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Cruciform Pilgrims:
A Constructive Theopolitical Anthropology

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Cruciform Pilgrims: A Constructive Theopolitical Anthropology

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M.Div., Harvard University, 2004

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Cruciform Pilgrims: A Constructive Theopolitical Anthropology
By John E. Senior

This dissertation explores three related questions: What kind of self is formed in the context of political activism? Is it a good self? And what theological sense can be made of such a self? Political activism often requires that citizens exercise uncooperative, instrumental, and even aggressive forms of moral agency. Yet many theologians have neglected the implications this has for the formation of the self. This neglect is sometimes by design. Some theologians, that is, think the church is the only morally relevant polity in which persons are formed and are therefore uninterested in these three questions. Other theologians have simply not attended to the morally complex ways in which persons exercise political agency and the morally ambiguous consequences that the exercise of political agency has for the formation of the self.

The first part of the dissertation examines the ways in which selves are formed as moral agents in the context of political engagement. Specifically, it accounts for the complex interplay between moral identity (the sources of moral meaning and experience that inform a person's understanding of their fundamental moral commitments and sense of purpose) and political agency (the capacities for effective political action in different political contexts). The mutually constitutive relationship between moral identity and political agency forms the political self. That formation, however, is always incomplete and ambiguous, owing to the moral challenges political engagement poses to both agency and identity.

The second part develops an alternative political anthropology, drawing chiefly on John Calvin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It argues that the political self, however broken, is a site of redemption. The cruciform shape the political self takes discloses God's reconciling presence in the world, despite the world's persistent denial of its ultimate political configuration in the City of God.

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Dr. Steven Tipton gave me and his other students an opportunity to explore his wonderfully intricate and remarkably comprehensive picture of American moral experience. It took all of my years at Emory, and the experience of teaching two of Steve's classes, for me to begin to see what Steve sees. I appreciate the great heart Steve has for me and his other students. He has been unwavering in his encouragement.

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thought. Tim and I respectfully disagree on several matters, but from him I have come to know what respectful disagreement, in its most generous form, means.

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"Christ has died for the world, and Christ is Christ only in the midst of the world. It is nothing but unbelief to give the world … less than Christ. It means not taking seriously the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the bodily resurrection. It means denying the body of Christ."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*[1]

"On the other hand, it is immensely moving when a mature person (whether old or young) who feels with his whole soul the responsibility he bears for the real consequences of his actions, and who acts in the basis of an ethics of responsibility, says at some point, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' That is something genuinely human and profoundly moving. For it must be *possible* for *each* of us to find ourselves in such a situation at some point if we are not inwardly dead. In this respect, the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposites. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being who is *capable* of having a 'vocation for politics.'"

- Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation"[2]

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 67.

[2] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. C. Wright Mills and Hans Heinrich Gerth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 127. In-text citations to Weber's "Politics as a Vocation" in the introduction refer to this work.

Introduction

I. Steve Mackey[3]

Steve Mackey is, among other things, a former Presbyterian pastor, a former denomination executive and policy advocate for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a former representative to the Georgia General Assembly, and a current state president for the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

Steve was first elected to the Georgia General Assembly in the 1970s and served that body for 11 years. During his tenure, the Assembly considered ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA was unpopular in Georgia and in Steve's own district. But a time came when Steve, as an elected official, had to take a stand on the proposed Constitutional amendment. In an interview, he said:

> And people said, 'Well you can't support the equal rights amendment. If you do they'll beat you.' And especially the Republicans would say to me, 'People in your district do not agree with equal rights amendment.' And they were right, they didn't, they were overwhelmingly opposed to it. And I had to make a decision; you know how was I going to deal with that. And I didn't have a hard time making that decision because I felt like that was the right thing to do, and furthermore personally I couldn't face my daughter or my wife if I didn't support it.

Steve frames his conviction that supporting the ERA is "the right thing to do," informed by a sense of responsibility towards his daughter and wife, as a matter of conscience. 'Conscience' for him means something like a deep awareness or conviction of moral rectitude that both orients and also transcends calculations of political benefit. Conscience in this usage doesn't *per se* supply clear principles or norms that direct or obligate action, though it is certainly possible to identify principles and norms that would describe the demands of conscience. Conscience, as Steve describes it, is instead

[3] All citations refer to the author's interview with Steve Mackey from September 12, 2007. For reasons I discuss in Appendix A on qualitative research methodology, and in accordance with informed consent agreements, I have given pseudonyms to all of my interview participants. My participants understand that because they are public figures, it is nearly impossible to disguise their identity reliably.

something more akin to an intuition about "the right thing to do," which also illuminates one's most important commitments (in this case, to Steve's wife and daughter).

Conscience, understood as a normative category, doesn't come from nowhere. Steve had "grown up with" an understanding of conscience: "You gotta live with your conscience," as he says, "and that's pretty much Calvinistic theology." Conscience marks the boundaries of both political utility and responsibility to constituents. Steve reports that he came to appreciate the role of conscience in political life early in his political career:

> You know I remember when all this was coming up, one particular conversation came to my mind, I never forgot this conversation. I could find the house where this conversation took place today. Fellow came to the door and I was – that was just my campaign style, and he said "Mr. Mackey if you're elected, are you going to vote the wishes of your constituency or are you going to vote your own will?" I had no problem with that because as a Presbyterian this was my theology coming in, I said, "I'm going to vote my conscience. I'll have to live with my conscience much longer than I have to live with the constituency." He thanked me and closed the door. I don't know whether he liked the answer or not. But he didn't argue with me, he accepted it and went on. I don't think he was pleased, but at least it didn't lead to a confrontation. But that became something that stuck with me, and I tried my best to live by that.

In Steve's account, conscience isn't just a matter of adhering to conviction. Conscience also carries with it consequences when not properly heeded. These consequences weigh more heavily than do the consequences of appeasing one's constituents. One must, after all, live with one's conscience longer than one must live with one's constituents. Steve's telling invites us to sympathize both with his principled and consequentialist consideration of conscience. The narrative also induces us to imagine that the fellow at the door similarly appreciated and respected Steve's rationale, even if he in some sense disagreed.

Steve goes on to explain that attention to his conscience helped him to negotiate the seductions of politics: "Politics is so seductive, so seductive, and once you're elected

you don't want to lose it. And so getting reelected becomes the ultimate priority for most people, not for everybody, but for most people." Politics trades on the poor judgment of inflated egos, Steve suggests. The parable of the emperor with no clothes appropriately describes what happens to politicians when they don't pay attention to their conscience:

> It is true, it is absolutely true when you're in elected office how people defer to you. They hold the door open so you can go in first, they want you to sit in the best seat. And lo and behold they don't ever tell you that's a dumb idea, and you need to hear that. They're not helping you when they – you have the dumbest idea in the whole world, and they say, "That's great. My goodness what a great idea that is." And you know you're standing there everybody else knows you're naked except you.

To prevent himself from becoming such an emperor, Steve decided, again as a matter of conscience, to term-limit himself to six, two-year terms.

That conscience figures prominently in Steve's account of his work in political life is probably not unusual for a Christian who both "grew up with" and was formally trained as a seminarian in "Calvinistic theology." It's no secret that Calvinisms have played an important role in the development of modern conceptions of liberty of conscience.[4] What is interesting about Steve's invocation of conscience is that he appeals to what he understands to be a theological category to make sense of the ways in which he goes about political work. That is, conscience both limits the kinds of decisions Steve can make and provides a context in which the inevitable political losses that result from conscience-authorized decisions have meaning. As a matter of conscience, Steve can't vote against the ERA. Should constituents be so angry with him for voting for it that Steve isn't reelected, well, better to live forever after with a clear conscience – a sense that he did the right thing – than with irritated voters.

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[4] For historical accounts of the relationship between Calvinist traditions and the development of modern political understandings of conscience, see for example Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). See also John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially chapter 3 (143-208).

For Christian citizens, the notion of taking a political stand in the name of conscience is not unfamiliar. Statues of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer adorn Westminster Abbey precisely because these martyrs are remembered for standing up against demonstrable evil on principles dictated by conscience. But secular political life isn't always about demonstrable evil. It more often makes morally ambivalent demands of political agency. As a seasoned politician and policy advocate, Steve sometimes had to take stands on behalf of his conscience. But in many other and comparatively mundane moments of his political career, Steve also had to negotiate, argue, compromise, marshal support, win votes (both on Election Day and on the floor of the Legislature), and learn how to lose votes in constructive ways.

Politics, according to Steve, is not only about taking stands when conscience dictates. It is also about using instrumental power to realize interests, sometimes over against the interests of others. Steve's first foray into local politics came during his pastorate at a Presbyterian Church in Paducah, Kentucky, in the early 1960s. That church, Steve says, was situated "on the edge of a defunct subdivision that had been built after the Second World War." Some houses in the subdivision were occupied, but many were unoccupied or had never been lived in. The entire subdivision was in receivership to the FHA.

Paducah was a very poor community. Many families lived in old homes with dirt floors and without indoor plumbing. Steve saw a disconnect: "I thought to myself, you know there's something wrong with this picture if you've got all these houses that are not being lived in, and you've got all these people who need a house, why can't we put these things together." So, Steve and a colleague undertook to secure federal funding to buy

the subdivision, turn it into a "rental project for the poor," and operate it under the auspices of the church.

Steve needed a plan. He persuaded an advanced professional course of architects and city planners at Washington University in St. Louis to do a comprehensive study of the subdivision as a class project, which the students did free of charge. "It was a total analysis of the power structure in Paducah, a total analysis of the economics of the proposal that we were putting out, and a total analysis of the social structure in Paducah. Everything as you can imagine was thoroughly analyzed by these people who were practicing professionals but back in school. And it was an overwhelming document." Plan in hand, Steve went to Washington to find federal funding for his project.

Steve's move to secure federal funding for the church's project made the "city fathers" uneasy. Federal funding for a re-development project like the one Steve was proposing would have meant mandatory integration. At first, Steve encountered a lot of resistance along the way. But the city fathers finally gave in: "They were impressed by the research, and it was not because they were necessarily eager to do it but they knew it was going to be done. And so they decided that if it was going to be done, better that they do it than us." The city administered the project instead of the church. But the subdivision was successfully turned into a rental community for poor families. In the end, Steve was able to leverage his interests with the threat of federal involvement, forcing the "city fathers" of Paducah to choose between what from their point of view appeared to be the lesser of two evils.

As his early work in Paducah shows, Steve is no stranger to the play of power and interest in the context of secular political life. One thing that Steve has learned in his

work in both church and state is that politics exists in both places. In fact, Steve prefers what he calls "civil politics" to "ecclesiastical politics." He says:

> Ecclesiastical politics is very difficult because one side or the other has a tendency to say, "Thus saith the Lord." And that said, the argument is over, I mean what else is there to discuss? And you don't run into that in civil politics so much. People will say to you "I'm gonna beat your ass." But you understand that, and you say, "Well, we'll see."

The philosopher Richard Rorty famously argued that religious claims made in the context of public deliberation serve as a "conversation-stopper."[5] Steve is saying that religious claims made in the context of ecclesiastical politics are more likely to end constructive argument. Activists expect that instrumental power is used to back up claims made in secular political life. But instrumental political power also structures the politics of the church. The difference is that not all church people expect political power to work in the church and thus don't know how to handle it when it appears.

Political power is indeed "seductive," to use Steve's term. It's also messy. The episode in Paducah shows that success in political work is rarely unqualified. Steve forced the city fathers to choose between the possibility of a federally funded project in their city, in which case they would have had to live with an aggressive integration of the subdivision, or partnership with Steve and his colleagues, which meant more control over who would get to live in the subdivision. Steve, for his part, calculated that it was better to get some of what he wanted rather than face the possibility that federal funding wouldn't come through in the long run, in which case he wouldn't have gotten anything at all. In fact, Steve believed that the newly retooled subdivision ought to have been integrated. (On integration, Steve says: "And [integration] was not such a super keen idea for [the city fathers], but I thought it was a pretty good idea. You know, what's

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[5] See Richard Rorty, "Religion as a Conversation-Stopper" in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 168-174

wrong with that?") But in opting to work with the city fathers, Steve effectively chose an option that limited the progress of integration in Paducah.

*****

Steve's career is marked by the careful exercise of political judgment. He has made difficult decisions about the appropriateness of political negotiation, the value of competing goods, the use of political power, the value of political relationships, and the like. His sense of his own moral agency has been conditioned by hard-won and incremental achievement, met, at times, by loss and setback, a rhythm of political life that the German sociologist Max Weber famously called "the strong and slow boring of hard boards." This dissertation asks: How should we understand a life devoted to secular politics, a life that looks like Steve's, in Christian theological perspective?

To get clear on what this question means, it will be useful to unpack its key terms and assumptions. First, what is politics? I do not intend in this dissertation to invoke any idiosyncratic understanding of that term. Unless otherwise qualified, the term "politics" as used here has the common sense meaning that English speakers typically ascribe to it.[6] In ordinary sentences, politics means something like the sphere of social life in which human communities work to constitute and maintain themselves as communities. Political work in this sense includes the identification of shared norms, values, and identities. It also includes the processes by which political communities make decisions about the creation and distribution of social benefits and burdens. The latter exist by virtue of the existence of communities and include things like defense, taxation, and law.

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[6] My thinking about the structure of meaning is indebted to theorists of ordinary language, including, most importantly, Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin.

These activities are what most people have in mind when they talk about "governing," the active form, or the doing, of politics.

We ordinarily use the terms "politics" or "political life" to refer to the forms of human activity that unfold in local, state, national, and international structures of governance. Some theologians insist that the most authentic form of politics happens in the church community.[7] They use the term "politics" to mean the polity that is formed in the context of the church. This appropriation of the term "politics" and its permutations in these theological conversations necessitates in this dissertation the use of inelegant locutions like "secular political life" or "the political life of modern democracies" to indicate that what is under consideration is identical with the ordinary meaning of the word "politics." Unless otherwise noted, the word "politics" and its permutations in this dissertation refer to their ordinary meanings – that which goes on in secular political life.

This dissertation is a theological examination of political anthropology – a study, from a theological point of view, of the kind of self a life devoted to politics produces. It includes a consideration of two related elements: what such a self does and who such a self is. An evaluation of a life devoted to politics is not only an evaluation of the sum of actions that are politically efficacious or injurious. It is not simply, in other words, a calculation that reckons whether or not a person did more good than ill over the course of a political career. Such a life entails a process of moral formation that makes the ability

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[7] For example, the Duke University theologian Stanley Hauerwas appropriates the ancient concept of the *polis*, and its derivative *politeia*, to describe the Christian community. See e.g. Hauerwas's *In Good Company: The Church as* Polis (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) and Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as* Polis: *From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). See also my discussion of Hauerwas in this introduction and chapters 2 and 3 below. This ancient concept implies a relatively small community, such as the Greek city-state, the citizens' common concern for which is articulated and formalized in a constitution. See e.g. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), III.1.1274b32-41.

to act – what philosophers and theologians call "agency" – possible. Steve didn't just arrive in Paducah with seasoned political savvy. In Paducah, Steve began a lifelong journey devoted to politics, in which he not only honed a set of political skills, but also struggled to define a sense of the good life. In short, a life devoted to politics is one in which deeds are not only done, but a self is also made.

The trouble, this dissertation contends, is that a person like Steve doesn't fit easily into dominant philosophical and theological frameworks that explore the participation of religious citizens in secular political life. Secular political theorists have long worried that religious citizens pose a potential threat to the politics of modern democratic regimes. For these theorists, religious citizens are problematic because they might make explicitly theological claims in their public speech, which, the argument goes, will serve as a "conversation stopper," to recall Rorty, shutting down processes of public deliberation. These framings have been roundly criticized in recent scholarship. But the conception of the religious citizen they posit has gone largely unchallenged. I argue that the figure of the religious citizen appearing in these discussions does not account for the complexity of self-formation and moral agency that a person like Steve represents.

There is also much confusion in contemporary Christian political theology about politics. Theologians have had much to say about what might be called "political ethics," the norms that govern the participation of Christian citizens in the secular polity. But rarely have theologians begun their work on these prescriptive projects with a thick description of political engagement in order to understand what the work of persons like Steve *actually* looks like. Normative theological inquiry about Christian participation in political life, I want to suggest, has been set adrift from a sufficient understanding of

what politics is. Let me make this last claim as strongly as possible: To the extent that Christian theologians care about Christian participation in secular political life, they have largely failed to specify what they mean when they talk about politics in that context.

Some Christian theologians, for example, have the idea that politics at its best involves cooperative, public discourse in which citizens share and mutually critique ideas about issues that bear on policy, law, and public opinion.[8] But as Steve's case indicates, much more belongs to the work of politics than practices of deliberation. Political practice is often – perhaps more often than not – uncooperative, instrumental, or even aggressive. Does that make secular political life, and the kind of moral formation it entails, problematic for Christians? Or does the complex reality of political practice render the norm of cooperative deliberation ineffectual since the latter governs a situation that does not often exist?

Other Christian theologians believe, as I mentioned above, that the most faithful form of political engagement begins with the political community that takes form in the church. On this view, Christians are formed in and through the practices of the church. Participation in the world, and in the secular polity, emanates from this formation and consists in witness to the brokenness of the world and its politics. Political engagement in the world, in other words, is mediated by the normative traditions of the church.[9] Steve's work in politics, though anchored in important ways in his upbringing in the Reformed Christian tradition, was shaped in considerable measure by the norms and practices of secular political life. One cannot therefore understand Steve's moral agency

[8] Here I have in mind theologians like Robin Lovin, Charles Mathewes, Kristen Deede Johnson, Franklin Gamwell, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, among others. I return to this view in chapters 4 and 5.

[9] Stanley Hauerwas is the most notable exponent of this view. It resonates also in the work of Radical Orthodox theologians like John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and William Cavanaugh.

apart from his formative experiences in various contexts of secular political life. Yet it seems, at least *prima facie*, problematic to conclude that Steve's is the work of an unfaithful or poorly formed Christian.

A third approach, Christian realism, takes seriously the complex realities that mark secular political life. The American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose work has received renewed attention in the years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, masterfully analyzed the dynamics of political power and self-interest.[10] Niebuhr famously argues that human beings, particularly when they associate in groups, are motivated by self-interest. The rapacious self-interest of group politics obscures concern for the common good.[11] Political analysis for Niebuhr involves the task of countering assertions of power in service of narrow group interests with countervailing power – of balancing power, in other words, such that no one group has exclusive claim on the goods of social and political organization.[12] Niebuhr assumes the existence of seasoned and savvy political agents, like Steve, who work in many different contexts of secular political life. But because his attention is trained upon the dynamics of group politics, he

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[10] Niebuhr's work has surfaced in diverse analyses of U.S. foreign policy in the post-9/11 context. See e.g. Arthur Schlessinger, Jr., "Forgetting Reinhold Niebuhr," *The New York Times*, September 18, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/18/books/review/18schlesinger.html (accessed March 19, 2010); Justin Isola, "Everybody Loves Reinhold," *The Atlantic*, October 2007, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/10/everybody-loves-reinhold/6367/ (accessed March 19, 2010); and Paul Elie, "A Man for All Reasons," *The Atlantic*, November 2007, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/11/a-man-for-all-reasons/6337/ (accessed March 19, 2010).

Conversation has stirred also over President Obama's interest in Reinhold Niebuhr. See e.g. David Brooks, "Obama, Gospel and Verse," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007, http://select.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/opinion/26brooks.html?_r=1 (accessed March 19, 2010); Fred Kaplan, "Obama's War and Peace," *Slate*, December 10, 2009, http://www.slate.com/toolbar.aspx?action=print&id=2238081 (accessed March 19, 2010); Paul Raushenbush, "Mr. President: Find Your Inner Niebuhr," *The Huffington Post*, February 1, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/mr-president-find-your-in_b_444138.html (accessed April 20, 2010).

[11] See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934).

[12] I return to Niebuhr in chapter 2 below.

tends to ignore the matter of what the formation of these persons might mean in a theological point of view. Though he made important contributions to theological anthropology, Niebuhr does not explore in theological perspective the relationship of moral formation and agency in the context of political work.[13]

Missing from all of these approaches (by design, in the case of Duke theologian Stanley Hauerwas and others in the second group) is serious reflection upon the notion that different contexts of secular political life correspond to differing, though not totally unrelated, forms of political vocation. Elected officials are different from policy advocates. Both are different again from grassroots community organizers. All of these are different still from bureaucrats, judges, public intellectuals, and religious leaders.

All political vocations require that persons use a range of political skills, but each emphasizes some skills more than others. Religious leaders and public intellectuals may call prophetically on publics to attend to some neglected value or values. A jury may deliberate together about the merits of some case. Elected officials may engage in horse-trading to get some of what they want for their constituents. Community organizers might organize a neighborhood to hold elected officials accountable on some issue, such as improved public education or crime prevention.

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[13] Niebuhr had much to say about the nature of moral agency. Drawing on Augustine and Kierkegaard, Niebuhr posited the human capacity of limited self-transcendence. Human beings are capable, to an extent, of moral agency that brackets the interests of the self and elevates regard for others. This capacity, however, is bounded by dual sinful propensities: pride (a sin committed when human beings claim too much moral agency for themselves, thereby rejecting God's ultimate sovereignty) and sensuality (a sin committed when human beings do not claim enough moral agency for themselves, when, for example, they give themselves over to desire and passion). See Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), especially vol. 1.

But Niebuhr doesn't show how his moral anthropology responds to the moral formation of political activists, and this gets him into trouble. Traci West critiques Niebuhr's moral anthropology because, she argues, it reinforces dominant distortions of women's moral agency. West examines the work of African American women activists in Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s, showing that their political work was assertive and constructive without being prideful or sensual. See Traci West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2006), 3-35.

Some among the political vocations, in other words, require that persons use a strident prophetic voice more often than not, others the capacity for reasoned deliberation, others for compromise, and still others the ability to organize people and power and then, when necessary, to use them aggressively in order to win contests of competing wills and interests.[14] Christian theological reflection has not entirely neglected consideration of last of two modalities of political vocation – the more aggressive and instrumental kind. They featured prominently, for example, in the Christian Realism of Niebuhr. But even in Niebuhr, politics, which in his view really amounts to the politics of balancing competing powers, is regarded as a necessary evil, a symptom of the aberrant tendencies of group interests. For Niebuhr, politics stands at great distance from God's presence in the world. I argue that this diagnosis isn't entirely wrong. Political vocations are inevitably broken, and they do, from time to time, produce behavior that is irreducibly problematic, as in Steve's case. But unlike Niebuhr, I emphasize the way in which God is present even, perhaps especially, in the midst of the failure of politics.

This dissertation attends to the complexity of secular political life by examining the lives and work of Christians who are professional activists. With the term "activist," I mean persons who work in different political contexts (electoral politics, policy advocacy, grassroots community organizing, etc.) and whose work bears directly on the

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[14] I follow Duncan Forrester in his insight that different political vocations require different emphasis in theological reflection: "There is not one, but several, political vocations," Forrester writes. "The tension between the spiritual calling to faith and all worldly callings, with their associated ethics is real, but not ultimate, and can be a most creative tension. The realist and the idealist need one another if realism is not to degenerate into a moral and manipulative cynicism and idealism to retain an earthly relevance. Not only do different vocations complement and challenge one another, but different vocations quite properly come to the fore in specific contexts and times. Different vocations relate to particular ethics, and they generate their own theological emphases as well." This dissertation explores the theological meaning of political vocation when it is situated closer to Forrester's "realist" pole. Duncan Forrester, *Theology and Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 159.

formation of public policy. Why *professional* activists? Laypersons only occasionally participate in politics (when they, for example, vote on election day). But as a professional, Steve has worked in a variety of contexts of political life (elected office, parachurch activism, issue advocacy) that require a range of well-honed skills. Unlike laypersons, Steve's work has been accountable to different constituencies who care, if not that his work is ultimately successful in achieving particular political ends, then at least that he does his work in a way that measures up to other standards of performance (that, for example, he accurately represents the interests and values of his constituents in his work). Steve has to be good at what he does in a way that laypersons do not. Finally, as the episode in Paducah shows, the moral agency of professional political activists like Steve bears the lasting marks of the careful exercise of moral judgment in the midst of profound and sometimes tragic moral complexity. Thus, the political lives of professional activists disclose a moral intricacy for which Christian theology needs to account if its normative analysis is to be relevant.

II. Political Vocation, Agency, and Identity: Preliminary Definitions

The question about the kind of self produced in a life dedicated to political work, as I noted above, is a question about political anthropology. To answer this question, the dissertation develops a theological framing of political vocation. Political vocation is the primary analytical category this dissertation explores. Vocation, as I discuss below, is a category of work that accommodates an examination of political anthropology because vocation implies not only work but also its moral meaning and the implications of work for moral formation.

Vocation includes two mutually constitutive concepts, political identity and political agency, preliminary definitions of which I offer in this section. First, I define vocation and then indicate what I mean by a political vocation. I then unpack the concepts of political identity and political agency and indicate why they should be understood to exist in a mutually constitutive relationship.

Political Vocation

Vocation, from Greek *kesis* by way of the Latin *vocatio* (calling) and *vocare* (to call), is an orientation to a whole life's work. In Christian theological perspective, vocation implies a contribution to the common good and, through its creative activity, the glorification of God.[15] Thus, work in the framing of vocation transcends but also

[15] The Protestant reformers radically broadened the medieval concept of vocation, understood as formal service to the church, to include secular careers. Renaissance humanists, developing one strand of classical thinking about work, stressed the human capacity to discern the calling that is most appropriate to one's innate aptitudes. A life's work, in other words, is the product of human agency in the form of self-knowledge and conscious choice. The reformers, on the other hand, emphasized in the concept of vocation divine agency: God calls human beings to the work for which they are intended. See Richard M. Douglas, "*Genus Vitae* and *Vocatio*: Ideas of Work and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Usage," in Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Seigel, eds., *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

Ernst Troeltsch argues that for Luther and the Lutheran legacy, the vocational structure of human work is fixed. Once God calls a person to a vocation, one cannot leave or disturb the vocational setting but can only serve God in the context of one's work (*in vocatione*). The Reformed legacy, on the other hand, posited a fallen world in which social structures are never perfectly organized and are thus always in need of reformation. Not only is one's place in the vocational order subject to change, but the order itself is mutable as well. In the Reformed Christian imaginary, one serves God not only in but also through one's work (*per vocationem*). Thus, according to Troeltsch, then, both Lutheran and Reformed Christians understand vocation to be integral to service to the common good. But only in the Reformed conception does vocation also include a socially transformative dimension. See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, v. II, trans. Olive Wyon (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), 609. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 15-17, and Douglas A. Hicks, *Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 90 ff. A useful study of the development of the concept of vocation in Christian ethical thought is Robert C. Trawick, "Ordering the Earthly Kingdom: Vocation, Providence, and Social Ethics" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1997).

Vocation for Calvin, and for the Reformed tradition generally, Alister McGrath argues, is oriented to the glorification of God and to the promotion of the common good: "All human work, however lowly, is capable of glorifying God. Work is, quite simply, an act of praise – a potentially productive act of praise.

includes the individual's good. In this sense, vocation can be distinguished from another, more modern species of work, the career. The career, at least in its contemporary usage, refers to a life's work, the ends of which are a person's own happiness and sense of fulfillment.[16] Vocation, as I develop it here, belongs to communal contexts of moral meaning and practice to which a life's work is committed.

I frame the inquiry of this dissertation in terms of vocation because it is a category of work that implies an awareness of the way work intentionally connects persons to communities of shared moral meaning and value. All work has moral implications. Some categories of work, like the career or the profession, might also imply an awareness of the moral implications of work, or at least such awareness is not necessarily inconsistent with these categories. But only vocation implies the awareness that work has significance in service to a community or communities of persons who share a moral vision. As I interviewed Christian activists about their political work, I noticed that interview participants like Steve thought a lot about which community or communities their work served, and how being members of these communities made their work especially meaningful. Thus, vocation seems to me to be the appropriate category in which to inquire about the formation of persons in the context of political work.

Work glorifies God, it serves the common good, and it is something through which human creativity can express itself." Alister McGrath, "Calvin and the Christian Calling," *First Things* 94 (June/July 1999), 31-35. Emphasis original.

[16] Robert N. Bellah and his colleagues point to the distinction between career and vocation and criticize the inordinate self-involvement of the former in American society. See Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 119 ff. James M. Gustafson explores the difference between calling and profession, and suggests ways in which the moral framing of vocation, which values the dimensions of "motives" and "vision," can be re-incorporated into the professional experience. See his essay "Professions as 'Callings'," in *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life: Essays in Theological Ethics*, eds. Theo A. Boer and Paul E. Capetz (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 126-138.

I define *political vocation* as a life's work devoted to the good of a political community or communities. A political community is one in which members work together to identify and pursue common goods and aims. Political communities may be local, national, or transnational; secular or ecclesial; realized or ideal; imminent, eschatological, or both.

The question of what should count as a political community from the point of view of Christian theology is fiercely contested. This dissertation revisits this question throughout. It is useful here, for the purpose of delimiting the dissertation's scope, to identify two very broad conceptions of political community that have been important in recent Christian theological reflection. To each of these correspond two distinct conceptions of political vocation. There are, firstly, the more and less formal forms of political life that create and maintain *secular* political communities. These include the formal apparatuses of local, state, national, and even international governments as well as the less formal political organizations of civil society. To this form of political life corresponds a type of theological conception of political vocation. A theological framing of political vocation that understands politics to mean secular political life will likely include the idea that one's Christian commitments orient one's basic moral and political commitments. These commitments motivate work towards the good of secular political communities, even though the good of these communities may be incomplete or deficient in the view of one's Christian commitments.[17]

A second tradition of theological reflection, which I already named above, regards the *ecclesial* community as the authentic polity to which Christians owe primary

[17] A recent example of this framing of political vocation is Franklin I. Gamwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation: Faith and Democracy Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

allegiance. In this conception, the church forms persons into a coherent moral community in and through its practices, particularly its liturgical practices. The church, in other words, is a "polis," in Stanley Hauerwas's formulation. The moral integrity of the church in these framings is understood to witness over against the inherent deficiencies of secular political communities. A political vocation in this point of view means that one's political work is dedicated to the life of the church (in either lay or ordained capacities).

This dissertation recognizes the central role the church plays in the formation of Christian citizens. It acknowledges the church as one among many political communities to which Christians owe political allegiance and ought therefore to devote their political energies. But this dissertation is concerned primarily to explore the meaning of political vocation in the context of secular political life (the former conception), in the context of which, it seems to me, Steve's political vocation is intelligible. The latter, ecclesial framing of political vocation has so dominated recent theological reflection that there are not, I argue, adequate resources for understanding Steve's work from a theological point of view. This dissertation aims to remedy that problem.

Political Agency and Identity

A political vocation includes many practices of political work – practices, that is, that contribute to the good of a political community or communities. Most of us do political work occasionally or strategically, but most of us are not committed to a political vocation.[18] We vote, pay taxes, and serve on juries. We may, for a season,

[18] The sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that since the latter part of the twentieth century, American participation in civic and political life is increasingly episodic and strategic, whereas earlier it

participate in campaigns, assist voter drives, work with an interest group to advance legislation on some issue, etc. While all of these are markers of good citizenship, this dissertation is concerned to explore political vocation as it orients a person's *whole* life concern, for the reasons I named above.

As a species of work, political vocation implies both a conception of the kind of work one does and one's ability to do it (one's "agency"). By "political agency," I mean the capacities, skill sets, and practices (e.g., debating, compromising, mobilizing resources, etc.) efficacious in particular political contexts (a state legislature, a city street, a public hearing, etc.) in which agents engage in forms of political work (policy activism, community organizing, legislating, campaigning, protesting, etc.).

An adequate understanding of political vocation, I contend, will include not only a consideration of what one does and how they do it (their political agency), but also *why* one does it. And questions about why one does the work of a political vocation intersects with questions about who one becomes – how one is formed as a moral agent – in and through the work any political vocation demands. One cannot, for example, understand what Steve did in the many stations of his political vocation, and why he did them, without also understanding the sources of his moral formation. These include his formation in the context of the church, as well as the moral learning about political life he gained in the very process of pursuing a political vocation. Steve had to learn about careful planning, the play of interest, the seductions of power, and the demands of conscience, among many other lessons, to do his work with integrity. These learnings do

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was marked by long-term commitment. See Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). Compare Wuthnow's argument to Bellal et al, *Habits of the Heart* and Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

not simply amount to a collection of useful knowledges and related practices that Steve mastered. They translated into moral commitments, and complex ways of understanding and articulating them, that, reciprocally, gave shape to Steve's political vocation. In other words, vocation is not only a description of the kind of work one does and how one does it. It also entails a description of the moral development that emerges reciprocally in and through the work one does and the ways in which one learns to exercise political agency. Vocation, then, is as much about *political agency* as it is about *political identity*.

Political agency can't be understood apart from a person's deepest moral commitments. These commitments, in turn, can't be understood without reference to the sources of a person's formation as a moral agent. In his own deliberations around the ERA, Steve arrived at a commitment to women's moral agency, which he took to be importantly addressed in the amendment. This commitment, in turn, was generated by and grounded in Steve's "conscience" – in his framing, a kind of moral faculty that both generates moral norms and also induces a person's faithfulness to the defense of these norms. Steve's sense of conscience, as he says, is rooted in his upbringing in a Reformed Christian tradition. If one were to ask about the nature of Steve's political agency in this situation, any answer that reflects Steve's own understanding will have to give an account first of his commitment to the issue at hand, the ERA. This commitment is, in turn, rendered intelligible by an account of the sources of Steve's formation as a moral agent (here, in the context of a particular religious tradition).

Thus, political agency is always connected to what I'll call a person's "political identity."[19] Political identity is the interrelated understanding of self and moral

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[19] Readers familiar with debates in Christian ethics may wonder why I do not draw on the notion of "character," an important category in Christian theological engagements with virtue ethics. In these

commitment grounded in, and relevant to, membership in a political community or communities. Political identity makes political agency intelligible. It accounts for why a person does what she does (why, that is, a person exercises agency in any way at all).[20] Political agency, in turn, both realizes and reinforces political identity. Actions speak louder than words because actions give us a clue about who people are and what they value. They also make moral and political commitments concrete. In so doing, the exercise of agency realizes selves capable of holding and acting upon these commitments.

Political identity, one might say, is a particular region of a more capacious category that I'll call "moral identity." By moral identity, I mean a person's interrelated

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conversations, the category of character signals a concern for coherent moral worlds in which persons are formed. I argue throughout the dissertation that the challenge of the moral life in the context of modernity is not to find coherent contexts or traditions of moral meaning but to order discontinuous and competing moral worlds – a project that is both necessary and necessarily bound to fail.

[20] Here I follow insights about the relationship between identity and moral commitment that Charles Taylor explores in his work. In his early article "What is Human Agency?," Taylor argues that human beings make "strong evaluations," qualitative distinctions between desires, inclinations, and motivations. Among strong evaluations, some are "fundamental evaluations" that prioritize and give meaning to all other evaluations that human beings make. Our commitment to fundamental evaluations, in turn, determines our identity. He writes: "Our identity is therefore defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents. Shorn of these we would cease to be ourselves, by which we do not mean trivially that we would be different in the sense of having some properties other than those we now have – which would indeed be the case after any change, however minor – but that shorn of these we would lose the very possibility of being an agent who evaluates; that out existence as persons, and hence our ability to adhere as persons to certain evaluations, would be impossible outside the horizon of these essential evaluations, that we would break down as persons, be incapable of being persons in the full sense." Charles Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 34.

In his later book *Sources of the Self*, Taylor argues that human beings all operate within a set of normative presuppositions that determine fundamental moral commitments. Taylor calls these presuppositions a "framework," that which "we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement of status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner." In: Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 26. For Taylor, we cannot do without frameworks (27). He goes on to show the necessary connection between frameworks and identity: "To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" (Ibid.). Frameworks create a kind of "moral space," in which identity is situated: "To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (28).

understanding of who they are and what they ought to do. It includes the sources of one's moral formation (e.g., church community, political culture, ethnic heritage, gender identities, etc.), the fundamental commitments generated as a result of such formations, and a sense of what one ought to do in the world, how one ought to do it, and the directions in which a life lived in such a way will ultimately lead. The regions of moral identity are many. One might hold certain moral commitments by virtue of their sense of belonging to communities that share life experiences – for example, religious, ethnic, or national communities. Political identity is a region of moral identity pertaining to the moral commitments one holds by virtue of their membership in a political community or communities.

Political Vocation, Anthropology, and Ethics

One way to write a dissertation about political vocation would be to focus on the kind, quality, meaning, or ends of work a vocation in politics entails. It might, for example, argue that the goal of a political vocation is the promotion of hope or human flourishing. That is not what this dissertation is about. Instead, I use the category of vocation to locate a context of moral formation. I am interested in the question: What kind of self does a vocation in modern political life produce, and how ought we to understand that particular kind of moral formation in theological perspective? Herein lies the connection between vocation and political anthropology: vocation is the context in which political anthropology is illuminated.

Political vocation also intersects with political ethics, understood as the inquiry into the moral status of political goods and comportments. Because my focus here is on

political anthropology, however, the dissertation does not seriously consider questions that belong properly to political ethics, nor does it recommend any particular political ethic. That is, this dissertation does not prescribe any particular view a Christian citizen might hold or a course of action that she might take with regard to particular political issues, such as stem cell research, gay marriage, etc. A more complete political anthropology, admittedly, might also consider which moral commitments are commendable in the context of political vocation. But this would take the work of this study too far afield.

III. Political Vocation, Agency, and Identity in Modern Polities

I argued above that any adequate account of political vocation considers the reciprocal relationship between political agency and political identity. This relationship has a distinctive shape in modern societies. In modern societies, persons are formed within and across many different contexts of moral meaning. These include religious communities, market systems, the secular polity, family life, educational systems, health care systems, criminal justice systems, the military, and the like. Different "styles" of moral meaning-making are normative in these different contexts. This situation creates not only divisions in moral meaning between contexts but also opportunities for meaning-making across contexts.[21] Thus, for example, instrumental moral logics dominate in the context of the market system and to an extent also in political life, but they are not typically normative in the family or the church. On the other hand, Americans have always appealed to religious experience to try to make sense of their political experience,

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[21] For more on the "styles" of moral meaning in different institutional locations, see Steven M. Tipton, "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism," in *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*, ed. Richard Madsen et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15-40.

thus attempting to bridge church and polity. In short, contexts of moral meaning are themselves the sites of *multiple*, often *competing*, but also *ambiguously related* moral logics and languages. The secular polity is one such site.

