58] Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1960): 100.
[59] Ibid., 101.
[60] Ibid., 109.

panacea applicable as much to women as to men is in fact to peddle a pernicious moral nostrum that underwrites the continued oppression of women as it undermines the healthy forms of self-assertion necessary if they are to realize their full identities. Put differently, Saiving's point is that such a prescription is bound to leave women perverted not towards themselves but towards the excessive claims of others that keep them from truly developing a self in the first place.

Although there have been powerful dissenting voices among the ranks of feminist theologians, in the intervening years since Saiving first wrote, a number of feminist thinkers have also developed accounts of evil and sin that have extended her general critique. And many have done this while softening or eliminating the essentialist account of the differences that Saiving presumed obtained between women and men, showing that this increasingly questionable basis is not integral to such a critique. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, for instance, has argued that when it is "defined exclusively as other-regard or self-sacrifice," love "is not an appropriate virtue for women who are prone to excessive selflessness," showing how suspicion of such a version of love goes back even to nineteenth-century feminists.[61] Susan Nelson has provided another complementary take on the matter as she more thoroughly illuminates the holes in Niebuhr's treatment of sin. Even though Niebuhr has a brief account of the sin that he calls "sensuality," in which one seeks to hide from freedom by losing oneself in the world's vitalities, Nelson argues that he fails to develop it fully, leaving it to be conceptually consumed by the sin of pride. Instead of using the language of sensuality, as Niebuhr does, she believes we should talk about the sin of "hiding," which focuses us upon the fact that one sins in attempting to escape from one's freedom before God. The problem with Niebuhr's solution, then, is that in "making self-sacrificial love the ultimate Christian

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[61] Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9, no. 1 (1981): 74.

virtue, one makes the sin of hiding into a virtue as well, and thereby encourages those already committing the sin of hiding to stay in that state."[62] And Marjorie Suchocki takes the sin of hiding a step further in her book *Fall to Violence*, specifying it as the sin of making the other absolute. By absorbing the perspective of the other, Suchocki maintains, one sinfully loses "the rightful sense of a self as the centered self who enters into relation."[63]

Taken together, Saiving, Andolsen, Nelson, and Suchocki helpfully push us towards a more complex understanding of perversion, which can consist not only in a turning to the self but in the evil of what I will call "self-loss," a term that encompasses both the more active flights from communion suggested by the term "hiding" and more inactive responses to God's call to communion that others refer to as "sloth."[64] Whatever we call it, at bottom, one might describe these thinkers' respective projects as attempts to convict us—and particularly women in patriarchal contexts—of our true mode of implication in evil in order to liberate us. Only by knowing the true nature of our sin, they suggest, can we be set free. And the truth of the matter appears to be that human beings are guilty of the evil of perversion not just in one way but in a variety. Perversion does not have a single dynamic that directs us exclusively towards the self. Rather, it has variable dynamics and almost innumerable possible objects.

As the wide acceptance of evil as egocentric perversion attests, it is not generally very difficult to perceive the ways in which selfishness creates the kind of serious ruptures in our relationship with God, other human beings, and creation that are definitive of evil. To exalt

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[62] Susan Nelson Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings* 65, no. 3 (1982): 321.

[63] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 40.

[64] I borrow the term "self-loss" from Daniel Migliore. See Daniel L. Migliore, "Sin and Self-Loss: Karl Barth and the Feminist Critique of Traditional Doctrines of Sin," in *Many Voices, One God* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 139-54. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, drawing from Barth's account of sloth, Migliore associates sloth and self-loss more closely than I would. See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume IV.2*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 403-83.

ourselves pridefully above God and others and to seek to bring them into the manipulative orbit of our power involves a clear defection from our proper worship of God and our fellowship with others. Rather than participating in the perichoretic dance that emulates Christ by lovingly communing with God and neighbor, selfishness renounces this in favor of an existence turned in upon itself. Instead of humbly emulating God who became incarnate in Jesus, in Suchocki's words, selfishness imperialistically seeks "to be like God, not in terms of character, but in terms of power."[65]

The problem with the evil produced as we turn towards created things other than ourselves is more subtle, but we can bring it into clearer relief by viewing it through the lens of the last chapter's claim that the form of communion to which God calls humanity is exemplified by Jesus Christ and summarized in his twin commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). As Augustine keenly observes, in these commandments "[one] finds three things that [one] is supposed to love: God, [oneself], and [one's] neighbor."[66] To the extent that one loses one's self or never develops a self truly worthy of the name and possessed of a proper self-love, one remains incapable of proper, loving communion with God and neighbor. There can be no love without a self capable of giving it and no communion without various selves being brought together. When our wills become perversely captive to the things of this world, leading us to lose or effectively dissolve our selves, we find our relationships with God and others seriously ruptured as we are left without the capacity to participate in the communion to which God has called us.

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[65] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 29.
[66] Augustine, *City of God*, xix.14.

And yet a number of factors make it difficult to determine when such a serious rupture is in fact present. Perhaps the most bedeviling is that a vision of perversion that includes loss of self as an evil casts movements such as self-assertion and self-sacrifice in an ambiguous light. Whereas any self-assertion seems clearly contemptible when we define evil as perversion solely in egocentric terms, in this more ambiguous situation an act of self-assertion that looks formally similar to pride may in fact be a healthy expression of self-love by which one resists the overweening claims of others. Matt Jenson precisely locates the problem here: "in construing pride as sinful in principle (and thus cordoning off all self-assertion as illegitimate), rather than sinful in certain relational contexts, Christian theology has too often underwritten abusive power relationships in its call for a pathological self-denigration under the rubric of 'Christian humility.' "[67] Self-love, rather like most Aristotelian virtues, is a mean between the extremes of pride and self-loss, and it is only in particular instances that one can determine when self-assertion fittingly expresses self-love and when it has itself become overweening and devolved into pride. What matters is not the movement per se but its quality and context.[68]

Similarly, although pernicious when oppressively demanded of those denied any other route of self-expression, self-sacrifice may paradoxically serve as a healthy expression of a mature self. Such, I take it, is the realization towards which thinkers like Beverly Harrison push us as they attempt to reclaim Jesus Christ from those who would portray his life simply as a continuous movement of self-sacrifice. Harrison thus claims that "Jesus' paradigmatic role in the story of our salvation rests not in his willingness to sacrifice himself,

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[67] Matt Jenson, *Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 4.

[68] Both Oliver O'Donovan and Eric Gregory would see this as being very much in accord with Augustine's understanding of self-love. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980). Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), especially 262.

but in his passionate love of right relations and his refusal to cease to embody the power of relation in the face of that which would thwart it."[69] Self-sacrifice is not a good in any and all contexts but only when it involves such a self constructively willing love and communion despite danger.[70] Once again, context rather than form determines the meaning and moral standing of such an act. The difficulty is that properly appreciating the context of acts of self-assertion and self-sacrifice requires considerable virtues of discernment, not simply the promulgation of unexceptional principles.

Learning from feminist criticisms, we can offer a more sophisticated and multidimensional account of evil as perversion of the will. Evil arises not only as one pridefully turns to oneself and "seeks to raise [one's] contingent existence to unconditioned significance,"[71] but also when one turns to things other than the self in ways that inhibit one from proper communion with God and neighbors. Even if we wish to join Augustine in holding that the first evil of humanity was one of pride, we need not maintain that all subsequent ones are as well.[72] Indeed, reading Genesis 3 in an Augustinian fashion, we might see that Adam and Eve gave way to evil first through pride when they ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but then through self-loss as they hid themselves and

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[69] Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Elizabeth M. Bounds et al. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 64. It is perhaps worth noting that similar claims in fact have deep roots in the Christian tradition and ought not be dismissed out of hand by the more traditionally inclined. Indeed, although Harrison does not explicitly do so, one may identify precursors of this claim even as far back as Anselm of Canterbury, who near the turn of the twelfth century sought to distinguish "between, on the one hand, what Christ did because of the demands of his obedience and, on the other, the suffering inflicted upon him because he maintained his obedience." The point for Anselm, much as for Harrison, is that Christ was not forced to die but "underwent death of his own accord" in order to uphold righteousness. Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, in Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), I.9.

[70] Timothy Jackson makes a point similar to that made by Harrison when he claims not that *agape* demands self-sacrifice but that it entails an "openness to self-sacrifice … premised on its being both constructive and consensual." Timothy P. Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 55.

[71] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 186.

[72] This argument is well made in Jesse Couenhoven, " 'Not Every Wrong Is Done with Pride': Augustine's Proto-Feminist Anti-Pelagianism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 1 (2008): 37.

fled from communion with God (Genesis 3:10).[73] To venture a provisional enumeration of the various forms of evil as perversion, then, we could say that evil results when one turns excessively to oneself (pride) or to other created things (idolatry) or when one passively fails to develop a self that is capable of true communion (despair or sloth). Specifying further, we can classify idolatry, despair, and sloth as all sub-types of self-loss.

One of the most serious objections to the account of perversion that I have developed here is that it may appear to prepare the way for us to blame the victims of evil. If one loses one's self, would it not follow that that person is the cause of the evil of self-loss? As feminist, Black, womanist, and Latin American theologians have so poignantly illustrated, however, we must realize that many who turn away from God and neighbor and thereby lose themselves either through sloth or idolatry do so under external pressure, especially that of prideful individuals and dehumanizing social forms. Hence, though they may deserve a share of the blame depending upon the particular configuration of individual and social forces at work, we cannot simply blame the victim for such evil.[74]

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[73] Augustine comes tantalizingly close to such an account of evil as hiding at points, such as when he writes that God's question to Adam in Genesis 3:9—"Where are you?"—is meant "to admonish him to reflect upon where he was, now that God was no longer with him." Nevertheless, Augustine never develops these intimations fully. Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.16.

[74] Saying that the victims of evil social forms may deserve some blame for self-loss moves us towards a far more vexed question, though one that is less central to this project. Should we say that one who loses one's self, particularly under the conditions of oppression, is guilty of a sin? If we use "sin" to refer to evil acts or conditions of the soul that one can rightly be said to bear the responsibility of restraining or remediating, a great deal depends on when we can say that such responsibility no longer obtains. Does, for instance, a woman born into a patriarchal social system that has thoroughly normalized the self-loss of women truly possess the resources to resist self-loss and thus bear responsibility for it when she indeed loses herself? Questions of this sort are so vexing in no small part because one must walk a very fine line, recognizing both the continued agency of the oppressed even while acknowledging the, at times crippling, effects of evil social forms. At the very least, however, this self-loss might be said to be a sin of a peculiar sort, for even if one is not responsible for causing it, such an evil can only be remediated by one realizing one's self-identity. Though less concerned with social structures than interpersonal relationships, for a helpful treatment of the theological issues involved in such questions, see the discussion of whether it is possible to render decisive spiritual harm in Timothy P. Jackson, "Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Daniel Marino (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 235-56.

Nevertheless, even as we recognize the complexity of these dynamics, I believe that we must still maintain that self-loss constitutes an evil, for upholding this ascription is, somewhat paradoxically, an indicator of the worth of that self. When an oppressed person loses or fails to develop her self under external influence, it is an evil precisely because she is one whom God has created for and called to the communion of the City of God, and the loss of her self seriously ruptures that communion with God and others for which God intends her. In a significant respect, the final humiliation would be if such self-loss did not constitute an evil. Again, however, this by no means entails that oppressive individuals or social systems are not to blame at least for contributing to, and perhaps even for causing, such evils. The trajectory of this dynamic suggests that if we are to comprehend the phenomenological manifestations of evil in this world more fully, we must turn to a consideration of evil as the corruption of social relations, which brings us to the topic of our next section.

B. Evil as the Corruption of Social Forms

Human social life spans numerous levels, from intimate one-on-one relationships to complex, highly impersonal meta-institutions, such as government, that serve to organize the functions of numerous other institutions. And each of these levels is susceptible to corruption by evil. This corruption comprises the second aspect of the predicament of evil.

Especially at more micro-social levels (such as those involving relationships between individuals, within families, or even in relatively simple groups), we can at times trace the cause of such evils clearly to particular instances of individual perversion. One person may viciously encourage another's addiction to drugs, family members may treat one another hatefully, or a school board may pursue blatantly inequitable funding policies for the schools

within its district, and such people may willingly do these things simply because they are perversely oriented away from God and neighbor. For those who adhere to a strict sociological individualism—such as that which underlies much of social contract theory, as well as rational choice theory, and which evinces itself so quintessentially in Ayn Rand's proclamation that "[a]ny group or collective, large or small, is only a number of individuals"[75]—there is never anything more to social forms than the sum of such individual actions. The correlate of this would hold that social evils simply represent the aggregation of perverse individual actions, an opinion that has historically had wide, if tacit, support in Christian theology. Such an explanation of social evil would render a separate discussion of the matter largely superfluous since it suggests that a more effective manner of analyzing evil would be to reduce it to its constituent, individual parts.

And yet, while it may appear tenable enough when applied to micro-social realities,[76] such an individualistic account of social phenomena falters particularly when we turn our attention to more complex forms of social existence, especially those represented by institutions and large social groups, which I will refer to collectively in this section as "social

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[75] Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 1964), 119. I invoke Rand here in part as a small way of responding to her continued influence in American political and social discourse, exemplified by the influence she has been acknowledged to have upon long-time Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and Republican Vice Presidential candidate Paul Ryan. Nevertheless, in the field of sociology the more classic exemplar of sociological individualism (which its critics more commonly refer to as "atomism") is Herbert Spencer, who saw individuals as the "units" of modern society and taught, for instance, that "[n]othing comes out of a society but what originates in the motive of an individual, or in the united similar motives of many individuals, or in the conflict of the united similar motives of some having certain interests, with the diverse motives of others whose interests are different." Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 349. Spencer's exemplary position in the canon of modern sociology owes much to the withering criticism to which Emile Durkheim subjected his work. See Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1997), espially Book 1, Chapter 7. For a critical analysis of atomism in political thought, see Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 187-210.

[76] I say "appear tenable enough" here because such an account at least ostensibly possesses a fair amount of explanatory power at such levels. Nevertheless, I believe that Georg Simmel's work on dyads and triads cogently illustrates that even the dynamics of small groups are sociological phenomena not strictly reducible to the acts of the individuals involved. See especially Georg Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*, ed. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton.K. Jacobs, and Mathew J. Kanjirathinkal (Boston: Brill, 2009), 53-128.

forms."[77] Social forms such as institutions and large groups not only differ from individuals quantitatively but also qualitatively. It is not simply that social forms have greater power than individuals, but that they have different kinds of power. Most significantly, for good and for ill, they have the power to establish modes of relation and norms of judgment that exist outside of individuals, that precede us in the world, and that have the appearance of natural and moral authority. Of course, such forms must originate from the actions of a group of individuals, but in their combination these actions establish something *sui generis*, something more than a mere aggregate of themselves.[78] Much as the union of elements into a living cell creates a qualitatively different entity than the elements themselves, so too do the individual actions that create a social form yield a new phenomenon.[79] A vital dimension of the uniqueness of social forms resides in this external existence, which impresses itself upon

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[77] I am largely content for readers to understand the terms "group" and "institution" in a commonsense manner. Nevertheless, given the extreme vagueness that often plagues the use of these terms and the diverse construals to which they are subject, it may be helpful for me to note how I understand them. As I use it, *group* refers to a collection of people joined by a self-recognized common identity or by common interests, beliefs, or goals and that, as a result of these commonalities, tends to act in concert at least on specific matters. While this rubric includes what sociologists often call "primary groups," such as families, for reasons signaled in the preceding paragraph, this section will generally be more interested in larger social groups, such as corporations and nations. Diverging from one of the more common distinctions in sociological parlance, this manner of construal would also classify as groups certain assemblages of persons that are not joined by direct interaction or an organizational structure but that nonetheless tend to act in concert at least on limited matters, such as a particular economic class or White people within a given region, assemblages that sociologists tend to classify as "categories."

Meanwhile, I understand *institution* to refer to an enduring social structure that organizes stable patterns of human activity in order to meet the challenges of providing for fundamental human needs and desires and that in doing so, or in order to do so, mediates conceptions of appropriate social roles, norms, and values. Institutions are thus forms as diverse as marriage, government, the economic system, and even particularly influential groups, examples of which might be the Roman Catholic Church, powerful political parties, or large business enterprises like McDonald's or Disney. Institutions, then, regularly shape the behavior of groups even as groups can themselves become institutions in their own right when they gain a particular centrality in the life of a society. Although I disagree with important aspects of the way he construes institutions and particularly with his emphasis upon the necessity of extent, my definition of institutions owes a great deal to Jonathan Turner's. See Jonathan H. Turner, *The Institutional Order: Economy, Kinship, Religion, Polity, Law, and Education in Evolutionary and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Longman, 1997), 6.

[78] Although less strictly sociological in nature, in the latter half of the twentieth century, thinkers such as William Stringfellow, Hendrikus Berkhof, John Howard Yoder, and Walter Wink provided a different take on the *sui generis* character of social forms as they interpreted them as the "principalities and powers" that Paul references in passages such as Romans 8:38; Colossians 1:16 and 2:15; and Titus 3:1. See also Ephesians 3:10 and 6:12.

[79] This metaphor comes from Emile Durkheim, *Selected Writings*, ed. Anthony Giddens (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 69.

individuals such that the social form and its patterns of relation and judgment possess what Emile Durkheim called a "material and moral supremacy" over the individual.[80] This material supremacy consists in their disposition of things like resources, wealth, and even political power. Meanwhile, through their moral authority social forms shape the ways in which we think and feel as they cultivate modes of thought and practice that to the individual come to seem natural, simply "the way the world is."

For the most part, Durkheimians tend to be optimistic about the effects of the material and moral supremacy of social forms, and Christians should acknowledge that they often do shape human beings in favorable ways. There are, for example, few societies whose members are not early on socialized to abhor murder. Yet the potential of social forms to bend towards evil entails that we must regard the notion that they possess a "moral supremacy" to mean not that they invariably establish ethically right patterns of relation but, in accord with the English word "mores," to denote that something is in accordance with the customs or traditions of a specified people, whether or not that thing is ethically justified. And that is how I will use the term when referring to the moral supremacy of social forms.

Appreciating this *sui generis* nature of social forms will help us to perceive the peculiarity of the evils that they perpetrate and enable, which itself will provide a further demonstration of their uniqueness. Before doing so, however, it will be helpful to begin by discussing the formal dynamics of social evils, which largely mimic those of individual evil.

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[80] Ibid., 71. In this paragraph I draw largely from Durkheim. Nevertheless, often influenced especially by Marx's critique of ideology, contemporary thinkers widely share the conviction that one of the things that distinguishes social forms is their ability to establish apparently authoritative modes of material relation and moral judgment. For two examples from very different camps and of thinkers with very different assessments of whether or not this is a good thing, one might point to Michel Foucault and Alasdair MacIntyre. This aspect of their work becomes particularly clear when one realizes that, unlike for Durkheim, the primary social forms of concern are, for Foucault, economics and politics and, for MacIntyre, traditions. See especially Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 78-145. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), especially 1-11.

This is because, like individuals, social forms are capable of producing evil both through selfishness and self-loss.

To begin with the second and far more exceptional case, we should acknowledge that, however rare, it is possible for social forms to produce evil by allowing themselves to dissipate or dissolve. In this world, human beings rely upon certain social forms to meet fundamental needs. Were an essential institution that provides necessary resources merely to allow itself to disintegrate when there is no other to replace its essential functions, this would undoubtedly constitute an evil. To be sure, most institutions are far from essential. Accordingly, it is possible that the self-dissipation of McDonald's or Disney would not be a true evil.[81] The disappearance of the local water department, on the other hand, is a very different story, for it would quite likely bring immense human suffering in its train. Moreover, Christians should also maintain that the self-dissolution of the church—something threatened today by Christians' widespread loss of confidence in the church as a social form—would constitute a significant evil. Much the same could be said of government, as the evils endured by those who live in anarchic regions like contemporary Somalia attest.

To put these insights into a more theological key, we might say, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer maintains, that there are certain institutions that Christians should consider not merely to be desirable but to be "*mandates of God* in the world."[82] For Bonhoeffer, this list includes work (the rubric under which I believe the water department would fall), marriage, government, and church. The role of the first three of these divinely mandated social forms is not to redeem the world or even to perform distinctively Christian acts but to "hold the

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[81] Note the use of the subjunctive here, which is very much intentional. It seeks to convey that, even if McDonald's or Disney may not meet fundamental needs that could not be met by other institutions, any assessment of the evil of their self-dissipation would have to take into account the ramifications of such a development upon these corporations' employees, vendors, and others.

[82] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Isle Tödt et al., trans., Reinhard Krauss, Charles West, and Douglas Stott, vol. 4 (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 68. Emphasis original.

way open for the gospel" of redemption in Jesus Christ that the church is to proclaim. Accordingly, none of these social forms is validated in and of itself; as Bonhoeffer insists, they "obtain their value wholly from outside themselves, from Christ, from the new creation."[83] In other words, their value derives from the way in which they help to alleviate "conditions that hinder faith in Jesus Christ" or, in the case of the church, from the mission positively to proclaim the gospel of Christ.[84] To the extent that it gives widespread rise to conditions that would present significant obstacles to faith in Christ, we should judge the dissipation of an essential social form to constitute an evil.

Still, it bears repeating that while it is possible for social forms to give rise to evil through self-loss, this appears to be tremendously rare, not only because many social forms do not serve essential functions but also because even those that do are often tempted in the opposite direction. So rare is self-loss among social forms that the precious few instances of it that one could adduce would seem to be exceptions that prove the rule, suggested by Augustine and most powerfully rearticulated by Reinhold Niebuhr, that social forms, especially institutions and groups, fundamentally become perpetrators of evil through self-centeredness as they orient themselves and those under their sway solely towards securing those forms' own interests. This is because social forms tend to be animated by selfish motives, which manifest themselves in what Niebuhr calls "collective egotism." In Niebuhr's thought political groups provide the paradigmatic illustration of this egotism as they consistently seek to present the group as a higher value than it truly is. They thus customarily

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[83] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "On the Theological Basis of the Work of the World Alliance" in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 100-1. The close reader of Bonhoeffer will notice that I have in the last few sentences joined statements from two parts of his career in which he refers to these forms under different names. Hence, in context this quote is applied not to "divine mandates" but to what Bonhoeffer calls "orders of preservation." Nonetheless, like most interpreters, I find that the former label is Bonhoeffer's more sophisticated attempt to render the thoughts he had ealrier articulated under the latter.

[84] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 361.

exhibit lust for power, pride, and contempt for others in their attempts to prove and ensure their significance. These tendencies reach their apex in the "claim of moral autonomy by which the self-deification of the social group is made explicit by its presentation of itself as the source and end of existence."[85] Hence, the besetting sin of social forms is not self-loss but self-exaltation as they pridefully present themselves as values worthy of a loyalty that not only would rupture their members' relations with others outside the group but that in its most extreme forms can even alienate from God those who accept their pernicious pretensions. To formulate this point somewhat differently, we might say that social forms tend to give way to evil as they lose reference to the common good of all and refer narrowly to themselves, their own interests, or the good of those who control them. Even those that do not have the transcendent pretensions about which Niebuhr so worries are often guilty of seeking their own institutional interests at the expense of others' needs; even water departments can and do go too far at times.

Although the formal dynamics by which social forms give rise to evil are not unique, the kinds of evils that they make possible are. Perhaps the most effective way to exhibit this uniqueness is to investigate how corrupt social forms perpetrate evils and draft human beings into their service, dynamics we can illuminate through the study of two rather different examples of social evil, first, the Holocaust and, second, the contemporary poultry industry.

(1) Corrupt Social Forms and Their Collaborators

Beginning our discussion of social evil with an extreme example can be instructive since it will help to illustrate more vividly its *sui generis* nature. One particularly fitting example is Hannah Arendt's account of the career of Adolf Eichmann in her famous and

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[85] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 211.

controversial work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Despite the book's subtitle, Arendt never fully explains what it means for evil to be banal. Rather, she demonstrates it throughout the book as she provides a well-written yet often plodding treatment of the everyday bureaucratic acts of the Nazi regime. Much as one critic said of *Waiting for Godot*, if you're not bored at the end of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, you have missed the point. Evil here is not striking or intriguing. It is banal, mind-numbing, silly, enervating. There is certainly no heroism but neither is there blatant wickedness. "Eichmann," writes Arendt, "was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been further from his mind than to determine with Richard III 'to prove a villain.' Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his own personal advancement, he had no motives at all."[86]

Whereas for Augustine the extreme and peculiar enormity of social evil was in part explained by the ministrations of the spectacularly malevolent demons whom the Romans worshipped, for Arendt it results from the fact that evil could draft into its service people as unspectacular and unimaginative as Eichmann, the insipid former Vacuum Oil salesman whom she found to be afflicted by "an inability to *think*," someone who exhibited no clear malice and yet was so unoriginal that even at his execution he could only spout ill-fitting clichés.[87] As Mathewes puts it, there are no Satanic *Übermenschen* in Arendt's story.[88] Instead, the tale of evil here is one of unremarkable bureaucrats punching the clock, dutifully managing the widgets and doodads under their charge, thoughtlessly oblivious to what they are actually doing.[89] The unique power of social evil in this instance is that it can become a

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[86] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1965; reprint, New York; Penguin Books, 2006), 287.

[87] Ibid., 49, 252. Emphasis original.

[88] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 166. See also Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 55-7.

[89] Arendt claims this of Eichmann in Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 287.

bureaucratic phenomenon by capitalizing upon the thoughtlessness that fails to recognize that these widgets and doodads are in fact human lives destined for destruction.

Arendt's notion of the banality of evil could thus be read as something of a gloss on Max Weber's account of the social form known as bureaucracy. For Weber, bureaucracy operates and garners authority through technical efficiency, which it achieves by reducing bureaucrats to mere cogs in a machine. Because of this, the bureaucratic apparatus "with its peculiar, 'impersonal' character, means that the mechanism … is easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it," and therefore it can be pushed into the service of "quite varied … interests in domination."[90] In this light, the horrific destruction of the Holocaust derives from the combination of a mindless bureaucratic apparatus populated by the likes of Eichmann with an exceptional few—Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler most notably—who were particularly adept at gaining control over that apparatus and used their influence to direct it in vicious, murderous paths. Yet the bureaucratic social form makes possible evils far greater than the sum of its parts—even greater than the profound, sinful malice of Hitler—for it not only allows the exceptional few to be murderers on a grand scale but even people like Eichmann. The banality of evil that becomes possible within such a social form thus marks what one might call "the democratization of atrocity."

Contrary to the fears routinely expressed by political conservatives when one broaches the topic, acknowledging that evil corrupts social forms, which in turn impress their moral legitimacy upon individuals, does not necessarily exonerate those who take part in such evils. Arendt underscores this point with her repeated indictments of Eichmann even while displaying the social evils that contributed to making him the mass murderer that he was. Much like at the Nuremberg trials, where the Allied judges maintained that "obeying

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[90] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 230, 232.

orders" was not an acceptable legal defense, thoughtlessness here is not an acceptable ethical defense.

Nevertheless, we miss the true severity of social evil if we cannot recognize that Eichmann does not bear sole responsibility for the evils he committed. Rather, he was aided, abetted, and encouraged by a particular constellation of social forms whose contributions were both material and moral. Establishing modes of material relations designed for immense destruction, social forms reduced the physical effort needed for extreme evil, such that mere bureaucrats became capable of it. And by inculcating modes of judgment that legitimated such destruction, social forms also reduced the moral effort that extreme evil required, such that Eichmann did not even need to override the safeguards of conscience when performing his functions in the Nazi genocide machine. Indeed, social forms are capable of creating a situation in which someone like Eichmann who perpetrates enormous evils does not even need to "close his ears to the voice of conscience" because his conscience speaks "with a 'respectable voice,' with the voice of respectable society around him," with a voice that validates his viciousness.[91] Evil's corruption of social forms means that one need not be Prometheus to become Eichmann.

Of course, however, few could imagine ourselves ever becoming Eichmann or even a tacit supporter of the Nazi regime. This points not simply to an underestimation of our own capacities for evil but to some of the limitations of using Nazism as an example of social evil. One limitation is that the particular form of evil that Nazism represents can appear to be the unique product of a specific historical moment. A second is that the very enormity of the Holocaust presents an obstacle, for an evil so extreme allows us to think that we surely would recognize social evil were we to see it. Taken together, these create the

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[91] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 126.

space to believe that social evil is simply something "out there," something in which we are too clever or too pious to become enmeshed. For the world's more relatively wealthy inhabitants, particularly those of us in so-called "developed nations," such pretensions become far more difficult to sustain when we are confronted by the fact that a number of the goods that we regularly consume are the products of corrupted social forms predicated upon exploitative relationships.

Examples of such problematic goods are legion, from clothing and technological devices that are manufactured in sweatshops to so-called "blood diamonds" whose sales finance warlords to tea and fruit that are harvested by workers who make low wages and have few rights. In the year 2000, the Catholic Bishops of the South (United States) shone a light upon the unjust arrangements that undergird the production of one such problematic good that is a staple of many Americans' diets—chicken. Poultry processing workers in the United States, as well as other industrialized countries, must perform demanding labor in which they are vulnerable to debilitating injuries from repetitive movements and workplace dangers, such as the high speed of the production line and close-quarters cutting. And yet, as the bishops sought to highlight, such workers are paid low wages and generally offered only minimal health insurance, if they receive any at all. Even as the broiler industry pocketed $1 billion in profits in 1996, Department of Labor reports issued in subsequent years found that the real wages of poultry processing workers had declined between 1987 and 1997 and that 60% of poultry companies were in violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act, commonly failing to pay workers for job-related tasks or to provide safety equipment as required.[92]

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[92] Catholic Bishops of the South, *Voices and Choices: A Pastoral Message on Justice in the Workplace* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000), 6, 2.

Through injustices such as these, the bishops suggested, the poultry industry "exacts an intolerable personal and community cost."[93]

Largely as a result of more aggressive action by the Department of Labor, the years since the bishops issued their pastoral message have brought some advances. Perhaps most notable of these are injunction agreements reached in 2010 with the United States' two largest poultry producers, Pilgrim's Pride and Tyson Foods, that require them to pay employees for all the hours they work.

Nevertheless, in many respects the fundamental conditions of the poultry industry have not changed. Processing workers continue to receive low pay. In 2011, 25% of full-time poultry processing workers earned $19,750 or less, and the median wage for full-time workers was $22,720, only slightly above the federal poverty threshold of $22,113 for a family of four.[94] Poultry workers also remain subject to hazardous on-the-job conditions. Data compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that 5.9% of poultry processing workers suffered occupational injuries or illnesses that required days away from work in 2010.[95] This rate, though a precipitous drop from 22.7% in 1994,[96] still remains well above the average of all goods-producing industries. There is good reason to believe, however, that these more recent numbers significantly underestimate the actual incidence of injury and illness. In a 2008 exposé in which it studied the injury rates of a number of poultry processing plants, the *Charlotte Observer* revealed irregularities that indicated drastic underreporting of injuries, a judgment also reached by Bob Whitmore, who served as the

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[93] Ibid., 1.

[94] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2011: 51-3022 Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers," http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes513022.htm (accessed June 4, 2012).

[95] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1: Incidence Rates of Nonfatal Occupational Injuries and Illnesses by Industry and Case Types, 2010," www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osh/os/ostb2813.pdf (accessed June 4, 2012), p. 5.

[96] Greg Guthey, "The New Factories in the Field," *Southern Changes* 19, no. 3-4 (1997): 23.

head of the record-keeping division of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) for nearly 20 years.[97] Subsequently, Whitmore has testified before the House Committee on Education and Labor, alleging that, across industries, the injury and illness information that the government compiles "is inaccurate, due in part to wide scale underreporting by employers and OSHA's willingness to accept these falsified numbers," which helps the agency to create the appearance that it is succeeding in its mission of making workplaces safer.[98] And recent developments appear likely to make the industry even more perilous as the United States Department of Agriculture has proposed regulatory changes that would allow manufacturers to raise the speed of their processing lines from 140 birds per minute to 175, putting even more stress upon line workers.[99]

In addition to the plight of processing line workers, the current configuration of poultry production is problematic in many other ways. A number of these have resulted, directly or indirectly, from the "vertical integration" of the industry. Under this new, vertically integrated paradigm, poultry companies own the birds and provide the feed, medications, and veterinary services while farmers are responsible for building and maintaining facilities and raising the birds to a marketable weight. With increasing vertical integration, the stake of the top four firms in the United States grew from controlling 14% of the chickens slaughtered in 1963 to controlling 57% in 2010.[100] Moreover, it has created a

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[97] Kerry Hall, Alexander Ames, and Franco Ordoñez, "The Cruelest Cuts," *Charlotte Observer,* February 11, 2008, http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2008/09/30/223415/the-cruelest-cuts.html (accessed June 4, 2012).

[98] "Testimony of Bob Whitmore before the Committee on Education and Labor United States House of Representatives Hearing on 'Hidden Tragedy: Underreporting of Workplace Injuries and Illnesses' ", Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility http://www.peer.org/docs/osha/09_3_11_Whitmore_Congressional_Testimony.pdf (accessed 4 June 2012), p. 3.

[99] Jim Avila, "USDA to Let Industry Self-Inspect Chicken," ABC News http://news.yahoo.com/usda-let-industry-self-inspect-chicken-191142649--abc-news-topstories.html (accessed June 4, 2012).

[100] "Public Workshops Exploring Competition in Agriculture: Poultry Workshop," United States Department of Justice and United States Department of Agriculture http://www.justice.gov/atr/public/workshops/ag2010/alabama-agworkshop-transcript.pdf (accessed 4 June 2012), p. 11.

situation where in many geographic regions a single company maintains an effective monopoly on poultry processing. This arrangement has endowed the companies with enormous power. And many farmers complain that poultry companies have used that power to intimidate them, as well as to pressure them into accepting unfair contracts.[101] Nevertheless, many feel that they have no choice but to acquiesce because, unfair as they may be, without those contracts farmers could not pay the loans they have had to borrow in order to equip their farms to the standards dictated by the company.

Beyond the concentration of power, vertical integration has also entailed a spatial concentration of chickens; in 2006 the typical broiler chicken came from a facility that produces more than 605,000 birds a year.[102] This increased concentration has had detrimental effects upon the environment. Foremost among these, gathering so many chickens together has created problems for properly disposing of their manure. As a result, excess nitrates and phosphates from chicken waste have contributed to higher levels of pollution in both waterways and groundwater.[103] Furthermore, animal rights groups have maintained that such densely populated farms routinely subject chickens to overly crowded living conditions that are themselves essentially abusive.

This is an admittedly partial depiction of the poultry industry. To assess its ethical standing fully would require greater space and nuance than is possible here, for in making

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[101] See for instance, ibid., pp. 84, 190, 104-5.

[102] "Big Chicken: Pollution and Industrial Poultry Production in America," The Pew Environment Group http://www.pewenvironment.org/uploadedFiles/PEG/Publications/Report/PEG_BigChicken_July2011.pdf (accessed June 4, 2012), p. 7.

[103] In 2003 the US Department of Agriculture issued a study that noted, "Ever-growing numbers of animals per farm and per acre have increased the risk of water pollution." Marc Ribaudo and others, "Manure Management for Water Quality: Costs to Animal Feeding Operations of Applying Manure Nutrients to Land. Agricultural Economic Report No. 824," United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer824/aer824.pdf. These risks are apparently being realized in the Chesapeake Bay, which is adjacent to one of the most concentrated areas of chicken production and which has suffered from a loss of biodiversity and seasonal dead zones due to water pollution. According to a May 2010 study by the Environmental Protection Agency "an estimated 19 percent of excess nitrogen and 26 percent of excess phosphorus were directly linked to animal manure." See "Big Chicken," p. 17.

relatively nutritious food widely available it indeed serves an appreciable social good. Still, what these lurid realities of poultry production underscore is that, despite the good served, there is clearly something wrong with the present configuration of this social form. Insofar as that configuration appears both to make the exploitation of workers and farmers and the abuse of God's creation matters of standard operating procedure, the practices of the poultry industry represent a significant rupture in the communion among human beings and between humans and their neighbors in the community of creation. Indeed, those culpable for its evil may have reason to fear the oracles that declare that God will judge "against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages" (Malachi 3:5) and will destroy "those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

But just who is culpable for these evils? The *sui generis* character of social forms means that questions of culpability are profoundly complex. The temptation to pin blame upon poultry company executives is strong and, to a degree, justifiable. Yet to condemn these persons alone would overlook the fact that they are themselves responding to powerful stimuli. Among those are relatively lax governmental regulation, the pitched competition between poultry companies, and consumers' increasing demand for low-cost chicken. Were executives simply to pursue unilateral changes without regard to these conditions, they would potentially run the risk of putting their companies out of business, a fate from which many processing companies have suffered since the 1950s. Consequently, even the most morally sensitive executives might believe that, given the current market ecology, they have little choice but to continue with policies that even they find objectionable. In this sense, the poultry industry may represent the kind of social system about which Walter Rauschenbusch so worried—one that even "makes good men do bad things."[104] And it is a system for which

[104] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 127.

numerous parties bear varying degrees of culpability, including poultry company executives, government agencies, and the consumers themselves.

While it is easy enough to recognize the guilt of company executives and even government agencies given the direct and substantial power that they exercise over the poultry industry, consumers generally have greater difficulty recognizing their own culpability. For one thing, they are remote from the centers of concentrated power represented by corporate boardrooms and regulatory agencies. Perhaps even more significantly, the power that they do exercise when they purchase poultry products appears to have little relation to the industry's abuses. After all, when one buys, say, a pristine package of chicken breast, it appears as if out of nowhere, with virtually no indications of its origins or the conditions of its production. It is the quasi-magical quality of such goods that creates what Karl Marx referred to as the "fetishism of commodities." Consumers offer monetary payment for commodities and in return receive a highly sanitized version of a product that is shorn of any trace of the conditions under which it was produced. This type of exchange, Marx observes, "conceals, instead of disclosing, the social character of private labour, and the social relations between the individual producers."[105] On the basis of the package of chicken breast itself, we have no inkling of the blood, sweat, and tears that may have been mingled in its journey from farm to market. The very nature of the capitalist marketplace thus renders the conditions of production invisible to consumers. Like the bureaucratized Nazi regime, it functions in such a way that questions of conscience are less likely to arise.[106] And yet, despite their ignorance and perhaps even their intentions, when

[105] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 324.

[106] Of course, chicken is by no means the only good whose fetishized form obscures injustices in its making. Further examples of such goods are legion, and the grievous details of their production regularly populate the news. For instance, in early 2012 a rash of worker suicides drew attention to the labor practices of Foxconn, a contractor that operates numerous factories in China at which it assembles many of Apple's highly

they purchase certain products consumers become implicated, however remotely, in a web of exploitation in which they benefit from the maltreatment of workers, the pollution of the environment, and the abuse of animals. And with their purchase, they lend their monetary support to that system.

The complexity of assigning guilt in such scenarios and the way in which consumers often become unwittingly implicated in evils to which they are related only remotely both attest to the *sui generis* character of social evil and to the fact that there is more at work in them than simply individual perversion. Rather than flowing forth exclusively from the present selfishness of individuals, in social evils the putrid springs of individual selfishness are gathered together with currents from many additional tributaries. These include, as John Bennett has perceptively identified, the limitations of human understanding and imagination, the vastness and complexity of social systems, and the inertia that social forms create as they mediate to us insufficient social theories as well as "the congealed results of the sins of the past generations."[107]

As these sources have come together in the contemporary poultry industry, they have created a situation less openly brutal but not altogether dissimilar from that in Nazi Germany. Much as Eichmann was able to function as a vital cog in the Nazi genocide machine despite what Arendt identified as a lack of malicious motives, many who keep the gears of the poultry industry oiled and spinning as they do—whether they are executives,

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profitable devices, including iPods and iPads. In that case, journalists found that Foxconn forced employees to work extreme hours in unsafe conditions, subjected them to humiliating forms of discipline, and paid exceedingly low wages. Responding to these allegations in an address to workers, Foxconn's billionaire chairman Terry Gou brushed aside the allegations by blithely asking, "What's wrong with sweatshops?" Over the past decades, eerily similar stories have revealed exploitation in the making of apparel, the growing of produce like bananas, the mining and trade of diamonds, and the recycling of high-tech gadgets. In its own way, each of these bears witness to the corruption of social forms. For Gou's quote and more on Foxconn, see Lee Chyen Yee and James Pomfret, "Activists Rip Conditions at Iphone, Ipad Plants," *Chicago Tribune,* June 1, 2012, Business, p. 3.

[107] John C. Bennett, *Social Salvation: A Religious Approach to the Problems of Social Change* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 34.

mid-level managers, government officials, or consumers—are not so much selfish as short-sighted. It may be that there are some verifiable villains, and there are surely others who less villainously but nonetheless willingly act to ensure the continuance of the industry in its current form. But it seems certain that there are far more who are merely thoughtless, deluded, or morally insensitive. Yet that thoughtlessness, delusion, and moral insensitivity are precisely the kind of things that allow corrupted social forms to perpetuate themselves despite the evils that they entail.

In part because they derive from such varied sources and from the operation of corrupt social forms that possess both a material and moral supremacy over individuals, social evils prove to be uniquely durable. Although the reorientation of individuals' perverted wills is a necessary condition for the full redemption of social forms, it is not alone sufficient for remediating social evils. Instead, one must also educate people, helping them to see the larger impact of their choices, and reconstruct those social forms. At least in the case of many corrupted social forms, including the present poultry industry, even if each person involved in the exploitative practices of that system repented of his or her individual selfishness, it seems doubtful that the perverse system itself would simply wither on the vine. This is because those forms have established regimes of material relations (represented in the poultry industry by its infrastructure of production and distribution) and moral judgment (represented by its coordinated attempts to sway consumer choices and government policy, as well as its use of public relations firms and techniques to cast its labor record in a more favorable light). Hence, the task of reconstructing material relations and moral judgments would still remain, and such tasks require not only good will but also an understanding of the complexity of social forms and social processes. With regard to the poultry industry, reconstructing its material relations might require, for example, finding ways to increase

workers' pay and reasonably ensure their safety without making chicken prohibitively expensive for poor families and doing all of this while simultaneously safeguarding the health of ecosystems, as well.

As Bonhoeffer argues, then, the church ought to understand that it is called not only to denounce conditions that hinder faith in Christ by declaring them reprehensible. Beyond such denunciation, it should also make a "positive contribution to a new order" through the "responsible counsel" of Christians who are educated in the intricacies of social forms and who can help to articulate what a more just society might look like.[108] For without reconstructing corrupted social forms, their unique persistence means that the corrupted patterns of material relation and moral judgment that they establish will continue to shape our lives together. It may be true, as Augustine contends, that evil is parasitic and ultimately self-destructive, but in this time between the times it is also peculiarly resilient, especially in its social manifestations. What the examples of Nazism and the poultry industry highlight is that social forms possess a uniqueness that resides in their material and moral supremacy and that allows not only selfishness and malice but ignorance and thoughtlessness to serve as key factors in the perpetration and perpetuation of social evil.

(2) Corrupt Social Forms and Their Victims

To this point we have focused primarily upon the ways in which social forms impact those who, however unwittingly, become their collaborators, a focus warranted by the fact that this is the key dynamic that allows for the peculiar power of social evil. Nonetheless, Christians ought never to forget that, even if they are not completely innocent, there are also those who are more rightly described not as perpetrators but victims of social evil. And the Bible is profoundly and consistently sensitive to the plight of such victims, including the

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[108] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 361.

poor, the alien, the orphan, and the widow, as well as those whom Jesus refers to as "the least of these." This overriding biblical concern suggests that John Bennett is right to remind us in the last line of *Social Salvation* that what is of greatest significance for Christians in the question of social evil is the fate of the victims.[109] Liberation theologians of various persuasions, among others, have more recently helped to illustrate the fates of those oppressed by social evils. Attempting to schematize the insights of such thinkers in the terms that we have used throughout this section, we can say that social evil chiefly inflicts itself upon its victims in two interrelated but provisionally distinguishable modes. The first is through the material arrangement of social forms, and the second is through the moral content that those forms convey. The following paragraphs will examine these in turn.

When social forms are materially mal-configured, they almost inevitably give rise to what one might call the evil of deprivation, in which people are unjustly deprived of the resources necessary to sustain human life or enable human flourishing.[110] The most patent and readily recognizable form of deprivation is poverty. In its most absolute sense poverty denotes a state in which one does not have the basic material resources required to sustain life itself. Especially in this extreme form, as Gustavo Gutiérrez so succinctly puts it, "poverty means death,"[111] for the absolutely poor are left immediately vulnerable to

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[109] Bennett, *Social Salvation*, 216.

[110] One should be sure not to overlook the word "unjustly" in this sentence, which bears a great deal of conceptual weight. Not all deprivation is necessarily unjust and thus neither is it necessarily evil. A key example of deprivation that may be justified involves the case of those convicted of serious crimes. Although I do not believe that convicted criminals should be deprived of the things necessary to sustain human life or of life itself, a properly established authority may justly deprive them of certain of the things necessary for human flourishing in punishment for their crimes or in order to restrict further crimes. Imprisonment is one such punishment and involves, among other things, depriving one of the ability to participate fully in social life. Nevertheless, even this by no means justifies the thoroughly dehumanizing affair that imprisonment has so routinely become in the United States. While noting the possibility of just deprivation, my concern in this section is instead with what Gustavo Gutiérrez calls the "'evil of misfortune,' the evil suffered by the innocent." Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans., Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), xv.

[111] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Gustavo Gutiérrez Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 144.

malnutrition, preventable diseases, and starvation. Often, however, economists and other scholars use the term "poverty" not only to talk about those who suffer from "absolute poverty," whose victims do not currently possess the necessary resources to survive,[112] but also "relative poverty," which measures one's resources in comparison to one's particular national or social context. One is poor in a relative sense when he or she is without the resources to enjoy a minimum standard of life considered acceptable in his or her context.[113] Obviously, in such relative measurements the meaning of poverty varies, but even in wealthier countries, the ascription of the term "poverty" to such a condition is not necessarily a misapplication. Although one's life may not be immediately threatened by deprivation of resources, relative poverty nonetheless often leaves one at high risk of being so, and thus the relatively poor are also far more likely to suffer from malnutrition and preventable diseases. Furthermore, whether absolute or relative, as Adam Smith perceived even in the late-eighteenth century,[114] in all but the most exceptional contexts poverty generally brings with it subsequent deprivations, especially of those things necessary not for mere human life but for human flourishing.

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[112] Currently, the most widely recognized measure of absolute poverty is the World Bank's standard, set in 2005, of $1.25 (US) based on purchasing power parities. See The World Bank, "2008 World Development Indicators: Poverty Data," (2008), 1-3. Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS /Resources/WDI08supplement1216.pdf.

[113] For a small sampling of some of the ways in which relative poverty has been defined, see Stewart MacPherson and Richard Silburn, "The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty," in *Poverty: A Persistent Global Reality*, eds. John Dixon and David Macarov (New York: Routledge, 1998). Of course, it is possible for one to be poor absolutely but not relatively, such as if one were comparatively well off in a context where people are largely destitute. Nevertheless, since my concern is with poverty more generally and such a relatively privileged person would still be considered poor by absolute standards, my remarks in this section do not address this complexity but instead, as is common practice, take absolute standards to define poverty in poorer countries and relative standards to define them in richer ones. See, for instance, Martin Ravallion and Shaohua Chen, "Weakly Relative Poverty," *Policy Research Working Paper*, no. 4844 (2009).

[114] In a justly famous passage, Smith writes, "A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct." Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Great Books of the Western World (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), book 5, chapter 2, article 4.

While it is not too difficult to understand what one requires for the sustenance of life in its most basic form (such as food, water, clothing, and shelter), human flourishing is more complex. Nevertheless, the first chapter provides the basis for us to hold that human flourishing is best understood eschatologically in light of the nature of City of God. The truly flourishing life is one that embodies to the greatest possible degree God's will for us to live in communion with God, neighbor, and creation. Thus, the list of things that enable human flourishing would include the ability to join in communion with others, as well as at least a degree of security, recreation, and education.[115] Each of these represents an aspect of the eschatological communion that God desires to establish, a communion whose participants enjoy perfect security as they share with one another in the restful yet vivacious dance of love that embodies true wisdom.

Of course, since each of these is only an aspect of the final communion, none is an absolute good. And Christians may be called at times to sacrifice such goods in order, like Jesus Christ himself, to point towards the true communion of the City of God in the face of earthly regimes that pretentiously present themselves as the sole guarantors of such goods. Such an account of the things that promote human flourishing, however, provides the basis for two key acknowledgements. First, it allows us to acknowledge that when someone forfeits such true but limited goods, this is indeed a sacrifice. Second, when material forms deprive human beings of such goods, whether as a subsequent deprivation to poverty or on the basis of things such as race, this constitutes an evil.

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[115] My goal with this very short list is to provide evocative illustrations rather than to formulate a comprehensive list of all of the things necessary for human flourishing. Nevertheless, if I were to do so, one of the places where I would begin is with Martha Nussbaum's list of central human functional capacities. While my eschatological approach obviously differs from Nussbaum's capabilities approach in key respects, I am nevertheless deeply sympathetic with her vision of human flourishing and the short list that I offer here intersects with hers at many points. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 78-80.