We find that our political identities are claimed by any number of these competing styles. A central part of the moral life is working out our relationship to them. Thus, Steve had to make a decision about whether to accept limited gains on his housing project even if it meant compromising with the interests of the Paducah "city fathers," which, he suggested, were motivated by racism. Steve could have on principle continued to push for federal intervention in order to provide for affordable housing regulated by federal integration standards. But he decided that some gain was better than the possibility of no gain at all. He made a consummately political calculation.

Steve's story points to the way in which the modern polity is a particular context of moral agency that makes particular demands on moral judgment and formation. I argue throughout this dissertation that a flat-footed understanding of what goes on in modern political life plagues recent political theology, either because it rejects the modern polity as a context of legitimate political agency, or it simply fails to consider the polity as a particular context of moral formation.

What challenges, then, does the modern polity pose to political vocation and the formation of political identity and agency it entails? Here I want to offer a preliminary demarcation of this relationship that the rest of the dissertation will unpack. I do this by way of an analysis of Max Weber's lecture "Politics as a Vocation" (1919), a seminal account of the complex and sometimes irreconcilable negotiations of competing moral

logics that mark political agency in modern polities.[22] Weber's work charts the development of political bureaucracies, party politics, and the role of modern configurations of wealth and particularly of instrumental political power, all of which condition the modern political vocation.

Max Weber on Political Vocation

In October 1918, Germany, John Patrick Diggins notes, "had not only lost a war but seemed to have lost its head as well."[23] Germany's devastating defeat at Allied hands and the resultant political fallout ripened an atmosphere charged with liberal leftist, anarchist, and pacifist sentiment. The collapse of the German war effort culminated in the Wilhelmshaven mutiny in October 1918, igniting a leftist "Revolution." Workers and soldiers seized power, formed local governing councils in cities and towns all over Germany, and pushed the Revolution towards Berlin. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated on November 9, a republic was proclaimed, and an armistice with Allied forces followed two days later. From November 1918 until January 1919, when the Weimar constitution was finally drafted, various social democratic and communist factions struggled for power, while a Council of People's Commissioners clumsily administered the new republic. On the evening of January 28, 1919, squarely amidst this turmoil, Max Weber presented his lecture "Politics as a Vocation" to an audience at the University of Munich.

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[22] Christian theologians have rightly faulted Weber's account for being unimaginative in its construal of Christian ethics. They criticize Weber's suggestion that religious ethics in general, and Christian ethics in particular, doesn't contain an "ethics of responsibility" – an ethic, that is, that has a deep concern for the results of actions. See, among others, Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 225-226; William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91-92, 194-195.

[23] John Patrick Diggins, *Max Weber: Politics and the Spirit of Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 249.

Weber aimed to construct a sociology of political leadership that would disabuse aspiring politicians of the fanatical idealisms that dominated political rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. For Weber, the "decisive means" of politics is violence. And violent means in the hands of revolutionary elements who are unwilling to bear the responsibility of their actions is dangerous. Weber criticizes "Spartacism," a movement of revolutionary communism associated with the "Spartacist uprising," a general strike in Berlin (January 5–12, 1919), which had concluded only several days before Weber's talk. Movements like "Bolshevism" and "Spartacism" prefer violent Revolution to a peaceful maintenance of the *status quo*, even if a successful revolution isn't likely. For Weber, this inattention to the implications of revolutionary action makes radical leftist politics morally no different than the politics of the imperial regime against which the revolution is directed: "Hence it is of course utterly ridiculous for such people to condemn *morally* the 'politicians of violence' of the old regime for using precisely the same means as they are prepared to use (no matter how justified they may be in rejecting the *aims* of the other side" (361).[24]

But Weber also wanted to avoid another extreme, a conception of politics that would reduce leadership to mere remunerated occupation, denuded of the weighty responsibilities of office. The problem with German imperial politics, Weber elaborates in his essay, was that it governed under the rule of officials rather than leaders. For Weber, officials act dispassionately and impartially upon the instruction of leaders, who

[24] Weber scholars have varied views of Weber's own political sensibilities. Wolfgang Mommsen, Fritz Ringer explains, emphasizes Weber's nationalism. See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Fritz Ringer's Weber, on the other hand, is sympathetic to liberal pluralism. See Fritz Ringer, "Max Weber's Liberalism," *Central European History* 35, no. 3 (2002). Interestingly, Weber's relationship to socialism was complicated. He was often critical, but in some episodes he appeared demonstrably sympathetic to at least some stripes of German socialism. See for example J.J.R. Thomas, "Weber and Direct Democracy," *The British Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 2 (1984).

issue and bear responsibility for policies and instructions they develop. Officials are skillful administrators. "An official's honor," Weber writes, "consists in being able to carry out [the leader's] instruction, on the *responsibility* of the man issuing it, conscientiously and precisely in the same way as if it corresponded to his own convictions" (331). Officials, however, make bad leaders because they are unable to act and bear the responsibility of their actions:

> Precisely those who are officials by nature and who, in this regard, are of high moral stature, are bad and, particularly in the political meaning of the word, irresponsible politicians, and thus of low moral stature in this sense – men of the kind we Germans, to our cost have had in positions of leadership time after time (331).

Germany had been an officialdom, a "rule by officials." In fact, Germany, Weber remarks, "had the best officials in the world" (348). But Germany, for all its official prowess, lacked political leadership. In Weber's view, the result was government without responsibility.

Two kinds of irresponsibility, then, marked recent German political life: the irresponsibility of political idealists and ideologues who wouldn't claim responsibility for their actions, and the irresponsibility of the administrators of the German empire who couldn't. The German situation, Weber suggests, reflects dynamics that have fundamentally conditioned social and political life in the modern world. As in other contexts of social life, politics has undergone a process of rationalization in the direction of greater instrumentality. Politics in the context of the modern state is more about the play of interest than it is about the exploration of value.[25] Thus, Weber's analysis of

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[25] Diggins argues that Weber wanted in "Politics as a Vocation" to acknowledge the irredeemable forces that modern processes of rationalization exert on political life: "…Weber elaborates two points: the character of the modern state will remain a structure of commands regardless who runs it; and politics itself is much more a practical enterprise (*Betrieb*) of interest as a calling, a vocation (*Beruf*) of ideals." Having recognized these conditions, Diggins continues, Weber also sought to rehabilitate a conception of politics as an honorable calling that transcends the play of interest and expediency. In this way, Weber's recovery

politics tracks with his critique of rationalization and instrumentality he develops throughout his corpus. Weber's task in "Politics as a Vocation" is to reclaim responsibility for the political leader. But any adequate examination of political leadership in the context of the modern state must reckon with the elements that condition political life under the force of rationalization. For that reason, Weber begins his work on political vocation with an analysis of power, money, and bureaucracy in modern polities.

The Munich audience listening to Weber's lecture in January 1919, in the middle of a revolution, would have recognized the provocative note on which Weber begins his analysis.[26] In sociological framing, the modern state, Weber argues, is defined in terms of the "specific" means by which the state creates and sustains human community. And that specific means is "physical violence" (*Gewaltsamkeit*) (310). States, Weber remarks, quoting Trotsky, are "founded on force." Physical violence is not the exclusive or even the normal means by which states create and sustain community. States are "peculiar" among human associations because they are in some sense authorized to use violent means. Violence, in other words, is a *legitimate* means of social coordination deployed in the context of the modern state. The means of violence distinguishes the modern state from other forms of human association. States "[lay] claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence" (Ibid.).

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of political responsibility reflects the fundamental critique that he develops throughout his work. Diggins, 253-254.

[26] The provocation was of course also not lost on Weber, who remarks: "At the present moment the relation between the state and violence is a particularly intimate one" Max Weber, *Weber: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 310. All emphasis is original unless otherwise noted.

Weber's understanding of politics is set against this conception of the state. Politics, Weber argues, is a contest over power, the "striving for a share of power or for influence on the distribution of power, whether between states or between the groups of people contained within a single state" (311). Weber doesn't tell his audience in "Politics as a Vocation" what precisely he means by 'power' in this context or how exactly power relates to violence. In his posthumous *Economy and Society* (1925), Weber defines power as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."[27] Given what Weber says about power in *Economy and Society*, we can understand political power to be something like the capacity of an actor or actors (individuals or states) in the context of that "striving" (which constitutes politics) to realize control over the violent means of the state. "Realizing control," Weber writes in "Politics as a Vocation," amounts to a "relationship of *rule* (*Herrschaft*) of human beings over human beings." Politicians want ruling power either "as a means to attain other goals (which may be ideal or selfish), or 'for its own sake', which is to say, in order to enjoy the feeling of prestige given by power" (311).

Thus, politics is always and fundamentally a contest for power in order to rule. But claims to rule, if they are to be successful, must be legitimate. The legitimation of rule, Weber argues, happens in three ways: by virtue of tradition (ruling power is authorized because it is a customary arrangement); by virtue of "legality" (ruling power is authorized because it is codified in legal statute); and, by virtue of charisma (ruling power is authorized by virtue of the dynamic personality of the political leader, which commands respect and devotion). Charisma is the legitimation of rule that grounds an

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[27] Weber, *From Max Weber,* 180.

inquiry into political vocation because, Weber says, political vocation has its "roots" in charisma. Devotion to a leader by virtue of the leader's charisma has always entailed some recognition of the leader's calling to political office (312). Hence, Weber's sociological analysis of political vocation endeavors to understand the elements of character, motivation, and moral judgment that characterize political calling in the context of the modern state.

Another key element of political leadership is money. Politicians can pursue their vocation by living either "from" or "for" politics. A politician who lives "from" politics engages in political life in order to generate income. A politician who lives "for" politics, on the other hand, "'makes this his life' in an *inward* sense, either by enjoying the naked possession of the power he exercises or by feeling his inner balance and self-esteem from the sense that he is giving his life *meaning* and *purpose* by devoting it to a 'cause'" (318). There have always been prebendaries who have lived from politics. But modern politics, particularly in the German context, Weber suggests, is dominated by bureaucrats, officials, and myriad other political functionaries for whom politics amounts to a wage, not the passionate dedication to a cause. Politics for these functionaries tends to look like an enterprise (*Betrieb*) rather than a genuine vocation (*Beruf*).

While distinctively modern constellations of power, money, and bureaucracy complicate the calling of politics, one cannot simply dispense with them by way of critique. These three factors profoundly condition politics in the modern state and therefore must be kept in view in any examination of political vocation. Indeed, power, money, and bureaucracy are precisely the conditions that from time to time create unavoidable tragedy in political life. Weber endeavors to construct a sociological

framing in which to show that political vocation exists within these conditions and is not exempt from the pressures they exert on political life.

Many professional politicians will live strictly *from* politics. But the rise of modern bureaucracy and officialdom does not preclude that a professional politician might also live *for* politics, that is, in dedication to a cause or ideal that motivates one's interest in political life. A "feeling of power" confers "joy" upon the professional politician who lives for politics: "The professional politician can have a sense of rising above everyday existence, even in what is formally a modest position, through knowing that he exercises influence on people, shares power over them, but above all from the knowledge that he holds in his hands some vital strand of historically important events" (352).

With the enjoyment of power comes ethical concerns about its proper enjoyment. A politician must have three qualities of character: passion, responsibility, and judgment. By passion, Weber means "the *sense of concern for the thing itself*." Passion must be tempered with responsibility, a concern for the implications and consequences of power, as well as judgment, "the ability to maintain one's inner composure and calm while being receptive to realities, in other words *distance* from things and people" (353). As virtue is never without vice, so politicians who cultivate passion, responsibility, and judgment must strive to avoid vanity. Though to a degree unavoidable in politics, vanity, "the need to thrust one's person as far as possible into the foreground" (354), threatens to compromise a politician's judgment and her sense of responsibility.

Political vocation also bears a determinate relationship to ethics – it has, as Weber argues, a determinate "ethos." All "ethically oriented activity," Weber argues, has to

follow "two fundamentally different, irreconcilably opposed maxims" (359). These are what Weber calls the "ethic of principled conviction" and the "ethic of responsibility." The first, the ethics of principled conviction, is marked by the unflinching, unconditional acceptance of a commandment that applies absolutely and universally. An ethics of principled conviction requires that we must accept the commandment "in its entirety *or* leave it alone" (358) – that is, without regard to the consequences that follow the acceptance of the commandment. "'Consequences,' however, are no *concern* of absolutist ethics" (359). Weber identifies the Sermon on the Mount as an exemplar of an ethic of principled conviction. The ethic of responsibility, on the other hand, is concerned with the anticipated consequences of action. Whereas "[t]he Christian does what is right and places the outcome in God's hands," the responsible politician worries that the end may not justify the means. And since "the decisive means of politics is the use of violence" (360), the responsible politician will always consider the unintended consequences of her action.

The choice between an ethic of principled conviction and an ethic of responsibility often creates dilemmas. It is "not possible to unite" them; the politician must simply choose. The dilemma between these two ethics "gives all the ethical problems of politics their political character" (364). For Weber, the dilemma reflects the very possibility of the modern world. Weber understands the modern world itself to be a response to the "age-old problem of theodicy." In modernity, divine authority as a response to evil and suffering has withered away, leaving only a residue in the ethic of principled conviction. The authority of law, economy, and science, an edifice built by human beings that embodies a concern for the ends of human action, replaces divine

authority in a "disenchanted world."[28] The concern to save souls has not disappeared in the modern world, but a new approach that relies upon human agency has supplanted an ancient one that relied upon divine agency.

Any politician makes "a pact with the means of violence" (364). And when he (Weber has men in mind) commits to the means of violence, he is liable for the consequences of his action. The politician, Weber writes, "is becoming involved, I repeat, with the diabolical powers that lurk in all violence" (365). He threatens to endanger the "salvation of his soul" no matter what he does. If he only attends to an ethic of responsibility, he likely will fall short of the ends that an ethic of conviction demands. But if he only attends to an ethic of conviction, he threatens to do violence to his soul "because responsibility for the *consequences* is lacking" (362).

While tension between the ethics of conviction and responsibility cannot be resolved, these two ought not to be regarded as "absolute opposites" but as "complementary" (368). For precisely this tension makes it possible to be human in the context of the political vocation. Politicians will inevitably make decisions that generate unpleasant consequences. They will simply have to live with them. Weber writes:

> On the other hand, it is immensely moving when a mature person (whether old or young) who feels with his whole soul the responsibility he bears for the real consequences of his actions, and who acts in the basis of an ethics of responsibility, says at some point, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' That is something genuinely human and profoundly moving. For it must be *possible* for *each* of us to find ourselves in such a situation at some point if we are not inwardly dead. In this respect, the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposites. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being who is *capable* of having a 'vocation for politics' (367-368).

Conviction and responsibility coexist in a "complementary" relationship, not because the tension between them is at some point resolved, but because the soul bears the weight of

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[28] Weber's lecture "Science as a Vocation," the companion lecture to "Politics as a Vocation," examines the notion of the disenchantment of the world. See Ibid., 129-158.

responsibility when it acts with conviction (that is, if the soul is not "inwardly dead"). Their complementarity, in other words, is tragic: each shows the tragic limitations of the other, and both together reveal human finitude in evidence in political life. The political vocation in its most profound moments is about living with, without solving, the "age-old problem of theodicy," the mystery the modern response to which has only finally reinforced. Self-formation in the context of the political vocation entails, by Weber's lights, the ongoing negotiation of the tension between conviction and responsibility, a process inflected in a distinctive way by the peculiar structures and conditions of modern political life.

For Weber, then, the complex organization of modern political institutions conditions political vocation. Modern polities greatly multiply political structures, roles, constituencies, and ends. The political media of money and power are not new, but the pressures these media exert upon political processes are novel. These complexities, in turn, obscure and strain the moral task of political responsibility. For whom does the modern politician work? What does she owe to relevant constituencies? And when political ends conflict, how she chose between them?

Just as the modern context of political responsibility is marked by vast complexities, so legitimate physical force, the political means distinguishing the modern state, amplifies the stakes of responsible choice. In this situation, Weber argues, responsibility inevitably conflicts with the unconditioned ideals that guide it. These irreducible conflicts generate moments in which politicians must, like Martin Luther, simply take a stand and live with and within abiding tensions and consequences.

Weber's stand is emblematic of the process of moral formation marking the modern political vocation. As such, the stand has implications for both political agency and political identity. In terms of agency, it entails violence done to the good. The stand means, for example, that persons use their power to choose between competing goods and interests that, in other situations, they might want to affirm or defend, or to compromise to a position that falls short of one's goals and aims (recall Steve's dealing with the powers that be in Paducah).[29] The stand may also mean that persons alienate constituencies or allies (recall Steve's deliberation about the ERA).

The stand also entails violence, of a certain sort, done to the self. Political agents who take a stand have not only done something, they become, or confirm that they have become, a political agent of a certain sort. In taking a stand, political agents become someone who is willing to support a political community with or without qualification; someone who values certain political goods over others; someone who cares about their ability to continue to exercise political agency effectively or doesn't. Taking a stand means that a person, unless she is a hypocrite, commits herself to some goods instead of others. The stand is violent in the sense that it closes off the possibility of being a person who is committed to certain other goods – goods that, in some other situation, one might even want to affirm. She must live with the consequences of her actions. These may include aspersion and enmity on the part of those against whose good she has decided. For Weber, the tragic choices facing the politician even threaten to destroy the soul.

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[29]Isaiah Berlin's "value pluralism," as John Gray calls it, captures this dilemma. Berlin writes that "The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable – that is a truism – but conceptually incoherent. I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss." Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 13. For Gray on Berlin's value pluralism, see John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Thus, political vocation, which has a peculiar shape in modern political life, is a context both of agency and identification. Weber's discussion of political vocation frames the complexities to which the discussion in this dissertation will be attentive. In particular, I argue that any adequate theological response to political vocation must account for its tragic dimensions – the way, that is, that the complex structure of responsibility in modern societies requires that political agents inevitably do violence to their sense of ultimate value, which also disrupts the formation of the self.

In the next section, I outline the argument and dissertation chapters. In the following section, I articulate a theological method for the dissertation and indicate its theological trajectory.

IV. Argument and Chapter Outline

The first part of the dissertation (chapters 1-4) provides a thick description of the constituent parts of political vocation, political identity and agency, and explores the relationship between the two. In light of this thick description, the dissertation offers critiques in these chapters of contemporary theological and philosophical treatments of secular political life.

The first three chapters consider political identity. Chapter 1, "Modernity's Divided Self," explores the ambient situation in which Weber's conception of political vocation resides. Modernity names a time in which both moral meaning and the moral formation of selves are conditioned by an irreducible pluralism. Drawing on sociological and philosophical framings, I describe this pluralism in two related ways. There is, first, a pluralism of institutional contexts (e.g., family, market, polity, religious community,

etc.) in which persons are formed. These institutional contexts are marked by a pluralism of moral logics and languages that both overlap and are also in tension with one another. Moreover, institutions are structured by constellations of power that enhance or constrain moral agency in different ways. The multiple and sometimes contradictory formations that all persons receive in institutional settings challenge moral commitment.

A second, related framing of pluralism focuses on the multiple identifications available to modern selves. Persons are challenged to understand themselves in terms of the categories of race, gender, sexuality, etc. These identifications also bear on questions of moral meaning and formation. As irreducible conditions of modern societies, these pluralisms pull the self in different directions, towards different moral formations and commitments. I argue that the modern self is always working to sort out these tensions. The modern predicament is one in which the project of crafting an identity is complex and always unfinished.

Chapter 2, "Closed Identities," analyzes the work of several theologians who propose approaches to understanding the relationship between theological and political commitments. The analysis in this chapter proceeds by way of an examination of representative characters, an analytical strategy that I use first in this chapter and again later chapters.[30] Representative characters, as I use them here, are types of political agents to which are ascribed some normative conception of political agency and identity. In other words, a representative character models a particular political anthropology.

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[30] The inspiration to use representative characters comes from Bellah et al's *Habits of the Heart*. For the authors of *Habits*, a representative character is "a kind of symbol. It is a way we can bring together in one concentrated image the way people in a given social environment organize and give meaning and direction to their lives" (Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart,* 39). I am using the concept of a representative character in somewhat a different way. Whereas the authors of *Habits* identify representative characters that represent historically and culturally situated "strands" of a tradition of moral meaning in the U.S. context, I draw them in this chapter out of five political-theological framings, each of which, explicitly or implicitly, posits the existence of a representative political agent whose agency has characteristic features.

Consider the following familiar representative characters: The prophet of the Hebrew bible, Plato's philosopher-king, Augustine's pilgrim, Machiavelli's prince, Rousseau's citizen, the Marxist-Leninist comrade, Weber's party boss and bureaucrat, and, more recently, the American president-*cum*-CEO. Each of these represents a normative conception of political identity and agency. The political identity of Plato's philosopher-king, for example, is given in his commitment to the life of the mind and dedication to the true, the beautiful, and the good. His political agency consists in the capacity to lead the republic on the basis of his knowledge of these most real things. Each of these characters represents a normative political anthropology – a model of the political self, which posits the political self's identity, agency, and an understanding of the relationship between them, that recommends that political self as a norm for political life. For Plato, then, human beings are *at their best* golden-souled philosopher-kings, and thus political leaders ought to strive to be like them.

By attending to representative characters and the normative political anthropologies they represent, I hope to expose the complex relationships between political identity and agency in order to prepare it for critique. Representative characters help to answer the question: What kind of political identity would an agent have to have in order to be able to exercise political agency in the way that is ascribed to the character?

The representative characters considered in chapter 2 are Alexis de Tocqueville's American Christian, John Howard Yoder's disciple, Stanley Hauerwas's Catholic peasant, John C. Bennett's Christian citizen, and Reinhold Niebuhr's moral man. I argue that none of these models adequately captures the complex ways in which persons negotiate political identities in light of the analysis of pluralism in chapter 1. At the end

of the chapter, I propose Michael Walzer's conception of the circled self as an alternative framing of political identity.[31]

Chapter 3, "On the Narrative Construction of the Self," looks at the ways in which persons craft political identities in the context of what I call "personal narratives," biographical accounts of the self, the self's formation, and its commitments. This chapter presents three personal narratives from my interviews with Atlanta-based Christian activists. These narratives show that persons construct political identities by bringing sources of identity into conversation with one another. In the context of personal narrative, these sources are interpreted, sometimes in terms of one another, in order to craft moral commitments. Chapter 3 concludes with a critique of the treatment of the relationship between narrative and moral formation in so-called "narrative theology." The problem with narrative theology, I suggest, is that it fails to account for concerted and faithful attempts to negotiate complex self-formations in and through political work.

Chapter 4, "A Critique of Political Discursive Agency," turns to the relationship between political identity and agency. This chapter considers that relationship as it is theorized in contemporary political theory and theology that addresses the role of religion in democratic public life. The dominant normative conception of political agency in much of this contemporary literature is public, deliberative speech. This chapter asks: What kind of agent is capable of public, deliberative speech, and what implications does

[31] Walzer's thought, I should note, plays an important role in this dissertation, particularly in chapters 2, 4, and the concluding chapter 5. I am drawn to Walzer's anthropological approach to political theory. Walzer typically begins with some description of what people actually do and then theorizes the normative structures of political life in light of that description. Walzer's approach is anthropological, but it isn't anthropology. He doesn't do field research, in other words. Instead, he typically proposes his own rendering of what people typically do. In a way, I take this approach a step further by incorporating field research. But the descriptive component of my work here is more like Walzer's anthropological method than genuine ethnography. I discuss these differences in more detail in the methods section below and in Appendix A.

this model of political agency have for a normative conception of political identity, particularly for religious citizens?

To answer these questions, chapter 4 takes up two more representative characters, the Kantian scholar and the religious citizen. The scholar appears in Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" and represents the dominant normative framing of political agency in contemporary political theory. The scholar's political agency in this dominant account is public, cooperative, and discursive. The religious citizen, a modern relative of the Kantian scholar, appears in contemporary political theory and is meant to addresses the problem of the contribution of persons of faith to democratic public life. That figure represents an attempt to negotiate the scholar's discursive political agency and the religious citizen's theological commitments.

Chapter 4 keeps political identity in view but turns its focus to political agency. Its thesis is three-fold. First, it argues that the dominant normative framing of political agency in political theory and theology renders it as public, discursive, and cooperative. Second, this dominant framing inadequately captures the complex ways in which Christian citizens actually exercise this form of discursive political agency. Third, since political identity and agency are inextricably linked, this dominant framing confers, more or less explicitly, inadequate conceptions of political identity upon Christian citizens.

The end of chapter 4 draws on the work of Michael Walzer to suggest that there is more to political agency than the dominant normative model allows. Political agency does not always feature discursive acts, let alone forms of public deliberative speech. Sometimes political agency is instrumental and aggressive, aimed not at cooperation but at victory in a contest of competing interests. Walzer shows that these uncooperative and

instrumental modalities of political agency need not be judged morally problematic in every instance. Indeed, any political movement that has achieved a measure of greater justice and equality has relied upon these modalities in one form or another. Walzer's critique of the deliberative norm of political agency pulls the argument of the dissertation back into the orbit of Weber's reflections on the morally ambiguous character of political vocation.

By the end of chapter 4, I will have presented a model of political vocation that entails intricate formations of political identity developed in relationship to morally complex modalities of political agency. The concluding chapter, "Cruciform Political Vocation" (chapter 5), reflects theologically on this picture of political vocation. I suggest a constructive theology of political vocation that takes seriously the dilemmas of political vocation Weber describes. In the theological framing I develop, I argue that it is precisely in the most intractable moments of political life that the theological import of political vocation emerges.

Chapter 5 introduces one more representative character, the Augustinian pilgrim, who appears in the work of some recent Augustinian political theology. The Augustinian pilgrim represents a particular theology of political vocation, which reframes the scholar's discursive political agency in the perspective of an Augustinian political ontology. The pilgrim's political identity and agency are oriented to and motivated by an Augustinian account of the eschaton.

However, I find there are some problems with this character in relation to the account I have developed in the dissertation. Political vocation entails the exercise of many modalities of political agency. Some of these modalities are more discursive,

others more prophetic, and still others, as Walzer and Weber suggest, are more instrumental and aggressive. The Augustinian view I explore in chapter 5 trades on a conception of discursive political agency that fails to account for the complexity of political agency and its relationship to the formation of the self in the context of political vocation.

I then ask: What theological framing can more adequately respond to a complex conception of political vocation? Drawing on John Calvin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I develop a theological framing of political vocation that accounts for the complex, morally ambiguous, and mutually constitutive qualities of political identity and agency. I argue that God's cruciform response to the world redeems the inevitably compromised ways persons of faith work out their commitments to the political communities in which they are formed: the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world.

V. Theological Assumptions, Rhetoric, and Method

Theological Assumptions and Concerns

Three related concerns coalesce around the primary theological assumption I make in this dissertation: God redeems fallen creation in and through its brokenness. These three related concerns are what I call: (1) the relevance of social science to theology; (2) individual moral agency; and (3) complex political agency.

(1) *Social science and theology*: I view this dissertation as an initial effort to reclaim social scientific methodologies as important sources of theological reflection. The conversation between social scientific methodologies and constructive public theology has in recent years been strained. One reason for this has been the influence of

both the "new traditionalism" of thinkers like Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas and the "Radical Orthodoxy" of John Milbank and others. Both neo-traditionalists and exponents of Radical Orthodoxy are profoundly suspicious of modernist epistemologies and the modernist disciplines – sociology, political theory, economics, etc – in which they are instantiated.[32] They take these disciplines to rest on a problematic model of moral agency that Hauerwas calls the "sovereign self." The sovereign self is an autonomous individual who uses reason to exercise control over the world.[33] For these authors, the use of these methodologies in theological reflection inevitably displaces God as the Lord of creation and replaces the void left in that space with the sovereign self.

In a sense, I agree with this diagnosis. As a thinker formed in the Reformed tradition, I understand that creation is fallen and that God has inaugurated its redemption through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With thinkers like Hauerwas, Milbank, and others, I think that the ways human beings look at the world, particularly when these framings are motivated by the desire to exercise sovereign control over the world, reflect the brokenness of fallen creation.

I noted above that the fundamental theological assumption I make in this dissertation is that God redeems the world in and through its brokenness. I won't fully flesh out this assumption until the final chapter. But it underwrites my sense that in order

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[32] John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990) is a landmark theological critique of modern social theory. Milbank argues that the modernist worldviews out of which secularism emerges rely on an ontology that posits an original state of chaos or conflict, an "original violence," that the disciplines of modern social theory (sociology, economics, political theory, etc.) attempt to control by way of objective reason and universalizing moral logics. Milbank, embracing some of the insights of postmodernism regarding the radically contingent character of creation, argues that the Christian tradition posits an alternative social theory in its witness to peaceable "non-mastery" in the life of the Christian community. For a critique of Radical Orthodox's "resentment" of the secular and the "new traditionalism" of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, see Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 92-139.

[33] See Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 137 ff.

to know what it means for God to redeem a broken world, one must understand what that world looks like.[34] With Milbank, I'm convinced that modern disciplines and the epistemologies that underwrite them are congenitally problematic. Then again, the world is congenitally problematic (which relieves modern epistemologies of uniqueness in this regard). I find the theoretical framings and methodologies of the social sciences helpful in the work of constructive theology because they disclose the shape and contours of this brokenness. I do not imagine that social scientific knowledges are somehow objective or value-free. Instead, they reflect the same messiness and disorder that exists in the world they describe.

With Calvin and Bonhoeffer, whom I discuss in the conclusion, I hold that God responds to fallen creation both, and paradoxically, by embracing it as it is – that is, by suffering with it in its fallenness – and by transfiguring it, ever so slowly, into an image that reflects the way things will be. For that reason, I am thoroughly unconvinced by arguments, particularly in Hauerwas's articulation of them, that the world needs only to turn itself to the church and participate in its ritual life for it to become what God intends for it to be. God loves the world, not only the church.

(2) *Individual moral agency*: I work with individual moral agency in this dissertation. For better or worse, persons in the modern West experience moral agency as individuals, an experience that is sometimes called "individualism." Of course, individualism is not experienced the same way everywhere it is a meaningful framing of

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[34] In his *Intersections*, James M. Gustafson argues that theological and ethical discourse can be informed by the disciplinary framings of other disciplines, not just in terms of the raw material of data and other information to which theological and ethical reflection responds. More radically, Gustafson envisions that disciplines can inform one another in a fundamentally reciprocal way, so that theologians and ethicists, having engaged other kinds of discourses in some area of inquiry, might alter fundamental axioms. Gustafson's insight motivates my sense of the importance of social scientific discourses in ethical inquiry. See his *Intersections: Science, Theology, and Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1996).

moral agency. Individualism as a modality of moral experience isn't entirely bad: some of our deepest intuitions about the good life are only intelligible because they require a degree of individual moral agency. But I recognize that the "sovereign self" leads to the kinds of problems of which thinkers like Hauerwas and Milbank are so critical. In my theological perspective, excessive individualism is a feature of a world that is broken, has fallen into sin, and is in need of redemption.

Individualism is, at least for Western persons, a given. We only begin to step outside of that modality of moral agency with great effort. Indeed, I don't think that we ever fully step outside of it. I doubt, in other words, that persons in the modern West can ever fully know what it would mean to lead lives in which moral agency were construed primarily in communitarian terms. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't challenge individualism in favor of developing more communitarian ways of being in the world. But excessive individualism, that is, individualism that tends towards the sovereign self, is simply one of the deep, irreparable distortions of our experience of the world.

I do not, however, think that we can simply dismiss individual moral experience. I trust that in the person of Jesus Christ, God meets us where we are and begins God's redeeming work in that context. Therefore, I begin in this dissertation with the moral journeys of individual political agents and attempt to see how God works gracefully in their lives.

(3) *Complex political agency*: A third concern motivates the main critical point that this dissertation develops, which has to do with the lack of theological reflection upon the range and complexity of political agency. As I noted above, theologians have a tendency to imagine either that political agency in its most genuine form emerges from

the politics of the church, or that political agency exercised in the public sphere is a form of cooperative, public discursive practice. I'll argue throughout the dissertation that as norms of political agency, these views are valuable. They fail, however, to capture the complex ways in which persons actually exercise political agency.

The theological assumptions I make about the nature of sin inform my view of complex political agency. I am a moral realist in the sense that I think that a fixed moral order inheres in creation, but this is more like an article of faith that an object of genuine knowledge. According to my Reformed sensibilities, sin distorts the human capacity both to know God and the good.[35] These deficiencies are partially remedied through the aids of Scripture, tradition, reason, and human experience. Still, our capacity to know the good inevitably fails us, not completely to be sure, but consistently enough to make ethics an interesting field of inquiry. We don't always know, for example, what our moral commitments should be, what a particular moral commitment means in a certain situation, how to resolve competing values, etc. Politics is one area of human life in which these conflicts are resolved. Sometimes political decisions are made through processes of deliberation that generate consensus. But often times, political decisions are made not by consensus or agreement but by compromise, zero-sum competition, or even force.

I critique the dominant normative framing of political agency in political theory and theology as public, cooperative discourse aimed at generating consensus or, at least,

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[35] For Calvin, the Fall obscures natural knowledge of God, the *sensus divinitas*, both as it pertains to metaphysical knowledge of God and God's attributes, as well as to moral knowledge (knowledge of the good). See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.2.22. Paul Helm argues that Calvin understands moral knowledge to be more intact than metaphysical knowledge. See Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 378.

understanding. My sense is that a more complex rendering of political agency is needed, one that includes public, cooperative discourse but also accounts for more instrumental and aggressive modalities of political agency, such as compromise, contest, and the like. This conviction derives in part from the theological assumption I've named here – that the limits the fallen condition of creation places upon moral knowledge create situations in which goods, as human beings construe them, compete. Consensus, unfortunately, often does not resolve tensions between competing goods.

Rhetoric

The argument of this dissertation complicates dominant theological framings of political vocation in order to make space in which to construct an alternative. I appeal to two primary rhetorical strategies with which to develop my argument.

The first of these is representation. Whenever possible, I argue with thinkers whose work represents a dominant articulation of a particular position. I examine the work of representative thinkers in detail. By critiquing a representative thinker, I expose weaknesses and limitations that I take to reflect more general problems with a particular genre of argument. In chapter 3, for example, I critique Stanley Hauerwas's appeal to narrative as a context of moral formation since Hauerwas's approach to narrative has been so influential in certain regions of Christian theological reflection. In doing so, I hope to expose problems I take to be chronic in the genre of argument around the relationship between narrative and theology that Hauerwas represents.

I mentioned in the section above my use of representative figures in chapter 2. This is another way in which representation functions as a rhetorical strategy in this

dissertation. I read normative arguments to discern what implicit portraits of political vocation, identity, and agency are operative in them. I then critically examine these portraits to determine whether or not they adequately address the complex relationships that obtain between identity and agency (usually I find them lacking). My use of this strategy derives from a tenant, attributed to the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, which has been reiterated throughout my graduate studies: every ethic contains a sociology, and every sociology an ethic. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am more interested in the first part of this aphorism. That is, normative theories don't just function to indicate what ought to be done; they also presuppose a world that can accommodate persons who behave according to prescribed norms. My analysis of representative figures throughout the dissertation raises the question of whether or not the prescriptions these figures represent norm realities that exist.

A second rhetorical strategy that complements my use of representative figures is juxtaposition. As in this introduction, most chapters juxtapose normative accounts of political vocation, identity, and agency to descriptive ones, which are drawn from field research with Atlanta-based Christian activists like Steve Mackey. I utilize juxtaposition in part for forensically mischievous ends, to call into question the relevance of normative framings to complex realities. I am careful to emphasize throughout the dissertation that normative framings are not intended to describe adequately what is going on. Instead, they assert how things ought to be. Still, juxtaposing normative and descriptive accounts exposes the problem that some normative framings threaten to oversimplify complex states of affairs. Steve Mackey, for example, is a complex self. He exercises political agency in complicated ways. I'll argue that to recommend that Steve be more like a

Catholic peasant, an Augustinian martyr, or a Christian citizen (to name a few of the normative models of political agency I'll explore below) is to ask him to behave in a way that does not respond adequately to the complex negotiations of self and agency the political vocation requires.

Beyond forensic mischief, juxtaposition reflects the critical role my field research has played in orienting the inductive patterns in which I consider these matters. I find myself, in terms that Isaiah Berlin famously articulated, more of a fox than a hedgehog, more often attracted to the messiness and complexity of the good life rather than any singular, elegant frame in terms of which it can be organized.[36] Juxtaposition, then, reflects the pathways that led me through the research process to the dissertation's conclusion.

Qualitative Research Method

Between 2007 and 2009, I conducted interviews with ten Christians who work in different contexts of political activism, some of whom appear in this dissertation. My semi-structured interview format included a set of questions intended to identify the fundamental moral commitments participants bring to their political activism and to explore their meaning. To contextualize these commitments, I asked participants to situate them in terms of an account of their moral formation. My interview format was informed by an approach that Steven Tipton calls "moral biography."[37] The interviews

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[36] See Berlin's essay "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History" in: *The Proper Study of Mankind*, eds. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 1997, 436-498.

[37] A moral biography is a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer situates the participant's normative point of view in terms of their moral formation. The moral biography seeks both to capture the terms in which a participant understands her own normative framing and also to push on places where the framing seems to be inadequate. In doing this, the interview seeks to reveal the complexity of

paid particular attention to the categories and framings my participants thought were important. I have included the interview schedule and format in the appendix to this study.

In chapter 3, I analyze these interviews as personal narratives. By "personal narrative," I mean the stories people tell about themselves which construct and present an identity to an audience. Personal narratives weave intricate moral identities that interpret, arrange, and prioritize normative commitments, work out tensions between them, and provide a context in which the exercise of political agency is rendered intelligible. Political identities constructed in the context of personal narratives illuminate and motivate the exercise of political agency in different contexts and modes.