In addition to the oppression wrought by their material arrangement, perverted social forms also routinely victimize persons with oppressive moral messages and patterns of judgment that they deceptively present as truthful accounts of reality. This comprises the heart of the social evil of "psychological abuse," a term that I use not just in the mental sense associated with modern psychology but, as the meaning of the Greek word *psychē* conveys, to signal that there is a spiritual valence, as well. Corrupted social forms inflict psychological abuse in various forms, including through the humiliation dealt by crushing material deprivation. On a more purely moral level, however, another way in which social forms abuse people psychologically is by inculcating demeaning modes of thought and imagination, such as widely purveyed stereotypes that belittle particular groups. "Women are not as smart as men," "Blacks are criminals," "Hispanics are lazy," "the poor are irresponsible and the sole cause of their poverty." So the stereotypes commonly disseminated by social forms in the United States tell us. And such stereotypes are joined by innumerable further images and messages that derogate these and other marginalized groups in more subtle ways.

Such images, blatant and subtle, are part of what womanist thinker Emilie Townes calls a "fantastic hegemonic imagination" that shapes "how we understand the world, as well as others and ourselves in the world."[116] These images are fantastic because they distort our vision of reality in favor of a fantasy. And they are hegemonic both because they underwrite a particular disposition of privilege and domination embodied in the material arrangement of social forms and also because they impel us into embodying particular roles in society. So powerful is the effect of social forms, however, that Townes suggests that these images of the fantastic hegemonic imagination are nearly inescapable and are thus found "in all of

[116] Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 21.

us."[117] It is not only the privileged who demean the oppressed; rather, the material and moral supremacy of social forms insidiously presses these humiliating images upon the oppressed themselves, who internalize them to greater and lesser degrees. Those who accept them wholesale come to believe that such distorted judgments of their abilities and worth are in fact true. This dynamic is at the heart of what Cornel West calls "the nihilistic threat" to Black America in which Blacks, living in the midst of a society that tells them that their lives are meaningless, hopeless, and loveless, find it difficult not to give way to despair.[118] And similar forces drive women, Hispanics, and other marginalized peoples towards nihilism.

Identifying the connection between psychological abuse and nihilism, West gestures towards a more strictly theological dimension to the psychological abuse inflicted by social forms. Not only does such abuse rupture the proper communion that ought to exist between human beings as it sows prejudice among the privileged and self-hatred among the oppressed, but in marginalizing and humiliating the oppressed it can damage their ability to relate to God, as well. As I briefly suggested at the end of the section on perversion of the will, many who succumb to the evil of self-loss do so under the influence of dehumanizing social structures. When they accept the messages of their own worthlessness that continually bombard them, oppressed persons often cannot see themselves as valued by God. Nihilism threatens not only their belief in earthly values but in a loving God who desires to commune with them. Of course, this movement is not necessarily inevitable. Indeed one of the most tremendous miracles of Christianity is that, even as it sinfully offered material support and ideological sanction to chattel slavery, which brutalized and dehumanized African slaves, the Christian faith would itself become a source of hope that assured many slaves that "they were of infinite worth as children of God, no matter what slaveholders thought and

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 22-3.

taught."[119] Still, we cannot ignore the clearly deleterious effects of psychological abuse and should instead regard such cases as miraculous instances of God's triumph over the evil of human beings and our corrupted social forms. While the psychological abuse of oppressed peoples may not render faith in the gospel strictly impossible, it can unquestionably create serious obstacles to it.

Making explicit a connection that has been frequently implied in this discussion, it is important to underscore that, though they do not necessarily do so, the evils of deprivation and psychological abuse routinely overlap, especially since psychological abuse tends to derive from and reinforce a particular arrangement of material relations. Moreover, deepening this analysis and expanding our vocabulary, we might recognize that terms such as "racism" and "sexism" signal the tendency of a given society or certain social forms to inflict either or both of these evils upon members of a particular group of people. Thus, Blacks in a racist, White-dominated society or women in a patriarchal one are more likely to experience deprivation as well as to be subjected to psychological abuse. Similarly, as womanist thinkers in particular have emphasized, it is possible not only for the material and moral modes of social evil to intersect with one another in the oppressions of racism or sexism, but also for those forms of oppression themselves to intersect, such that one finds oneself suffering simultaneously from the material and moral effects of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of social evil.[120] At such intersections, the effects of these overlapping oppressions compound exponentially so as to become greater even than the sum of their parts.

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[119] Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46.

[120] For one of the most cogent and often cited discussions of intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York: New Press, 1995), 357-83.

III. Pilgrims and Migrants Amid the Predicament

The vision of the City of God elaborated in the previous chapter and the account of the predicament of evil in this one could hardly stand in starker contrast. In the first we learned that God desires to establish a holy city whose citizens' individual souls and corporate life emulate Christ in their loving orientation towards God and neighbor; in the second we have found that evil creates a twofold predicament in this world as it perverts individuals and corrupts social forms, twisting both away from God and neighbor. Because of the ubiquity of human implication in evil and the tendency of social forms to become instruments of oppression, evil compromises all attempts at communion as it ruptures the very relationships with God, other human beings, and creation writ large that define the City of God.

In a world that is mired in the predicament of evil, how can Christians live faithfully in ways that authentically witness to God's will, thus defying the evil that corrupts creation without becoming further ensnared by it? If God has created and called human beings to be citizens of the perfect political reality known as the City of God, then any answer to such a question ought to be inherently political in the sense that such lives should seek to nurture and sustain communion among human beings, as well as between humans, God, and creation. In other words, any response must seek to form and maintain a *polis* of some sort. More specifically, then, I wish to ask, *how should Christians understand and engage in politics in a world caught in the predicament of evil but destined for the communion of God's eschatological city*? This is the fundamental question that animates the remainder of this project as it seeks to develop a constructive theological ethic of politics.

Much as a builder must keep in view both the plan for a building and the site upon which it is to be built, in addressing this fundamental question, we must attend both to the

City of God, which composes God's ultimate plan for creation, and the predicament of evil, which characterizes the present state of the creation that is to become the site of God's city. Hence, we must avoid two diametrically opposed mistakes. The first is to focus exclusively upon the City of God, a tendency whose folly is dramatized by the account of the Ascension related in the Acts of the Apostles. After appearing to his disciples for forty days after his resurrection, a period in which he was "speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3), Jesus ascended to heaven. "While he was going up," writes the author, his disciples "were gazing up toward heaven, [when] suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?' " (1:10-11). As the disciples find themselves tempted to concentrate solely upon the City of God and the one who manifested its form in his life, death, and resurrection, these two apparently angelic interlopers direct the disciples' attention back to the earth, which is to be the site of their mission. There is work to be done in this world, and Christ's followers must accordingly be sensitive to the contours of its terrain.

A second, converse error is to focus exclusively upon the predicament of evil. If looking only to heaven is a mistake, it is equally mistaken to look only to the earth in its present, marred state. To do so would blind us to the vision of the City of God that represents the world as it is to be and that should function as the moral blueprint by which Christians orient themselves and their political engagement in this world. Moreover, it would also obscure the fact that Christ, the *autobasileia*, has already come into this world, scoring the decisive victory over evil, and has also sent the Holy Spirit to empower his followers' ministry in the world (e.g., Acts 1:8). Both of these realities suggest that possibilities of communion exist even now that a solely immanent account of politics cannot appreciate.

Rather than focusing singly upon the City of God or the predicament of evil, then, we must keep both in view.

If it is not properly qualified, however, the analogy that likens the work of Christian political ethics to that of a builder could mislead us in certain respects. At least three characteristics define the work of any builder worth her salt. She will (1) select a stable site that (2) she shapes such that it will lend itself seamlessly to the plan of construction and will then (3) construct her building according to plan. If a world disfigured by the predicament of evil represents the site and the City of God the plan, then we must confess our incompetence in each of these crucial tasks. The predicament of evil creates a landscape that is ever in flux as evil is continually taking on slightly varied contours and corrupting new and different aspects of human existence in this world. We have no other possible site on which to build, and yet this one is exceedingly unstable. Additionally, even if it were not so, enmeshed as we are in evil, human beings are incapable of utterly reshaping the world to purge it of evil in order that it might serve as an appropriate site for the City of God. And finally, we do not have the expertise necessary to construct such a grand city. Indeed, the city that we await is one "whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Whereas the construction of a skilled builder brings together plan and site seamlessly, in this world we can achieve no such synthesis. Instead, the best we can do—but what we must do—is to hold the City of God and the predicament of evil in dialectical tension.

Using the metaphor of construction is not altogether inappropriate, however, provided that we recognize just what it is that such an ethic would help us to build. Acknowledging that human beings cannot construct the City of God itself, the Christian political ethic that I attempt to develop over the ensuing chapters is not one that seeks to build that eternal home in this world. It is what one might call a "pilgrim ethic," for like

Augustine it recognizes that those who await the full realization of the City of God are "pilgrims [*peregrionos*] even in their own habitations."[121] What this ethic seeks, then, is to build polities that can serve as such temporary habitations, forms of communion that will be provisional shelters rather than permanent homes. Nevertheless, temporary though they may be, we still hope by God's gracious help to construct such political habitations that reflect the character of the politics that will ultimately replace them. In the end, it may even be that God will transfigure these pilgrim politics and incorporate them in some form into God's holy city.

Nonetheless, so long as we remain in this world we must regard any and all politics that currently exist as provisional, for the predicament of evil signals the distance between such politics, which will inevitably suffer corruption by individual and social evil, and the paradigmatic politics of the City of God. Hence, no institution or group can justly claim that it fully embodies the politics of the City of God or even that it is the "proleptic presence" of that city to the extent that a prolepsis manifests completely in the present something that belongs to the future. The City of God invariably remains in the future, and the best we can do is to approximate it in the present. This is a warning especially applicable to government and the church, two institutions with long histories of styling themselves as present manifestations of God's eschatological purposes. Rather than embodying the City of God, such earthly institutions continue to stand under its judgment and are at best pilgrim shelters that resemble the City of God in certain respects.

We ought not neglect these "certain respects," however. They are in fact of capital importance to such an ethic as they represent substantive goods of communion that are possible in this world. Even though the vitiated and vitiating bane of evil means that we

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[121] Augustine, *City of God*, I.15.

cannot currently live the perfectly political existence that God intends for us, we can nonetheless live more faithful, more political lives that embody limited goods, loosen evil's grip, and point towards the perfect realization of God's city.

In this quest the church possesses a uniqueness and value that derives from the fact that it is a community, founded by Jesus Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, that explicitly dedicates itself to proclaiming and attempting to embody the Christoform shape of the City of God. Nevertheless, to adapt a Pauline turn of phrase, the church only proclaims in part and only embodies in part because it too remains mired in the predicament of evil. Not only is the church, as Augustine argues, a "mixed" body in which evildoers "are mingled … with the good,"[122] but the church as an earthly institution is itself an ambiguous social form capable of both good and evil. Thus, while the church helps to secure substantive goods, as the final line of the Nicene Creed reminds us, the church does not simply look to itself but "to the life of the world to come."

In addition to orienting itself towards the ultimate political good that lies in the eschaton, the church, as well as its individual members, must recognize that it has no monopoly upon the goods of political communion that point to Christ in this world. Although they will frequently be just as partial and fragmentary as those embodied in the church or even more so, other institutions and groups are capable of appreciable goods. When such extra-ecclesial social forms help to alleviate the deprivation of the poor, encourage appropriate self-love among the oppressed, and provide ways for people to live together in peace, they secure true goods and remove hindrances to faith in Christ. In doing so, they foreshadow in their own way the life of the City of God. To be sure, pride and selfishness often tinge even these goods, as they do many of the goods of the church itself.

[122] Ibid., XVIII.49. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, ed. R. P. H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), III.32.45. See also Augustine, *City of God*, I.35.

Moreover, the fact that they help to achieve such goods never exempts social forms from criticism since they remain always under the judgment of the City of God. Yet, while limited and compromised, these remain goods properly so-called.

Having dedicated themselves to following Christ and thereby to embodying through word and deed the Christoform shape of the City of God, Christians have a stake in nurturing such goods of communion both in the church and beyond. For this reason, the metaphor of Christians as pilgrims needs to be supplemented by another. Augustine's notion of the Christian pilgrim helpfully expresses the fact that we should properly orient ourselves towards the City of God in its eschatological fullness. But it can make our engagements in the world appear as if they are at best a matter of biding time—and at worst of killing it—as we simply await the coming of that eschatological city. Accordingly, such an image can underrate the interest that Christians have in cultivating the goods of this world. On account of this interest and the fact that such goods are not isolated to a single earthly field but spread across many, we might say that Christians ought to be not only pilgrims but simultaneously "migrant workers."

As a migrant farmworker, my step-grandfather for many years traveled up and down the East Coast of the United States, returning year after year to the same fields, which he meticulously cultivated and tended. Rarely have I seen greater care for or joy in the goods of creation than he demonstrated in the vineyards of Western New York. Surely, we must not allow the comparison of Christians to migrant workers to sanctify the numerous forms of deprivation and humiliation to which Grandpa Ben and his fellow workers were subject; if anything it should motivate Christians to join in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who endure such oppression in order to end it. But what this image aspires to convey is the care that I saw my grandfather and other workers exhibit while cultivating the goods of the world

in many different fields and their joy in seeing creation's good fruit, even in the midst of very difficult labor. As migrant workers of a sort, Christians do not have a single ethical habitation in this world but many. Thus they should seek to foster the goods possible not only in the church but also in many different arenas of life, such as within families, businesses, governments, economies, and other social forms.

In the liturgy of the United Methodist Church, the primary prayer for concluding the Eucharist reads, "Lord, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit to give ourselves for others."[123] This prayer, I believe, encapsulates the migratory nature of the Christian life, which gathers us together in the field of the church—where we cultivate, construct, and care for its goods and also encounter the mystery of God most powerfully—but then sends us forth to labor in other fields, as well, where we also encounter God present and at work. For Christians, the church is our habitation indeed, and even our primary one in this world. But it is not our only one. The Christoform shape of the Christian life and the City of God call us also to other places where we should build and maintain habitations, nurturing the goods of creation as a way of rendering Christ-like service to our fellow human beings and witnessing to the shape and reality of God's city. While these habitations are of many different types, in this project we are specifically concerned with those that we might justly classify as "political," in other words, those that pertain to the ordering of persons into some sort of *polis*.

Yet there is no definitive, unchanging blueprint for building even the kinds of temporary, political habitations that on this side of the eschaton realize limited goods and blunt the force of evil. Although interpreting through the metaphor of acting rather than

[123] *The United Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 11.

construction, Sam Wells helpfully characterizes the situation in which individual Christians and the church as a body find themselves. This is a situation in which they must learn "to be faithful without the reassurance of [a] script" that would provide "a comprehensive version of life, in which all eventualities and questions meet their appropriate forms of engagement and resolution."[124] There are innumerable aspects of life in which the proper response is not obvious, in which the Christian community "is not clear how the story is to be performed."[125] Hence, "Christian ethics cannot, like *King Lear*, be read off the page of the text." Rather than simply reciting lines already laid out for them, Wells contends that Christians must learn to improvise by acting in appropriate ways that take account of the present circumstances and keep the drama going.

While it involves more than simple repetition, improvisation is not the same thing as creation *de novo*. This is because Christian improvisation finds itself embedded in a drama authored by God. This drama, Wells believes, is in five-acts, three of which lie in the chronological past: the first is the act of creation itself; the second is the calling of Israel; the third comprises the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The fifth and final act, which lies yet in the future, consists in the eschatological consummation of this drama. Christians now live in the fourth act, between Christ and the City of God. Here, they must improvise their responses, but in doing so they receive guidance both from the Holy Spirit and from the arc of the drama as it has unfolded and as it will culminate in the City of God. But this means that Christians must develop skills of discernment so that they can react in ways that are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and faithful to that story.

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[124] Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004), 65, 62.

[125] Ibid., 60.

By replacing "script" with "blueprint," one can largely adapt Wells's theatrical reading of improvisation to our overarching metaphor of construction while retaining his central point. In this time between the times, Christians are called to help build forms of communion that faithfully witness to the salvation wrought by Christ, which will be fully manifested in the coming of the Christoform City of God. Whereas Christ and the City of God stand as features that dominate the horizon and even shape the contours of the landscape in between them, the terrain of this world possesses innumerable peculiarities. Furthermore, it is highly unstable, for it is being warped by the influence of evil even as the earthshaking force of God's Holy Spirit is working to reshape it to be a fitting foundation for the City of God. In this uncertain and mixed time, there is no clear blueprint for constructing the kinds of communion that faithfully testify to Christ and the City of God. Nowhere do we find explicit and thorough instructions for how we are to build our common life on terrain that is fractured and fragmented in such ways.

Christians are, of course, not without resources to guide them, especially those given in Scripture, which tells the story of God's work in this world, and in the practices of the church, which proclaim that story and attempt dramatically to embody it in the present. But neither of these is a comprehensive blueprint. The Bible teaches us the history of God's work in this world and of humanity's rebellion against it, in addition to serving as a privileged place where God encounters human beings. In this capacity, the Bible helps to inculcate virtues of discernment that can help us both to recognize where God is at work and how we might contribute to that work. Yet, the Bible deals far more with the past than the peculiarities of the present. Similarly, the church's proclamation can help us develop the habits necessary to see this world in light of God's past and present work. Nevertheless, as I have argued, the church itself cannot provide a comprehensive blueprint given the fact that

it invariably remains caught in the predicament of evil. Consequently, it can devise no way to escape or overcome that predicament.

While the training provided by Scripture and the church can help us to recognize the hallmarks of God's work and to become more sensitive to the peculiarities of this world, in the end we must still improvise a response in light of these realities. Christians thus continually pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit. But without a clear blueprint, we must exercise discernment, improvising forms of political communion that, as best as possible, faithfully witness to the reality of the City of God. This task requires us to keep in view the City of God in order that we might do our best to approximate it in the midst of a world fractured and fragmented by evil.

PART II

GATHERING RESOURCES

CHAPTER 3

POLITICS-AS-STATECRAFT: REINHOLD NIEBUHR AND THE GOVERNING OF SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

Despite the realistic recognition that that we live in a world mired in the predicament of evil, the conviction that God has created and called human beings to become perfectly political citizens of the City of God beckons Christians to embody a political form of life even now, imperfect though it will unavoidably be. From this perspective, we might identify the recovery of the political significance of Christianity as one of the chief virtues of contemporary Christian thought as thinkers from various quarters have come to claim that the faith is fundamentally political. And yet, the meaning of such claims is ambiguous and varies greatly between thinkers. Significant divergences arise not merely when one attempts to specify the particular policies, actions, and judgments that a Christian political ethic should promote. Even more foundationally, it is unclear what Christians mean—and, more importantly, what they should mean—when they refer to "politics" or matters "political." As Sheldon Wolin observes of political philosophy in general, within Christian thought "the boundaries of what is political have been shifting ones."[1] The shifting nature of those

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[1] Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

boundaries comes into view when we ask questions as rudimentary as, what *polis* is the proper site of Christian political life? Varying answers to this question tend to underwrite starkly contrasting visions of political ethics.

With Part I having surveyed the theological convictions that I believe ought to frame a Christian political ethic, Part II sets out to examine two contemporary Christian accounts of politics. The first is that formulated by Reinhold Niebuhr and the second by Stanley Hauerwas. Although each of these accounts is propounded by an American thinker, both have exercised considerable influence beyond the United States. Perhaps more importantly, the two conceive of the Christian political vocation in widely divergent ways that represent recurrent and vital strands within Christian thought. Our task will be to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these accounts, identifying key aspects that help or hinder us in understanding how Christians might live faithful, political lives that witness to the City of God in a world menaced by evil. To express this in terms of the overarching metaphor of construction, if Part I has surveyed, first, the blueprint of the City of God and, second, the geography of the predicament of evil that defines the world in its current state, the goal of Part II is to gather resources for building a constructive political ethic, which I will do by assessing two prominent yet contrasting approaches to politics.

The present chapter begins this task of gathering resources as it appraises the political ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr. Born in 1892 as the son of a German Evangelical pastor, Niebuhr would earn degrees at Yale and Eden Theological Seminary before serving a Detroit pastorate for 13 years. In 1928 he left this charge to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York. There he would publish his first major academic work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, in 1932. Despite being slowed by a stroke in 1952, Niebuhr would continue publishing books and essays until shortly before his death in 1971.

Throughout his writings Niebuhr developed a compelling account of politics that has impacted political actors and thinkers from diverse corners, including George Kennan,[2] Martin Luther King, Jr.,[3] Michael Novak,[4] and Barack Obama,[5] and that created a generation of clergy in the United States, the United Kingdom, and beyond "who took Niebuhr's template for the Christian's place in society as a default setting for all subsequent discussion of social ethics."[6]

Deeply appreciative of Augustine's teaching that "evil … threatens the human community on every level,"[7] Niebuhr maintained that the task of politics is to utilize power in order, primarily, "to coerce the anarchy of conflicting human interests into some kind of order" and, subsequently, to secure a degree of justice.[8] Niebuhr's construal of politics calls Christians back from the perennial temptation to focus exclusively upon ideals, such as the City of God, as it highlights the persistent corruption of human wills and social forms. According to Niebuhr, such evils make the use of power a tragic necessity on this side of the eschaton. At his most incisive, Niebuhr warns us that, though it is necessary, such power is morally ambiguous even as he simultaneously stresses that this ambiguity by no means

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[2] Kenneth Thompson has famously reported that Kennan once described Niebuhr as "the father of us all," though many, especially Richard Wightman Fox, have detailed the more complex nature of their relationship. See Kenneth Thompson, "Niebuhr and the Foreign Policy Realists" in *Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited: Engagements with an American Original*, ed. Daniel F. Rice (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 139. Also, Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 238ff.

[3] Although King ultimately concluded that Niebuhr was "too pessimistic … on the question of man," he nonetheless gave Niebuhr credit for "making me aware of the complexity of human motives and the reality of sin on every level of man's existence." Moreover, King would famously quote Niebuhr in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." See "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" and "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 56 and 87.

[4] Michael Novak, "Needing Niebuhr Again," *Commentary* 54, no. 3 (1972): 52-62. Michael Novak, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Model for Neoconservatives," *The Christian Century* 103, no. 3 (1986): 69-71. Michael Novak, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Father of Neoconservatives," *National Review* 44, no. 9 (1992).

[5] David Brooks, "Obama, Gospel and Verse: Op-Ed," *New York Times,* April 26, 2007, A.25.

[6] Samuel Wells, "The Nature and Destiny of Serious Theology" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power*, eds. Richard Harries and Stephen Platten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 71.

[7] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 122.

[8] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1935; reprint, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 85; also 116. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics: A Commentary on Religious, Social, and Political Thought in a Technological Age* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968), 99.

absolves Christians of the "duty to seek a just society … even if we know … that human egoism and collective will-to-power will reduce the justice actually achieved by every new society to something less than perfect justice."[9]

Niebuhr's conception of politics helpfully dramatizes the evil that invariably corrupts all human achievements and historical institutions and in the process persuasively argues that politics must use power to ensure social peace and justice. Nevertheless, I will contend that in the final analysis his account appears insufficient as a response to the predicament of evil and as a witness to the City of God. For one thing it ironically runs the risk of encouraging political complacency. Moreover, while keenly alive to the social dimensions of the City of God and the predicament of evil, Niebuhr largely neglects the state of the soul, in the process eliding important distinctions within the lives of both institutions and individuals. Consequently, he also obscures the dynamics of how individuals of virtue are formed.

I. The State and the Location of Politics

As noted in the Introduction, "politics" is a more ambiguous term than we typically acknowledge both on account of its inherent capacity to refer to the structure and practices of numerous different polities and on account of the semantic expansion that the term has undergone since the mid-nineteenth century. Hence, however basic a question it may seem, when someone speaks of "politics" we have good reason to ask, "To what polity is this person referring?" Identifying the referent can prove a key step in clarifying what one means when invoking the concept. Niebuhr's construal of politics is not entirely incompatible with the more expansive notions of politics that often characterize both current academic discourse and colloquial use, in which the term can be used to describe corporations,

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[9] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, ed. D. B. Robertson (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 162.

universities, and even youth soccer teams. Nevertheless, it is the traditional pattern that understands politics as a matter of government that decisively shapes his political vision and that ultimately makes statecraft the quintessential form of politics in his thought.

Although Niebuhr writes often about "politics," he spends precious little time defining exactly what he means by it. Despite the numerous evolutions that his thought underwent, however, one theme that he maintained with remarkable consistency was the conviction that politics is fundamentally about power. This connection receives one of its most prominent expressions in a collection of essays published in 1940, which bears the revealing title *Christianity and Power Politics*. In this volume, Niebuhr maintains that political strategies "invariably involve the balancing of power with power" and describes "the contest of power" as "the very nature of politics."[10] It is understandable that the relationship between politics and power would occupy a salient place in Niebuhr's thought during this period when Hitler was becoming an increasingly clear and present danger. Yet the connection that Niebuhr drew between them was by no means simply a result of that unique context. In fact, in 1932 Niebuhr had written, "Politics will, to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet."[11] And nearly two decades after *Christianity and Power Politics*, Niebuhr would begin an essay on national and international affairs by proclaiming, "Every student of politics knows that political communities and relations must deal with 'power.' "[12]

The kind of power with which politics deals, however, is a unique sort. In Niebuhr's thought, power appears as a complex and variegated phenomenon that can derive from

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[10] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940; reprint, 1946), 4, 78.

[11] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932; reprint, 1960), 4.

[12] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 199.

numerous sources, including military, economic, technical, spiritual, or rational capacities. But political power constitutes what one might call a "meta-power," which overarches these other types even as it draws upon them. "Political power deserves to be placed in a special category," Niebuhr explains in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, "because it rests upon the ability to use and manipulate other forms of social power for the particular purpose of organizing and dominating the community."[13] The essence of political power thus resides in its ability to fashion the various vitalities of social existence into some sort of order.

The tight conceptual connection between politics and government in Niebuhr's thought comes into focus when we recognize that Western political thought has generally regarded this order-inducing capacity as the foremost function of government. And, while he rarely spends time defining his terms, Niebuhr clearly shares this view. Accordingly, in the same section of *Nature and Destiny*, the categories of "politics" and "political power" soon give way to that of "government," which Niebuhr describes as one of the instruments invented by "conscious political contrivance in human history … for the enlarging of communities."[14] Such political contrivances, Niebuhr allows, may take other forms, such as a balance of power in which an individual's or group's will-to-power is offset by the contrapuntal interests of another. Yet those sorts of arrangements are highly precarious for two reasons. First, they do not necessarily defuse the tension between groups and thus can become "a principle of anarchy." Second, and even more telling, Niebuhr asserts that a perfect balance between opposing forces only arises if social life is "consciously managed and manipulated."[15] The peace of human society therefore requires an institution that can arbitrate conflicts from a more impartial center, coerce submission to the social process, and

[13] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume II: Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943; reprint, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 263.
[14] Ibid., 265.
[15] Ibid., 266.

redress disproportions of power whenever they make for injustice. This central authority Niebuhr refers to as "the principle of government."

Not only is government one possible political institution, but we might say that it is for Niebuhr the quintessential manifestation of politics. Politics, Niebuhr acknowledges, exists on "lower" levels where individuals and groups contend over the power to organize society. Still, he maintains, government "stands upon a higher plane of moral sanction and social necessity."[16] As we shall see, this sanction by no means places the present shape of any particular government beyond moral question. What it conveys, however, is Niebuhr's belief that politics finds its fulfillment in the establishment of a governing center for organizing the community and mediating social tensions.

This belief undergirds key moves elsewhere in Niebuhr's work, most notably in *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, the only one of his books that Niebuhr describes as "a volume of political philosophy."[17] In this work, Niebuhr subtly presents "government" as an essential dimension of "political morality" and in key passages depicts the respective function of these two in remarkably similar terms. Hence, government "must guide, direct, deflect and rechannel conflicting and competing forces into a community in the interest of a higher order" whereas the role of political morality is to "deflect, beguile, harness, and use self-interest for the sake of a tolerable harmony of the whole."[18] Although Niebuhr uses slightly different verbs in these characterizations—with only "deflect" occurring in both—the particular tasks of government and those of political morality overlap in their central charge to create harmony not merely by opposing the forces that make for social conflict but

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944; reprint, 1960), viii.

[18] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 44, 73. Niebuhr later describes "political justice" in similar terms, writing that it is achieved "not merely by destroying, but also by deflecting, beguiling and harnessing residual self-interest and by finding the greatest possible concurrence between self-interest and the general welfare." Ibid., 186.

more characteristically by massaging them into some sort of order. In further comments, Niebuhr suggests that this relationship extends beyond the mere similarity of function as he easily slips from discussing the tasks of political morality to talking about the nature of government.[19] This and similar depictions present government as an indispensible element of political morality, so much so that Niebuhr seems hardly able to conceive of the latter without immediately invoking the former.

On this basis and with proper qualification, one might say that in the sphere of what Niebuhr calls "political morality," the principle of government thus represents the normative expression of politics. Properly qualifying this claim entails that we must see it in light of Niebuhr—s belief that the "principles of political morality [are] inherently more relative than those of pure morality."[20] For this reason, government's normative status is a weak one, for it can never mean that even the principle of government—let alone any extant government—is morally final. Depending as it does upon power and coercion,[21] even the principle of government invariably falls short of the ideals of equality, disinterestedness, and uncoerced harmony that define "pure morality."[22] Nevertheless, the principle of government is normative insofar as politics must establish or employ mechanisms of government if it is to achieve morally appreciable levels of order and justice—and thus to fulfill its defining function of organizing the community and establishing tolerably just relations within it.[23]

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[19] Ibid., 73.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Niebuhr makes this claim in many ways and many places. See, especially, Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 14.

[22] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 72-4.

[23] This normative quality finds expression elsewhere when Niebuhr writes that Revolutionary utopians' "resentments against traditional injustice inevitably obscure the necessity of the restraints and balances which justify the traditional means of social peace, in spite of their corruptions." Again, the point here is that some form of governmental restraint is not only necessary but even morally sanctioned. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires: A Study of the Recurring Patterns and Problems of the Political Order in Relation to the Unique Problems of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 224.

Even as Niebuhr habitually talks about "politics," "community," and "government" without further specification, his work concentrates preponderantly upon the communities called "nations" and the governmental forms known as "states." Niebuhr perceives that human communities "are subject to endless variety and progression"[24] and range from those as small and intimate as the family to those as expansive as the empire and the "world community" that he believes marks "man's final necessity and possibility, but also his final impossibility."[25] In spite of this recognition, Niebuhr focuses primarily upon the community of the nation, a focus that he suggests is justified by the fact that "the modern nation is the human group of strongest social cohesion, of most undisputed central authority and of most clearly defined membership."[26] Like all human communities, the nation relies upon more than political power for its life as other factors, such as "[g]eographic limitation, ethnic and cultural uniqueness … and a common history," also contribute to its existence and provide the basis for its cohesion.[27]

Whereas the nation is a community, the state, as Niebuhr construes it, is a governmental apparatus that serves as "the bearer of power in the community," and it is through the state that "the life of nations is organized and their wills articulated."[28] For its part, then, the state both manifests the cohesion of the nation and at the same time refines it. Although certainly possessed of instruments of coercion, the state's power in regard to the national community that it governs is more complex as it also "presents the imagination of

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[24] Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 1.

[25] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 187. On the range of human communities, see, for instance, Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 33. For more on the family as a (sometimes problematic) human community, see Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 128. Also Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 127. And Reinhold Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities: Essays on the Dynamics and Enigmas of Man's Personal and Social Existence* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 32-5, 47, 108.

[26] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 83.

[27] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 166. For a similar statement, see Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 111.

[28] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 85, 83.

individuals with … obvious symbols of [the nation's] discrete collective identity."[29] Hence, individuals obey the state not only because they fear its coercive power but also because they revere its majesty.[30] Despite the reverence that it routinely evokes, Niebuhr believes that the state is even more ethically ambiguous than the nation. This is because the state hypocritically claims to represent the entire national community when in fact it is always controlled by a particular oligarchy that uses the state to assert its own interests over against those of the rest of the community.[31] Such hypocrisy notwithstanding, as the most prevalent form of government, the state nonetheless assumes something of a paradigmatic quality in Niebuhr's political thought. And Niebuhr's solution to the besetting sins of states is not to call for their dissolution but, as we shall see, to call them to higher realizations of justice.

Recognizing the politically paradigmatic role of the state in Niebuhr's thought brings into focus at least three notable features that mark his construal of politics. First, he defines politics in a way that is demographically inclusive. Second, and closely related, politics is also locationally determined. Together, these two features indicate that Niebuhrian politics concerns how all people within a given place will live. Borrowing a phrase from Robin Lovin, we might say that for Niebuhr politics "gather[s] up all people within a given geographical area"—regardless of race, class, creed, or other such factors—and attempts to structure their common life.[32] The locational nature of politics does not mean that it must be parochial, for Niebuhr envisions the political possibility of a world government. Yet even here politics remains locational since the realization of this possibility rests upon the transfiguration of

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[29] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I: Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941; reprint, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 209.

[30] Ibid. See also Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 34.

[31] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 85-6. See also Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 237. And Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 220.

[32] Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 161.

locationality wrought by the technical advancements that "have established a rudimentary world community."[33] At its core, then, politics concerns using power in a way that orders the lives of all people within a locationally bounded community.

A third feature of Niebuhr's account is that it suggests that politics will most often be—and ought to be—an institutionally defined enterprise. Politics, Niebuhr admits, can be carried on apart from the institution of government, such as in informal balances of power. And many contemporary readers have leveraged this recognition in order to interpret Niebuhr as forwarding an expansive account of politics that is unbound from institutional centers. To take an example, Robin Lovin maintains that one of the lessons of Niebuhrian realism is that "politics, with its demands for recognition and its search for cooperation, goes on even in … intimate communities" and that it "encompasses the search for knowledge of the self and knowledge of God."[34] While, as Lovin notes, these may be lessons that one takes from Niebuhr, they ought not masquerade as an exposition of his political thought. For Niebuhr, the foundation of an institutional center for governing society and adjudicating conflicts is not only, descriptively, an extremely common development of political life; but also, prescriptively, in his thought it constitutes a vital political and moral achievement.[35] In communities that establish such a governing center, as most do, numerous groups and organizations may participate in the political process, but politics is most essentially about what happens within the institution of government and the ways in which those groups and organizations influence its shape and dynamics.

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[33] Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 15.

[34] Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, 246-7.

[35] Indeed, Niebuhr at one point even goes so far as to maintain that the establishment of government to provide a "single organ of will and order is an absolute prerequisite of any community." Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 149. Even though Niebuhr himself makes this claim, it slightly confuses his typical view of the relationship between government and community, in which he more commonly holds that the community precedes and articulates itself through government and that government in turn orders the community. In the process, this confusion brings Niebuhr closer to the position of Thomas Hobbes than he is normally comfortable. Yet it nonetheless vividly dramatizes the importance of government in his thought.

II. THE AIMS OF POLITICS: LOVE AND JUSTICE

To understand the ends that Niebuhr believes such demographically inclusive, locationally determined, and institutionally defined politics should seek, it is first necessary to understand his account of the relationship between love and justice in an imperfect world. The ideal that orients Niebuhr's political thought, as well as his ethics as a whole, is love. While Niebuhr allows that there is such a thing as "mutual love,"[36] he finds this to be a lesser form, for love in its truest sense is defined by self-sacrifice. Perfect love "is sacrificial love, making no careful calculations between the interests of the self and the other" as it entails "an uncoerced giving of the self to the object of its devotion."[37] Offering itself on behalf of the other apart from concerns of equality or mutuality, love is thus heedless and disinterested, characteristics most fully propounded in Jesus' absolute ethic of love and perfectly incarnated in his "suffering and self-giving life and death."[38] Such perfect love, Niebuhr claims, is "the ultimate law of life."[39]

This does not mean, however, that Niebuhr believes that the prospects of human beings embodying perfect love are very bright. In fact, shortly before declaring love's relevance to every moral experience, Niebuhr suggests that in the religion of Jesus "the moral ideal of love and vicarious suffering … achieves such a purity that the possibility of its realization in history becomes remote."[40]

Numerous forces inhibit us from attaining the ideal of love. Two of these figure most saliently in Niebuhr's work, and they largely accord with the discussion of the two

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[36] On mutual love, see Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 77-97. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 185. Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 160.
[37] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 134. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 128.
[38] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 106.
[39] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 68.
[40] Ibid., 19.

prongs of the predicament of evil in Chapter 2. The first is the character of human life, which in this world is limited by both finitude and sinfulness. Human beings cannot love perfectly, Niebuhr believes, in part because their finite imaginations are "too limited to see and understand the interests of others as vividly as those of the self."[41] But this finitude is tightly linked to the egoistic sinfulness that perverts human nature. Not only are we unable to grasp the needs of others vividly, but the power of egoism leads us to assert ourselves over against them. Hence, human beings are inclined to sin by "seeking security at the expense of the other."[42] A second set of factors that inhibits the realization of ideal love are the peculiar circumstances of collective life, a point that Niebuhr treats most diligently in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Observing that human beings "have not yet learned how to live together without compounding their vices," he argues that we must draw a sharp distinction between the moral behavior of individuals and that of social groups.[43] Whereas sinful human beings are by no means paragons of moral sensitivity, they nonetheless have a greater capacity for self-transcendence than groups, which possess only an inchoate form of the mind that can restrain selfish impulses. Consequently, "human communities have greater difficulty than individuals in achieving ethical relations."[44]

Woven as they are into the fabric of this present life, the obstacles presented by personal sinfulness and collective egoism mean that individuals attain the ideal of love only in the most exceptional of cases and that groups virtually never do. For this reason, Niebuhr repeatedly and unsparingly reproves those that labor under the utopian illusions that regard love as a simple possibility in this world. The finitude and selfishness of both individuals and

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[41] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 296.

[42] Ibid., 182. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, the expansiveness of our desires transmutes the will-to-live into the will-to-power, which egotistically seeks our own good regardless of its impact upon our neighbors. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 18.

[43] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 1.

[44] Ibid., 85.

groups, as well as the sublime and self-sacrificial perfection of love, mean that every actuality of history will ultimately stand as "only an approximation of the ideal."[45] Yet, at the same time, especially in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, Niebuhr adamantly asserts the continued moral relevance of love against what he calls "orthodox Christians," who would regard it as a strict impossibility. Love is "both the ground and the fulfillment" of existence, and Niebuhr's brand of prophetic Christianity insists upon its "organic relation" to "historic human existence."[46] Neither easily achievable nor strictly unreachable, love is an "impossible possibility" that is nonetheless "relevant to … every moral experience."[47]

In a world menaced by individual and collective sin, love may remain morally relevant, but for Niebuhr it is by no means solely sufficient. Most especially, love proves wanting as a guide to social and political ethics since in its purest form it "presupposes the resolution of the conflict of life with life" and "makes disinterestedness an absolute ideal without reference to its social consequences."[48] As such, it finds itself "baffled by the more intricate social relations in which the highest ethical attitudes are achieved only by careful calculation."[49] Rather than intransigently holding to the lofty demands of perfect love, Niebuhr believes that we must introduce other principles that help to relate it to the circumstances of this world that is riven by sin and conflict. Most especially, he emphasizes the importance of justice, which contrasts with love to the extent that it "presupposes the conflict of life with life and seeks to mitigate it."[50] As opposed to love's heedlessness, then, justice "is discriminate and calculating, carefully measuring the limits of interests and the

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[45] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 36.
[46] Ibid., 63.
[47] Ibid., 72, 22.
[48] Ibid., 91. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 263.
[49] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 74.
[50] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 215-6.

relation between the interests of the self and the other."[51] While justice is inherently a more relative moral ideal than love, it nonetheless marks an approximation of love under the conditions of sin and in a context where there exist multiple neighbors with competing claims.[52] Even as justice stands forever under the judgment of love, a great deal—morality, political peace, and even civilization itself—hinges upon justice and its nicely calculated more or less.[53]

But in what precisely does justice consist? While he was relatively consistent in formally characterizing justice in terms of balancing the vitalities at work in a given context, Niebuhr's specification of its content evolved throughout his career. In his earlier writings, when his thought betrayed deeper Marxian influence, Niebuhr focused centrally upon equality as the definitive component of justice, an emphasis evinced in his 1932 declaration that the aim of justice "must be to seek equality of opportunity for all life" and his 1935 claim that "[e]quality is always the regulative principle of justice."[54] With the intellectual upheavals occasioned by his growing disenchantment with socialism, the Second World War, and the Cold War, Niebuhr did not abandon equality but rather supplemented it. To be sure, even later in his career he could continue to speak at certain times as if equality stood alone in regulating justice and at others of "various regulative principles of justice," including security, order, and peace.[55] Nevertheless, the most significant regulative principle of justice that would join equality was liberty. Having played a central role in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, by 1957 Niebuhr would refer to liberty as a "twin regulative principle" of justice, along

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[51] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 134.

[52] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 254. Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 147.

[53] See Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 62. Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 295. Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 176.

[54] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 258. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 65.

[55] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 177. This sentence owes a large debt to Robin Lovin. See Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, 218.

with equality.[56] Despite the fact that they are both regulative principles of justice, in Niebuhr's view liberty and equality exist in a paradoxical relationship such that "it is possible to purchase the one only at the price of the other."[57] This paradox can only be resolved in the perfect love that transcends law and history.[58] At a political level, attaining the greatest degree of justice thus requires finding the best possible balance between equality and liberty in a given historical situation.

Also integral to Niebuhr's account of justice is the concept of order, which he sometimes includes as a regulative principle alongside the likes of equality and liberty, but which in the final analysis seems to be more a prerequisite—rather than a principle—of justice. This is certainly the case in *The Children of Light*, in which he posits that "the first task of a community is to subdue chaos and create order."[59] Fifteen years later he would strike a similar note when writing that "order must always remain the first value of any community."[60] Such passages suggest something of a secularized and socialized *ordo salutis*—or, better, an *ordo defensionis*—that proceeds from order to justice to nearer approximations of love. Only after establishing order by taming the anarchy of social life can a political community achieve these higher values.

Why, then, would Niebuhr sometimes depict order as a regulative principle that must be weighed against others rather than as a prerequisite of justice? This occasional tendency appears to arise from his worry that conservative forces often utilize the claim that they are protecting "order"—or more recently in the United States "law and order"—as a way of

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[56] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 189. See also Harlan Beckley, *Passion for Justice: Retrieving the Legacies of Walter Rauschenbusch, John A. Ryan, and Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 313-4. Gary J. Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 273.

[57] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 192.

[58] See Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 209.

[59] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 178.

[60] Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 5-6.

thwarting social changes that might threaten momentary chaos but ultimately create a more just status quo. Intent upon removing such specious moral cover, Niebuhr suggested that order needed to be balanced against values such as liberty.[61] On the whole, however, this move appears somewhat superfluous in light of the most trenchant insights of his early and mid-career. In the former, Niebuhr had insisted that the double task of humanity included not only reducing the anarchy of the world to some kind of order but also placing that order "under the criticism of the ultimate ideal" of love.[62] In the latter he claimed that establishing justice is implicated in the task of creating order.[63] Regardless of whether order ought to be understood as a prerequisite or a principle of justice, the ultimate point is that legitimate concern for order must be carefully weighed against the prospects of achieving higher degrees of justice and more nearly approximating the ideal of love.

In Niebuhr's view, the political system that most effectively establishes order, harmonizes it with justice, provides for the optimal balancing of liberty and equality, and equilibrates social vitalities is democracy. Democracy thus proves most conducive to justice in a world of sin and conflict. The power that politics provides over others and over social processes proves tremendously alluring to the self-interestedness of human beings, who are profoundly tempted to wield it as an instrument of their own selfish purposes. The key feature of the kind of Madisonian democracy that Niebuhr advocates is that it sets the self-interest of individuals and factions against one another, preventing any one from gaining a monopoly on political power. Whereas other political systems concentrate power in the hands of a small number, leaving themselves exceedingly vulnerable to the ambitious self-assertion of the powerful, democracy "arms the individual with political and constitutional

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[61] See, for instance, Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 114.
[62] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 38.
[63] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 178-81.

power to resist the inordinate ambition of rulers."[64] Niebuhr thus approvingly quotes Sam Rutherford's line that checks upon power must be "measured out ounce by ounce"[65] and repeatedly argues that democracy is "a perennial necessity" without which there is "no way to justice."[66] Apart from democratic checks and balances, society is doomed to injustice and tyranny.

Given his understanding of the dynamism of social life and the indeterminate character of love, however, Niebuhr did not believe that it is possible simply to codify a political system that will remain just in perpetuity. Instead, much like his fellow American democratic pragmatists, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Niebuhr thought that justice and democracy required ongoing adjustment: "Short of the complete identification of life with life which the law of love demands, it is necessary to arbitrate and adjust between competing interests in terms of a critical scrutiny of all the interests involved."[67] Punctilious examination and judicious political recalibration are necessary, on the one hand, to deal with emergent vitalities. The rise of new economic, political, or military powers needs to be deflected or offset, lest they become tyrannical. On the other hand, the indeterminate possibilities of love similarly call for continuous readjustment. The flawed and fallen nature of human beings and this world mean that we will never attain perfect love. Which ought to prompt us to be humble in our expectations of what we can attain through socio-political reform: "human history offers no simple way out to the kingdom of pure love and complete disinterestedness."[68] Nevertheless, we ought to seek to achieve "the highest measure of order, freedom and justice despite the hazards of man's collective life."[69] Such a quest demands that

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[64] Ibid., 46-7.
[65] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 62.
[66] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 85, 93. See also Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, xiv.
[67] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 100.
[68] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 62.
[69] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 131.

we continually reassess and reconfigure our political lives so that they more fully embody justice and thereby more closely approximate the ideal of love.

Helping to direct their political communities towards greater approximations of love is a responsibility particularly incumbent upon Christians, whom Niebuhr suggests can both confound and contribute to political life in various ways. Few are more frank than Niebuhr in acknowledging the ways that Christianity has historically sown political confusion. Perhaps most centrally, it has done so in the form of utopianism, which "creates confusion in politics by measuring all significant historical distinctions against purely ideal perspectives."[70] By so doing, it not only obscures relative distinctions within history but it invests political matters with religious significance. Niebuhr believes that this is an egregious mistake: "As politics deals with the proximate ends of life, and religion with ultimate ones, it is always a source of illusion if one is simply invested with the sanctity of the other."[71] Such an approach can be misconstrued to suggest that it is human beings who are responsible for the final victory over evil when, in fact, "[t]he final victory over man's disorder is God's and not ours."[72] Even as he criticizes Christians who would sentimentally claim more responsibility than human beings can possibly possess, however, in the middle part of his career especially Niebuhr also set himself against the related but converse tendency of Barth and his followers, whose perfectionism Niebuhr believed leads them to pessimism as they conceive "God, the will of God, and the Kingdom of God … in such transcendent terms that nothing in history can even approximate the divine."[73] Leveling the distinctions of history, such an approach is "too consistently 'eschatological' for the 'nicely calculated less and more' which must go into political decisions" and thus neglects the fact that human

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[70] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 169.
[71] Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, 120.
[72] Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 116.
[73] Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 148.

beings maintain responsibility for proximate improvements.[74] Consequently, Barthianism can eventuate in a "lack of social vigor" that "devours ethical passion."[75]

Such deviations notwithstanding, Niebuhr believes that a properly understood, prophetic version of the Christian faith can make a vital and uniquely valuable contribution to human political life. One aspect of this contribution is that such a faith prompts Christians to assume political responsibility even as they recognize the fleeting and fragmentary nature of all historical accomplishments. "We are men, not God," this faith teaches; yet Niebuhr reminds us that as such "we are responsible for making choices between greater and lesser evils" and "have an obligation as Christians to establish and extend community and justice as far as lies within our power."[76] Prophetic Christianity thus offers a powerful goad to political action. At the same time, it contributes in another way as, to quote Kevin Carnahan, it makes the Christian "well suited to participate in democratic practice … since she or he is, by virtue of her or his Christianity, a humble, critical, and responsible member of society."[77] Carnahan surely makes the process of formation sound more automatic than Niebuhr would allow, for Niebuhr recognizes that Christians are often sentimental, perfectionistic, and given to despair. Still, Carnahan highlights that for Niebuhr a key contribution is not only that prophetic Christian faith prompts one to assume responsibility but that it suggests the need for humility in such social and political engagement. In this way, Christianity makes a crucial contribution to democratic politics since, in Niebuhr's words, "the toleration which democracy requires is difficult to maintain

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[74] Ibid., 186. Although, particularly in his essays, Niebuhr takes Barthianism to task on this charge, it is one that he believes applies to Protestantism more generally as it "has frequently contributed to the anarchy of modern life by its inability to suggest and to support relative standards and structures of social virtue and political justice." Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 60.

[75] Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 148, 150.

[76] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 56, 65.

[77] Kevin Carnahan, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Ramsey: Idealist and Pragmatic Christians on Politics, Philosophy, Religion, and War* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 142.

without Christian humility."[78] Understanding the ubiquitous power of egoism and the fragmentary nature of historical achievements, Christians can have the ability to criticize not only the status quo and the actions of others, but their own virtue, as well.

Having such a responsible and humble attitude towards political matters partially entails accepting what Niebuhr regarded as the inevitability that politics must utilize less than ideal means in order to avoid greater evils. Since human egoism is ineradicable and "makes large-scale co-operation on a purely voluntary basis impossible," Niebuhr concludes that "[g]overnments must coerce."[79] One should not be so cynical as to think that politics is simply reducible to coercion since it also rests upon persuasion and organic forms of unity.[80] Yet it would be an even larger mistake to attempt to disqualify coercion and violence from political use. In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr offers one of his strongest endorsements of limited violence: "If a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which violence and revolution can be ruled out."[81] To foreswear violence and coercion in principle means not only refusing to participate in achieving such potential social progress,[82] but also surrendering to those who would use physical force for evil ends. This does not make the use of coercion good but only a lesser, yet necessary, evil.

Here we confront what Niebuhr calls "the very heart of the problem of Christian politics: the readiness to use power and interest in the service of an end dictated by love, and yet an absence of complacency about the evil inherent in them."[83] To be sure, Niebuhr acknowledges that there may be a place for a form of pacifism that "disavow[s] the political

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[78] Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 103.
[79] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 14.
[80] See, for instance, Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 80.
[81] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 179.
[82] Ibid., 240.
[83] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 136.

task" as a witness that reminds us of the evil that afflicts our actions and even our highest achievements.[84] Nonetheless, he believes that, however reluctantly and contritely, the majority of Christians ought to accept the use of coercion as a means of establishing order, achieving greater degrees of justice, and approximating the ideal of love. What is more, as he puts it on the last page of *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, he believes that by offering "confidence in an eternal ground of existence which is, nevertheless, involved in man's historical striving to the point of suffering with and for him," the Christian faith "can prompt men to accept their historical responsibilities gladly."[85] And in many respects, encouraging Christians to do just that was the central goal of Niebuhr's career.

III. THE STRENGTHS OF POLITICS-AS-STATECRAFT

Assaying Niebuhr's political thought through the lens created by the preceding treatments of the City of God and the predicament of evil reveals that it offers a number of promising resources for conceiving how Christians might live more faithful political lives. In particular, two aspects of his account of politics appear especially well-suited to the ethic we are attempting to construct: (1) its vision of politics as a demographically inclusive enterprise that takes seriously Christians' responsibilities towards their neighbors; (2) the way in which it situates politics under a principle of indiscriminate criticism while at the same time attempting to formulate relative distinctions between historical achievements. This section will examine these dimensions of Niebuhr's work, underscoring their resonance with central Christian convictions and their fitness for helping us to build the kind of temporary political habitations that approximate the City of God in this world.

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[84] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 5.
[85] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 321.

A. Demographic Inclusivity and Christian Responsibility

While it has long drawn critical fire from various quarters, in recent decades Niebuhr's conception of politics has been targeted especially by a number of thinkers who advocate an ecclesiocentric account of politics. At the heart of these criticisms is the conviction that Christians are to be first and foremost—and, one might fear, exclusively—concerned with the politics of the church rather than, as Niebuhr would have it, the politics of governing society writ large. Examining the work of Stanley Hauerwas, one of the leaders of this cadre of critics, the next chapter will make clear that there is a great deal to commend at least a limited acceptance of such ecclesial politics. Nevertheless, the terms of this acceptance must be precisely specified, for many such criticisms of Niebuhr obscure key elements of the Christian tradition that simultaneously push towards a more demographically inclusive vision of politics. Such is the case with the influential criticism articulated in John Milbank's 1997 essay, "The Poverty of Niebuhrianism."

The crux of Milbank's case against Niebuhr is that in point of fact his purported realism is not realistic at all. This is because he fails to appreciate that human beings can only talk about a meaning or logic of history from within particular linguistic and cultural matrixes. Inattentive to this, Niebuhr attempts to render a reading of history that is not expressed in the grammar of the Christian faith but that instead seeks to bring Christian insights to bear on some ostensibly "neutral reality." In the process, he produces not a Christian account but instead one that is determined by Stoic presuppositions as it suggests that "human finitude is an impassable barrier to the actualizing of the good life in the human world" and (even after partially correcting this former defect) renders an overly individualistic account of sin.[86]

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[86] John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1997), 235, 243.

In contrast to such an approach, Milbank asserts that a true Christian realism "does not consist in factual survey and surmise, but in an evaluative reading of its signs as *clues to ultimate meanings and causes*."[87] Christian interpretations thus fundamentally diverge from those that "the world" would deem realistic because they do not begin by presuming a neutral reality. Instead, "[w]e start reading reality … under the sign of the Cross."[88] This reading of history simultaneously demands a fundamentally different understanding of politics, one which does not attempt to hold violence in check through the use of violence but that proceeds from the conviction that "such evil … can be altogether rooted out within the fellowship of those who follow the way of Christ, who has recovered for us the true pattern of perfection, the original *logos* of human existence." Milbank thus contends that the cross reconfigures the Christian political imaginary as it "signals the ultimate replacement of the coercive *polis* and *imperium*, the structures of ancient society, by the persuasive Church."[89]

Even if Niebuhr was never so subtle a theologian as Milbank and in fact, rather speciously, denied the title,[90] in my view many of Milbank's theological critiques nevertheless miss the mark. Maintaining that Niebuhr predicates his reading of history upon the Stoic assumption that it is human finitude that alienates human beings from the good life, Milbank implies that in his early work Niebuhr conflates creation and Fall. To make such a suggestion, however, one must overlook Niebuhr's clear distinction between them in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, as well as his emphasis upon evil as parasitic upon the good and sin as a result of perversion.[91] Admittedly, Niebuhr significantly refines these insights, especially in

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[87] Ibid., 244. Emphasis original.

[88] Ibid., 251.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 3.

[91] See Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 44-49. Niebuhr's awareness of this concern is also evident in his criticism of Barth's alleged conflation of creation and Fall. See Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 68.

The Nature and Destiny of Man, but they are undeniably present even in the earlier stage of his career. This ought to acquit Niebuhr of the claim, formulated by Hauerwas and Michael Broadway as they gloss Milbank's work, that he endorses an "ontology of conflict."[92] Recognizing that the highest possibilities of humanity are for a perfect unity of life with life, Niebuhr at most offers a phenomenology of conflict in our postlapsarian state where life is at odds with life.[93]

So far as I can see, however, an adequate ecclesiology demands just such an account. Of course, as Ben Quash notes, "[a]t the heart of the confrontation between Niebuhr's 'realist' and Milbank's radically orthodox theology is precisely the interpretation of the 'real.' "[94] Yet is it realistic to claim, as Milbank does, that evil can be rooted out from the common life of those who follow Jesus Christ? In light of Christ's own insistence that "[n]o one is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18), one might in fact doubt whether such a claim is justified by the gospel, let alone by historical experience. Nevertheless, even if one accepts Milbank's extremely bold assertion, it remains the case that the church is not a demographically inclusive polity but a vocationally determined one. This point comes etymologically embedded in the Greek term most often translated as "church," *ekklēsia*, a compound noun formed by combining the prefix *ek*-, meaning "from," and *kaleō*, meaning "to call."[95] The church is thus composed of those who have responded to God's call to enter "into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). While God

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92 Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 49-57.

93 Here I agree with John Burk's claim that when Niebuhr speaks of conflict, he is not speaking metaphysically. Rather, "his attention is directed instead at conflicts that happen at the level of existentiality only: those that occur between … human life and human life." John K. Burk, "Moral Law, Privative Evil and Christian Realism: Reconsidering Milbank's 'the Poverty of Niebuhrianism'," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 2 (2009): 217.

94 Ben Quash, "Radical Orthodoxy's Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics*, eds. Harries and Platten, 59.

95 See Walter Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303-4, 502-4.

convokes this community for the good of all creation, not all are currently included in it; it is this fact that sets the basis for the Johannine distinction between the Christian community and "the world."[96] Even within the terms of Milbank's presumption, then, the church would be at best an island of peace amid a sea of violence.

Later sections in this chapter, as well as succeeding chapters, will make clear that maintaining and upbuilding the church is a vital political task. At the same time, however, as discussed at the end of Chapter 2, any viable account of the church as a *polis* must also take seriously Christians' charge to serve their neighbors. Even in John's gospel Jesus sends his disciples into the world: "As you [the Father] have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). The followers of Jesus are to have a profound care not just for those within their own fellowship but for their neighbors beyond, as well. Although Christians' beliefs distinguish them from the world, they are commanded to care for it. We find a vital model of such care in Israel's Babylonian Captivity when Jeremiah writes to those who have been taken into exile, offering the word of the Lord. Among other things, God commands them to "seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7). The word here translated as "welfare" has numerous possible meanings, including peace and completeness. Like exilic Israel, the church should aspire to cultivate welfare, peace, and completeness in the non-ecclesial polities where it finds itself living as pilgrims and migrants.

This means that Christians require some way of talking not only about ecclesial politics but about the political life that they share with their non-Christian neighbors. Put differently, we need a grammar for politics as a demographically inclusive enterprise that

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[96] See especially John 15:18; 16:33; 17:6-18; 1 John 3:13; 4:3-5; 5:4-5.

structures the lives of those gathered together not by divine vocation but by geographic location. Milbank's suggestion that the church has replaced secular polities tempts us to imagine that such polities are insignificant for the Christian life and that the church is somehow able to eliminate the need for them. Seductive as it might be, we ought to resist this temptation. Not only does the church name a limited, vocationally formed community rather than a demographically inclusive one, but as a matter of simple observation, these political realities continue to exist. Moreover, as a matter of moral judgment, we might recognize that there is good reason for them to do so. On the one hand, governments can restrain evil. This includes not only the evils produced by individuals but also the subtle yet powerful evils wrought by social forms, such as what Ronald Preston identifies as those forms of "private coercion—whether by firms, professional associations, or private networks—which only the state can hold in check" because only the state can leverage sufficient countervailing social power.[97] On the other hand, governments are capable of producing limited, though appreciable, goods of political communion, such as greater justice for the poor, a fact that problematizes Radical Orthodoxy's tendency to read the state simply in terms of violence.[98] In their continued existence, states generate political frameworks that the church itself must navigate and that determinatively shape the lives of those within their borders. A true, full-bodied love of neighbor calls the church to recognize the impact of these forces and also to engage with them in ways that create the greatest degree of justice for society writ large but with a special focus upon the lot of the poor, outcast, imprisoned, and those otherwise afflicted. The blithe proclamation that the church has supplanted all other political realities comes off as either a docetic discounting of the continuing power of

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[97] Ronald Preston, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the New Right" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, ed. Richard Harries (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1986), 92.

[98] On this tendency, see Burk, "Moral Law, Privative Evil and Christian Realism: Reconsidering Milbank's 'the Poverty of Niebuhrianism'," 218.

these polities, an insensitive disregard of those who suffer from their current configurations, or both.

Learning to speak the language of statecraft does not mean that Christians must simply capitulate to its conceits, a point of which Milbank's grammatical approach to the faith is not always sufficiently appreciative. Nonetheless, juxtaposing the coercion that allegedly lies at the heart of secular and non-Christian polities and the persuasion that he believes defines the church's political *modus operandi*, Milbank tacitly warns against uncritically accepting the presumption that coercion is necessary for political life. Neither Milbank nor Niebuhr is, to my mind, sufficiently precise in defining what constitutes "coercion." At the very least, however, Milbank reminds Christians that the question of whether coercion is indeed politically necessary is one whose answer must be discerned rather than simply assumed. Another of the characteristic conceits of the state that Christians ought to challenge is the inevitability of its self-centeredness. However much they recognize the need to create sustainable forms of political cooperation within the bounds of locationally determined communities, the universal hope of the City of God must continually push Christians to insist that love and the quest for justice do not stop at the state's borders. As I will argue in coming portions of this chapter, I believe that Niebuhr's thought has intellectual resources that can help to challenge the moral myopia that characteristically afflicts states but that he was not always sensitive to their full practical implications.

B. Combining Indiscriminate Criticism with Relative Distinctions

"It is a good thing to seek for the Kingdom of God on earth," contends Niebuhr, "but it is very dubious to claim to have found it."[99] The dubiousness of such a claim arises

[99] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 178.

from the fact that for Niebuhr the Kingdom of God is defined as a reign of perfect, heedless love. Although love is the ultimate moral ideal, it can only be fully embodied under conditions radically different than those that obtain in the current, fallen state of human existence. Once again, love "stands on the edge of history and not in history," representing "an ultimate and not an immediate possibility."[100] Nevertheless, Niebuhr's commitment to such eschatologically pure love provides him with the resources to indict all historical accomplishments. This is not, as Milbank suggests, because they are historical or finite but because they are infected by human sinfulness and pride. Even at points where Niebuhr denies that love offers a basis for a positive social ethic, then, he nonetheless recognizes it as an "unattainable ideal, but a very useful one" that can provide "a vantage point from which to condemn the present social order."[101] At his most profound and prophetic, Niebuhr uses love as a principle of indiscriminate criticism that enables him to expose the sinfulness insinuated in every status quo, "to convict every historical achievement of incompleteness, and to prevent the sanctification of the relative values of any age or any era."[102]

This well equips Niebuhr to offer a trenchant diagnosis of the ethical ambiguity that he believes is inherent to politics. This ambiguity has two core aspects. First, government itself invariably falls short of the ideal of disinterested love as it is forced into the service of a particular segment of society. Analyzing Isaiah's and Amos's accusations against the authorities who subvert justice, crush the needy, and despoil the poor, Niebuhr interprets such indictments as "call[ing] attention to the inevitable corruption of government because the coercive power required to maintain order and unity in a community is never pure and

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[100] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 298.

[101] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957; reprint, Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Press, 1967), 32-3.

[102] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 200.

disinterested power."[103] At least to a degree, government ineluctably becomes warped into a protector of privilege and thus falls short of the disinterestedness of love. For Niebuhr, such shortcomings are illustrated by the dialectic that he sees created by Romans 13, which portrays government as a servant of God to punish evildoers, and Revelation 13, which depicts an apocalyptic government in the form of a beast that rebels against God, demands idolatrous worship, and makes war on the saints.[104] Even as government is necessary, it is capable of flagrant injustices and cannot achieve the disinterestedness demanded by the law of love.

A second aspect of the ethical ambiguity of politics resides in the necessity of utilizing means that are ethically suspect. Most especially, Niebuhr believes that politics must use power—and, even more specifically, coercion—to sustain order and promote the common good.[105] Once again, however, the indiscriminate principle of love, which envisions a world of perfect and spontaneous harmony, reveals that sin unavoidably taints such methods. "Since power is a necessity of social cohesion," Niebuhr writes, "a rational politics must accept it as a necessary evil. But it must know that it is an evil."[106] And this taint of evil persists even when power is turned to the service of worthwhile ends. Accordingly, in an indictment of the Oxford Group movement led by Frank Buchman, Niebuhr highlights the "sinfulness of power," declaring that it stains "men of power" even when they "wield it ostensibly for the common good."[107] Hence, applying love as a principle of indiscriminate judgment, Niebuhr emulates Augustine's refusal to divinize any earthly political arrangement,

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[103] Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 220.

[104] For Niebuhr's treatment of this dialectic, see Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 269ff.

[105] For instances where Niebuhr suggests that coercion is a requisite of politics, see Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 4, 234. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 105. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 104. Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 55. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 219-20. Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 82. Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 34-5.

[106] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 100.

[107] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 163.

reminding us that they all fall short of humanity's highest possibilities and that the gospel demands that we examine "every institution … of government, recognizing that none of them are as sacrosanct as some supposedly Christian or secular system of law has made them."[108]

Nevertheless, as Mark Haas highlights, Niebuhr simultaneously recognizes that if a standard of action, such as love, becomes simply "an impossible goal, history loses its potential for meaningful action because all attempts to realize this standard will be hopelessly futile."[109] Niebuhr thus dialectically balances the indiscriminate function of love with more discriminate standards that illumine the fact that "the moral ambiguity in all social structures and institutions does not destroy the possibility of an indeterminate improvement in them."[110] At points the discriminate standard that reveals such possibilities is love itself, such as when Niebuhr asserts that in addition to being a indiscriminate standard "love is also a principle of discriminate criticism between various forms of community and various attempts at justice."[111] Love, then, is capable not only of convicting historical accomplishments but distinguishing between their relative merits. More commonly, however, it is justice and its regulative principles that appear to set the basis for such discriminating judgments. Not only is justice "the application of the law of love" in social life,[112] but when compared with love the ideal of equality is "more immediately relevant to social and

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[108] Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 110.

[109] Mark L. Haas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian Pragmatism': A Principled Alternative to Consequentialism," *The Review of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 614. See, Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 30.

[110] Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 199.

[111] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 26. Some have criticized Niebuhr for confusing the indiscriminate and discriminate functions of love. See Carnahan, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Ramsey*, 100. For a discussion in much the same spirit, see Paul Ramsey, "Love and Law" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, especially 84-90, 101.

[112] Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, 435.

economic problems" and is more suited as a norm of social ethics.[113] The discriminate function of justice is further reinforced by Niebuhr's claim that our inability to rid the world of sin means that it is wrong "to insist that every action of the Christian must conform to *agape*, rather than the norms of relative justice and mutual love by which life is maintained and conflicting interests are arbitrated in history."[114]

Whatever the minor inconsistencies that cropped up in his specification of the discriminate standard of judgment, Niebuhr's overall point is well taken. On the one hand, we must recognize that no political accomplishments perfectly incarnate God's will as they are all marred by sin and evil. On the other hand, however, if we are to relieve oppression and to inspire higher attainments of justice that more closely approximate the ideal of love, we must be able to distinguish between the particular evils that afflict different political regimes. Niebuhr captured the essence of this dialectic in a 1954 address to the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches when he declared: "Thus we decide and discriminate and even fight for our causes in history. We cannot escape these responsibilities. But every effort to end history, to bring it to a conclusion by a victory over our foe or by the triumph of our scheme of wisdom, only brings the final evil into history by the claim of a final righteousness."[115] Even though all of our political habitations in this world will be necessarily provisional since human beings are incapable of ending history by establishing the City of God on earth, Niebuhr can help us to see that certain forms of political communion more closely resemble it; furthermore, he offers powerful conceptual tools for making discriminate judgments between more and less just political structures. Hence,

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[113] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 91.
[114] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 88.
[115] Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 341.

Niebuhr's dual approach allows for Christians to be not only critics of demographically inclusive politics but also constructive contributors to them.

IV. The Weaknesses of Politics-as-Statecraft

In underscoring how necessary it is to find ways for demographically inclusive communities, such as nations, to live together justly and peacefully and in reinforcing the need to assess their accomplishments in view of the ultimate possibilities of human life, Niebuhr's conception of politics-as-statecraft possesses marked strengths. We ought not gainsay nor disparage these. Its strengths notwithstanding, however, his account appears an inadequate political response to helping Christians live faithfully in the midst of the predicament of evil. This section will take up what I judge to be the three most serious deficiencies with Niebuhr's approach to politics: (1) particularly in the 1950s and early 1960s, Niebuhr betrayed a tendency for such an approach to become complacent and lose its critical edge, discounting emergent possibilities and being insufficiently critical of an unjust status quo; (2) as Niebuhr develops it, this construal of politics is not adequately attentive to the dynamics of character formation even as it relies upon well-formed individuals; and (3) it infelicitously diminishes the place of the church in Christian political ethics. Exploring these claims further will elucidate weaknesses within the resources that Niebuhr offers, weaknesses that it will be necessary either to omit or somehow to overcome in the ultimate construction of a Christian political ethic.

A. A Tendency Towards Complacency

Examining the combination of indiscriminate criticism and relative distinctions in Niebuhr's thought, the last section argued that his approach ideally demands that we

continually assess every political achievement in light of the transcendent possibilities of love. In his words, such a morality "must appreciate the virtue of historic and traditional forms of justice … but it must at the same time subject every structure of justice, whether historically, rationally, or Scripturally validated, to constant scrutiny."[116] Despite the demands that his theory might make, a number of interpreters have portrayed Niebuhr not as a critic of the status quo but as an apologist for it. Such depictions have focused above all upon two crucial cases. The first is his approach to the Cold War, in which both supporters and detractors of Niebuhr frequently paint him as an advocate of increasing US power. As Gary Dorrien illustrates, not only have neoconservatives revered Niebuhr because his "highly masculine rhetoric of power, duality, and realism promoted an aggressive anticommunist politics" but similarly "Christian leftists" have "viewed Niebuhr chiefly as the figure who turned American Christian ethics into a form of Cold War apologetics."[117] Where these two sides converge is in casting Niebuhr as a champion of the American-led military-industrial status quo of the 1950s and 1960s.[118]

A second key episode in which Niebuhr has been interpreted as a supporter of the status quo, and one which we will consider in greater detail, is his response to the Civil Rights Movement. To claim that Niebuhr granted a privileged position to the racist establishment in the United States will surely sound odd to many, especially to those who read him through the lens of his early works like *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Not only did Niebuhr argue there that Blacks in the United States "have a higher moral right to challenge

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[116] Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 195.

[117] Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, 263.

[118] One of the more cogent and creative recent articulations of such an argument has been made in Jason Stevens, "Should We Forget Reinhold Niebuhr?," *boundary 2* 34, no. 2 (2007): 135-48. Of course, however, not all are convinced that Niebuhr advocated the extension of American power. Robin Lovin, for instance, contends that seeing him in his historical context reveals that "[t]o his contemporaries … Niebuhr was a critic, not an apologist." Robin W. Lovin, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Impact and Implications," *Political Theology* 6, no. 4 (2005): 465.

their oppressors than these have to maintain their rule by force," but moreover he also outlined a regime of non-violent resistance drawn from Gandhi, predicting that "[t]he emancipation of the Negro race in America probably waits upon the adequate development of this kind of social and political strategy."[119] And he appeared truly eager for this achievement. In later years, Martin Luther King, Jr., would credit Niebuhr with having accurately prophesied the avenue through which Blacks would succeed in the quest for liberation,[120] and King would also favorably invoke Niebuhr in two of his most famous pieces, "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," explaining that he drew from Niebuhr the notion that freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor but must be demanded by the oppressed.[121] In addition to King, James Cone, the foremost proponent of Black theology, has also found positive resources in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, claiming that it "moves in the direction of blackness" by considering the perspective of the oppressed. Likewise, Cone took from it the lesson that the Black community must marshal its forces in order to change the balance of power and take the freedom that they deserve.[122]

Notably, however, only five years after making such claims Cone would include Niebuhr in his blanket denunciation of the mainstream of American theologians, both radical and conservative, who "have interpreted the gospel according to the cultural and political interests of white people."[123] Understandably in light of his purposes, Cone did not identify the reason for his changed assessment of Niebuhr. Nonetheless, it is telling that

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[119] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 234, 252.

[120] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 151.

[121] See Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 292, 374.

[122] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970; reprint, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 204 n4, 98.

[123] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975; reprint, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), 43.

even in his earlier remarks Cone was careful to limit his praise to *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, a work written during Niebuhr's most obviously Marxist phase. Although even then Niebuhr discouraged Blacks from undertaking armed insurrection, during this period he nonetheless viewed revolutionary change as desirable.[124] This openness to revolution contrasts with the more incrementalist approach to social change that Niebuhr characteristically advocated from the mid-1940s onward and especially in response to the Civil Rights Movement.

In a short yet incisive piece entitled "Niebuhr, 'Realism,' and Civil Rights in America," Herbert Edwards, who influenced Cone's later appraisal of Niebuhr,[125] attempts to unveil both the assumptions that undergirded Niebuhr's assessment of the Civil Rights Movement and also what this reveals about his own privileging of the White establishment. Most crucially, he finds in Niebuhr's thought the propensity "to view the position of black people as fundamentally outside of society (that is, white society)."[126] One instance where Edwards detects this tendency is in Niebuhr's commentary on the Fair Employment Practices Act of 1950, in which he counseled that it would have been better to have advanced anti-lynching or anti-poll tax legislation since this more ambitious act could not be enforced, even if it had passed.[127] Enforcement was impossible, Niebuhr claimed, because it violated the conscience of the southern community. Yet Edwards shows that to cast the matter in such terms is to assume that it is Whites alone that compose "the southern community." Combined with a "realism" that—however unwittingly but nonetheless effectively—attended more to the

[124] Niebuhr's appreciation of the possibilities of revolution appears clearly in the title of chapter 7, "Justice through Revolution." For his discouragement of armed insurrection in the case of Blacks in the US, see especially Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 253-4.

[125] Edwards's influence is obvious in a later chapter when Cone cites his essay "Racism and Christian Ethics in America" for demonstrating "with unmistakable clarity, that white ethicists, from Reinhold Niebuhr to James Gustafson, reflect the racism current in the society as a whole." Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 184.

[126] Herbert O. Edwards, "Niebuhr, 'Realism,' and Civil Rights in America," *Christianity and Crisis* 46, no. 1 (1986): 13.

[127] See "Fair Employment Practices Act" in Niebuhr, *Love and Justice*, 145-8.

power of the White community, this assumption framed an approach to Civil Rights issues that Edwards argues "became almost normative for Niebuhr":

> First, agreement with the noble aims and ideals of the black movement, with the *moral* ideal. Second, the "realistic" analysis of the *political* situation, an analysis that almost always places the white power structure in the foreground as definitive of the "real" situation and then explains why failure is all but inevitable given the nature of that "reality." Third, the attempt to locate a course of action that will not rock the boat too much, to locate an "uneasy conscience" among the enemies of "racial justice." This conscience can be appealed to by not demanding too much too soon, by demanding not what the established powers will not give but what they might be willing to cede. Finally, comes the advice to the victims of racism and their supporters: Be patient.[128]

On Edwards's reading, then, Niebuhr did not openly reject Black aspirations but he did undeniably put them off. In doing so, he placed the Black movement on the defensive by "making the effects of delayed action on Blacks less central than the effects of action on whites."[129] And, in contrast to interpreters such as Richard Wightman Fox, who maintain that Niebuhr's views on racism "underwent a marked evolution," Edwards sees this as a pattern that Niebuhr maintained with remarkable consistency until the end of his public career.[130]

Even if Edwards's account wants greater nuance than he could offer in such a short essay, at the very least it is undeniable that Niebuhr discouraged bolder attempts at socio-political transformation and that in doing so he betrayed a degree of complacency about the racist status quo. Hence, although King cites him approvingly, it is not altogether clear that Niebuhr was not himself indicted when King denounced those who "have never felt the stinging darts of segregation" and yet say "Wait," failing to understand that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."[131]

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[128] Edwards, "Niebuhr, 'Realism,' and Civil Rights in America," 14.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 282-3. Edwards, "Niebuhr, 'Realism,' and Civil Rights in America," 13.
[131] King, *A Testament of Hope*, 292.

One shortcoming of Niebuhr's approach to the Civil Rights Movement is that, despite pretentions to the contrary, it in fact failed to evaluate the situation realistically. To be sure, higher achievements still call, but the advancements of the 1950s and 1960s clearly exceeded what Niebuhr believed possible in light of the configurations of power that he perceived. Reflecting upon broader trends in political history, Robin Lovin, one of the intellectual heirs of Niebuhr's Christian realism, has written, "we know in hindsight that the risks run by Freedom Riders in Mississippi, Anti-Apartheid marchers in South Africa, and the citizens of Prague, Warsaw, and Leipzig produced changes out of all proportion to a political realist's reasonable expectations."[132] It is his appreciation of these unanticipated potentialities that evidently lies behind Lovin's attempt to salvage Christian realism by arguing that its proponents cannot simply repeat Niebuhr's insights but must instead reckon with newly emergent cultural, environmental, and political forces.[133] Surely, any self-proclaimed realism will need to make such adjustments. Nevertheless, from Niebuhr's miscalculations we might just as easily draw the lesson credited to William Ernest Hocking, namely, that "realism is not a philosophy but a boast."[134]

Doubts about the achievability of true "realism" notwithstanding, the more troubling worry occasioned by Niebuhr's approach to the Civil Rights Movement is that it exposes critical fissures in the architecture of his thought that dispose it to collapse into political complacency, especially under the burden of weighty times. In 1956, during another momentous episode, Niebuhr counseled against federal enforcement of the *Brown v. Board* decision, arguing, "Prudence is as necessary as courage in the tasks of statesmanship. The fact that it is not appealing to the victims of a current injustice does not make it any less the

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[132] Lovin, "Reinhold Niebuhr in Historical Perspective" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics*, eds. Harries and Platten, 11.

[133] See especially Lovin, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Impact and Implications," 468-9.

[134] Cited in Novak, "Needing Niebuhr Again," 53.

course of wisdom in overcoming historic injustices."[135] In response, Irving Howe would lament, "Surely one might expect something a little more forthright—a little more moral—from the foremost exponent in the United States of the Protestant 'crisis theology.' "[136] And surely we might expect more from a thinker who insists upon critically scrutinizing every status quo. In Howe's view, however, Niebuhr's excessive caution was not, as his contemporary defenders might contend, simply an aberration or a lapse in judgment. Thus he continues by maintaining that it eventuates from the fact that "Mr. Niebuhr has developed a marvelous intellectual system—the world being necessarily evil, perfection being unattainable, man being inherently sinful—by which his theological right hand *does* know and proceeds to approve of what his political left hand does." Stated in overly bald terms, Howe's judgment unfortunately blames the recognition that evil corrupts this world for Niebuhr's political timidity. Nevertheless, like Edwards, Howe perceptively identifies that a key factor at work is a rupture internal to Niebuhr's thought between the ethical or theological ideal and the alleged political reality.

As we have seen, Niebuhr views love as the definitive ethical and theological ideal; yet it is an ideal that appears largely estranged from the realm of politics. Albeit that in certain places he insists strenuously upon the omni-relevance of love (most famously in the chapter entitled "The Relevance of An Impossible Ethical Ideal" in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*), elsewhere Niebuhr effectively dismisses it as inapplicable, especially to politics. Such moves are particularly prominent in his more explicitly political works. For instance, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* centrally argues that we must sharply distinguish between the behavior of individuals and that of groups, which demands that we adopt a "frank dualism in morals" that recognizes that the highest ethical attainments, most

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[135] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Nullification," *The New Leader* 39, no. 10 (1956): 4.
[136] Irving Howe, "Reverberations in the North," *Dissent* 3, no. 2 (1956): 123.

especially true love, forever remain beyond the reach of groups.[137] Niebuhr even goes so far as to maintain that there exists a "conflict between ethics and politics," and that relationships between groups must remain political rather than ethical.[138] And he makes similar assertions in numerous works penned during his middle and late career, including *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1944) and *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959).[139] In *Man's Nature and His Communities* (1965), Niebuhr pronounces that the complete, heedless self-giving that characterizes love "is a moral ideal scarcely possible for the individual and *certainly not relevant* to the morality of self-regarding nations," hardening the claim that he had previously made in his essay "Christian Faith and Social Action" (1953) that "the law of love is remote, if not irrelevant" to the behavior of political units.[140] Such moves either eliminate the political role of love or reduce its lines to generic mutterings about the pretension involved in every human endeavor and the guilt we all bear.[141]

Of course, one can interpret the tension between such dualistic claims and Niebuhr's insistence on the relevance of love in various ways. For instance, one might hold, with Eric Gregory, that the dualism of such statements are merely rhetorical and are softened by his "more nuanced statements" elsewhere, which "close the distance of love from justice."[142] Tellingly, however, when the chips are down Niebuhr appears to be thinking not in such softened terms but in more starkly dualistic ones that alienate love from the political arena. Unable to offer substantive political guidance, love collapses and its orienting role is left to

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[137] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 271.

[138] Ibid., 257, xxiii.

[139] See his distinction between "pure morality" and "political morality" in Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 73. In *The Structure of Nations*, Niebuhr similarly argues against the belief that "there is only one moral law for individuals and for nations." See Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 30.

[140] Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 42. Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 132.

[141] See Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 135.

[142] Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 17.

justice.[143] Itself comprised of divergent and jockeying regulative principles, however, justice allows for diverse interpretations, from the highly equalitarian to the extremely libertarian. Yet in times when chaos threatens, the significance of order as a precondition for justice appears to wax. The difficulty, as Edwards and Howe highlight, is that this leaves Niebuhr insufficiently sensitive to the injustice insinuated in the present order. It would be wrong to claim that, even at his most cautious, Niebuhr himself ever endorsed the racist status quo. Still, in his attempt to adhere to a "realism" that would "take all factors in a social and political situation … into account, particularly the factors of self-interest and power,"[144] he erred in thinking that those who mattered most were those who held the instruments of power and that securing order required not pushing such stakeholders too hard.

While the rupture between Niebuhr's ethical and political thought promotes this ascension of order in times of trial, more fundamentally we might worry that the very definition of politics in terms of statecraft colludes in it. This is because such a construal can suggest that Christians' foremost concern ought to be with the maintenance of the state, nation, or society in general. Sam Wells captures the way in which this assumption shapes Niebuhr's thought with his cheeky observation: " 'We' for Niebuhr tends to mean 'The Secretary of State and me, his closest adviser.' "[145] The difficulty with such an approach to politics is that it can easily occlude the peculiar concern that Christians are to have for the most vulnerable, especially the poor and oppressed. In ways both substantive and numerous, the well-being of these groups is intricately connected to the well-being of the social and

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143 Thus, as Gregory puts it, Niebuhr's thought "tends toward a docetic account of love and justice—love 'appears' as justice but it really can not have anything to do with social justice *unless* it is self-sacrifice." Ibid., 182. Emphasis original.

144 Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 119.

145 Wells, "The Nature and Destiny of Serious Theology" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics*, eds. Harries and Platten, 80, n13. For a similar claim, see Bullert's assertion that Niebuhr "would covet the role as a consummate political insider and prophetic spiritual advisor." Gary B. Bullert, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Century: World War II and the Eclipse of the Social Gospel," *Journal of Church and State* 44, no. 2 (2002): 275.

political regimes in and under which they live. Hence, we cannot simply disregard the health and order of entities such as states. Simultaneously, however, as Niebuhr suggests in many of his works, we must recognize that the pursuit of justice may at times present an immediate peril to order when it is deeply insinuated with injustice and that such peril does not entail that demands for greater justice are irresponsible.[146] While this is a salient theme in his theory, it is something that Niebuhr appears to ignore in the more occasional writings of his later career when he raises order to the status of *always* being the first value of any community and suggests that the oppressed and their advocates should refrain for making extreme demands in the quest for justice, instead settling for the incremental improvements that their oppressors are willing to grant. To construe politics as a matter of statecraft need not lead down this road, however, provided that order is properly balanced with the demands made by equality and the Christian calling to care for the oppressed.

B. Insufficient Attention to the Cultivation of Character

Throughout his career, Niebuhr explored the mysteries of human nature and the human psyche, and his works are peppered with insights into the ambiguities of human existence and the persistence of egoism in all human actions. From the perspective of many, including the coterie of "atheists for Niebuhr" that "applauded his discussions of human

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[146] Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 5-6. In notable ways, Niebuhr maintained the balance between justice and order more fully in his earlier works, especially *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Despite its advocacy of moral dualism, *Moral Man's* radical edge is preserved by what one might call the division of political labor that Niebuhr forthrightly outlines in the final paragraphs when he posits that the work of social redemption may be most effectively advanced by those possessed of illusions, such as the achievability of perfect justice, which "generate a sublime madness in the soul," even as he sees that these illusions need to be "brought under the control of reason." Hence, this social vision ideally made room for both the reasonable needs of society while at the same time seeing the contribution made by "fanatics" who called for the highest realizations of justice. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 277. There is a marked change later in his career when it can seem that making too extreme of demands is intrinsically and unconditionally politically irresponsible.

nature, but spurned his theology," it is here that his signal contributions lie.[147] The widespread admiration that Niebuhr's moral psychology has garnered notwithstanding, viewing it from within the framework of the City of God and the predicament of evil reveals that it is one-sided in a way that ultimately compromises his political thought. More specifically, while emphatically stressing the egoism of human beings, Niebuhr frequently presumes the existence of comparatively virtuous individuals. And yet he offers only the vaguest hints as to how such individuals might be produced. In the end, this neglect leaves him with a highly externalized and procedural understanding of politics that fails to account for the deepest resources upon which it draws.

One of the central arguments of Chapter 1 is that the social peace and justice that obtain in the City of God are profoundly connected to the peace and justice that characterize the souls of its members. Even as he devoted his greatest attention to examining supra-personal social forces, Niebuhr was more appreciative of this connection between soul and society than some might imagine. Indeed, he was able to recognize "the importance of personal character in politics" and add to it the claim that, despite its apparent insignificance "in comparison with the great impersonal forces which go into the making of history," the future may depend upon such character to a great extent.[148] Moreover, while Niebuhrian politics deals with outer checks on egoism, he nonetheless identified that these were ineffective apart from inner checks upon individuals' egoistic desires.[149] Calling attention to the importance of such checks, he writes that a healthy society must seek to achieve not only

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[147] Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, 270. For a more detailed study of the confluences between Niebuhr and one of the notable figures of this group, see Thomas S. Kidd, " 'Men Are Not Perfect or Essentially Good': Finding Perry Miller and Reinhold Niebuhr's Common Ground," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33, no. 2 (2004): 197-211. A more detailed consideration of Niebuhr's work in relation to major figures in the field of psychology can be found in Terry D. Cooper, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Psychology: The Ambiguities of the Self* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009).

[148] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 226.

[149] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 182.

"the greatest possible equilibrium of power, the greatest possible number of centers of power, the greatest possible social check upon the administration of power" but also "the greatest possible inner check upon the administration of power, and the greatest possible inner check on human ambition."[150] In many such comments, Niebuhr suggests that politics depends upon individual character in crucial respects in order to mitigate and restrain the selfish use of power. Recognizing this, Robin Lovin suggests that there exist strong connections between Niebuhr's ethic and an ethic of virtue.[151]

Beyond such commendations of character in general, Niebuhr also highlights the politically indispensible role played by certain characteristic dispositions—or, one might even say, virtues. Foremost among these is the virtue of humility, which is vital to securing social and political harmony in any society but which occupies a particularly salient position in pluralistic and democratic ones. "Whether the encounter [between myself and another] is creative or destructive," Niebuhr observes, "depends not so much upon the rule of justice but upon the humility with which the pretensions of the self, particularly the collective self, are laid bare and the contrition with which its dishonesties in conflict are acknowledged."[152] Sorely tempted as we are to assert ourselves over against others, creative engagement can only begin with a humble acknowledgement of our own limitations. Such humility is thus particularly essential to the flourishing of democracy, which requires a toleration of other opinions that is difficult to maintain apart from humility.[153] But Niebuhr also believes that humility and allied virtues could facilitate constructive engagement between rival polities so

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[150] Niebuhr, "Coercion, Self-Interest and Love" in *The Organizational Revolution: A Study in the Ethics of Economic Organization*, ed. Kenneth E. Boulding (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 244.

[151] Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, 95.

[152] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 135.

[153] See Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 103. Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 150-1.

hostilely opposed to one another as the United States and the Soviet Union of the Cold War era. Hence, near the conclusion of *The Irony of American History* he urges his readers to see

> the possibility and necessity of living in a dimension of meaning in which the urgencies of the struggle are subordinated to a sense of awe before the vastness of the historical drama in which we are jointly involved; to a sense of modesty about the virtue, wisdom and power available to us for the resolution of its perplexities; to a sense of contrition about the common human frailties and foibles which lie at the foundation of both the enemy's demonry and our own vanities; and to a sense of gratitude for the divine mercies which are promised to those who humble themselves.[154]

Political peace and even the future of the world thus appear to hang upon modesty, contrition, gratitude, humility, and similar dispositions of character.[155]

The pivotal role that such dispositions play at key points in Niebuhr's thought has led a number of scholars to maintain that Niebuhr's political ethic is fundamentally a dispositional one. One such interpreter, Dennis McCann, sees the dispositional nature of Niebuhr's thought not only in such typical virtues but entailed in the very principles of love and justice. Reading Niebuhr through the lens of Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system in which ethos and worldview are intricately connected,[156] McCann contends that in Niebuhr's account love and justice in fact "designate certain 'powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations' that provide orientation for Christian social action."[157] The point for McCann is that love and justice are not simply principles for judging human actions. Rather, they work to orient our consciences in ways that produce certain social actions. Other commentators have opposed such a strong interpretation of the dispositional

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[154] Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, 174. Although it does not explicitly mention such virtuous dispositions, Niebuhr makes a remarkably similar move when at the conclusion of *The Structure of Nations and Empires* he maintains, "Our best hope, both of a tolerable political harmony and of inner peace, rests upon our ability to observe the limits of human freedom even while we responsibly exploit its creative possibilities." Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 299.

[155] For another argument that greatly accentuates the political significance of contrition, see Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 23.

[156] See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 87-125.

[157] Dennis McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), 91. For more recent dispositional interpretations of Niebuhr, see Haas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian Pragmatism'," 605-36. Carnahan, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Ramsey*, 59-63; 153.

nature of Niebuhr's ethic. Hence, James Gustafson criticizes McCann for "the extent to which he reduces Niebuhr's ethic to the dispositional."[158] Such criticisms notwithstanding, as Gary Dorrien notes, this "is not so much a debate about whether Niebuhr's ethic was dispositional, but to what degree."[159] In the final analysis, such characteristic dispositions play a key role in Niebuhr's ethics and particularly in his political ethics.

One begins to sense a major tension in Niebuhr's thought, however, when turning to interrogate the source of such dispositions. From just where do they come? In order to appreciate the tension fully, we must view this question in light of the proverbially pessimistic nature of Niebuhr's anthropology, which he develops most fully in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. In opposition to the optimism of the social gospel and modernity more generally, which hope "for redemption either through a program of social reorganization or by some scheme of education," Niebuhr accents human beings' sinfulness not as something accidental but as rooted in the deepest levels of human selfhood.[160] In this vein, he repeatedly quotes the apostle Paul's confession, "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin" (Romans 7:23). Most commonly, Niebuhr believes, this sin takes the form of pride in which one "seeks to raise [one's] contingent existence to unconditioned significance," by self-centeredly overemphasizing one's power, knowledge, or righteousness.[161] As mentioned in the last chapter, although he recognizes the possibility of a kind of sin that he calls "sensuality," in which one attempts to lose oneself in the vitalities of existence, that form is ultimately subsumed by the sin of pride as he offers only a cursory discussion of it while examining the

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[158] James Gustafson, "Theology in the Service of Ethics" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, ed. Harries, 45 n5.

[159] Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 152.

[160] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 96.

[161] Ibid., 186.

manifestations of pride at great length in *Nature and Destiny*.[162] Furthermore, Niebuhr almost never returns to sensuality in other works but instead concentrates upon pride alone.

So deeply is the prideful inclination to self-centeredness inscribed in the human soul that Niebuhr believes that it can never be fully eradicated. While he admits that God in Christ has broken the power of sin and self-love "in principle," he contends that this does not mean that self-love has been broken "in fact." "The actual situation," writes Niebuhr, "is that man may be redeemed from self-love in the sense that he acknowledges the evil of it and recognizes the love of God as the only adequate motive of conduct; and yet may be selfish in more than an incidental sense."[163] So long as we remain in this life, even redemption has its limits. Niebuhr is thus fond of the Reformation's maxim *simul justus et peccator*, believing that a human being may become more a *justus* but he or she ever remains a *peccator*.

Humanity's perverse bent towards pride becomes even more dangerous when compounded with power. For Niebuhr, "All power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely," a common misquotation of Lord Acton's maxim but one that expresses Niebuhr's general suspicion of power's corrosive effects.[164] Frail as it is, human character almost invariably gives way to the temptations to domination that power provides. Indeed, "only God can perfectly combine power and goodness."[165] Conveying the power not simply

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[162] For a similar judgment, see Susan Nelson Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings* 65, no. 3 (1982): 318.

[163] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 137. For a criticism of Niebuhr's use of the formulation "in principle but not in fact," see Paul Lehmann, "The Christology of Reinhold Niebuhr" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, 279.

[164] Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 163. Milbank helpfully points out that Niebuhr's own emphasis upon the corrosiveness of power contrasts with the tendency of contemporary Niebuhrian conservatives to think in terms of the "need for 'law and order' " with little regard for power's corrupting influence. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 234. Of course, the first part of Lord Acton's original statement was more tentatively phrased: "Power tends to corrupt; and absolute power corrupts absolutely." John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, *Historical Essays & Studies*, ed. John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 504.

[165] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 22.

to assert oneself over other individuals but to insinuate domination into the overall organization of society, political power provides peculiarly potent, alluring, and corrosive instruments of self-assertion. Needful though it is, politics is thus a perilous enterprise that tends to poison character and in which the quest for justice becomes inevitably corrupted by egoistic imperialism.[166]

In light of the defects of human nature and the corrupting influence of political power, the question of where human beings are to come by the noble dispositions so crucial to Niebuhr's political ethic becomes even more poignant. Despite the fact that Niebuhr offers no comprehensive answer to this question, his work gestures in the direction of three intricately interwoven sources that he never fully distinguishes and, rather confusingly, each of which he at points refers to as "grace." All three of these come into view in a crucial passage from his essay "Love and Law in Protestantism and Catholicism" when he writes that grace

> has meaning only when life is measured at the limits of human possibilities and it is recognized that there are things we ought to do which we cannot do merely by the strength of our willing but which may become possible because we are assisted by the help which others give us by their love, by the strength which accrues to our will in moments of crisis, and by the saving grace of the Spirit of God indwelling our spirit.[167]

The first source of grace in this passage and of noble dispositions more generally in Niebuhr's thought is that which comes to us from others. As he sees it, the "traditional and historic disciplines" of human communities mediate to individuals virtues and dispositions that they otherwise would not possess.[168] To be sure, human communities routinely exacerbate selfishness, or at the very best sublimate it, but in certain respects they can also

[166] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 21. Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 89.
[167] Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 154.
[168] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 132.

exercise a "healing power."[169] Further elaborating the contributions of human communities, in an essay published in 1965 Niebuhr suggests that those such as the family even convey a form of "common grace" that endows "the capacity of the self to relate itself to others."[170]

Niebuhr finds a second potential source of noble dispositions within the self, signaled in the above passage by his mention of "the strength which accrues to our will in moments of crisis." Defying rigid distinctions between nature and grace, Niebuhr identifies a form of grace that resides in human nature. Such suggestions make it a mistake to read him simply as a dour pessimist who sees nothing positive in human nature. Niebuhr is no believer in total depravity and openly refutes the doctrine.[171] Instead, in his assessment human beings are profoundly ambiguous. Although the human self is a "diseased organism" in which it is impossible to isolate a locus of righteousness, it nonetheless retains the ability to transcend itself as it recognizes the possibility of perfection.[172] Even more, Niebuhr maintains that there is "some inner testimony from the very character and structure of the human psyche against the strategy of sinful egotism" and that this provides "the point of contact between grace and the natural endowments of the soul."[173] One crucial element of this point of contact, it appears, is a basic understanding of the essence of justice, which is vital to political life.[174]

Third and finally, Niebuhr suggests that human character becomes disposed in positive ways through a form of grace that is external to individual souls but nonetheless at work in them; in the passage above, it is a form of grace represented by "the Spirit of God

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[169] Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 136.
[170] Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 107-8.
[171] See especially Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 268-300.
[172] Ibid., 277.
[173] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 117.
[174] See Lovin, "Reinhold Niebuhr in Historical Perspective" in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics*, eds. Harries and Platten, 14. Niebuhr implies this point throughout his discussion of *justitia originalis* in Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 265-300.

indwelling our spirit." Contrary to allegations that Niebuhr did not believe in an internal and enabling grace, throughout his career he insisted that in relation to the individual "grace" has a twofold connotation, referring not only to the pardon of sin but also to the bestowal of the power to act righteously.[175] While this is not a major emphasis of his writings, it is nonetheless clear that Niebuhr at the very least presumed that such grace was at work in the world, if in mysterious ways. Moreover, recognizing the transformative effect of divine grace, near the end of his career he would regret having contended that human beings could be redeemed from self-love "in principle but not in fact," noting that it fails to do justice to "the real sanctification which takes place in conversion when the soul turns itself to God."[176]

The common and fundamental difficulty shared by each of these three sources is that Niebuhr never sufficiently examines their dynamics and particularly neglects their temporal dimensions. Despite the fact that Niebuhr evinces a clear understanding of the historical nature and development of human communities, he devotes almost no ink to explaining how their practices and disciplines shape individual dispositions over time. Instead, he appears to take the existence of individuals possessed of such positively disposed character as a historical given. Similarly, he exhibits little awareness that the structure of the human psyche, which he believes confounds insinuations that human beings are totally depraved, might still need to be trained—or that it would at least benefit from training. Perhaps most

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[175] For examples of Niebuhr emphasizing the double meaning of grace, see Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 3. Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 98-100. Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 200-1. Niebuhr, *Structure of Nations and Empires*, 135. Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 42. This repeated emphasis undermines Colm McKeogh's too simple contrast between John Howard Yoder and Niebuhr when he writes that "Yoder pointed to grace, not only the forgiving grace that Niebuhr saw as the way to have peace in spite of our continuing sin, but enabling grace." Nonetheless, as I shall make clear, McKeogh is right to the extent that he suggests that Niebuhr does not sufficiently examine the dynamics of this form of grace. Colm McKeogh, "Niebuhr's Critique of Pacifism" in *Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited*, ed. Rice, 218. Similarly, it defies Stevens's implication that Niebuhr held to a purely external interpretation of grace that "referred to the comic discovery that men's rational choices sometimes yield just results even when their motives are biased by illusions that they are more pure than they have right to claim." Stevens, "Should We Forget Reinhold Niebuhr?," 141.