I take my understanding of personal narrative from a category of qualitative research known as "narrative ethnography."[38] The latter is a social scientific analysis of narrative practice. Narrative ethnography examines a range of external conditions that structure personal narration while also affirming that within these conditions, persons exercise limited agency in crafting personal narratives.[39] The kind of limited agency persons exercise in crafting personal narratives, moreover, constitutes a kind of moral agency. Through personal narratives, persons construct themselves as moral agents who affirm or challenge the dominant narratives of race, class, gender, etc. that structure their social environment.

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normative viewpoints. See Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), preface and appendices III and IV.

[38] For an overview of narrative ethnography, see Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "Narrative Ethnography," in *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, eds. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: The Guilford Press, 2008).

[39] Gubrium and Holstein define narrative practice as "the broad term we use to encompass the content of accounts and their internal organization, as well as the communicative conditions and resources surrounding how narratives are assembled, conveyed, and received in everyday life." Ibid. 247.

In chapter 3, I discuss the ethnographic study of personal narrative in more detail. To anticipate, personal narratives are always constructed under the weight of intricate and ambient normative systems. These include, among others: (1) the norms of particular audiences, communities, and institutional contexts that determine what counts as an acceptable narrative structure and sanction narrative content; (2) the conditions under which a narrative is occasioned, as well as the expectations attached to the occasion, as in the invitation of a researcher, a ritual in an institutional context, an informal meeting of friends, etc.; and (3) the precise patterns of narrative construction that govern how a story can be told in different social contexts, as for example, a testimony in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Gubrium and Holstein call these conditions the "narrative environment" within which narratives are constructed.[40]

Under these conditions, persons work in intricate ways to present narratives that respond to different "interpretative needs." Narrators select and omit storylines recognizable in different social contexts in order to foreground aspects of their narrative. They work with audiences to create discursive spaces in which storytelling is recognizable and appropriate. They also work within the context of narratives to negotiate power relationships in their personal and professional relationships.[41] Gubrium

[40] See Gubrium and Holstein. 252 ff. See also Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "Narrative Practice and the Coherence of Personal Stories," *The Sociological Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1998). Here the authors explore two elements of narrative construction: "narrative composition" and "narrative control." Narrative composition has to do with the elements of narrative presentation that storytellers shape in their telling, and narrative control has to do with the ambient conditions that structure how and in what ways narratives can be told.

[41] See e.g. Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994); Deborah Schiffrin, "Narrative as Self-Portrait: Socioloiunguistic Constructions of Identity," *Language in Society* 25, no. 2 (1996); Steven Stanley and Michael Billig, "Dilemmas of Storytelling and Identity," in *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, ed. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).

and Holstein write that "the storyteller, in effect, is an editor who constantly monitors, modifies, and revises themes and storylines."[42]

My decision to focus on personal narrative began with the preliminary research for this dissertation. When I first talked with Christians who work in different contexts and callings of political activism, I noticed that they quite readily framed their work in terms of biographical accounts that stretched back into their earliest formations. For this reason, I found it useful to devise an interview strategy that explores personal narratives in a loosely structured way.

One problem with work in contemporary political theory and theology on the place of religion in public life is that it is dominated by mostly white, mostly male scholars. This is not so much the case in other areas of inquiry into this issue – in, for example, historical and sociological accounts. One reason I involved the voices of Christians who work in different contexts of political activism is that I wanted to bring a variety of life experiences to bear on my theological reflection. All of these men and women understand their work from some Christian perspective. They also represent different ideological points of view. Interview participants included an HIV/AIDS policy advocate, a child welfare policy advocate, a former member of the Georgia legislature, a community organizer for a local interfaith grassroots organizing project, a former Atlanta city councilor, the chairman of a conservative Christian interest group, a former denominational policy advocate, and a local pastor who is a neighborhood organizer, among others.

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[42] James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 113.

Some social scientists will find my exclusive attention to narratives developed in the context of interviews to be problematic. Nina Eliasoph shows that the complex ways in which persons frame their work in various political contexts depends in great measure upon the audience to which they are addressing. The varying ways in which citizens talk about politics shows, Eliasoph argues, that citizens go to pains to convince themselves and others that they are doing work that is politically meaningful, even if it isn't.[43] Paul Lichterman argues that researchers need to complement interviews with participant observation data because the latter show the implicit meanings persons ascribe to their action.[44]

I concede that an exclusive reliance upon interviews limits my ability to understand the lives of my participants. I offer some arguments in my defense. First, in the case of professional political activists, there is less cause for concern that well-crafted narratives are embellishing what amounts to, in Eliasoph's framing, an avoidance of politics. Admittedly, participants might be embellishing their work and the meaning they make out of it. But it is likely that they really do have some political skill – otherwise, they would not be employable. Second, some research shows that biographical narratives are part and parcel of the way in which persons who are engaged in political work exercise political agency skillfully. That is, the ability to provide an intelligible account

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[43] This is in part, Eliasoph argues, because persons often feel paralyzed to do anything about the most problematic political issues in their communities. See Nina Eliasoph, "'Close to Home': The Work of Avoiding Politics," in Lyn Spillman, ed., *Cultural Sociology* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 130-139. See also Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[44] See Paul Lichterman, "What Do Movements Mean? The Value of Participant Observation," *Qualitative Sociology* 21, no. 4, 1998. Elsewhere Lichterman argues that interviews need to be cross-examined with participant observation in order to render adequately the unacknowledged meanings that persons attach to what they say about themselves. See Lichterman, *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 237-242.

of oneself to a variety of different audiences is itself part of political work.[45] We need not, then, be as concerned that my participants aren't very good at explaining themselves as we might be in the case of lay activists.

Third, and most important, while more description is better than less in an absolute sense, I don't believe that I need the most descriptive rendering of these activists to advance my argument. All I want to do with the interview data is complicate normative framings of political vocation, particularly in the context of Christian theology. But since the latter have so ineptly considered what political vocations actually look like, as it were, on the ground, one doesn't need much data to expose their deficiencies.

Despite these counterarguments, I treat the qualitative research I use in the dissertation with much qualification. I do not intend for the qualitative research that informs this dissertation to suggest any kind of generalizable, descriptively adequate understanding of political vocation.

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This dissertation tells the story of persons like Steve who struggle faithfully to respond to the world in light of commitments that ultimately transcend it, whose moral agency, while inevitably conditioned by the world, orients the self beyond it, and of a God whose presence in the penultimate moment known as the world and the ultimate polity called the City of God graciously reconciles the two to one another. The first chapter examines the formation of political identity.

[45] See for example Alessandro Duranti, "Narrating the Political Self in a Campaign for U.S. Congress," *Language in Society* 35, no. 4 (2006), 467-497.

Chapter 1: Modernity's Divided Self

Weber argues, as we saw in the introduction, that a tension between competing political ethics – a politician's commitment to absolute ends and responsibility – marks political vocation in modern polities. Modern politics, Weber argues, involves a contest for control of the legitimate means of domination. The political ethics of responsibility and ultimate ends have always been important in the task of governing, and there have always been tensions between them. But complex configurations of power and money exacerbate the tensions between these political ethics in ways that are novel in modern societies. This situation generates a distinctive problem for those who would pursue a political vocation.

In the broader scope of his work, Weber shows that the tension between competing political ethics evinces a more general condition under which modernity exists. In modern societies, Weber argues, there are many complex and relatively distinctive institutional contexts in and through which persons live their lives – the polity, the church, the market, the family, etc. Each of these contexts has its own, relatively distinct, but not completely autonomous, moral logic in terms of which persons make moral judgments and which form persons as moral agents.

While moral meaning and experience are divided among these relatively distinct institutional contexts, they are not neatly contained within them. Different sources of moral meaning and experience open up possibilities for interpreting each in terms of the others, and thus of creating and recreating moral meaning. Moral meaning in

institutionally differentiated societies, then, is far from rigid and determinate. It is plural and ambiguous.[46]

Those who pursue a political vocation in modern societies, we can imagine, must not only choose between competing political ethics. They must also grapple with competing moral formations that inform the ways they negotiate the moral demands of a political vocation. Some of formations, as Weber helps us to understand, are institutionally located. They affect the lives of anyone who enters into and leads their lives in institutional settings.

We all know, for example, how to be good bargain shoppers whenever we head to the grocery store. We know, that is, how to use our money to maximize the satisfaction of our wants and needs. But we also know that most of the time, we can't apply the same kind of instrumental logic to our family members or co-religionists, although we might at times very appropriately apply it to our political allies and rivals.

We are, in short, formed as moral agents within and across many different institutional contexts, each of which forms our moral agency in different ways. Other dimensions of our moral formation are tied to particular kinds of life experiences, such as race, gender, age, ability, and socioeconomic class. These conditions are socially structured so that the moral agency of some is enhanced and that of others is constrained or marginalized.

To negotiate multiple moral formations is to negotiate multiple moral identities. Recall that by "moral identity," I mean a person's interrelated understanding of who they are and what they ought to do. It includes the sources of one's moral formation (e.g.,

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[46] For the ambiguity of moral experience, see Tipton, "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism," especially 35-38.

church community, political culture, ethnic heritage, gender identities, etc.), the fundamental commitments generated as a result of such formations, and a sense of what one ought to do in the world, how one ought to do it, and the directions in which a life lived in such a way will ultimately lead.

We're formed, for example, as citizens in a democratic polity. In terms of that formation, we're trained to think of ourselves as persons whose voice matters; who ought therefore to vote and express political opinions; who ought to consider serving our country through military service, the Peace Corps, public office, or in some other way; who might bristle when persons from other countries criticize our political affairs, etc.

We might also be formed in the context of some religious tradition. In terms of that formation, we might understand ourselves as persons whose existence is called into being and sustained by a loving God who creates all things with inherent dignity and value. Thus, we think we ought to respect creation and show our thankfulness for it by giving ourselves to others in a variety of ways.

A critical task of the moral life, then, is to sort out different and often competing moral formations and the moral identities that correspond to them. We have to decide how our multiple moral formations and the kinds of moral judgments they generate will relate to one another. Which will take precedent, and to what extent? When, for example, will it be appropriate to lean on our formation as a rational actor in a market system ("*homo economics*," as it is sometimes called[47]), a soldier, a citizen, or a member of the Kingdom of God? In making more or less conscious decisions about how our

[47] For a detailed discussion of *homo economicus*, see Herman E. Daly, John B. Cobb, and Clifford W. Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), chapter 4.

multiple formations relate to one another, we craft a moral identity. And, *ipso facto*, we make fundamental determinations about how we will exercise moral agency.

I argued in the introduction that political vocation is best understood in the reciprocal relationship between what I called "political identity" and "political agency." Political identity is a person's interrelated understanding of who they are and what they ought to do in service to political communities. Political agency includes the capacities, skill sets, and practices (e.g., debating, compromising, mobilizing resources, etc.) efficacious in particular political contexts (a state legislature, a city street, a public hearing, etc.) in which persons (agents) engage in forms of political work (policy activism, community organizing, legislating, campaigning, protesting, etc.). I suggested that political identity is a region of what I termed "moral identity." In other words, political identity is that part of our moral identity that motivates our political agency – our commitments and service to political communities.

This chapter explores the formation of political identities in modern selves. It argues that moral experience in modern societies is conditioned by an irreducible moral pluralism. By "moral pluralism," I mean the existence of different sources of moral meaning. As in the examples above, the claims of these different sources often compete with one another. They affect the formation of moral identity in general and political identity in particular.

The condition of moral pluralism is inescapable: it constitutes the conditions that make moral experience possible for modern selves. We can't step outside of it. We wouldn't even know what it would mean to do so. And we can't help but invoke

pluralism even as we describe it.[48] Thus, descriptions of pluralism have the quality of inevitable circularity. A useful strategy, in light of this quality of circularity, is to show moral pluralism operating in the lives of persons who are going about the task of crafting political identities.

I therefore begin the chapter by introducing Wanda Foley, an Atlanta-based community organizer, whose personal narrative illuminates the theoretical considerations in this chapter. Wanda's account of herself illustrates a number of important points that this chapter will begin to unpack. First, it shows that moral and political identities are both given and constructed. Wanda's story highlights aspects of racial and gender identities and religious formation that were simply given dimensions of her moral formation. But persons also exercise some agency in constructing their identity, both from elements that are given in their formative environments as well as the projects persons choose to undertake later in life.

Wanda's story shows, secondly, that the construction and disposition of moral identity is a complex matter. For example, even though it is fair to say that Wanda's Christian identity nurtures the "fundamental evaluations," as Charles Taylor calls them, that make her work in community organizing intelligible, it is not the case for Wanda that her identity as a Christian supplies the *only* terms in which her Christian identity and her

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[48] Here I follow James M. Gustafson's critique of theologians who think they can escape modernity through sophisticated theological arguments or ancient religious practices: "Christians do not confront 'modernity' in some reified ('essentialized') form that at a high level of generalization can be criticized from an equally general view of a Christian particularism. They confront it in how events are interpreted by news commentators as well as political and social scientists, in pastors' use of evidence and insights from psychology as they counsel, in evaluating choices as consumers, in interpreting both the tensions and the blessings of their interpersonal relations. There is no escape from 'modernity,' whether it is attempted by fundamentalist recourse to the authority of the Bible on matters of history and nature as well as sin and salvation, or by sophisticated 'postmodern' critiques of the sciences." In: Gustafson, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 86.

work in community organizing is understood.[49] Rather, the experiences she has had in community organizing generate the very terms in which her identity as a Christian is meaningful.

Thirdly, Wanda's story shows how a complex moral identity renders intelligible a particular exercise of political agency. Wanda could have been a politician, a lobbyist, a strategist, a staffer, or an activist of a different sort. But her moral identity, as she accounts for it, illuminates her work in a particular style of community organizing.

In the second section, I return to the question of political identity in the context of modernity. As we began to see in Weber, pluralism poses a fundamental challenge to the formation of identity in modern societies. There are, I suggest, two dominant framings of moral pluralism in academic literature relevant to the formation of political identity. These two framings are deeply intertwined, but for the purposes of this analysis may be artificially separated. Attention to both framings will help us better understand the complex conditions under which persons craft political identities.

There is, first, moral pluralism of the sort that we have already encountered in Weber – the pluralism of moral logics and languages that mark modern societies which are structurally differentiated into various institutional contexts. I call this framing of moral pluralism "institutional moral pluralism." Pluralism of this sort is often the concern of sociological examinations of morality, social institutions, and human agency in modern societies.

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[49] Recall from my discussion of Taylor in the introduction that human beings, according to Taylor, make "strong evaluations," qualitative distinctions between desires, inclinations, and motivations. Among strong evaluations, some are "fundamental evaluations" that prioritize and give meaning to all other evaluations that human beings make. Our commitment to fundamental evaluations, in turn, determines our identity. See Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?"

The second framing is what might be called the “pluralism of identity” – the many ways in which persons understand themselves in terms of life experiences that include the categories of gender, race, ethnicity, religious life, occupation, ability, and socio-economic class, among others. An important accent of this framing of pluralism is its consideration of the ways in which some of these experiences are privileged by social configurations of power and privilege, and others marginalized. Gender, race, class, ability, and ethnicity are all categories of identity and experience that are conditioned by socially legitimated norms. The framing of moral pluralism as pluralism of identity focuses on the way asymmetrical relationships of power and privilege, rather than institutionally located moral logics, structure identity. These relationships aren’t located in any particular institutional context but rather structure moral experience across institutional contexts. The pluralism of identity framing appears prominently in philosophical accounts of identity, particularly in phenomenology, gender theory, and political theory.

One way to view the difference between these two framings of pluralism is in terms of scope. Institutional moral pluralism conditions moral life within institutional contexts. Furthermore, persons experience institutional moral pluralism in their everyday experience. All of us move in and out of the market place, the polity, educational systems, health care systems, etc. Pluralism of identity trains attention on particular life experiences and the ways in which persons interpret them as they craft identities. Not all of us can claim the experience of being a woman, an African American, a Catholic, wealthy, educated, etc. What links these two framings are the ways in which constellations of power and privilege are encoded into institutional life so that some life

experiences are enhanced and others marginalized. Thus, the experience being African American, for example, is inevitably and distinctively conditioned by the structure of the marketplace, the polity, educational systems, etc.

In the third section of the chapter, I examine the relationship between the two framings in detail. Here I draw on philosophical and sociological accounts of the relationship between social institutions and individual moral agency to argue that these two framings of identity are mutually constitutive. Institutions, such as the market system, the secular polity, the family, religious community, etc., constitute the contexts in which persons are formed as moral agents. Institutions both supply the moral logics and languages in which persons understand themselves as moral agents and are the means by which human communities coordinate the distribution of material resources. In other words, they work to configure both symbolic and material resources.[50] Institutions also encode and reproduce pernicious relationships of power and privilege.

Political identity and agency are, however, not reducible to institutional formations. Under the conditions of moral pluralism, persons configure their identity in relationship to a number of different institutional formations. They work to craft identities that render particular exercises of moral agency intelligible. Moral agency, in turn, makes possible the pursuit of life projects. The exercise of moral agency in the pursuit of life projects may reinscribe patterns of moral meaning already encoded in

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[50] Here I rely on the definition of institutions offered by Roger Friedland and Robert R. Alford. Institutions for Friedland and Alford are the "supraorganizational patterns of human activity by which individuals and organizations produce their material subsistence and organize time and space. They are also symbolic systems, ways of ordering reality, and thereby rendering time and space meaningful." Friedland and Alford, "Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, ed. Walter W. Powell and Paul DiMaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 243. In the argument I develop below, I point to the irreducibly plural character of institutional life, which I think is not inconsistent with Friedland and Alford's understanding but is also not emphasized in it.

institutional life. On the other hand, as we'll see in Wanda's case, life projects may also seek to fundamentally reconfigure extant institutional patterns. While persons may creatively reconfigure moral logics and languages in ways that correspond with innovative forms of moral agency, in an important sense they never fully step outside of institutional formations, as if to craft moral identity *ex nihilo*.

The modern self, then, is not a unity that a differentiated institutional life serves to promote. Instead, the self is irreparably divided. It is divided between its multiple formations, across institutional contexts, and in terms of life experiences, some of which are enhanced and others marginalized by socially legitimated norms encoded in patterns of institutional and social life. These divisions shape and constrain the ways in which persons both craft political identities and exercise political agency. Modernity's divided self, in other words, reflects the divided contexts of moral meaning in which the self is formed.

The account of modernity's divided self I develop here opens up the constructive question: How should we understand the way persons negotiate the divided self to create political identities? In the fourth and final section of this chapter, I draw on the work of Michael Walzer to describe the process of crafting a political identity. Walzer likens the agency the modern self exercises in crafting identity to a person who stands encircled by a company of critics. Some of these critics belong to the company of critics because of the self's choice to include them, and others are not chosen. The construction of the self's identity is a project in which the self continuously responds to the claims made by the circle of critics. In this way, the self crafts an identity. But this project is always unfinished, always ongoing.

For sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and scholars of literature, this chapter probably won't offer much, if anything, that is groundbreaking. But Christian ethicists, particularly Christian political ethicists, haven't, in my view, adequately attended to the complex relationship between the formation of political identity and the exercise of political agency. Thus, this chapter prepares a more informed Christian theological consideration of the relationship between political identity and agency, on the way to constructive theological reflection about the nature of political vocation.

I. Wanda Foley

Wanda Foley is a professional community organizer for the Atlanta chapter of the Gamaliel Foundation, a national grassroots community organizing network. She grew up in the Midwest, in an African American Baptist church, which she describes as a large congregation that wasn't engaged in any form of political activism. It wasn't until Wanda graduated from college and entered graduate school that she began to think about the relationship between her faith and community organizing. An important moment came in a course in which a professor discussed Gandhi:

> One of my professors started talking about organizing. And then he started talking about Gandhi and I really got kinda fascinated with learning about Gandhi and what he did and how he was willing to die—you know, not just for himself but for others—and I was like wow that is awesome, you know. I knew a lot about King and, you know, we know that King followed Gandhi but I didn't know a lot about Gandhi. And for me the fact that he was driven by his faith, you know, so much that I'm—that I'm willing to die over something that I believe—and I'm like I wanna do that. And so that's how it all starts for me, just learning about Gandhi in school.[51]

The notion that faith could generate commitments so deeply held that one would be willing to die for them sparked Wanda's imagination. She mentioned this episode early in our interview. Towards the end, I asked her to flesh out the idea of being willing to die

[51] All quotes in this section are from my interview with Wanda Foley, May 1, 2008.

for one's commitments. Wanda explained that to be a "person of Christ" is to be "militant." She evoked St. Peter: "I'm like Peter; I will cut off your ear." The figure of St. Peter signifies for Wanda that Christians are committed to certain fundamental values that engender enthusiasm for working on behalf of those values. But commitment also comes at a "cost": "You know, there's a cost and I'm willing yeah—I'm willing to go to jail over something I believe. I'm willing to die over something I believe because you can have my body but you're not gonna have my spirit. But that's how I look at it."

After Wanda finished her graduate work, she moved back home. There she applied for a job as an organizer with a local interfaith organizing project. Seeing an advertisement for the job in the newspaper, Wanda was intrigued: "And so I got on the internet and did some research on it, and I was like, oh my God, it's organizing and it's interfaith, it's working with congregations. So honestly this is what I said, 'I can be saved *and* get paid.'"

Wanda found that she had a lot to learn about community organizing when she began her new job. An important part of grassroots organizing in the model developed by Saul Alinsky and others stresses the importance of building relationships within and without the grassroots organization in order to build power.[52] Wanda said that her gregariousness made that piece of the job easy. The difficult part was learning how to diagnose complex social problems in order to facilitate organizing projects on a

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[52] Alinsky explores community organizing practices in his two books *Reveille for Radicals* and *Rules for Radicals*. Ed Chambers, the current Executive Director of the Industrial Areas Foundation, articulates in his book *Roots for Radicals* a modified version of Alinsky's approach to community organizing that takes seriously cultivating relationships on the grassroots level as an integral part of building power. See Saul David Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1946); and Saul David Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1971). See also Edward T. Chambers and Michael A. Cowan, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2003). Taken together, these works usefully describe the methods and strategies deployed by organizations like the Industrial Areas Foundation.

manageable scale. The technique prescribed by Alinsky and others calls for identifying relatively small-scale projects to address on a local level. Smaller successes, Wanda explained, build both morale and power. The hope is to scale up to more ambitious projects.

In her first assignment, Wanda was charged with developing a project in a six-month period that was to culminate in a "public action"—a kind of public meeting on a particular issue. Community leaders and elected officials are invited to the action meeting and are expected to commit publicly to supporting the organization's response to the issue. Going from nothing to a public action is a long road, Wanda explained, "because when you look at the issues in preparing yourself for a public meeting you wanna cut your issues down where it can be winnable and concise, which means also a short campaign. I mean I had six months to do this. So you can't, you know, say, well hey, I'm gonna work on universal health care and have a victory in six months." Wanda and her colleagues settled on the issue of affordable dental care for poor youth in the community. At the end of six months, they had a commitment from four local dentists and the local school system to support free dental services.

Wanda has come to see her work with community organizing efforts in the Midwest and Atlanta as part of God's calling: "I look at my work as a ministry. I feel that I'm blessed because I get paid to do something that I love. And to do something that I'm passionate about, but this is truly ministry for me, and it's truly a calling. You know, I feel like God called me and placed me in this position." And God didn't just call Wanda *to* her work; God calls Wanda *in* her work as well. Wanda told me about the importance of listening for the voice of God. She does a lot of listening to her gut, and

she understands gut feeling in terms of God's ongoing call to her. When I asked Wanda about how she understands her gut feeling, she said:

> It's more of trusting what you feel inside. That first initial thought, that first initial reaction and beginning to trust it. It's sorta like that—you know being a Christian and hearing the voice of God and trusting that. You know the Bible says, you know, that my sheep know my voice, but trusting that you're hearing his voice and I'm gonna follow it, and I don't really know how you get to that point, but I know that my relationship with Christ has helped me to I guess realize that, you know, I do have an inner voice within that's speaking to me and trust that inner voice and go with that.

The voice of God sustains Wanda in her work—it encourages her, as she says, not to give up, even when she makes mistakes.

One of the things that struck me about Wanda was how much she drew on categories of meaning that come out of her formation in a tradition of faith-based community organizing politics to make sense both of her Christian identity and her work as an organizer. Wanda described a week-long training for new organizers. She noted how unfamiliar were the new concepts and skills she was learning. I asked her to describe which of those were the most difficult to learn. She told me it was difficult to come to terms with the power white men wield against African American people in general and African American women in particular, and the idea that interaction with powerful white men could be constructive:

> I just started actually really talking about this, was the fact of that I had a fear of white males. You know, in the training they talked about this word called power and, you know, now, and then, I found out what power meant, but it's just the ability to act. But for me I could—I've never conceptualized it as the ability to act. For me it was power was evil and those who had power was white males and that's that. And white males don't like African-American people at all and they don't like African-American women and they are the enemy. That's how I looked at it.
>
> So when I got that revelation of you know power's just the ability to act, and God is—and let me say this, it was a disconnect even with my faith because in my faith, it said that you know we have the power and ability to tread upon the enemy. You know, God has given us power and authority … and that I had power because of who I serve; because of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has given me power. So the disconnect is how is it then that you can have power, Jesus Christ has given you power, but then you're afraid of power and only white people can have power or white males can have power. So it was a disconnect, it didn't really make any sense. So it was all fuzzy. And so—but when I got

> the revelation that one, I do have power, and my power is not limited to the four walls of the church.

The training was a time of empowerment and even conversion for Wanda. When she talked about listening to one plenary speaker, the Reverend Cheryl Rivera, Wanda's point of view changed: "And it was finally when I said, 'Oh! I get it!' I could connect everything that they have been talking about, power and self-interest, building relationships, even the issues, the agitation, you know, holding up this mirror, this is what you say but this is how you act and, you know, living out of passion and live also out of your anger. I had my *ah-ha* moment." Wanda's "ah-ha moment" opened up new ways of thinking about power, relationships, and self-interest. It didn't happen in a church, and she doesn't frame it in terms of conventional Christian theological categories. In fact, this "revelation" constituted a "disconnect" with her Christian formation, since it didn't reconcile the claim that persons are empowered with the understanding that empowerment was to be confined, in her words, "to the four walls of the church."

While this key moment challenged the orientation of Wanda's Christian identity, it also opened up new possibilities for theological reflection on the categories of power and action. The Gamaliel Foundation, like other community organizing projects that share Alinsky's legacy, have increasingly turned their attention to religious communities as a foundation for community organizing work. With this turn has come increased awareness of, and engagement with, the theological languages and practices of the religious traditions that participate in organizing work.[53] Wanda wasn't doing all of the

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[53] For analysis of this turn, see e.g. Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 40-71; Richard Wood, "Faith in Action: Religious Resources for Political Success in Three Congregations," *Sociology of Religion* 55:4 (1994), 397-417; Wood, "Religious Culture and Political Action," *Sociological Theory* 17:3 (1999), 307-332; and Wood, *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 55-88.

work of integrating traditions of theological and political meanings on her own. Instead, Wanda's work to craft a political identity in the context of her Gamaliel experience happens in a particular institutional setting in which there are ongoing processes of reflection that bring religious and political traditions of thought and practice into conversation with one another. Wanda suggested that Rev. Rivera's plenary presentation helped her to make the connection between the theological notion of being a child of God and the obligation to empower others to work together for social justice. In Gamaliel, in other words, Wanda found a blending of theological and political traditions of meaning.

Wanda incorporates the language of relationship and relational power that is distinctive in traditions of grassroots community organizing. She mentions Luke 4:18-19, in which Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."[54] Wanda interpreted this passage to prescribe a relational approach to action:

> I mean [Jesus] said that, according to Luke 4, I came to set the captives free. That's action, that's more than just praying, that's more than just fasting, that's more than just winning souls to Christ. That's an action word, that's a relational word 'cause in order to set the captives free, one you gotta know who the captives are so you got – so that means you gotta be in communion with other people [55]

Organizations like Alinksy's Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and Gamaliel are interested in building power through building relationships. That is, they want to advance

[54] I quote from the NRSV.

[55] She continued: "So in learning about you know this other side of Jesus that we don't gotta talk about you know Jesus being so revolutionary or radical as some may say but he spoke out about the injustices and so for me as a child of God, he said – the bible says that we were created in his likeness and in his image so we're supposed to be like him right. Meaning that we're supposed to do like him. So Jesus prayed, Jesus fasted, Jesus won people over onto him, but Jesus also spoke out for the injustices. And so when – when I got that revelation, that was it for me. Like as a child of God I am commissioned to speak out. You know, as we say to speak truth to power; I'm commissioned to do that."

their interests on the basis of relationships they build with people and organizations that have power. Action flows from relationship building. The lens Wanda uses to interpret the passage from Luke 4, in other words, is familiar in this framing.

I was interested in how Wanda reconciles the tactical demands of grassroots organizing politics and the other-regarding ethic of Christian traditions. While Alinsky's own approach was more tactical than relational, the spirit of his tactical savvy survives in organizations like the Gamaliel Foundation, which inherited his legacy.[56] One tactic is the action meeting, a kind of rally to which public officials are invited and asked to indicate publicly their support for the organization's platform. The meeting is scripted ahead of time, and the relevant leaders are briefed on what is going to happen. That invited officials are expected to lend their support to the effort is not a surprise. But there is still a coercive element: an audience of voting constituents expect that the VIPs will commit to the program the organization has prescribed. And the not-so-subtle message is that there will be consequences if no such commitment is made.[57]

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[56]Here I rely on Chambers' discussion of the evolution of IAF politics since the period of Alinksky's leadership. See Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*.

[57]In the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) model of grassroots community organizing, in the family tradition of which Gamaliel belongs, political agendas are both very modest in scope and are developed from the bottom up. That is, professional organizers do not determine the issues that an IAF affiliate organization works on in a particular community. Rather, they emerge from a series of intentionally structured and skillfully conducted conversations among organization participants and other community leaders about issues that drive passion for politics (known as the "one-to-one relational meeting").

In this way, the political theorist Coles argues, the IAF practices a kind of "trickster" politics: In the very process of identifying interests and developing strategies to realize them – a game that in other political contexts often serves to fracture political community – IAF organizations build community by building relationships (See Romand Coles, "Of Tensions and Tricksters: Grassroots Democracy between Theory and Practice," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 3 (2006), 552). Coles argues that indeed democracy at its best isn't all talk; it's about constructive listening: "At its best, the democratic counterculture emerging in the IAF aims at *cultivating a power for democracy and justice that grows precisely in and through its capacity to listen*" (Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 223, emphasis original). But Coles wants also to say that the notion of 'listening' is a much too narrow way to describe the particular form of democratic practice that the IAF has developed. In its one-to-one relational meetings, as in its other distinctive

I asked Wanda how this use of power squares with her Christian commitments. She told me that the drama of the public meeting isn't as it seems; there's a trick to it: "We actually set down, we talk to them we let 'em know exactly this is what we're gonna ask you. Sometimes we have to tweak what we're gonna say to—so they'll feel a little comfortable or whatever. So it's a lot of work that's done behind the scenes, and they're actually aware of what's gonna be asked of them."

While I could see her point about the relational work that is done to prepare public meetings, I still wanted to push Wanda on the coercive dimension of these meetings. I reformulated the question and asked again. She replied: "We look at the issues as an excuse to bring us into a relationship. The key is really the relationship

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practices, the IAF encourages the development of a radical ontological openness to others. Coles captures this radical openness with the terms "receptivity" and "receptive generosity" (Ibid. 220).

Though he does not emphasize them, Coles is certainly not ignorant of the moments in IAF politics that rely on the use of coercive power to achieve political ends. The IAF "accountability session," or "action meeting" as it is sometimes called, is a kind of public drama in which relevant political leaders, who are often elected officials, are invited to commit publicly their support for some issue. While the commitment of these invited guests is the focus of action meetings, the meetings are not supposed to be sneak-attacks: Ideally, the leaders in question are already involved in the relationship-building process that makes a public commitment to the organization's agenda likely. And they are also briefed on what is going to happen at the meeting. Still, when elected leaders stand on stage in front of a gymnasium or church sanctuary full of their constituents and are asked publicly to commit their support to an issue, the message is clear: There will be consequences if the result is disappointing.

Richard Wood, in his ethnography of community organizing, *Faith in Action*, notes the uneasiness some participants in an interfaith IAF affiliate organization in California feel about the coercive use of power: "One pastor noted, 'I just don't like treating out elected officials that way. It just doesn't sit right with me." Likewise a leader said after an action, "I can see he [action target] got mad about us only giving him two minutes to respond. I wouldn't like that either. It doesn't seem quite fair or Christian or something." Wood goes on to say that while community organizations structured on the IAF model certainly have resources for reflecting on the balance between instrumental and absolute moral logics, they rarely do. When reflection happens, he observes, it is done "typically in an instrumental sense, to legitimize the issue being addressed and to mobilize the affective commitments and interpersonal solidarities of participants. Reflections at public actions—in the heat of the battle, so to speak—typically fit this instrumental mode." Wood, *Faith in Action*, 188.

Interesting in this regard is the way in which Coles talks about IAF public meetings as an "exuberant Dionysian enactment of utopic being-together in an (im)possible beloved community of differences." Here Coles focuses on the way in which the accountability session creates community through public liturgy and ritual. But Coles doesn't have anything to say here about the moments in these "enactments of utopic being-together" in which power is used to achieve political ends, as in the Wood citation above. See Romand Coles, "The Wild Patience of Radical Democracy: Beyond Zizek's Lack," in *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack*, ed. Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 81.

because what we're really about is how do we create or build community." She went on to relate her experience of using power to her experience of oppression: "That's not how I operate because, one, that's not me and that's not how God created me and my first obligation is to be who I am as a child of God … I mean we have a lot of people who are oppressed, OK. I've been oppressed, you know, we talk about oppression. So how dare I come and then—'cause I'm fighting against oppression, OK. I'm clear about that I'm fighting against oppression—so how dare do I come and then create oppression?" It is important to try to use power to create community in order to avoid reinscribing the very conditions that tear communities apart, Wanda was saying. Still, she recognizes that instrumental power is in play in the public meeting: "But whatever—but how 'bout I have one thousand or more of their constituents standing behind me. That's power right there. [To] be able to say you know we can have you kicked out of office. You know, you will not be reelected the next time around, you know. That's power."

Within a constellation of life experiences, which she didn't in every case choose for herself, Wanda has crafted a political identity that draws on a number of different sources of her moral formation. Her political identity brings religious categories into conversation with categories of moral meaning that come out of a particular tradition of political practice (the Gamaliel Foundation), and intersects also with her experience of race and gender in the U.S. context. While Wanda's "first obligation" is to her understanding of herself as a "child of God," it is clear that the meaning of this obligation is thoroughly infused by categories that come out of a grassroots organizing tradition, which was not, in its origins, a tradition of theological meaning but rather a particular kind of political tradition.

A sense of religious value seems to hold a superordinate position in the constellation of meanings comprising Wanda's sense of moral obligation. But her case shows that the prioritization of values doesn't generate a sufficient interpretation of their meaning. Not one, but many sources of Wanda's moral formation furnish the terms in which she understands her deepest moral commitments. Thus, for example, one can't understand Wanda's sense of being a child of God, and the moral obligations it entails, apart from notions of power and action tied to the tradition of political thought and practice to which Gamaliel belongs. Moreover, apart from this complicated political identity, one can't understand why Wanda might exercise the particular kind of political agency, with its distinctive focus on relational action, which belongs to the traditions of grassroots community organizing in America. In her account, political identity and political agency are inseparable.

The rest of this chapter is a beginning attempt to bring rigorous theoretical interpretation to these complicated relationships. I begin in the next section with an examination of the sources of political identity in modern societies.

II. Two Framings of Pluralism

Wanda's account of her political identity is in one way not at all unusual in the context of modernity. It explores sources of political identity given in her experience. These given sources have in some ways turned out to be important for, and thus endure in, Wanda's self-understanding. Other sources have been modified or jettisoned altogether in light of new experiences that have created opportunities for self-reflection and self-understanding. This part of Wanda's story is not unusual because identity in

modern contexts requires that persons contend with a pluralism of moral meanings and sources of identity formation.

If the project of identity construction is constrained by a pluralism of moral meanings, then we need a thick description of that pluralism in order to better understand how it functions as a condition of political identity. I want to suggest that there are two dominant framings of pluralism in academic literature relevant to this issue. I'll call the first "institutional moral pluralism" and the second the "pluralism of identity." These labels name two theoretical approaches to understanding pluralism. To separate them is useful for the purposes of analysis, but the separation is artificial.

Institutional moral pluralism is typical in sociological analyses of the differentiated structure of modern societies into relatively distinct institutional contexts. In this framing, democratic polities, market systems, family structures, religious communities, health care systems, military institutions, and incarceration systems, among others, all have relatively distinct, though not radically autonomous, moral logics and languages.[58] Different institutional contexts construct moral agency variously, posit different (though, again, not radically autonomous) sets of norms and values and modes of moral reasoning, and look different in various social-historical contexts.[59] Institutions

[58] Friedland and Alford argue that "each of the most important institutional orders of contemporary Western societies has a central logic – a set of material practices and symbolic constructions – which constitutes its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate … These institutional logics are symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defended, and technically and materially constrained, and hence have specific historical limits." Friedland and Alford, 248.