[176] Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, 437.

of all, however, one witnesses the temporally punctiliar nature of Niebuhr's ethical vision in his suggestion that sanctification happens when the soul turns itself to God. Leaving aside the problematic and overly voluntaristic implications of a soul turning itself to God, this and similar statements conjure an image of sanctification as a phenomenon that, though never perfected in this life, becomes concentrated in the moment of conversion. While, as I argue in the next chapter, we need not disqualify the *possibility* of immediate sanctification, Niebuhr clearly neglects the many aspects of the Christian faith that indicate that sanctification is more typically a temporally dilated process in which, over time, we are being transformed into Christ's image as "our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

This general failure to attend to temporal duration in the moral life is abetted and aggravated by Niebuhr's existentialist emphasis upon human freedom. Positing human beings' continual capacity to transcend themselves in any given instant, Niebuhr focuses upon isolated moments of decision. Even if human agents technically retain the capacity of self-transcendence, this by no means justifies Niebuhr's heedlessness to the ways in which their respective dispositions and characters are shaped over a span far larger than those represented by isolated quandaries. This is in no small part because the ways in which their dispositions and characters are shaped in that larger span predisposes individuals to respond in certain ways when confronting such quandaries. As we saw in the last chapter, numerous themes in the Christian Scriptures, and especially Deuteronomy's emphasis upon the heart, suggest that good and virtuous actions spring not from a momentary flit of freedom but from established dispositions of character that are developed over time.

Hence, one ought to modify the judgment issued by Hauerwas and Michael Broadway when they write, "It is by no means clear from whence Niebuhr thought people

of virtue would come."[177] There are, in my view, sufficient and clear indications of the sources that Niebuhr believed would produce persons possessed of noble dispositions. What Niebuhr does not explain are their dynamics, that is, *how* these sources work over time to create such individuals. Instead, as Lovin notes, Niebuhr's own attention to matters of human good "was shaped primarily by a concern to understand the sources of social, rather than personal, transformation."[178] This preoccupation led him to a highly externalized account in which politics consists in the techniques of balancing the interests of egoistic individuals and social groups against one another; and yet at the same time Niebuhr appears to be haunted by the recognition that even such a politics depends upon the configuration and composition of individual souls to a considerable degree if it is to establish peace and justice.

Without an account of how such individuals are formed, Niebuhr is left with only the largely unsubstantiated assumption that they will exist, an especially dubious supposition in light of his own emphasis upon humanity's ineradicable susceptibility to prideful self-assertion and the overwhelming temptations of political power. Political participants possessed of virtuous dispositions, whose ambitions are checked by internal restraints, thus appear as a *deus ex machina*, springing fully formed from historical communities, the endowments of human nature, and the empowering grace of God without the cultivation of communities, practices, or disciplines. Lacking an account of the remediation of evil within individuals' souls, Niebuhr's political ethic offers an insufficiently radical response to the predicament of evil.

Furthermore, it is a response that is potentially dangerous in key respects. Most immediately, his lack of attention to the importance of cultivating character threatens the

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[177] Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 60 n21.

[178] Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, 90.

very communities, practices, and disciplines that he presumes will perform this task as it strips them of their place in political ethics, consigning them to a private sphere cordoned off from the purportedly public realm of politics. In the process, they come to have little recognized place in promoting the health of a polity. Eventually, however, this reduction of such forces to political invisibility and inconsequence threatens even the politics of statecraft, as we must countenance the very real possibility that the number of virtuously disposed political participants will decline when the historical communities, practices, and disciplines that cultivate them are deprived of a recognized place in political life. This might occur not only because political disregard could weaken these forces but also because those that remain strong are likely to see in the politics of statecraft little more than a realm of self-assertion that is alien—and even corrosive—to their own attempts to cultivate virtues like humility.

Beyond these worries, Niebuhr's diagnosis of pride as the fundamental human sin and his correlative prescription of humility as an all-purpose moral remedy are also politically significant. For if it is true that pride subsumes the category of sensuality in Niebuhr's moral theory, it is especially true of his political ethics. However important it will always remain to restrain self-assertion, any politics that would resemble that of the City of God will need to counter the evil of self-loss, as well. In her critique of Niebuhr, Traci West highlights the example of Dr. Bessie Delaney, an African American woman who earned her doctorate of dental surgery from Columbia University in the 1920s and who became a determined and daring opponent of racial discrimination. In Delaney's example West finds a significant lesson: "Unlike Niebuhr's view of pridefulness as a quintessentially sinful need that fuels the drive to dominate others, for Delaney, taking pride in her achievements represented an

empowering reassurance of her own dignity."[179] Certain contexts, such as the one that Delaney inhabited, will make it a crucial political task, in the words of Isaiah, to help "strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees" (Isaiah 35:3) of oppressed peoples, aiding them in freeing themselves from the evils of deprivation and psychological abuse so that they may develop a healthy self-love. Such cultivation of character is particularly necessary given the tendency, classically documented by the likes of Frantz Fanon and Paolo Freire, for oppressed peoples to respond submissively in situations of oppression.[180] By no means should this lead to the presumption that the oppressed must rely upon others to liberate them; indeed both Fanon and Freire envision pedagogies led by the oppressed themselves. Nonetheless, it should make clear that in this world East of Eden, an adequate Christian political ethic must take seriously not only the task of restraining self-assertion but also that of helping to cultivate self-love among those who lack it. Without that, one can hardly hope to approximate a polity whose members relate justly and peacefully to God and one another.

C. The Church Diminished

To claim, as I will, that a major weakness in Niebuhr's thought lies in the lack of an appreciation of the positive political contributions of the church is to specify my criticisms from the previous section with regard to one particular human institution. Nonetheless, it merits separate treatment because, as Chapter 2 argued, while it neither provides a comprehensive blueprint for political life nor exists as a completely self-sufficient polity, the church mediates critical resources to guide Christians in the task of embodying faithful

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[179] Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 10.

[180] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1968). Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1973; reprint, 2000).

political lives amid the predicament of evil. Moreover, in the process it serves as Christians' primary political habitation in this world. Such claims make the status of the church in Niebuhr's thought a matter of especial concern.

In the major book-length works of his early and middle career (especially *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, and *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*), Niebuhr has little flattering to say about the church. His reflections instead centrally aim to expose the church's sinfulness in order to break its pretensions and reveal its similarities to other historical institutions. Niebuhr views the church as far from holy and even sees it as integral to one of history's most egregious sins as it "conspired the cross."[181] Consequently, we must face the fact that, even as it may encourage humility, religion regularly underwrites self-assertion in the name of the absolute. In this way, the church is like unto the state and other large groups, for it can and frequently does "become the vehicle of collective egoism."[182] Accordingly, Niebuhr seeks to debunk any assertions that too closely identify the church with the Kingdom of God, particularly those made in Roman Catholic theology. Over against them, he stresses that the church is a human institution that is "involved in the flux of history and the relativity of human existence" and "prone to corruption by sin."[183] The critical edge of Niebuhr's comments in these works fills them with salutary reminders of the church's limitations and historical sins.

Owing in part to Niebuhr's critical tone, his relentless quest to expose the church's sinfulness, and his effort to assimilate it to other historical institutions, it has become common to deny that he had an ecclesiology at all. Most notably, while acknowledging that Niebuhr believed in the sociological necessity of the church for the continued existence of

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[181] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 82; see also 64.
[182] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. I*, 217. For a similar claim, see Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 145.
[183] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 70.

Christianity, Stanley Hauerwas has claimed, "In neither his ethics nor his theology did Niebuhr provide an account of the church" and that he failed "to develop an ecclesiology."[184] This is but a more recent incarnation of criticisms made in an earlier generation when John Howard Yoder and William J. Wolf alleged, respectively, that "the concept of the church is quite absent from [Niebuhr's] thought" and that it is "an undeveloped area."[185] Niebuhr, these criticisms suggest, either ignores the church entirely or finds little to distinguish it from other social institutions.

Despite their persistence, such criticisms mislead in at least two ways. First, they imply that the negative—one might even say apophatic—account of the church that Niebuhr develops in his earlier works is not in fact an ecclesiology. To the contrary, one might argue that Niebuhr's criticisms at the very least provide the basis for a functional ecclesiology designed to chasten some of the church's more extravagant presumptions and thus to clear the way for one to discover its true essence. Second, and more consequentially, such criticisms typically ignore or downplay significant strands of Niebuhr's thought that figured more prominently in his essays, particularly those written from the late-1940s onward. Although they are nowhere systematically expounded, together these strands create an ecclesiology intended not only to chasten the church but that seeks to highlight its distinctiveness. Here we find that the church is not only a historically ambiguous community but also "a community of grace which, despite historic corruptions, has the 'oracles of God.' "

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[184] Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001). More recently, William Cavanaugh, a former student of Hauerwas's, has (nearly word for word) seconded this judgment. See William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 134. Also Cavanaugh, "Church" in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 401. Similar but somewhat more restrained claims are also made in Jane Barter Moulaison, "Theology, Church and Political Change: Engaging Reinhold Niebuhr's Ecclesiology," *Didaskalia* 19, no. 1 (2008): 185.

[185] John H. Yoder, "Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29 (1955): 115. William J. Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, 249.

[186] Furthermore, it forms "the one place in history where life is kept open for the final word of God's judgment to break the pride of men and for the word of God's mercy to lift up the brokenhearted." Ultimately, these strands create the suspicion that Niebuhr's critics have either overlooked these aspects his thought or that in claiming that he does not have an ecclesiology what they truly mean is that he does not have the kind of ecclesiology that they favor.

Recognizing that it is not the same thing as having no ecclesiology, I nonetheless believe that Niebuhr's is deficient in foundational respects, particularly in its diminishment of the role of the church. This is because, even in these strands, he casts the church's function in terms that are almost wholly negative and proclamatory. Above all, he suggests that the task of the church is to proclaim the word of God's judgment. The church, Niebuhr tells us, is "that place in human society where the Kingdom of God is known and where the judgments of God are felt to be pointed at all human actions and institutions, including the church itself."[187] The connection that Niebuhr draws between the church and the Kingdom of God in this passage might lead one to imagine a positive contribution on the part of the church, and yet here and elsewhere, Niebuhr identifies the Kingdom's impingement upon history not with positive accomplishments but with the knowledge of God's judgment.[188] Meanwhile, despite his description of the church as a community of grace and his acknowledgment of the potential of a grace within the soul, Niebuhr appears to see little connection between them. Instead, the grace of the church is, as Richard Wightman Fox has called it, a "verbal" grace that consists in the message of judgment that the church is to

[186] Niebuhr, "Reply" in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, 437.
[187] Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 209.
[188] Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 239.

proclaim to individuals and nations.[189] In addition to subsuming the category of grace, judgment also engulfs the concepts of divine mercy and new life, as these characteristically manifest themselves in a life lived more humbly on account of being lived in view of the judgment of God.

Over against Niebuhr, however, one must assert that God calls and graciously empowers the church to be not only a polity of humility but a polity of holiness. And while it is a crucial aspect of it, holiness entails more than just humility. It cannot be repeated enough that in its quest for holiness the church must keep always before it Niebuhr's warning that grace is subject to a paradox of having and not having, "and that, claimed as a secure possession, it becomes a vehicle of the sin from which it ostensibly emancipates."[190] The question, however, is just what the church has and how the church has it. Most of all—and most conspicuously absent from Niebuhr's treatment—it has promises of God's presence not only in the word of judgment that it is charged to proclaim but in the worship that it celebrates, the sacraments that it receives, and the common life that it shares. And it has, both among its number and preserved within its memories, saints whose lives testify to the sanctifying power of God present in its communion. The church does not simply convey grace through the proclamation of the word; it is itself a creation of grace. In its existence it testifies to God's steadfast, continuing, and effective will to commune with humanity and to create a polity in which human beings live together in peace and justice—even in spite of the continued sinfulness of humanity generally and the church particularly.

In each of these dimensions of its life, the church not only has but also does not have, for such promises of God do not preclude the possibility of human corruption. Moreover, as the wild shoot grafted on to Israel, the church finds itself confronted by the

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[189] Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 286.
[190] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny. Vol. II*, 147.

fact that God's election does not proceed on the basis of merit: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you" (Deuteronomy 7:7). God's grace is given irrespective of human merit, and the presence of that grace does not make the current form of the church's life meritorious or righteous by definition. Rather, we must acknowledge forthrightly that the church itself is sinful. It is with good reason that one of the first admissions in the prayer of confession used by United Methodist Church is, "We have failed to be an obedient church." While we might be forgiven our failings, no amount of hyssop will make us obedient in all circumstances.

Nevertheless, in the midst of such confession—or, perhaps more rightly, as the condition for it—God beckons Christians to come together, forming an *ekklēsia* that worships God, celebrates the mysteries of salvation, partakes of the sacraments, and whose members dedicate themselves to attempting to emulate Christ, who is the *autobasileia*. And we believe that there is a peculiar and empowering grace present in this life together that not only consists in what the community of Christians says but that positively empowers its members to live more righteously than they would otherwise be able. All of this entails that the church should occupy a prominent place in the Christian life and that Christians have a vocation to preserve and edify the church as a *polis*.

Exactly what this will mean in any given situation is by no means obvious, however. In part this is because it will surely not mean that God calls us simply to serve any and all dictates of those institutions that style themselves to be Christian churches. All such institutions will find themselves ensnared by the lures of pride and collective egoism—even as the majority of them remain communions of grace in crucial respects. Perhaps the most we can say, then, is that both Christian individuals and institutional leaders must develop virtues of discernment through practices like prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, worship, and

confession. Discerning eyes will find that pride infects all churches to some degree and thus that none can rightly claim an absolute identity with Christ.[191] But they will also perceive that there are degrees of disease and of health. One of the infelicities of Niebuhr's critical approach to the church is that it can occlude these relative distinctions. Only when we recognize them can we move beyond merely negative assessments in order to help the church to live more fully into the calling to which it has been called, that is, to be a *polis* that offers light to the world both in the content of its proclamation and also in the life it embodies.

Such discernment not only enables one to recognize relative distinctions in the lives of institutions but in the lives of individuals, as well. Too frequently Christians utilize their purported virtues of discernment primarily to judge others and assert the superiority of their own righteousness. When they do so, they forget that the first and continuing movement of Christian discernment is not a judgment of others but of oneself. Modeling this pattern, the apostle Paul, utilizing not the past tense but the continuing present, confessed to being the foremost sinner (1 Timothy 1:15). Chastened by this repeated return to self-criticism, we gain the capacity to recognize that there are those who more fully embody the peace and justice of Christ, the peace and justice that defines the City of God. Those who do so most fully are the individuals that the Christian faith has historically called "saints." By no means does such status assure that these holy persons never erred, a mistake made not only in certain forms of veneration of the saints but that acutely afflicts the work of many theologians, who treat the works of sainted thinkers as if they contain only truth. Still, what makes such persons saints is that in their lives we find possibilities for living more faithfully, justly, and peacefully. And in their lives we might also see that, in its existence as a *polis* called

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[191] Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 198.

by God and constituted by a host of historical practices and disciplines aimed to help us become more Christ-like, the church is a vital aid in this quest.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICS-AS-SOULCRAFT: STANLEY HAUERWAS AND THE CHURCH AS *POLIS*

INTRODUCTION

If Niebuhrian politics-as-statecraft offers an insufficiently radical response to the predicament of evil, the work of Stanley Hauerwas would seem a fitting place to turn in search of a more extreme remedy. Widely regarded as the most influential American theologian since Niebuhr, Hauerwas has made a career out of unsettling assumptions and assailing golden calves. At the heart of his project is an alternative understanding of the political that fundamentally challenges not only Niebuhr but the dominant modern assumption that politics is fundamentally a matter of statecraft. Over against such conceptions, Hauerwas persistently and emphatically maintains that politics properly so-called refers to the practices required for forming people in the virtues necessary for them to discover goods in common. Hauerwasian politics, then, is not about controlling social chaos but cultivating character. In other words, it is a matter of soulcraft that aspires to shape human beings' practices, passions, imaginations, and lives so that they become capable of sharing common goods.

In a world destined for the Christoform communion of the City of God but currently mired in the predicament of evil, Hauerwas offers Christians crucial resources for

envisioning how we might live faithful, political lives. Like Niebuhr, he appreciates the profound perversion of human wills. And yet, highlighting the possibilities of a politics of soulcraft and the morally formative potential of the church, he refuses to leave us to wallow in our sin. Returning to key biblical and Augustinian themes, Hauerwas offers technologies of soulcraft that aim, in the words of Charles Wesley's hymn, to "take away our bent to sinning" and instead inculcate Christ-like virtues.[1] Not only do such communities of character help to reform our perverted wills and thus make us more fit for Christoform communion, but when properly constituted they are also capable of appreciably blunting the impact of the social evils that afflict our world.

Such virtues notwithstanding, however, Hauerwas's conception of politics ultimately leaves us wanting as it fails to appreciate adequately the enduring importance of government and statecraft. As I argue later in this chapter, charges that Hauerwas is a "sectarian" who tempts the church to withdraw from the world are overblown and predicated upon tendentious assumptions; yet in his effort to reclaim the integrity of the church as the primary *polis* of Christian life, Hauerwas is insufficiently attentive both to political realities outside the church and to the political limitations of the church itself. This creates the danger—which those who criticize him for advocating sectarian withdrawal rightly perceive yet overemphasize—of the Christian community becoming excessively self-regarding in a way that leaves it incapable of witnessing to the City of God's desire to embrace all of creation. Ultimately, then, this chapter contends that, particularly in a world menaced by powerful forms of social evil, we must counter such a danger forthrightly by articulating a positive account of how Christians might engage with the mechanisms of statecraft in order

[1] Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House), 384.

to help create peaceful and just political habitations that are more expansive and demographically inclusive than the church itself can be.

I. Defining "A Different Kind of Politics"

Given the multiple threads that Hauerwas's work weaves together, its ad-hoc character,[2] and its sheer volume, identifying where one should start in analyzing his thought can prove exceedingly difficult. In light of our present purposes, a logical and particularly promising place to begin is by considering the unique way in which he defines politics in opposition to dominant modern conceptions.

As with his thought generally, Hauerwas does not attempt to found his conception of politics upon universally verifiable, foundationalist truths but instead to help his readers see the world through the distinctive lens of the Christian faith.[3] From this perspective, Hauerwas believes, politics "names … the practices required for the formation of a people in the virtues necessary for conversations and conflicts to take place if goods in common are to be discovered."[4] This exact way of phrasing the matter is a relatively recent innovation, but it nonetheless neatly encapsulates themes that have defined Hauerwas's understanding of politics throughout the vast majority of his career, especially his emphases upon the inculcation of virtue and the achievement of common goods. Over 25 years earlier, for instance, Hauerwas proclaimed that politics in its truest sense "is … concerned with the development of virtue" and indicated that the importance of virtue lay in the fact that it

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[2] It is important to note that this description is not intended pejoratively. According to Hauerwas, theology is essentially an ad hoc discipline that is distorted by attempts at systematization. See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xx.

[3] See, for instance, ibid., 29.

[4] Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2008), 112.

enabled the conversations necessary "for a community to discover the goods it holds in common."[5]

Nonetheless, perhaps the most remarkable thing about such formulations for many contemporary readers is how decidedly apolitical they are likely to appear. After all, they make no mention of social order, the state, coercion, or allied concepts that are typically understood to be defining concerns of politics. It is thus somewhat unsurprising when Hauerwas admits that even one of his friends has described him as the most apolitical person he knows, for Hauerwas avoids many of the issues that modern thinkers routinely identify as politically essential. Instead, he calls Christians to practice "a different kind of politics."[6] This different kind of politics requires us to rethink the typical conceptions we have inherited. In the introduction to *Christian Existence Today*, Hauerwas cautions his readers that "[o]ne cannot understand what I am about if one continues to presuppose the dominant philosophical and theological habits of the last hundred years."[7] If possible, one might say this is even truer when it comes to habits of political thought, for Hauerwas challenges presuppositions that have shaped the way Westerners think about politics for far longer than 100 years. Most especially, Hauerwas's vision of politics challenges two of the most deeply entrenched tendencies of modern political theory: its preoccupation with order and its identification of the state as the paradigmatic political entity.

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[5] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2, 61.

[6] Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 10. Rom Coles characterizes the difference of Hauerwas's political project well when he describes a conversation between himself and Hauerwas as involving "the genesis of imaginaries that provide a striking alternative to the political imaginary of the U.S. nation-state." Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 340.

[7] Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1988; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 2.

For the mainstream of modern political theory—beginning with the humanists of the sixteenth century,[8] cascading through the work of Thomas Hobbes, flowing to John Rawls, and including Reinhold Niebuhr along the way—these two tendencies have come as conjoined twins. For thinkers standing within this stream, the preeminent and defining question of politics has been how to establish order given the conflicting, centrifugal desires of individuals and groups, which threaten to rend society apart. Such thinkers find the answer to this threat in the coercive power of the state, configured and applied in such a way that it can govern with the greatest possible stability. Hence, as Sheldon Wolin aptly describes it, "[t]he political becomes identified with a narrow set of institutions labeled 'government,' the harsh symbol of the coercion necessary to sustain orderly social transactions."[9] The ascendance of politics-as-statecraft thus follows as a fitting response to a political project that is searching above all for order.

Hauerwas, however, defies both the narrow concentration upon order and the correlative fascination with the state by changing the defining question of politics, which enables him to push towards the more profound sort of politics that he believes the gospel requires. Rather than asking how a society is to contain social chaos, politics in this view asks how a polity is to cultivate good people. Though it gives them a unique turn, such a conception is not without precedent in Western thought as it returns to themes that were central among ancient political thinkers. Plato, for instance, characterized politics as "that concerned with the soul."[10] And Aristotle, who influences Hauerwas even more directly, asserts that the primary concern of politics is "making … citizens to be of a certain character,

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[8] See, for instance, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2. The Age of Reformation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 350.

[9] Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 261.

[10] Plato, *Gorgias* in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 464b.

viz. good and capable of noble acts."[11] Consequently, it is not order but virtue that stands at the center of Hauerwas's definition of politics. Order, as he sees, it is too thin a concept to make good people or to secure common goods; at most it can create an attenuated form of cohesion based upon the fear of death.[12] Accordingly, Hauerwas suggests that "the practice associated with the nation-state and studied in most political science departments"—one that focuses primarily upon the subtle use of power to maintain order—is undeserving of the title "politics," "except in the most degraded sense."[13] True politics aims at the inculcation of virtue since it is only as a truthful polity crafts the lives, visions, and imaginations of its members to embody the virtues that they become capable of recognizing and attaining the substantive common goods proper to human life.

For Christians, Hauerwas believes, this truthful polity of soulcraft is none other than the church. Writing together with Will Willimon, he locates the uniqueness of the church in the fact that it "is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life."[14] Committed to the One who is the truth, unlike other polities, the church need not fear the truth, and therefore it can have the veracity and

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[11] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1099b 30. Although the emphasis upon Aristotle in this section perhaps comes at the expense of deemphasizing Hauerwas's theological influences (which I highlight elsewhere), in a way it nonetheless mimics the evolution of his own conception of politics. For instance, in *Dispatches from the Front*, Hauerwas writes that "it was my increasing appreciation of the importance of Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis*, the kind of politics necessary to sustain an ethic of virtue, and the corresponding historicist perspective required by each that led me to appreciate Yoder's significance." Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 22.

[12] Hauerwas makes this and similar points in a number of places. Some prominent examples are in Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1991), 29. Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Thinkers* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 169. One finds a more oblique articulation of this point in Hauerwas's essay, "A Story Formed Community: Reflections on Watership Down" when he describes Cowslip's warren. See Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 18-22.

[13] Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 10. Elsewhere, Hauerwas makes this conclusion somewhat clearer when he writes that governments that are concerned primarily with making sure that conflicts do not get out of control "will no longer be about the goods held in common." Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2000), 148.

[14] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989), 77.

courage required of any polity if it is to form its citizens properly in the virtues.[15] This radical way of life is not, however, the church's own doing. Rather, it is the creation of God, who has begun working salvation through Israel and has now made possible in the church a new, virtuous, and truly political way of life that witnesses to the Kingdom of God that "was present in Jesus, is present in the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit, and will be fully manifest in the second coming."[16] Accordingly, Hauerwas asserts that "the polity of the church is the truest possible for human community" and the standard by which Christians "even come to understand the nature of politics and have a norm by which other politics can be judged."[17]

Liberated from the misguided perception that politics is primarily concerned with using power to establish order, Christians can recognize the church's profound political significance. At least in Hauerwas's hands, then, politics-as-soulcraft finally becomes politics-as-churchcraft, for it is the church that is the only *polis* capable of forming souls in true virtue. "For Christians," writes Hauerwas, "without the church there is no possibility of salvation and even less of morality and politics."[18] Consequently, it is the church, not the theoretical "well-ordered state," that stands as the paradigmatic political institution.[19]

Hence, in contrast to Niebuhr's demographically inclusive, locationally determined, and institutionally defined conception of politics, Hauerwas develops an account that is demographically exclusive, vocationally determined, and institutionally expansive. Hauerwas does not attempt to formulate a political ethic for all people, and he argues that the belief

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[15] Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1985), 130.

[16] Ibid., 116.

[17] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 2.

[18] Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 26.

[19] This point is well made in the title and throughout Arne Rasmusson's work comparing Hauerwas and Jürgen Moltmann. See Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Ind., 1995).

that Christian ethics should undertake such a task blinds us to the truth that "Christian social ethics can only be done from the perspective of those who do not seek to control national or world history."[20] Rather than attempting to do ethics for everyone contained within some geographically determined area, Hauerwas teaches that Christian political ethics should be demographically exclusive to the extent that it is "first of all an ethic for God's eschatological people," an ethic for those who have responded to God's vocation and become members of the church.[21] Yet the ecclesial community can only fulfill its mission of forming people in the virtues that witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ if it it refuses to limit politics simply the sphere of government. Politics is thus not primarily identified with an institution that governs society. Instead, although centered around the church, Hauerwasian politics aspires to shape Christians' lives in their entirety, helping them to live faithfully in and across the various institutional settings that compose our lives.

If the church is to form such people of virtue and stand as such a political paradigm, however, Hauerwas insists that it must set itself apart as a counter-polity over against all others, including and especially those represented by contemporary nation-states. The exact way that he expresses this point shifts between books and even between essays within the same book. Yet the metaphors of contrast are constant. The church is a "countercultural phenomenon,"[22] an "alternative politics,"[23] a people "distinct from the world,"[24] and a community that must keep itself "separated"[25] from the nations in which it lives, existing instead as "a colony."[26] Maintaining its integrity as the true *polis* demands that the church

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[20] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 11.
[21] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 6.
[22] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 30.
[23] Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 6. See also Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 12. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 46.
[24] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 60. See also Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 1.
[25] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 123. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 247, 68.
[26] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 12.

stand "against the nations," lest it become conformed to the mendacity, self-deception, and violence that characterize such degraded polities.

In more sober passages, which are in fact more numerous than many critics allow, Hauerwas is clear that the language of contrast must be employed carefully since contrast, separation, and distinction are not ends in themselves but means that the church uses to serve the world.[27] Yet, as even sympathetic commentators worry, Hauerwas's employment is not always as circumspect as it might be. Instead, in John Howard Yoder's words, Hauerwas often "maximizes the provocative edge of the dissenting posture," something that becomes particularly problematic, Sam Wells points out, when he utilizes spatial metaphors to describe the relationship between the church and world.[28] Moreover, as Section V of this chapter will in part argue and as Jeffrey Stout worries, even when Hauerwas has set out to make the "for" of his position more determinative than the "against"—which he names as an aspiration, for instance, in the introduction to *A Better Hope*—he nonetheless routinely states the latter more forcibly than the former and thus leaves readers with a largely negative account of the relationship between the church and the world.[29]

For a variety of reasons, including the belief that it is "sectarian" and leads inexorably to a withdrawal from the demographically inclusive realm of statecraft, numerous critics have flatly rejected Hauerwas's conception of politics. But those who both long for the City

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[27] See, for instance, Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 6. This emphasis upon service to the world is, I believe, crucial in illustrating the political nature of Hauerwas's proposal. As Sheldon Wolin writes, "political language alone does not constitute a political theory, any more than the existence of 'internal politics' in churches, trade unions, business corporations, or universities make these groups identical in nature to a political society. To qualify as political, language must serve as a medium for expressing a theoretical conception that is itself political." In stressing that the church's life is lived in order to serve the world, Hauerwas displays that the church is not only concerned with its intra-ecclesial polity and thus that his conception is properly political. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 73.

[28] John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 3 n6. Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2004), 141ff.

[29] Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 9. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 140.

of God and are sensitive to the predicament of evil ought not dispatch his proposal so quickly or completely. Like Hauerwas, such Christians realize that politics in its fullest sense is about far more than the maintenance of social order. Reconceiving politics as a matter of soulcraft, Hauerwas raises the possibility that even now a polity might exist that, like the City of God, is not held together by mere coercion but that is truly united by its gathering around the Triune God and by the divinely instilled, Christ-like virtue of its members.

Thus, even the brief overview of Hauerwas's understanding of politics offered so far is enough to illuminate exciting possibilities even as it hints at potential problems. At this point, however, these remain but suggestions. A fuller and fairer assessment of the resources that Hauerwas offers us for reconceiving our political lives demands a more detailed analysis of how he imagines the church forming virtuous individuals and existing in relation to the world and its politics. The rest of this chapter will attempt to provide such an analysis. Section II considers the heart of Hauerwas's understanding of politics, examining his conception of the church as a morally formative polity. Sections III and IV then evaluate the strengths and shortcomings, respectively, of such a conception. Finally, Section V examines how Hauerwas envisions the church existing in relation to other polities, particularly that represented by the state.

II. The Church and The Cultivation of Virtue

A. Why Soulcraft Requires a Polis

Much like Niebuhr's, Hauerwas's account of politics is founded upon a moral psychology that recognizes the central difficulty posed by perversion of the will. From the perspective of the theological framing elaborated in the first chapter, however, what is even

more intriguing and promising is that Hauerwas does not seek simply to diagnose or check the perverted will. Rather, he identifies concrete, political means intended to remediate and reorient it.

Hauerwas articulates a moral psychology that joins Augustine and Niebuhr in the general view that after the Fall humans are a sinful and self-deceived lot possessed of perverted wills. Loath to accept our proper place as God's creatures, we rebel against God, denying the contingent character of our lives and overreaching our powers. While it can be difficult to find places where Hauerwas openly agrees with Niebuhr, in *The Peaceable Kingdom* he lauds him, saying, "[n]o one has better characterized this rebellion than Reinhold Niebuhr."[30] Most especially, Niebuhr rightly perceived that human beings' refusal to accept our own contingency breeds insecurity, which we attempt either to overcome through the prideful will-to-power or to escape by drowning ourselves in sensuality. In either case, however, Hauerwas believes that we are in the grip of self-deception, which he identifies as the fundamental form of sin.[31] Echoing Iris Murdoch, whose influence is especially evident in his earlier work, Hauerwas maintains that self-deception results from the very disorientation of the will itself, which distorts our vision of reality. Contrary to the presumptions that undergird many modern ethical theories, immoral acts do not result from discrete decisions but rather from the self's perverted orientation. Hence, Hauerwas asserts

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[30] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 31-32. Admittedly, Hauerwas later has serious reservations about Niebuhr's account of sin. In general, however, these seem to stem primarily from Niebuhr's tendency to naturalize the category of sin—and thus to eliminate the need for revelation—rather than with his substantive characterization of it. See, for instance, Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 43-45. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001), 138ff.

[31] See Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 46.

that our problem is that "we do not so much choose to sin but rather are sin," for our perverted wills leave us with no other choice.[32]

Humanity's case is all the more dire on Hauerwas's reading because we are not only prone to sin, but we furthermore inhabit a world that is itself perverted and thus reinforces our deceptions. "The world," as Hauerwas construes it, is not a neutral stage upon which the drama of history is played out. Rather, using the term in the Johannine sense, he understands "the world" to denote "all that in God's creation [which] have taken the opportunity of God's patience not yet to believe in him."[33] Created good by God, the world is not utterly or ontologically estranged from God's purposes or salvation. Yet, in this time between the times, the world uses its God-given freedom to oppose God. Refusing to accept that God is the Lord of all, it is in the grip of a deep delusion that inhibits it from seeing the truth about creation and thereby places it in fundamental rebellion against God and a relationship of profound hostility to all those who believe in the truth.[34] In "the world," evil (not as an ontological but an agential "force") takes on diverse corporate forms that seek to deny the truth in myriad ways, from its open assault upon Christ to its clever attempts to co-opt the church.[35] Though he employs the concept with less sophistication than William Stringfellow or John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas at points invokes the biblical language of "powers and principalities" to characterize these evil forms. Through the powers and principalities, the world seeks to inure human beings to its deceit and violence by convincing us that they serve

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[32] Stanley Hauerwas, "Seeing Darkness, Hearing Silence," in *Naming Evil, Judging Evil*, ed. Ruth W. Grant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43. Hauerwas elsewhere makes a similar point when he concludes that "the emphasis in recent theology on sin as a fundamental orientation of the self, rather than sin being associated with certain wrongful acts, is essentially correct." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 47.

[33] Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, "The Gift of the Church and the Gifts God Gives It" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 21.

[34] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 30.

[35] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 51.

good ends.[36] Hence, the world's social evils confirm and perpetuate the delusions produced by individuals' perverted wills.

Although one may well object to the way in which Hauerwas portrays "the world" and the ethical conclusions to which that leads him, one of the things this conception allows him helpfully to display is the mutually reinforcing relationship between individual and social evil, which Chapter 2 analyzed. Furthermore, his treatment of perversion reminds us that our sin is not the result of discrete decisions but of an overall dys-orientation of the will that is continually reinforced by social forms of evil that themselves often appear "natural" to us on account of their material and moral supremacy. Hence, human beings cannot simply will themselves out of evil. Attempting to do so, in fact, plunges us further into sin and self-delusion since "one of our greatest fantasies is precisely that we are capable of such a will."[37] Warped as it is, the soul can offer no cure for evil—even for those evils for which it is responsible.

This does not mean, however, that the soul cannot be cured; rather this is precisely why soulcraft requires a *polis*. Indeed, Hauerwas's account of politics-as-soulcraft centrally highlights concrete ways by which the soul's rehabilitation may proceed. Yet such healing must come from beyond the soul. And Hauerwas believes that it comes to us especially from the grace of God instantiated in the "concrete historic people" known as the church, which God uses to mediate "God's great good act for the world in the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth."[38]

Embodying the truth of Christ's death and resurrection in its life together, the church seeks continually to reorient the wills and vision of its members so that they might

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[36] Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 149.
[37] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 44.
[38] Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1993), 82.

come to see the world not in the distorting twilight of sin but in the revelatory luminousness of God's salvation. Because human beings are so deeply habituated to view the world through the clouded lens of the perverted self, such clear vision does not come easily. Instead, it is the result of a slow process of training. "We do not come to see merely by looking," Hauerwas maintains, "but must develop disciplined skills through initiation into that community that attempts to live faithful to the story of God."[39] Only through such training, which fundamentally reorients the self, can we come to see the world as it truly is—as created and redeemed by a loving God. Since "we do not see simply with our eyes but with the self," we cannot perceive the truth unless our lives are changed to correspond with it.[40] Right vision thus requires the simultaneous cultivation of virtue, which enables us to imitate Jesus Christ and transform our lives in accord with the truth about the world.[41] For Hauerwas, then, the task of the church, as well as Christian ethics, is to transform individuals so that they may more closely resemble the truth found in Jesus—and thereby more accurately see the truth of the world.[42]

A number of practices and disciplines are vital in transforming the self, but none is more so than worship. Indeed, Hauerwas declares that for Christians "our worship is our morality."[43] In worship, the church gathers together to offer praise and thanksgiving to the God who has created and redeemed the world. Placing us in the position of adoring creatures of this God, worship embodies the truth about the world. At the same time, the very act of putting ourselves in such a position and learning to see the world from this vantage point helps to cultivate the virtues necessary for us to live in a Christ-like manner

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[39] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 29-30.

[40] Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 2, 38-47. See also Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 30.

[41] See Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 52.

[42] See Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 16.

[43] Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 108.

not just in worship but in our lives writ large. "Ethics names the ways in which disciples discern and embody Christ's life in the world, and the chief way they learn to do this is through worship."[44] The goal of Christian ethics and the Christian life, then, is not for us to become moral in some nebulous sense but to be conformed more fully to the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. By dramatically enacting the story of God's salvation that is the truth of the world, worship not only reminds us of the nature of the world but is itself an indispensable form of training that cultivates the virtues necessary if we are to resemble Christ more fully and to worship the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit more faithfully. Accordingly, for Hauerwas no act is more ethically significant than worship.

Furthermore, since worship and the morality it enacts are constitutive of the polity that is the church, no act is more politically significant. Together with Sam Wells, Hauerwas writes, "Worship is, or aspires to be, the manifestation of the best ordering of [the Body of Christ], and is thus the most significantly political—the most 'ethical'—thing that Christians do."[45] Foremost among the acts of worship for Hauerwas are baptism and eucharist, the rituals by which Christians are engrafted into the story of God and remember that story as they take part in God's eschatological meal. These rites are politically essential because "[t]hrough them we learn who we are," namely, members of a community of God's new age.[46] Correcting those who would argue that the political nature of such acts lies in Christians' subsequent participation in some politics beyond the church, Hauerwas insists that these acts are themselves inherently political. As he puts it in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, for the church "these liturgies *are* our effective social work" and "our most important social

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[44] Hauerwas and Wells, "The Gift of the Church" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Hauerwas and Wells, 26. For more on Christian ethics as a discipline that seeks to help us emulate Christ, see Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 2.

[45] Hauerwas and Wells, "Christian Ethics as Informed Prayer" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Hauerwas and Wells, 6.

[46] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 108, 73.

witness" because they exhibit "the marks of God's kingdom in the world."[47] Worship is not a goad to action in some extra-ecclesial political realm, but is itself the fundamental political act of the church, which is "the only true political society."[48]

Through worship and also through other disciplines—many of which are part of worship but also extend beyond it, such as prayer, confession, forgiveness, and theology—the church enacts its political nature as it shakes its members loose from the shackles of self-deception and forms them in the virtues. Although many moderns, including Niebuhr, would write off such practices as "private" and thus *ipso facto* non-political, in Hauerwas's expansive understanding of politics they are crucial political acts.[49] Theology, to take an example, is profoundly political because it is a vital means by which the church seeks to "change lives by forming the imagination by faithful speech."[50] In this way, theology makes it possible for us to live in a world that we previously could not see and in holy, communal ways that we previously could not imagine, much less enact.[51] Because they are integral to the church's life as a *polis*, Hauerwas believes that we should understand such disciplines of virtue-formation to be political matters of profound import.

B. The Virtues of the Church

What exact virtues should define the life of the church? Like many contemporary virtue ethicists, Hauerwas provides no definitive, systematic catalogue of the virtues but instead a rotating cast of characters. What Jesus offers his followers, in Hauerwas's view, "is

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47 Ibid., 108. Emphasis original.

48 Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 40.

49 According to Hauerwas, Christians should reject the characteristically modern attempt to distinguish between public and private at least in part because it "reflects a political theory that assumes the political realm is not dependent on a people of virtue." Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 191.

50 Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 5.

51 In *The Peaceable Kingdom*, for instance, Hauerwas suggests that it is the case that "I can act only in the world I see and that my seeing is a matter of learning to say." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 117.

a journey, an adventure,"[52] and he construes the virtues functionally as those qualities necessary to sustain the church on this journey.[53] The traits that Hauerwas highlights as helpful in this emprise are a diverse lot that range from classical virtues, such as courage and discernment, to less standard qualities, like forgiveness. An exhaustive analysis of all of these virtues would take us afield from the concentration of this present project, which is on Hauerwas's understanding of politics rather than his understanding of the virtues per se. Yet an overview of what are for Hauerwas the three most central virtues—peacemaking, patience, and hope—will illuminate the nature of the politics that Hauerwas advocates.

Even though he refers to it under different names and identifies it explicitly as a virtue only occasionally, peacemaking is nonetheless the most crucial virtue for Hauerwas, and one might even say that together with worship it is a chief end towards which all other virtues aim. As Hauerwas interprets it, the story of the divine economy is fundamentally about God's triumph over evil, which comes not through violence but through the peaceableness of suffering love. For Christians, then, the call to be a people of peace is "not just one implication among others that can be drawn from our Christian beliefs; it is at the very heart of our understanding of God."[54] Living peaceably is thus not solely an eschatological hope but a present possibility, which Christ calls his followers to embody. If they are to live as such a people, however, Christians must find ways of making peace in a world of war. Hence, "Peacemaking among Christians … is not simply one activity among others but rather is the very form of the church insofar as the church is the form of the one who 'is our peace.' "[55]

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[52] Ibid., 87.

[53] See Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 62. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 10. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 19.

[54] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xvii.

[55] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 95.

Even as it demands that we forswear the use of violence, the call to peacemaking does not mean that Christians should simply avoid conflict, but that we instead must seek imaginative ways of resolving conflicts short of violence. Peacemaking aims at the creation of true peace and thus cannot simply turn a blind eye to offenses, pretending that an orderly status quo is somehow equal to peace. "No genuine peace can come from simply forgetting past wrongs," writes Hauerwas.[56] Within the church, this means that we must confront those who offend us so that we may be forgiven and reconciled.[57] In relation to the larger world, it means that Christians must "confront and challenge the false peace of the world which is too often built on power more than truth" and instead "help the world find the habits of peace whose absence so often makes violence seem like the only alternative."[58] Because Hauerwas believes that politics requires conversations over common goods—something that can only begin with the disavowal of violence—this means that peacemakers "must be the most political of animals."[59] The virtue of peacemaking is thus of the utmost political significance because politics itself is contingent upon a people capable of acknowledging and resolving their disputes.

Nevertheless, the ability to seek peace in a world at war requires other virtues, as well, most especially hope and patience. Because violence is a primary means by which human beings attempt to gain control over the world, the renunciation of violence entails that Christians must learn, in Hauerwas's language, "to live out of control."[60] Christians live in such a way not because they do not care about the world but because their "hope is not in

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Hauerwas writes that the first Christians, who remembered the Sermon on the Mount, "did not know they were pacifists. Rather, they knew as a community they were part of a new way of resolving disputes—through confrontation, forgiveness, and reconciliation." Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 71.

[58] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 95.

[59] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 7. On politics beginning only with the disavowal of violence, see also Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 15.

[60] See, for instance, Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 11.

this world … but in God and God's faithful caring for the world."[61] Having such a hope, Christians are empowered to look for alternatives to violence because they do not believe that the outcome of history relies upon their judicious use of force but instead upon the gracious love of God. At the same time, hope requires patience lest it transform into fanaticism or cynicism.[62] Since Christians do not believe that the kingdom will come by human efforts, they must learn to wait patiently for God's complete triumph while embodying the kind of peaceable lives modeled by Jesus' cross.[63] This does not entail the passive acceptance of injustice; yet patience provides the strength for the church to confront injustice even while forswearing the use of violent means to remediate it.

III. COMMENDING THE COMMUNITY OF CHARACTER

As we await the coming of the City of God and yet find ourselves ensnared in the predicament of evil, what ought Christians to make of Hauerwas's account of the church and its politics of soulcraft? When considered from within the theological landscape that we surveyed in the first two chapters, and particularly when seen in contrast to Niebuhr's conception of politics, Hauerwas's proposal possesses a number of strengths as it offers Christians a rich vision of how we might live more faithfully and politically on this side of the eschaton. Although even sympathetic commentators have criticized Hauerwas for not devoting sufficient effort to grounding his highly Aristotelian politics of soulcraft upon the substantive convictions of Christianity,[64] in my view three interrelated strengths—(1) the

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[61] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 104.

[62] Ibid., 103.

[63] See, for instance, Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 104.

[64] L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Accoun of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 15-18. Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 50-51. A particularly egregious example that begs for such criticism is in Hauerwas's much scrutinized article, "The Politics of Justice: Why Justice is a Bad Idea for Christians." In this essay he centrally relies not upon Christian scripture or tradition to illustrate the problems with modern

reestablishment of the church as a vital political entity, (2) the focus upon Jesus Christ as the orienting center of politics, and (3) the emphasis upon temporal duration and growth in the Christian life—especially commend his account and illustrate how conceiving politics as a matter of soulcraft deeply resonates with and recalls us to core Christian convictions.

These three aspects of Hauerwas's work are in fact intricately interwoven, for it is in the virtuous, grace-enlivened polity of the church that human beings and the community itself are increasingly formed in the image of Christ over time. Nevertheless, considering them separately will allow us to identify more clearly the particular contribution each makes in addressing the predicament of evil.

A. The Reestablishment of the Church as a Vital Political Entity

At the heart of Hauerwas's project, as we have witnessed, is his attempt to reclaim the church as a vital—and visible—political institution. In doing so, Hauerwas sets himself against the powerful influence of one of his foremost foils, a force he refers to as "Constantinianism." Even though Hauerwas has admitted that not everything about Constantinianism is bad,[65] it is still clear that he perceives it as a pervasive and pernicious threat to the Christian faith.

Drawing heavily from Yoder, Hauerwas asserts that the rise of Constantinianism occasioned a decisive shift in the theological and ethical outlook of Christianity. The crucial predicate of this new worldview is the conviction "that what God is doing is being done primarily through the framework of society as a whole and not through the Christian

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theories of justice but instead upon Alasdair MacIntyre's reading of Aristotle. See especially Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 49-50. Yet, while these criticisms held a great deal of validity at one time, particularly around 1998 with the publication of *Sanctify Them in the Truth* one can see Hauerwas shifting to a more theological register in which he begins to put a firmer Christian foundation under his construal of politics.

[65] See especially Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 19-31. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 160. And Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 188.

community."[66] Above all, it presumes that it is in the realm of statecraft that God is decisively at work. These convictions fundamentally refigured Christian ecclesiology as, under the aegis of Constantinianism, "the church's mission and the meaning of history" became identified "with the function of the state in organizing sinful society."[67] The state thus takes center stage as the singular political institution and a primary concern of Christian ethics. Meanwhile, as Rusty Reno puts it, the church is rendered "invisible and weightless," effectively dissolving into society.[68] The church is no longer regarded as politically relevant except, at best, "as a helpful, if sometimes complaining, prop for the state."[69] Its occasional complaints notwithstanding, Hauerwas believes that the Constantinian church cannot help but accommodate itself to the state. Having lost its political integrity, the church no longer forms individuals in the virtues proper to the Christian life but instead simply reinforces the habits that define the status quo generated and guarded by the state.

The precise contours of the Constantinian arrangement have shifted over time; irrespective of their changing form, however, they have characteristically consigned the church to political insubstantiality and impotence. In Hauerwas's view, perhaps no thinker epitomizes the modern expression of Constantinianism more fully than Reinhold Niebuhr. Here he takes issue with what he interprets as Niebuhr's overriding focus upon the state and his general neglect of the church, which most characteristically functions, as we have seen, as a negative example of the ambiguity that afflicts all historical existence.[70] Even more

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[66] Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 221. See also Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 181.

[67] John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1971), 83. Cited in Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 231.

[68] R. R. Reno, "Stanley Hauerwas" in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 310. In his memoir, *Hannah's Child*, Hauerwas puts the matter quite succinctly when he writes that the deepest problem with Constantinianism is that "in the name of being politically responsible, the church became politically invisible." Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 160.

[69] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 38.

[70] See, for instance, Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 53. Elsewhere, Hauerwas acknowledges that Niebuhr was "embedded in the language and practices of the church," but nonetheless notes that he gave it "little status

significantly, however, Hauerwas believes that Niebuhr's project remains trapped in the state's moral logic. Accordingly, Niebuhr finds the political essence of Christianity not in the formation of a community that remakes us in the likeness of Christ but instead in promoting the judicious use of power to attain relative justice. Put more provocatively, as Hauerwas repeatedly asserts, Niebuhr simply assumes that the task of Christian ethics is "making America work."[71] As a result, he cannot imagine that Christianity may espouse a moral logic at odds with the presumptions of the American experiment and the demands of the state, such as the assumed need to use violence.

Admittedly, there is much to criticize and even contest in Hauerwas's broad-brush rejection of Constantinianism and his criticism of Niebuhr, and this chapter will take up the most salient of these points in Section V where we will examine his understanding of how the church relates to the state. Yet I do not believe that one needs to accept all aspects of Hauerwas's criticisms in order to grant his constructive point. Offering a much needed corrective to Niebuhr and making what is likely his most outstanding contribution to contemporary Christian ethics, Hauerwas passionately argues that if the church is going to be the kind of community of character envisioned by the Bible, it must recover its political visibility and integrity.

In Chapter 1, I argued that while the full realization of the City of God awaits the eschaton, in this world we can build political habitations that approximate it. And "church" (*ekklēsia*) is the name that we have come to ascribe to the earthly institution called and committed to witnessing to the City of God by forming a polity that, as Jesus suggests in Matthew 5, is salt, light, and a beacon to the world, pointing forward to the coming of God's

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in his theology." Hence, while Niebuhr "regarded the church as a sociological necessity for Christianity to exist across time, … he did not regard it as an ethical or epistemological necessity." Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 137-38.

[71] Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 29.

holy city. In short, the church is to be a community that stands out and that in doing so calls others to give glory to God (Matthew 5:16). Commenting on this passage, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: "discipleship is as visible as light in the night, as a mountain in the flatland. To flee into invisibility is to deny the call. Any community of Jesus which wants to be invisible is no longer a community that follows him."[72] Such a community must be a political reality, existing as a distinctive, public entity and resisting attempts to reduce it to a handmaiden of the state or consign it to some hidden "private" sphere.

Significantly, what Matthew's Jesus notes as distinctive about this community are the characteristic traits that its members exhibit, such as meekness, purity of heart, and an abiding desire for justice (Matthew 5:3-10). To the extent that it faithfully pursues its proper mission, then, the church must be about the task of soulcraft as it seeks to inculcate in its members such Christ-like virtues. Given the deep-seated sinfulness of human beings, such a regime of soulcraft requires not just the cultivation of virtue alone; rather, it must begin by reorienting perverted wills. Augustine rightly perceives that the process of growth in the Christian life includes both the conquest of the bodily passions that tend towards sin as well as the acquisition of virtue.[73] The refractory habits of the will that incline us towards sin must be broken, and in their place we must develop new ways of being, ways that are Christoform in their receptivity to God and neighbor. To use the language of First Peter, if it is to practice such soulcraft effectively, the church ought to provide concrete means to help its members rid ourselves "of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander" and ultimately to "grow into salvation" (1 Peter 2:1-2).

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[72] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Volume 4, ed. Martin Kuske et al., trans., Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 113.

[73] Rowan Greer, "Sighing for Love of the Truth: Augustine's Quest," in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas*, eds. Reinhard Hütter, L. Gregory Jones, and C. Rosalee Velloso da Silva (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2005), 23.

One of the fundamental practices designed to help us root out such sins is the practice of confession, which rightly ought to force us to confront the inveterateness of our own bent towards evil. And in practices such as greeting one another, receiving the eucharist, worship, sending forth, and service, the church helps to illustrate the kind of virtues that Christians ought to embody. When seen in this light, one can better appreciate the great importance that Hauerwas, like the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, ascribes to "meeting together," for in doing so we confront evil head on, acknowledging our sins and repenting of them even as we seek to "provoke one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

In this process of soulcraft, I believe that the church must continually heed at least two warnings. The first is that its entire regime of soulcraft is—in its beginning, end, and all points in between—fundamentally contingent upon grace. Our deformed wills, as Colin Gunton reminds us, require more than human practices; they require redemption, the "radical redirection of the created order through Christ."[74] That is to say, they require grace to set them free from sin and death. And they require grace in order to grow in the Christoform virtues. To adapt a Pauline metaphor, the church may plant or water, but it is always God who gives the growth (see 1 Corinthians 1:3ff). Second, the church must never forget that it is itself a community in process, a community on the way. As such, it stands continually under the judgment represented by the fully realized City of God. Ecclesial pretension, then, ought to be checked by a recognition that at present neither the church nor any of its members see with absolute clarity but "in a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). The rest of the chapter will have more to say about these warnings, particularly in the

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[74] Colin E. Gunton, "The Church as a School of Virtue? Human Formation in Trinitarian Framework," in *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, eds. Mark Theissen Nation and Samuel Wells (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 223.

subsection entitled "The Limitations of the Church." For the moment, it is enough to note that the church walks a treacherous road in which it needs to assert itself as a visible, political community that seeks to cultivate virtue even while recognizing the inevitable shortcomings of its own.

B. The Focus upon Jesus Christ as the Orienting Center of Politics

As this project has maintained throughout, the shape of the polity for which God has created human beings and to which God has called them is embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, who is the *autobasileia*. The City of God's Christoform nature manifests itself above all in Christ-like love of God and neighbor. And Christians are called to devote themselves to embodying that kind of life in this world as fully as possible by emulating Christ. Repeatedly—almost incessantly—the evangelists and apostles hold up Jesus as the paradigm for Christian life. Enabled by grace, Christians are called to take up their crosses and follow Christ daily (Luke 9:23); to "put on Christ" (Romans 13:14); to have their minds renewed in accordance with the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16); to look to him as the "pioneer and perfecter" of their faith (Hebrews 12:2); and, like him, to be holy in all their conduct (1 Peter 1:15).

Such imitation of Christ is inherently political because it binds together the polity of disciples that is called to be a "city on a hill" (Matthew 5:14-16) but even more because it is oriented towards the Christoform love of God and neighbor that will characterize the fully realized City of God, which exemplifies politics in its most perfect sense. Learning to follow Christ, human beings become more truly political beings, increasingly fit for citizenship in the *polis* that defines our political nature and destiny. Hence, I believe that we ought to say of

Christian political ethics much what Dale Allison does of the ethical vision of the gospel of Matthew: "Christ is the 'canon.' "[75]

On this side of the eschaton a fundamental goal of the ecclesial polity must be to provide a venue in which Christians can encourage one another to pursue and embody more perfectly the virtues constitutive of the Christian life and the life of the world to come. The Beatitudes is one key place that helps to specify the particular shape of those virtues. Indeed, as Allison well displays, in the Gospel of Matthew Christ is the paradigm of the qualities that the Beatitudes expound.

> If Jesus exhorts others to be meek ('Blessed are the meek," 5:5, cf. 18:4), he himself is such ("I am meek and lowly of heart," 11:29, cf. 21:5). If he enjoins mercy ("Blessed are the merciful," 5:7), he himself is merciful ("Have mercy upon us, Son of David," 9:27; cf. 15:22). If he congratulates those oppressed for God's cause ("Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake," 5:10), he himself suffers and dies innocently ("Then he [Pilate] asked, '…what evil has he done?' " 27:23). All of which is to repeat what Origen … perceived long ago: "Jesus confirms all of the beatitudes he speaks in the Gospel, and he justifies his teaching through his own example."[76]

Beyond the Beatitudes we could add numerous other virtues that characterize Christ, such as compassion (Matthew 14:14; Mark 8:1; Luke 7:13; et al), generosity (2 Corinthians 8:9), and discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14-16; cf. Romans 12:2).

Hence, the virtues that the church seeks to help its members inculcate are not simply any virtues but ones reflective of the nature of Christ. While we might debate whether Hauerwas—or any thinker, for that matter—accurately identifies the virtues that are most fully representative of Christ,[77] he nonetheless avidly recalls us to fact that it is Christ whom we should be seeking to emulate. Recognizing this is particularly significant in our present

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[75] Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 152.

[76] Ibid., 149-50.

[77] Indeed, Hauerwas himself would be unsurprised by such debates since he envisions the church as "the extended argument over time about the significance of [Jesus'] story and how best to understand it." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 107.

context wherein the resurgence of interest in Aristotle and the category of virtue has generated a proliferation of discourse about the virtues. Often the virtues such accounts commend, however, are civil rather than Christological. Although accounts of the virtues will likely remain in debt in many ways to Aristotle and his civically determined construal of the virtues—and Hauerwas clearly exemplifies that debt and at times perhaps even totters into default—Christian accounts ought nonetheless to find themselves definitively determined by the peculiarity of Christ. "Christology is," Gunton reminds us, "the determinative motor of the exocentricity which takes us from an Aristotelian to a biblical focus."[78] For, to borrow from Sam Wells, "There is no use proposing virtue if the virtues one advocates are not genuinely true to salvation."[79] And it is in Christ that we find the shape of that salvation exemplified.

As much as any thinker, Niebuhr displayed a keen awareness that politics stands perennially in danger of devolving into a solely immanent enterprise determined exclusively by the exigencies of the contemporary situation rather than the kind of transcendent, salvific possibilities evident in Jesus. Nonetheless, as I argued in the previous chapter when discussing Niebuhr's tendency towards complacency, his thought in many ways ironically succumbs to just this immanentism. Both in his writings that advocate a strong moral dualism and in his occasional writings in response to political crises, such as the Civil Rights Movement, Niebuhr betrayed a tendency to alienate love from the political arena, pushing it to the eschatological horizon. As love loses the ability to orient practical political action, its place is taken by justice, whose own internal instability often results in the ascension of order

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[78] Colin E. Gunton, "The Church as a School of Virtue? Human Formation in Trinitarian Framework," in *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversations with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. Mark Nation and Samuel Wells (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 228.

[79] Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2004), 72.

as the central political value. In the process, Christ, whom Niebuhr portrays monochromatically as a purveyor of the principle of impartial love, is subtly but effectively eliminated as an exemplar for political life.

Hauerwas, for his part, will allow us no such relief. Indeed, the crucial break that he makes when he turns to talking of character, virtue, and a different kind of politics finds its genesis in his dissatisfaction with ethical models such as Niebuhr's that define Christian ethics in terms of principles (such as love and justice) and then focus on how we are to decide between them. As a result, Hauerwas laments, they "provide almost no means to talk meaningfully of the relation between Christ and the moral life."[80] More clearly specifying the relation of Jesus to the Christian life through the categories of character and virtue, as one early commentator noted, Hauerwas's project marks "a corrective to a too easy incorporation of various forms of *Realpolitik* into the Christian life."[81] Jesus thus functions not merely as an illustration of the ultimate possibilities of humanity but as an exemplar of the kind of life his followers are to embody in this world.

When cast in this light, Jesus recalls us from the temptations of political immanentism. As I have argued above, if we are to embody such a life, the church must provide means by which it graciously both confronts our perverse wills and seeks to edify us in the Christoform virtues definitive of God's eschatological city, whose order derives not from external coercion but from the Christ-like virtue of its citizens. To the extent that such a politics dedicates itself to making human beings into citizens fit for our true political destiny, we might join Hauerwas in the judgment that in this world the "truest politics … is

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[80] Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 1975), 180; cf. 230.

[81] Thomas W. Ogletree, "Character and Narrative: Stanley Hauerwas' Studies of the Christian Life," *Religious Studies Review* 6, no. 1 (1980): 30.

that concerned with the development of virtue."[82] One of the foremost strengths of Hauerwas's project, then, is that it will not allow us to forget that politics in its truest sense is not solely about power or order but about Jesus Christ.

Still, a vital crucible for any such "politics of Jesus" is how it relates to other polities, and particularly how it is to express the inclusive, evangelical nature of the City of God as it reaches out to all of creation. Thus, the questions we will consider in Section V of this chapter, as well as throughout the next chapter, shall be crucial in discerning how any such politics is to be configured and practiced.

C. The Emphasis upon Temporal Duration and Growth in the Christian Life

Sam Wells nicely characterizes one of the major emphases of Hauerwas's project as an attempt to move "from quandary to character." Consistently since the early part of his career, Hauerwas has argued that "a distinctively Christian ethic should concentrate on the character of the believer," a move that undercuts the central position quandaries have long occupied in modern ethics.[83] Still, he labors under no delusions that transforming the character of believers is an easy process. Like Niebuhr, he generally recognizes that human beings are currently caught in a predicament in which evil perverts both individual wills and social forms. Moreover, exhibiting the clear signs of one living after Niebuhr's reemphasis of human sinfulness has problematized any simple moral optimism, Hauerwas perceives that the inculcation of virtue is achieved only by dint of grace and the church's regime of soulcraft.

Nonetheless, beginning with the focus upon sanctification in his doctoral dissertation, later published as *Character and the Christian Life*, and shifting only slightly as he moves later in

[82] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 2.
[83] Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 13.

his career to characterizing Christianity as a "journey," Hauerwas doggedly maintains that moral transformation is possible. Such transformation occurs through time as we are trained in the virtues and come to embody the truth more fully. Hence, as Hauerwas points out, the virtues definitive of the Christian life are "timeful activities" both because they require time to develop and because in so doing they bind our past with our future.[84] Christian ethics, then, is not a matter of ahistorical beings confronting timeless quandaries,[85] but the grace-enabled cultivation of individuals and communities over time as they develop the skills necessary to conform their lives, characters, and affections more completely to Christ.

Such an emphasis upon moral growth over time is likely to ring dissonant especially on many Protestant ears. Not only do contemporary Pentecostals and charismatics routinely assert that grace works by immediately transforming believers, but no less than Martin Luther has famously asserted that "nothing makes a man good except faith, or evil except unbelief."[86] In such passages Luther admits little possibility for growth in the Christian life, a life that is determined not by action or development but by the passivity of faith. One is either righteous or not on account of one's faith, which, Gilbert Meilaender observes, "is not a virtue developed and strengthened bit by bit. It is a mathematical point: the self passive before God."[87] This punctiliar posture determines the quality of one's self, for it is at that point that one becomes—to use one of Luther's favored metaphors—a good tree that invariably produces good fruit.[88]

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[84] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 265.

[85] For more on this criticism, see Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 51ff.

[86] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 71.

[87] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 117.

[88] See, for instance, Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Martin Luther: Selections*, ed. Dillenberger, 69-71.

Those sensitive to the predicament of evil need not deny the possibility of immediate transformation, so long as it is properly interpreted. In this sense, Hauerwas can at times overstress the importance of temporal duration, such as when he asserts, "We *cannot* learn that we are sinners unless we are forced to confess our sins to other people in the church."[89] One could level the same criticism at Gunton's article on Hauerwas entitled "The Church as a School of Virtue? Human Formation in Trinitarian Framework," in which he analogizes human sinfulness to faulty genetic encoding and asserts that "this bad information cannot be simply wiped from the slate. That would represent an over-realised eschatology."[90] But what reason is there to doubt that the God who created the very universe is *capable* of decisively and instantaneously convicting us of our sin and even of reorienting the human will? In this sense, depicting temporal duration as if it marks some external limitation upon God (e.g., by speaking of the necessity of confession or by likening grace to the natural means of genetic modification) appears misguided. Should God so choose, we ought to believe that God is capable at any moment of "over-realizing" our eschatologies, summarily knocking us from our high horses even as we ride into Damascus breathing threats and murder, instead opening our eyes to a new reality (see Acts 9:1-19).[91]

To allow that God is capable of such immediately transformative acts of grace, however, by no means eliminates the importance of temporal duration and growth in the Christian life. For, in the most profound mystery of the divine economy, the God who is

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[89] Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 110. Emphasis added.

[90] Gunton, "Church as a School of Virtue?," 227.

[91] One might note that in making such claims Hauerwas departs widely from the theory of the virtues forwarded by Thomas Aquinas, whom he often credits as having substantially influenced his thought on the virtues. According to Thomas not only is it possible for God to infuse the theological virtues in the soul immediately, but also the moral virtues, as well. See Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues: Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae, Quaestio 49-67*, trans., John A Oesterle (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), I-II.63.3. My own position seeks to make room for such immediate infusion while at the same time allowing that even the theological virtues may be infused over time rather than instantaneously. I believe that this is a point that is implicit in Thomas. Since it remains undeveloped, however, it is possible that here I am departing from Thomas, as well.

Creator of all does not instantly crush evil with unlimited divine power but instead calls the people of Israel to be a light to the nations and then becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, redeeming the world for the City of God through means that are not only timeful but whose very timefulness is eminently costly. The arc of salvation history thus attests that God's quintessential means of relating to the temporality and finitude of creation is not to suspend or overwhelm them but instead to redeem them, creating new possibilities in their midst. Time, then, is not incidental to the realization of God's purposes but is instead the very medium through which those purposes grow and take form in our lives.

The timeful, temporally dilated nature of God's characteristic work in creation as a whole, as well as in the lives of individuals, is a crucial theme throughout the Bible. In the gospels Jesus repeatedly uses organic metaphors for the Kingdom of God, likening it, for instance, to a mustard seed that germinates and branches out to become a great tree (see Matthew 13:31ff; Mark 4:30ff; Luke 13:18ff). Moreover, he uses a similar metaphor to describe the way the word of God works in individual lives, suggesting that the word is like a seed that over time grows to produce an abundant harvest (Matthew 13:3ff; Mark 4:3ff; Luke 8:5ff). Not only does the growth from seed to fruit-bearing plant convey the significance of time—for such growth only comes with time—but this significance is further reinforced by the Lukan version of the parable in which Jesus proclaims that those who provide good soil for the seed of the word of God "bear fruit with patient endurance" (Luke 8:15).

The emphasis upon time and growth is even more prominent in the parenetic portions of the New Testament epistles, such as when Paul exhorts his congregations using athletic metaphors to characterize the Christian life, notably comparing it to a race (1

Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 2:16; 3:14-15; Galatians 2:2; cf. Hebrews 12:1-3).[92] Just as a runner trains in order to improve her performance, Paul suggests that, aided by grace, Christians are likewise called to train themselves in holiness so that they can press on and more firmly take hold of the holy calling for which they have been "taken hold of by Christ" (Philippians 3:12, author's translation). Elsewhere, Paul uses explicit temporal language to describe the Christian life as one in which we are being transformed into Christ's image "from one degree of glory to another" as "our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:16).[93] Thus, rather than a comprehensive, punctiliar transformation, Scripture repeatedly depicts the Christian life as something in which we progressively grow over time through the help of a grace that crafts our very soul.

Numerous key figures in the Christian tradition have similarly emphasized the importance of growth and duration in the Christian life. This includes Augustine, who distinguishes between two operations of grace, a first in which God "anticipates us … that we may be healed" and a second in which God will "follow us, that being healed we may

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[92] Admittedly, Paul appears to undercut the importance of growth in key passages when he describes the holiness of Christians in the indicative, suggesting that it is something already achieved. In this vein, he proclaims to the Corinthians, "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Yet such indicatives are offset by the numerous imperatives that populate Paul's letters. Indeed, later in the same letter Paul suggests that the Corinthians can yet advance in the Christian life as he admonishes them to "pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts" so that they might build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:1ff). Seeking to make sense of this tension between indicative and imperative, Joseph Kotva argues that Paul makes an implicit distinction between what-we-happen-to-be and what-we-could-be now that Christ has broken the power of sin. Paul's use of the indicative attempts to take seriously the objective effects of the Christ-event as it refers to what-we-could-be; yet the imperative attests to Paul's recognition that Christians have not yet fully reached that goal. Accordingly, "the imperative (e.g., precepts and injunctions) comes from the incongruity between our goal in Christ (what-we-could-be) and our actual state (what-we-happen-to-be)." Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 128. In light of the prevalence of such imperatives in Paul's writings we might say that, to the extent that he has one, Paul's considered judgment appears to be that while the Christ-event has objectively changed our state by breaking the power of sin, there remains room for grace-enabled growth in the Christian life as we attempt to embody the truth of that reality-altering event more fully.

[93] We find similar themes in the Catholic Epistles, as well. To give two examples: the epistle of James, suggests that Christians learn to live properly over time through testing, which produces the endurance that makes us "mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:4); similarly, the author of the first epistle of Peter advises his recipients to "long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation" (1 Peter 2:2).

grow healthy and strong."[94] Notably, it also includes Luther. In a masterful exposition, Gilbert Meilaender observes that the language of immediate transformation is only one of the idioms Luther uses for talking about the Christian life. At a number of points, Luther speaks in terms amenable to a more temporally dilated interpretation in which we see ourselves "both in light of the law, which reveals our sinful nature, and the gospel, which infuses faith and begins the healing process." When seen in this way, Meilaender argues, we can "think of life as a grace-aided journey and of virtue as a gradual possession which we may come to acquire through the moral discipline to which faith is committed," even as this model of the Christian life must be balanced by the recognition that our virtues can never justify us and thus we must continually "return to the word of promise which assures us that the wrath of God has been overcome by his favor."[95] Hence, even Luther's conception of the Christian life can be interpreted in terms of temporal duration and growth provided that such talk is always couched within the controlling idiom of grace.

Yet in modernity influences from diverse corners—including one-sided interpretations of Luther, charismatic belief in immediate sanctification, existentialism's emphasis upon unfettered human freedom, and modern ethics' concentration on quandaries and decisions—have promoted punctiliar interpretations of Christianity, eroding appreciation for the importance of temporal duration and growth. Depicting the Christian life as a journey and revitalizing the language of character and virtue, Hauerwas recalls us to these vital themes.

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[94] Augustine, "On Nature and Grace," in *Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans., Peter Holmes and Benjamin B. Warfield (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 133. Augustine makes a similar distinction elsewhere when he writes: "Forasmuch as in beginning He works in us that we may have the will, and in perfecting works with us when we have the will… He operates, therefore, without us, in order that we may will; but when we will, and so will that we may act, He co-operates with us." Augustine, "On Grace and Free Will," in *Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans., Peter Holmes and Benjamin B. Warfield (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 458.

[95] Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 110-11.

Given that God's grace quintessentially works not by suspending time but by redeeming it, any political response to the predicament of evil requires such an appreciation of the importance of temporal duration and growth. Time is needed to reorient our perverted, fractious wills, whether by recalling them from the pride that shuns the communion of the City of God or from the self-loss that abashedly hides from it. Through time God's grace works to restore such bent wills—rescuing them not only from their own perversion but also from the destructive power of deformed social structures—so that we may in fact will the good. To be sure, so long as we remain pilgrims in this world who see in a glass darkly rather than face to face, we never utterly escape our susceptibility to sin and self-deception. And yet, when we are capable of willing the good, grace can enable us to grow through time as we are transformed from one degree of glory into another, acquiring the Christoform virtues that allow us not only to will the good but to do it, virtues that are constitutive of the divine *polis* for which God created human beings.

Perfectly exemplified by the Trinitarian God, these virtues are not static possessions but eternal qualities. This means that there is always room for finite creatures to grow in them—both in time and perhaps beyond it.[96] Hence, even for those who experience the exceptional grace of immediate transformation, the Christian life ought to manifest itself in the steadfast pursuit within time of the holy calling for which Christ has taken hold of us. Time is integral for us to grow and solidify in the virtues proper to that calling. The Letter to the Hebrews even goes so far as to suggest that Christ's experience in time was integral in inculcating and confirming his own virtue. Hence, it proclaims: "In the days of his flesh,

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[96] For more on the possibility of transformation beyond time, see the discussion of Gregory of Nyssa in Chapter 1, Section II.C. Hauerwas gestures in this direction when he maintains that Christians need the language of growth and progress "because the basis of the Christian life is God's action in Christ which can never be fully comprehended in one action or even in one lifetime." Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 219.

Jesus offered up prayers and supplications… Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:7-8). Responding to the predicament of evil, then, requires not simply concentrating upon quandaries and moments of crisis but recognizing that the Christian life is one extended over time and embodied in daily discipleship as we grow in the Christoform virtues.

IV. Questioning the Community of Character

As this chapter has now argued at length, Hauerwas's conceptualization of politics as a matter of church-based soulcraft has many virtues that help us in imagining what a faithful response to the predicament of evil might look like. Such strengths notwithstanding, his account nonetheless falters in key respects that call for critique. Most especially, I believe that, in the final analysis, it does not adequately appreciate either the pervasiveness of evil or what it means that the City of God provides the true norm for our political lives. These inadequacies manifest themselves both in Hauerwas's account of the church's intra-ecclesial moral life, as well as in his understanding of how the church ought rightly to relate to other polities, particularly that represented by the state. This section will discuss the first and in doing so will lead us towards the second, which we will examine in Section V.

Gloria Albrecht's *The Character of Our Communities*, the most significant book-length criticism of Hauerwas's work, provides a helpful place to begin investigating the potential difficulties with his depiction of the church as a morally formative *polis*. At the heart of Albrecht's critique is the attempt to expose how Hauerwas's social location decisively shapes his vision of the church and blinds him to insidious forms of violence within it. Most significantly, she takes issue with two internal contradictions that she believes undermine his project.

The first is that, although Hauerwas superficially renounces the quest for a universal, foundationalist epistemology in favor of a more historically specific, narrative approach, this narrative in fact "becomes the new foundation for the assertion of universal truth."[97] Initially, this may sound like a relatively inconsequential failure in logical consistency. Albrecht endeavors to show that it is far more dangerous. This is because for Hauerwas, the power to interpret this narrative lies within "the Church" and with "spiritual masters," and while Albrecht admits that it is not entirely clear to whom such titles refer, she believes that it finally means that "authority … lies within the hands of (predominantly white) male clerical or (predominantly white) male communal leadership" (50). Ultimately, then, Hauerwas's now-universalized narrative and his understanding of how it is to be interpreted function to deny difference, subjugating and excluding those who would challenge the established interpretation.

This leads to the second internal contradiction that Albrecht identifies in Hauerwas's work, namely, that his commitment to nonviolence ultimately serves to justify the violence of domination. Construing violence in a way that Albrecht suggests is characteristic of white middle-class men, Hauerwas generally identifies it with two phenomena: war between nation-states and the allegedly universal human tendency towards self-interest and self-protection. In the process he ignores the violence inherent in "structural oppressions that support 'our' institutionalized privileges: poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and political injustice" (117). Neglecting these structural oppressions that are wrought by corrupt social forms and the way in which these shape not only "the world" but the church itself, Hauerwas identifies the essence of justice with what Albrecht sees as

[97] Gloria H. Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1995), 26. In this section, subsequent references to this volume will be made parenthetically in the body of the text.

relatively trivial acts of personal care. In so doing, his understanding of the gospel "removes from us the ability or responsibility to respond to structural injustice" (112) and allows such oppressions to reside unchallenged in the church. Hauerwas's politics of soulcraft is thus deficient because it fails to see that "neither Christians nor the Christian church can be reformed without participating with 'others' in a corresponding transformation of the society that shapes us Christians" (137). Without entering into struggles for transformation, the church is doomed to replicate structural forms of oppression within its own walls.

In her attempt to provide not "a 'true' reading … [but] an authentic interpretation of the way [Hauerwas's] texts could function in the formation" of women such as herself (32), Albrecht often offers a partial and at times even uncharitable reading of Hauerwas that ignores elements within his thought that suggest his texts might instead function in other ways. In a particularly notable instance, briefly mentioned above, Albrecht initially acknowledges a bit of uncertainty about who the "spiritual masters" of the Christian community might be. Quickly, however, she presumes that this means that women and men of color are required to submit to white patriarchs. In my opinion, however, Hauerwas makes it quite clear that the masters to whom he refers are Jesus Christ and those who most closely imitate him—that is, the saints. As Hauerwas asserts in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, it is Christ who is our master and who teaches us the skills to live faithfully, and it is through the lives of those saints who truly follow Christ that we come to know what the narrative of God's salvation truly means.[98] Moreover, Hauerwas often points out just how thoroughly destabilizing the saints can be to the status quo. Hence: "Recognizing the saints, especially while they are still alive, is no easy task either, for by their very nature saints remind us of

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[98] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 95, 70.

how unfaithful we have been to the story that formed us."[99] It may indeed prove that Christ and the saints are an overly patriarchal group; or that they are not truly destabilizing to patriarchal institutions; or that white patriarchs will inevitably monopolize the job of interpreting their lives; or that the very idea of submission is oppressive and can never lead to greater liberation. If any of these were true, it would undercut Hauerwas's proposal. As it stands, however, Albrecht's argument would have to go further to show that they are indeed the case rather than shortcutting the task by assuming the worst.

Because of this tendency to assume the worst, Albrecht may also miss larger themes in Hauerwas's writings that suggest they could function in more liberative ways than she imagines. Linda Woodhead, for instance, joins Albrecht in the judgment that Hauerwas's project has not adequately addressed matters of gender, as well as the view that this results in part from his belief in a single truth. Nonetheless, Woodhead finds in Hauerwas's work the articulation of an embodied theology that, though it has not yet done so, is nevertheless highly conducive to treating matters of gender in a liberative fashion. She thus asserts that a gendered perspective "is validated by the theological revolution which his work has set in train."[100] Albrecht appears to perceive no such possibilities. Consequently, it can appear as if, in her zeal to convict Hauerwas, she refuses to entertain the idea that there might be anything truly life-giving in his thought.

Such shortcomings notwithstanding, in prosecuting her case Albrecht nonetheless opens a number of fruitful lines of interrogation that can help us to identify some of the key flaws in Hauerwas's account of the ecclesial polity. Albrecht's criticism suggests that a

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[99] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 104. Although *In Good Company* was not published until 1995, the year Albrecht's book came out, an earlier version of this essay, with this passage worded in precisely the same way, was published in *Theology Today* in 1985. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Gesture of a Truthful Story," *Theology Today* 42, no. 2 (1985): 184.

[100] Linda Woodhead, "Can Women Love Stanley Hauerwas? Pursuing an Embodied Theology" in *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, eds. Nation and Wells, 163.

politics of soulcraft that is sufficiently attentive to the predicament of evil ought to emend or supplement Hauerwas's work in order to provide a more satisfactory treatment of at least three crucial issues: (1) ways of addressing the variable dynamics of individual evil; (2) the limitations of the church; and (3) appropriate practices of soulcraft. The remainder of this section will discuss each in turn.

A. Confronting the Variable Dynamics of Individual Evil

In one of his most extended discussions of sin, Hauerwas perceptively observes that, though Christian tradition has at different times sought to utilize a single category, such as pride or self-love, to capture sin's essence, attempts of this sort are probably misguided. This is because it is unlikely that "there is any one term sufficient to suggest the complex nature of our sin."[101] In setting himself against such reductive tendencies, Hauerwas helps to remind us that sin is a complex force that works its insidious evil in more than one way. On the very same page, however, he describes sin as springing from "hopes of being my own lord," the attempt to "to overreach our powers," and the desire "to live *sui generis*."[102] Failing to balance these characterizations with offsetting descriptions of how sin might also manifest itself in something like self-loss, Hauerwas in the end leaves us with the impression that sin's defining movement is indeed one in which we seek to aggrandize ourselves. At key points both here and elsewhere, then, Hauerwas belies his own best insights as the trajectory of his thought implies that sin is most fundamentally a matter of pride.[103]

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[101] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 31.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Later in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, for instance, Hauerwas maintains that "sin is the positive attempt to overreach our power as creatures. … In other words, our sin—our fundamental sin—is the assumption that we are the creators of the history through which we acquire and possess our character." Ibid., 46-7. See also Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 206.

Such implications obscure the variable dynamics of sin and individual evil more generally, which pervert human wills not only in ways that cause us pridefully to disdain communion with God and others but to lose ourselves in ways that leave us incapable of such communion. In this respect, Albrecht is right when she argues that Hauerwas's understanding of sin does not exhibit the ability to distinguish satisfactorily between the different forms of sin that afflict different people.[104] As a result, Hauerwas's regime of soulcraft often appears solely focused upon restraining self-assertion. Accordingly, we find statements like: "Discipleship is quite simply extended training in being dispossessed. To become followers of Jesus means that we must, like him, be dispossessed of all that we think gives us power over our own lives and the lives of others."[105] What we rarely—if ever—find are suggestions that the church may need to nurture souls not simply by restraining self-assertion but also, at least in the case of some, by helping individuals to develop proper self-love.

Unlike Albrecht, however, I do not believe that Hauerwas's project is starkly incompatible with such insights. Admittedly, given his opposition to the therapeutic emphasis of much modern theology, it is perhaps doubtful that Hauerwas himself would develop his thought in these directions. Nevertheless, the emphasis upon the need to cultivate a fitting self-love in which one recognizes oneself as created by God and called to communion with God possesses notable affinities with Hauerwas's attempt to recover the significance of virtue in Christian ethics.

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[104] Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities*, 99.
[105] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 86.

Cast in the proper light, we might see that the very nature of virtue itself presupposes self-love. It is commonly charged that virtue ethics is self-regarding,[106] and I think this charge possesses a degree of validity. What critics who make this charge routinely overlook, however, and what Gilbert Meilaender reveals, is that this self-regard ultimately "is in service of the virtuous treatment of others."[107] Paragons of Christian virtue especially seek to grow in the virtues not for their own aggrandizement but so that they might love God and neighbor more fully and faithfully. Without a proper self-love, however, such self-regard would be unintelligible, for one simply cannot attend to the development of a self that one does not love. Returning us to an insight from Chapter 2, this points towards another connection with virtue ethics, which is that, like many Aristotelian virtues, we may well think of self-love as a mean between extremes.[108] When overweening, it becomes pride; when deficient, it becomes self-loss. Despite its potential for excess, self-love is not inherently bad—and is perhaps even itself virtuous when present in proper proportion. Only by recognizing that it must combat not just the evil of pride but also that of self-loss and by incorporating practices designed to encourage appropriate self-love into its politics of soulcraft can the church offer a sufficiently nuanced response to the predicament of evil.

B. The Limitations of the Church

Not unlike the protagonist of a Shakespearean tragedy, one of the most outstanding strengths of Hauerwas's project—its recovery of the political visibility and integrity of the church—becomes the source of perhaps its greatest weakness. For, in attempting this

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[106] For a recapitulation of recent instances of this charge and a nuanced response to it, see Christopher Toner, "The Self-Centredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *Philosophy* 81, no. 318 (2006): 595-617.

[107] Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 40.

[108] Of course, for Aristotle, not all virtues are means. For instance, he writes, "there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme." Aristotle, "The Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1107a 20.

recovery, Hauerwas all too often depicts the church in tones that elevate it to an unjustifiably high status in the divine economy, portraying it in an overly realized and excessively self-sufficient light.

At his best, when Hauerwas describes the church he creates an eschatological dialectic that balances more ideal statements of what the church already embodies with others that substantively acknowledge that all is not yet realized. One witnesses this, for instance, in the essay "The Reality of the Kingdom: An Ecclesial Space for Peace," which Hauerwas co-wrote with Mark Sherwindt. Seeking to correct what they deem to be the eschatological missteps of Walter Rauschenbusch, Hauerwas and Sherwindt argue that, as a theological image, the Kingdom of God does not alone sufficiently specify the concrete content of Christian ethics. Hence, Christians ought to focus not simply upon the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom but "on the concrete ecclesial community established in its name," for "[w]ithout the kingdom ideal, the church loses its identity-forming hope; without the church, the kingdom loses its concrete character."[109] Of course, even this much would be enough to make many Niebuhrians cringe on account of the strong relation it posits between the church and the Kingdom of God. Such scruples notwithstanding, here and elsewhere in the essay the authors create a dialectical tension in which the church itself, though related to the Kingdom, continues to stand under the judgment of the Kingdom. Hauerwas is thus able to mix a strong ecclesiology with an eschatology predicated on the recognition that "there is more to the Kingdom of God than the church."[110]

In spite of its general circumspection, however, even in this essay there are points where one begins to sense just how powerfully the trajectory of Hauerwas's thought arcs

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[109] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 112.
[110] Ibid., 119.

toward even stronger claims about the continuity between the church and Kingdom. One such passage comes when Hauerwas and Sherwindt write, "It is not as if we are the kingdom, or that the Church is even the beginning of the kingdom" and then immediately seek to undercut the reservation this expresses. Hence, they add, "but that as a people Christians can point to the fact that the kingdom has been and is present in our midst."[111] The church, then, appears not to be pointing beyond itself at all but instead *to* itself. In this sense, the church may not be the kingdom but at the very least it is transparent to it.

Elsewhere, Hauerwas appears to stake out an even higher place for the church in the divine economy, such as in the introduction to *In Good Company*. Attempting to articulate an understanding of salvation that differs from the individualistic accounts that predominate in contemporary Christianity, Hauerwas argues that salvation truly involves incorporation into practices that save us from the powers that would make it impossible for us to worship God. In support of this, he draws upon Joe Dinoia's *The Diversity of Religion*, which argues that discourse about salvation ought rightly to be situated within an understanding of how "the dispositions to attain and enjoy the true aim of life develop over the course of a lifetime of divinely engendered and sustained 'cultivation.' " If, however, Dinoia or others may find the true aim of life in the eschaton, Hauerwas wants to insist that the church gets its due and thus flatly asserts: "The church's politics is our salvation."[112] Perhaps Hauerwas means by this that the church is the institution through which God is working to conform us more fully to the ultimate goal of the City of God. When stated so baldly, however, it instead appears as if the church itself is that goal.

Other key passages in Hauerwas's writings lend further credence to these suspicions. In *A Community of Character*, for example, Hauerwas asserts that Christians have good reason

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[111] Ibid., 117.

[112] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 8.

to claim "that the polity of the church is the truest possible for human community" since "[i]t is from the church, past, present, and future, that we even come to understand the nature of politics and have a norm by which all other politics can be judged."[113] Reading this single passage with extreme charity, one could possibly interpret it as suggesting that the church is the truest possible community only in this time between the times and that the political norm it gives us is not itself but the polity to which it witnesses, namely, the City of God. Yet such a reading becomes markedly more difficult to sustain when seen in light of some of Hauerwas's other declarations about the church: the church "is the organized form of Jesus's story"[114]; it is the alternative to Babel and the story of reconciliation that God is telling[115]; it "*is* what God has said about war."[116]

With the repetition of the indicative "is" in such passages, Hauerwas packs ever more theological heft into the present reality of the church. As this happens, one begins to feel the eschatological dialectic teeter under the weight of this increasingly realized ecclesiological eschatology. Simultaneously, the church's ascendant position further relativizes the City of God, threatening to displace it as the true paradigm of our political and moral lives as the church becomes "our true home."[117] Along with Duncan Forrester, then, we might worry that one of the major problems with Hauerwas's account of the church is its "tense and mood" as he "writes in the present rather than the future eschatological tense, and in the indicative rather than imperative mood."[118]

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113 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 2. Hauerwas makes this point in somewhat different language elsewhere, as well, such as when expressing approval for Leo XIII's insistence in *Rerum Novarum* that "it is the church, and the church alone, which provides the world with the means to know the substance of the good society." Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 126.

114 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 50.

115 Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 54.

116 Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 16. Emphasis original.

117 Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 102.

118 Duncan Forrester, "The Church and the Concentration Camp: Some Reflections on Moral Community" in *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, eds. Nation and Wells, 206. Sheldon Wolin might help us put this point somewhat

Defenders of Hauerwas could argue that such indicatives are merely calculated rhetorical flourishes intended to recall us to the ethical significance of the church that Christians, particularly in the United States, have too long ignored. Such statements, then, might be classified among the "exaggerations" that Hauerwas utilizes because he believes they "function to invite thought."[119] If this were the case, readers could view the depiction of the church that these statements conjure as something of a theological conceit. Yet Hauerwas himself forecloses any such interpretation when he admits that his theological convictions will not allow him to distinguish between the visible and invisible church or to say that he is recommending ideals to be realized. Rather, he tells us, "my church has to exist as surely as the Jews have to be God's promised people."[120] Such indicatives therefore cannot have simply a rhetorical function but must have at least a limited conceptual function, as well.

Even more crucially, in the greater scope of Hauerwas's thought these indicatives are reinforced by larger themes whose function is more clearly conceptual. In the end, these themes so greatly overshadow Hauerwas's admissions of the church's limitations—such as his acknowledgement that the church has often failed to be the true polity that it is called to be[121]—that such admissions can feel as if they are little more than feeble provisos unable effectively to counterbalance the weight of what is already eschatologically present in the church.

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differently. He identifies that from a very early point Christian writers attributed at least three distinct meanings to the notion of church: (1) the local organization; (2) the church universal; (3) the church transcendent. The difficulty with many of Hauerwas's claims, then, is that they do not sufficiently distinguish between the second and third meanings and thus appear to assign characteristics of the latter to the former. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 116.

[119] Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 226.

[120] Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 20.

[121] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 2.

One of these themes is Hauerwas's repeated argument that the church does not have a social ethic but is a social ethic. The difference between these two claims, as I take it, is that in the latter the church does not merely possess an ethic to which it aspires but one which it embodies.[122] Put somewhat differently, "[f]or the church to *be* a social ethic, rather than to *have* a social ethic, means that the church must be (is) a body polity."[123] Particularly with the awkward, parenthetical insertion of the indicative "is," Hauerwas once more suggests that the place one should look for the true paradigm of Christian politics is not in the City of God but in the church itself.

Yet if the church is as racked with sin as Albrecht so vividly illustrates—and as Hauerwas is willing to acknowledge, however provisionally—then how is one to distinguish between those things that the church embodies that are sinful and those that are salvific? Doing so would require the sophisticated tools necessary to make detailed distinctions between and within churches; it would require the ability to distinguish between the things that we call churches and "the church" properly so-called or at least to identify those communities that more closely embody the life that the church ought. Unfortunately, by redirecting us from the City of God to the church itself, Hauerwas obscures what may be the most powerful of these tools.[124] And without the ability to make sufficiently subtle distinctions, it is finally unclear even how Hauerwas's own descriptions of the church square with one another, let alone with reality. Thus, the reader may feel as if she has stepped into the realm of the absurd when, for instance, Hauerwas tells us that we must "accept the discipline of the Church's preaching" shortly after having shown the insufficiencies of the

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[122] See, for instance, Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99ff.

[123] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 26.

[124] Although, for obvious reasons, I favor the framework of the City of God, it is of course by no means the only tool that would allow us to make such distinctions. Perhaps the most influential attempt to do so is Luther's enumeration of the seven marks of the church in "On the Councils and the Church." See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 41: Church and Ministry III*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

message preached in the vast majority of American churches.[125] This is because what remains unelaborated in Hauerwas's work is how one is to differentiate one from the other.

Cumulatively considered, these numerous aspects of Hauerwas's project suggest a failure to appreciate sufficiently the limitations of the church and ultimately give way to what Charles Mathewes characterizes as an "incipient ecclesial triumphalism, a weirdly 'Christendomed' theology that insists that we have all the answers already."[126] Mathewes perhaps overstates the case slightly when he claims that for Hauerwas the church has all the answers already. In the narrative of the community, however, what we do have is at least the resources to discern those answers.[127] Robert Jenson is thus probably closer to the truth when he observes that for Hauerwas Christ's Kingdom may indeed be wider than the church but that is "not because it includes 'more' than the church but because the world is narratively enveloped in the church."[128] The church need not look beyond itself, then, but ought simply to inhabit its own narrative more fully and faithfully.

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[125] Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 38.

[126] Charles T. Mathewes, "Appreciating Hauerwas: One Hand Clapping," *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 2 (2000): 345. A similar way of expressing much the same aspect of Hauerwas's thought is the claim that it represents a form of "presentative millenarianism." John Thomson has used this phrase to characterize Hauerwas's work, and Nathan Kerr has since adopted it. I avoid the phrase, however, for much the same reasons that I cannot fully accept Mathewes's description. Ultimately, I believe it suggests an even more realized ecclesiological eschatology than does Hauerwas. John B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 206ff. Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2009), 123.

[127] The supposedly untainted nature of those resources, most especially the "Christian narrative," suggests that James Gustafson is right to a large degree when he groups Hauerwas among those theologians who assume "that the Church or the Christian community is socially and culturally isolable from the wider society and culture of which it is a part." James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 (1985): 90. Or, as Melissa Snarr puts it, Hauerwas "believes the truthfulness of the Christian narrative could exempt the historical church from malady if the church were to immerse itself in the narrative properly." C. Melissa Snarr, *Social Selves and Political Reforms: Five Visions in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 63. It is this assumption that would appear to lie behind Hauerwas's tendency, as Coles describes it, to constitute "the borders between church and world in a way that *makes the border secondary to an interior volume* that is at the center." Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 212. Emphasis original.

[128] Robert W. Jenson, "The Hauerwas Project," *Modern Theology* 8, no. 3 (1992): 293.

This way of construing narrative does not in my opinion result, as Albrecht alleges, from a veiled attempt to establish unassailable truth and secure ultimate control.[129] She is right, however, that so strongly stressing the church and its narrative deprives us of the leverage necessary if we are effectively to interrogate the various and variegated narratives that the church in fact articulates and embodies. We need such critical reflection not only to divide the faithful elements from the faithless, but perhaps even more, to consider how those faithful ones are to be faithfully embodied.[130] In other words, we need the skills to live improvisationally as a pilgrim people not simply attuned to the faith that the church currently embodies but to the ever-new individual and corporate possibilities that lie before us. To extend one of Nigel Biggar's insights, it is always the case in this world that "the Christian Church itself is still in the process of learning what a properly Christian politics would look like under the conditions of sin."[131] Much of this, I believe, Hauerwas would second; yet I fear that key aspects of his theology deprive us of the resources we so desperately need for such improvisational living.

A greater appreciation of the church's limitations suggests that a politics of soulcraft that is sensitive to the predicament of evil will require an account of the church with a somewhat different emphasis. Most especially, we might recognize that danger attends the

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[129] Here I am in substantial agreement with Sam Wells that such claims reflect a misreading of Hauerwas's ecclesiology. See Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 71. In this sense, I find no reason to doubt the claim that as Christians Hauerwas and Willimon "can fully understand why others may disagree with us" and that they need not take such disagreement as a sign that those others "are irrational, less than human, or evil." Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 101. Like Hauerwas, and perhaps even Albrecht, I doubt that the same can be justifiably said about the Enlightenment's quest for unassailable truth.

[130] Rom Coles offers a highly Niebuhrian reading of a similar point when he worries that Hauerwas locates the generative elements of "the politics of fear" solely outside of Christianity. He then asks Hauerwas, "Might not doing this risk preventing or discouraging certain critical reflections on possible sources of fear that reside 'inside' the Christian story/body/practices? Sources that might lie in *potentia* in the heart of some of its highest aspirations, needing to be kept at bay repeatedly?" With such comments Coles recalls us to the need to reflect critically not only on the ways in which the church might become sullied by external, "worldly" elements but perverted in pursuit of its own highest aims. Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 38.

[131] Nigel Biggar, "Is Stanley Hauerwas a Sectarian?" in *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, eds. Nation and Wells, 159.

implication that the church is a privileged possessor of the truth. What the church is instead is a community dedicated to the pursuit of that truth, a community that gathers around and seeks by grace to emulate the One whom we proclaim is the Truth, but whom we never know fully in this life. Indeed, this One is ever on the move in this world, for the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58).

C. Appropriate Practices of Soulcraft

"I am convinced," Hauerwas writes in an essay about the ministry of Broadway United Methodist Church in South Bend, Indiana, "that no theology or ethic is truthful that does not help people, such as those at Broadway, appreciate the significance of their worship."[132] Clearly one of the major aspirations of Hauerwas's career—as well as one of his most prominent contributions to Christian ethics—has been to cultivate just such an appreciation. This connection between worship and ethics is so vital for Hauerwas because it is in worship that Christians are engrafted into the story of God and acquire the skills necessary to live faithfully to that story. Worship, then, is not only the activity to which the virtues of the Christian life are ordered but a vital practice through which we acquire those very virtues.[133]

The theological survey contained in the first two chapters is, I trust, deeply sympathetic to this reconnection of worship and ethics. Worship is a vital context in which we find a provisional prefigurement of human beings' eschatological destiny, a place in which Christians come together not just to remind ourselves that humanity was made to live in perfect communion with God, other human beings, and all creation but also to experience an anticipatory, refracted glimpse of that communion. Moreover, in reciting and reenacting

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[132] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 123.
[133] See, for instance, Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 108.

the divine economy, worship serves as an indispensable avenue through which we can develop the grace-endowed skills and dispositions to live such a life more faithfully in the present. At the same time, however, particularly when taken together with Albrecht's critique, a recognition of the character of both the City of God and the predicament of evil should make us hesitant about the direction of certain suggestions that Hauerwas makes about the ethical function of worship.

The most problematic of these suggestions present the very act of worship as something that forms worshippers in the virtues proper to the Christian life in an almost automatic way. Although from a very early point in his career Hauerwas exhibited a concern with the ethical significance of worship, in the mid-1980s such troubling suggestions became more prominent in his work. In an essay originally published in 1985, for instance, he claims that liturgy is itself the church's social action because through it "we are shaped to live rightly the story of God, to become part of that story, and are thus able to recognize and respond to the saints in our midst."[134] Striking a similar note, in a piece from the late 1990s he asserts: "Through worship we not only come to know God, but we are changed by our knowledge of God, morally and also rationally."[135] Worship, such claims imply, is itself a morally transformative act that reverberates inexorably throughout the whole of our lives.

If, however, this was merely intimated in the middle part of Hauerwas's career, with the publication of *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, it threatened to become a project unto itself. Attempting to establish the significance of worship for Christian ethics, Hauerwas and Sam Wells write: "The liturgy offers ethics a series of ordered practices that shape the character and assumptions of Christians, and suggest habits and models that inform every aspect of corporate life … not simply for clergy, or for those in religious orders,

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[134] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 107.
[135] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 156.

but for lay Christians, week in, week out."[136] And throughout the volume's programmatic essays they repeatedly assume the morally formative efficacy of worship, indicating that it shapes "the character of Christians and the mind of the church," "trains Christians to be saints," and is the place "where people are conformed to Christ."[137]

Once again the use of the indicative bedevils Hauerwas as it suggests that these are primarily descriptive statements rather than normative ones and thus that they represent the actual experiences of all who participate in worship rather than those who have been *properly formed* by that participation. Hauerwas clearly understands that no automatic relationship between worship and moral formation obtains descriptively. One sees this not only in isolated comments but in the overall shape of his career, which has centrally attempted to articulate the ethical implications of worship for matters such as abortion or war. The fact that these matters require articulation presupposes that worship alone has not automatically shaped Christians so that they invariably know what to do when confronting such situations. Nevertheless, by their very mood these problematic, indicative statements continue to lend themselves to descriptive interpretation in ways that would depict worship as an activity that inevitably and reliably forms Christian virtues in those who participate in it. From this, one might justifiably conclude that all the church really needs to do in order to form its members in the Christian life is to devote itself to sustaining and embodying rich liturgical practices.