[59] Different theorists posit more or less social differentiation. For example, Steven Tipton, analyzes four "styles of ethical evaluation" – authoritative, regular, consequential, and expressive – that are dominant in modern societies. Each of style has its own orientation, mode of knowledge, discursive form, understanding of right, and conception of virtue. Each has characteristic institutional locations, organizational structure, social roles and relations, occupational and educational class locations, and degrees of prescriptivity. But these characteristic features do not reflect absolute divisions. Instead, styles of ethical evaluation overlap in different institutional contexts, which generates ambiguous boundaries between them. See Steven M. Tipton, "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism," in *Meaning and*

are extended through a wide variety of social practices, which sustain and reproduce them.[60] They form persons whose capacity to exercise moral agency is informed by the moral logics and languages that are created and maintained in them.[61]

In such a framing, one might, for example, argue that modern democratic polities posit the citizen as a primary moral agent, market systems the consumer, health care systems the patient, military organizations the soldier, and so on. The consumer, one might say, employs an instrumental moral logic to maximize material gain and minimize loss, while the citizen is governed by an ethic of civic duty to serve the interests of the political community, etc.[62] The institutional framing of moral pluralism is useful in that it

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Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self, ed. Richard Madsen et al.(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Tipton's four ethical styles roughly correspond to the four "strands" of moral tradition shape moral discourse in the U.S. context, according to Robert N. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Another approach focuses on the kinds of selves that are produced in different moral systems. For example, Diane Margolis identifies three primary "views of the self" that are constructed in Western moral systems – the exchanger self, the cosmic self, and the obligated self – as well as three "combined forms" of the former - the reciprocator, the called self, and the civic self. Margolis focuses on the social relationships in which these self-types are constructed and inquires into how they might be destabilized. See Diane Rothbard Margolis, *The Fabric of Self: A Theory of Ethics and Emotions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

[60] The work of Pierre Bourdieu on the notion of the *habitus* has been important for sociologists who are interested in the ways in which institutions produce and reproduce themselves through practice and theory. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* has been widely criticized for being too reductive – that it becomes difficult to understand what genuine human agency, manifest for example in social change, would look like in self-reproducing social contexts. For a discussion of Bourdieu's influence on anthropology and sociology, see Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (1984).

William H. Sewell argues that while social structures reproduce themselves, structures are also susceptible to change. Social structures are multiple, producing, in turn, multiple schemas of meaning, which can be "transposed" onto other structures. See William H. Sewell Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 1 (1992).

[61] It is important to note that these formations are not utterly deterministic. For example, Robert Wuthnow has pointed to the "porousness" of institutional life in American society. Whereas a sense of belonging to and participation in institutions was important to Americans in the middle of the last century, Americans increasingly participate strategically and episodically in institutions, Wuthnow argues, in order to achieve particular ends, at which point they exit institutions. See his *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[62] For Tipton, the ethical style associated with the citizen is "regular." The mode of knowledge of the regular style is reason. Regular discourse is marked by an attention to relevant rules and principles and is located in legal-political institutional contexts oriented to debate and discussion. Tipton, "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism."

accounts for the existence of tension and conflict between competing systems of moral meaning ubiquitous in modern societies.

The pluralism of identity framing draws on a family of philosophical lenses to examine the diversity of identities and the concomitant life experiences out of which these identities emerge. These theories stress that identities are constructed and malleable rather than found and rigid. Identities are constructed when people imagine groups defined by identity characteristics – white, male, able-bodied, young, wealthy, etc. Identities, moreover, are always constructed in relationship to difference – in relationship, that is, to what they are not. These theories of identity are typically sensitive to the workings of power in the construction of identities. Some identities in particular social, cultural, and political contexts are privileged. The conditions that create privileged identities are coded into the very structures of society, economy, and polity. This last point – about the way in which identities enjoy privilege or are pushed to the margins of society – is the clearest link between the two framings of identity.

In the rest of this section, I examine the recent work of one exponent of each framing. Robin Lovin is a Christian ethicist interested in crafting a Christian theological response to institutional moral pluralism. William Connolly is a political theorist who crafts a theory of democracy that embraces the pluralism of identity. Both examples show some typical limitations of the respective framings. My goal in this section is to note the distance between these two framings and to suggest ways in which they might constructively be thought together.

Lovin on Contexts and Institutional Moral Pluralism

In his book *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (2008), Robin Lovin queries the theological tradition of Christian realism to address the "new realities" that exist in a post-Cold War world.[63] The end of the decades-long conflict between the two superpowers compromised a power equilibrium that continues to destabilize the world order. No single institutional reality – government, market, or otherwise – can adequately regulate social and political conflict on its own. The end of the Cold War also marked the end of the historical-political context in which Christian realism, in its original formulations, was intelligible. Lovin, then, has two tasks: To imagine what Christian realism means in a post-Cold War world, and then to respond to that world from a Christian realist perspective.

Some realists, Lovin argues, look primarily to government structures to regulate social and political conflict. For these "antiutopian realists," as he calls them, governments create and maintain approximate peace and order. On the contrary, "counterapocalyptic realists" urge a deep suspicion about formal political structures, arguing that governments are likely to abuse power and ought to be kept in check. Lovin defends a third alternative, what he calls a "pluralist realism," an understanding that no one social or institutional context will be able to maintain approximate order and peace. He writes that in a post-Cold War world, "What the [pluralist realists] learned was that no power – political, economic, or religious – can be trusted to settle every question. So a realist committed to peace and freedom has to ask not 'Who should win?' but 'How do we sustain the conflict?'"[64]

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[63] Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[64] Ibid., 23.

Lovin's pluralist realism unites political, moral, and theological realisms, holding the vagaries of human existence in tension with the existence of "durable" moral goods created by an eternal God. Human finitude and sinfulness fundamentally condition the moral life. Thus, political realism holds that "self-interest and power" inevitably motivate political choices.[65] But these conditions don't lead ineluctably to relativism, Lovin argues, for enduring moral and theological realities stand behind human experience. According to the pluralist realist, the moral life requires that human beings critically and continuously question their sense of virtue, their understanding of the good, and their motivation for action.

Modern societies are marked by the existence of many different "contexts" of moral meaning. Political, economic, educational, and ecclesial institutions all create and sustain "their own traditions, rules of discourse, and standards of rationality."[66] That is, contexts are differentiated from one another and together constitute a pluralism of moral meaning and moral logics. In modern societies, differentiated contexts "create and maintain" human goods. But contexts are also interdependent, since claims on goods often traverse contexts. The combination of institutional (or, to invoke Lovin's term, "contextual") differentiation and moral pluralism distinguishes modern from pre-modern societies. In pre-modern societies, undifferentiated institutional contexts maintained a unitary conception of the good life. But in modernity, the pursuit of goods in one context often works at cross-purposes with the pursuit of goods in other contexts.

As each context as becomes differentiated from other contexts, Lovin argues, each generates its own "forum." A forum is a discursive space in which "discussions"

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[65] Ibid., 6.
[66] Ibid., 134.

germane to the goods created and maintained in a particular context are conducted. The moral logics that distinguish each context are rehearsed and reinforced in the discussions that happen in a context's forum. The problem is that a variety of different contexts often make claims on goods like health care, education, employment, etc. Thus, a pluralism of discursive norms and rationalities that norm forums often renders discussion across forums and contexts difficult.[67]

Pluralism, then, poses a fundamental challenge to social coordination in modern societies. Any response to pluralism will involve an attempt to sort out tensions that arise between competing goods and the contexts in which they belong. One response is reductionism, whereby all contexts are made to translate moral meaning in terms set by a dominant context. But pluralist realism resists reductionism, for the pluralist realist believes that the contexts of modern life are ultimately coherent and complementary in the order of creation.[68] Each context has an irreducibly important role to play in moral experience. Pluralist realism therefore rejects totalizing moral discourses that ignore the complex relationships that exist between goods in modern societies:

> The Pluralist Realist, by contrast, begins with the experiential variety of human goods, and seeks them where they are to be found. Whatever goods or evils really exist for human life are created and sustained in these complex and differentiated systems of relationships, and it is in that multiplicity of contexts that we must seek whatever unity the moral life will have. Pluralist realism includes a commitment to moral realism, but moral realism under the conditions of modern life requires us to attend to the diversity of goods and to make comprehensive claims very cautiously.[69]

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[67] Ibid., 135.

[68] Lovin argues that the existence of a pluralism of contexts in modern societies does not entail a finally intractable division in moral meaning. Building on Bonhoeffer's conception of the divine mandates, Lovin's Christian pluralist realism asserts that contexts, while structurally differentiated, are finally ordered in creation to the good of human beings, even if human beings never completely understand the complementarity of contexts. Thus, pluralist realism differs from Isaiah Berlin and William Galston's value pluralism, which asserts a deep division between contexts of moral meaning. Critiquing Galston's value pluralism, Lovin writes: "Christian realism, by contrast, resists taking these differences as ultimate, at the same time that it insists on taking the experienced conflicts seriously" (187).

[69] Ibid., 40.

Knowledge of the good always will be incomplete. Human beings will always disagree about the relationships that contexts and their moral demands will bear to one another, and they will always have to work towards a corporate understanding of the good.

Since disagreement is both an inevitable and permanent feature of the moral life, pluralist realists value constructive disagreement and negotiation between contexts. Politics for Lovin is the site in which competing moral claims are negotiated through public discourse: "Politics is made up of discussion of goods within contexts and the negotiation and renegotiation of claims between contexts. The differentiation of a variety of interdependent contexts that shape important areas of life makes that inevitable."[70] Negotiation of goods across contexts happens in what Lovin calls the "public forum." The public forum is not a separate entity from particular forums, as though public discussions about goods could abstract from the meanings and logics that different contexts attach to them. Rather, "the public forum is located within each of the forums that contexts create, not in some one place separate and apart from them."[71]

In order to maintain the integrity of contexts and avoid reductionisms, Lovin proposes a norm that regulates public discourse in the public forum, which he calls the "unapologetic principle." The unapologetic principle states that "*no context is required to explain itself in terms that reduce it to an instrument of other purposes*."[72] The principle formalizes a standard for public discourse. Christians who participate in public forums in which questions about the good are examined and negotiated need not feel as though their voice should be somehow be translated into a moral language that would accommodate the moral norms and logics of other contexts. But neither should

[70] Ibid., 139.
[71] Ibid., 137.
[72] Ibid., 129. Emphasis original.

Christians expect that the moral language of their relevant context, the church, will enjoy uncontested authority in the public sphere. Public debates about competing goods will be heated and permanent, but such conflict is necessary to sustain pluralist democratic polities.

Lovin, then, wants Christians both to be sensitive to the complexity of contexts and to contribute a distinctive perspective to the discussions happening there. He doesn't expect or want conflict between contexts to be resolved. Conflict, he argues, simply marks the boundaries of the many ways in which God has gifted human society with organization and meaning. Pluralism, then, is part of that gift.

Lovin's framing of institutional moral pluralism is helpful for understanding Wanda's story. The Gamaliel Foundation is an important institutional "context" in which Wanda has worked to craft her political identity. Gamaliel supplies a moral language in terms of which she has learned to articulate her fundamental commitments and to complement these with strategies that work on relatively local levels of political life and in terms of relatively modest political projects. Interestingly, Gamaliel is itself a context in which differing moral languages and practices – those of religious and political traditions – are negotiated on an ongoing basis. This is a somewhat different situation than what Lovin has in mind. Lovin is primarily concerned that the patterns of moral meaning and practice distinctive in different contexts maintain their normative integrity as they interact with other patterns. Lovin implies in his discussion that the moral shape of the contexts is more or less settled. But Gamaliel shows that the construction of moral meaning within contexts is always an unfinished project, even as the work of the organization moves ahead. Persons like Wanda learn from these ongoing processes of

meaning-making as they craft their own political identities. They also contribute to these processes in their efforts to advance the cause of social justice.

Connolly on the Pluralism of Identities

For William Connolly, pluralism is not only a feature of modern societies. It is a condition of human experience that resonates in the deepest structures of the universe.[73] Here I focus on the implications of Connolly's conception of pluralism for social and political contexts.

Connolly argues that identity is constructed and, importantly, constructed in relationship to difference.[74] Identities are not in the first place chosen but imposed upon us. But the imposition of identity does not utterly preclude the agency to choose: identity is "what I am and how I am recognized rather than what I choose, want, or consent to. It is the dense self from which choosing, wanting, and consenting proceed."[75] For Connolly identities are thoroughly enmeshed in relationships of power that enhance or constrain the way persons exercise agency to construct identities. A main trajectory of Connolly's work, then, is to explore the relationship between power and identity.

One way that Connolly approaches this exploration is through a theodicy that he develops in his work. There are two problems of evil in the Western tradition, he argues. The first is the familiar version of the problem of evil. It is the question about how a God

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[73] Connolly calls this view of pluralism "multidimensional pluralism": "Multidimensional pluralism I call it, arguing that the expansion of diversity in one domain ventilates life in others as well. We then consider the radical contention that not only human culture but the nonhuman world contains an unruly element of pluralism within it." William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

[74] Identity, he writes, is "established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized." William E. Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002 [1991]), 64.

[75] Ibid., 64.

who is allegedly omnipotent and omnibenevolent can allow evil, both as it is caused by natural occurrences like disease and natural disasters (traditionally called "natural evil"), and as it is perpetrated by people against one another (traditionally called "moral evil"). The consistent response in Western religious thought has been to try to spring God out of the prison this first problem of evil creates. But in absolving God for the responsibility for moral evil, Connolly argues, responsibility is directed towards human beings in ways that rely on constructions of identity necessary to identify both the guilty and the innocent. These identity constructions in turn facilitate prosecution or absolution. Such identifications tend towards rigidity, so that guilt becomes a dimension of a group's identity. In short, this process of identification does violence to identities. This "second problem of evil," Connolly writes, is:

> the evil that flows from the attempt to establish security of identity for an individual or group by defining the other that exposes sore spots in one's identity as evil or irrational. The second problem of evil is *structural* in that it flows from defining characteristics of a doctrine as it unravels the import of its own conception of divinity, identity, evil, and responsibility …[76]

Western religious thought is a favorite target of Connolly's, particularly the thought of Augustine. Augustine's invectives against the Manicheans, Pelagians, Donatists, etc., Connolly argues, serve as a *locus classicus* in Christian thought in which difference is defined in order to attack it.[77]

Connolly argues that certain identities normative in particular social contexts are encoded in social institutions through processes of definition that fix patterns of identity and difference. But identities that aspire to be normative or "true" in a social context, as in the case of Augustine's invectives, inevitably create difference in that very aspiration.

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[76] Ibid., 8.

[77] See Connolly's "Letter to Augustine," chapter 5, in *Identity/Difference*. See also William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative: The Politics of Morality* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993).

Moreover, "true" identities, in their quest to maintain their normativity, must always assume an antagonistic posture over against difference.[78]

The norms defined by dominant identities become "standards of freedom and responsibility" maintained by institutional disciplines. Persons are expected to conform themselves to these norms. If they don't, the consequences are dire: "If one fails to measure up to one (or more) of these disciplines, one runs a high risk of entrapment in one of the categories of otherness derived from it … and these latter categories of abnormality license bureaucratic correction."[79] Under regimes of fixed normativity, the life course is either a "project," in which persons try to navigate dominant norms, or else it is a "struggle," in which a life is spent resisting norms at one's peril.[80] Thus, the norms prescribed by dominant identities in an important sense situate the life possibilities that persons have.

Connolly isn't arguing that identity could not or ought not be defined. Identities must in some sense be defined and maintained. Human beings need defined identities:

> The human animal is essentially incomplete without social form; and a common language, institutional setting, set of traditions, and political forum for enunciating public purposes are indispensable to the acquisition of an identity and the commonalities essential to life.[81]

Identity and difference are co-original and symbiotic concepts; identity constitutes difference. At the same time, the definition of any identity determines not only what is

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[78] "*If* there is no natural or intrinsic identity, power is always inscribed in the relation an exclusive identity bears to the differences it constitutes. *If* there is always a discrepancy between the identities a society makes available and that in human being which exceeds, resists, or denies those possibilities, then the claim to a true identity is perpetually plagued by the shadow of the other it constitutes." Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, 66, emphasis original.

[79] Ibid., 21.

[80] Ibid., 21-22. Of the notion of life as project, Connolly writes: "The late-modern definition of life as a project first demands intensive self-organization and then produces dependent uncertainty – dependence upon a more refined set of institutional standards and disciplines, uncertainty about the temporal stability of established rules of dependence" (22).

[81] Ibid., 94.

other, but also what is not either the same or different. Identity, in other words, renders impossible any identification that falls outside of the identity\difference dyad, at least momentarily.[82] Thus, the movement towards identification, which is inevitable and necessary for human beings, always already creates the conditions for antagonism towards difference.

Antagonism, however, can be short-circuited if identity is understood aright. Identities must be defined, but that doesn't mean that they are therefore fixed and unchanging. Instead, identities are "historically contingent and inherently relational."[83] Identity is always constituted in relationships to identities that are different. That differences induce processes of shaping and re-shaping identity shows the inherent instability of identity. Still, Connolly argues, some features of identity, while fundamentally contingent, are extremely durable. Connolly calls the durable features of identity "branded or entrenched contingencies:" "Some of the contingent elements that enter into your identity are susceptible to reconstruction, and others remain highly resistant to it, even if you desire to transform them and even if there is cultural support for doing so."[84]

With this understanding of identity in view, Connolly urges that politics is a context in which identities, as well as the relationships that constitute them, can always be defined and renegotiated:

> Politics, then, is the medium through which these ambiguities can be engaged and confronted, shifted and stretched. It is simultaneously a medium through which common

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[82] Identities always create and limit possibilities for identities to emerge: "To establish an identity is to create social and conceptual space for it to be in ways that impinge on the spaces available to other possibilities. The appropriate response to this condition is not merely to reconsider the structure of some identities generally endorsed today, but to reconsider the *way* in which individuals and collectivities experience identities invested in them." Ibid., 160. Emphasis original.

[83] Ibid., 48.

[84] Ibid., 176.

> purposes are crystallized and the consummate means by which their transcription into mutual harmonies is exposed, contested, disturbed, and unsettled.[85]

"Agonistic democracy" is Connolly's term for a conception of democracy that values the contingent character of identity and induces therefore an ongoing, respectful, but critical interaction with difference. It is "a practice that affirms the indispensability of identity to life, disturbs the dogmatization of identity, and folds care for the protean diversity of human life into the strife and interdependence of identity\difference."[86]

Agonistic democracy implies, Connolly argues, a "bicameral orientation to citizenship" requiring "a tolerance of ambiguity in politics." Citizens enter the public sphere with a sense of who they are. Citizens have "a faith, doctrine, creed, ideology, or philosophy (I do not distinguish sharply between these) that [they] adopt as an engaged partisan in the world." While they enter into political life with a defined "faith" (Connolly uses "faith" generically and playfully to refer to any worldview, religious or otherwise), citizens who participate in agonistic democracy also understand that their faiths are contingent and ought therefore to be open to revising them in light of interaction with difference.[87]

Politics for Connolly always involves an agonistic relationship between being and becoming. It therefore requires the development of two related civic virtues. The politics of being applies to identities already recognized, and it requires openness to contingency and change.[88] Agonistic respect is the virtue Connolly associates with the politics of being. It engages the "bicameralism of citizenship," requiring that political "partisans"

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[85] Ibid., 94.

[86] Ibid., x.

[87] "There is, second, the engrained sense that you should exercise presumptive receptivity toward others when drawing that faith, creed, or philosophy into the public realm." Connolly, *Pluralism*, 4.

[88] He writes: "In my vocabulary the politics of being refers to crystallizations that persist, even as subterranean forces may accumulate within them. The politics of being provides indispensable points of reference for politics, judgment, and action." Ibid., 121.

recognize both the inherent contestability of other identities as well as their own.[89] The politics of becoming applies to emergent identities. It calls for settled identities to be open to ongoing development and potential contribution of new identities to political life. The virtue associated with the politics of becoming is "critical responsiveness." Critical responsiveness requires "careful listening and presumptive generosity" to those who represent identities that are "struggling to move from an obscure or degraded subsistence below the field of recognition, justice, obligation, rights, or legitimacy to a place on one or more of those registers."[90]

Thus, for Connolly, participating in the public realm "involves mixing into the relational practice of faith itself a preliminary readiness to negotiate with presumptive generosity and forbearance in these numerous situations where recourse to the porous rules of commonality across faiths, public procedure, reason, or deliberation are insufficient to the issue at hand."[91] Agonistic democracy is therefore a risky venture. It is a context in which identities change. And change, respectfully negotiated, ensures, in Connolly's view, a polity that is open to difference.

Connolly helpfully illuminates the way in which political agency entails the ongoing negotiation of identity. Politics at its best facilitates constructive encounters with difference, and encounters with difference affect the formation of identity. But

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[89] Connolly defines agonistic respect as "a relation between interdependent partisans who have already attained a place on the register of cultural recognition – that is, on the register of being … In a relation of agonistic respect, partisans may test, challenge, and contest pertinent elements in the fundaments of others. But each also appreciates the comparative contestability of its own fundaments to others, drawing upon this bicameralism of citizenship to inform their negotiations." Ibid., 123.

[90] Ibid., 126. Elsewhere Connolly writes: "Critical responsiveness thus moves in two registers: to redefine its relation to others a constituency must also modify the shape of its own identity. In that sense critical responsiveness is always political. It is a political response to the politics of identity\difference that already precedes its intervention." William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xvi.

[91] Connolly, *Pluralism*, 64.

social and political life, Connolly tells us, is conditioned by norms that privilege some identities and marginalize others. At the heart of Wanda's conversion narrative is a reckoning with the way power works to norm the experience of white men. Her conversion also included the recognition about the way power can be used to unsettle these norms. Connolly helps us to see that politics entails the negotiation of norms that, at the deepest level, structure identities. A constructive politics recognizes that norms, values, and identities are connected and that political negotiation engages all of these at once.

III. Identity, Agency, and Institutional Formation

Lovin's work on contexts and Connolly's on identity point to two important framings of pluralism. These two framings are complementary and together indispensable, it seems to me, for understanding the complexity of political identity and its connection to political agency. We do not, however, get a clear picture in either of these two accounts of *how* pluralism understood as many social structures that generate a plurality of moral languages and logics, on the one hand, and pluralism as the existence of multiple, contingent, and contending identities, on the other, relate to one another.

Wanda's story suggests some connections. I argued above that we might think of Gamaliel as representative of a certain political institutional "context," to use Lovin's language. This particular tradition of grassroots organizing has a particular moral logic, moral language, community ethic, conception of moral agency, and view of the good life, all of which are produced and reproduced through a set of practices. We see in Wanda's story, moreover, how a person with a particular understanding of herself as an African

American woman and person of faith began to work out some of the tensions between those identities by participating – being formed, really – in Gamaliel politics. I also suggested that Gamaliel is an evolving context. It is one in which diverse traditions of moral meaning and practice are brought into conversation with one another. Persons like Wanda contribute to these conversations even as they learn from them. In this way, institutions like Gamaliel are produced and reproduced by the persons who participate in them. What does all of this complexity teach us?

It teaches us, first, that institutions are not only multiple, they are sub-divided. Sometimes the literature about institutional life, as Lovin's work illustrates, has very expansive, monolithic institutional contexts in mind: economy, polity, family, religion, etc. But it may be more useful to think in terms of much more institutional diversity. There are, for example, many kinds of political "contexts" that exist in American life, of which traditions of grassroots community organizing constitute just one. Probably different political contexts – the jury room, the floor of Congress, the community organizing meeting – share many of the same features. Political contexts in modern democratic polities will all in some sense likely propagate the category of the citizen who is bound by some conception of civic duty. But how exactly these categories will be fleshed out will depend significantly on the political context in question. Grassroots community organizing is in important respects a much different kind of political context than, say, the jury room, the voting booth, or the halls of Congress. To understand Wanda's story, one must understand the particular kind of political space that is grassroots community organizing and how it shapes selves and political agency.

Secondly, power is a critical issue. In Lovin's framing of institutional moral pluralism, it isn't clear how asymmetrical power relationships are encoded and reproduced in institutional life, an important focus in Connolly's work and a critical dimension of Wanda's story. This isn't true of all sociological and philosophical accounts of institutional life. Sociological and philosophical literature often adds a theory of social structure to analyses of institutions. Social structures are patterns of moral meaning that condition and inscribe social relations of all kinds across institutional contexts in the form of roles, rules, and expectations.[92] The late political theorist Iris Marion Young understands social structures to "consist in determinate social positions that people occupy which condition their opportunities and life chances. These life chances," she writes, "are constituted by the ways the positions are related to one another to create systematic constraints or opportunities that reinforce one another, like wires in a cage."[93]

Like institutions, social structures do not exist apart from the relationships that obtain between persons and social groups. And like institutions, social structures are maintained and reproduced by persons acting individually and collectively as well as intentionally and unintentionally. Structures include socio-economic class, gender, and race relationships. Social structure acts as a limiting factor on both institutional moral pluralism and the pluralism of identity, since it restricts participation in institutional life and encodes the norms and privileges of particular groups and their identities, as Connolly argues. The notion of social structure, it seems to me, lends theoretical rigor both to Lovin's analysis of social contexts and Connolly's contention that some identities

[92] For an important sociological account of structure, see Sewell Jr., "A Theory of Structure."
[93] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 94.

come to positions of dominance in society (the particular dynamics of which he tends to assume rather than explain).

Thirdly, while the formation of moral agency in institutional contexts is inescapable, it is also malleable. While Connolly recognizes that human beings need forms of association, his discussion of institutions almost always implies a negative evaluation. Institutions appear in Connolly's work as the embodiment of dominant identities that marginalize alternative identities. Of course, institutions need and ought to be reconfigured. Both Connolly's and Young's proposals for re-imagining political life are important in this regard. But we simply do not ever completely step outside of our multiple institutional formations. Persons who are formed in the context of modern democracies can, for example, introduce changes into political institutions. To do this, they might draw on patterns of moral meaning that come from other institutional contexts, such as a religious community, to urge new ways of organizing political life. But while moral insight is often profoundly creative, it is never fundamentally creativity *ex nihilo*.

Still, human beings exercise some agency in crafting their political identity. Human moral agency isn't completely determined by these formations; human beings are not automatons. But neither is human moral agency absolutely unhindered by institutional contexts and patterns of experience. Human beings, as Connolly recognizes and as Wanda's story evinces, exercise some agency in "positioning" themselves, to use Iris Marion Young's term, relative to the sources of their formation and their life aspirations: "Social groups do indeed position individuals, but a person's identity is her own, formed in active relation to social positions, among other things, rather than

constituted by them. Individual subjects make their own identities, but not under conditions they choose."[94]

IV. The Self, Divided and Circled

What emerges in the picture I've presented so far is a portrait of a divided self. It is divided between different moral formations in different institutional contexts. It is further confounded by the dominance of some identities (and their attendant normative structures), which pushes others to the margins. The self reflects these multiplications, divisions, and rigidities of moral meaning. The divided self, however, is in tension with some Christian theological reflection on the relationship between self-formation and institutional life.

Lovin, for example, argues that while contexts are differentiated, they are finally united in purpose because they work for the good of creation. Human moral formation is not subject to the push and pull of competing contexts:

> The idea of a person completely subordinated to the laws of economics sends us scurrying to government to try to limit the economic context and fix the problem. But the idea of a person subordinated simultaneously to the laws of economics, the laws of the state, the doctrines of the church, the expectations of culture, and the demands of the family is absurd. What we need to fix in that case is our understanding of the person who exists in the center of these contending social forces.[95]

Rather than social differentiation leading to multiple moral formations, the human being is the site of an ultimate unity of contexts. Lovin concludes that the diversity of contexts and the variety of human goods they create and maintain make possible a wholeness of life, in which all goods can be enjoyed in appropriate relations to each other and in relation to God.

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[94] Ibid., 99.
[95] Lovin., 208.

Lovin follows the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer on these points. Bonhoeffer developed throughout the corpus of his work a theological response to human institutional life, which in his mature theology issued in the notion of the "divine mandates." Early on, Bonhoeffer was concerned to respond to Emil Brunner's notion of the "orders of creation." Brunner took the orders of creation to be natural configurations of human life that inhere in God's creation. Bonhoeffer viewed institutions not as natural features of the created order but as God's response to a fallen creation in need, in Bonhoeffer's term, of "preservation" against its own destructive tendencies. The orders of preservation secure human life against the deleterious effects of sin so that human beings can participate fully in the redemption of creation, effected in Christ:

> All orders of our fallen world are God's orders of preservation that uphold and preserve us for Christ. They are not orders of creation but orders of preservation. They have no value in themselves; instead they find their end and meaning only through Christ. God's new action with humankind is to uphold and preserve humankind in its fallen world, in its fallen orders, for death – for the resurrection, for the new creation, for Christ.[96]

Bonhoeffer's orders of preservation in their last incarnation became what he later called "divine mandates."

In his unfinished *Ethics* (1949), Bonhoeffer defines the divine mandates as "the concrete divine commission grounded in the revelation of Christ and the testimony of scripture; it is the authorization and legitimization to declare a particular divine commandment, the conferring of divine authority on an earthly institution."[97] The divine mandates are the institutions of work, marriage, government, and the church in the context of which human beings to live their lives before God. The mandates are brought into being by God's command and therefore have the character of "divinely imposed

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[96] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Pres, 1997 [1937]), 140.

[97] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 389.

tasks."[98] Bonhoeffer explains that the mandates are divine because, like the orders of preservation, their end is Christ. That is, the mandates are the concrete form in which human beings participate in creation reconciled to God in Christ.[99] In the context of the mandates, God's command to human beings becomes intelligible.

For Bonhoeffer, the divine mandates are finally united in persons who are conformed to Christ:

> The divine mandates in the world are not there to wear people down through endless conflicts. Rather, they aim at the whole human being who stands in reality before God. The human person is not the place where the divine mandates show that they cannot be unified. Rather, nowhere else but in the human person, in concrete human life and action, is the unity created of that which 'in itself,' that is, theoretically, cannot be unified. This happens, to be sure, in no other way than when people allow themselves to be placed through Jesus Christ before the complicated reality of God's becoming human, the reality of the world that was reconciled to God in the manger, the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[100]

In other words, while there may be "social differentiation and moral pluralism," in Steven Tipton's words, on the level of institutional life, these conditions do not extend all the way down into the formation of persons.

I find Lovin and Bonhoeffer's arguments in this regard to be problematic because they assume that there is only theological value in moral "unity," so that there must be moral unity on some level even if it isn't found on every level. (For Lovin and Bonhoeffer, it is found on the anthropological level.) Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, as I'll argue in the final chapter of this dissertation, is an important theological resource for those who

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[98] Ibid., 68-69.

[99] Bonhoeffer, unlike Brunner, emphasizes that although God calls the mandates into being, an adequate understanding of the work of the mandates depends on their situation in particular historical moments. Lovin writes: "The principal difference between Bonhoeffer's mandates and Brunner's orders is that Bonhoeffer incorporates into the mandates an element of theology and history that cannot be understood in purely natural terms. Brunner argues that the orders of creation are shaped by invariant requirements that apply in all ages. For Bonhoeffer, the requirements that govern labor, marriage, church, or state are not absolutes built into nature but limits that have evolved in history." Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 152

[100] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 73.

wish to claim theological value for the world in all of its messiness. Bonhoeffer argues over and again that God in the person of the crucified and resurrected Christ embraces the world for what it is – messy, broken, and fallen. Why not extend this analysis to the formation of selves? In the conclusion of this dissertation, I return to consider this problem in theological perspective.

In my view, modern selves are divided in ways analogous to the divisions of moral meaning extended institutionally and structurally through modern societies. The challenge of moral agency in modern societies involves in part a continual and always incomplete negotiation of the sources of formation from which we derive our moral commitments. Thus, what it means for persons like Steve and Wanda to have a political vocation entails the project of sorting out a divided self, which comes in part through in their personal narratives. How then might we imagine a self that is capable of such ongoing negotiation? Michael Walzer's reflections on the "circled self" suggests a useful model for thinking about how to respond to a self divided by the conditions of pluralism in modern societies.

In his book *Thick and Thin* (1994), Walzer argues for a thick conception of the self which he thinks defeats hierarchical models proposed by some modern thinkers. For example, Freud in his moral anthropology advocates a version of what Walzer calls "the critical self," one in which some superordinate moral authority, a "critical I," stands above the self and regulates her moral judgment. For Freud, the superego regulates the self. The therapist, in turn, brings critique to bear on the superego. Similarly, modern philosophers have posited a critical 'I' that takes the form of some universal moral value or condition. Unlike the superego, the critical I of the philosophers is not contingent on

the particular moral voice of a society. It orients critique of the self from a stance outside of history.

We speak with more than one moral voice, Walzer says, making self-criticism possible. Our self is divided in this sense, but it is also thick. Rather than the hierarchical conceptions of the critical 'I' posited by Freud and the philosophers, Walzer argues for a dialogical conception of the self. He writes that "the order of the self is better imagined as a thickly populated circle, with me in the center surrounded by my self-critics who stand at different temporal and spatial removes (but don't necessarily stand still)."[101] The self does not dissolve in the circle; rather, the circled order is always maintained, and the self is in constant dialogue with the different moral voices that bring critique to bear on her.

I propose that Walzer's circled self usefully models the agency that persons in modern, pluralistic societies exercise in crafting political identities. For modern selves, the task of constructing a political identity involves the work of the self who is in continual dialogue with a great many sources of moral authority that encircle it. The circle that surrounds the self includes some authorities the self didn't choose to include in the first place. Their presence is simply given. And some sources exercise more authority than others, owing to the dynamics of power in society. In crafting a political identity, persons aren't able to step outside of the circle. But neither, as Walzer says, is the self at the circle's center subsumed by any authority that stands on its periphery. In short, persons exercise limited agency in constructing identity.

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[101] Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 98.

We can imagine how Walzer's circled self maps onto Steve and Wanda's processes of self-formation. Steve's figurative conversation partners might include representatives of the Reformed tradition, the voices of his wife and daughter which he heard as he considered his response to the ERA, his parishioners in Paducah as well as the City Fathers who also made claims on his work there. Populating Wanda's circle might be Gandhi, Saul Alinsky, voices from the Christian communities of her youth, perhaps certain white men who undermined her sense of moral agency and to whom she is now making an effort to listen. The figurative circle of interlocutors makes both appreciative and critical claims. And the way Steve and Wanda respond to these voices contributes to an always evolving sense of moral and political identity.

The next chapter explores models of political identity available in Christian social thought. I argue that none of them sufficiently capture the complex process of identity construction that Walzer's work on the circled self helps to illuminate. Later chapters will be concerned with theorizing an alternative that will better account for the complex ways in which persons craft political identity.

Chapter 2: Closed Identities

In the last chapter, I argued that moral pluralism conditions modern societies, and this condition requires that persons continually negotiate and re-negotiate their political identity. Moral pluralism reaches all the way down into the self and its formation. Persons must always work, in other words, to make sense out of pieces that often don't fit together very well. I urged Walzer's model of the circled self as a helpful theoretical framing of the way in which persons negotiate their identity in conversation with many voices that make different and sometimes competing claims on fundamental moral commitments.

In this chapter, using Walzer's circled self as a norm, I evaluate several dominant approaches to the political identity of religious citizens. My diagnosis is that these approaches do not adequately account for the work of the circled self. Instead, many of the dominant framings of political identity in Christian theological ethics trade, albeit for many different reasons, on what I call "closed identities." Closed identities are models of political identity, implicitly or explicitly theorized, which do not provide for the ongoing negotiation of the self that the circled self accommodates. In closed identities, whatever part of the self understood to be the Christian part is closed off from reciprocal engagement with other sources of moral meaning and experience.[102] That is not to say that the Christian part is not relevantly related to these other sources. Indeed, the Christian part is often held in a superordinate position that provides moral direction to

[102] The reciprocal and constructive interaction between sources of moral meaning-making mirrors James M. Gustafson's argument about two-way "traffic" between moral discourses, in which the movement between discourses is mutually informing and even mutually constitutive. See footnote 33 above on Gustafson's *Intersections*.

other sources. But finally these simple hierarchical relationships do not capture, I want to suggest, the kind of moral complexity we see in figures like Steve and Wanda.

For Christian theologians, closure of political identity often reflects a concern to preserve the moral priority and normative integrity of Christian commitments and identities, which are formed in Christian communities and inform distinctively Christian conceptions of political vocation. Recall my definitions of political vocation and community. I defined a political vocation as a life's work devoted to the creation and maintenance of a political community or communities. A political community is one in which members work together to identify and pursue common goods and aims. Political communities may be local, national, or transnational; secular or ecclesial; realized or ideal; immanent, eschatological, or both. In this sense of the term, it is fair to say that all Christian theologians in some sense affirm that the church is a particular kind of political community that aspires to promulgate in its members some conception of political vocation.

It is also fair to say that all theologians recognize that the moral-political formation available in the church distinguishes it, to a greater or lesser extent, from the moral-political formations of "the world."[103] That has to be true in order for there to be any distinction between church and world. Some Christian theologians understand that in addition to the moral-political formation that Christians receive in the context of the church, Christian traditions also contain resources for Christians to exercise political agency *qua* Christians in ambient political contexts. For example, Christians draw on thick Judeo-Christian traditions of prophetic witness to defend the poor and the

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[103] Stanley Hauerwas famously explores the particular moral-political formation of Christians in the context of the church, which he understands to be a radical alternative "polis" to that of the world. See for example Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company.*

marginalized against oppressions perpetrated by secular political authorities. The prophetic as a modality of political agency is often understood to situate Christian witness over against the world. Indeed, precisely the distance between the moral universe of Christian traditions and that of the world creates the critical purchase making prophetic witness possible.[104]

Political vocation becomes problematic for Christian theological reflection when the distance between Christian and secular political identities begins to close – when, that is, Christians like Steve and Wanda endeavor to exercise political agency along norms set by the secular polity (recall, for example, the way Weber describes the moral demands of responsibility in modern polities). Such an endeavor merges the moral logics and languages of Christian and secular political traditions. Modalities of political agency that are less obviously prophetic, that "speak truth to power" in a language that cast both truth and power in similar terms, make some Christian theologians uncomfortable. Thus, Catherine Keller warns that the "the productive difference" that should characterize the constructive relationship between religion and state in the U.S. context can be elided in ways that are dangerous for religion: "The danger arises when the difference between worship and citizenship dissolves into an idolatrous blur. The *power of worship* morphs into the *worship of power*."[105]

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[104] Walter Brueggemann's classic study of the prophetic imagination is a useful example in this regard. Brueggemann insists that the integrity of the prophetic imagination is given in the faithfulness of the church to its own experiences and traditions of meaning rather than to external sources. He writes: "That is to say, the shaping of Israel took place from inside its own experience and confession of faith and not through external appropriation from somewhere else. That urging is fundamental for this discussion, for I am urging in parallel fashion that if the church is to be faithful it must be formed and ordered from the inside of its experience and confession and not by borrowing from sources external to its own life." Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 5.

[105] Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), viii. Emphasis original.