We should acknowledge that worship can indeed function as a morally transformative practice that, when properly celebrated, both recapitulates the divine economy and graciously fosters the skills that prepare us to participate in it. As Augustine

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[136] Hauerwas and Wells, "Christian Ethics as Informed Prayer" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Hauerwas and Wells, 7.

[137] Ibid., 9, 26, 25; see also 13.

reminds us with his de facto, anticipatory acceptance of the doctrine of *ex opere operato*, it is not only human beings but divine grace that is at work in the crucial acts of worship.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to presume that such grace automatically transfers to the ways in which Christians live outside the sanctuary. Sociologists refer to this presumption as the "fallacy of religious congruence." Sociological research has repeatedly revealed that for the vast majority of religionists—both Christian and non-Christian—there is at best a loose connection between what they do in explicitly religious contexts and how they behave outside of those contexts. Mark Chaves stresses this point when, attempting to summarize the general findings of the field, he observes that rituals do not "connect tightly, coherently, and literally to the beliefs, attitudes, and practices evident in people's lives outside the ritual."[138] Because of this, it is wrong, for instance, to assume that "because religious people hear hundreds of sermons connecting religious faithfulness with, say, caring for the poor … religious people therefore will be more likely to help the poor when given the opportunity to do so outside the religious setting." Instead, "what happens in church mainly stays in church."[139]

While sociological observation is helpful in illuminating the problem of religious incongruence, I believe that explaining it is best done in a theological idiom and that the predicament of evil is especially well fitted to this task. From this perspective, the problem is not best expressed in passive language that implies that the beliefs, attitudes, and practices—or, perhaps better, grace—that Christians enact and encounter in worship simply fail to transfer to the other aspects of our lives. Rather, the problem is that social and individual forms of evil actively, if unconsciously, prevent it from doing so. Structural evils routinely

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[138] Mark Chaves, "Rain Dances in the Dry Season: Overcoming the Religious Congruence Fallacy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 1 (2010): 4.

[139] Ibid., 8.

blind us to the true humanity of other people. The effects of the systemic forces of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, among others, render others invisible to us; meanwhile, as Niebuhr so compellingly dramatizes time and again, influences such as group pride lead us to demonize those others that we do see.

Even as these forces impress themselves upon us and thereby upon our wills, our wills themselves are by no means innocent. One of the most powerful and insidious forms that the perversion of our wills takes is compartmentalization, which divides our lives into separate spheres with separate and even conflicting moral norms. Such a division functions essentially as a self-defense mechanism that isolates certain spheres of our lives from the implications of our worship. When our lives are so neatly yet perversely compartmentalized, the universal fellowship that we celebrate and expectantly await in the sanctuary means little when we encounter the downtrodden fellow in the street.[140]

This does not mean that Hauerwas is wrong to aim for ultimate religious coherence, that perfect unity of being and doing in which, like God, "we … are what we are and … do what we do."[141] What it means instead is that even beginning to grow in this high calling will likely require practices of soulcraft that extend beyond the liturgy of the church and that make clear to us the meaning of our worship. Hauerwas highlights a number of such practices, including nurturing children, being present with the poor, and caring for the dying and mentally disabled. These practices may be mundane, but they are far from trivial, for in order to sustain such acts of care we must develop virtues that are at the heart of the City of God, such as love, patience, and gentleness.

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[140] One of the most infamous demonstrations of such religious incongruence is Darley and Batson's famous study of Princeton seminarians, which found that those preparing to speak on the parable of the Good Samaritan were no more likely to help a person in distress than those going to give a talk on a less ethically freighted topic. John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, " 'From Jerusalem to Jericho': A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27, no. 1 (1973): 100-108.

[141] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 67.

Yet the social dimensions of evil also suggest that such acts of personal care alone will often be inadequate to free us from the hold of evil upon our bodies and souls. In this respect, Albrecht is right when she argues that entering struggles to transform society is likely to be crucial in reforming the church and its individual members.[142] Participating in such struggles can help us to recognize the ways in which social forces oppress our brothers and sisters and alienate us from one another. And they help to make it clear that the City of God to which Christians witness calls for the transformation of socio-political forms that deal death and despair to our sisters and brothers. To put the point more strongly, such practices are themselves integral to forming people that fully manifest the virtues of the City of God.

Without such practices that directly engage structural, political realities beyond the church, the strong emphasis that Hauerwas increasingly places upon worship threatens to validate Jeffrey Stout's thinly veiled criticism that Hauerwas recommends an imprecise form of sacrifice that allows at least certain members of his audience "to indulge … in fantasies of martyrdom without experiencing actual poverty or persecution at all." Stout continues:

> Many of Hauerwas's readers probably liked being told that they should care more about being the church than about doing justice to the underclass. At some level they knew perfectly well how much it would cost them to do justice… It was tempting to infer, half-consciously, that following Jesus involves little more than hating the liberal secularists who supposedly run the country, pitying poor people from a distance, and donating a portion of one's income to the church.[143]

As Stout tacitly acknowledges by placing this criticism in the mouth of "a cynic," this is a caricature of Hauerwas's project. Still, an important step in inoculating the church against the kind of insular, self-centered, and self-consoling existence that Stout portrays and that certain elements of Hauerwas's thought tend towards is to emphasize the necessity of

[142] Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities*, 137.

[143] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 158-9. As Stout recognizes, however, at least something of the kind of sacrifice that Hauerwas calls for has become clearer after September 11, 2001, when pacifism has become a more controversial matter.

practices of soulcraft in which Christians engage with polities beyond the church. This brings us to the topic of this chapter's final section, to which we will turn momentarily.

Before moving on, however, it is important to note that none of this supplants the central and ineliminable significance of corporate worship in the Christian life. Nor does it suggest that all acts of worship are somehow incomplete without making an immediate connection to extra-liturgical acts of care or justice. Rather, it means that the vast majority of Christian worshippers will need to be shown how worship should rightly recast and reconstitute our lives outside the sanctuary. To give a violent metaphor a pacific turn, we might say that worship will often function as something of a Trojan Horse. Most worshippers will welcome it unthinkingly, convinced that the very acts of worship—confessing our sins, praying, listening for the word of God, reciting the creeds—are anything but subversive. Such acts may indeed transform the lives of some. For the majority, however, the church must be able to spring forth at key points in order to offer extra-liturgical practices that make it clear that worship is a truly revolutionary act that extends beyond the sanctuary and seeks to refigure not simply what we do on Sunday mornings but the whole of our lives.

Christians, then, cannot assume religious congruence but must seek to cultivate it. Chaves expresses this in highly sociological language when he observes, "Internalized religious schemas that produce automatic responses in other settings are unlikely to form without repeated experiences in religious settings that are reproduced more or less exactly in other settings."[144] Theologically, we might say that the church must offer appropriate practices of soulcraft that, with the assistance of grace, help Christians to embody the

[144] Chaves, "Rain Dances in the Dry Season," 8.

meaning of our worship in the other parts of our lives and in doing so to extend our worship until ultimately there are no "other" parts.

V. STATECRAFT AND THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

One of the chief arguments of the last section was that the very shape of Christian soulcraft calls us beyond the confines of the church and into engagement with other polities. Learning to work with and on behalf of those outside the church is vital to forming souls possessed of the Christoform virtues definitive of the City of God, which evangelistically reaches out in care and service to all of creation. Moreover, so long as systemic forces of evil break the bodies and bruise the souls of our brothers and sisters, the calling to follow Christ and incarnate the communion he exemplifies graciously draws us into engagement with other polities in the quest for social transformation.

Surely, of course, the demographically inclusive state is not the only extra-ecclesial polity with which Christians can and will engage, and Hauerwas does well to remind us of how unfortunate it is that most Christians think about remediating social evils singularly as a matter of harnessing state power.[145] Nonetheless, engagement with the state is one crucial way in which Christians ought to confront such evils, for as I suggested in Chapter 2 and as Niebuhr has also shown, the state is a polity that, on the one hand, often aids, abets, and actively perpetrates social forms of evil even as, on the other hand, it has the capacity to restrain such evils and direct society towards greater approximations of justice. To put the matter somewhat more directly, even as Christians ought to recognize that the state is not solely sufficient to effect social change, we cannot ignore the real positive and negative

[145] Stanley Hauerwas, "Will the Real Sectarian Please Stand Up?," *Theology Today* 44, no. 1 (1987): 90.

effects that it has upon the lives of Christians and non-Christians alike.[146] Appreciating this, those committed to witnessing to the reality of the City of God ought forthrightly to articulate the importance of engaging with the organs of statecraft.

As we proceed in our assessment of the resources that Hauerwas offers for a constructive Christian political ethic, acknowledging the importance of statecraft may tempt us to approach the issue as many others have, that is, by seeking to ascertain whether or not Hauerwas is a "sectarian." Indeed, one of the most prominent and often repeated accusations against Hauerwas's project is that it represents a form of sectarianism that would discourage or prevent Christians from truly engaging in the moral, economic, and political life of the extra-ecclesial world. James Gustafson's 1985 lecture to the Catholic Theological Society, entitled "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, The Church and the University," has become something of the *locus classicus* of this indictment. In his lecture, Gustafson clearly takes issue with the theological and philosophical presuppositions that undergird Hauerwas's work, as well as the work of others, including Gustafson's former colleagues (and Hauerwas's mentors) George Lindbeck and Paul Holmer. Nevertheless, Gustafson's most pressing worry appears to be political as, sounding a Niebuhrian chord, he repeatedly alleges that such a way of doing theology is politically reckless since it is "not based on a concern to be responsible participants in the ambiguities of public life" and would ultimately isolate Christians from participating in such "ambiguous choices."[147]

Although the question of whether Hauerwas is a sectarian at one time sustained something of a small cottage industry,[148] I fear that manner of approach is unhelpful,

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[146] Melissa Snarr makes a very similar argument. See Snarr, *Social Selves and Political Reforms*, 64.

[147] Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," 88, 91.

[148] See, for instance, Wilson D. Miscamble, "Sectarian Passivism?," *Theology Today* 44, no. 1 (1987): 69-77. Michael J. Quirk, "Beyond Sectarianism," *Theology Today* 44, no. 1 (1987): 78-87. Ronald Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 114ff. Max Stackhouse, "Liberalism Dispatched Vs. Liberalism Engaged," *Christian Century* 112, no. 29 (1995): 962-67.

particularly for our present purposes. One reason for this is that the very allegation of sectarianism tends itself to be rooted in the assumption that politics is ultimately a matter of statecraft that fundamentally requires the use of violence.[149] Critics who make such allegations thus routinely overlook the way in which Hauerwas is attempting to redefine politics. More importantly, however, this current project operates under the belief that it is not the state but the City of God that defines politics in its truest sense. Hence, for us the crucial question is not whether Hauerwas conforms to some pre-defined theological or sociological type but whether his thought helps or hinders Christians in understanding how they might more faithfully approximate the life of the City of God within this world where sin and evil oppress. Seeking to further that project, this section will examine how Hauerwas envisions the church serving the world through its relationship with the polity represented by the state. Even while this is the primary task, pursuing it will also shed light upon why the charges of sectarianism are so persistent as it illuminates how some of Hauerwas's common tropes and the emaciated nature of his account of what the church positively contributes to the political life of the wider society give comfort to such allegations.

As this chapter has suggested explicitly, as well as implicitly by its arrangement and proportioning, engaging the state is not one of Hauerwas's principal political concerns. As Hauerwas reminds us, "the first task of the church is not to supply theories of governmental legitimacy or even to suggest strategies for social betterment. The first task of the church is to exhibit in our common life the kind of community possible when trust, and not fear, rules

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Nigel Biggar, "Is Stanley Hauerwas a Sectarian?" in *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, eds. Nation and Wells. Terrence P. Reynolds, "A Conversation Worth Having: Hauerwas and Gustafson on Substance in Theological Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2000): 395-421. For one of Hauerwas's notable responses to the charge of sectarianism, see Hauerwas, "Will the Real Sectarian Please Stand Up?," 87-94. He offers another in Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 1-21.

[149] See Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 12ff.

our lives."[150] Or, to put roughly the same point more succinctly, "The first task of the church is to be the church."[151] With such reminders, Hauerwas seeks to correct the prevalent assumption that achieving a particular arrangement of the state is the essence of Christian political ethics. He believes that this assumption, which forms the heart of the Constantinian project, unwarrantedly diverts our attention from the political reality that is the church.

Contrary to what his harshest critics imagine, Hauerwas insists that his concentration upon the ecclesial *polis* does not prohibit Christians from participating in the political life of the state. Instead, he repeatedly acknowledges that the church itself and individual Christians will engage the mechanisms of statecraft in various ways. In one of his strongest such statements—which, perhaps not coincidentally, also comes from one of his earliest works—Hauerwas asserts that Christians "must … in the interest of charity ask the state to live up to its own standards of justice—to feed the poor, clothe the naked, aid the weak."[152] Even in later works when the intensity of his insistence flags, he still maintains that his vision would not keep Christians from participating even in high-level government positions. Reflecting on what it means that Methodists send more people to the United States Congress every year than any other Protestant denomination, Hauerwas and Willimon write, "We do not want to call Methodists out of Congress; we just want them to be there as Methodists."[153] To be sure, Hauerwas worries about the danger of occupying such positions, suggesting that doing so, like wearing Tolkien's ring of power, allows "the systemic forces of corruption [to] dig deep

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[150] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 85.

[151] This and similar formulations recur frequently in Hauerwas's writings. See Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99. Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 236. Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 32.

[152] Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 141.

[153] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 60. Making much the same point, Hauerwas elsewhere writes that calling into question those who defend liberal democratic orders in the name of being "responsible" "does not mean I am calling for Christians to withdraw from social engagements. I just want them to be engaged as Christians." Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 18.

into the soul."[154] Even as he warns them about the dangers of occupying such positions, Hauerwas suggests that Christians are not required to isolate themselves from the politics of statecraft. When engaging in such politics, however, they cannot exempt themselves from thinking and acting as Christians. All of this is to say, as Hauerwas puts it in responding to Gustafson's "The Sectarian Temptation," that Christians will render service to the states in which they find themselves, but the shape of Christian convictions requires that this will be "selective service."[155]

Despite the passion and repetition of these assertions, Hauerwas has in fact done little to elaborate exactly the sort of positive contributions that he imagines Christians might make through such selective service, instead devoting far more energy to developing a negative account focused on the ways in which the church serves to oppose the state. It is true, as Hauerwas stresses in defending himself against Gustafson, that he has written at length about the medical and legal professions, Christian-Jewish relations, and nuclear war[156]; furthermore, in more recent works he has discussed the kind of grassroots, extra-ecclesial politics advocated by radical democrats.[157] And of course, all of these impinge upon matters of statecraft in varying degrees. Yet even in relation to these issues, Hauerwas characteristically resists articulating what a distinctively Christian approach would mean for governmental policy. If they were properly schooled by the soulcraft of the church, what kinds of laws would or should everyday Christians promote in regards to euthanasia, freedom of religion, or arms control, and what means should they use to pursue them? Similarly, what policies should those few that are Congresspersons seek to enact? Hauerwas says precious little on such matters.

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[154] Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 7.
[155] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 15.
[156] Ibid., 7.
[157] See Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*.

This reticence at least in part reflects the central emphasis in Hauerwas's work upon particularity and practical reason, as well as his belief that Christian ethics is about the unification of being and doing. These three themes come together illustratively in Thomas Merton's response when asked what Christians should do, a response Hauerwas approvingly cites: "Before you do a damned thing, just *be* what you say you are, a Christian; then no one will have to tell you what to do. You'll know."[158] Hauerwas does not tell Christians what to do in our engagements with the state because he apparently presumes that those who are what they profess to be—those who through the disciplines of the church have seamlessly united their being and doing—will necessarily possess the virtues of practical reason to understand what they should do when confronted by particular situations. Moreover, reticence is demanded because Hauerwas believes that it is only in such particular situations that one can make judgment of this sort. The social ethic of the church is not one that operates in the abstract. "For there is no universal social strategy of the church that applies equally to diverse circumstances. Indeed different circumstances and different social contexts bring different needs and strategies."[159]

Once again, however, the fallacy of religious congruence haunts Hauerwas. At bottom, he is calling for Christians to develop not disembodied theories about the state but instead "the kind of discriminating judgments about this or that state or society which Christians must negotiate with the skill acquired through their worship of God."[160] As detailed above, however, I remain unconvinced that the virtues cultivated in worship or even

[158] Quoted in ibid., 100-101.

[159] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 111. Sam Wells, I think, captures the arc of Hauerwas's thought on these matters quite well: "Because the Church claims no special insight into the general form of the good society, its witness will always be expressed in specific criticisms and suggestions, addressing particular injustices at a given time and place." I am simply calling for Hauerwas to display more clearly what those suggestions mean not only for the church but for the policies of a demographically inclusive polity. Moreover, as I argue later on, I worry about what not doing so ultimately implies about the relationship between the church and the state. Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 103.

[160] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 163.

in the larger political life of the church will transfer undistorted into the realm of statecraft without further display of how they rightly function in this novel context. Particularly since Hauerwas worries about the corrupting nature of state power, such display would seem vital since it is one way in which Christians might seek to limit systemic evils and individual perversion from warping our judgment on such matters.

Beyond this, I see no philosophical reason why Hauerwas could not provide some such display. Even if one agrees that the church's social ethic does not operate in the abstract, there is no reason one could not attempt to articulate what that social ethic means in concrete, specific cases of public policy either past or present. For instance, what forms of engagement would it have dictated for persons living in Montgomery, Alabama, during the 1955 bus boycott, and what sort of society should those acts have aimed to create? Those are not abstract questions. And providing such elaboration would serve an important pedagogical function. According to Hauerwas, it is certainly right "to say that the church must pursue societal justice … but it is not very informative. For justice needs to be displayed and imaginatively construed by a people who have been formed to know that genuine justice derives from our receiving what is not due to us."[161] To display what justice means for such concrete interactions with the state could be a vital way of helping to form the imagination of such a people to see the profound and extensive meaning of their worship and convictions.

What Hauerwas routinely offers, however, are statements that appear more akin to the claim that he condemns, vague but pregnant statements such as "the church must pursue societal justice." Such statements raise at least as many questions as they answer. Claiming that Christians might harness the resources of the state to alleviate people's needs or that the

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[161] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 113-14.

church should not "cease to work toward a more just society" are themselves quite uninformative apart from further exposition.[162] Does justice have any specifiable content in concrete instances that might help us to grasp how it functions? How can Christians faithfully pursue justice in the realm of statecraft? What might a more just state or society look like? Hauerwas typically brushes aside such questions as Constantinian and thus offers little to guide the positive contributions that Christians might make in and through the state.[163]

Rather than providing guidance for such positive contributions, Hauerwas instead most frequently depicts the church's service to statecraft in largely negative terms. Accordingly, the church is concerned less with helping to shape state policy but instead serves most prominently as an alternative to and a check upon the state's hubris. Fundamental to the church's identity for Hauerwas is that it is "a community capable of being a critic to every human pretension," and in this capacity it serves society and even the state itself by exposing the state's deceptions and resisting its insatiable appetites.[164] Founded in part upon the lie that not God but human beings are lords of the world,[165] the state constantly seeks to expand its lordship, disciplining human bodies and shaping souls in subtle but powerful ways that inure us to such lies. Hence, Hauerwas believes that given the opportunity every state—even purportedly limited, democratic ones—"will be anything but limited," and will instead push towards increasingly totalitarian control of our lives.[166]

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162 For the first claim, see for instance Hauerwas, "Will the Real Sectarian Please Stand Up?," 90. For a similar claim, see Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 141. The second claim comes from Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 232.

163 As this paragraph, I trust, makes clear, I can agree with Sam Wells's observation that "Hauerwas has no hesitation in asserting the positive role of Christians within the public realm." My worry, however, is that while Hauerwas asserts it he leaves that role woefully underspecified. Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, 102.

164 Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xviii, 142.

165 See, for instance, ibid., 142.

166 Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 126. See also Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 26.

Even though it is not first of all a strategy to insure the existence of a limited state,[167] Hauerwas believes that, given the state's tendency towards a totalitarianism, the church nevertheless "has a stake in a limited state."[168] It is not theories of statecraft that keep states limited, however. Instead, he believes that the only hope of doing so lies in the existence of a people disciplined by the practices of the Christian faith that "create the capacity to resist the disciplines of the body associated with the modern nation-state."[169] Only a community of such political integrity is capable of defying the state's overweening claims. In other words, "No state, particularly the democratic state, is kept limited by constitutions, but rather states are limited by a people with the imagination and courage to challenge the inveterate temptation of the state to ask us to compromise our loyalty to God."[170] A key aspect of the church's service, then, is to be "a body of people separated from the nation that is willing to say 'No' to the state's claims on their loyalties."[171] As such a people, the church creates the possibility of true peace, which can never be founded upon the state's mendacity but only upon the truth that God is the Lord of all.

One ought not disparage the kind of defiant service that Hauerwas imagines the church providing; bodies of people capable of resisting the state provide a vital form of service in no small part because they function as a limited check upon social forms of evil. And, indeed, the church should be just such a body. But ultimately this service of defiance adds very little to Hauerwas's repeatedly intoned axiom that the first task of the church is to be the church. Effectively, it becomes not an account of extra-ecclesial politics at all but

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[167] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 130.
[168] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 113.
[169] Ibid. Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 26; cf. 16.
[170] Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 71.
[171] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 123.

merely another way of talking about the need for discipline and circumspection in the church's internal political life.

This is further suggested by the way in which Hauerwas utilizes the language of "witness," which is his favored metaphor for characterizing the church's relationship to the world writ large and to the state in particular.[172] Certainly, there is nothing inherently problematic about the metaphor of witness itself, for it can be used in a way that is fundamentally outgoing and highly interactive. I trust that when the metaphor of witness has been used in this project that it has been in this sense. And such a usage is found repeatedly in the New Testament, which often uses "witness" to describe the active embodiment and proclamation of the good news of Jesus to those beyond the community of faith. In Luke 24:47, to take a key example, the resurrected Jesus appoints the disciples to be witnesses who carry forth the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations.[173]

When Hauerwas employs the metaphor of witness, however, its connotation routinely appears more visual, distantiated, and oriented not outward towards the world but inward towards the community itself. As Hauerwas puts it, "witness derives from no other source than that which invites us to 'look what manner of life has been made possible among us by the power of the cross and the resurrection of Christ.' "[174] Even as he describes this witness as involving confrontation, however, Hauerwas is clearly suggesting that the true confrontation happens *within* the church as it negotiates its own differences rather than

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[172] Admittedly, Hauerwas also utilizes other metaphors, including the metaphor of engagement, which generally suggests a deeper level of interaction and interest. See, for instance, Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 11ff. Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 62. He also uses this metaphor in the subtitle of *Dispatches from the Front*.

[173] Highly interactive usages of the metaphor of witness that employ the Greek *martur* are extremely prevalent in the book of Acts, such as in Acts 1:7, 13:30, 22:14, 23:11 26:16-22. One also finds them in John 1:6 and Revelation 1:2. Despite the fact that it is commonly translated as "testimony" in English, this metaphor is also present in the Greek *marturion*, which occurs 19 times in the New Testament, including in Matthew 10:17-18, where Jesus tells the disciples that they "will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a witness [*marturion*] to them and to the Gentiles" (author's translation).

[174] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 105.

between the church and the nations to which it bears the gospel. Nathan Kerr is thus generally right when he notes that Hauerwas's use of the language of witness focuses "almost solely upon the practices and virtues that constitute the church as a 'habitable world' and sustain it as a community with its own 'alternative history.' "[175] Those beyond the church appear as mere spectators whom Hauerwas imagines will be moved (or not) when they see the quality of the life the church embodies. The church, then, is where the action is; others are less interlocutors than onlookers.

There are numerous difficulties with such a characterization of the relationship between the church and the world. Not the least of these is that it seems highly dubious that anyone in a world such as Hauerwas construes it—one that has given up concern for truth in favor of a pusillanimous tolerance—would care at all about such a church. In fact, despite Hauerwas's diatribes against Christendom and his claim that we must develop ways of thinking appropriate to our existence in a time after Christendom, in an odd way nothing reflects the ethos of Christendom more than the apparent assumption that those beyond the church would have some compelling desire to attend to what happens in a church that is almost wholly concerned with embodying its life together. Consequently, as Luke Bretherton worries, significant elements of Hauerwas's thought threaten effectively to reduce the church's political witness to little more than "subcultural resistance."[176]

Concentrating so preeminently upon the political integrity of the church, Hauerwas ultimately renders a thoroughly attenuated account of how the church and its members might engage in extra-ecclesial politics. Michael Baxter, one of Hauerwas's former students

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[175] Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic*, 109.

[176] Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 191. Mathewes makes a similar charge when he argues that Hauerwas's project ultimately amounts to a form of identity politics. Mathewes, "Appreciating Hauerwas: One Hand Clapping," 354ff.

and co-authors, argues that because of this Hauerwas ultimately leaves us without an account of "plain politics," that is, the kind of politics that "deals with the whys and hows of mundane things."[177] Not all politics, Baxter rightly points out, is intra-ecclesial. Rather, Christians should and routinely do engage in forms of "plain politics" that involve non-Christians and are conducted in non-theological language. Even still, such politics "involve[s] justice, fairness, equity, entitlement," and concerns crucial goods.[178] And yet Hauerwas offers scant resources for conceiving how Christians should reason practically in such venues. This is not to suggest that Baxter would agree with my suggestion that one of the key facets of plain politics that Hauerwas has omitted is an account of how Christians might engage with the mechanisms of statecraft. After all, he has chided Hauerwas for voting, saying, "Don't vote—it only encourages them."[179] Yet I believe Baxter acutely and accurately identifies the deficiencies that plague Hauerwas's treatment of extra-ecclesial politics.

This failure to develop an account of how the church positively engages in extra-ecclesial politics threatens to give a worrisome spin to Hauerwas's project and its organizing motto that the first task of the church is to be the church. One of the questions that Hauerwas leaves perpetually unanswered is exactly the sort of priority intended by the ordinal "first." It is obvious that the priority is axiological as the church teaches Christians what is of value and helps us to develop the skills and virtues necessary to identify and pursue those goods. Hence, the church is the "primary polity through which we gain the experience to negotiate and make positive contributions to whatever society in which we

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[177] Michael Baxter, "The Church as Polis? Second Thoughts on Theological Politics" in *Unsettling Arguments: A Festschrift on the Occasion of Stanley Hauerwas's 70th Birthday*, eds. Charles Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson, and Charles Collier (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2010), 144.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 138.

may find ourselves."[180] What we learn to value through the soul-crafting disciplines of the church, then, decisively shapes the forms of service that Christians render to the state and to society at large.

More troubling are hints that, at least in relation to statecraft, this priority could and perhaps ought to be interpreted lexically to suggest that the church must somehow fulfill the task of embodying its identity with complete faithfulness before it can engage in state politics. Shortly before asserting that the church is the primary polity through which we gain the experience to make positive contributions to society, Hauerwas tells us that "[t]he first social task of the church is to provide the space and time necessary for developing the skills of interpretation and discrimination sufficient to help us recognize the possibilities and limits of our society. In developing such skills, the church and Christians must be uninvolved in the politics of our society and involved in the polity of the church."[181] One might doubt whether it is truly possible for Christians to be uninvolved in this way. Even if we grant that it is, however, a more foundational difficulty arises from the fact that while Hauerwas vaguely indicates that such an arrangement is temporary, he never makes it clear when this period of uninvolvement ought rightly to end. And since Hauerwas envisions the church's contribution to the politics of the larger society in predominantly negative terms that locate the church's service to extra-ecclesial politics in the embodiment of its own intra-ecclesial polity, it can appear as if engaging in state politics has little, if any, value of its own. Thus, the very trajectory of Hauerwas's career—which has spanned nearly four decades but continually returned to concentrating upon the church's first political task rather than, as Eric Gregory notes, pushing on to develop "an account of what the second, or third, social ethical task

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[180] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 74.
[181] Ibid.

might be or look like"—itself gives comfort to the suggestion that the church's intra-ecclesial life possesses a sort of lexical priority to engaging in matters of statecraft.[182]

Defining the relative priority of soulcraft and statecraft thus requires a more explicit and nuanced treatment than Hauerwas supplies, and one of the tasks of the next chapter will be to provide just such a treatment. Even still, we should note that it is on this very matter of priority that we find one of the most outstanding strengths of what Hauerwas does offer, namely, his energetic, prophetic insistence that Christians ought not to engage in the politics of the state in ways that are incommensurate with the soulcraft appropriate to the City of God, a polity whose peace derives not only from the external ordering of social relations but from the grace-inspired, internal ordering of its citizens, who are Christoformly directed in love towards God and one another. Stressing the axiological priority of soulcraft, which itself is oriented towards the emulation of Christ, Hauerwas will not allow us to forget that Christian service in the realm of statecraft must inherently be "selective service" that can be somehow narrated in accord with the nature of the City of God that we find exemplified in Christ.

At the same time, the outgoing, evangelistic nature of the City of God ineluctably calls Christians forth to engage with the state in an attempt both to cultivate the goods of communion that the state can foster, and perhaps even more crucially, to limit the evils that it often legitimates and perpetrates. To claim, as Hauerwas does, that Christians are not "prohibited from trying to make nations in which they find themselves more just" so long as

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[182] Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 132. Although Gregory makes this claim particularly about *The Peaceable Kingdom*, I believe it is true of Hauerwas's authorship in general, and I have extended it accordingly. Nathan Kerr registers a similar worry when he argues that Hauerwas "has effectively rendered the church itself as the very *object* of mission, such that it makes the 'truth' of the world itself (as with the 'truth' of Jesus) 'community dependent.' " Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic*, 121.

they do not use violence is to put the matter too weakly.[183] So long as our brothers and sisters whom God has created to share the communion of the City of God find themselves sorely oppressed and exploited by conditions for which the mechanisms of statecraft are responsible or through which those conditions could be remedied, not only should nothing prohibit us from engaging the state but *nothing should stop us*. While the church can and should provide a limited haven that helps to blunt the impact of those social forces of evil, the politics of the church and those of local communities are simply not sufficiently extensive to confront the systemic evils that wreak havoc upon human relations, a conclusion with which Albrecht would surely agree.[184] Accordingly, the next chapter will also consider the forms that Christian engagement with state politics might faithfully take, arguing that they should especially focus upon defending and empowering the poor and oppressed.

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[183] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 110.

[184] Luke Bretherton makes a similar criticism of Hauerwas in Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 140.

PART III

CONSTRUCTING

CHAPTER 5

SOULCRAFT, STATECRAFT, AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

> Politics is always the most direct path to dominance, and political power is probably the most important, and certainly the most dangerous, good in human history.
>
> -Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*

> No soul of man, while young or accountable to no control, will ever be able to bear the burden of supreme social authority without taking the taint of the worst spiritual disease.
>
> -Plato, *The Laws*

INTRODUCTION

Having in Part II assessed the resources provided by two influential conceptions of politics, this chapter seeks to utilize the insights gleaned there in order to begin constructing an ethic appropriate to guide Christian political life in this world. The preceding assessment has revealed, on the one hand, that an adequate Christian ethic ought to incorporate an appreciation of the politics of statecraft. The call for Christians to care for our neighbors and the injunction—extrapolated from Jeremiah's word to the exiled Israelites—to seek the welfare of the cities where God has sent us demands that we find some way of talking about the political lives that we share with non-Christians living in the same geographical area. However numerous their injustices and infelicities, states at present represent a vital site of such demographically inclusive politics. Moreover, states create political frameworks not

only that the church must navigate but that also exercise peculiar influence on the lives of the most vulnerable. In doing so, states prove capable of restraining certain evils and nurturing limited goods. All too easily, these true achievements can be overdrawn to present the state as the final embodiment or guarantor of ultimate values. Yet Niebuhr's theoretical insights—if not always his actual political judgments—helped to show that keeping the state under the constant scrutiny of a principle that enables both indiscriminate criticism and relative distinctions can subvert such tendencies towards idolatry and nonetheless allow Christians to contribute positively to the politics of statecraft.

While exploring these claims in greater detail, we must also attempt to situate them in relation to the ascertained need for Christian political ethics to attend to the crucial role of a politics of soulcraft. Such a conception of politics proves most adept at capturing the interconnections between the individual and the social dimensions of the City of God, whose social peace and justice, as we saw in the first chapter, spring from the peace and justice that characterize its members' souls. If defined in light of the City of God, then, politics is not simply about quelling conflict or even achieving a just distribution of goods, worthy goals though these are. Instead, politics in its fullest sense is about helping us to become more holy, growing together individually and corporately into the image of Jesus Christ. When integrally connected to the church, such a conception reminds us that, even as the City of God desires to embrace all of creation, this distinctive ecclesial people has responded to God's call to herald the coming of that city both in its proclamation and in its way of life as it cultivates individual character and seeks to live together in justice and peace.

A chief difficulty that we must here confront is that of the relationship between these two contrasting conceptions of politics. If both conceptions are necessary in some degree, as our examination of Niebuhr's and Hauerwas's respective political ethics has

shown, how are they to relate to one another? This question presses itself upon us principally because these two conceptions construe politics and the Christian political vocation in such divergent ways. While previous chapters have mentioned them, it is helpful at this point to isolate the most significant of these tensions. First, politics-as-statecraft and politics-as-soulcraft define politics in reference to different polities, with the former identifying the political with matters that concern the control of the state while the latter finds the true referent of politics in the life and practices of the church. Second, stemming from this divergence, they stand in tension on the scope of politics. To construe politics as a matter of statecraft generally involves understanding it as a demographically inclusive enterprise that concerns all people within a locationally bounded community. In contrast, the ecclesiocentric understanding of politics-as-soulcraft advocated by Hauerwas suggests that politics refers to a demographically exclusive community determined not by location but by human beings' response to a divine vocation. Third, these two conceptions diverge over the ends of politics. In the prototypically modern form represented by Niebuhr, statecraft generally seeks to bracket ultimate concerns so that politics can focus upon proximate goods, a stark contrast to the view that politics is a matter of soulcraft that aims to make human beings holy. Finally, although we will not be able to address the matter in this chapter we ought to note that there is often dissent over the means proper to politics. This is particularly dramatized in the disagreement between Niebuhr and Hauerwas, with Niebuhr maintaining that coercion and even violence are necessary aspects of politics whereas Hauerwas contends not only that the church is called to be non-coercive but that politics can only begin with a disavowal of violence.

These tensions between the politics of statecraft and the politics of a morally formative church are by no means novel. Throughout Christian history, a number of ways of

resolving them have been proposed and practiced. This chapter will enter into conversation with a number of these arrangements. Yet its central concern will not be to offer a descriptive historical survey and even less to examine the laws that currently structure the relationship between various states and the church. Instead, it aspires to formulate a prescriptive ethical account of the proper relationship between soulcraft and statecraft.

Although it aims for broader applicability, this account is admittedly a historically and culturally located one that primarily addresses the particular situation confronted by Christians in contemporary pluralistic, Western polities. Hence, Section I begins with a treatment of the modern state, its unique forms of power, and its current trajectory, which are crucial features of such political landscapes. In this way it situates the modern state, identifying it not simply as the present manifestation of some trans-historical principle of political rule but as a unique historical phenomenon.

From there, Section II offers a highly formal characterization of what I believe to be the proper terms of the relationship between soulcraft and statecraft. While this elaborates what I regard to be the most fitting—and even the most faithful—account, it is admittedly *an* account of the relationship between soulcraft and statecraft. Navigating this particular terrain requires care to avoid significant dangers, and yet I believe that there is more than one way to do so faithfully. Hence, I do not claim that this is the only fitting or faithful account, something further disallowed by the admission that such an ethic is formulated in view of the unique circumstances of modern Western polities. Section III then seeks further to unfold and substantiate my argument by considering how Christians ought to understand themselves as citizens.

To anticipate the argument of Sections II and III, I will there contend that the church's regime of soulcraft ought to possess a multifaceted priority to matters of statecraft,

even as the church recognizes that both it and the state remain forever under the judgment of the City of God. Ascribing such priority to the church, I obviously and undeniably accord it a place of elevated significance vis-à-vis the state. In order to be clear about exactly what this significance entails, however, these sections must be read especially in light of Chapters 2 and 4, both of which forthrightly confess the limitations and sins of the church. The church is by no means sinless, and I make no pretensions to the contrary. Furthermore, certain communities that we colloquially call "churches" can become so warped and oriented away from Christ that they are no longer deserving of the name. And even those that have not forsaken their rightful claim to be part of the church properly so called often need to be renewed and reoriented by both internal and external criticism.

Despite its besetting sinfulness, however, at its heart the church comprises a set of practices, including worship, service to neighbor, and a commitment to dialogue, that concretize Christians' devotion to emulating Jesus Christ in order that they might grow in the virtues that define the City of God. It is for this reason that I ascribe priority to the politics of the church while also acknowledging that the church remains a community *in via*, a point that comes embedded in my consistent use of the language not of possession but progress. Thus, the church does not have Christ but seeks to *follow* Christ; it is not the Body of Christ but endeavors to *grow* in order to incarnate that body in the world; and it is not the City of God but dedicates itself to *approximating* that city's form of life.

As will become clearer below, neither the priority that I assign to the church nor the contrast that I draw between politics-as-soulcraft and politics-as-statecraft entails that the church is the only political association that will or ought to form human souls. To the contrary, not only do states (including those that would ostensibly foreswear the task) in fact form souls in ways both varied and powerful, but I maintain that they have a legitimate

interest in doing so and acknowledge that the state's influence upon human character can be salubrious. What the priority of the church's politics of soulcraft conveys, then, is not that the church will be the singular locus of soulcraft but that Christians ought to judge such extra-ecclesial regimes of formation through the lens of the message of salvation that the church has been entrusted to proclaim and in which it seeks to help its members grow. Conversely, neither does the distinction between soulcraft and statecraft cede to the state an exclusive and unbridled power to structure the politics of society writ large. Far to the contrary, as the final section of the previous chapter has already argued, I will contend that the church can and should vigorously engage the mechanisms of statecraft in order to create a demographically inclusive polity characterized by greater justice. In order to grasp this argument more fully, however, we must first analyze the dynamics of the modern state.

I. The Modern State as a Historical Creation

When thinkers refer to "the state," they generally do so in one of two ways. In its first sense, the term is used in a trans-historical manner to refer to the various structures by which societies throughout history have been organized politically. So construed, the Greek *polis* is a kind of state (typically, a "city-state") that differs, for instance, from the modern nation-state. And yet the concept of "the state" constitutes a thread running through history that connects these and other forms of political organization. Used in this way, the state appears as if it has existed virtually since time immemorial and is "a necessary and unavoidable aspect of social life ever since people moved out of … primitive chaos."[1] To the extent that he invokes the category of "the state," Niebuhr most often does so in this sense. Accordingly, while he recognizes that there is a "progression from the primitive community

[1] Peter Bratsis, *Everyday Life and the State* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 26.

to city-state, empire, nation, and modern super-state," Niebuhr nonetheless can and does refer to pre-modern polities as being ruled by a "dominant state."[2] With Niebuhr serving as our guide in matters of statecraft, to this point we have largely employed the term in this manner.

In offering a constructive account of the relationship of soulcraft and statecraft, however, we must take account of a second way of speaking about "the state," which insists that it should not be understood as a trans-historical category but instead as a peculiarly modern phenomenon. From this more historically situated perspective, "the state" is something that "simply did not exist in the medieval world" and even less in the ancient world, for it instead marks "a relatively new invention, originating in Europe between 1450 and 1650."[3] Such restrictive usage finds justification in the fact that something distinctive indeed arose in this period as European princes began to establish permanent bureaucratic infrastructures that were initially intended to provide the financial and logistical support necessary to equip, train, and command the more sophisticated armies that became increasingly necessary for protection. While it is debatable whether they comprise "the essential characteristic of the modern state,"[4] these durable administrative structures nonetheless produced a novel arrangement in which there existed for the first time a "public

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[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires: A Study of the Recurring Patterns and Problems of the Political Order in Relation to the Unique Problems of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 1; 45, see also 116.

[3] Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 6.

[4] Phillip Bobbitt attributes this position to Samuel Finer in Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 81. Most notably, however, in Max Weber's classic definition, which we will consider below, the monopolization of violence appears as the essential characteristic of the modern state.

power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme political authority within a certain defined territory."[5]

The novelty of this arrangement manifested itself on a linguistic level in the evolution of a new political vocabulary. Although the Latin word *status* made its first appearance in political contexts during the thirteenth century, as Quentin Skinner observes, over the next two centuries it was nearly always used to refer to "either the state or condition in which the ruler himself finds himself (the *status principis*); or else the general 'state of the nation' or condition of the realm as a whole (the *status regni*)."[6] Near the end of the fifteenth century, however, the term begins to refer to an independent political reality, such as when Machiavelli advises the prince to secure his power by calling on "the majesty of the state."[7] Hence, both institutionally and conceptually, the modern state is *sui generis* as it takes on what Phillip Bobbitt calls "legal personality." In the process it becomes both practically and conceptually "an entity quite detachable from the society that it governs as well as the leaders who exercise power" and an entity to which "the legal and material attributes of a human being were ascribed."[8]

Some strenuously insist on disqualifying one or the other of these ways of construing "the state"; yet, in my view, either is legitimate provided that one is clear about the sense of its use. It therefore behooves us here to clarify our meaning. While there will be much that is more widely applicable, the goal of this chapter is to begin formulating a constructive ethic suited to guide Christian political engagement not just in any time whatsoever but in our contemporary age, in which some version of the modern state is the predominant organizing

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[5] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2. The Age of Reformation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 353.

[6] Ibid.

[7] The translation here is from ibid., 354. This passage, however, occurs in Chapter XIX of *The Prince*. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 57.

[8] Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 81.

force in most corners of the world. Hence, whereas previous chapters may have referred to "the state" in the first, trans-historical sense, in this chapter I will use it principally in the second sense to refer to the modern state more specifically.

It is also important to note that the way in which I have construed the modern state, emphasizing the centrality and detachability of its administrative infrastructure presupposes a further distinction in its meaning. The eminent sociologist Anthony Giddens points out that "the state" in one sense can be used to indicate "the overall social system subject [to] a government or power," including its people and customs.[9] When speaking of such matters, however, I will follow Giddens by doing so under the rubric of either "society" or "culture." Instead, I will use "the state" in a different, more narrow sense to refer to the various mechanisms of government or power that order a given society. These mechanisms, which frequently interlock and overlap, need not be national in extent but can have local jurisdiction. In the United States, for instance, it is not just the federal government but also state and local governments that are state apparatuses, not just the Federal Bureau of Investigation but also city police departments, and not just the Supreme Court but also local courts.

Focusing upon its discrete institutional existence, this understanding of the state explains why I favor the metaphor of "engagement" to describe Christians' relationship to the state. If one were to understand "the state" to denote the overall social system, including its people and practices, the metaphor of engagement might be problematically interpreted to imply that Christians have no integral relation to the societies in which they live. I do not believe that this is the case, although Section III will examine this relationship in greater

[9] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence. Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 17. For a similar distinction, see Porter, *War and the Rise of the State*, 5.

detail. Yet to construe the state in such a way that it is coextensive with society seems to fit contemporary states poorly and to be more appropriate when treating pre-modern polities, such as the *polis* of ancient Athens, of which Thucydides famously proclaimed "the *polis* is the men [*andres gar polis*]."[10] The modern state's distinct institutional structures and existence mean that the state *is not* the people—or at least that it is always more than the people—and that, in a very real sense, neither Christians nor non-Christians are born integrally connected to it. They may be governed by the state, and the state may even purport to draw its legitimacy from their consent. Nevertheless, as the declining metrics of political participation in the United States and other Western countries make all too clear, in many modern states it is possible to remain uninvolved in even the most minimal ways unless one consciously seeks to engage the state's structures of power.[11] Moreover, Cornel West has exposed that many putatively democratic states are profoundly anti-democratic in practice, barring citizens from meaningful participation.[12] Hence, despite the fact that states claim to rule over demographically inclusive bodies of people, that does not necessarily translate into demographically inclusive political practice.

The existence of an institutional power structure distinct from ruler and ruled is a particularly salient characteristic of the modern state, but this is by no means its only distinguishing feature. Sociologists, political scientists, and historians point to an array of features as defining attributes of the modern state. Examining three other features upon which there is widespread convergence will help us to understand just what it is that

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[10] See Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 81. This translation of Thucydides is from "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy" in Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 278. See Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Henry Dale (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858), VII.77.

[11] This growing disengagement seems to be especially true of state politics. See, for instance, Colin Hay, *Why We Hate Politics* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007), 1-61, especially 22-3.

[12] Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2005).

Christians and others encounter when they engage such states. Each of these three features—the monopolization of legitimate violence, authority, and territoriality—comes into view in Max Weber's classic definition of the modern state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory."[13] Before discussing these features, one should note that these are not fully distinguishable since they mutually implicate one another and also that none is ever perfectly achieved. Nonetheless, reviewing each will help us to focus on certain crucial aspects of the modern state.

Most prominent in Weber's characterization is the state's monopoly on the licit use of physical force, and indeed he even goes so far as to say that one can characterize the modern state sociologically "*only* in terms of the specific means peculiar to it … namely, the use of physical force," or what he also calls "violence."[14] As we shall see, this does not mean that the state is merely a creation of brute force. Nevertheless, the modern state's authority over the legitimate use of physical force is central to its identity. In this respect, it stands in contrast with the arrangement of European feudal society, which featured "multiple sites and sources of power" and in which "the wielders of power at any level depended upon their capacity to mobilize the resources (including armed force) controlled by many lesser power holders."[15] Each of these power holders generally had his or (far more rarely) her own claim on some legitimate uses of violence. Yet jurisdictions and allegiances overlapped, and there was no clear hierarchy of authority. As Charles Tilly puts it, in such feudal societies "rivals and ostensible subordinates commonly used force on behalf of their own interests while

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[13] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78. Emphasis original.

[14] Ibid. Emphasis added.

[15] Christopher Pierson, *The Modern State* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9. See also Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 76.

paying little attention to the interests of their nominal sovereigns."[16] With the gradual aborning of the modern state there was a move towards increased centralization as the state efficaciously asserted jurisdiction over the forms of physical force within its territory. Despite the fact that no state ever completely eliminates unlicensed uses of physical force, such as domestic violence, to quote Weber, the state nonetheless comes to be "considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence."[17]

Significantly, the state can devolve this right to other actors. In the United States, states routinely do so, for instance granting the right to use violence to local agencies tasked with policing certain populations, such as officers on college campuses. Beyond this, states also frequently bestow such power even upon individual citizens, something vividly dramatized with the proliferation of so-called "stand-your-ground" laws, which validate the right of citizens to use deadly force against assailants in cases where they feel threatened.[18] While such laws may seem to fracture the state's monopoly on violence, in fact they indirectly reaffirm it, for the underlying assumption is that such uses of force come under the state's jurisdiction and require the state's approval.[19] Moreover, those who violate the stipulations laid out by the state remain subject to its various forms of force.

In part owing to the threat of such sanctions and the state's increasing administrative ability to apply them, many become more hesitant to resort to the casual use of physical force; thus, as Giddens persuasively argues, the state's monopoly on violence is one vital factor contributing to increasing "internal pacification," which brings "the progressive

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[16] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 39-40.

[17] Weber, *From Max Weber*, 78.

[18] Depending on how one determines what places a law in his category, roughly 24 states had such laws as of early 2012. For an overview of the growth of statutes of this sort, see Ross P. Luevonda, "The Transmogrification of Self-Defense by National Rifle Association-Inspired Statutes: From the Doctrine of Retreat to the Right to Stand Your Ground," *Southern University Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2007): 1-46.

[19] As Weber puts it, "the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it." Weber, *From Max Weber*, 78.

diminution of violence in the internal affairs of nation-states."[20] And yet, as Giddens highlights and Bobbitt illustrates in detail, this centralization of the licit means of physical force was part of a process that drastically increased the violence between states as the scale of war grew tremendously.[21]

A second feature of modern states is their possession of authority. Even if the state maintains a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, by itself this is insufficient to assure its dominance, for it cannot alone create the everyday forms of obedience that are necessary to the functioning of political society. Violence may stand as a threat of last resort, Giddens observes, but the state's "monopoly of the means of violence is normally only indirectly the resource whereby those who rule sustain their 'government.' "[22] This is a point to which Niebuhr was quite alive, and thus he distinguished between "force" and the kind of power that is "composed of the authority and prestige which gains the implicit or explicit consent of the subject or the ally with a minimal use of coercive force."[23] Modern states generally possess various forms of authority or prestige, which prompt most of the population to obey most of the time not because they fear the threat of violence but on account of what Weber called "inner justifications."[24]

This leads to the complex yet compelling question, what justifications typically legitimate the authority of the modern state? An exhaustive answer to such a complicated question escapes even the most devoted treatises, let alone such a cursory overview as this. Yet clearly one central reason is precisely because people believe that the state brings internal pacification, reducing the amount of violence that would otherwise mar everyday life.

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[20] Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 187.

[21] Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, see especially 101, 152-3, and 61.

[22] Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 4.

[23] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics: A Commentary on Religious, Social, and Political Thought in a Technological Age* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968), 199.