Thus, if "closure" implies critical distance, then some degree of closure is obviously good. Closure in this sense is what keeps Christian citizens "Christian." Christian political ethics isn't possible if Christian citizenship just means a political ethics by secular political norms. The trouble with closed identities in Christian political theology and ethics, however, is that they threaten to flatten the moral complexity of political identity. Theologians sometimes talk about Christians as though they are subject to no other moral formation relevant to their political identity besides the one they receive in the context of the church. But this flattening may render irrelevant the normative force of a Christian political ethic. In other words, a Christian political ethic that doesn't adequately account for the complexity of political identity may enjoin a set of comportments that are impossible to enact because there is no such thing as a Christian citizen who has the capacity (the political agency) to act upon them.

My critique of closed identities in this chapter exposes a lack of attention, particularly in Christian political theology, paid to the relationship between political vocation and the formation of the self. This critique, then, accounts for one part of the problem with Christian theological reflection on political vocation.

I explore two ways of closing identity. I call the first "functional closure." In this approach, political identity is closed to the constructive negotiation of moral pluralism because different sources of moral meaning are given different but complementary work to do in the construction of political identity. In the first section, I examine Alexis de Tocqueville's seminal work *Democracy in America* (1835/1840). Tocqueville argues that a new kind of political self appears on the American scene. The American citizen is animated by a democratic soul that an emerging social dynamic, the equality of

conditions, makes possible. But the democratic soul needs a rock-solid normative foundation to hold the corrosive effects of freedom in check. Religion provides that foundation. Tocqueville even suggests that religion and democracy in America exercise a syncretistic pull towards one another.

Tocqueville's reflections on the relationship of religious identity and political agency is paradigmatic because his work captures the way in which Americans have often thought about the relationship between religion, politics, and the self. Religion provides the moral backbone of political life, the argument goes – and maybe even fuses in some way with the American political imagination. This kind of thinking finds its way into modern reflections on civil religion and public theology.[106] For this reason, I include Tocqueville among a collection of theologians whose work I analyze later in the chapter.

The problem with Tocqueville's functional closure is that it doesn't help us to understand how religion as a dimension of the political self undergoes change as a result of political engagement. I agree with Tocqueville that religion supplies an important normative foundation that both motivates and renders intelligible the exercise of political agency and acts as a buffer against the corrosive effects of freedom. But religion doesn't simply perform a function. As we saw in Wanda's experience, the normative foundation on which rests a citizens' deepest commitments is a dynamic and unfinished negotiation of many sources of moral meaning, including religious traditions, among others. Religion in Tocqueville's rendering must be a stable element of political identity in order

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[106] See e.g. Robert Bellah's famous essay "Civil Religion in America" in his *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 168-192, as well as his follow-up essay, "Religion and the Legitimation of the American Republic," in *Varieties of Civil Religion*, eds. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), 3-23.

for it to function properly to guarantee normative stability in a turbulent political environment. But it is closed to complex negotiations of moral meaning.

The second kind of closure, what I call "insulated closure," is somewhat more complicated. In this approach, one source of moral meaning is elevated above all others and determines how the self will respond to them. Elevation in this model is an insulating tactic: it closes the elevated constellation of moral meaning to interpretation in terms of those sources of moral meaning over which the dominant source is elevated. Elevation in the sense of priority given to one constellation of moral meaning is not, I argue, the problem with insulated closure. The problem, rather, is the impermeable boundary holding the superordinated constellation above the others. That rigid boundary forestalls genuinely constructive negotiation between differing and often competing sources of political identity. Unlike functional closure, insulated closure ultimately fails to engage moral pluralism in a constructive way.

In the second section, I examine three Christian theological approaches to political identity that insulate theological commitments from other sources of moral meaning by way of superordination. Each of these insulated identities accommodates a different conception of political agency. First, certain arguments imagine a Christian political formation utterly different from any the world, and particularly secular political culture, offers. Here the goal of the political ethic is to define a radical alternative to Christian political identity that generates a radically prophetic form of political agency. Representative thinkers here are the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder and the Duke theologian Stanley Hauerwas. A second kind of closed identity protects a distinctive Christian political identity but offers a form of political agency, a particular

kind of public political speech, which is supposed to mediate this political identity without altering it. The Union Seminary theologian John C. Bennett is a useful example here. A third form of closed identity concedes that secular political culture, and the kind of political agency it demands, is practically discontinuous with Christian norms. It thus theorizes political agency on the basis of secular norms as the use of coercive forms of power to balance competing group interests. This view holds out Christian norms only as a compass that directs secular politics in a vague and indeterminate way. Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism is a classic example here.

This chapter proceeds by way of analysis of representative figures, a strategy I discussed in the introduction. Representative figures exhibit a particular type of political identity embodied in a particular conception of political vocation. The representative figures I address here are Tocqueville's American Christian, Yoder's disciple, Hauerwas's peasant and martyr, Bennett's Christian citizen, and Niebuhr's moral man. Analysis of representative figures is helpful because it attends to the concrete ways different conceptions of political vocation are supposed to look on the ground.

I detect in all of these representative characters, albeit for different reasons, a lack of complexity with respect to the way the relevant thinkers understand how persons encounter and negotiate moral pluralism in order to craft political identities. For Tocqueville, religion is a moral buttress that works to moderate the corrosive effects of democracy. Tocqueville doesn't recognize any connection between political agency and complex and ongoing negotiations of moral meaning that constitute the self. Hauerwas and Yoder intentionally resist meaningful moral pluralism. For them, the church is finally, and at its best, a unitary moral community in which selves are formed to

participate in a common moral discourse. Niebuhr and Bennett are largely unaware of tensions existing between moral pluralism and political life. Both lived and worked in a historical context in which Mainline Protestantism exercised a primary ideological influence upon American politics. For these thinkers, the most important questions for Christian citizens were not about the status of competing sources of moral meaning but about how to make a fairly broad moral consensus accessible to political life.

I argued in the last chapter that moral experience in modern societies is conditioned by irreducible moral pluralism. We can't step outside of this ambient condition. We wouldn't even know what it would mean to make sense of our experience apart from it. But Christian ethics is without, in my view, an adequate theological account of the formation of identity that takes seriously the conditions of moral pluralism. The critiques of this chapter, then, set up the constructive work of this dissertation, which is to reflect theologically on this problem.

I. Functional Closure: Tocqueville's American Christian

Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America* argues that the distinguishing mark of democratic polities is "equality of conditions," a force transforming all modern polities. He writes that since the eleventh century, the aristocratic order in France and "throughout the Christian world" has slowly but inexorably unraveled, beginning with the democratization of the clergy. In the intervening time, class distinctions that marked feudal Europe have weakened. Access to the material, intellectual, religious, and political conditions of social existence has become more diffuse, a process that has empowered the lower echelons of feudal societies and attenuated the power and influence

of the aristocracy. Taken together, these developments "cooperate to enrich the poor and impoverish the rich."[107]

Tocqueville understands the movement towards the equalization of conditions to constitute an "irresistible revolution," a "Providential fact." He writes that the "gradual development of the principle of equality" has "all the chief characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is durable, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress."[108] Tocqueville concludes: "To wish to stop democracy would then appear to be to struggle against God himself, and it would only remain for nations to accommodate themselves to the social state that Providence imposes on them."[109]

The ineluctable movement towards "social equality" and the concomitant flowering of democracy open up new possibilities for human social and political existence. Tocqueville has a vision of these developments that is ultimately felicitous.[110] But their mere emergence does not guarantee felicity. Like any social and political arrangement, democracy contains weaknesses and opportunities for abuse and corruption. Tocqueville famously proposes to develop a "new science of politics," with which to understand the nature of democracy, not only in terms of the institutions of democratic politics, but also in terms of the kind of human beings it creates. A new science of politics endeavors to:

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[107] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., Richard D. Heffner (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001). 28.

[108] Ibid., 29.

[109] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7. All in-text citations refer to this edition.

[110] "I conceive a society, then, which all, regarding the law as their work, would love and submit to without trouble; in which the authority of government is respected as necessary, not divine, and the love one would bear for a head of state would not be a passion, but a reasoned and tranquil sentiment" (9).

> … educate the democracy; to renovate, if possible, its religious belief; to purify its morals; to regulate its movements; to substitute by degrees a knowledge of business for its inexperience, and an acquaintance with its true interests for its blind instincts; to adapt its government to time and place, and to make it conform to the occurrences and the men of the times (30).

With the ambitions of a new science of politics in view, a careful evaluation of the most undisturbed development of democracy to date is in order, Tocqueville argues. This is democracy as it exists on the American continent.[111]

Democracy is beset by a number of inherent, double-edged challenges. Democracies, owing to popular participation in government, tend to legislate the good for the greatest number more effectively than aristocracies. But by that same token, democracies tend to legislate inefficiently. Aristocracies, on the other hand, have more mastered the "science of the legislator," Tocqueville argues. Aristocracies are not "subject to getting carried away in passing distractions." Aristocrats legislate "wisely;" they better understand how to make the "collective force" of laws "converge at the same time toward the same point" (222).

Freedom is chief among the double-edged advantages of democratic polities. Freedom, Tocqueville argues, is not only a quality of the formal structure of a polity. It is

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[111] On the American continent, Tocqueville argues, democracy found a place where it could flourish, disengaged from the confines of old-world aristocracy. In the New World, democracy "could grow in freedom, and, advancing along with mores, develop peacefully in laws" (12).

What makes the American project important for the understanding of democracy, Tocqueville argues, is that its founding is knowable as a particular point in time, and it's knowable precisely because it evidences both a profound break from European forms of life but also deep continuities with it. In the founding of nations, "peoples always feel [the effects of] their origins" (28). And America is "the only country where one has been able to witness the natural and tranquil developments of a society, and where it has been possible to specify the influence exerted by the point of departure on the future of states" (28). Thus, America as a "point of departure" can explain all relevant developments "without difficulty" (29). America is fortunate, Tocqueville thinks, because its earliest European settlers were already connected by a "bond of language." This bond of language was already deeply informed by the struggles for freedom that took place in early modern Europe. "All the new European colonies contained, if not the development, at least the seed of a complete democracy." For this reason, all of the original English colonies contained "a great family resemblance." "All, from their beginning, seemed destined to offer the development of freedom, not the aristocratic freedom of their mother country, but the bourgeois and democratic freedom of which the history of the world had still not offered a complete model" (30).

also a quality of character, a moral capacity that citizens must develop and master. Successful democracies must teach people to be free. But that is no easy task: "One cannot say it too often: There is nothing more prolific in marvels than the art of being free; but there is nothing harder than the apprenticeship of freedom" (229).

The "immense freedom" that Americans enjoy promotes a politics that is always in motion. Democracy in America is irregular, restive, and disorderly.[112] A "restive activity" spreads "through the whole social body." It is a "superabundant force, an energy that never exists without it, and which, however little circumstances may be favorable, can bring forth marvels." On the one hand, freedom that drives a motional politics, continuously engaging a broad public in political life, is one of democracy's "true advantages" (234). On the other hand, this condition conduces to a certain amateurish and spectacular political sensibility:

> To meddle in the government of society and to speak about it is the greatest business and, so to speak, the only pleasure that an American knows … An American does not know how to converse, but he discusses; he does not discourse, but he holds forth. He always speaks to you as to an assembly, and if he happens by chance to become heated, he will say 'sirs' in addressing his interlocutor (232).

In short, democracies naturally limit constraints on freedom, but minimally constrained freedom promotes an inept citizenry.

The "omnipotence of the majority" also threatens the formation of good citizens in democratic societies. "Democratic tyrannies" are different, Tocqueville argues, than the "absolute governments" of princely despots. In the latter, the government can strike against the body, but the soul can escape. In democracies, however, tyranny "leaves the body and goes straight for the soul" (244). That is, the power of the majority can

[112] Elsewhere Tocqueville notes that restiveness and freedom give way to envy: "I found in the United States the restiveness of heart that is natural to men when, all conditions being nearly equal, each sees the same chances of rising. I encountered there the democratic sentiment of envy expressed in a thousand different manners" (297).

effectively, if not formally, compromise participation in political life and the goods that affirm moral agency along with it. Consequently, democratic citizens are careful to restrain candor in public space, for fear of antagonizing the majority opinion. This, in turn, compromises the formation of civic character: "I have seen few men indeed who show that virile candor, that manly independence of thought, that often distinguished Americans in previous times and that, everywhere it is found, forms the salient feature of great characters" (247).

What freedom and democracy inherently lack, then, is some grounding in moral order. Tocqueville argues throughout *Democracy in America* that such a grounding will solidfy in the moral formation of persons capable of democratic citizenship. There religion has an indispensable role to play.[113] Religion provides moral order, and moral order prevents freedom from becoming anomic. "Anglo-American civilization," Tocqueville writes, has been a context in which "the spirit of religion" and the "spirit of freedom" have traditionally warred against one another. But in America, "they have succeeded in incorporating somehow into one another and combining marvelously." These two spirits appear to be opposed but instead "advance in accord and seem to lend each other a mutual support."

Americans want two things at once, Tocqueville observes, "with an almost equal ardor," namely, "material wealth and moral satisfactions, Heaven in the other world and well-being and freedom in this one." Accordingly, they have developed a capacity to let the mind explore the "political world" in a universe of inquiry that constitutes a "field without horizon." In the political world, everything is "agitated, contested, uncertain;"

[113] Tocqueville uses the category of "religion." What he mostly has in mind is Protestant and Catholic Christianity. When I use the term "religion" in the context of my discussion of Tocqueville in this section, I do so with an awareness of his reduction of religion to Christianity.

the mind can explore it with "independence, contempt for experience, and jealousy of every authority." But as soon as that exploration takes the mind to the "limits of the political world," where the political world meets the moral world, Tocqueville writes, "Trembling, [the mind] leaves off the use of its most formidable faculties; it abjures doubt; it renounces the need to innovate; it even abstains from sweeping away the veil of the sanctuary; it bows with respect before truths that it accepts without discussion" (43). The moral world of religious truth is one of fixed order,[114] not to be disturbed by the critical wanderings of the mind through the political world.

The boundary between the religious world of moral order and the political world of contestation and independence are strictly to be respected. But this same boundary sets up a relationship of complementarity, a relationship of "mutual support," between the two. Tocqueville understands this relationship to issue in a kind of mutual respect between religion and freedom.

On the one hand, religion respects the fundamental role freedom plays in driving human accomplishment in the political sphere:

> Religion sees in civil freedom a noble exercise of the faculties of man; in the political world, a field left by the Creator to the efforts of intelligence. Free and powerful in its sphere, satisfied with the place that is reserved for it, it knows that its empire is all the better established when it reigns by its own strength alone and dominates over hearts without support (43).

On the other hand, freedom respects religion as "the cradle of its infancy, the divine source of its rights. Freedom considers religion as the safeguard of mores; and mores as the guarantee of laws and the pledge of its own duration" (44). Mores, Tocqueville argues, are the learned "habits of the heart," the "moral and intellectual state of a people," particular, embodied ways of being in the world that are rehearsed in everyday

[114] "Thus in the moral world, everything is classified, coordinated, foreseen, decided in advance" (43).

practices.[115] Religion is a necessary condition of freedom, because religion grounds mores, which in turn ground laws. Freedom is thus secured via religion on two counts: religion is the foundation of the moral formation of citizens capable of being free, and religion ultimately grounds the formal legal structure that firmly fixes freedom in political society.[116]

Religion drives a moral formation for freedom that happens in the context of family life, a private, gendered space. It "reigns over the soul of woman, and it is woman who makes mores" (279). The European, whose home life is characterized by the tumult of unregulated passion, "submits with difficulty to the legislative powers of the state." Americans, by contrast, are buoyed by religion in the turbulent world of politics, mediated through the work of women at home:

> When, on leaving the agitations of the political world, the American returns to the bosom of his family, he immediately meets the image of order and peace. There, all of his pleasures are simple and natural, his joys innocent and tranquil; and as he arrives at happiness through regularity of life, he becomes habituated to regulating his opinions as well as his tastes without difficulty (279).

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[115] Tocqueville famously defines mores in this way: "I understand here the expression *mœurs* in the sense the ancients attached to the word *mores*; not only do I apply to it to mores properly so-called, which one could call habits of the heart, but to the different notions that men possess, to the various opinions that are current in their midst, and to the sum of ideals of which the habits of the mind are formed. I therefore comprehend under this word the whole moral and intellectual state of a people" (273).

[116] Although religion doesn't exert "an influence on the laws or on the details of political opinions," it does prepare the soul for politics. It "directs mores, and it is in regulating the family that it works to regulate the state" (278).

For a useful discussion on the connection between religion, mores, and laws in Tocqueville's political thought, see Joshua Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25 ff.; 162-214. Mitchell argues that Tocqueville's political theory responds to twin dangers embodied in what Mitchell calls the "Augustinian self," an archetypal political anthropology. On this model, human beings, without proper formation in political society, are likely beset by two immoderate movements. Either they turn inward, resulting in a pernicious individualism, or they will move outward, wholly given to the world and "searching at a frenzied pace for a satisfaction it can never wholly find there" (3). Tocqueville, Mitchell argues, counters these problems both through the formal institutions of political life and the institutions in which persons receive their formation as citizens – religion and the family: "The problem of too little motion (individualism), then, can be absolved with the assistance of face-to-face political life. The second problem – the debilitating effects of restiveness, of too much motion – can be attenuated by the institutions of family and religion" (7).

The European brings his "domestic sorrows" into political life, which accounts for the relative disorder of European politics. The American, on the other hand, "draws from his home the love of order" in his participation in political life. Thus, Americans are formed as citizens oriented to a "moral world" that is "certain and fixed." This fixed moral order helps Americans navigate the tumult of democratic politics (279).[117] Religion for Americans, then, must be understood as "the first of their political institutions," because religion is so central to the formation of democratic citizenship.

So far, we've seen Tocqueville argue that, in the context of democratic polities, religion and freedom are mutually beneficial. Indeed, he urges, religion is a necessary condition of freedom. That doesn't mean that religious and political institutions and the worlds that they create are allowed to mix. A strictly enforced boundary separates religious from political life, so that religion plays a critical role in the moral formation of a democratic citizenry but makes no explicit appearance in the "political world" itself.

But Tocqueville goes beyond mutual support to argue that American religion takes a form conducive to American democracy. American democracy becomes unimaginable without some form of religious commitment. In a democratic republic such as the United States, religion "teaches Americans the art of being free" (278).

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[117] Tocqueville later reiterates the argument that religion is important for regulating political equality. The notion of equality, unmediated, tends to engender "dangerous instincts … it tends to isolate [men] from one another and to bring each of them to be occupied with himself alone … [equality] opens [men's] souls excessively to the love of material enjoyments" (419). Religion, on the other hand, inspires contrary instincts. It places human desire beyond earthly goods and draws human beings away from contemplation of themselves alone. "Religious peoples are therefore naturally strong in precisely the spot where democratic peoples are weak; this makes very visible how important it is that men keep to their religion when becoming equal" (419).

Among the passions to which equality gives birth, the one most characteristic of democratic ages is the "love of well-being." "The taste for well-being forms the salient and indelible feature of democratic ages" (422). Thus, a religion that undertakes to destroy this "mother passion" will only be destroyed by it. Instead, "the principle business of religions is to purify, regulate, and restrain the too ardent and too exclusive taste for well-being that men in times of equality feel, but I believe that they would be wrong to try to subdue it entirely and to destroy it" (422).

Christianity in the New World, Tocqueville notes, is both democratic and republican. It "favors the establishment of a republic and of democracy in affairs" (275). While there are a multitude of sects in the United States, they don't insist that everyone worship God in the same way; only that God be worshipped: "All agree on the duties of men towards one another," Tocqueville writes. "All sects preach the same morality in the name of God … [a]nd what is most important to [each sect] is not so much that all citizens profess the true religion but that they profess a religion" (278). Even American Catholicism, though it requires obedience to an ecclesiastical hierarchy, does not "prepare [men] for inequality" in secular political life (276). Catholicism as it exists under the conditions of a democratic polity conduces to the promotion of equality of conditions, according to Tocqueville.

In short, religion in the United States is inextricably bound up with the education and experience of freedom and equality of conditions. Recalling a New York state trial in which a witness who declared his unbelief in "the existence of God and the immortality of the soul" and whose oath to the court was consequently and summarily invalidated, Tocqueville concludes: "Americans so completely confuse Christianity and freedom in their minds that it is almost impossible to have them conceive of the one without the other" (280-281).

Later, Tocqueville argues that whether religions maintain themselves in "democratic centuries" will depend on the "nature of beliefs they profess." Religions conducive to democratic polities tend to presuppose a single Creator who distributes rights and justice equally, "a single omnipotent being, dispensing the same laws to each

man equally and in the same manner" (421). Moreover, religions that flourish in democratic regimes develop practices that tend to reinforce the idea of equality.[118]

Tocqueville's religious citizen crafts a religious identity that reconciles the experience of democratic freedom with the demands of an ordered moral universe. At times, Tocqueville focuses on the "mutual support," the complementarity, of religion and freedom, stressing the former as a necessary condition of the latter. To exercise political agency in democratic polities – that is, to be free to engage in the tumultuous give-and-take of political life but to do so with moral integrity and vision – requires this complementarity. But Tocqueville also gestures beyond complementarity toward a deeper, syncretistic integration between religion and democracy, whereby both "combine marvelously." Religion becomes more democratic in theory and practice, while democratic political agency relies upon religiosity to provide its most fundamental moral orientations and convictions.

It seems to me that, on the whole, Tocqueville is more interested in the complementary relationship between religion and democracy and holds out synchrony as an inevitable but as yet unfinished project. The complementarity Tocqueville has in mind understands that although freedom is both a welcome and an inevitable condition of modern political and social organization, it threatens anomie in the absence of a stable normative foundation, which religion provides. On the other hand, religion at its best, Tocqueville thinks, requires freedom for its vitality.

We might agree with Tocqueville that "religion," whatever that looks like, provides a resource that reinforces freedom with moral content. But Tocqueville's

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[118] "A religion that would become more minute, inflexible, and burdened with small observances at the same time that men were becoming more equal would see itself reduced to a flock of impassioned zealots in the midst of an incredulous multitude" (422).

analysis too hastily dismisses other traditions of moral meaning as possible normative sources for democratic mores. He therefore also fails to consider how different sources of moral meaning might be negotiated in the formation of identity. Take Wanda's case. I argued that there is a way in which the Gamaliel Foundation, in which Wanda has found an important source of her own political identity, is a site in which different traditions of moral meaning, among them Judeo-Christian religious traditions, are negotiated in an ongoing way. Religion is just one strand of the relevant sources of the "mores" in play. Moreover, religion is inflected in new ways as a result of the interaction (though this inflection stops short of a syncretistic fusion with democracy). Thus, Luke 4, for Wanda, is a text about relationship building and organizing communities for political change.

Tocqueville's functionalist question about religion's relationship to the American Christian's democratic soul is: What does religion do? Or perhaps: How can religion help? But that question is much too narrow to support a robust analysis of the play of pluralism in the formation of political identity. The circled self, it seems to me, moves beyond the functionalist question into the deep waters of constructive interaction between sources of moral meaning.

II. Insulated Closure: Yoder, Hauerwas, Bennett, and Niebuhr

The second kind of closure is insulated closure, and it plagues Christian theological treatments of secular political life. This closure emerges from the attempt to hold Christian commitments and moral formations in a superordinate position above other commitments and formations that Christian citizens might encounter in secular political life. This superordination not only creates a relationship of normative priority of

Christian commitments over other moral commitments; it also shields Christian formations from constructive engagement with other sources of moral meaning. Insulated closure is a more subtle form of closure than Tocqueville's functional closure.

Think again of Wanda. Her story suggests that Christian commitments can be elevated above others – can take normative priority over others – but that elevation doesn't mean different sources of moral meaning and experience cannot critically engage one another, each lending to others the terms in which one makes sense of the meaning of different commitments. For Wanda, one can't say what it means for her to be Christian without reference to the politics of interfaith organizing, and one can't understand why community organizing is important to Wanda without reference to her Christian identity and commitments. Wanda's political identity, in other words, is a kind of conversation between these two and others (and not a perfectly coherent conversation, to be sure). In Wanda's story, we see traditions of moral meaning that exist in critically interactive relationships.

With Wanda in mind, I analyze four representative Christian characters who embody insulated closure in different ways: Yoder's disciple, Hauerwas's peasant and martyr, Bennett's Christian citizen, and Niebuhr's moral man. Common to all of them is an attempt to elevate Christian sources of moral formation and meaning above other competing sources but in ways that foreclose the possibility that there might be constructive engagement among them. None of these models, it seems to me, adequately captures what is going on in the case of Wanda's political identity.

II(a). Yoder's Disciple

The Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder argues that the Roman appropriation of Christianity under the Emperors Constantine and Theodosius I profoundly reoriented the Christian tradition along ecclesiological, eschatological, metaphysical, ontological, moral, political, and social lines. In the wake of the Constantinian turn, Yoder argues, the very "meaning of the word 'Christian' has changed."[119]

The Constantinian era fundamentally altered Christian conceptions of church and moral agency (what Yoder calls the "new ecclesiology" and the "new universality," respectively). Before Constantine, Yoder argues, being Christian meant being a part of a persecuted minority population. "It took at least a degree of conviction to belong," Yoder writes.[120] The pre-Constantinian Christian ethic was one of radical neighbor-love, epitomized by love of enemy and Christ-like servanthood. After Constantine, everyone belonged to the church. The post-Constantinian situation required that the Christian conception of the moral life be "generalized" so that everyone, "Everyman," to use Yoder's term, could participate.

But this universalizing of scope fundamentally changed Christianity. Christianity had offered a radically alternative and demanding way of being in the world, one which only a select few would be able to choose for themselves and live out faithfully. In a Constantinian world, Christianity had to be tamed if all were to be Christian. Yoder writes: "Most obvious of the results of this mental shift is that *ethics is for everybody* … For the individual, this means that the heroic dimension of Christian obedience, the self-abandon and the witness of nonconformity are necessarily gone; this can't be asked of

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[119] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 136.

[120] Ibid., 136.

everyone."[121] As an imperial ethic universalized for Everyman, Christian norms had to be qualified. Pacifism was no longer tenable in the context of Christian empire, since pacifism in universalized form pressed deep concerns about the capacity of the civil authority to defend itself. The question, "What would happen if everyone did it" worked to constrain the ethical demands of pre-Constantinian Christianity: "…more fitting than 'What if everybody did it' would be its inverse, 'What if nobody else acted like a Christian, but we did?'"[122]

Conceptions of Christian duty after Constantine undergo fundamental shifts as well. The more rigorous ethic that characterized the Christian life before Constantine was, in a post-Constantinian era, reserved for "the religious," while a popular simulacrum was developed for "the laity:"

> The "evangelical counsels" will be commended to the religious and highly motivated. The 'precepts,' less demanding, will suffice for catechesis and the confessional. Two levels, two kinds of motivations and sanctions will be discerned, entailing different specific duties (contradictory ones, in fact, at points such as power, property, marriage, bloodshed, which were morally proper for the laity but not for the religious).[123]

The formerly obvious distinction between authentic Christians and non-Christians remained. But since all were now nominally Christian, the distinction took the form of the "invisible church" of the elect and the more capacious "visible church" that also included the reprobate. Thus, from the dawn of post-Constantinian "Christendom," moral agency was divided into two "levels:" those called to live a rigorous life resembling the original, more authentic, pre-Constantinian Christian ethic and those who would lead a version of the Christian life accommodated to the moral standards of the secular political community.

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[121] John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 104. Emphasis original.

[122] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*.

[123] Ibid., 139.

The Constantinian turn reoriented Western conceptions of history so that the political "establishment," rather than the church, became the "main carrier of historical movement," and its moral agency the dominant focus of Christian political ethics. Even when they are marshaled to challenge actually existing secular polities, Yoder argues, Christian political theologies after Constantine are deeply conditioned by the conviction that *some* established civil order is primarily responsible for ordering the good life. The dominant ecclesiology in the post-Constantinian context, in turn, understands the church to care for the soul in such a way that Christians can acquiesce to the demands of the civil polity: "The church has felt she [*sic*] needed to provide religious resources for the morality of Everyman, and it was largely the accommodations necessary to meet that standard which she found legitimized war and violence."[124] The Constantinian church underwrites an ethic of normalized violence that the civil authority (later the modern nation-state) needs in order to secure itself.

The reorientation of history as the history of the progress of the state prepares a concomitant transformation in the dominant moral languages, Yoder argues. The progress of the states can be verified empirically. Thus, the dominant moral frame in the Constantinian era measures success, and its primary criterion is utility. Yoder writes: "[Once] the evident course of history is held to be empirically discernable, and the

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[124] John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971). 127. Similarly, in *For the Nations*, Yoder writes: "The 'church' is no longer predominantly a body of people and secondarily the things they do together and the facilities they use to do them together; it is rather the institution that services the entire population with a certain category of 'religious' resources. The church is the services station for 'crisis experiences' and for 'the depth dimension.' Except for emergencies it should stay out of economic and political concerns and deal with the needs of the soul." Yoder, *For the Nations*, 106.

prosperity of our regime is the measure of the good, all morality boils down to efficacy. Right action is what works; what does not promise results can hardly be right."[125]

The universalizing of the church as Christendom and the consequent thinning of Christian ethics for all but the religious represents for Yoder a fundamental loss of an original and authentic Christian identity. Historians mark "the fall of the church" variously. But, Yoder writes, "the deeper shift behind it all *was the loss of the identity of the Christian community*, as visible over against the world, replaced by the effort to 'Christianize' (thinly) the entire society. Once the premise that Europe is 'Christendom' has been granted, the rest follows."[126]

In response to Constantinian Christianity, Yoder affirms both a "New Testament realism about the nature of governmental power" and a "free church realism about the ambivalence of 'Christendom.'"[127] The biblical text acknowledges "the fact of dominion among the nations."[128] In other words, the Constantinian world, and the dominant civil and ecclesial arrangements that mark it, aren't going anywhere. Yoder argues that God ordains the state to secure relative peace in the fallen world while it awaits eschatological transformation. What is distinctive about "the mandate of the state" is that it uses "evil" means to combat evil: "What is peculiar to this 'relative order' is that evil is applied to itself, so to speak. People protect themselves – motivated by selfishness and using violence – against the violence and unselfishness of other people." The work of the secular state, then, is to use "evil means to keep evil from getting out of hand."[129] With

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[125] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 140.
[126] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 104. Emphasis original.
[127] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 153.
[128] Ibid., 156.
[129] John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 18.

Weber, Yoder thinks that the decisive political means available to the state is sanctioned violence.

Christians ought not accommodate themselves to a post-Constantinian Christianity. Yoder sets Christian discipleship over against the mandate of the state. The "mandate of the church consists in overcoming of evil through the cross."[130] The church witnesses to the triumph of the cross, which, defeating sin, makes possible a peaceable world in which evil is overcome. Christian disciples witness to the cross by rejecting the violence of the state and suffering evil in the world. Christian discipleship as a form of political vocation therefore means that Christians "confront evil with suffering, cross-carrying love."[131] Yoder argues that the church's mandate is "superior" to that of the state. The two mandates are willed by God but are also mutually exclusive: "Both ministries, that of the church and that of the state, are carried out in accordance with God's will and God's appointment. However, they cannot be carried out simultaneously by the same person: their very nature is too different for that."[132]

On the other hand, discipleship doesn't mean that Christians ought simply to withdraw from society. Throughout his writings, Yoder mines pre-Constantinian Christian traditions to enable pacifist resistance to the accommodationist ethic of "Christendom" and critical response to secular political ethics that promote war and violence.[133]

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[130] Ibid., 21.
[131] Ibid., 26.
[132] Ibid., 27.
[133] In his *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), Yoder argues that the church's first political responsibility is to the tasks of "evangelization and discipleship" and then, secondly, "witness to the social order." This serial order is important because the second task is always informed by the church's performance of the first. In other words, the church's affirmation of Jesus' Lordship over creation that defeats evil is always the content of its witness to the "social order." In that book, Yoder examines the nature of the "criticism" that the church brings to bear upon the state.

While Yoder calls for Christian engagement with the world, he is deeply suspicious of Christian engagement with the world *on the world's terms*. On the world's terms, Christians would use coercive forms of power to bring about desired ends and measure their engagement by criteria of success. Christians are challenged to resist Constantinian identities and recover a Christian moral life characterized by servanthood and radical love of neighbor that loves even the enemy. Thus, Yoder criticizes the tactics of nonviolent resistance famously employed in the civil rights movement: "Although the justice thus obtained is the indispensable precondition of loving social relations, the movement itself is less than loving and no less intrinsically sinful than another kind of warfare. It wields power; and power is always selfish and proud. Its immediate goal of tolerable justice must be realized before men will have the liberty to love."[134]

A central problem with the politics of the Civil Rights Movement (the "racial revolution," as Yoder calls it) is that it accommodates itself to the politics of effectiveness. Over against the moral logic of "effectiveness," Yoder proposes the "criterion" of the "incarnation." The criterion of the incarnation marks the dimensions of a Christian ethic of servanthood. It is "the standard by which we measure our obedience is therefore Jesus Christ himself; from him we learn that brokenness, not success, is the normal path of faithfulness to the servanthood of God."[135] The incarnation ushers in a radically new way of being in the world, one in which evil is overcome, and human beings become who God made them to be through a life of peaceful servanthood.

For Yoder, then, Christian political vocation is a calling of the church. Christians are called to develop a political identity inaugurated in the incarnation, exemplified on

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[134] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 100.
[135] Ibid., 109.

the cross, and fostered in and through the practices of the church.[136] Without defending a Christian sectarianism, Yoder's critique of Constantinian Christianity and his Christian ethic of incarnation and servanthood serve to protect a particular conception of Christian moral identity from the corrupting, "always selfish and proud" influences of secular political life.

Yoder's ethic requires a profound faithfulness that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes possible a radically alternative moral identity that similarly motivates a radically alternative form of political agency. The church, as the body of Christ, is itself a radically countercultural polity that affirms God's call to peaceable existence over against the violence of the state. A coherent tradition of corporate political practice takes form in the church. The Yoderian disciple, formed in and through the life of the church, reflects this moral coherence in the very constitution of her self. In terms of the framing introduced in the last chapter, there are no divided selves in Yoder's church when the church is properly constituted. The political identity and agency of the disciple, and of the body of disciples, are therefore all of a piece.

The framing of political identity and agency I develop in this dissertation departs significantly from Yoder's disciple. However, to echo Romand Coles, I find Yoder's "wild patience," his faith that such a community is possible, to be "haunting." That is, Yoder induces me to wonder whether the real problem is simply a lack of faithfulness on my part.[137] I think, however, that Yoder overdraws the distinction between the moral worlds the church and state inhabit. For Yoder, the state is that worldly entity that wields

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[136] In his *Body Politics* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), Yoder examines five practices that constitute the church as a political body. These are binding and loosing, baptism, Eucharist, multiplicity of gifts, and open meeting.

[137] See Romand Coles, "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder: 'Outsiders' and the 'Otherness of the Church'," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 3 (2002).

"the sword," doing evil to keep evil in check. The church, by contrast, abstains from doing evil by suffering its consequences as Jesus suffered on the cross. The political identity of Yoder's disciple is closed to the moral formation in which the state's violence is a legitimate political calculus.

While both Yoder and Weber associate the state with a monopoly on legitimate violence, Weber's claim is situated in an extensive analysis of modernity that points to deficiencies in Yoder's account. For Weber, the task of the political vocation isn't limited to "wielding the sword," though it is always related to it. In his account, a complex and intersecting network of consequentialist moral logics complicates political judgment and, by extension, political vocation in modern polities. Political judgment in the modern world inevitably entails making choices using complex instrumental calculations backed up by the coercive use of power. Sometimes those choices also have implications for the use of physical violence. More often, probably, political judgment does violence against the goods of some partisans while favoring the goods of others.

Surely, these ambient conditions, which make complex political decisions in the modern world possible, infiltrate the church as well.[138] Disciples have to make difficult choices about how the church will use resources, how it will distribute power among leaders, how it will contribute to local communities, etc. These decisions are not unlike the decisions that persons who pursue a political vocation in secular political life have to confront all the time. In other words, modernity saturates the politics of the secular polity as well as the church. There is no leaving the modern world, though there are many ways to negotiate it (at which point the disciple becomes very interesting). To reduce secular political life to the violence of the sword misunderstands political vocation and the nature

[138] See n. 49 above on Gustafson's sense that there is no escaping modernity.

of political violence in the modern world. The political vocation of Yoder's disciple, then, is too narrowly defined to respond adequately to the complexity modern political life.

II(b). Hauerwas's Peasant and Martyr

Stanley Hauerwas reiterates many of the themes Yoder develops with respect to Christian political vocation and identity. However, Hauerwas's work is more suspicious, in my view, of the demands modernity places on moral formation, and thus more preoccupied with the question of what it might mean for Christians to counter them.

In his book *Sanctify Them in the Truth* (1998), Hauerwas cautiously asserts that postmodern thought, with its focus on "the loss of 'self' and the increasing appreciation of the significance of the body, and in particular the body's permeability," offers interesting possibilities for understanding Christian holiness.[139] He critiques Western modernity, which offers the rational, autonomous individual as its primary moral agent. For Hauerwas, genuine moral agency is possible only in the context of the Christian community, the church, in which the narratives of the Christian tradition are corporately embodied and enacted. Agency is not an individual property but a corporate one. Indeed, Hauerwas even hesitates to use the language of agency at all, since he thinks that notion encodes its modern connotation of the rational, autonomous individual. He writes: "At most, 'agency' names the skills correlate of a truthful narrative that enable us to make what happens to us our own, which includes 'decisions' we made when we thought

[139] Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 78.

we knew what we were doing but in retrospect seem more like something that happened to us."[140]

Hauerwas sees in postmodern thought a promising move to destabilize the rational, autonomous agent.[141] In place of such an agent, Hauerwas offers the Catholic peasant. "Part of the great genius of Catholicism," Hauerwas writes, "was its ability to sustain Christianity as a way of life for peasants."[142] A peasant is someone "who works everyday at those crafts necessary for us to eat, have shelter, sustain the having of children, and allow us to carry on the basic practices necessary to sustain communities." Peasants have a kind of practical knowledge that is "habituated in their bodies that must be passed on from one generation to another." This embodied knowledge accounts for peasants' suspicion of intellectuals. Peasants "rightly worry about 'ideas' that come from people [i.e., 'intellectuals'] who do not work with their hands."[143]

For Hauerwas, the Catholic peasant represents a commendable form of Christian holiness. Peasants don't think that they have any special calling. "It is enough that they pray, obey, and pay."[144] Peasants, however, do acknowledge "the importance of holiness – venerating people, sacraments, and relics that are clearly 'different.'" Hauerwas recognizes that "peasant Catholicism" is not without its "perversions." But the virtue of this form of Christianity is it "is not a set of beliefs or doctrines you believe in order to be

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[140] Ibid., 102. Early in his career, Hauerwas worked to reconcile a modern conception of self and moral agency with his emerging understanding of narrative ethics. See his essay "The Self as Story: A Reconsideration of the Relation of Religion and Morality from the Agent's Perspective," chapter 4, in Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue; Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1974).Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue; Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*(Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1974). See also Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 38 ff.

[141] For a critique of Hauerwas's turn to the de-centered postmodern self in favor of a corporate, sanctified body, see Charles Marsh, "In Defense of a Self: The Theological Search for a Postmodern Identity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 3 (2002).

[142] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 78.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid., 78.

Christian, but Christianity is to have one's body shaped, one's habits determined, in a matter that the worship of God is unavoidable."[145] Peasants are formed by patterns of work, worship, and family life that constitute embodied ways of knowing and habitual forms of worship and service to God.

Peasant holiness stands in stark contrast to the religiosity of modern persons. Modern moral agency trades on the notion that individuals are empowered to make their own destiny, to choose for themselves who they will become and to undertake whatever is necessary to achieve such a formation:

> We [modern selves] believe our lives are the outcome of choices we have made. Such a world seems, moreover, to be the kind of context that the pietist longed for. No longer is anyone made to be a Christian, but only becomes a Christian through experience and voluntary commitment.[146]

The peasant, by contrast, allows herself to be made or formed as a person who is not in control, but lets God be in control. Echoing Yoder's Constantinian critique, Hauerwas proposes the peasant as an anecdote to the modern urge to rule, to be master: "In contrast to that [Constantinian] posture, I would like Christians to recapture the posture of the peasant. The peasant does not seek to become the master, but rather she wants to know how to survive under the power of the master."[147] In Hauerwas's conception, the peasant does not so much "exercise moral agency," for this is a notion shot through with modern preoccupations with the autonomous individual who acts solely on her own volition and is always in control. Instead, peasant Christianity undoes the formation offered by the modern world, in which individuals make the false claim to be in control of their own destiny, and instead seeks a formation that affirms God's lordship in creation.

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[145] Ibid., 79.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 105.

More recently, Hauerwas has explored the figure of the Christian martyr as it appears in the work of Augustine. Like the Catholic peasant, the martyr is formed in the Christian tradition enacted corporately in the context of the church. And like the peasant, the martyr's knowledge of God is practical wisdom, embodied virtues and habits that make possible a life lived in service to God. The martyr, more clearly than the peasant, appears as a figure embodying Hauerwas's critique of the modern liberal state. The rational, autonomous individual in the modern imaginary is understood to enjoy the freedom to live a life of her own choosing. The modern polity, in turn, is designed to facilitate such freedom. It interferes minimally with the doings of individuals, limiting the pursuit of individual happiness only to the extent that it contravenes the ability of other individuals to do the same.

Hauerwas famously thinks that such a conception of a polity is deeply problematic. The church, the polity that God has called into being, is not an arrangement that facilitates the individual pursuit of happiness. Instead, the church is a community that, in enacting the narratives of the Christian tradition, becomes the corporate body of Christ. Unlike the modern secular polity, which pledges allegiance to only a very thin conception of the good life, the church witnesses to God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ, and embodies that witness in the moral formation of Christians. Thus, Hauerwas argues, Christians are called to lead a life in an alternative polity, the church, which calls the secular polity into question and shows that it is in need of salvation.

Like the resident alien and the Catholic peasant who appear in Hauerwas's earlier work, the Augustinian martyr reiterates his insistence that the church is a polity that

constitutes a radical alternative to the politics of the world.[148] Hauerwas, famous for his criticism of the discourses and practices of liberalism, has connected the figure of the martyr to a qualified openness to radical democratic politics. The political theorist Romand Coles reports that when he and other Durham, N.C., community organizers approached Hauerwas to support efforts to organize students on the campus of Duke University, Hauerwas, according to Coles,

> responded by enthusiastically urging a room full of several dozen students to participate in building this grassroots coalition. In speaking with [Hauerwas] around that time he told me and others that, 'What I've been trying to do all along is simply to *make the church worthy* of participating in the kind of political relationships sought by the IAF.'"[149]

Appealing to the Coles's work on community organizing and his reading of John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas characterizes radical democratic politics as dialogical, local, relational, and eminently mutable. On Coles's account, Hauerwas notes, grassroots community organizing resists a politics that is "coercive, selfish, nondialogical, or invulnerable," political vices that are incompatible with the politics of Jesus.[150] Community organizing and other forms of radical democratic practice have the potential, Hauerwas suggests, to resist the politics of fear and foster the martyr's virtues of patience and humility.[151]

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[148] For Hauerwas and William Willimon's notion of the resident alien, see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989). For Hauerwas's invocation of the Catholic peasant, see Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth,* 78-80. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 105.

[149] Romand Coles, "Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess: A Review of Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (2005), 312. Emphasis original.

[150] Ibid., 21. Interestingly, Hauerwas doesn't comment explicitly on the relationship of the martyr's patience and humility to moments in radical democratic politics, such as IAF politics, which draw on highly strategic, even aggressive political practices calculated to achieve political gains.

[151] The IAF is well known for its relational approach to politics. But true to the legacy of the work of founder Saul Alinsky, the IAF is not afraid to use forms of coercive power against recalcitrant opponents in order to achieve political gains. Here I have in mind the IAF's "action meeting," in particular. For thick descriptions of the IAF approach, see Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling.* See also Richard L. Wood, *Faith in Action.*

Hauerwas, drawing on Augustine, argues that only when Christians learn disciplines of attention to place and enduring patience possible in an "alternative political ethic" will they be worthy of authentic participation in radical democratic movements. For Augustine, Hauerwas explains, the politics of the world trades on a death-denying "rhetoric of glory" – the desire of the Roman statesman to cheat death by memorializing personal glory. The politics of glory is driven by the fear of death. Augustine posits the martyr as an important counter-figure to the Roman statesman. The glory of the martyr is not a heroic but a "reflected glory – a reflection of the glory of Christ."[152] Freed from the fear of death, the martyr faithfully discloses the glory of Christ's lordship over life and death. Thus, the martyr works with patience and humility born of the awareness that political being is finally the work of God, not of human beings. Precisely these political virtues – patience and humility, Hauerwas asserts – are needed to sustain radical democratic politics. He finds precisely these virtues in figures like Ella Baker, Miles Horton, and Robert Moses.[153]

Like Yoder, Hauerwas is concerned to emphasize the extent to which the church offers a radically alternative political identity to that of the world. As in the Yodererian picture, the church for Hauerwas is a community marked by deep coherence of moral meaning and practice. Thus, the peasant and the martyr are political agents whose political identity and agency reflect a moral formation in such a community. The peasant and martyr's political agency consists in the ability to glorify God (rather than self) in and through their work in the world. For Hauerwas, the politics of the world congenitally

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[152] Stanley Hauerwas, "A Haunting Possibility: Christianity and Radical Democracy," in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles(Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2008), 25.

[153] Ibid., 27.

aspires to the glorification of the self. Thus, the martyr's politics of reflected glory – the politics, in essence, of the church – is finally the only genuine form of political agency. Hauerwas remains incredulous as to the possibility that radical democratic politics of the sort that Baker, Horton, and Moses have practiced can accommodate the martyr's uncompromising politics of "reflected glory." But at the very least, Hauerwas seems to be saying, the politics of these civil rights figures resemble the politics of the martyr.

As with Yoder, I admire Hauerwas's demand that Christians have faith that a radically different world is possible and develop qualities of character, like patience and humility, that put their sense of moral identity and political purpose at odds with worldly demands. Still, I am incredulous that either the Catholic peasant or the Augustinian martyr adequately captures the complex negotiations of political identity that figures like Ella Baker, Miles Horton, and Robert Moses had to sort out in order to do the work of political activism. These figures were not only obedient, patient, humble, and unafraid of death. They were also shrewd, calculating, and persistent in ways that helped them to negotiate distinctively modern political quandaries of the sort that Weber describes. They cared about success, and they wanted to win – though these concerns do not necessarily conduce to a "politics of glory." This varied constellation of political virtues points to, in my view, the more nuanced account of political identity I am seeking to develop.

II(c). Bennett's Christian Citizen

The Union Seminary ethicist John C. Bennett worked for much of his career in the shadow of his towering colleague Reinhold Niebuhr. Bennett's work in Christian

political ethics has, in my view, been largely neglected. Bennett, like Yoder, thinks that Christians have an important contribution to make to secular political life. Like Yoder and Hauerwas, Bennett is concerned to theorize that contribution in a way that preserves the integrity of Christian moral identity. For Bennett, however, the Christian contribution to secular political life is not limited to a Yoderian politics of witness. Yoder wants Christians to call the world to a form of life that embodies the ethic of servanthood and cruciform sacrifice modeled by Jesus. Yoderian witness, as we've seen, constitutes a radically different politics than the world's Constantinian politics. Unlike Yoder, Bennett is amenable, to a point, to a form of Christian contribution to secular political life on terms set by the norms and standards of the secular polity.[154]

For Bennett, there is a vast and, at first glance, impassable "distance" between Christian ethics and social policy.[155] Christian ethics contains universal moral prescriptions that offer general principles for social justice, while social policy develops technical responses to particular social problems. Bennett's concern is to develop a method by which "Christian citizens" can make useful recommendations about the formation of social policy without presuming that Christian ethics is able to offer any expertise about the practical and technical aspects of policy formation.

Bennett names a number of reasons why it is so difficult to bridge the distance between Christian ethics and social policy. First, Bennett notes that the problems of "public life" are so complicated that it is hard to know how to respond to them, no matter

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[154] Interestingly, Yoder, citing one passage from *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, commends Bennett for beginning to develop a "vision of the church as community over against the world." Yoder recognizes that Bennett never developed this view: "It cannot be said that [Bennett] retreated from that affirmation, but it was most of the time not his calling to be sharpening it." Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 90. Thanks to Brad Burroughs for pointing me to this passage.

[155] The second chapter of Bennett's *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* is entitled "The Distance Between Christian Ethics and Social Policy." See John C. Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1946).

what normative framing informs the response.[156] Secondly, Christian citizens constitute only one constituency among a multitude of voices in public life. Thus, "the Christian citizen must always act in cooperation with citizens who do not even admit the authority of Christian ethics."[157] Other factors create distance between Christian ethics and social policy: the anonymity of the experiences of all who are affected by social policies; the contest of conflicting interests as well as the "extraordinary resources of the human spirit for cloaking self-interest;" and the ways in which responsibility for social policy is "diluted," both for individual citizens, who have limited influence in the process of policy making, and elected leaders, who often have to soften their own sense of responsibility because they are beholden to an electorate.

Bennett critiques "four Christian social strategies" – four Christian approaches to framing the duties of citizenship – and develops his own in response.[158] Bennett's "fifth strategy" holds Christians accountable to the normative standards that elevate Christian ethics above alternatives while also denying that such transcendence renders Christian ethics irrelevant to social policy.[159] With Reinhold Niebuhr, Bennett wants to recognize

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[156] "In public life there is a long unbroken history which provides opportunity for the accumulation of disorders, for the development of encrusted prejudices, vested interests that have the sanction of the fathers, vicious circles of fear, hatred and vindictiveness which the wisest contemporaries do not know how to overcome." Ibid., 17.

[157] Ibid., 18.

[158] Bennett critiques the (1) "Catholic strategy," framed in terms of natural law and is mediated through the hierarchy of the church; (2) the "strategy of withdrawal," an approach typified, Bennett thinks, in Anabaptist traditions, the "ideal" of which is "the development of a community that is self-sufficient and thus is as free from compromise with the world as possible" (43); (3) the simple "identification of Christianity with particular programs," such as pacifism, nationalism, or socialism; and finally (4) "the double standard for personal and public life," a view developed among neo-orthodox thinkers such as Karl Barth, which holds that "Christian ethics are so distant from social policy that they are irrelevant to the problems of public life and that there must be two independent moral standards, one for political relationships for the Church or for the Kingdom of God understood in either an other-worldly or in a futuristic sense, the other for the state and world of nations" (51-52). See Ibid., Chapter 3.

[159] Bennett writes: "*To summarize, this fifth strategy is one that emphasizes the relevance together with the transcendence of the Christian ethic and which takes account of the universality and persistence of sin and the elements of technical autonomy in social policies*." Ibid. 59. Emphasis original.

the pervasive influence of sin that leads persons to advance their own interests at the expense of those of others in the context of political life.[160] But unlike Niebuhr, Bennett thinks that politics need not be limited to the play of "enlightened self-interest" by way of a "discrete balancing of interests." Rather, Christian love, an other-regarding love that "seeks the welfare of all," drives a "passion for justice and fellowship."[161] Christians can mediate the demands of Christian love to meet the challenges of social policy. Just how this mediation happens is, as Bennett says, "not easily labeled, nor is it easily followed."[162]

Bennett, following an innovation that he credits to the ecumenist J. H. Oldham,[163] prescribes a form of public speech that Bennett calls the "middle axiom." The middle axiom offers a Christian response to social policy that is "more definite than a universal ethical principle, and less specific than a program that includes legislation and political strategy."[164] Middle axioms set "goals which represent the purpose of God for our time."[165] They translate the most general Christian ethical principles into broad formulations that direct the aims of social policy. But middle axioms stop short of making recommendations about the minutiae of public policy formation – an area of expertise about which Christian ethics has nothing to say. In this way, Bennett thinks,

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[160] Bennett described himself as "a defender of Christian political realism." But he argued that "political realism has itself become too rigid. It has frequently become a position which is no longer under Christian criticism. It often becomes a rationalization of whatever seems necessary for Western strategy in the cold war. We must try to bring back this political realism that has gained too much momentum of its own under Christian criticism." John C. Bennett, *When Christians Make Political Decisions* (New York: Association Press, 1964), 33

[161] Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, 65. About Christian love as "an element of Christian thinking and deciding about political problems," Bennett writes: "It is response to the love of God for all men – not a passive benevolence, but an ongoing love for the whole world which was demonstrated in the incarnation, in God's coming in Christian into our history." Bennett, *When Christians Make Political Decisions*, 28-29.

[162] Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, 58.

[163] John C. Bennett, *The Christian as Citizen* (New York: Association Press, 1955), 38.

[164] Ibid. 38. See also Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, 77.

[165] Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, 76.

Christians can contribute to public discussions about policy issues without presuming the expertise needed to craft policy on the level of technical particulars.

The method of the middle axiom enables religious citizens to contribute to public moral discourse in a way that doesn't require that they compromise the integrity of their moral voice. Responding to Will Herberg's seminal study *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955), Bennett argues that there is a "moral consensus, but this always needs to be renewed and corrected by the historic faiths in their fullness." Even though we have a "common life," persons with different fundamental moral commitments *do* differ, Bennett argues, and those differences should be brought to bear on fundamental moral questions:

> I am not suggesting that we should make a virtue of differing from one another in religious matters; but the fact is that we do differ and it is not helpful to try to hide our differences; and it is better to live within a whole tradition than in the part of it which can be held in common with those in the other two religious communities [Catholics and Jews]. The sources which we have in common are not in themselves enough to nourish our minds, our hearts, or our consciences.[166]

It is imperative, then, that each of these traditions evaluates political decisions in a way that reflects its own particularity.

When Bennett considers what I have called political agency, he usually means something like discrete "personal choices," which constitute consent to, or critique of, social policy, such as voting or voicing support for a policy. Personal choices bear "moral responsibility." Bennett writes:

> The choice of a Christian as a citizen or as a participant in the economic process are his personal choices. He retains moral responsibility in what he votes for, in what he supports through his part in the development of public opinion, to the policies to which he consents or by which he profits.[167]

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[166] Bennett, *When Christians Make Political Decisions*, 107.
[167] Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, 58.

"Choices," voting, "consent," "support," and "political decisions" are all acts that rely on Christian moral commitments for orientation. But they don't necessarily require critical engagement with identity itself, in such a way that a different self-understanding might emerge as a result of exercising political agency. The dominant image in Bennett's work, in other words, is of a citizen who consults her most fundamental moral commitments, oriented by her Christian formation, and then acts accordingly upon them.

As his formulation "the Christian as citizen" indicates, Bennett sets up political agency as a matter of role-play. The Christian exercises political agency *as*, or in the role of, citizen. But playing a role sets agency at a distance from identity formation. The notion of a middle axiom is paradigmatic in this sense. It is a form of political speech mediating fundamental commitments that constitute a particular religious identity in order to make them intelligible and relevant in the political sphere.[168] Bennett expects that middle axioms will also facilitate critical interaction with differing voices, a process the result of which a Christian citizen may revise her view on some issue. But one doesn't get the sense that Bennett thinks that these critical engagements will result in meaningful reconfigurations of political identity, even if they do push Christians to revise their views on particular issues.

Bennett's is a version of a one-way model of political agency in which a commitment informs a discrete political action. No consideration, however, is given to the ways in which exercising political agency in turn shapes political identity. In this way, then, Bennett's Christian citizen constitutes a closed identity. In the exercise of political agency, he doesn't seem to anticipate, in other words, complex negotiations of

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[168] It is important to note also that Bennett was writing in the heyday of mainline Protestant cultural influence in the United States. Like Reinhold Niebuhr, he could assume a homogeneous, durable, and normative Protestantism that had broad cultural currency.

identity that go along with making political choices. Christians assume the role of citizen, make some "political decision," and then exit the role mostly unchanged.

II(d). Reinhold Niebuhr's Moral Man

Though few Christian thinkers understand the realistic dimensions of political life better than Reinhold Niebuhr, his work doesn't offer a straightforward choice for a representative political agent. Perhaps Reinhold Niebuhr is Reinhold Niebuhr's own best example of a representative political agent. As I noted in the introduction, Niebuhr was a savvy and persistent commentator on American political life and international affairs. His own political vocation included prophetic church leadership, political organizing, running for public office, advising prominent figures on the national political scene, political journalism, and theological scholarship in the area of religion and politics. To urge Niebuhr's figure of the "moral man" as a typical political agent is an ironic and inelegant choice, since Niebuhr argues throughout his corpus that politics is finally a feature of group dynamics – groupings of individuals in companies, nations, races, socioeconomic classes, and the like. Thus, Niebuhr's figure of the moral man, as I'll show below, is, in a sense, an a-political representative figure. But precisely this feature of Niebuhr's work is revealing of the way in which closed identity operates in it.

Niebuhr's Christian realism posits coercive power as the fundamental social reality. According to Niebuhr, groups of people are constitutionally incapable of disinterested ethical comportment. Instead, groups pursue their own self-interest relentlessly. Public life is characterized by the ongoing competition of group interests. Niebuhr argues that Christian social ethics can frame these social dynamics in theological

perspective. It can also provide broad aims towards which social and political policies that regulate the play of group interest ought to aim. Beyond these two important tasks, however, Christian ethics has little to contribute to the minutiae of creating a balance of power between competing interests. Niebuhrian realism protects Christian moral identity by rendering it mostly irrelevant to political agency.

In his seminal early study *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), Niebuhr famously argues that human beings are the only creatures endowed with reason. Reason, in turn, enables "a capacity for self-transcendence … reason enables [man], within in limits, to direct his energy so that it will flow in harmony, and not in conflict, with other life."[169] Human beings are able to create community with others precisely because reason checks self-regard and "[supports] those impulses which carry life beyond itself."[170]

Because human beings are congenitally sinful, Niebuhr argues, the individual's capacity for self-transcendence is not utterly reliable. Moreover, the rational capacity of the individual is diluted, and finally disappears altogether, as human beings aggregate into ever larger groups, such as families, economic classes, and nations.[171] Groups are more likely to be given over to "impulses" towards self-interest. Thus, Niebuhr concludes, "group relations can never be as ethical as those which characterize individual relations."[172] The only way to control group interests is to keep them in check using

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[169] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* 26.
[170] Ibid. 27.
[171] Niebuhr writes: "Men will never be wholly reasonable, and the proportion of reason to impulse becomes increasingly negative when we proceed from the life of individuals to that of social groups, among whom a common mind and purpose is always more or less inchoate and transitory, and who depend therefore upon a common impulse to bind them together." Ibid. 35.
[172] Ibid. 83.

coercive, countervailing forces. Ranging from war to control via formal legal and policy structures, coercive force can be more or less overtly violent.[173]

This view poses a problem for Christian ethics. For Niebuhr, the "ethic of Jesus" constituted a moral "perfectionism" that demands "complete disinterestedness, religiously motivated." Christian ethics prescribes a moral life governed by the "law of love": "No one was to seek his own … Evil was not to be resisted, the borrower was to be given more than he asked for without hope of return."[174] But such a perfectionism is an unworkable paradigm for a social ethic.[175] At best, the ethic of Jesus supplies an ideal "vantage point" from which both to critique extant social policy and organization and very broadly to suggest directions in which to push present states of affairs. Indeed, a social ethic that seeks to balance contending powers in order to achieve relative justice needs broad ideals that define what relative justice will look like.[176] Still, justice as the attempt to preserve the "equilibria of power" is always only a rude approximation of the law of love.[177]

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[173] Ibid. 173.

[174] Reinhold Niebuhr and D. B. Robertson, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1976).

[175] "Valuable as this kind of perfectionism is, it certainly offers no basis for a social ethic that deals responsibly with a growing society. Those of us who believe in the complete reorganization of modern society are not wrong in using the ideal of Jesus as a vantage point from which to condemn the present social order, but I think we are in error when we try to draw from the teachings of Jesus any warrant for social policies which we find necessary to attain to any modicum of justice." Ibid. 33.

[176] Niebuhr writes: "One contribution which Christianity certainly ought to make to the problem of political justice is to set all propositions of justice under the law of love, resolving the fruitless debate between pragmatists and legalists and creating the freedom and maneuverability necessary to achieve a tolerable accord between men and nations in ever more complex human relations." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 110.

[177] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969), 26. Niebuhr writes: "Justice is basically dependant upon a balance of power. Whenever an individual or a group or a nation possesses undue power, and whenever this power is not checked by the possibility of criticizing and resisting it, it grows inordinate." He goes on to say: "A balance of power is different from, and inferior to, the harmony of love. It is a basic condition of justice, given the sinfulness of man. Such a balance of power does not exclude love. In fact, without love the frictions and tensions of a balance of power would become intolerable. But without the balance of power even the most loving relations may degenerate into unjust relations, and love may become the screen which hides the injustice" (26-27).

Niebuhr's realism gives a theological account of social and political life. It also generates a political ethic in which the distinctively Christian contribution is limited to a set of general ideals political societies attempt to approximate via laws and policies that also aspire to balance countervailing powers. Like Bennett, Niebuhr understands that Christian ethics will have little to say about the nuts and bolts of secular political life – the processes by which policies are developed and legislated. But unlike Bennett, Niebuhr thinks that a Christian ethic in its genuine form – a kind of moral perfectionism – is only really relevant for moral agents *qua* individuals – for the "moral man," in Niebuhr's rendering – or, at most, in small groups. Because he frames the dynamics of group interest in terms of his understanding of sin, Niebuhr is free to endorse forms of political agency that require the use of coercive force to balance competing group interests, both within political societies and among national communities. But these forms of political agency belong properly to the norms and practices of the fallen world rather than to the perfectionist morality of Jesus Christ.

Niebuhr works his way around the tension of Weber's stand by attributing the sometimes tragic negotiation of political responsibility to a state of affairs caused by sin and exacerbated by the moral incapacities of human communities. Christian norms entail moral "perfectionism," which the "moral man," acting alone, might come appreciably close to approximating. But in an imperfect world, and particularly in the context of "immoral society," those norms sit at a great distance from the rough-and-tumble of political life.

With Niebuhr (as, I imagine, with many Christians), I am in some sense a moral realist.[178] That is, even if we can't ever know the good adequately, I take it, as an article of faith, that there is a moral order that adheres in creation, and we ought to strive to know it as best we can. Our knowledge of this moral order is not simply a matter of utility (that we can access the moral order when it is useful to do so, in case we need to act). Rather, our moral commitments constitute fundamental features of our own moral identity, apart from which we wouldn't recognize ourselves. When we act on moral commitments, the experience of acting, as well as the results of the action, matter for the way we continue to understand these commitments and ourselves.

The trouble is, in my view (not Niebuhr's), that because of sin, we never know the moral order adequately, and our inadequate renderings of the moral order bring goods into conflict. Thus, a political realism of the sort that Niebuhr defends, which holds that evil must be restrained by countervailing force, means something to the person who does the restraining because it *does* something to her. That is, with Weber, I hold that hard choices between competing moral goods have implications for how the self is formed. Weber asks us to consider what kind of self a person will become if she aspires to the vocation of politics, which entails choices made in the context of moral dilemma. Precisely this concern is obscured in the distance between Niebuhr's moral man and immoral society.

The way in which we understand fundamental moral commitments is, as I've said, also conditioned by our experience of moral pluralism. As in Wanda's narrative, we can't help but draw on a multitude of sources of moral meaning to make sense of the

[178] Robin Lovin explains Niebuhr's moral realism in Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20 ff.

others. Traditions of moral meaning, in other words, serve to interpret one another. Because moral commitments are features of moral identity, this ongoing process of interpretation is also an interpretation of the self. These moral commitments are very present to us as we think about political action and, simultaneously, as we experience ourselves in it.

I don't know that Niebuhr would disagree with all of this, though he understands moral failure more as a problem of volition rather than moral epistemology. Interestingly, his analysis of the self in some places resembles the picture of political identity and agency I've begun to develop in the last chapters and will in the next.[179] But typically, the morally incapacitated "immoral society" looms so large in his realist political theory that the self's experience of what I call political identity and agency is lost. And when Niebuhr does discuss the moral man's moral experience, he tends to emphasize the ways in which the self either overreaches or fails to realize its moral capacity.

Because Niebuhr's moral man is, as I said above, essentially an a-political figure, it doesn't make sense to speak of his (and Niebuhr has a "he" in mind) political identity and agency. *Qua* individual, the moral man is capable of doing the right thing, though he may at times choose not to. Politics for Niebuhr is the realm in which volition is atrophied by group interest. The problem, then, is that Niebuhr doesn't offer us a figure in whom we can see the relationships between political vocation and moral formation,

[179] In his *Self and the Dramas of History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), for example, Niebuhr argues that selves negotiate mind, body, spirit, as well as their relationship to communities and history, exercising limited agency in each case. The view he articulates in this work as in his *The Nature and Destiny of Man* sounds the themes of limited transcendence and self-creativity that I develop in the last chapter and the next.

commitment, and agency. Niebuhr in this way closes the moral man from the question of political identity.

III. Conclusion

I take this chapter not to have resolved any problems about the nature of political identity. It has merely called into question dominant theopolitical anthropologies. The moral experience of Christian citizens like Wanda stands apart from Tocqueville's American Christian, Yoder's disciple, Hauerwas's peasant and martyr, Bennett's Christian citizen, and Niebuhr's immoral society. None of these help us to understand the complex process of identity formation that happens in and through political engagement

In the last chapter, I defended Michael Walzer's conception of the circled self as a normative model that responds to the way in which persons craft political identity in modern, pluralistic societies. What is compelling about that model, in my view, is that it takes seriously the task of negotiating identity in response to many different, often conflicting, sources of moral meaning and experience. In the dissertation's conclusion, I offer theological justification for why negotiation ought to be an important criterion for how we think about political identity. That argument will constitute a final justification for my appeal to Walzer's circled self. Here I simply assume that the model is relevant, as I did in the last chapter. With that strategy in view, I make the following critical claim: none of the models of identity I have discussed in this chapter adequately accommodate the kind of negotiation that characterizes the work of the circled self.

Tocqueville's American Christian draws upon Christian moral formation to countervail the corrosive effects of freedom in modern democratic societies. For Tocqueville, democracy also has a determinate, though emerging, normative content. Christianity and democracy in America seem even to be moving towards a syncretistic unity. But neither the functional view of Christianity as moral support for democracy nor the syncretistic argument conduces to genuine negotiation. In negotiation, each source of moral meaning bears a constructive and critical relationship to the others, even if one is finally held in a superordinate position above others. Moreover, no one source collapses completely into the others.

Yoder and Hauerwas want at most guarded engagement between sources of moral meaning in order to preserve the integrity of Christian formation. For them, negotiation is deeply problematic and probably corrosive of Christian identity.

Bennett's Christian citizen is similar in some ways to Tocqueville's notion of Christianity-as-moral-support. The Christian part of Bennett's Christian citizen tells the citizen part how to behave as a citizen: how to vote, how to evaluate moral argument, etc. But here again, there isn't genuine negotiation between different sources of moral meaning in the crafting of political identity. Bennett's view, like Tocqueville's, constitutes a one-way model of political agency.

Finally, Niebuhr's moral man is closed to the negotiation of political identity because Niebuhr understands political life to be a context in which the best moral resources that persons and communities of persons have collapse under the weight of sin that motivates self-interest. In other words, political life, as a context of group morality,

has no normative integrity. Thus, political life is not a context in which self-making, in any meaningful sense, is possible.

Open Identities

If this chapter has explored "closed identities," what would it mean for political identity to be open? It would mean that the sources of moral meaning and experience that inform the way persons work to construct political identity – including religious experience, experience of gender, class, and race, experience of political culture and education, etc. – would, as I think they do in Wanda's case, mutually interpret one another in the circled setting of the self Walzer helps us to imagine.

One of the most intriguing elements of my interview with Wanda was the way she wove the moral language and categories of the Christian tradition together with those that come out of community organizing traditions. Recall, for example, what she said about Luke 4:

> I mean [Jesus] said that, according to Luke 4, that I came to set the capturers free. That's action, that's more than just praying, that's more than just fasting, that's more than just winning souls to Christ. That's an action word, that's a relational word 'cause in order to set the capturers free, one you gotta know who the capturers are so you got – so that means you gotta be in communion with other people.

I don't necessarily credit Wanda with a completely original interpretation here – it could be that she was simply echoing something she has heard in her Gamaliel training. Her formation in that institutional context, in other words, certainly plays an important role in the way she constructs her own political identity.

Still, notice that the categories of “action” and relationality,[180] which are so important in the family of organizing traditions of which Gamaliel is a part,[181] are used as the terms in which the liberating message that Jesus proclaims in Luke 4 is interpreted. The command (as Wanda invokes the passage from Luke 4) to redeem captives is the superordinate value that orients her political work. But if we’re to understand what that command means for Wanda, we have to know something about the constellation of moral meaning and practice belonging to the particular tradition of community organizing to which Gamaliel belongs.

An open identity, then, is one in which different sources of moral meaning are creatively incorporated into one’s identity such that these sources illuminate and interpret one another. How should we understand the formation of open identities? The next chapter begins to introduce a constructive alternative to the closed identities that this chapter critiqued. It looks more closely at the structure of the narratives to which I have appealed so far in an informal way. An analysis of personal narrative, I argue, will map the complexities of political identity to which any theological framing of political vocation needs to be aware.

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[180] That is, Wanda’s claim that setting the captives free is “a relational word.”

[181] For a discussion of the role that these categories play in the organizing traditions to which Gamaliel belongs, see e.g. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 40-71.

Chapter 3: On the Narrative Construction of Political Identity

So far, I have argued that an adequate picture of political vocation will include an examination of the relationship between political identity and agency. Focusing first on political identity, I argued in chapter 1 that the task of crafting a political identity in the context of modern societies requires the negotiation of plural sources of moral meaning and formation. I then argued in chapter 2 that dominant models of political identity in Christian social ethics are inadequate to the task of understanding the complexity of identity formation described in chapter 1.

This chapter attempts to answer the question raised in the last. Recall what I said in the last chapter about open identities: An open identity is one in which different sources of moral meaning are creatively incorporated into one's identity such that these sources illuminate and interpret each other. I have urged Walzer's circled self as a normative model of open identity. This chapter considers *how* exactly this creative incorporation happens. A better understanding of how political identity is constructed, I contend, will thicken the account I offered the preceding chapters and ultimately clarify the task of reflecting theologically on political vocation, the aim of this dissertation.

I argue in this chapter that one way in which political identity is constructed is through personal narrative. In the introduction, I defined "personal narrative" as the stories people tell about themselves that construct and present an identity to an audience. Personal narratives weave intricate moral identities that interpret, arrange, and prioritize normative commitments, work out tensions between them, and provide a context in which their exercise of political agency is rendered intelligible. Political identities

constructed in the context of personal narratives illuminate and motivate the exercise of political agency in different contexts and modes.

Personal narratives take on many different forms and do many different kinds of work for the ongoing project of self-construction, addressing different dimensions of that project simultaneously. Stories about the self may at once situate one in relationship to one's past experiences and family history, personal relationships, moral commitments, life goals, and the like. In this chapter, I am interested in focusing on the dimensions of personal narratives that address the self's relationship to political communities.

Recall that in the introduction, I defined political vocation as a life's work devoted to the good of a political community or communities. A political community is one in which members work together to identify and pursue common goods and aims. Political communities may be local, national, or transnational; secular or ecclesial; realized or ideal; immanent, eschatological, or both. This chapter, then, explores the way personal narrative functions as a site in which persons work out their understandings of and commitments to political communities.

I am not saying that there are some personal narratives that are exclusively political and others that do some other kind of identity work (e.g., religious identity, sexuality, ethnic identity, etc.). Again, personal narratives work on many different fronts of self-construction simultaneously. To focus on the political work they do requires an artificial separation but one that will be useful for the purposes of analysis.

I also said in the introduction that I take my understanding of personal narrative from a category of qualitative research known as "narrative ethnography."[182] The latter is a social scientific analysis of narrative practice. Narrative ethnography examines a range

[182] See n. 36 above.

of external conditions that structure personal narration while also affirming that within these conditions, persons exercise limited agency in crafting personal narratives.[183] The kind of limited agency persons exercise in crafting personal narratives, moreover, constitutes a kind of moral agency. Through personal narratives, persons construct themselves as moral agents who affirm or challenge dominant narratives of race, class, gender, etc. that structure their social environment.

In the first section, I explore social scientific approaches to personal narrative research. These framings assume that persons actively construct themselves in and through personal narratives, exercising limited agency to craft their stories. Personal narratives are always constructed under the weight of intricate and ambient normative systems. These include, among others: (1) the norms of particular audiences, communities, and institutional contexts that determine what counts as an acceptable narrative structure and sanction narrative content; (2) the conditions under which a narrative is occasioned, as well as the expectations attached to the occasion, as in the invitation of a researcher, a ritual in an institutional context, an informal meeting of friends, etc.; and (3) the precise patterns of narrative construction that govern how a story can be told in different social contexts, as for example a testimony in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Gubrium and Holstein call these conditions the "narrative environment" within which narratives are constructed.[184]

Under these conditions, persons work in intricate ways to present narratives that respond to different "interpretative needs." Narrators select and omit storylines recognizable in different social contexts in order to foreground aspects of their narrative.

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[183] See n. 37 above.
[184] See n. 38 above.

They work with audiences to create discursive spaces in which storytelling is recognizable and appropriate. They work within the context of narratives to negotiate power that structures personal and professional relationships.[185] Gubrium and Holstein argue that "the storyteller, in effect, is an editor who constantly monitors, modifies, and revises themes and storylines."[186]

In the second section, I examine the personal narratives of three more Atlanta-based Christians who work in different contexts of political activism and bring vastly different life experiences and moral commitments to bear on different styles of political practice. Amanda Bostwick is a former Director of CARE, an Atlanta-based HIV/AIDS advocacy organization, Diane Lawson is the former "chairman" (her term) of Georgia Heritage, the Georgia chapter of a conservative, parachurch advocacy organization, and Carol Hughes is a community activist who served on the Atlanta city council.[187] These interview participants tell stories about themselves that negotiate diverse sources of their moral formation (e.g., religious community, political culture, racial, ethnic, and gender identities, etc.), arrange, prioritize, and work out tensions between normative commitments, and render their activism intelligible. Political identity as it is constructed in the context of personal narrative illuminates and motivates political agency. Thus, personal narrative mediates political identity and political agency in an important way.

By the end of the second section of this chapter, then, I will have explored the relationship between political identity and political agency through the lens of personal

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[185] See n. 39 above.

[186] See n. 40 above.

[187] The names of my participants are pseudonyms. I have also altered all indentifying information to disguise my participants' identity. For more on my rationale here, see Appendix A.

I use the term "chairman" to describe Diane Lawson's leadership position her organization. I understand that this is a gendered term, but it is the one that Diane and her organization use to describe that position.

narrative. In the third section, I draw on the ethnographic research presented in the second section to dispute a dominant theological framing of the interrelationship of narrative, political identity, and moral agency.

Some Christian theologians in the North American context have been very interested in the relationship between narrative, theological reflection, and moral formation. Narrative theology, notably advanced in the U.S. context by Yale theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, sought to reclaim intra-textual patterns of biblical interpretation and moral meaning that were standard interpretive framings before the modern period. According to these theologians, historical-critical biblical hermeneutics, the dominant hermeneutical paradigm since the nineteenth century, attenuated the normative claims of Scripture through extra-textual interpretative framings. Over against the historical-critical approach, Yale theologians advocated "realistic" readings of the biblical text – readings, that is, that approach the biblical narrative with a view to understanding how it shows the reader the way to live life before God.[188] This project began a tradition of theological reflection known as narrative theology. While narrative theology no longer receives as much sustained attention as it did in the 1970s and '80s, the treatment of narrative that began at that time still motivates the work of Duke University theologian Stanley Hauerwas and the school of thought that has grown up around him.