[24] Weber, *From Max Weber*, 78.

Another and related reason for deferring to the state derives from its administrative infrastructure. Despite the seemingly ubiquitous frustration with the Department of Motor Vehicles, the bureaucratic agencies of the state in fact prove remarkably efficient not just in waging war and punishing crime but also in facilitating complicated social transactions and distributing certain social goods. Much as John Locke perceived, the state accrues authority in part because it makes—or at least appears to make—people's lives more convenient and commodious than they would be in its absence.[25] A somewhat loftier justification is the perception that the state embodies or advances worthwhile values. For instance, when citizens of the United States of America pledge allegiance to its flag and "to the republic for which it stands," thereby ritualistically acknowledging the state's authority, many do so in no small part because they believe, as the last line of the Pledge maintains, that the state protects the values of "liberty and justice for all." A more theologically problematic extension of this is that at times the state may garner authority, as Hauerwas and William Cavanaugh especially worry, because its citizens believe that, through its own use of violence, the state will somehow or in some sense deliver them from death or other evils.[26]

In addition to its administrative infrastructure, monopoly on violence, and authority, another feature of the modern state, and the final one that we will consider here, is its territoriality. Polities have always occupied particular territories, but beginning in the seventeenth century the relation between states and their territories changed in crucial ways. Prior to this period, political domains frequently had highly irregular borders, something exemplified by the fact that under Henry V the Habsburg Empire claimed territory in

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[25] See especially John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Second Treatise, Chapter IX.

[26] See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 110. William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 113. Also William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), 9-52.

contemporary Spain, southern Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria, though these varying dominions were in no way geographically connected. Beginning with the Peace of Westphalia and increasing thereafter, states were defined contiguously, and it became a chief goal of European diplomacy to secure their territorial borders.[27] Bobbitt identifies a crucial shift in this period: "In place of the princely pursuit of titles and their appurtenant rights, once the coin of European patrimonial conflict, states struggled to gain or hold territory per se."[28] It is this shift that has led to our modern situation in which states "defend their territorial integrity with a quite ferocious jealousy."[29]

Not only do such states predicate themselves upon protecting their territory against foreign incursion, but more recent forms of the state also control their territory in a way that previous political powers did not. Especially with the rise of the nation-state, which we will discuss further presently, states assert greater control over the totality of their territory, and with this comes the transition from what Giddens calls "frontiers" to "borders." Frontiers, as Giddens understands them, are peripheral areas "in which the political authority of the centre is diffuse or thinly spread."[30] The result is that such places generally exist outside the regularized control of the state and are often plagued by bandits or raiders. Borders, on the other hand, mark lines that separate states. With the increase of its administrative and surveillance capabilities, the state's administrative purview comes finally to correspond "exactly to its territorial delimitation."[31] Previously peripheral areas are thus brought under the control of the state.

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[27] See Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 120-9.
[28] Ibid., 141.
[29] Pierson, *The Modern State*, 10.
[30] Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 50.
[31] Ibid., 172.

While such treatments of its defining characteristics may make the state as a form appear to be static, since its birth in fifteenth century Europe, it has been an ever-changing phenomenon. The state's form has undergone numerous mutations as individual states have harnessed new technologies, adopted novel military strategies, addressed various crises of legitimation, and been changed by the influence of forces such as capitalism and globalization. Bobbitt illuminatingly traces the evolutions of the modern state in his highly acclaimed work *The Shield of Achilles*. Although the geo-political arrangements of much of the contemporary world may condition us to think that clear territorial boundaries encompassing a coherent national culture and a shared language are vital to the recipe of a state, Bobbitt shows that the rise to prominence of such a nation-state model is, in fact, a relatively recent historical development. (While the language of "development," "evolution," or "progression" makes it easier to speak about such changes, it is important to note that in this context I am using these terms with solely a chronological and not an ethical valence. That is, more recent arrangements represent a historical "development" but they are not necessarily morally preferable.)

The story of the state that Bobbitt tells begins with its birth in the form of "princely states" in the late fifteenth century as Italian cities first established separate administrative apparatuses in order to mount the sorts of defense necessary to counter the threat of mobile artillery. Most often the heart of this defense consisted of hiring of mercenaries. During the first half of the sixteenth century, however, princely states began to be challenged and ultimately superseded by "kingly states," which "took the Italian constitutional innovation—fundamentally, the objectification of the state—and united this with dynastic legitimacy."[32] These kingly states possessed many strategic advantages over their princely counterparts,

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[32] Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 97. In the remainder of this section, citations of this volume will be included parenthetically in the body of the text.

including their wider territorial control, which brought with it increased revenue and allowed for the maintenance of standing armies. And they also brought a novel conception of the state that continued to delegate direct supervision of governmental matters to the state's administrative apparatus even as the king became regarded as the embodiment of the state, an evolution whose apotheosis is found in Louis XIV's famous declaration, "*L'état, c'est moi*."

Even before Louis ascended to the throne, however, a competing form of the state—the "territorial state"—emerged and its various representatives would compete with kingly states for the century and a half after the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Netherlands, Britain, and Prussia developed such "territorial states," which were most clearly distinguished from kingly states by the fact that "[w]hereas a kingly state was organized around a person, the territorial state was defined by its contiguity and therefore fretted constantly about its borders" (120). Such worries arose because its territory provided not only the tax base for such a state but also its defense perimeter and its claim to legitimacy. In an effort to defend that territory, territorial states continued to maintain standing armies and also expanded the practice of conscription even as they sought to limit its effects upon the economically productive members of society. Eventually, most territorial states transformed themselves into states that mobilized entire national, ethno-cultural groups, configurations that Bobbitt calls "state-nations." Such states presumed that they exercised a legitimate claim "on the revenues of all society and on the human talent of all persons" (146). Napoleon was a pivotal figure in the progression of the state-nation, expanding conscription universally while also developing revolutionary military tactics that preyed upon the weaknesses of territorial states.

Only in the mid-nineteenth century did there arise the form of the state that currently predominates, namely, the nation-state. Characterized by its belief that the state

exists to serve the national community, the nation-state was born in a context in which the success of outflanking maneuvers made the sheer number of soldiers a key ingredient for military success. In order to field the vast armies needed for such tactics, however, a state needed to provide its citizens with "not only a sense of national purpose (which the state-nation was well-suited to provide) but also a sense of participation in the politics that led to war (which only the nation-state could provide)" (190). This sense of participation was furnished in part through new constitutional practices, such as plebiscites and referenda. It was also accompanied by the notion that the state should serve as "the deliverer of the people's welfare" (204). Along with these developments, however, came both a new form of total war that aimed to destroy the enemy's state by destroying its nation and also the increased militarization of individual nations as the state began to guide and manage ever more of society in order to assure military success.

As Bobbitt narrates it, the majority of the twentieth century, from the beginning of World War I in 1914 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, comprised a single epochal war, the "Long War." Despite the fact that a rotating cast of parties participated in this conflict, it was fundamentally fought between three different models of the nation-state—communism, fascism, and liberal democracy—each of which derived its legitimacy from claims that it best ensured national well-being. The collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s may not have fully vindicated liberal democracy's assertions in this regard, but it nonetheless became the sole inheritor of the nation-state's claims to political legitimacy. Consequently, it is now generally agreed that "[g]overnment by consent, freely given and periodically capable of being withdrawn, is what legitimates the nation-state" (63).

Liberal democracy's victory does not, however, mark "the end of history" in the sense that the evolution of the state is by no means concluded.[33] Rather, Bobbitt perceives a continuing development as the nation-state is progressively transforming itself into what he dubs the "market-state." It is doing so in response to a crisis of legitimation engendered by the nation-state's inability to secure its citizens' well-being in an era where weapons of mass destruction threaten to inflict catastrophic casualties, international markets allow money to flow seamlessly across national borders and diminish the possibility of political control, and global communications and the news media have de-legitimated the state "largely through [their] ability to disrupt the history of the State, that process of self-portrayal" (226). Hence, beginning around 1980 with the administrations of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States, a vanguard of nation-states has moved towards a model in which the state no longer sees its purpose as maximizing the well-being of its citizens but instead maximizing their opportunities. "If the slogan that animated the liberal, parliamentary nation-states was to 'make the world safe for democracy' … what will the forthcoming motto be? Perhaps 'making the world available,' which is to say creating new worlds of choice and protecting the autonomy of persons to choose" (233). Under this new model, the state relies increasingly on international capital markets, features less representative political institutions, and "is largely indifferent to the norms of justice, or for that matter any particular set of moral values so long as law does not act as an impediment to economic competition" (230).

Bobbitt's work is both historically richer and more conceptually nuanced than such a thumbnail sketch can portray. Nevertheless, it might benefit from supplementation in at least one key respect. Whereas, prior to his examination of the emergent market-state, Bobbitt's

[33] Of course, the most noted treatment of the "end of history" in this sense is Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

focus is almost exclusively upon military factors, Giddens balances such considerations with a greater emphasis upon the economic forces that have driven the consolidation of the modern state, particularly the effects of capitalism and industrialism.[34] "The nature of the state, as a mode of 'government,' " writes Giddens, "is strongly influenced by its institutional alignments with private property and with the insulated 'economy.' "[35] Such an account brings into focus the fact that the contemporaneous expansion of capitalism and the modern state is not simply a historical accident. Such possible amendments notwithstanding, Bobbitt's treatment nonetheless helpfully illumines both the late arrival of the nation-state as a form of government and the current changes that it is undergoing. Particularly in Part III, these will allow us to think more trenchantly and specifically about how Christians might engage the state.

II. Relating Soulcraft and Statecraft

Even if we recognize, as the trajectory of the Chapters 3 and 4 has indicated, that both statecraft and soulcraft are essential to how Christians should think about and practice politics in this time between Fall and Fulfillment, one of the most salient questions that remains is whether we can define how they ought to relate to one another. The early paragraphs of this section begin that task by offering a formal statement of the terms that I believe ought to govern the relationship between soulcraft and statecraft, terms that I attempt to clarify in the rest of the section by comparing this vision to notable historical episodes and examples.

Properly construed, I believe that for Christians the church's politics of soulcraft should possess a multifaceted priority over the politics of statecraft. The first facet of this

[34] See especially Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 4-5, 148-71.
[35] Ibid., 136.

priority is axiological. As a fellowship that has responded to God's call to witness to the City of God and received the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit, the church comprises a *polis* charged with the task of shaping human souls as it proclaims the reality of God's redemption, teaches its members to worship the Lord, and encourages them to develop the virtues that characterize the citizens of God's eschatological city. For Christians there can be no higher values than these.

Second, deriving in part from its axiological priority, for its members the church's formative politics of soulcraft should also possess, to the greatest degree possible, a chronological priority to Christian participation in the politics of statecraft, especially in higher levels of government. It is important to note the asymmetry between formation and participation in this claim. Virtually all states (and especially modern nation-states) have their own pervasive regimes of moral formation that typically begin at an early age. Because of this, few people will ever come to the church untouched by such formation. Insisting upon the absolute chronological priority of formation by the politics of the church is thus impractical if not impossible. And the extent and power of the mechanisms of the state mean that one will almost invariably engage with it, at least at lower levels of its institutional life. Such mundane acts as traveling public roads, applying for a zoning permit, attending public school, and even paying taxes bring one into engagement, however minimal, with the state.

Yet one should distinguish these from higher levels of governmental power, such as those embodied in state and national legislatures, administrative agencies, and even local councils. Governmental power and the contestations over it entail peculiar temptations to impose our wills upon others. Those who confess their sins before God and one another ought to recognize how susceptible we are to the sinful self-assertion that Augustine

identified as the defining movement of what he called the *libido dominandi*. The church should insist that its members are ready to engage with the state's mechanisms of power only when—through disciplines such as confession, penance, caring for the poor, and offering hospitality—they have acquired the virtues necessary to check such self-assertion by ruling over their own wicked desires, abandoning the craving for empty glory, repenting of their sins, and doing all of this in the hope of the City of God, qualities that Augustine names in Book V of *The City of God*.[36] Put differently, Christians ought to become, as Rowan Williams puts it, "detached and mature believer[s], who in [their] own soul[s] [know] the true nature and true *ordo* of sovereignty."[37] And the church is justified in attempting to assure that its members acknowledge this order—in which they humbly stand under the judgment of God and within the fellowship of the church—and learn to embody it in their lives before it deems them ready to make constructive contributions to the politics of statecraft.

Few have more clearly exemplified what this relationship between the politics of soulcraft and the politics of statecraft might look like in practice than Martin Luther King, Jr. The image of King canonized in the civil mythology of the United States is that of a prophet of statecraft. What this depiction overlooks, however, is the importance that King ascribed to the church and to the cultivation of character. As he saw it, racism is a "tragic expression of man's spiritual degeneracy and moral bankruptcy."[38] The challenge, then, was not merely to develop wise governmental policies but to craft virtuous souls capable of true community. This realization was evident from some of the earliest days of the Montgomery Improvement Association when King and Glenn Smiley pronounced that they were engaged

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[36] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), V.24.

[37] Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God," *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 67.

[38] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 147.

in a "spiritual movement."[39] At the heart of that movement was King's understanding of *agape*, the creative and redemptive good will that loves others not on account of their merit but simply because God loves them. If it is to be embodied in our lives, such love must be nurtured, King believed. And in various forums—from mass meetings to training seminars in nonviolent resistance to sermons to speeches—he attempted to cultivate souls disciplined in the nonviolent way of *agape* and that possessed the dignity and self-love necessary to overcome oppression through agapic "soul force."[40]

King thus interpreted the Civil Rights Movement as an intensive regime of soulcraft aimed at reshaping both oppressed and oppressor, a view summed up in his 1966 proclamation: "Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives."[41] In this movement, soulcraft was axiologically prior to statecraft as it sought the highest of values, namely, the embodiment of love. Thus, over against Niebuhr's embrace of lesser evils in the name of "political morality," King insisted that those seeking justice cannot utilize methods inconsistent with *agape*. Chronologically, soulcraft preceded engagement in the politics of statecraft for King because he believed that it provided the basis for creating positive social change. Hence, he especially desired that protestors first be trained in the discipline of nonviolence, which would enable them to endure travails such as police brutality and mass incarceration in ways that constructively contributed to changing oppressive governmental policies.[42]

Contrary to intimations in Hauerwas's work, however, King simultaneously makes clear that the priority of soulcraft can never isolate the church and its members from

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[39] Ibid., 83.
[40] Ibid., 256.
[41] Ibid., 58.
[42] See, for instance, ibid., 336-7.

engaging apparatuses of the state. Although true change depends upon the reshaping of individuals' attitudes, which required time, the state is capable of controlling—or at least punishing—the actions that spring from those attitudes.[43] Hence, Christians should call the state to shape its policies in ways that relieve oppression and promote justice. Implicit in such a perspective was a recognition of the important truth, which any viable Christian political ethic ought to validate, that the church is by no means the only institution capable of realizing the goods of political communion that point to Christ in this world. To reiterate an argument made near the end of Chapter 2, when extra-ecclesial institutions and groups help to alleviate poverty, encourage appropriate self-love among the oppressed, and provide ways for people to live together in peace, they foreshadow the life of the City of God. The potential that they possess to do so calls Christians to engage with them in order to help in creating a more just and peaceful world.

Although King helps us to elucidate its meaning, this multifaceted priority of the church's politics of soulcraft requires careful articulation in order to avoid the numerous forms of distortion to which it is vulnerable. One common distortion attempts to hijack the politics of statecraft, universalizing the priority that Christians ascribe to ecclesial soulcraft in order to make participation in the church's politics a prerequisite for taking part in governmental affairs. Such an interpretation would effectively bar non-Christians from taking part in the politics of the state. Among many other places, such a view ostensibly finds support in Augustine's theory of virtue, which suggests that worshipping God is a prerequisite of justice.[44] If this is the case, then it would seem logical to disqualify non-Christians from state politics since their failure to worship God renders them incapable of justice. Yet interpretations of this sort overlook the fact that even for Augustine "[b]eing

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[43] Ibid., 101.
[44] Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.21; see also V.19.

imperfectly just is not the same thing as being unjust,"[45] as well as his acknowledgement that members of the earthly city can have "an imperfect kind of virtue" that is politically salutary and that makes for temporal peace.[46] Christians have no monopoly on virtue, something captured in the assertion widely ascribed to Martin Luther that he would "rather be ruled by a wise Turk than a foolish Christian." Moreover, the attempt to give Christians a corner on the virtue of justice obscures the fact that those who confess their sins on a weekly basis must acknowledge how quick we are to sacrifice to other gods and that, in Augustine's words, our righteousness in this world "consists only in the remission of sin rather than in the perfection of virtue."[47]

Historically, another common and influential distortion begins precisely with an appreciation of the high values entrusted to the church. Unfortunately, their very loftiness has perennially beguiled Christians into believing that they should utilize governmental power in order to secure these values of eternal significance. Justinian, the sixth century Byzantine Emperor who profoundly influenced Western civil and ecclesiastical law, classically enunciated this conviction. In his *Corpus Juris Civilis*, he wrote, "In providing for our subjects' every advantage, we have made it the chief and first object of our most urgent consideration how their souls may be saved … And finding many astray in various heresies, we have taken vigorous measures … using laws to correct the wrong decisions which have affected their judgments."[48] Further developing this sentiment, he would elsewhere ask, "If for the general welfare, We have taken measures to render the civil laws more effective, with whose execution, God, through His good will towards men, has entrusted Us, how much

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[45] Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 43-4.

[46] Augustine, *City of God*, V.19, XIX.26.

[47] Ibid., XIX.27.

[48] Justinian, *Codex* I.5.18 in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 100-1625*, eds. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 191.

more reason is there not for Us to compel the observance of the sacred canons, and Divine Laws, which have been promulgated for the safety of Our souls?"[49] In such passages, Justinian styles the Empire, and himself at its head, as charged with the duty to care for human souls and direct them towards salvation. Other sections of the *Corpus* make it clear that this responsibility justified imperial authorities in persecuting pagans and Christian heretics by confiscating their property, sending them into exile, and in exceptional circumstances even putting them to death.[50]

Among the most poignant political lessons of history is that conflating church and state in this manner—and thus taking the goals of a vocationally defined *polis* to be the goals of a demographically inclusive one—provides a powerful invitation to indulge the *libido dominandi*. One need not literally demonize Justinian—as does the secret history allegedly written by his court historian Procopius when it describes him as "a demon in human shape"[51]—in order detect a line connecting such policies to some of the most disgraceful episodes of Christian history, including the Inquisition. In this light we might recognize the wisdom of the mature Augustine. While in his earlier career he might be seen to underwrite the use of state power to secure such eternal values, Augustine's final, considered judgment appears to limit the purview of government to the narrower task of "put[ting] a check on the

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[49] Justinian, *Novella* CXXXVII in *The Civil Law*, ed. S. P. Scott, vol. XVII (Cincinnati, Ohio: AMS Press, 1932), 152. In the previous quotation I rely upon the O'Donovans' version due to the justified scholarly criticism of Scott's translation. Its limitations notwithstanding, Scott's remains one of the most comprehensive English translations of Justinian's works.

[50] Justinian, *Codex* I.11.1 and I.5.1-12 in ibid., vol XII, 79 and 63-71. In the vast majority of cases, the most extreme penalties allotted for heretical Christians were confiscation of property, banishment, and (for those who reproduced banned works) amputation of the hand. Nevertheless, it appears that at least in aggravated instances, the *Codex* made certain heterodox Christians liable to capital punishment. The clearest indication of this comes from Justice Fred Blume's translation, which was based upon more authoritative Latin manuscripts than Scott's. Blume's version includes a passage at I.1.3(3) that Scott's lacks and that stipulates that those who continue to possess the works of Nestorius are to be punished with death. Fred H. Blume, "Annotated Justinian Code," University of Wyoming George William Hooper Law Library http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/blume%26justinian/.

[51] Procopius of Caesarea, *The Secret History of the Court of Justinian* (London: Echo Library, 2006), 64; see also 50, 66.

bad, so that the good may live peacefully among the bad."[52] To this we might add, as Niebuhr repeatedly and adamantly insists, that government should also establish an appreciable degree of justice. In any event, it is clear that the government should not aspire to the attainment of eternal values, salvation least of all.

Justifiably rebelling against Justinian and recognizing the distinction between eternal and temporal values, we must nonetheless avoid overcorrecting by dichotomizing too strongly. When this happens, not only does one distinguish sharply between eternal and temporal but then in turn imposes this distinction upon the individual, severing soul and body and assigning each to a separate sphere of social life. Early in his career Martin Luther leaned strongly in this direction when he contended that the purview of government ought to "extend no farther than to life and property and what is external upon earth," denying that it should have any influence on the soul.[53] While Luther allowed the church some jurisdiction over the body, a century and a half later John Locke laid the foundation for a more rigid liberal reinterpretation of this position that would foreclose such claims altogether. Famously addressing the matter of religious toleration, Locke declared it "necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other" and suggested that religion is defined by "a concernment for the interest of men's souls" whereas government takes as its charge "care of the commonwealth" and "civil interests," such as "life, liberty, health, and

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[52] Augustine, *ep.* 153.16 in *Augustine: Political Writings*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Robert Dodaro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Of course, to the end of his life Augustine never repented of his decision to enlist imperial authority to coerce the Donatists, which might appear to undermine this judgment. Nevertheless, I believe that Robert Dodaro is right to suggest that for Augustine the resort to governmental force arose fundamentally as a response to "the persistent violence of certain groups of extreme Donatists." Robert Dodaro, "Introduction" in ibid., xxiii. On the more chastened view that Augustine advocates later in his life, see also R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Revised ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40.

[53] Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority" in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 382-3.

indolency of body" and "the possession of all outwards goods."[54] Such boundaries, asserts Locke, are "fixed and immovable."[55] The ultimate implications of Luther's position and the clear upshot of Locke's are that the church should consign itself to the care of the soul while the state retains control of the body. In addition to soul and body, soulcraft and statecraft are likewise divorced with each being entrusted to the ministrations of a different social institution.

Although admirable in their attempts to limit governmental interference in religious life, such dichotomized political conceptions find themselves plagued by numerous problems. At the root of these troubles is the failure to recognize the psychosomatic unity of human personhood. Instead, they suggest that a human being is composed of two discrete parts, body and soul, that are largely separable and in many ways already alienated from one another. To the contrary, as I argued in the Introduction, I believe that, rightly understood, body and soul represent two intrinsically and mutually implicating aspects of human existence that are profoundly related to and deeply impact one another. To divvy up an individual and assign body and soul to different social spheres is thus to misconstrue human nature itself.

This misunderstanding conspires in the widespread yet erroneous conviction that states are somehow unconcerned with the soul. If the soul is not simply the part of the human being that inherits eternal life, as Luther and Locke both generally assume, but the seat of the dispositions and character that fundamentally determine the shape of our actions, then states unquestionably have an interest in human souls. More specifically, states have a legitimate concern in promoting certain virtues among their citizens. The constellation of

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[54] John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," in *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 2-3.

[55] Ibid., 7.

virtues deemed necessary to the political life of the state will shift between states—and even between different groups within a single state. Nevertheless, these prescriptions are sure to overlap considerably, particularly on virtues such as honesty, wisdom, compassion, and social responsibility. Any healthy society requires a critical mass of citizens who possess such virtues if it is to sustain social trust and cooperation. To invoke Thomas Aquinas's distinction, we might say that the state has a valid concern with cultivating such "natural virtues," which "perfect man according to his common state of life" in this world since these virtues are integral to the maintenance of earthly peace and justice.[56] Yet the state exceeds its proper jurisdiction when it attempts to cultivate supernatural virtues, such as faith, hope, and love, which "have God as their object." And were its various forms of soulcraft in fact to inculcate vice, the state would flatly betray its mission.

Moreover, not only do states have a vested interest in forming souls of certain sorts, but even purportedly limited liberal states are practically engaged in doing so all the time. As a powerful and pervasive social form, the state organizes patterns of relations that appear normal to us, and it can also reach into some of the most intimate and impressionable parts of our lives. Through public education, civic rituals, the media, military service, taxation, and numerous other avenues, the state exercises what Charles Mathewes calls powers of "existential creation" through which it is "quite literally creating its citizens."[57] By no means is it the case that the church must oppose such creation in all its forms. Nevertheless, without powerful and countervailing forms of influence, one can hardly expect that a child attending public school for thirteen years, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance each morning, and receiving innumerable messages of national pride through textbooks, television, and the

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[56] Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues: Summa Theologica, Prima Secundae, Quaestio 49-67*, trans., John A Oesterle (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), I-II.65.1.

[57] Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149.

wider culture will remain unaffected. A central meaning of the axiological priority of ecclesial soulcraft is that Christians must judge the state itself and such regimes of moral formation through the lens of the message of salvation that the church has been entrusted to proclaim and that it seeks to embody in its life together.

Ironically, however, coupled with their regularly cozy relation to the political powerbrokers of modern Western states, the widespread belief in liberal societies that the state is neutral in matters of soulcraft has routinely blinded Christians to the manifold, frequently subtle, powers that modern states wield upon our souls. Given the alarmism that often follows when these powers are recognized, it is important to emphasize that their influence is not necessarily negative. At times the state may help to establish morally formative norms and practices that are extremely beneficial even for the church itself, reminding it of truths that it has repressed or lacked the courage to speak boldly.[58] Indeed, in the case of racial integration in the United States, the state played a central role in bringing parts of the White church, both in the South and in the North, into a more Christian relationship with their Black brothers and sisters.

And yet, from a Christian perspective the moral influence of the state unquestionably can be deleterious. Unflinching nationalism, xenophobic disdain for foreigners, and a forgetfulness of past atrocities are all examples of pernicious dispositions that such formation can nurture and that are patently contrary to the gospel. Precisely the point, then, is that, though acknowledging that the state has a valid interest in shaping souls, Christians

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[58] Perhaps the most famous indictment of the church's failure in this regard is King's charge in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that the contemporary church "is often a weak and ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound" and that it is "so often the arch-supporter of the status quo." Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 300. An intriguing, though less famous, treatment is Earnest Campbell and Thomas Pettigrew's article, "Racial and Moral Crisis: The Role of the Little Rock Ministers," which exposes the tendency of those ministers who favored integration not to speak unequivocally but in vague generalities, the application of which was generally left to the listener. Ernest Q. Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Racial and Moral Crisis: The Role of the Little Rock Ministers," *American Journal of Sociology* 64 (March 1959): 509-16.

must be circumspect of its formative powers and their influence upon human lives and characters. The church has its own politics of soulcraft that aims to cultivate citizens in the virtues that fit one to participate both in political life in this world and, more importantly, in the life of the City of God. Hence, Christians need not insist, as Justinian would, that the state utilize its powers of formation in ways that are positively Christian but only, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that such formation "does not exclude Christ" by inculcating vicious traits of character.[59] Above and beyond such formation, the church must strenuously insist upon the axiological priority of its own essential practices of soulcraft, which may indeed run contrary to that of the state at crucial points. As Hauerwas so elegantly puts it, for Americans this means that we must accept that "there might be irresolvable tensions between being a Christian and being 'a good American.' "[60] One might say the same for Christian citizens of any state.

If the assumption that the state is to be unconcerned with the soul is one misapprehension wrought by overly dichotomized political conceptions, a second and obverse error is the belief that the church should prescind from concern with human bodies and what Locke called "outward goods." Even if one were to accept that the church's defining concern is with the soul, the intimate and mutually influencing relationship between body and soul would entail that its interest must extend to the body, as well.[61] To cordon off the church from human bodies and outward goods, however, we must not only separate soul

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[59] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 305. Here one might also be reminded of Augustine's claim that the City of God "brings together a society of pilgrims in which no attention is paid to any differences in the customs, laws, and institutions by which earthly peace is achieved or maintained," the point being that such differences are completely compatible with membership in the City of God. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.17.

[60] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 12.

[61] For a similar discussion of whether it is possible to render someone spiritual harm via bodily violation, see Timothy P. Jackson, "Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Daniel Marino (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241-6.

from body but also effectively ignore vital strains of the Christian faith that are deeply concerned with how and to whom social and material goods are distributed. One of these strains finds poignant expression in the plaintive calls for social justice that run like a chorus through every genre and era of the biblical canon. Such pleas were intoned most fervently by the Israelite prophets, who denounced landowners who "join house to house, who add field to field" until they crowd out the poor (Isaiah 5:8), lambasted societies who had "excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49), and chastised the greedy who "buy[…] the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" (Amos 8:6). In the Gospels, Jesus teaches us that neglecting the bodies of our neighbors and their need for goods such as food, water, and clothing puts us in eternal peril (Matthew 25:31-46; cf. Luke 16:19-30). To this chorus James adds jarring chords that instruct "you rich people" to "weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you" as due punishment for fraudulent and exploitative business practices (James 5:1-4).

In addition to the profound impact upon "the least of these" who are Jesus' brothers and sisters, such a faith will not allow itself to be alienated from what its members do with our bodies and how we dispose of material goods because it furthermore recognizes that it is by participating in material, bodily practices—such as gathering together for worship, receiving Christ's body and blood in the sacraments, caring for the sick, serving the poor, and advocating for greater justice—that God's salvation is manifested and experienced in this present life. Hence, Christians may applaud many of Locke's insights, including his chastening of the pretensions of civil authorities and his recognition that, whereas "the Gospel frequently declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer persecution," the New Testament nowhere says that the church "should persecute others, and force others by

fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine."[62] Yet they must protest that Locke's declarations often cut too cleanly. The Christian faith neither simply consists of granting assent to some system of beliefs that are thought to be "effectual to the salvation of [our] souls," nor does its truth and salvific power consist merely "in the inward persuasion of the mind."[63] Rather Christians are called into a polity of disciples devoted to following Jesus and to growing together in order to incarnate the Body of Christ in the world through bodily practices that include what we do with outward goods.

For this reason, Christians ought to recognize that, in a very real sense, their fellowship may well compose one of the very things that Locke most fears, a church that "is constituted upon such a bottom that all those who enter into it do thereby *ipso facto* deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince."[64] For, in the words of the United Methodist liturgy, in our baptisms we pledge "to serve [Christ] as [our] Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races."[65] While the Prince of Peace may not be a prince or lord of a state, he is nonetheless the one who has the foremost claim upon our bodies and souls in this world, the one to whom we look for protection, and the one whom we promise to serve loyally not only with our heart, souls, and minds but also with our strength (Mark 12:30). The first claim of Christ's Lordship is therefore not upon our souls in another world but upon the human person—body and soul—that is in this world buried with him in the waters of baptism and born to new life.

On account of this claim, Christians cannot accept the assertions made by Locke and other modern political thinkers that suggest, in Cavanaugh's words, that religion "is limited

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[62] Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," 5.
[63] Ibid., 4, 3.
[64] Ibid., 18.
[65] *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Publishing House), 34.

to the realm of the 'soul,' and the body is handed over to the state."[66] "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" in both body and soul (Romans 14:8). We need not deny that the state has some legitimate claim upon either our bodies or our souls, as Cavanaugh appears inclined to do when he invokes Dorothy Day's comment that "if you give to God what is God's, there is nothing left for Caesar."[67] Yet the axiological priority of ecclesial soulcraft means—much in the spirit of Day's comment—that whatever obligation Christians believe that they have to the state comes only subsequent to and filtered through the claim of Christ upon our bodies and souls. To be sure, the church will never instantiate this claim with perfect faithfulness and thus ought never to be confused for Christ. Nevertheless, it possesses a priority that derives from its commission to proclaim the good news of Christ's resurrection and the coming of the City of God, its devotion to following Christ, and the promise of God's presence in the form of the Holy Spirit that it has received, for these make the church the place where the claim of Christ most clearly takes concrete form in the world. Moreover, regardless of how much the powers that be may wish to bar us from concern with the body and outward goods, paired with the recognition of our non-Christian neighbors as members of the City of God *in potentia*, this axiological priority of soulcraft means that Christians can never allow ourselves to be so contained. Hence, as both Niebuhr and Hauerwas recognize, the Christian faith is a natural enemy of totalitarianism.

III. The Christian as Citizens

The last section began with a formal statement of the terms that I believe ought rightly to structure the relationship between the politics of ecclesial soulcraft and the politics of statecraft. Although pointing to Martin Luther King, Jr., and his approach to the Civil

[66] Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 35.
[67] Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 59.

Rights Movement as a positive illustration, the approach so far has been a largely negative one, seeking to clarify the meaning of those terms by preempting potential distortions of the argument that, for Christians, the church's regime of soulcraft should possess a multifaceted priority to matters of statecraft. That negative account has above all attempted to preclude interpretations that would attain an overly facile accord between soulcraft and statecraft either by conflating the sociological realities of church and state, as would Justinian, or by consigning them to different realms of human existence, as suggested by Luther and Locke.

If we cannot harmonize them either by conflating or utterly alienating church and state, this suggests that in their political lives Christians will be stretched—body and soul—across multiple polities that defy ultimate reconciliation on this side of the eschaton. Yet the deep fractures wrought by evil's influence in this world perhaps help us to understand why such reconciliation evades us. Reflecting the condition of the world itself, our political lives are fractured, making it incumbent upon those whom the church deems ready to participate in the politics of the state to live as migrants who shuttle repeatedly between the church's fields of soulcraft and the fields of statecraft, for each makes legitimate claims upon us. This section will explore these claims in order to explicate further my thesis that the church's politics of soulcraft should possess an axiological and chronological priority in the lives of its members. Yet, rather than taking a sociological approach that begins with the church and state as political institutions, I instead wish to focus upon the individual Christian who lives within and across these institutions. Hence, this section will set out to by asking, how should Christians understand themselves as citizens?

An adequate response to this question must, I believe, begin with a complex moral psychology of citizenship. Such an account is "complex" because it is predicated upon the recognition that a Christian is never simply *a* citizen. The category of citizenship is, of course,

a contested one that different communities have historically construed in myriad ways. Yet we might minimally define a citizen as one who possesses the status of a recognized member of a political community, who enjoys the benefits and privileges that accrue therefrom, and who consequently is subject to at least basic responsibilities, even if they are so minimal as refraining from flagrant violations of that community's laws.[68] In these terms, an individual Christian simultaneously maintains citizenship within numerous polities. First and foremost, Christians live as aspirational citizens who hope to be included as members of the City of God, a form that I will call "eschatological citizenship." As I argued in Chapter 1, while God's mercy will surely manifest God's goodness, it is not amenable to human prediction, which means that in this life we can never know with certainty who will be among the citizens of the City of God. Accordingly, eschatological citizenship is perhaps the least concrete form of citizenship. Nevertheless, I believe that it is also the most consequential form since the hope that we will be in that number should foundationally shape Christians' conduct and conceptions of themselves. Closely related but not identical, Christians are at the same time "ecclesial citizens," members of the polity represented by the church, that community which endeavors to help us grow in the likeness of Christ so that we might approximate the City of God in this world and become more fit to be members of it. The church's continuing quest to live faithfully in the midst of a world ensnared by evil clearly differentiates it from the City of God. Yet its call to proclaim and embody the message of

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[68] This definition draws substantially from Richard Bellamy, *Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52. Such a minimal definition differs from more robust conceptions of citizenship that emphasize one's active involvement in matters of the community. Consider, for instance, Wolin's claim, "Being a citizen involves doing the best one can to take part in common tasks, the deliberations that define them, and the responsibilities that follow." Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 604. For more on varying notions of citizenship, see Jean L. Cohen, "Changing Paradigms of Citizenship and the Exclusiveness of the Demos," *International Sociology* 14, no. 3 (1999): 245-68.

salvation makes it a place where our eschatological citizenship takes on its most substantive form in this world.

In addition to the City of God and the church, in most circumstances Christians will also be counted, and count themselves, as citizens of the demographically inclusive, locationally determined polities that exercise authority in the this world. For lack of a better term, one might label this "municipal citizenship." In this phrase "municipal" is primarily intended in the first adjectival sense recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* and thus denotes matters "relating to the internal affairs of a state as distinguished from its international relations." Yet a secondary meaning that the term conveys is that such citizenship relates only to one place "with narrow limits," a necessary reminder that the state is not, as Hegel for instance would have it, "a universal society" and hence that it is not our "highest duty … to be a member of the state."[69] The state is instead a particular, municipal institution and whatever responsibility we conclude that we have to it should accord with that fact.

Apart from matters of definition, municipal citizenship is extremely complicated for a number of other reasons. For one, as I have already suggested, citizenship is a social good that communities distribute according to their own, often idiosyncratic, criteria.[70] Accordingly, speaking about it requires the caveat "in most circumstances" because certain Christians may have no citizenship of this kind since, for various reasons, some political communities may refuse to extend them such recognition. While acknowledging this as a possibility, however, this section will principally address the more common contemporary case in which one possesses some sort of municipal citizenship. Still, just because a

[69] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans., S.W. Dyde (New York: Cosimo, 2008), §258.

[70] One of the most illuminating discussions of membership as a distributed social good is found in Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 31-63.

community extends such citizenship does not necessarily mean that one must accept it. Another complication thus arises from the fact that there may be extreme circumstances on account of which a Christian might renounce her municipal citizenship. Finally, a further facet of complexity derives from the internal constitution of many states, which are themselves composed of numerous overlapping and concentrically organized polities. Thus, at this moment I am concurrently a municipal citizen of the United States, the state of North Carolina, the Fourth Congressional District, the county of Durham, and the city of Durham. To these one might perhaps add even more jurisdictions.

How is one to understand, organize, and prioritize these various forms of citizenship and especially the commitments that they entail? I believe that Michael Walzer's conception of a socially formed and "thickly settled" self provides a helpful path by which we can approach such questions. In a chapter entitled "The Divided Self," Walzer begins by noting the peculiarity of the phenomenon of self-criticism, in which one calls one's own actions or opinions into question. Which prompts him to ask, "Who is the 'I' that does the criticizing? Who is the 'self' that is criticized?"[71] Such criticism thus enables us to see—as Plato, Freud, and others have taught—that the self is not a unitary entity but is instead multiplex and internally differentiated. Nonetheless, unlike for Plato, who believed that the tripartite division of the soul was innate, for Walzer this multiplicity arises from the fact that the self contains within it numerous interests, roles, and identities. Each of these represents a different "self" that exists within and constitutes the self as a whole. Thus the self as a whole is an ordered and "thickly populated circle with me in the center surrounded by my self-critics," who criticize both the self—or "me"—and one another (98).

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[71] Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 86. In the remainder of this section, citations of this volume will be included parenthetically in the body of the text.

Even though they are part of me, however, I do not perceive all criticisms of my self-critics simultaneously. Instead I must discursively attend to their objections. And at times I must decide between them. Yet, sounding rather like Hauerwas and other virtue ethicists, Walzer argues that more often than not such decisions are already largely made by the characteristic ordering of the self. Such ordering stems from the fact that my critic-selves "stand at different temporal and spatial removes," which means that I am more attuned and attentive to some of these critic-selves rather than to others (98). Although many of these critics and much of their arrangement are socially and culturally bestowed, I can change the economy of my self by bringing certain of the critic-selves closer to the center, suppressing others, or creating still more through the recognition that I occupy new roles or hold new values.

Although, as I will highlight, Walzer's account of the self has significant limitations, using it as a lens allows us to see the various forms of citizenship that we have identified to be not simply relationships between communities and their members but also aspects of those members' selves, as well. For Christians, eschatological, ecclesial, and municipal citizenship each represents a particular constellation of roles, identities, and values that have the potential to shape the self, press specific demands upon it, and provide the basis for one to act in corresponding ways. From this perspective, then, questions about the relationship of these forms of citizenship to one another are, at least on one level, questions about the ordering of the self.

Christians' overriding devotion to the City of God that Jesus proclaimed and embodied suggests that their hopeful citizenship in that eschatological polity should occupy the paramount position within the self. Before other commitments stands our commitment to follow Jesus, becoming members of his very body who seek to emulate him in our lives

both here and now and in the world to come. Christ is the one to whom we desire our selves be conformed, even to the point that we might declare, "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). For his part, Walzer warns of the dangers of introducing any such linearity or hierarchy into the self's "confabulation of critics," lest one become a "dominated self, who identifies whole-heartedly with, or yields everything to, a single all-powerful critic" and in doing so gives way to fanaticism (99). Instead, he wishes to promote the kinds of thick, differentiated selves that are brimming with critics and that will therefore both require and produce a pluralistic society.[72]

On this point, however, one might question Walzer's highly adversarial depiction of our critic-selves, many of whom appear to be aspiring despots bent on subjecting the self as a whole to their tyranny and thus must be restrained by checks and balances. Even as it ought to occupy pride of place, the self represented by the eschatological citizen does not necessarily captivate other selves but helps to place them within the proper theological frame. In calling us to love our neighbors as ourselves, much as I argued at the end of Chapter 2, Jesus adverts our attention back to this world that is fractured by evil and to our various roles and responsibilities in it. We cannot solely focus upon the City of God or simply "turn our eyes upon Jesus," as the popular worship song would have it. Rather, as we truly see Jesus we are directed back to this world that currently cannot attain the glory of the City of God, to its constituents, and to our place in it. To quote Bonhoeffer, once we have beheld Jesus we "can no longer see God without the world, or the world without God."[73]

This recognition returns us once again to the two forms of citizenship that most centrally characterize Christian political life in this world, those represented by the church's

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[72] See ibid., 101.

[73] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Volume 6, ed. Isle Tödt et al., trans., Reinhard Krauss, Charles West, and Douglas Stott (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 82.

politics of soulcraft and the state's politics of demographically inclusive government. While these two forms of citizenship will by no means exhaust all aspects of the self, for Christians they are the most crucial for matters of political ethics.

It is primarily in and through the politics of the church that we find specification of what it means to live here and now as a prospective member of the City of God, for the church composes a polity of people who have responded to God's call to proclaim the good news of that eschatological city and, as much as possible, to approximate it in this world. Without this form of ecclesial citizenship, to borrow from Hauerwas, the ideal of eschatological citizenship too easily "loses its concrete character."[74] Central to the constitution of the ecclesial polity is a set of practices, such as gathering for worship, confessing our sins, being reconciled to one another by the love of Christ, receiving the sacraments, ministering to the downtrodden, and advocating for those oppressed by systemic evils. Rightly embodied, these practices of faith can serve as conduits of grace through which we are remade in the image of Christ. For the proud—or, perhaps more accurately, for those prideful aspects of us all—the disciplines of the church help to chasten the wild, selfish pretensions that so frequently and ferociously grip our lives. At the same time, such disciplines should remind those persons and aspects of our selves that bend towards self-loss that God loves us in body and soul. In doing so, they help to free us from those parts of our selves that would deride our value and to liberate the oppressed from the psychologically abusive messages purveyed by the fantastic hegemonic imagination, which proclaim their worthlessness. When they are faithfully performed, these practices bring both the prideful and the self-dissipated towards a healthy self-love, at the heart of which is a profound love of the God who created us.

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[74] Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1985), 112.

Once again, however, this love does not solely direct us towards the Trinitarian God who has entered into our midst in Jesus Christ. Nor does it direct us only towards those who are fellow members of the church. Rather, as Jesus himself exemplified in his life, death, and resurrection, the love of God turns us to God and also to the multitude of others whom God loves. Thus, in its life together the church should unmask the illusive powers that would alienate us from God and one another, instead teaching us to live in ways that witness to God's grace, especially by entering into communion with the poor, the oppressed, the widowed and orphaned, the handicapped, and the otherwise marginalized. Over and above this, it should seek to empower these groups so that they may live fuller and more flourishing lives. Of course, the church has often done quite the opposite. Hence, as Gustavo Gutierrez reminds us, in many contemporary contexts this will mean, that the church must "assume its responsibility for the injustice which it has supported both by its links with the established order and by its silence regarding the evils this order implies."[75]

Even in view of the historical and continuing sinfulness of the church, however, Christians nonetheless assign an axiological and chronological priority to their identities as ecclesial citizens for numerous reasons. For one thing, we recognize that, even amid the undeniable brokenness of the church, the set of practices that constitute it brings us together in communion with those from whom evil would otherwise estrange us, instead uniting us in the praise of God. Hence, in its life we find that we can provisionally yet powerfully glimpse the reality of the City of God. Simultaneously, however, this communion not only shows us a glimpse of the holy city but provides indispensable training for it by helping to orient us towards God and neighbor and encourage us to fulfill the responsibilities that we have to each. In addition to curbing evil by reorienting individual wills, when they are faithfully

[75] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 108.

embodied the practices of the church also help to lessen the impact of social evils by creating a community that cares for the vulnerable and marginalized. Accordingly, we value the political life of the church above all others in this world. Beyond this, we strive as much as possible to become faithful ecclesial citizens chronologically prior to taking on the responsibilities of municipal citizenship because in confessing our sins we acknowledge that perfection exceeds our grasp and that evil continues to ensnare us. We thus require the ecclesial body politic both to aid us in living more righteously and to call us to account when we inevitably fall short. Apart from such a polity, we ought rightly to fear that in engaging the state we will be even more apt to do so not in ways that promote the common good but that insidiously attempt to harness its power to advance our own selfish and corrupted interests. Hence, while recognizing that being a faithful citizen of a fallible church may mean standing in loyal opposition to aspects of its current configuration or customs, we nonetheless draw the self represented by the ecclesial citizen close to the center of our psyche.

Nevertheless, much as I have argued in regard to our eschatological citizenship, prioritizing our identities as ecclesial citizens ought by no means produce a "dominated" or "sectarian" self that is unconcerned with the world beyond the church. This is both because the church's mission—and, when it is faithful to that mission, its actual ministry—extend far beyond its own communion and also because the nature of that mission should sensitize us to the effects that the powers-that-be have upon our lives, as well as those of our non-Christian neighbors whom we are called to love. Put differently, with its overriding concern to love our neighbors, ecclesial citizenship further pluralizes the self by placing it in relation to numerous social institutions, in which we play different roles and have different interests,

which ought to be consistent with our ecclesial citizenship but are not simply reducible to it. One such institution is the state, which is of course our primary concern here.

As paradigmatically symbolized in chapter 13 of Revelation, at times the nature and effects of the state may be so depraved that Christians will understand themselves as implacably opposed to it. Confronted by a Roman Empire that demanded that they worship the Emperor and that, at least under Nero, subjected them to death by horrific means such as crucifixion or immolation,[76] early Christians were certainly justified when they saw themselves not as Roman citizens but outsiders. *Mutatis mutandis*, we might say much the same of Christians living in Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Khmer Rouge Cambodia, Pinochet's Chile, and other political settings in which the perpetration of abominations is all but inextricable from the state's identity.

Captivating as they are in their stark horror and possible though it is that we might find ourselves living under such a regime, nevertheless we ought not let such cases determine our entire understanding of Christians' relation to the state. Making much this same point, Charles Mathewes criticizes William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist* for using "the Pinochet regime to normalize a grotesque manifestation of the state, insisting that this is the *telos* of modern political life in general" and thus setting Christians in a relationship of simple opposition to the state.[77]

In few contexts will Christians find themselves in relation to a state that is so rudimentarily evil. Under less blatantly horrific circumstances, their identities as aspiring citizens of the City of God, as well as the axiological priority of their ecclesial citizenship, will make their relationship to the state a complex one of simultaneous distance and belonging, terms that Miroslav Volf uses in his book *Exclusion and Embrace* to describe the

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[76] Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans., A.J. Woodman (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 2004), XV.44.4.
[77] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 223.

way in which Christians should relate to their native cultures. Reflecting both upon the legacy of the patriarch Abraham and the universalism of the apostle Paul, Volf argues that, while Christians must depart from their given cultures on account of their allegiance to the transcendent God and as a witness to God's judgment upon the evil implicated in those cultures, Christ transfigures this movement such that departure no longer demands a simple distancing. Rather "a genuinely Christian departure is always also presence."[78] Extending this insight into the realm of political ethics, we might say that Christians must depart from the state in order to recognize the primacy of their identities first as eschatological and subsequently as ecclesial citizens; and yet they ought nonetheless to find ways of being present to the state. Even in cases where they cannot in good conscience describe themselves as "citizens" of a given state, the nature of the Christian faith entails a form of public presence manifested in the church's worship, proclamation of the gospel, and advocacy on behalf of the poor and oppressed.

And yet Volf's recognition that one can occupy a posture of distance even "*within the cultural space one inhabits*" helps to highlight the possibility that Christians might maintain a necessary critical distance even while thinking of themselves as citizens of the state.[79] One finds this exemplified in the depiction of Paul provided in the Acts of the Apostles, in which he repeatedly claims his status as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-29) and still "turn[s] the world upside down … acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying there is another king named Jesus" (Acts 17:6). Indeed, even at the book's very end he continues in "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all

[78] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996), 49.

[79] Ibid. Emphasis original.

boldness" (Acts 28:30).[80] Whereas Paul appears to have invoked his citizenship largely to prevent an evil, Christians might think of themselves as municipal citizens because they recognize that the state is capable not only of restraining evils but also of accomplishing limited goods. This was a potential perceived sharply by Martin Luther King, Jr., who not only encouraged Blacks to view themselves as United States citizens in order that they might end the nightmare of segregation, but also organized a poor people's campaign of citizens "demand[ing] that the government address itself to the problem of poverty."[81] King saw no need for Christians to situate themselves as utter outsiders to the state because he believed, as Michael Long notes, "the state can and should redistribute the wealth so that poverty is eliminated and so that all have the basic goods required for the flourishing of the human personality."[82] Hence, even as he encouraged Blacks, Christians, and others of goodwill to identify themselves as citizens in order to pursue the goods of political and economic justice, King nevertheless did so in ways that challenged the racist and plutocratic status quo of the United States.