Hauerwas is interested in the ways in which Christian communities are formed in and through the narrative of God's enduring presence with God's creation, articulated in

[188] For a helpful summary of narrative theology as a method of theological understanding, see Elaine L. Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005), 78-108. See also Hans W. Frei, George Hunsinger, and William C. Placher, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the stories of Israel and Jesus Christ. Narrative for Hauerwas is both a fundamental hermeneutical and ontological frame. Narrative, in other words, not only constitutes the form of practical and theological rationality; it also constitutes the very form human life takes when lived in response to God's work in the world. To live such a life, according to Hauerwas, is to conform our story to God's story.

Hauerwas also develops his enthusiastic criticisms of modernity in general and modern secular polities in particular in relationship to his work on narrative. The problem with modernity for Hauerwas is that it has excised meaningful narratives out of our moral experience. The modern insistence on individual autonomy and agency means that no narrative in particular structures our lives. The "sovereign self" of modernity, in Hauerwas's term, is supposed to be able to choose what kind of life she will lead. By the same token, modern lives lose connection to any intelligible history: the modern self has no beginning, no ending, no corporate stories that explain why the self should pursue certain goods in community with other selves. Hauerwas argues that violence is the inevitable result of lives that are not meaningfully bound to others in the context of a shared and morally relevant narrative. Hauerwas encourages the church to be an "alternative polity," in which persons are bound together in the context of a coherent narrative, and thereby stand over against the violent politics of the world. Only in the church, a community of persons that live their lives together into God's story, is it possible to explore practices of forgiveness and reconciliation that resist violence.

For Hauerwas, Christian discipleship is finally about conforming our story to God's story. To be sure, Hauerwas has certain figures in mind who exemplify what this

process of conformation looks like – Christians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer[189] and Jan Vanier.[190] But because he is suspicious of Christian involvement in secular politics, Hauerwas hasn't to my knowledge explored in a sustained way the narratives of Christians like Steve and Wanda who labor in the secular polity. In this chapter, I explore some of these narratives to see how activists conform their story to God's story. I conclude that the problem with Hauerwas's account of narrative is not that he takes it too far but that he doesn't take it far enough. Hauerwas doesn't think that Christians ought not participate in secular politics. But he does think that when Christians *do* participate in secular politics, they will bear witness to alternative moral logics of forgiveness and reconciliation. These alternative moral logics form an identity that stands over against worldly logics of violence and coercion. In short, Hauerwas doesn't think that Christian identity can be formed relevantly through engagement with the world. But my examination of the personal narratives of Christian activists suggests the contrary: In the stories they tell about themselves, activists negotiate different sources of their moral formation (of which religious formation is but one) that come into conflict in the morally ambiguous settings of political life.

The third section exposes another disagreement I have with Hauerwas, one I won't be able to resolve until I propose my own theological framing of political engagement in the last chapter. My disagreement with Hauerwas turns on two related criticisms of his position: (1) that faithful moral formation only happens in the context of the Christian narrative; and (2) that faithful narrative formation is marked by narrative coherence, or "unity," to use Hauerwas's term. First, I'll show that personal narratives

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[189] Hauerwas writes extensively on Bonhoeffer in his book *Performing the Faith*.

[190] A number of essays in Hauerwas's volume with Romand Coles *The Radical Ordinary* deal with Vanier.

negotiate different sources of moral meaning to elaborate a political identity, in part by using the terms of each to interpret the others. Narratives, in other words, bring interpretation to bear upon those sources. For Hauerwas, properly formed selves – selves whose moral agency is borne of a coherent moral formation – will learn to construct their identity in unison with the narrative of the Christian tradition. But the interaction between personal narrative and Christian narratives is characterized by conformation rather than mutual interpretation.

Second, coherence is a problematic criterion with which to evaluate biographical narratives. The personal narratives of the interview participants whom I present here are clearly stylized, in the sense that interview participants work actively to shape the presentation of themselves within the context of narration my interview format occasions. They're putting their best foot forward, in other words, through their personal narrative. Style in this sense effects a kind of thin coherence, which, when pushed, is easily exposed as logically incomplete or problematic. But in terms of the moral work personal narratives do, their thin coherence, or even partial incoherence, doesn't necessarily constitute moral immaturity or bad character. Personal narratives are moral arguments in progress that help people move along in their lives. They also confirm what sociologists, psychologists, linguists, and philosophers who are interested in narrative constructions of identity think about these matters: the stories we tell about ourselves to others are conditioned by social and cultural contexts. We present ourselves differently in different contexts. And yet exactly this sensitivity to the contexts in which we perform narratives of the self is indispensable for exercising moral agency. None of this should suggest, I

argue, that persons are necessarily being disingenuous in the way they fashion personal narratives.

It is important to note at this point that my work in the third section of this chapter will not constitute a decisive argument against Hauerwas. Hauerwas will respond on theological grounds that faithful Christians imagine that a formation of human community is possible, and that formation departs radically from the moral formations of the self the modern world offers. Faithfulness *just is* a patient waiting in and for this alternative formation. Thus, for Hauerwas, simply showing that some Christian activists negotiate the moral logics of power and violence through narrative constructions of themselves will only beg the question about the meaning of faithful moral formation.[191] Moreover, he will be suspicious that the premise on which I conduct this whole exploration – that individuals possess a measure of agency allowing them to be authors of their own narratives – merely reinforces the modern conception of the self, the "sovereign self," as Hauerwas calls it, which he wishes to challenge. In the dissertation's conclusion, I argue on theological grounds that the ongoing construction of the self in continuous engagement with the world, which is fundamental to the political vocation, shows the way in which God works to redeem creation. That argument, which this one prepares, will, I hope, constitute a decisive response to Hauerwas.

Why dwell at length on Hauerwas's work on narrative? While Hauerwas has distanced himself from the sustained engagement with narrative that occupied his earlier work, his analysis of narrative has been and continues to be an important part of his work

[191] This is another iteration of the tension between describing selves are formed and recommending how they ought to be formed. I am mostly doing the work of thick description in this chapter. I juxtapose that thick description to Hauerwas's normative framing of the self, and use the former to complexify the latter. I will not, however, offer an alternative normative argument about the political self and its formation until the dissertation's conclusion.

on the formation of Christian persons and communities. That work also constitutes the foundation of Hauerwas's critique of modernity in general and political liberalism in particular. This constellation of arguments has been tremendously influential on recent Christian thinking about Christian participation in secular political life.

With Hauerwas, I think that narrative is a primary medium in which persons construct political identity and thereby supply their exercise of political agency with both motivation and intelligibility. But the narrative structure of identity looks much different in my view than it does in Hauerwas's, and it issues in a much less antagonistic treatment of Christian participation in secular political life. To claim a different conception of the relationship between narrative, identity, and agency, and to unsettle the dominant theological critique of modernity Hauerwas's work represents (and which is deeply connected to his treatment of narrative), an extended engagement with his work is in order here.

I. Political Identity, Agency, and Personal Narrative

How should we understand the link between political identity and personal narrative? Recall that by "political identity," I mean a person's interrelated understanding of who they are in relationship to political communities and what they ought to do in service to them. It includes the sources of one's moral formation (e.g., church community, political culture, ethnic heritage, gender identities, etc.), the fundamental moral commitments generated as a result of such formations, and, in light of these, a sense of what one ought to contribute to political communities, how one ought to do it, and what kind of life one will live as a result. Here I want to suggest that political

identity is constituted in and through forms of ongoing personal narrative – the stories that persons tell about their lives. Moral commitment, in other words, is inextricably bound up in the narrative construction of the self.

Social scientists who study the connection between identity and narrative often use the term "narrative identity" to describe the process by which persons construct understandings of themselves through personal narrative. Narrative identity, rendered in personal narratives, constitutes a fundamental context in which political identity is constructed. In this section, I examine this category in detail. Let me say, first, which debates I'm avoiding in my engagement with the category of narrative identity.

There is an ongoing debate in some philosophical literature about the nature of what is called "personal identity." These debates are concerned with questions about the diachronic integrity of identity – whether or not Smith at time *x* is the identical person at some later time *y*. Narrative is an important analytical category in these debates.[192] While these discussions are not irrelevant to my work here, I'm not as interested in philosophical explorations of the integrity of personal identity over time. Rather, my focus is on the way in which persons construct their identity both *in* and *across* time. That is, I'm more interested to know what goes into the construction of identity in the stories people tell about themselves. To that end, I have found work on narrative and

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[192] The notion of narrative identity in these discussions is used in an attempt to argue that personal identity is a normative, not a metaphysical matter. That is, philosophers like Christine Korsgaard have argued that personal identity has integrity because of the necessity of confronting normative problems over time, not because, as philosophers like Derek Parfit have worried, of some metaphysical condition that ensures a person is identical to herself over time. Narrative in these discussions is an important analytical category because narrative is the context in which persons construct personal identity in order to confront practical problems in their lives and thus create integrity in personal identity over time. See Korsgaard's work in Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," in *Personal Identity*, ed. Raymond Martin and John Barresi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003). Philosophers have more recently used Korsgaard's work to explore the connection between narrative, identity and human agency. See e.g. Kim Atkins and Catriona Mackenzie, eds., *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

identity in the social sciences, particularly in psychology and sociology, to be helpful.

The psychologist Dan McAdams situates his work in the field of “narrative psychology.” McAdams defines narrative identity in this way: “Narrative identity is the internalized and changing story of your life that you begin to work on in the emerging young adult years.”[193] McAdams thinks that storytelling is a fundamental dimension of human knowing.[194] He argues that as people move into adolescence and adulthood, they begin to understand themselves in terms of stories they tell about themselves. Life stories contain “key self-defining scenes or moments,” which McAdams calls “nuclear episodes.”[195] Nuclear episodes are concomitant with the development of “imagoes,” character types that give shape to a person’s sense of her own agency and her relationship with others. From his work collecting and analyzing life stories, McAdams defines several imago types, some of which are more strongly oriented to a sense of personal agency and others to a sense of community.[196]

While human psychology is such that identity is constructed in narrative, McAdams argues that the form our life stories take and the characters that populate them

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[193] Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 84.

[194] McAdams in his book *The Stories We Live By* writes: “Human beings are storytellers by nature. The story is a natural package for organizing many different kinds of information. Storytelling appears to be a fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others” (27). Later he writes: “Because of the nature of our minds, we are impelled as adults to make sense out of lives in terms of narrative” (124). Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: W. Morrow, 1993).

[195] Dan P. McAdams, "A Psychologist without a Country, or Living Two Lives in the Same Story," in *Narrative Identities: Psychologists Engaged in Self-Construction*, ed. George Yancy and Susan Hadley (London ; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 124.

[196] He summarizes imagoes as follows: “Narrators split themselves (the me) into different characters in the story, constructing multiple idealized personifications of the self, which I called *imagoes*. Imagoes themselves may be high in agency (e.g., ‘the warrior,’ ‘the sage’), high in communion (‘the lover,’ ‘the caregiver’) high in both agency and communion (‘the healer,’ ‘the peacemaker’) or low in both agency and communion (‘the escapist,’ ‘the survivor’). The imagoes enact plots against a backdrop of personal beliefs and values, especially those drawn from religion, which I called the story’s *ideological setting*. Looking to future chapters, narrators often spell out how they will have a positive impact on the world and leave and enduring legacy, what I called a *generativity script*.” Ibid., 124.

are given in the social contexts that form us. In his recent work, McAdams argues that in the U.S. context, the life stories of adults who are "highly generative" – adults who are invested in leaving a legacy to benefit future generations – tend to feature storylines about redemption. Redemption stories explain how these adults feel especially chosen to make some contribution to society. They also include Fall narratives: the subjects of redemption narratives falter in some way, they are redeemed, and finally they follow through on making said contributions.[197]

I don't propose here to carry out an analysis of my study participants along the lines McAdams would prescribe, although such an analysis would surely be interesting. I mention McAdams because his work is paradigmatic of social scientific scholarship on narrative and identity in that it pays attention both to the agency persons exercise in the construction of their own identities and also to the social and institutional contexts in which projects of identity construction are carried out. In other words, models of identity analysis like the one McAdams has developed are attentive both to individual agency and social context. Some models, like McAdams's, focus on the narrator and the structure of the story,[198] while others focus on the social and institutional contexts in which identity is constructed.[199]

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[197] This is the argument of McAdams in *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*.

[198] William Labov has done pioneering work in the analysis of the linguistic structure of personal narratives. See William Labov, *Language in the Inner City; Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972). See also William Labov, "Uncovering the Event Structure of Narrative," in *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 2001: Linguistics, Language, and the Real World: Discourse and Beyond*, ed. Deborah Tannen and James E. Alatis (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001).

[199] Three interesting examples of the latter are Carole Cain, "Personal Stories: Identity Acquisitions and Self-Understanding in Alcoholics Anonymous," *Ethos* 19, no. 2 (1991); Rebecca Anne Allahyari, *Visions of Charity: Volunteer Workers and Moral Community* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and Nancy T. Ammerman, "Religious Narratives in the Public Square," in *Taking Faith Seriously*, ed. Mary Jo Bane, Brent Coffin, and Richard Higgins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Cain looks at the way in which persons who participate in Alcoholic's Anonymous learn to understand themselves as recovering alcoholics through the categories supplied by

Moreover, many analytical models in the social sciences assume some version of a constructivist epistemology, which understands identity to be shaped by (but not reducible to) the many contexts in which persons are formed.[200] A constructivist analysis of personal narrative attempts to understand how and to what extent persons exercise agency as narrators of their own story within the many constraints that social and institutional contexts put on them. Kenneth and Mary Gergen, for example, argue that the self is not simply a performer of pre-existing, socially constructed roles that she passively plays.[201] Rather, they write:

> [the self-narrative] may be viewed as a construction undergoing continuous alteration as interaction progresses. The individual in this case does not consult the narrative for information. Rather, the self-narrative is a linguistic implement constructed and reconstructed by people in relationships, and employed in relationships to sustain, enhance, or impede various actions.[202]

On this view, narrators are always working within and upon socially constructed conditions that both provide resources with which persons construct identity through narrative and also put constraints upon that process.

Scholars have different ways of characterizing these conditions. First, narratives are conditioned by a determinate narrative structure. That is, narratives have a plot with a

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AA. In an analysis of volunteers at two organizations, Allahyari explores the construction of moral selfhood in a process she calls "moral selving." Moral selving happens in the interaction between the institutional contexts in which charity is performed and the personal history that persons bring to volunteer work. Ammerman examines narratives of religious citizens engaged in different forms of political work to show that their self-understandings map roughly onto the theological identities of the religious traditions of which they are a part.

[200] Swan and Linehan describe the constructionist view in this way: "[A] constructionist view of self and identity, that is, we assume that understandings of the world, including ourselves, are the product of social processes." Davina Swan and Carol Linehan, "Positioning as a Means of Understanding the Narrative Construction of Self: A Story of Lesbian Escorting," *Narrative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2000), 405.

[201] Erving Goffman in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* famously argued that the self is a performer of socially constructed dramatic scripts. In Goffman's work, the self has minimal agency in reconstructing socially given roles, for it is the very familiarity of a performed role that makes it intelligible to others. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959).

[202] Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary M. Gergen, "Narratives of the Self," in *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 163.

beginning, an end, and a serial account of what happens in between. They also have a setting; a cast of characters of varying significance in the context of the plot, including main characters; events in the plot that problematize matters for the main characters and therefore make the story worth telling; and some implicit or explicit evaluation of the story.[203]

External conditions, secondly, structure the occasion and reception of narratives. People learn how to tell well-constructed stories about themselves as they are formed within and across social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Moreover, these contexts provide genre types that an audience will recognize as legitimate narrative forms. Genre, in other words, not only structures the ways people relate narratives but also how they understand them.[204] These contexts also determine what will count as a convincing narrative plotline. Particular plotlines carry authority in particular places, as in McAdams's work on redemptive stories in the US context, noted above.[205]

Narratives of the self are always occasioned in some way and told to some audience. Social, cultural, and institutional contexts dictate not only which stories will be

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[203] According to Labov (1972), a "fully-formed narrative" will have the following features:

1. Abstract: A brief summary of the narrative;
2. Orientation: A scene-setting and character introduction account;
3. Complicating action: An unsettling event to which the characters have in some way to respond. The complicating action also explains why the story is worth telling at all.
4. Evaluation: Some indication of the point of the narrative;
5. Result or resolution;
6. Coda: An indication that the narrative is finished.

Labov, *Language in the Inner City; Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, 363 ff.

[204] He writes: "Genres seem to provide both writer and reader with commodious and conventional 'models' for limiting the hermeneutic task of making sense of human happenings – ones we narrate to ourselves as well as ones we hear others tell." Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 14.

[205] Margaret Somers uses the term "public narrative" to describe narratives that are authoritative in certain cultural and social contexts: "Public narratives are those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro- or macro-stories about American social mobility, the 'freeborn Englishman,' the working-class hero, and so on. Public narratives range from the narrators of one's family to those of the workplace (organizational myths), church, government, and nation." Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity," 619.

convincing to which audiences, but also whose narrative will be heard and on which occasions narratives will be appropriately related.[206] Examples of occasions are public speeches, casual conversations with friends, confessions, and sessions with a counselor. Occasions created by innumerable kinds of social practices give persons an opportunity to tell stories about themselves. They also inevitably come with strings attached. Narrative occasions are laden with power dynamics, role expectations, narrative grammars, etc.

To what extent, then, do persons exercise agency within conditions that both make possible and constrain the construction of identity in and through narrative? Some social scientists analyze the narrator's agency in terms of what they call "positioning." Psychologists and linguists use positioning theory to analyze how people craft narratives of the self within constraints of the sort I mentioned above. Positioning theorists argue that narrators are aware of these constraints and carefully negotiate them in crafting narratives.[207]

Interviews of the sort I conducted with my research participants constitute one

[206] Judith Butler explores these matters in her treatment of moral philosophy in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. In this work, Butler explores the paradoxical operations of power at work in narrative accounts of oneself. She notes that constraints on self-presentation, rooted in external power dynamics, condition the way in which people present themselves to others. But they are also the very conditions under which we are intelligible to ourselves – we can't step outside of these when we narrate ourselves to ourselves. Butler explores the implications of this insight for philosophical ethics. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

[207] Two interesting examples of positioning analysis are Steven Stanley and Michael Billig, "Dilemmas of Storytelling and Identity," in *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, ed. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004); and Swan and Linehan, "Positioning as a Means of Understanding the Narrative Construction of the Self." Stanley and Billig analyze the interviews of doctoral students to show how students carefully negotiate their position in the often ambiguous liminal space between student and faculty member. On the one hand, doctoral students are beginning to craft their own careers and identities as academics. On the other hand, they are still working under the direction of their advisors and the financial support entailed in that relationship. Thus, doctoral students have carefully to negotiate the presentation of their own success and agency in order both to recognize contributions to projects while also giving due respect to their advisors. Swan and Linehan examine the story of a lesbian escort to show how she negotiates social norms about sexuality and professional identity.

such occasion. McAdams examines the normative structure of the research interview. Interview participants, he writes, come to his interviews with "implicit knowledge" about what is supposed to happen in them:

> They know that the interviewer wants something akin to the 'truth' as they, the narrator, understand it. They know that the interviewer wants to know who they are, how they came to be, and where their life may be going in the future. They see their role as that of the subject of a biography. People have read or seen biographies on television. They are conversant in the norms of the genre – that they should tell about how things began in their lives, for example, that they should tell how things developed as well as remained the same, that they should identify heroes and villains, high points and turning points, that their lives should seem to be going somewhere. People have stories about these kinds of issues – stories that are different from the ones they might tell when trying, say, to woo a lover, or get a job, or pass the time waiting in line at the Wal-Mart.

McAdams concludes that narrative identity always results from a process of co-construction. In the interview, a project of construction happens between the interviewer, who creates a normed occasion for a narrative to be performed, and the interview participant, who brings "a wealth of images, metaphors, and accounts at their disposal – narrative resources that they have" into the interview setting and then appropriates them according to the norms of the occasion. "What results is not 'the-one-and-only' life story a person 'has' – the 'true' story behind all the other performances," McAdams writes, but a particular version of a narrative identity that is appropriate to the occasion in which it is related.[208]

As I argued above, my interviews with Steve, Wanda, Amanda, Diane, and Carol have to be understood not as an objective report of their identity as it "really is," but rather as a particular kind of performance in a particular context. I have the suspicion, for which I have no hard evidence, that seasoned activists – and these four have all done

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[208] McAdams, "A Psychologist without a Country," 128-129.

activist work throughout their professional lives – are especially skilled at narrating their identity for different audiences and in different contexts.[209]

Wanda's narrative provides an example. The tradition of community organizing to which Gamaliel belongs values, as I mentioned above, building power through building individual relationships. To this end, Gamaliel and other organizations that come out of the Alinsky organizing tradition train their members to conduct what are called "one-to-one relational meetings." In these one-to-one meetings, two conversation partners are supposed to narrate their life stories, giving particular attention to the episodes in one's life that account for one's interest in and motivation for the work of the organization.

In one monthly Gamaliel leadership meeting, Wanda led participants in a one-to-one exercise in which members conducted short one-to-one meetings with one another, rotating around a circle like a speed-dating session. I happened at one point to be paired with Wanda, and she shared a short version of her story that was very much like the longer version that she developed in out interview: It included the piece about Gandhi, the story of the week long training, and an account of her goals at Gamaliel. That experience helped me to see that Wanda's story is well rehearsed, and it needs to be since it is an integral part of her work. And I suspect that well-rehearsed life stories come in handy for the other participants as well.

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[209]On the skillful ways in which political figures use personal narratives to do political work, see Alessandro Duranti, "Narrating the Political Self in a Campaign for U.S. Congress," *Language in Society* 35, no. 4 (2006).

Social movement theories, which are focused on the sociological dynamics of a group of activists rather than the lives of individuals, suggest a correlation between the ability of movement participants to narrate their stories in light of the identity and aims of the movement and the movement's capacity to sustain itself over time. See for example James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Beyond the setting of the research interview, one could carry out a detailed analysis of all five of my interviews to show how the participants position themselves within stories they've learned from other contexts in order to tell their own story. I won't do that here, since ultimately I'm only interested in pointing to the complexity of the construction of identity in narrative. Were I to carry this analysis through, I would point to Wanda's appropriation of the language and ideology of Gamaliel organizing to give an account of her own sense of empowerment. I would also attend to the narrative arc of Steve's story, which is very much a tale of self-improvement, an account of the things he learned that enabled him both to confront the challenges of political life while also remaining faithful to his conscience.[210]

Narrative contexts and resources, then, condition narratives of the self. Activists tell stories about themselves to make sense of their work and the kind of moral conflicts they encounter there. If one pushes hard enough, one usually finds that personal narratives do not completely resolve the tensions they address. Recall that I prodded Wanda about the tension between using power to build community and using power instrumentally, sometimes at the expense of community building. Wanda didn't seem to have a way of resolving this tension completely. But her personal narrative makes clear that in the whole context of her moral experience, this problem simply isn't important enough to threaten the most fundamental insights about God and political life her narrative explores. Personal narratives, in short, don't work to resolve all problems that people encounter in the moral life. Rather, narratives make important tensions intelligible to the person who experiences them. As narrative theorist Jerome Bruner

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[210] To anticipate the narratives below, the dialectical shape of Amanda's story relates her merger of a particular Christian worldview with humanist commitments that she learned later in life. And elements of Diane's story tie it to recognizable forms of an evangelical conversion narrative.

writes: “[The] object of narrative is to demystify deviations. Narrative solves no problems. It simply locates them in such a way as to make them comprehensible.”[211] This feature of personal narrative is indispensable for Christian political activists who are formed in and work across different and sometimes competing contexts of moral meaning, each of which vies to determine a person’s political agency.

The sense-making quality of personal narrative brings us back to Weber’s stand. Recall that Weber helps us to understand the complexities of political vocation in modern societies. The stand is a moment of unresolved and irresolvable tension as well as inevitable loss, since the stand is the moment in which competing moral logics come into intractable conflict. In the stand, those who would pursue a political vocation must simply decide and live with the consequences. Narrative, it might be said, helps activists both to take a stand and to live with its consequences.

Thus, Wanda has a way of talking about the instrumental power she wields in the context of community organizing that comes into conflict with her aspirations to build power relationally. Steve, similarly, has a story to tell about how he negotiated competing goods in his encounter with the Paducah city fathers. A pessimistic view might be that personal narrative simply rationalizes the moral decisions these activists have made. The aim of rationalization is to resolve tension by absolving a person of their responsibility. But one senses that Steve and Wanda are not trying to absolve themselves of moral responsibility. Their narratives make tensions intelligible by rendering them in a larger context that gives rich, biographically situated explanations for why they do what they do.

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[211] Jerome Bruner, "Self-Making and World-Making," in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self, and Culture*, ed. Jens Brockmeier and Donal A. Carbaugh (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Pub., 2001), 31.

So far, I have been exploring social scientific approaches to the study of narrative to indicate the complex conditions under which narratives are constructed, rehearsed, and efficacious. In this exploration, I have made the claim that identity is constructed in and through personal narratives. In that process, narratives provide a context in which the exercise of moral agency in particular ways is given warrant and its deficiencies explained or at least rendered intelligible. The next section presents three more narratives. These narratives provide extended examples to clarify the arguments I've made so far.

II. Three Narratives: Amanda Bostwick, Diane Lawson, and Carol Hughes

Amanda Bostwick[212]

Amanda Bostwick was in the mid-2000s the executive director of CARE an Atlanta-based organization that advocates policy related to HIV/AIDS treatment in the Southeast.[213] Amanda moved to Atlanta to begin work on a theological degree. For 15 years, she managed her own consulting business, which assisted the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration in its implementation of the Ryan White CARE Act.[214] Amanda paused her long career in service to and advocacy for persons with HIV/AIDS to engage in more sustained theological reflection on her work.

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[212] The source material for this section is from my interview with Amanda Bostwick, July 24, 2007 and December 12, 2007, unless otherwise noted.

[213] I rely here on a 2008 article published online in the *Southern Voice*, which examines the closing of the Atlanta-based HIV/AIDS advocacy organization to which I have given the name "CARE" as a pseudonym (accessed October 29, 2009). I cannot give exact bibliographic information without disclosing Bostwick's identity.

[214] For biographical information on the person to whom I have given the pseudonym "Amanda Bostwick," I rely on an online article that appeared in 2006 in the *Southern Voice* (accessed October 29, 2009). I cannot give exact bibliographic information without disclosing Bostwick's identity.

Amanda told me that her work has always been steeped in ambiguity and tension, and CARE is no exception. HIV/AIDS care and treatment have been from the beginning articulated in terms of a medical-scientific "discourse," because, she said, we empower that way of talking about health care. But this scientific discourse tends to exclude the perspectives of the very people who rely on it for survival. The story is the same with legislation around HIV/AIDS issues: Legislators historically have not paid attention to the stories of those who live with the condition because the legal discourse does not include them. So, CARE began, in part, with the realization that persons with HIV/AIDS need to be advocates for themselves if they want medical and legal institutions to respond to them in ways that value their experience.

Amanda learned early on to negotiate different discourses. Her father, a preacher in the Church of Christ (Anderson, IN) and her mother, a nurse and public health official, negotiated those two languages in dinner table conversations about needy parishioners. Now Amanda understands her work as an ongoing process of negotiation and translation between medical, scientific, political, and theological discourses about sickness in general and the experience of living with HIV/AIDS in particular. These discourses frame sickness in ways that are often in tension with one another or are even incommensurable. Amanda understands these tensions to constitute a "creative" context for theological reflection.

In my interview with her, I noted Amanda's thoughtful narration of her own identity, particularly with respect to her ability to negotiate different discourses. This part of her story, she suggested, goes all the way back to her family context to which her mother brought an expertise in public health and her father a pastoral sensibility. I asked

Amanda how it is that she has so carefully explored her self-understanding in this way. She responded in two ways. First, she said, the Church of God, Anderson, IN, always had an important place for women in the life and ministry of the church. When Amanda first read about the Women's Movement, she couldn't make sense of the notion of a society that does not fully include women. Amanda's encounter with the Women's Movement initiated reflection on why that might be.

The experience of coming to terms with her identity as a gay person, Amanda said, also occasioned an intentional re-working of her self-understanding. Early on, there were no groups to support gay persons who came out, a process, she said, that requires that persons "intentionally unravel the worldview around [them]." Coming to terms with a worldview that doesn't accept being gay involves a "dramatic unraveling and reconstituting of the self," Amanda said. And this experience, she concluded, provides the "ability to tolerate ambiguity" in the work of policy advocacy. "You can't learn to tolerate ambiguity by reading it in a book," she said.

I wanted to know more about the tension that Amanda noted in negotiating different discourses and worldviews and how she understands that tension as a "creative context" for theological reflection. Amanda's experience of coming to terms with her identity as a lesbian initiated a process of self-reflection. She concluded that being gay made it impossible to stay in the Church of Christ. She left her community of faith and embraced in her study of anthropology (in which she holds a Ph.D.) and what she calls "secular humanism." Secular humanism, Amanda explained, is a worldview that finds irreducible value in human life, albeit without reference to God. This view was to take the place of Amanda's appreciation for Church of Christ holiness.

In this disruption of identity, she said, "you look for a meaningful framework in which to cast yourself." The holiness tradition, Amanda explained, understands the Kingdom of God to refer to a process of sanctification that unfolds within persons. In that theological tradition, "[the] Kingdom of God is in your heart … it has begun [to unfold], and one can witness and testify to that through your actions and how you live." Living "above sin" marks the Kingdom of God as it takes form in the self. But the Kingdom of God is not in evidence in a person whose sexuality is understood to be sinful, according to the Church of Christ (Anderson, IN). Even though Amanda's church rejected her because of her sexual orientation, the concept of the Kingdom of God has remained an important one for her. It is, she said, "the one thing that I hung on to and still cling to today."[215]

Amanda tried to develop a "framework," to use her term, of meaning that reconciled the holiness conception of the Kingdom of God in terms of secular humanist notions about the irreducible goodness of human beings. "It worked for a while," she said. But Amanda found herself asking what finally accounts for this irreducible goodness. She had to make a decision, and it took decades for her to make: "But now, you know, you do, ultimately, have to decide … whether or not there is a God behind that," she said. Amanda decided in the affirmative: "But yes, I mean, for me, yes." The existence of God underwrites the irreducible goodness of creation. And this fundamental framework, in turn, gives meaning to the values of freedom, life, and health that inform Amanda's activism.

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[215] In another segment of the interview, Amanda said: "Also, I think the thing that I carried most with me when I left my original faith community is our Kingdom theology, Kingdom of God theology."

When I asked how she understands freedom, life, and health, she noted first that they are fundamental values in her framework:

> Well, freedom, life, and health … those are three underlying values that interrelate in a set of expectations about life and also a guide for life. There's a practicality in them, John, and there's a visionary component to them, and they are the core way that I have always organized my life and the intersection of my public life and my private life.

Amanda did not so much define these concepts as describe them. She suggested that these commitments depend for their integrity on one another. Freedom, for example, is limited to the extent that free action ought not jeopardize health. This is sometimes an issue, she said, for persons who are coming to terms with their sexuality. When persons come out, they can experience freedom in an entirely liberating way: "There can be a sense of, 'I am free to have sex with whomever I want to as many times as I want to as often as I want to under any conditions I want to.' In other words, 'I'm gay or lesbian, and you are not. You are no longer going to tell me – I'm finally free of the oppression around being a sexual individual.'" Similarly, some people do not value their freedom: "There are folks who do not value their freedom. They value their jobs more than living openly and freely as this, that, or the other." For Amanda, helping people to consider how they might constructively balance these values in relationship to one another is central to leadership in HIV/AIDS advocacy: "But the leadership piece on it is that freedom, life, and health are of value, and that we need to try to pull ourselves up to that on a consistent basis.

Amanda hasn't given up on the project of relating the holiness notion of the Kingdom of God to the humanist values of freedom, life, and health. Indeed, that

question has motivated her theological study at Candler.[216] Amanda understands the "secular humanist" values of freedom, life, and health to have a "fundamentally religious" quality. She is interested in a non-exclusive notion of the Kingdom of God that affirms healthy human life in all of its forms. It has taken Amanda a long time to see a connection between the values of freedom, life, and health and a view of the Kingdom of God that takes the form of Christ in the self: "To understand how life could be a Christological vehicle. Sounds like the transportation industry. In other words that Christ is manifest in these lives and communicating something to us of a Christological, theological nature. That took me 20 odd years to get to."

But Amanda hasn't yet settled on a clear understanding of the relationship between these ideas and even appreciates the ambiguity that "I think there are disjunctures in the discourses of life that you learn to tolerate and ambiguities, John, that you even appreciate. And in ambiguities, is the creative, it's a place of the creative source of life."

Our conversation turned to the advocacy work of CARE. I asked Amanda about its current policy interests, strategies and approaches, and about how the organization does policy work on the ground. CARE is interested increasingly in issues around the "efficacy" of HIV/AIDS treatment and care. Amanda already established in the interview that she understands that the complexity of HIV/AIDS advocacy can be addressed in terms of any number of discourses – medical/scientific, theological, social-scientific, etc. One needs to understand, she said, that there are people from all over the state in the Georgia Legislature, and they come with different backgrounds, political

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[216] Amanda says: "I think I'm trying, one of the things I'm doing in seminary is trying to define some version of an integrated theology. And I don't have it all together. More importantly, I no longer feel the need for everything to perfectly integrate."

views and experience, religious identities, education, and understandings about issues. For example, there are, she noted, an awful lot of legislators with Baptist theological sensibilities. For these legislators, as with any other, she said, it is important to establish what Amanda calls "affiliation" as much as possible. That is, as far as possible, it is important to find an interpretive framework within which the advocate can communicate with legislators. "Debate," she said, on the other hand, doesn't work: legislators don't respond to debate as a form of advocacy.

Legislative victory is important in the work of any policy advocate. But there are also limits to affiliation, Amanda stressed. One does not want to misrepresent one's affiliation with particular points of view or interpretive frames. Such an approach would verge on the "manipulation" of legislators, she said. Of course, some lobbyists are content with manipulation. For Amanda, one must be satisfied with appealing successfully to some legislators some of the time with a view towards building and maintaining relationships. That's because advocacy is a form of "witness" to a set of fundamental commitments involved in an issue. And for Amanda, effective advocacy is the "accumulation of witness and testimony over time."

Diane Lawson

Diane Lawson is the recently retired "chairman" of Georgia Heritage. Georgia Heritage lobbies on behalf of "Judeo-Christian values, principles, and morals," including traditional marriage and family arrangements, school choice, limited government and

taxation, a pro-life agenda, and issues related to personal morality, such as blue laws and anti-gambling.[217] Diane is recognized as a powerful political figure in Georgia politics.

Diane, born Diane Smith, grew up in South Georgia to parents who were both educators. Her father was a principal and her mother an English teacher. Diane was a high school basketball star and an alto, singing along with her siblings in her family's gospel choir. Diane mentioned several times in our interview that her parents held her and her siblings to high standards:

> I was raised in a competitive environment. I was raised to always reach for the top, to do my best. There was room for error, but not much. The expectations were high. My father was not only my basketball coach through junior high, but he was also my school principal. My mother was my English teacher. So, you know, it was incumbent upon me to perform and to perform well.

Diane said her parents were fair, but when she broke the rules, there were consequences. "I would be sitting in the classroom writing, however many times my dad had assigned me, it could go anywhere from 500 to 1,000 depending on the infraction."

Diane notes that her family environment fostered deep respect for the notion that genuine freedom is possible only in obedience to rules and, in particular, to God's law. The commitment to obedience continues to inform her sense of religious duty as well as her political philosophy. Reflecting on the times in her childhood when she had failed to be obedient, she says: "I can look out the window and there were my classmates, playing in the sunshine. If I had been obedient, I would have been outside, you know, playing, instead of being punished."

Now Diane has come to understand her work in politics primarily as a practice of obedience to God's call. God, she says, has called her into service in the "political

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[217] Here I rely on information from the website of the organization to which I have given the pseudonym "Georgia Heritage." I cannot provide exact reference information here without disclosing Lawson's identity.

arena." "And when you're called to something, you don't walk away. You have to be released." It took her some time, and, she says, a lot of long days spent at the capitol when she didn't want to be there, and many years in which her side didn't have enough power to prevail very often. But God "did not call me to be successful, he called me to be obedient," she says. "And that is the essence of why I stayed during those years when we saw so little progress." Diane has come to understand that her father was teaching her an important lesson about the relationship between obedience and freedom: "And then I knew what my dad was trying to get across to me. If I am obedient, then I have more freedom than when I am disobedient." Diane believes that God made her to do this work, and when she does, she becomes the person that God wanted her to be. And this, she is saying, is the only way to be.

A turning point in Diane's life was the experience of being born again. Lawson had gone through a "very painful divorce" in 1977: "I went to bed one night, just crying out, I was miserable, and woke up the next morning, and I knew something had changed. I didn't know what it was, but I found the Bible on the bookshelf, and I could not read enough." About six months later, standing in her kitchen one day, she said, "it just came into my mind, 'You've been born again.'" God inevitably uses our lives as a witness to God, she said, and ultimately God decided to use Diane's talents in politics: "Ultimately, and I could not tell you an exact moment, but I, it came to me, I realized that one way to impact our culture for righteousness was through the political arena because God put the civil magistrates over us and they are to be accountable to us."[218]

[218] The story that Diane tells about her conversion invokes a recognizable pattern, a distinctively evangelical narrative in which God authors successive moments of suffering, humiliation, and redemption. And, as Bruce Hindmarsh points out, this pattern forms at once an essential feature of evangelical identity and also interprets experience in deeply personal ways; it's a narrative form that is at once bestowed on the

From the early 1990s, Diane Lawson rose quickly up the ladder of local politics.[219] At first, she worked as a volunteer in the Fulton County Republican Party. In 1993, Diane attended a conference in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the *National Review*, at which Robert Bork, one of her heroes, was speaking. Energized by the experience, Diane remembers asking God on the way home from the trip to open a way for her to work in political life professionally. "You know, and so, on the plane, coming back that Sunday night, I just told the Lord, I said, 'I know you didn't save me to be a bench warmer.' It turned out that during her trip to D.C., Diane had missed a reception for John Knox, a Republican candidate who was running for governor. She arranged to meet Knox. After a half an hour conversation, Knox, Diane says, was so impressed with her passion that he hired her on the spot to work on the campaign. Ultimately, Knox lost the nomination to Guy Milner, who brought Diane on his campaign in order to bring over all of Knox's support. Milner went on to lose his gubernatorial bid in 1994 to Zell Miller. But Diane ultimately was recruited in 1997 to chair the Georgia chapter of the Christian Coalition, later the Georgia Heritage.