As King demonstrates, understanding oneself first and foremost as a hopeful citizen of the City of God and derivatively as a member of the ecclesial polity ought rightly to transfigure our very notions of municipal citizenship in ways that are likely to raise not only eyebrows but also suspicions. Although in the contemporary United States King is generally lionized as a hero, we should never forget that J. Edgar Hoover suspected him of being a

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[80] The focus upon Acts' depiction of Paul is meant to obviate the question of whether or not Paul actually possessed Roman citizenship. As Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan point out, in his own letters Paul never asserts his status as a Roman citizen and admits that he was beaten with rods three times (2 Corinthians 11:25), a punishment that was not to be used on Roman citizens. Hence, they conclude that "Paul was either not a Roman citizen or, if he were, he never used that privilege to his own advantage." Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 68.

[81] King, *A Testament of Hope*, 274.

[82] Michael G. Long, *Against Us, but for Us: Martin Luther King, Jr. And the State* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 2002), 120.

"subversive" with Communist ties.[83] The essential convictions of their faith entail that those who follow Christ will, like King, regularly find themselves concerned with matters that the state would rather ignore or suppress.

Enjoined to proclaim that the eschatological City of God is the truest political community and that God is the Ruler of the world to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance, Christians should oppose the state's tendency, which both Niebuhr and Hauerwas identify, to make idolatrous claims for itself and upon its citizens. In this world of nation-states, Christians ought continually to bear witness to the fact that the state is not the universal community but is itself a parochial one whose moral vision is characteristically constrained not only by its territorial borders but also, as Niebuhr contends, by the fact that even in democratic nations the state's "power is always in the hands of a particular oligarchy."[84] Moreover, Christians should insist not only upon remembering their own individual sins and the sins of the church but also the sins of states. In the United States, then, Christians should not allow the state to whitewash our history in order to present it as an unambiguous story of good. Rather, they should remind us of the role played by both the church and the state in the extermination of the Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the apartheid of Jim Crow, the internment of Japanese-Americans, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and other such horrors. For without remembering such evils we cannot recognize the way that they continue to shape our histories, cannot repent, and, perhaps, cannot be forgiven.

Christians may well cause the state further discomfort on account of their call to care for the oppressed and marginalized, which should continually animate them to advocate for greater justice and provision to promote the flourishing of those who currently suffer from the evil of deprivation. Doing so in a context such as ours will problematize the nation-

[83] Athan G. Theoharis, *The FBI: A Comprehensive Reference Guide* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Press, 1999), 122-4.
[84] Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 86.

state's claim to derive its legitimacy from improving the lives of its citizens as it exposes the fact that many continue to be left out of its provision; and as greater inequality seems likely to follow in the train of the burgeoning market-state, Christian engagement ought rightly to expose the vulgarity of such a political system that seems so intent on leaving behind the common good. While non-Christian citizens may often recognize the worthiness of such actions, we ought not delude ourselves into thinking that these acts will always, or perhaps ever, gain widespread popular support. For Christians, the charge that we are "turning the world upside down" is an occupational—or, better, vocational—hazard.

In addition to illuminating matters that the state would rather obscure, particularly in contemporary liberal democracies, the very form of Christian engagement in state politics will frequently diverge from established norms in significant ways. For instance, Christians should rightly find themselves uncomfortable with the highly individualistic conception of citizenship that has long enjoyed wide currency in western democracies. Although not originating there, *The Federalist Papers* provided a key articulation of this conception. Encouraging the ratification of a Constitution that created a central government of unprecedented power, *The Federalist* conceived citizenship in a way that obviated already established political communities such that the federal government would "carry its agency to the persons of the citizens."[85] As Sheldon Wolin perceives, such a vision created "a new and abstract conception of the citizen," one who was "an unmediated subject" and whose "political nature would be confined to periodic elections every two, four, or six years."[86]

John Rawls conjures a similarly deracinated vision of state citizenship beginning in his celebrated work *A Theory of Justice*, the most influential treatise of political philosophy

[85] Jacob E. Cooke, *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), no. 16, 102.
[86] Sheldon Wolin, *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 98.

published in the twentieth century. According to Rawls's own characterization, his theory comprises two main parts. The first consists of a heuristic device that he calls "the original position" and in which individuals are situated behind a "veil of ignorance," not knowing what abilities or assets they will have, the conception of the good which they will hold, the historical generation in which they will live, or even the details of their own psychology.[87] Instead, in this position they possess only general information, such as the fact that there will be moderate scarcity of goods and competition over them. The second piece of Rawls's theory articulates the principles of justice that he believes parties in the original position would agree to. Rawls insists that, while they are deeply interconnected, the two parts of his theory are not inextricable: one could assent to either the original position or the principles of justice without necessarily approving of the other.[88] Despite this, however, Rawls elsewhere asserts, "The only principles which authorize claims on institutions are those that would be chosen in the original position."[89] As far as this is the case, citizens appear not as thick selves with ties to particular communities but as almost ghostly figures shuttling between the ethereal world of the original position and a comparatively naked political arena designed to limit the public role of such commitments and communities.[90]

Contrary to such conceptions of citizenship, for Christians the axiological and chronological priority of ecclesial soulcraft means that when we enter the arena of municipal politics we ought not do so as lone actors abstracted from our other political associations.

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[87] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised 1999 ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 118.

[88] Ibid., 14.

[89] Ibid., 191.

[90] Rawls's most notable restriction of such forces comes in *Political Liberalism*, where he contends that democratic citizens should try "to conduct their political affairs on terms supported by public values that we might reasonably expect others to endorse." John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 253. He later softens this position somewhat with his famous "proviso," which allows all reasonable arguments into the political arena provided that they give public reasons in due course. See ibid., xlix.

Instead we come bound in significant ways to the church as a community of moral commitment and dialogue, to the "least of these," and to many others. To describe one dimension of the priority of soulcraft as "chronological" may lead some to conclude that one can somehow fulfill this priority and then move on to "bigger and better" things. The axiological priority of the ecclesial polity reminds us, however, that there are no bigger and better things. Instead, to the extent that one remains a Christian one recognizes a continual need for the church and for the continual reformation of the soul. "Love," Eric Gregory writes, "must be trained and ordered or, better yet, always training and ordering."[91] And the church is that community committed to training and ordering the soul in the love of God and neighbor. As Ambrose once proclaimed, for Christians the church is the "gymnasium for the soul."[92]

Even as we go forth to toil in the fields of municipal politics, then, Christians remain migrants who must continually return to the church to be reoriented to God and neighbor through its practices of soulcraft, to remember our true political identities by hearing the Word of God, and to be shown what enacting those identities might look like in the world. Accordingly, Christians ought to understand municipal politics not as a realm in which they are severed from their bonds to the ecclesial community but where they should rightly give expression to the values cultivated in and through it. The point, much as Robert Markus writes of Augustine's view on the matter, is that Christians should not consider ourselves first and foremost "as parts of a governmental machinery, of the 'state' " but instead always

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[91] Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 262.

[92] Ambrose of Milan, "On the Psalms," in *Liturgy of the Hours III* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), 543.

primarily as members of the church, which seeks, through the aid of divine grace, to make us fit to be members of the City of God.[93]

This applies even to those Christians who might hold high positions of governmental leadership, where today the temptation of de facto ecclesial dissociation is tremendously strong in many Western states. Giving way to this temptation, we routinely imagine Christians who occupy governmental positions as more or less free agents, shorn from the bonds of the church in order to act in "the best interest of the state." When faced with a crisis, such figures would appear to have almost nothing upon which to rely other than their own consciences. This is a vision given archetypal articulation by Max Weber near the end of his essay "Politics as a Vocation" as he describes the person who has a calling for politics as a "*mature* man … [who] is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such a responsibility with heart and soul" and then acts responsibly, being compelled to declare, echoing Luther at the Diet of Worms, "Here I stand; I can do no other." Such a person is, Weber tells us, "not only a leader but a hero as well."[94]

Yet if it is true, as Bonhoeffer claims, that "[a] Christian who stays away from the assembly is contradiction in terms,"[95] then to the extent that such a leader claims to be a Christian, he or she should be bound in some manner to the church. This connection does not eliminate the role of conscience inasmuch as the church constitutes a living tradition in the sense that Alasdair MacIntyre defines the term, namely, one that "embod[ies] continuities of conflict" and in which there is "an historically extended, socially embodied

[93] Markus, *Saeculum*, 148.
[94] Weber, *From Max Weber*, 127-8. Emphasis original.
[95] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Volume 1, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans., Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1998).

argument."[96] Nonetheless it simultaneously means that we cannot think of Christian governmental leaders in such a heroic, Promethean fashion—nor should they conceive of themselves in this way. At the very least, the claim that they lay upon being a Christian ought to entail that such persons are willing to enter into dialogue and discernment with the ecclesial polity, even if they find that they must ultimately dissent from it.

Few recent cases provide a clearer anti-type of this relationship than the way in which United States President George W. Bush handled the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003. Bush had made a habit of touting his Christian faith throughout his political career, and especially leading up to the 2000 election. Most memorably, when asked who his favorite political philosopher was, he responded by saying, "Jesus Christ, because he changed my heart." In spite of this and the fact that he was a member of Park Hill United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, when Christian groups, including the bishops of the United Methodist Church and representatives from the National Council of Churches (NCC), sought to arrange meetings with Bush to discuss the administration's preparations for war in Iraq, they were rebuffed; moreover, letters both private and public went unanswered.[97] Bush may have feared that granting such a meeting would have undermined the case for war that the administration was so passionately attempting to make to the American people. Notably, however, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair received an NCC delegation despite the fact that he faced the task of persuading a populace that was even more ardently opposed to military action in Iraq.

I do not wish to suggest that Bush should necessarily have relented when confronted by the opposition of the United Methodist bishops and the NCC leadership to a potential

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[96] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 222.

[97] For more on these efforts, see Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 4-11.

war in Iraq. While I think it is unarguable that their position was in fact far more in line with traditional Christian teaching and more clearly faithful to the authoritative sources of the Christian faith, the nature of the church as a community embodying continuities of conflict creates the possibility for a debate over how the demands of the faith translate in our contemporary world, one which Bush insisted had changed rudimentarily after the events of September 11, 2001. The fundamental problem, then, is that Bush exempted himself from such conversation. His claim to be a United Methodist should have minimally demanded that he at least listen to church leaders and enter into dialogue with them over this issue that they recognized as so urgent and for him to attempt to narrate how his proposed course of action in fact aligned with core Christian values and convictions. To rebuff and ignore such invitations to conversation creates and enacts a distorted, overly individualistic vision of the Christian unmoored from the ecclesial polity and its structures of discourse and accountability. Moreover, it constitutes a case of "political amnesia," as one fails to remember one's axiologically prior citizenship in the church.

Unsurprisingly, given the influence of Thomas Jefferson's claim that the church should be divided from the state by a "wall of separation," the United States is replete with examples of political conceptions that would abstract Christian governmental leaders from any ecclesial polity. One finds another prominent example in John F. Kennedy's famous 1960 speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. Given Kennedy's context and purpose as he sought to reassure an anxious nation that electing a Catholic to the presidency would not result in a Vatican takeover of the United States government, one can easily appreciate why he would emphasize the distance between himself and the Roman Catholic Church. And in fact there is much in Kennedy's address that Christians can and should applaud, including his opposition to tests of faith for those who would hold governmental

office and the denial that state power could be used to persecute others' religion. In a crucial passage, Kennedy confesses his belief in a system where "no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote."[98] If we interpret these interventions in a strong sense as representing authoritarian impositions that would all but eliminate the individual conscience, we might further applaud this point. In this sense, Kennedy is right when he later declares: "I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me." Yet even if neither speaks *for* the other, Kennedy's Christian faith ought rightly to mean that they should somehow be listening and speaking *to* each other. Again, while it is understandable that he would not include this in an address to an already fretful electorate, it is nonetheless a grave omission that contributes to the notion that citizens, and especially governmental leaders, loose themselves from the church in assuming their municipal responsibilities.

Despite the fact that it is Kennedy who has made Christian conservatives like former US senator and fellow Roman Catholic Rick Santorum "want to throw up,"[99] Christians might in fact recognize that it is Bush who represents the more critical threat to the church. Suggesting that the state should erect a barrier that distinguishes it from the church in an "absolute" fashion, Kennedy would apparently disallow considerations of faith from shaping the deliberations and decisions of government officials. Otherwise, his vision bears comparatively little on the ecclesial polity itself. Antagonistic as such a position is to the public role of religion, Christians have continued to embody their faith publicly under far

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[98] John F. Kennedy, "Campaign Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association" in *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought: Reconstruction to the Present*, eds. Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 578.

[99] This refers to a comment that Mr. Santorum made during a television appearance on ABC's *This Week* on February 26, 2012.

harsher circumstances, as evinced in the *Second Apology* of Justin Martyr, in which he took the Senate of pagan Rome to task, indicting its members of their errors and calling them to "judge justly."[100] Unlike Kennedy, Bush clearly would allow a place for the Christian faith in the arena of municipal government. This place, however, is consigned to the heart of government actors in a way that detaches them from any substantive connection an ecclesial polity, thereby corroding the church's political integrity. Moreover, such a conception reduces the faith to individual proportions and alienates it from ecclesial structures of accountability that ought not eliminate the place of individual conscience but that should rightly call individuals to justify themselves when they diverge from historical judgments of the community. As the faith is so reduced it becomes even more susceptible to distortion and capable of being invoked idolatrously to sanctify an individual's own views, even though these may be profoundly at odds with traditional Christian teachings.

Non-Christians might understandably worry that, were Christian governmental leaders to attend to the ecclesial polity in the way that I am advocating that this would make them less attentive to others. In fact, I believe that when the ecclesial polity is faithful to its mission, the case is much the opposite. Drawing upon the work of Rachel Muers, Luke Bretherton contends, "For the church listening is *the* constitutive political act" since it is through listening to the Word of God that the church is called out of the world and enabled "to participate in God's hearing of the world."[101] Even if one finds the isolation of any one practice as the singular constitutive political act of the church to be overly reductive, Bretherton's larger point is well taken. Faithfully participating in the politics of a morally formative church should make Christians not less but more alert to the world. Learning to

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[100] Justin Martyr, *The First and Second Apologies*, Ancient Christian Writers, No. 56, trans., Leslie W. Barnard (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997), II.15.

[101] Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 100.

listen for the Word of God, the discernments of other members of the ecclesial polity, and the cries of the most vulnerable provide powerful forces that pull Christians beyond themselves and ultimately beyond the church. At the same time, such practices develop habits of attentiveness and demonstrate that truly cultivating the common good of a demographically inclusive polity requires listening to the various voices that compose the *demos*. Thus, we might justly fear that Christians who refuse to listen even to those with whom they claim to be bound as members of the body of Christ will lack the skills and willingness to attend earnestly to those beyond the church.

In addition to many other reasons, then, Christians will also be drawn to engagement with the mechanisms of statecraft on account of the state's potential to serve as a crucial site of listening and dialogue for a demographically inclusive polity. Yet this emphasis upon dialogue and listening should make clear that the recognition of the state's utility in such matters ought by no means to be perversely transmuted into a simple endorsement of the agglomeration or expansion of state power. Instead, the power allotted to the state must be carefully balanced, a point that Niebuhr makes when he writes, "The political life of man must constantly steer between the Scylla of anarchy and the Charybdis of tyranny."[102] Anarchy in the form that Hobbes envisioned when he described the state of nature as a war "of every man, against every man" remains a possible threat in cases where government lacks sufficient power.[103] Despite this potential, in advanced capitalist countries we might more reasonably fear that such cases will instead devolve into a non-governmental form of tyranny in which economic powers colonize civil society, distorting social life and

[102] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940; reprint, 1946), 14.

[103] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), I.13.

perpetrating large-scale injustices.[104] Hence, it is desirable for the state to possess a sufficient degree of power to curb chaos, prevent other forces from distorting social life, remediate the injustices inflicted by corrupt social forms, and help to establish more just and equitable relations.

Nevertheless, when the state's power grows to be too great or too extensive, it can easily result in precisely the kind of governmental tyranny about which Niebuhr warned. Even when the state does not intentionally seek to dominate society despotically, excessive state power can negatively impact other social institutions, remaking them in the image of the state or draining them of their vitality.[105] The state can serve as a site of dialogue and cooperation, a site where we speak and listen to others and pursue the common good with them. But it can also squash other sites that would serve similar functions. Even while acknowledging its needfulness, then, Christians must recognize that the power of the state requires limits. As Gregory maintains, "Some goods are too vulnerable and rich to be the focus of the state's direct concern."[106] Such insights also resonate with the Roman Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity, which holds that "[g]overnment should not replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiative … [but] should help them to contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice

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[104] In this section I am intentionally playing off Habermas's notion of the "colonization of the lifeworld," though reinterpreting his conception of the lifeworld so as to shear it of many of its overly sanguine presuppositions about the extent of moral agreement in society. Hence, I instead refer to "civil society." On the colonization of the lifeworld, see especially Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume II: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans., Thomas McCarthy (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1987), 155. Also, Stephen K. White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice, and Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 112. On the meaning of civil society, see Charles Taylor, "Modes of Civil Society," *Public Culture* 3, no. 1 (1990): especially 95.

[105] Bretherton deals with one form of the state remaking social institutions in its image in his discussion of the "institutional isomorphism" experienced by "faith designated groups" that have participated in government-funded faith-based initiatives. Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 41-5. Although Bretherton does not cite Habermas in this discussion, his emphasis upon the hegemonic influence of the state and its instrumental resonates deeply with Habermas's understanding of the way in which the state can colonize the lifeworld.

[106] Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 310.

exceed their capacities."[107] The doctrine of subsidiarity may have some superficial affinities with the dynamics of the market-state, which result from the fact that both seek to devolve governmental power. Yet where it differs crucially is that subsidiarity would insist that decisions that affect the public ought to be kept public rather than being ceded to private corporations, for only in this way can the institutions in question be held responsible to citizens and to the common good.

In a world marked not only by the immense potency of nation-states but also their burgeoning self-transformation into market-states, the task of limiting state power is becoming increasingly urgent and yet increasingly difficult. The nation-state's relentless push towards rationalization, which has generally meant bureaucratization, has tended to foreclose sites of political dialogue and cooperation. In this vein, Weber noted that, whereas bureaucracy and democratization have historically proceeded in tandem, this pairing eventuates not in "the minimization of the civil servants' ruling power in favor of the greatest possible 'direct' rule of the *demos*" but merely "the *leveling of the governed* in opposition to the ruling and bureaucratically articulated group."[108] Hence, the growth of bureaucratic control has generally restricted participation even in ostensibly democratic nation-states as decisions are instead handed over to putative bureaucratic "experts."

Matters are even more complicated in incipient market-states, where the dynamics of bureaucratic control are often compounded by those of privatization. Nearly two-and-a-half decades ago, Sheldon Wolin reflected on the Iran-Contra Affair, observing that one of its central lessons was that there existed a new arrangement in which "political power is not the

[107] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Tenth Anniversary Edition of Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1997), ¶124.
[108] Weber, *From Max Weber*, 226. Emphasis original.

monopoly of the government."[109] Instead "public and private power have become so entangled as to create a different version of power" that devolved de facto governmental powers to private corporations, something further manifested in the privatization of numerous public functions, such as schooling, prisons, and even national defense. At different points in his career, Wolin would describe these and allied changes as part of the growth of what he called the "megastate" or "Superpower."[110] Using the term Bobbitt has provided, however, we might see them as constitutive aspects of the emergent market-state, in which state activities are increasingly privatized.

As both Bobbitt and Wolin recognize (though with markedly different levels of alarm), these developments have even further diminished opportunities for citizens to participate meaningfully in governmental politics, especially at the highest levels of the state. On account of its increasing privatization, the market-state tends, Bobbitt writes matter-of-factly, "to make voting and representative government less influential and more responsive to the market" rather than the people.[111] Making a similar point, Wolin identifies that what such evolutions bring is not "the elimination of power but the elimination of politics, that is, the public discussion and argument over how power is to be used, for what ends, and who is responsible."[112] As heretofore public functions are turned over to the aegis of private corporations and market forces, the already waning control that citizens had over their administration is pushed to a vanishing point. In the United States, as well as other countries, citizens' disenfranchisement advances further as corporations pour massive amounts of money into political campaigns, depriving even the vote of its power and transforming elections in such a way that Wolin, in a rhetorical flourish, maintains that they are "steadily

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[109] Wolin, *Presence of the Past*, 182.
[110] See Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 559-62.
[111] Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 211.
[112] Wolin, *Presence of the Past*, 182.

coming to resemble totalitarian plebiscites."[113] With growing privatization, the waxing of corporate influence over government, and the dissolution of meaningful forms of citizen engagement, one could see why Bobbitt would speculate that governance in the market-state is both easier and more difficult: easier "because so much less is demanded it"; more difficult "because the habits of the good citizen are lost" as politics is reduced to "who's winning and who's losing, or, as shown by the little arrows in a popular news magazine, who's up and who's down."[114]

Even more worrisome for Christians, if Bobbitt is right, these developments are being accompanied by an advancing moral aloofness on the part of the state as it becomes largely indifferent to ethical values so long as they do not inhibit economic competition.[115] Though the evidence is mixed, if one takes the United States as a paradigm of the market-state, there are strong indicators that states of this new type are growing increasingly disinterested in pursuing moral values—or at least those of a particular sort. On the one hand, moral claims show no sign of disappearing from state politics in the near future as numerous governments have sought to legislate on various "moral issues," most saliently abortion and homosexual marriage. Yet, on the other hand, the federal government particularly appears to have become increasingly insensitive to equalitarian claims that would require intervening in, or even remediating the outcomes of, the market economy.

Exemplifying this trend, the federal government has rolled back regulations on many industries, including transportation, energy, telecommunications, and banking, allowing he development of massive concentrations of wealth and power. Simultaneously, it has reduced the progressive nature of the tax system, slashing the top marginal income tax rate from 70%

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[113] Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 554.
[114] Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 231.
[115] See ibid., 230.

in 1977 to 35% in 2012 and cutting the maximum tax rate on long-term capital gains from 39.9% in 1977 to 15.3% in 2008.[116] Along with this has come a reduction in spending on many social welfare programs, most notably through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which restricted access to poverty relief programs. By no means has the state utterly forsaken the task of blunting the impact of an amoral market upon the populace, as seen in the expansion of unemployment programs in the wake of the 2008 recession. But overall (with the notable exception of the politically sensitive Medicare program) it has generally reduced the scope of welfare programs, increasingly limited the government's role to more occasional interventions, minimized the tax burden of the richest citizens, and continued apace with privatizing many other institutions, such as hospitals, that were once part of the social safety net. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these trends have correlated with a significant increase in income inequality, which rose from a Gini coefficient of 0.395 to 0.469 in the quarter century between 1974 and 2009.[117]

As market-states continue their emergence, it is unclear exactly how they will develop. And, admittedly, some of the market-state's defining features may represent a necessary retraction from the hyperextension of the nation-state. Nevertheless, I believe that these trends warrant Christians' circumspection. If, as Niebuhr teaches, justice is a composite virtue defined by the regulative principles of liberty and equality, there seems to be more than sufficient reason to worry that the propensity of the market-state to emphasize

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[116] "Highest Historical Marginal Income Rates," Tax Policy Center http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/taxfacts/Content/PDF/toprate_historical.pdf (accessed April 26, 2012). Tax Policy Center, "Capital Gains and Taxes Paid on Capital Gains," http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/taxfacts/Content/PDF/source_historical_cg.pdf (accessed April 26, 2012).

[117] Amanda Noss, "Household Income for States: 2008 and 2009," US Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acsbr09-2.pdf (accessed April 26, 2012), p. 1. Arthur F. Jones, Jr. and Daniel H. Weinberg, "The Changing Shape of the Nation's Income Distribution," US Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/prod/2000pubs/p60-204.pdf (accessed April 26, 2012), p. 9.

economic freedom so strongly will tip the balance toward the former principle at the expense of the latter.

Whether in highly potent and bureaucratized nation-states wherein power is largely concentrated in governmental apparatuses or in budding market-states where the state and market represent a more diffuse but no less formidable constellation of power, along with Niebuhr (especially early in his career) and Hauerwas (especially in his most recent writings) I believe that Christians have an interest in limiting such massive conglomerations of power. This means that one of the tasks of the Christian municipal citizen will be, as Wolin says of the citizen generally, "to insist upon a widened debate in … vital matters: to reclaim public space as a space for deliberation, criticism, and alternatives and to prevent important political matters from being depoliticized and turned into in-house discussions."[118] The development of such spaces provides vital means by which the state can be held responsible to the standard that it ought to serve, namely, the common good of society as a whole. Not only Christians but non-Christians as well might worry that when mechanisms of accountability are sapped of their strength we face the danger of tyranny at the hands of unchecked power-holders or anarchy resulting from the rebellion of the *demos* against such powers.[119]

Such insights need not disdain the systems of checks and balances that liberals like Niebuhr have championed. And yet, as Hauerwas has gestured towards, particularly in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, they nonetheless demand that we go further and in doing so create a natural convergence between Christians and political thinkers like Wolin and Hauerwas's co-author Romand Coles. Such "radical democrats" seek to rework

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[118] Wolin, *Presence of the Past*, 191.

[119] Bobbitt is particularly alive to the concerns of anarchy and encourages market-states to incorporate mechanisms of accountability into their constitution, for "[t]he mass protests that took place during the meetings of the G-7, the IMF, and the WTO remind us that unless there is a legitimate process by which public opinion, in all its shades, can be registered there is little reason not to take to the streets." Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 337.

our conceptions of politics and expand political participation in ways that will advance the common good.

Nevertheless, the convergence here only extends so far, for a deep appreciation of the predicament of evil reveals that radical democrats often prove overly sanguine at key points. Most fundamentally, they can appear naively to believe that cultivating grassroots politics will lead to progressive outcomes, something evinced in Coles's description of radical democracy as a "trickster politics." As Coles sees it, the trickster nature of such a politics derives from the fact that it presents itself as if it is playing the game of interest-group liberalism but does so in order to enhance a radical democratic game that focuses upon building relationships with the goal of achieving cultural change and local redistributions in areas such as housing, living wage, infrastructure, and schools.[120] The faulty assumption that underlies this vision implies that encouraging grassroots engagement will somehow naturally transform into political initiatives that advance the common good. While this is undeniably a possibility, the recent history of the Tea Party Movement in the United States suggests that grassroots engagement can take a very different course. Uniting grassroots organization with a list towards Randian libertarianism and sociological individualism, the Tea Party illustrates that it is possible for such groups to come together not so much in order to debate about the common good or to seek progressive cultural change but on account of a common desire to be left alone. Moreover, although the Tea Party has stood against the expansion of state power in key respects, its animus has focused less upon government expenditures on things like the military and more upon spending on social programs, aid to the poor, and education, which have long been the heart of a

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[120] See Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2008), 278.

progressive redistributive paradigm in the United States and whose evisceration would have peculiarly pernicious effects upon the poorest and most vulnerable.

Accordingly, even as we seek to widen democratic debate, Christians ought not think that this alone will be sufficient, for it may unleash forces that would, whether intentionally or not, harm the flourishing of those with whom Christ most closely identifies himself. Thus, among the distinctive aspects of Christians' involvement in municipal politics will be their insistence that the common good is most accurately measured by the fate of the least advantaged and most vulnerable.[121] For this reason, it would be wrong to view Christians as composing a limited "interest group" that seeks only its own advantage. The church ought always to have the oppressed and misfortunate among its number; when it does not, it needs to consider seriously whether it has betrayed the nature of the ministry of the Incarnate God who proclaimed, "You always have the poor with you" (John 12:8). Yet it does not advocate only for its own interests or for that of its members but for the good of groups, as well as an overall conception of the common good, that generally have few defenders.[122] We should not make the mistake of believing that only the state can advance the goods of these groups, thereby forgetting that the church itself composes a vital polity that is called to minister to the poor, oppressed, imprisoned, and others. Yet we cannot ignore that the state indeed has a large influence over their well-being—as well as a responsibility to care for it as part of its call to promote the common good.

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[121] I agree with Duncan Forrester, Robert Rodes, David Fletcher, and others that on this point Christian thought has a natural, if limited, affinity with John Rawls's difference principle, which holds that the position of the least well-off is the point from which social and economic inequalities are to be evaluated. Nonetheless, Harlan Beckley seems right in his recognition that Christians might be compelled to demand even greater equality than this principle would allow. See Duncan B. Forrester, *Christian Justice and Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 133. Robert E. Rodes, *Pilgrim Law* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 102. David B. Fletcher, "Christian Social Justice and Rawls's Liberalism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 19, no. 3 (1990): 232. Harlan Beckley, "A Christian Affirmation of Rawls's Idea of Justice as Fairness, Part 2," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 2 (1986): 238.

[122] This claim is influenced by Tipton, *Public Pulpits*, 420.

In nation-states, demanding that the state address itself to the persistent poverty and oppression in its midst will call into question its validity as a guarantor of "liberty and justice for all" as well as its competence as a provider of public goods; in market-states, it will highlight that the mere maximization of opportunity is not a sufficient political goal, paling in comparison to the promotion of social justice and human flourishing. Regardless of the kind of state under which they find themselves living—even should it be one that bears the marks of their making—Christians should never rest easy with its status quo and should never accept, in the words of Charles Dickens, the pretensions of "the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general [are] settled for ever."[123] We cannot do so because the state will inevitably be controlled to some degree by oligarchic and plutocratic interests that use its power to seek their own advantage, will always be tainted by evil and complicit in it, and will always fall short of the possibilities of communion embodied in the City of God. And yet, as Niebuhr notes, it is unlikely that any of this will stop states from giving way to idolatrous pride both by claiming "a more absolute devotion to values which transcend its life than the facts warrant" and by regarding "the values to which [they are] loyal as more absolute than they really are."[124] To ascribe priority to our identities as citizens of the City of God and of the church means that Christians ought rightly to challenge such pretensions.

This does not imply, however, that the church or individual Christians ought to forsake concern for the state. As one of the most powerful and pervasive social forms, the state creates modes of relation that appear natural and right in the eyes of many. Because of this, it is simply too powerful to ignore. While we must be humble about what the state can

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[123] Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 1.

[124] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I: Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941; reprint, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 213.

actually accomplish, recognizing that it can never attain anything like the perfect social order of the City of God, turning our backs on it would leave far too many vulnerable to injustices and deprivations that could be remediated under a more just governmental arrangement. Hence, Christians must find a way of being present to the state while maintaining a critical distance. For my part, as I have argued, I do not believe that this precludes Christians from thinking of themselves as citizens or even serving in positions of power within the state. In doing so, however, such persons cannot forget—and the church ought to remind them incessantly—that their highest allegiance is always to the God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ and to the City of God that he proclaimed and manifested in his life, death, and resurrection. Moreover, Christ's establishment of the ecclesial *polis* means that Christians have another citizenship not only in the world to come but in the world here and now, for they are citizens of a church entrusted with the message of God's holy city and with training its members to live in ways that faithfully witness to its coming by joining with others to worship God, listen for God's Word, serve the poor, minister to those who suffer from evil, and seek greater provision for the deprived. While these responsibilities may begin within the territorial borders of a state, the nature of the City of God, which reaches out to encompass all in its reign of love, entails that they should never be limited by those borders. Hence, even as Christians might use the state to advance goals such as greater justice and more equal provision, they must not allow themselves to be constrained by its moral horizons.

Yet we Christians ought not to delude ourselves: being loyal to our eschatological and ecclesial citizenships will often put us out of step with the state. And it may even put us into danger. We should rightly oppose the overweening claims that the state would seek to assert over us and others, including by objecting to the validity of universal military conscription since even if we were to accept the permissibility of just wars we can by no

means trust that when the state enters into wars it will do so justly. Similarly, we might also doubt the faithfulness of baldly pledging allegiance to the flag and the nation for which it stands since our loyalties to God and to the holy city that God will bring forth, as well as to the church, will always rank as higher allegiances.[125] To understand ourselves in such a way represents a challenge to the authority of the state. Because the state has such powerful instruments of existential creation by which it presses its claims upon us, the church is always profoundly in need of ecclesiocentric thinkers like Hauerwas both to remind us of the political priority that Christians should ascribe to the church and to expose the ways in which the state's attempts to legitimate its authority so easily give way to idolatry.

On account of this tendency to idolatry, it is understandable that some, such as Hauerwas, have concentrated exclusively upon the negative service that the church offers to the state by confronting its pretensions, effectively renouncing the notion that Christians should contribute positively to the state's political life. Yet throughout the Old Testament, we read of those like Joseph, Isaiah, and Daniel who served as counselors to rulers who worshipped literal idols. The coexistence of this service with these figures' collective status as paragons of the faith problematizes any attempt simply to isolate ourselves from the state on account of its metaphorical idolatrousness.

At the same time, these scriptural figures also illustrate that it is very hazardous to be present to such powerful authorities in ways that seek to witness to the City of God and yet oppose or undermine their pretensions. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who served as administrators under Nebuchadnezzar, Christians may find ourselves labeled as

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[125] In this respect, I would judge the United States' Pledge of Allegiance to be far more objectionable than the oaths of office affirmed by government officials. This is because the Pledge broadly pledges "allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands," whereas the oaths of office generally involve a more narrow pledge, typically to administer justice and uphold the Constitution. To be sure, the very broadness of the Pledge opens the possibility of narrating one's opposition as a form of allegiance. Nevertheless, to pledge one's allegiance in such a broad fashion rather than to the execution of specific responsibilities should raise grave worries for Christians.

public enemies or disturbers of the peace when we refuse to fall down and worship the figurative golden statues that the state has erected (see Daniel 3:5ff). Such rebelliousness may be punished, perhaps by barring us from participating in the politics of the municipality. Were this to happen, Christians ought to continue to participate in the political life of the church, offering ourselves to God and in service to our neighbors. And as part of that latter service at least some among the church's number should persist in being present to the state. Such engagement may take numerous forms. In certain circumstances it may involve sharing a degree of power or publicly advocating in ways that hold the state accountable to the common good. In extreme cases—like those of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—it may even take the form of imprisonment or execution. Whether as power-sharers or as cross-bearers, however, Christians ought to understand engaging with the mechanisms of statecraft in the quest to create a world of greater justice to be an integral way in which the church points towards the City of God in a world caught in the predicament of evil.

CONCLUSION

Patterned according to a metaphor of construction, this project has now proceeded through three central tasks. First, it surveyed both the blueprint of the City of God, which it argued defines politics in its fullest sense, and the topography of the predicament of evil, which presents insuperable impediments to establishing such a perfect politics in our present world. Second, it gathered resources for a Christian ethic of politics by reviewing and evaluating the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Stanley Hauerwas. Third and finally, it sought to utilize these resources in order to construct such an ethic, one premised upon the recognition that both soulcraft and statecraft are indispensible political tasks in this time between the times.

Nevertheless, the most crucial test of any structure is not whether it can be built but how it functions when human beings attempt to utilize it, living, working, and communing within. The same might be said of any ethic. From this perspective, the present project has yet to face its most significant trial, for it has not yet elaborated how those who live within the ethical edifice that it has constructed might respond to some of the salient, practical issues of political life, especially those issues that arise within municipal politics. Obviously, in a field as complex and variegated as politics is, one will never be able to address all possible casuistical questions. Still, I believe that this project ultimately brings to the fore two issues—the permissibility of political violence and the proper idiom in which to express

Christian claims to a demographically inclusive public—whose consideration would greatly clarify its constructive vision and what it might mean to live by a political ethic of soulcraft and statecraft. Thus, I think it would be appropriate to end by foreshadowing the shape of future iterations of this project—or at least subsequent works that would extend its constructive vision to casuistical topics—by identifying the key questions involved in these issues and suggesting in very general terms how one might approach them on the basis of a political ethic such as this. Nevertheless, constraints of time and space make it impossible at present to devote to these matters the intensive treatment they require. Accordingly, these brief reflections are far from conclusive. Instead, they should be regarded as highly preliminary and exploratory, highlighting questions that will need to be addressed and briefly gesturing towards future work that will follow the trajectory that this project has set.

The first casuistical issue with which subsequent works would wrestle is that of political violence. Between the conception of politics-as-statecraft as elaborated by Niebuhr and the conception of politics-as-soulcraft as articulated by Hauerwas, there are numerous divergences; the fifth chapter attempted to resolve many of these by defining the place of each in the Christian political ethic that I advocate. But this project has not yet undertaken to arbitrate forthrightly the disagreement between them over the legitimacy of political violence, which constitutes one of their most significant breaches.

For Niebuhr, the goal of politics is to establish order in a demographically inclusive society that is inevitably threatened with potential conflict as it is riven by tensions, many of which are created by the pursuit of legitimate interests. Even as one must recognize the perils of resorting to violence, Niebuhr believes that "[a] responsible relationship to the political order … makes an unqualified disavowal of violence impossible [since there] may always be crises in which the cause of justice will have to be defended against those who will

attempt its violent destruction."[1] The defining task of politics therefore entails that responsible politicians and citizens must accept the potential necessity of utilizing violence against threats both foreign and domestic. To be sure, Niebuhr allowed that pacifism could be a valuable asset, provided that the one who advocates it "leave[s] the world of politics alone entirely and seek[s] simply to live by the love commandment in terms that demand an irresponsible attitude toward the problem of collective justice."[2] Nevertheless, while such a witness could remind us of the perfection of love manifested in Christ, Niebuhr fervently believed that "the Christian faith is not otherworldly, it always commits us in a responsible relation to the community" and thus presumably to the willingness to use violence to maintain political order and justice.[3]

In stark contrast, Hauerwas contends that "politics only begins with … a disavowal [of violence], for only then are we forced genuinely to listen to the other, thus beginning the conversations necessary for discovering goods in common."[4] To employ violence is thus to destroy the conversations that are constitutive of politics. Even more significantly, the use of such violence is flatly contrary to the Christian faith as Hauerwas interprets it. The narrative of the gospels that forms the charter of the church requires Christians "to be nothing less than a sanctified people of peace who can live the life of the forgiven."[5] Put differently, "nonviolence is not just one implication among others that can be drawn from our Christian

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1935; reprint, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 116.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957; reprint, Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Press, 1967), 171. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940; reprint, 1946), 5-6.

[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics: A Commentary on Religious, Social, and Political Thought in a Technological Age* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968), 44.

[4] Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1988; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 15.

[5] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 60.

beliefs; it is at the very heart of our understanding of God."[6] Placing us within a different narrative constructed not around the gracious act of God's salvation in Jesus Christ but the purported need for human beings to save themselves, the resort to violence thus degrades our communities and disfigures our souls.

How would a political ethic of both soulcraft and statecraft approach such matters? Would it concur that the use of violence is, at least at times, a political necessity? If so, what circumstances would qualify? And what means would be appropriate to them? Or must it categorically reject the use of violence as flatly contrary to the example of Jesus Christ?

An initial step in adequately addressing questions such as these would require making more fine-grained distinctions than Niebuhr and Hauerwas routinely do. Indeed, I believe that focusing upon the category of "violence" itself marks a refinement. Whereas both Niebuhr and Hauerwas talk at points about violence specifically, they more frequently invoke broader terms, such as "coercion." Let us, however, take violence in a narrow sense to denote, "The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property," the primary meaning given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If there exists such a thing as "nonviolent coercion," as Niebuhr suggests,[7] then there are potentially significant distinctions that one must make. Indeed, despite Hauerwas's broadly framed proclamation that the Kingdom of God "reveals the insufficiency of all politics based on coercion,"[8] one might find that the church as he envisions it exercises a nonviolent yet nonetheless coercive power as it leverages potent compulsions over the minds, souls, and behaviors of its members.[9] While one might nonetheless find even these compulsions to be

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[6] Ibid., xvii.

[7] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, ed. D. B. Robertson (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 83. See also Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics*, 99.

[8] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 102.

[9] Clifford Geertz helps us to perceive the coercion implicit in such endeavors when he writes that "religion, by fusing ethos and world view, gives to a set of social values what they perhaps most need to be coercive: an

problematic, inasmuch as such a community refuses to resort to physical or violent coercion, it still differs qualitatively from one that does; yet, this difference is too easily obscured by a term so general as "coercion." Failure to recognize the significance of this distinction flummoxes not only Hauerwas but Niebuhr as well. One detects this difficulty as the latter makes the eschewal of coercion generally rather than violence specifically the defining feature of pacifism. Under such a definition, the only true pacifists are those that refuse to resist evil in any fashion; one must accordingly strike the later Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., from the category.[10] By construing matters in this way, however, Niebuhr elides the crucial distinction between violence and nonviolence.[11]

In addition to defining what is meant by "violence" and distinguishing it appropriately not only from utter nonresistance but also from (coercive) nonviolent resistance, a proper treatment of the matter of political violence must exhibit discrimination regarding the targets of violence. As most recognize, there are morally significant differences between the targeting of armed combatants and that of civilians. Additionally, I believe that there are morally significant differences between using violence in the legislation of a full-scale war and doing so, for instance, in order to arrest or subdue criminals through police action. And there are still further relevant discriminations to be made when utilizing violence in order to compel recalcitrant groups in the interests of establishing more just social relations. The distinctions that obtain in regard to police action and the quest to attain greater justice gesture towards a crucial challenge too often skirted by pacifists, namely, what

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appearance of objectivity." Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 131.

[10] Niebuhr clearly disqualifies Gandhi as a pacifist in his article "Can the Church Give a Moral Lead." See Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, 82.

[11] This section evinces my agreement with Colm McKeogh's claim that "Niebuhr emphasized the distinction between resistance and non-resistance but downplayed the distinction between violence and non-violence." Colm McKeogh, "Niebuhr's Critique of Pacifism" in *Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited: Engagements with an American Original*, ed. Daniel F. Rice (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 206.

the rejection of violence finally entails for the shape of law enforcement. For my part, I am intrigued, if not (yet) fully convinced, by the possibility that, particularly when compared to war, the use of violence as a mode of law enforcement may be justifiable on account of its greater potential for discrimination and its more limited scope.

Ultimately, however, if one accepts the axiological priority of soulcraft then the legitimacy of political violence must hinge significantly upon the question of whether and in what circumstances the use of violence brutalizes our souls and our polities. For instance, the use of violent means (or at least the threat of them) in order to arrest a murderer may approximate God's will to "punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity" (Isaiah 13:11). Yet to execute that same evildoer could harden our souls to the truth that God remains gracious, "not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). While I have no definitive answers to these questions at this point, this provides an indication of the manner in which they should be approached based upon the ethic elaborated in earlier chapters.

A second issue with which subsequent works will wrestle is the proper idiom in which Christians should express their political claims to a demographically inclusive polity. Such questions have become especially pressing in light of both the increasing pluralism of contemporary states and also the continued, widespread appeal of liberalism, which a number of its proponents advocate as a value-neutral approach to dealing with the political disagreements that such pluralism generates. In his book *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls, the most influential advocate of such a view, has argued that political participants should understand themselves to be bound by a "(moral) duty of civility" that entails that they "conduct their political affairs on terms supported by public values that they might reasonably expect others to endorse," regardless of the beliefs to which those others

adhere.[12] As I already indicated in Chapter 5, the terms that Rawls has in mind are those arrived at on the basis of what he calls the "original position," a device of representation in which citizens are to imagine ourselves situated behind a "veil of ignorance" that inhibits us from knowing "[f]eatures relating to social position, native endowment, and historical accident, as well as to the content of persons' determinate conceptions of the good."[13] More recently, in a subsequent preface to *Political Liberalism*, Rawls has amended this view by making what he calls "the proviso," allowing that "reasonable [comprehensive] doctrines may be introduced into public reason at any time, provided that in due course public reasons, given by a reasonable political conception, are presented sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are introduced to support."[14]

The difficulty for Christians arises from the fact that our most fundamental reasons for supporting a given course of political action will frequently be based upon thick convictions that are not admissible behind the veil of ignorance or articulable within a political conception that others, particularly liberals like Rawls, would consider "reasonable." At the very least, the antinomy between church and world that shapes so much of the New Testament canon suggests that Christians should not expect that others will endorse many of our core convictions, such as our belief in the coming City of God or in the divinity and moral exemplarity of Jesus Christ. Does this mean that Christians ought to reject the political language of Rawlsian public reason in favor of the thick dialect of the Gospel?

According to Hauerwas, this is precisely the path that Christians must take given the untranslatable nature of Christian claims. Hauerwas has long championed the notion that one of Christianity's unique features is its belief that translations of its scriptures into other

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[12] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 253.
[13] Ibid., 79.
[14] Ibid., xlix-l.

languages can be valid.[15] And yet, while he never explicitly makes such a distinction, his comments suggest that what is at issue in the attempt to express Christian claims in the terms of Rawlsian public reason or of liberalism more generally is not merely a potentially legitimate translation into another language but a distorting, Procrustean truncation of those claims as they are fitted into the confines of another, incommensurate moral logic. "Indeed the problem," writes Hauerwas, "is that we have [been] taught by the Enlightenment to believe that in fact there is a concept of 'justice qua justice' that corresponds to an account of 'rationality qua rationality' which blinds us to the tradition-dependent character of any account of justice."[16] The quest to render Christian claims in Rawlsian or Enlightenment terms thus requires one to make a decisive shift out of the native tradition and moral logic of Christianity. This shift is detrimental, however, because something is always lost in translation. As they have attempted to navigate the transposition into these reductivist traditions what Christians have historically felt compelled to leave behind are their most profound theological convictions. As these condensed "translations" became mistaken for the whole of the gospel, Christians forgot that "the first thing … we have to hold before any society is not justice but God."[17] The attempt to render the political claims of the Christian faith in the terms of Rawls's public reason is thus a threat to the political integrity of the church and thereby to the souls of its members.

Hauerwas's arguments are compelling on a number of points. Most significantly, as my first chapter has suggested, I believe that Christians find the character of justice most

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[15] See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1993), 28. For a more recent instance of this claim, see Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 132 n44.

[16] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1991), 49.

[17] Ibid., 60. For a similar sentiment, see Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1985), 38-9.

fully embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Just One (Acts 7:52). Hence Christians should maintain the logical priority of *Dikaios* (the Just One) to *dikaiosune* (the concept of justice) or, to use the Latin, *Iustus* to *iustitia*. Moreover, even if the mature Rawls would allow it into public discourse, it is doubtful that such a full-bodied, Christological conception of justice could be adequately buttressed by what he would consider to be sufficiently public reasons.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Hauerwas's worries about the abandonment of such full-bodied claims stem in part from an insufficiency in his understanding of the possible modes of the church's presence in and to a demographically inclusive polity. Specifically, Hauerwas's account of Christian discourse seems to imagine that its speech must always serve the church's mode of countercultural witness. As he sees it, witness is "one of the most determinative forms of rationality," and the only form sufficient to express the richness of the Christian narrative.[18] Thus, what Christians offer to the world is "a witness that we think is the truth of our existence."[19] While this witness is constituted by practices such as nonviolence and forgiveness, it seems also to include the very form of Christian speech, as well. By refusing to abandon the unique claims of their faith, Christians witness to the world that there is something irreducibly unique about that faith.

Theologically rich and unapologetic speech of this sort is, I would agree, a vital part of the Christian vocation; any church that articulates itself only in the moral language and logic of the culture that surrounds it displays crucial signs that suggest it has been conformed to the world (cf. Romans 12:2). I am skeptical, however, that this is the only appropriate idiom in which Christians can legitimately express their faith publicly. This is because I

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[18] Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 117.

[19] Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 135.

believe that the church's mode of presence in and to the world is not limited to that of countercultural witness. For instance, it ought also to be present as an evangelist that, like Paul at the Areopagus, aspires to articulate the Gospel persuasively in terms that are at least incipiently intelligible to non-Christians (see Acts 17). Furthermore, in keeping with God's commandment for the exiled Israelites to seek the welfare of the cities to which they have been sent (Jeremiah 29:7), I believe that the church should also be present to demographically inclusive polities as a participant seeking to promote policies that advance the common good and especially the good of the most vulnerable. At times the church and its members may predicate their contribution upon the most theologically robust claims of the Christian faith, such as by prophetically denouncing oppression and announcing the coming of a new kingdom of justice. At others, however, they may find it necessary or advantageous to attempt to translate the logic of those claims as nearly as possible into other moral languages, whether they be those of Hindus, Muslims, Rawlsian liberals, government bureaucrats, or others. The challenge for the church is to balance both the cultivation of this sort of multifaceted presence with the continual reminder that for Christians these translated claims attain their full intelligibility only in reference to Christ.

Through casuistical work of this sort, I hope to illustrate further the practical dynamics of how Christians can live faithful, hope-filled, and loving lives in a world vexed by evil. As we seek to grow ever more in the likeness of Christ and bear witness to the coming of that eschatological "city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10), we do so trusting that the day is coming when God will transfigure the world, loosing it and us finally and fully from the grip of evil. We hope that God might hasten that day, praying, "O Emmanuel … Come and save us, O Lord, our God."

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