Diane tells a familiar story of an America in decline. After her conversion, Diane immersed herself in the works of conservative luminaries like Gary North, Robert Bork, and Allan Bloom. America was founded as a Christian nation, Diane thinks. But the cultural upheavals of the 1960s evacuated American culture of its foundational, Judeo-Christian values and left relativism in its place: "And then I read [Robert] Bork's *The Tempting of America*, and it gave me an understanding of what had taken place in the

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believer but also constructed by her. See D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 321-349.

[219] I rely here on a 2004 article about Lawson published in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. I cannot give exact bibiliographic information without disclosing Lawson's identity.

sixties, you know, where we had the shift from, a paradigm shift from moral absolutism to moral relativism." The Judeo-Christian heritage on which the country was founded is a neglected legacy:

> But government, we neglected, you know, and I think we thought we could live off the Christian capital of our parents and our grandparents because they left us a wonderful legacy of a Christian nation. And the sixties changed that. And the reason, the reason the sixties was able to happen is because we had been apathetic and complacent and thought it was always going to be the way it was prior to the sixties.

Relativism voids the public sphere of its value center, Diane says, latching onto the work of Richard John Neuhaus. She adds: "The void is going to be, if [the public square] is naked, which it's never been because somebody's morality is going to, you know, to be there, I want it to be a biblical morality." Politics after the 1960s means for Diane a struggle to re-establish the moral dominance of the Judeo-Christian worldview in the American moral experience.

The Judeo-Christian moral order that Diane is fighting to restore is marked by individual reverence for the law of God reinforced by the secular polity. For Diane, persons are free when they are obedient to God's call. They are also free when they are obedient to God's law, for "God's law is the most freeing law there is." Beginning with Moses, God ordained the civil magistrates to create and maintain social order in relationship to divine law: "The paradigm for our government today is in the Old Testament, when Moses was going, I don't know what to do with all these people and God said, you know, 'You get seven men and divide them up,' you know, and so everybody has a voice and you know, if you look at that, if you go back and read that, it's the exact paradigm we have today." Thus, obedient service to God in the political arena means working to ensure that the civil authority is governing according to the law of God. In terms of her own political vocation, Diane "realized that one way to impact our

culture for righteousness was through the political arena because God put the civil magistrates over us and they are to be accountable to us."

Diane uses a lot of war imagery to describe her political work. Politics, she says, is not a "mission field;" it is a "battlefield." "And it's a battle of ideas, it's a battle of philosophy, it's a battle of whose morality is going to prevail. And that's the battle I've been called to fight." She sees herself as a leader who draws on her passion to inspire her army of followers to action: "I would not be effective if I did not have that army, if you will, of soldiers out there, who are willing to respond when I call them to do so, call for them to do so. So, I think that a leader must be, one of the skills must be the ability to inspire, and inspiration, for me, comes from being passionate about what I'm doing."

Politics is a battle, though not one soon to be won. It requires both patience and pragmatism, Diane says. Since politics is a battle of ideas, the primary political activity is debate. "And debates take time," she says. Legislators in Georgia know Diane and what she stands for. She enters every legislative season with an agenda and aims to achieve everything on it, but knows that often she cannot. Diane looks for limited victories, and looks forward to advance her agenda further whenever she has a chance. The "political arena" is a place, in other words, where "pragmatism meets principle." Diane approaches her work by "never losing sight of my ultimate goal, knowing that I may not get there this year. If I can take a bite out of that and move the ball a step forward, then I will do that." Over the years, Diane has won a reputation for doing just that.

Carol Hughes[220]

Carol Hughes is a community activist and former Atlanta city councilwoman. Carol also served in leadership positions for many other service organizations, many of which advocate for child welfare.

Carol traces her lifelong commitment to community activism to her upbringing in Central Georgia. Macon in the 1940s and '50s was, according to Carol, a place in which there was "a huge sort of malaise" with respect to the political issues of the day. Carol attributes this malaise to the post-war context: "I mean, I think people were still being so happy to recover from World War II and be prosperous, and everybody was settling down and having families, and you have [the G.I.] Bill goin' back to school…"

The political malaise of the '40s and '50s in places like Macon, Carol suggests, fueled the anti-communist hysteria culminating in the McCarthy hearings. Carol's earliest memories of television are watching the hearings at an aunt's home in Washington, D.C.: "The Army-McCarthy hearings were on T.V., and that's such a strange thing for a kid – I would have been 11 then – to be watching, really; I guess I was 12 – but we were all caught up, and I mean, it was just this riveting thing that had to do with the future of the country …" Carol's parents and some of their peer group in Macon felt tremendous "dis-ease" about the McCarthy hearings.

Carol's family was liberally minded and politically engaged. Her mother, maternal grandmother, and maternal great-grandmother were all assertive women who worked in local politics and the early Women's Movement. Her father "was by nature very much of an activist." But he found little political outlet, save siding with the

[220] The source material for this section is from my interview with Carol Hughes, May 22, 2008, unless otherwise noted.

Republican party to break the county unit electoral system. On the whole, Carol complains that "there just was no sense of ferment, period." "Normalcy in middle Georgia," Carol remarks, "was not a comfortable place for me. It was just extremely – a stultifying place to be."

That situation changed when Carol began her undergraduate studies at a liberal arts college in Ohio. Carol's college created a learning environment that valued respect, expected that all students participate equally in the life of the school, and, in the early 1960s, nurtured the kind of political ferment Carol had missed Central Georgia: "[Whatever] was in the classroom was also what you were talkin' about outside the classroom, and students were just very caught up in current issues, so I really liked it that there was not that division between school and real life …" For Carol, college life offered a breath of fresh air, an empowering experience for a person who was raised in a family that valued empowered women: "I was extremely happy and felt very liberated. I mean, boy, I tell ya, for me to use the word 'liberated' living in a free country, and my family is not very authoritarian, is just a measure of how terribly – just in a straight jacket I felt, in Macon."

The college's internship program enabled Carol to experiment with psychology as a career path. After a year working in a treatment center for "emotionally disturbed" children, Carol decided that she was more interested in "group dynamics." That interest brought her to the University of Chicago School of Social Work, where she began work on a master's degree. At Chicago, Carol encountered the work of community organizer Saul Alinsky (whose legacy we already encountered in Wanda's story): "We would go and listen to the people [Alinsky] had trained in the Woodlawn Organization because that

was literally right next door to Hyde Park." Carol took a job as a community organizer with Head Start, a brand new initiative of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. She recalls that generous financial support in Head Start's early days made possible significant strides in Chicago: "The Head Start program was just flush, I mean, so we really were able to accomplish some stuff with community organizing because we had mega resources. I mean, there were fine teachers doing that, I was doing the community organizing to get the parents involved."

The late 1960s were an exciting time. With the emergence of the Women's Movement in addition to her work in community organizing, "all my interests are getting reinforced," Carol said. In 1969, she and her first husband moved to Atlanta when Carol's husband took a faculty position at one of Atlanta's universities. Carol and her husband wanted to start a family. With that goal in view, they moved into a house in the Candler Park neighborhood on Atlanta's east side. This move turned out to occasion a momentous career trajectory.

By the early 1970s, low-income neighborhoods south of Ponce de Leon Avenue and east of downtown Atlanta were threatened by the I-485 highway project. I-485 would have connected downtown Atlanta to its eastern suburbs on a path that would go through or lie adjacent to these neighborhoods. Carol's house in Candler Park was affordable, precisely because it was adjacent to land that was being re-zoned for the highway. Their move to Candler Park baffled some of their friends: "Our friends were horrified that we would even go south of Ponce, which they considered blighted and, oh, my God, you know, what's gonna happen with the schools? You might have to go to the public schools, and so forth." But the neighborhoods were already engaged in organizing

projects to oppose highway construction, including the Ponce Neighborhood Coalition (P.N.C.).[221] Carol and her husband were excited to be a part of the effort to sustain Candler Park as a viable neighborhood.

The P.N.C. included the historic neighborhoods of Little Five Points, Inman Park, Poncey-Highlands, Candler Park, and Lake Claire, all of which would have been affected by the highway project. Inman Park, Carol said, was in particular trouble: “Essentially what is now Inman Park would have been effectively obliterated because you would have had a north-south and an east-west expressway, and the amount of land that would have been taken up for that.” The P.N.C. neighborhoods successfully organized a formidable constituency of voters, which included, Carol said, “African-American neighborhoods in the southwest part of the city.” Counterpart organizing projects in the Morningside neighborhood lent strong financial resources and legal support to the effort.

The then mayor of Atlanta, Sam Massell, was very responsive to the grassroots approach the anti-expressway efforts were taking.[222] Carol explains Massell’s interest in these movements in terms of his experience as a Jewish American politician sensitive to the challenge of building electoral support in a city with both a traditional white power base and an increasingly powerful African American constituency:

> Well, we brought our group to the most activist sort of edge – to the attention of [Sam] Massell, who was the mayor – who was himself a liberal – and was very concerned with how to consolidate the votes of inner city neighborhoods because he was Jewish, and he was not at all sure if and when he was gonna be running against a black – it was clear to all the white power structure that it was just a matter of time because of the racial breakdown of the city, and because of the talent in the black community. I mean, clearly, I think, both Ivan Allen who preceded Sam Massell as mayor, and Massell, and really all the white power structure were clear that the kind of [African American] talent comin’ out of Morehouse … I mean, these were people who could be in a national administration; that was understood here. So Massell was really looking at – he was very concerned about where is there a base for me if I want to run for mayor. Well, he had

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[221] The “Ponce Neighborhood Coalition” (P.N.C.) is a pseudonym for an actual neighborhood coalition.

[222] Sam Massell was mayor of Atlanta from 1970-1974.

> followed Ivan Allen who couldn't run again – he'd served his two terms – but because Massell was both liberal and Jewish that's an outsider in the south group. So, of course, he, as a very astute political guy, was looking to build a base.

In the neighborhood coalitions, Massell, Carol was saying, saw an opportunity to ally himself with a formidable and relatively diverse voting constituency.

In 1971, a vacancy opened on the city council "caused by this guy convicted of taking a bribe so he had gone to jail." Massell had to appoint someone to replace him. The P.N.C. saw an opportunity. They knew that Massell was interested in appointing a woman. And the P.N.C. community wanted by all means to prevent a member of the business elite from being appointed, since such an appointee would likely support the expressway projects that threatened the P.N.C. neighborhoods. The P.N.C. community therefore endorsed Carol as its appointee, and Massell was responsive. Carol was appointed in 1971 and than ran successfully in 1973.

Carol credits her appointment to the Atlanta city council both to the emergence of the Women's Movement and the strength of the grassroots organizing effort in the P.N.C. communities. It took the Women's Movement to make it politically viable to appoint a woman in that moment:

> See, that's what I mean about the Women's Movement being that strong. Here was a mayor who sees it as an advantageous to appoint a woman, and that tells you something about the times. That would have been a first; there wasn't that – there had never been a woman elected official at – in the city government. There had been a state governor [Nellie Taylor Ross in Wyoming], but rare, rare.

But it also took a grassroots organizing effort that recognized a possibility and worked hard to turn it into a political advantage: "[Any] number of men could have – would have been equally relevant to this appointment, but this group just lobbied like gangbusters for this vacant seat, which was unheard of, I mean, that kind of grassroots organizing really showed up." In other words, Carol's appointment, as she frames it, was the result not

only of broad social and political change but also the work of local political strategy and calculation.

As city councilwoman, Carol represented the interests of the neighborhood organizations and advanced city planning more broadly. She found that Massell's successor, Maynard Jackson, was very interested in helping the city neighborhoods develop and flourish.[223] Federal monies to support city revitalization projects were in abundance:

> Our tax base was next to Newark, New Jersey, so we were not gonna turn things around for poor communities by ourselves, but see even after Johnson, with his big bucks, came Nixon who had the Law Enforcement Administration Association, that he had huge monies that he was putting into innovative public safety programs. The UDAG, which was the Urban Development Block Grant came in then – big bucks for urban community development.

According to Carol, the city under Jackson's leadership formed partnerships with private investors to renovate the Oakland Cemetery, Piedmont Park, and the Atlanta Botanical Garden.

In 1979, Jackson appointed Carol to lead planning efforts for the City of Atlanta. In 1982, the city passed a comprehensive zoning ordinance, which Carol describes as critical for city planning and neighborhood preservation efforts. The city had already begun to develop a mass transit system. But without a zoning ordinance, there was no provision for the kind of "clustered housing" that makes mass transit viable. "We wanted to use transit as an economic development tool to attract dense developments around those [rail] stations. That's what that new zoning ordinance represented."

Carol views her legislative work through the Jackson administration as "sort of an unbroken series of victories from the standpoint of the kinds of values of me and my friends in these neighborhoods." All of that changed when Andrew Young succeeded

[223] Maynard Jackson was mayor of Atlanta from 1974-1982 and again from 1990-1994.

Jackson as mayor.[224] For Carol, Young represented a "backlash" against Jackson's forceful, often undiplomatic, treatment of business interests that wanted to expand the expressway systems to promote suburban growth. Young immediately sided with the Chamber of Commerce. The days of creative city planning in Atlanta, as Carol describes it, were over:

> He came in and sided with the Chamber on the highways. His first question to me is why do we need zoning? The Texas cities don't have zoning, which he's right, they don't. We think – in Atlanta they – the neighborhood people would say, that's why you have a gas station right next to somebody's house. That's what you get when you don't have zoning, and it's a totally laissez-faire capitalist – those were the values he represented; civil rights and unfettered capitalism.

Under Young, Carol said, the highway system in the greater Atlanta area expanded significantly. The efforts of the neighborhood organizations, which had been so effective during the Jackson administration, languished during the Young years. These organizations found that their only recourse was to fight Young in court, and they did so on environmental grounds.

> By that time the Georgia DOT was so antiquated in the way that it did not observe the requirements for environmental impact statements, that we had a great basis for defeating them about how that right-of-way had been acquired, and how insensitive they'd been, and just how destructive those roadways would be to what was then, at that point, considered a very – very viable neighborhood.

Still, the development of urban neighborhoods suffered during the Young years.

Because her values were so at odds with the mayor's, Carol sensed that it was time to leave city politics. "I no longer wanted to be in city government. I didn't even think about it … [Young] had nothing to offer us." So, Carol went to work in the non-profit sector, where her efforts are still focused today.

When I asked Carol what, if any, theological meaning she makes out of her experiences in political life, she framed her response around a concern for marginalized

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[224] Andrew Young was mayor of Atlanta from 1982-1990.

people and society. Community organizing is for her all about attending to the needs of the marginal. And she credits Saul Alinsky with crafting a set of grassroots political practices aimed at empowering marginalized persons in the political process: "Since Alinsky [organizing] was about marginal people, that was about how do you get the robber barons to give up some of that power and realize that they have gained their power and consolidated it on the backs of the people that they're dependent on, but who are totally left out of public policy."

Carol cites the biblical command to welcome the stranger as a fundamental value that motivates her work in community organizing: "You welcome the stranger; you figure out ways to do that. I mean, that's just part of your religion that you've always heard, you know, as well as anybody who's left out - poor or, whatever." The needs of the marginalized come first. Carol says that she is not interested in questions about whether religion should affect government if that discussion gets in the way of creating partnerships to serve the marginalized:

> I have a tremendous amount of feeling about government serving the marginal well; I will always speak to whether government is doing that because it's my job to help define the marginal as a religious person, and to work on getting their needs met. My church is not gonna be sufficiently effective in doing that. We've got to have … the backing of government in order to address the needs of those particular marginal groups. So that's all I'm saying.

The command to provide hospitality for the stranger means that community leaders must work with whomever or whatever organizations they can in order to best serve the needs of the marginalized. No one institution can sufficiently address those needs. Partnership, then, is a fundamental value for Carol. The public sector must work together with businesses, religious communities, and other organizations in the private sector.

Carol notes the example of St. Francis of Assisi as a figure who poses an alternative to her way of thinking about the good life. St. Francis was, she says, a

"spiritual giant." A few figures in history – "spiritual persons" – are able to live exceptional lives outside the "real world," she thinks. But most people, and she includes herself in that category, do not or cannot lead such an exemplary life:

> [St. Francis], I think, was trying to create an alternative to the 'real world.' He would have wanted people to try to leave that, and maybe bump against it … I mean, he was a person who created a rhythm that the monastic movement has always struggled to figure out; how do we both be of this world and not of this world? Well, that's [not] anything I know how to do.

The other-worldly life that St. Francis exemplified, she was saying, is to be admired. But the "real world" is a rocky place in which, at best, citizens must work together to provide the good life for all.

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Each of these narratives serves to mediate political identity and agency. In the introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that political identity renders the exercise of political agency intelligible, and political agency, in turn, realizes political identity. In the rest of this section, I explore each personal narrative as the context in which these two dynamics are at work.

First, each of these stories shows a complex moral formation in the context of personal narrative that illuminates each person's exercise of political agency. Diane is perhaps the clearest example. For her, a story about moral obligation and duty illuminates a political ethic in which the fulfillment of obligation entails a deep, even militaristic, commitment to God's call. Diane's conception of her obligation to God's call is negotiated through a complex interweaving of many different moral formations: an upbringing in a demanding family, a political education in the works of conservative political theorists and theologians, and an experience of being born again into a personal relationship with God.

Carol's story, like Wanda's, weaves a narrative identity in which her experiences in grassroots community organizing illuminate her Christian commitments to the marginalized, not only in terms of their material needs, but also in terms of her sense that all persons ought to participate in public life. Unlike Diane, Carol's explicit appeals to traditional Christian theological categories are fewer and farther between, although she does consistently frame her work in terms of her commitment to the marginalized. But this commitment holds a fundamental place in her thinking about her own political activism. The story Carol tells about her political education, and her participation in Atlanta city politics, renders intelligible her exercise of political agency, which is concerned to empower persons whose experience in the life of the city is marginalized.

Amanda's narrative, finally, crafts a political identity that re-interprets a particular conception of God's Kingdom in light of her experiences with both the Church of God, Anderson, IN, and her encounter with secular humanism. Amanda's theological anthropology and her ecclesiology together provide a context in which to understand her activism as an ongoing process of negotiating the proper relationship between the values of freedom, life, and health. That negotiation happens in part through complex translations of various discourses around HIV/AIDS (legal, medical, philosophical) in which these values are rendered variously. Amanda's work in treatment, education, and policy advocacy is the outward expression of these intricate negotiations and translations, such that her career parallels her own identity formation.

In sum, Amanda, Diane, and Carol each craft a political identity, understood as a person's interrelated understanding of who they are and what they ought to do in service to penultimate and ultimate political communities. The relevant conceptions of political

communities to which these activists understand themselves to be committed differ to be sure. But they all negotiate moral meaning in terms supplied not only by their religious formation but also in terms of the many formations they encounter in the world. Hence, for example, Carol and Wanda bring moral meaning from their Christian formation into conversation with the political traditions of grassroots community organizing. Amanda and Carol are both very aware of the contributions women's rights movements made to their political education. Diane negotiates a political theology of divine command and human obedience in terms of a particular version of the history and political theory of American conservatism. Amanda's encounter with "humanism" supplies the terms in which she mediates her formation in the Church of God, Anderson, IN. All of these negotiations with different sources of moral meaning work not only to make sense of ultimate commitments but also address the tensions between them and countervailing goods that one encounters in the world.

Second, these personal narratives show how the exercise of political agency realizes political identity. I noticed in the course of analyzing these interviews the way in which my participants used them to explore and explain morally difficult situations. Recall Steve's narrative. He never said it in so many words, but his decision-making in Paducah involved a compromise that accommodated the segregationist concerns of the "City Fathers." In other words, he made a decision that issued in a concrete action, and that action, in turn, requires some explanation. His narrative thickly contextualizes that decision without directly explaining it away. Narrative, then, shows how identity is concretized in action because narrative responds to the implications of action.

Similarly, when I pressed Wanda on the use of instrumental power in grassroots community organizing, at first she told me that the approach aims at building meaningful political relationships inclusive of all stakeholders. Using power against people, Wanda seemed to suggest, merely reinscribes the kind of oppression that she is working against. But then she later admitted that the work she does sometimes appeals to the political force of numbers, which effectively threatens the use of power in a subtly coercive way. Again, Wanda's personal narrative doesn't explain this tension away. But it does address the tension by way of providing context. In short, political actions pose problems for self-understanding, and these are, in turn, addressed in the context of personal narrative.

Narrative, then, is an interesting medium of self-construction and meaning making. It brings sources of moral meaning and experience into conversation with one another, often without seamlessly integrating all of them. Narrative also addresses crises of moral meaning – again, often without fully resolving them. But at least narrative serves to make moral tension intelligible to a person.

So far, I've explored in the first two sections of this chapter the relationship between political identity, political agency, and personal narrative. In the next section, I begin an argument with a dominant theological rendering of moral formation in the context of narrative. I suggest that this dominant theological framing inadequately accounts for the complexities I have explored here.

III. Stanley Hauerwas on Truthful Story, Christian Politics, and the Moral Life

Stanley Hauerwas argues that moral agency is not a matter of identifying a moral calculus that will enable the application of certain rules and principles correctly to solve

moral problems. Nor is moral agency sufficiently described in considerations about appropriate ends of action. Rather, moral agency takes shape as a person is formed in the narrative resources of a particular community, and these resources are constituted in community practices. Such narratives and the practices in which they are extended are rehearsed by communities and take the form of moral traditions over time.

Not just any narrative will do to form moral agency properly, Hauerwas contends, but only a narrative that is truthful. The truthfulness of a narrative is disclosed in the kind of life it produces. As a person is formed in the truthful narrative of a community, she becomes capable of approaching the moral life in a particular way. Judgments about moral agency, therefore, will consist primarily in an account of the trajectory of a person's development in the context of a community rather than a tally of decisions made about particular moral problems.

A well-known polemicist, Hauerwas wields his account of the Christian moral life against competing conceptions that he thinks compromise the integrity of moral formation in the context of community. He is particularly interested to show that the normative frameworks of "modernity" – Hauerwas's catchall term for the historical context commencing in the Western Enlightenment – are pernicious. He makes a constellation of related criticisms of such frameworks, particularly liberal political theory of the sort whose contemporary exponents are John Rawls, Richard Rorty, and others. The primary problem with all of these normative frameworks, Hauerwas thinks, is that they attempt to conceive of the moral life apart from history, community, and tradition. That is, modernist moral theories are so preoccupied to show the primacy of individual moral agency that they are blind to the ways in which the moral life is formed properly

through practices that embody the stories communities tell and enact over time. Modern theories propose that moral agents apply their rational faculties to address the challenges of the moral life. Precisely this rational capacity makes moral agents autonomous.

But because modernity privileges autonomy in this way, shared conceptions of the good life erode. Without a shared normative framework, modern moral agents are frustrated when normative claims inevitably come into conflict. The best modern selves can do is to construct a polity that creates space in which persons can work out their own conception of the good life privately. This, at bottom, is the strategy of liberal political theory. Hauerwas thinks that such a solution is both morally bereft and doomed to issue in violence.[225]

Hauerwas proposes that the Christian narrative, embodied in the practices of the church, is a truthful narrative. The story of God's ongoing presence in God's creation, articulated in the stories of Israel and Jesus Christ, is a story of forgiveness and reconciliation. That narrative is worked out in the practices of the church, Hauerwas thinks. By participating in the life and practices of the church, the stories that persons bring to the church are formed into God's story. The formation itself, Hauerwas argues, evinces its own truthfulness, for it is a formation that makes persons capable of forgiveness and reconciliation, and resistant to the violence that inevitably marks the

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[225] Violence for Hauerwas is the inevitable result of the modern dissolution of storied-formed communities in which moral agents are shaped by and with clear conceptions of the beginning and end of their life (i.e., of history) framed in terms of shared conceptions of the beginnings and ends of their moral life (i.e., of the good). For these reasons, Hauerwas has become increasingly suspicious of terms like "agent" and "agency" because they imply the kind of profoundly distorted normative paradigm of modernity, at the center of which is the autonomous individual. More recently, Hauerwas has decided to stop worrying about agency altogether.

For example, in his book *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas writes: "'Agency' may not be the best notion in which to ground my idea of character, in that it may continue to draw on an ahistorical view of the self, a transcendental self somehow always 'behind' my character, to which I have objected I my criticism of non-qualified ethics." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 39. Hauerwas later gives up talk of agency altogether – in his words, he "learned to quit worrying about agency and love stories," a move that I explain in more detail below. Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth,* 100.

world. The challenge that faces Christians is the challenge of conforming their own story to the story that God tells in and through the church. The moral life, in short, is the working out of this challenge. And Hauerwas proposes that the church, because it is the place in which God's story is worked out, is an alternative polity to the violent polity of the world.

In the rest of this section, I explore in more detail what Hauerwas means by narrative, how he understands it functioning in the Christian life, and why he thinks that a correct understanding of the story-formed character of the moral life shows the moral logics of the modern world to be inadequate. This is a challenging undertaking, in part because Hauerwas is a prolific essayist. However, when one surveys the scope of his work, one finds a number of unifying themes developed throughout. I've tried to characterize Hauerwas's position in a general way here, using footnotes to document continuities and discontinuities in his thought.

Narrative, Rationality and the Formation of Character

The story of Hauerwas's own intellectual formation begins importantly in the 1960s and '70s with the advent of narrative theology in the U.S.[226] I do not intend to give

[226] Already a note of caution about narrative theology is due here: Hauerwas, looking retrospectively at the interest in the connection between narrative and theology, expressed in typical Hauerwasian fashion his dislike of the term 'narrative theology': "I hate all qualifiers to theology other than 'Christian.' Any qualifier other than 'Christian' suggests that someone is trying to highjack Christian theology for their peculiar set of interests or that they are trying to provide a theory about theology that is more determinative than first order theological claims. As I will explain below, I also dislike the description 'narrative theology' because it can suggest that theology is more concerned with narrative than with God." Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith,* 136. In using the term 'narrative theology' here, my only intention is to name in a shorthand way a historical moment (from roughly the early 1970s to the late 1980s) in which certain North American theologians were interested in narrative as a category of theological reflection.

a comprehensive analysis of narrative theology. I wish only to contextualize narrative theology in relation to Hauerwas in particular.[227]

Very roughly, narrative theology explores the fundamentally narrative character of theological claims, thereby challenging the notion that theological claims are merely descriptive of God. Narrative theologians contend instead that theological claims are only intelligible in the context of ambient narratives that belong to the church and its traditions, particularly the biblical narrative. Narratives at once describe and constitute ways of being in the world, responding to the claims God makes upon persons and communities. Narrative theology emphasizes that the condition for recognizing the truthfulness of theological claims is not intellectual assent but commitment to a form of life in which persons respond to those claims even as they learn what they mean. When Christians commit themselves to live faithfully in and through the Christian story, narrative theologians argue, their form of life will be fundamentally different from narratives the world offers. As a truthful way of being in the world, the Christian life will thus be a standard against which the truthfulness of other ways of being in the world will be judged.[228]

In the North American context, interest in narrative theology began with the work of Yale postliberal theologians. H. Richard Niebuhr's account of the relationship

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[227] A useful exploration of narrative theology in North America is the introduction to Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, *Why Narrative?*(Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989). This volume also collects selections from a number of the scholars I mention here in passing.

[228] Gerard Loughlin puts it this way: "”Whatever the case with science, Christian truth has never been a matter of matching stories against reality. It has always been a matter of matching reality-stories against the truth: Jesus Christ. For the Christian Church it has always been a life-story that comes first, against which all other things are to be matched. This life-story is what 'truth' means in Christianity. Nor is this a matter of making up the truth, because it is the truth that makes up the story. The story is imagined for us before it is re-imagined by us: the story is *given* to us. That, at any rate, is the Church's story." Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story : Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23.

between revelation and history, especially in his work *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941)[229] was particularly important, as was the work of Hans Frei on biblical hermeneutics,[230] and George Lindbeck's Wittgensteinian analysis of Christian forms of life.[231] From these thinkers, Yale theology engaged the insights of Karl Barth, emphasizing both the uniqueness and the epistemic priority of the revelation of God. This position, in turn, sets up a critique of the world and worldly attempts to appropriate the story of the church.[232] Theologians such as Hauerwas, David Burrell, Ronald Thiemann,[233] George W. Stroup,[234] James McClendon,[235] and Gerard Loughlin,[236] among others, further developed the category of narrative in theological reflection.[237]

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[229] See especially chapter 2, "The Story of Our Life," in H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006 [1941]). In that work, Niebuhr comes to terms with relativized forms of human knowing. What does it mean, he asks, that human beings claim to know about faith in terms that are descriptive rather than normative, historical rather than revelatory? Niebuhr proposes two perspectives, both necessary, from which to view "the story of our lives," as he calls it. Outer or external history is a mode of knowing that is descriptive. Its data are impersonal. External history is seen history. It abstracts from subjective contexts of meaning, objectifying its subject matter, and measuring it along indices of magnitude, power, and strength. Inner or internal history, on the hand, is lived history, the history of selves in community. Its subject matter is treated personally rather than objectively. And it tells the story of selves in light of community memory that provides indices of quality according to which "our story" can be judged. The church views itself through internal history, but it needs external history to provide a full account of itself (32-36).

Revelation belongs to internal history. For Niebuhr, revelation means "for us that part of our inner history which illumines the rest of it" (Ibid., 50). It involves a decisive event that patterns the way a community understands itself and its world. For Christians, this decisive event is the revelation of God's righteousness, power, and wisdom in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible," he writes (50). Revelation thus provides a pattern for interpreting past, present, and future, or better – the first two from the perspective of the third. Christians "use the life and death of Christ as a parable and an analogy" to understand their experience (66). This pattern works not as a dictionary that provides rigorous explanation at every juncture, but rather like a map or a drama that shows us our way through experience (68).

[230] See e.g. Hans Frei, "Apologetics, Criticism, and the Loss of Narrative Interpretation," 45-64, in Hauerwas and Jones, *Why Narrative?*.

[231] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 1st ed.(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

[232] Gerard Loughlin helpfully situates the legacy of Karl Barth and Hans Frei in relationship to early work in narrativist theology: "Against the prevailing current of modern theology, Hans Frei follows Karl Barth in advocating a diametrically opposed theology, one that seeks to fit the world into the story of God rather than God into the story of the world. Both Barth and Frei believe that such a theology is wholly congruent with the greater part of the Christian tradition, with the theology of the Reformers, the Fathers and the Apostolic writers." Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 34.

[233] Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

Narrative in these accounts has both epistemological and ontological valences. Narrative, in other words, is both the form that our practical reason takes, and the form of life into which we conform ourselves. To show the interrelation between these two claims, perhaps it is better to say: Because our practical rationality takes a fundamentally narrative form, the way in which we understand and relate to possible ways of being in the world will also take a fundamentally narrative form. Thus, what it means to live a moral life is to live into a meaningful narrative. And when one is formed by a story, one acquires by virtue of that formation the capacities necessary both to understand the truthfulness of that story and to recognize the story's limits. I elaborate below both dimensions of narrative and their relationship to one another.

For Hauerwas, narrative is not only one form of practical rationality; it is its fundamental form.[238] Since the Enlightenment, thinkers have sought to ground moral reasoning on an impersonal and purportedly objective conception of rationality,

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[234] George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

[235] James William McClendon, *Biography as Theology : How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).

[236] Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*.

[237] I am admittedly not offering a reading of the narrativist tradition as a whole here. An interesting analysis in this regard is in Francesca Aran Murphy's *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited*. Murphy argues that there are two strands of narrativist theology. One she calls "grammatical Thomism" and the other "story Barthianism," with some hybrid versions between the two. Grammatical Thomism filters through Bernard Lonergan via Anglo-American ordinary language philosophy to figures like George Lindbeck and David Burrell. It explores the limits of theological language, drawing both on Thomistic and Wittgensteinian insights. Narrative is important for grammatical Thomists because it is a genre that displays both the limits and pliability of language in its encounter with God. Story Barthianism is the revelatory disclosure of God through the Christian story, as in the work, e.g., of Hans Frei and Gerard Loughlin noted above. See Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press Oxford, 2007), 27-84.

[238] Stephen Crites's article "The Narrative Quality of Experience" (1971) on the narrative shape of human knowing is an important source for narrative theological reflection. In it, Crites argued that "the formal quality of experience through time is narrative" (26). According to Crites, experience is patterned, and narratives provide basic patterns that help us sort out experience through time. Sacred and mundane stories provide basic forms into which we fit our experience in order to make sense of it – not unlike the way in which action follows patterns that are themselves similar to musical patterns. See Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 26-50.

analogous, allegedly, to forms of scientific reason. This "standard account" of practical rationality, Hauerwas argues, divorces moral reasoning from the particular contexts in and out of which moral reasoning happens.[239] On the standard account, the dimensions of the moral life related to the formation of character become secondary questions of moral education – questions, that is, about how best to prepare an agent to exercise her reason.

For Hauerwas and other narrative theologians, the standard account of practical rationality is inadequate to explain how it is that we come to our moral judgments. Hauerwas and Burrell argue that we are able to make sense of the moral life by virtue of the narrative form practical reason takes. That is, we come to know the "grammar for action" in the moral life precisely because it forms the stories we have learned. Whenever we consider how to act, we are able to weigh the relevant values and principles, understand the persons involved and their stake in a situation, imagine what might happen as a result of one or another decision, etc., because all of these elements fit into narrative structure – a story. Furthermore, a story has a plot that relates all of the relevant elements in the story. The narrative patterning of practical reason thus makes a response to a given situation intelligible. In doing so, narrative functions as the condition for the continuation of the plot, which, in turn, makes future actions in the story intelligible. Narrative, then, shapes persons because it constitutes both the condition of the moral world's intelligibility and the response to it.

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[239] Hauerwas and Burrell write of the standard account: "Thus moral judgments, whatever else they may involve, must at least be non-egoistic in the sense that they involve no special pleading from the agent's particular history, community identification, or otherwise particular point of view to establish their truthfulness." Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics" in Hauerwas and Jones, *Why Narrative?*, 160.

Because narrative is the fundamental form of practical rationality, it is also the fundamental form theological claims take, as theological claims are inherently practical claims. Theological claims on the narrativist view do not primarily assert claims about metaphysical states of affairs, the truth of which is given in the rational assent of believers. Such a view of the epistemic status of theological claims reinforces the modernist epistemology of which Hauerwas and others are so critical. Rather, a focus on the narrative character of theological claims emphasizes that they invite persons to a form of life, a way of being in the world, articulated in the form of stories a community tells about itself. The truth status of theological claims is revealed in the kind of life that persons who affirm them lead. Thus, Hauerwas writes in an early work *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (1977):

> To emphasize the story character of the gospel is an attempt to suggest that examining the truth of Christian convictions is closely akin to seeing how other kinds of stories form our lives truly or falsely … Thus story is a way to remind us of the inherently practical character of theological convictions. For Christian convictions are not meant to picture the world. They do not give a primitive metaphysics about how the world is constituted. Rather the gospel is a story that gives you a way of being in the world. Stories, at least the kind of stories I am interested in, are not told to explain as a theory explains, but to involve the agent in a way of life. A theory is meant to help you know the world without changing the world yourself; a story is to help you deal with the world by changing it through changing yourself.[240]

Theological claims are thus “inherently practical” – they are finally ethical claims, not descriptive claims. That is, they do not describe the way the world is in terms of a “primitive metaphysics;” they are about the way we ought to be in light of the way the world is.

Since theological claims always exist in narrative frameworks and are inherently practical, their primary purpose is not to describe God if such descriptions are not taken to require an ethical response. Rather, the narratives that make up the Christian tradition

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[240] Stanley Hauerwas, Richard Bondi, and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 73.

always already make claims upon persons to live their lives in a particular way. They demand that persons conform their lives – their own stories – to the story that God tells in and through the church. In short, theological claims always call people to a life of discipleship, a life in which persons are preoccupied with living into a particular story.[241] Hauerwas writes: "What it means to be a Christian, therefore, is that we are a people who affirm that we have come to find our true destiny only by locating our lives within the story of God."

The church, in turn, is the ongoing unfolding of God's story through the stories of the people who make up the church: "The church is the lively argument, extended over centuries and occasioned by the stories of God's calling of Israel and of the life and death of Jesus Christ, to which we are invited to contribute by learning to live faithful to those stories." In short, "we become part of God's story by finding our lives within that story."[242] Hauerwas argues that God's story does not "obliterate" the individual stories that are being conformed to it. Rather, God's story "shapes how the story is told, so that it may contribute to the upholding of Christ's body."[243] God's story makes our own part of the life of God in the world. For Hauerwas, the process of conforming our stories to God's story happens in and through the liturgical practices of the church.[244]

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[241] "To be a disciple of Jesus means that our lives must literally be taken up into the drama of God's redemption of his creation." Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 52.

[242] Ibid.,102.

[243] "Our unity is constituted by our inability to tell our stories without one another's stories. It takes time to do that. Indeed, such unity is the way God's patience creates time by providing us the space to have our stories conformed to the story of Christ. Such a conformation does not obliterate our story, but rather it shapes how the story is told, so that it may contribute to the upholding of Christ's body – so that finally our stories will be joined in one mighty prayer. That our unity is so constituted is a great mystery, but here is even a greater mystery: what it means for our lives to confess that Jesus is Lord is that we, finally, are not the tellers of the story of our lives." Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company,* 41.

[244] This formation happens particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist for Hauerwas constitutes the community of Christians as the body of Christ. Citing Milbank, Hauerwas writes: "It is only in Eucharistic celebration that the church is body exactly because there a ritualistic distance

An important dimension of narrative for Hauerwas is the notion of character, the pattern of life that narrative makes possible. Narratives are necessary to the formation of character because narratives make characters intelligible: one can't understand what motivates a character's actions without understanding the ambient narrative, the "whole story" and the "rest of the story." In order to see how all of a character's actions have integrity, one must have a global view of the story in which those actions take place. Thus, character is the name for moral agency intelligible within a narrative framework. But this conception of moral agency is in tension with modernist accounts in which the agent is autonomous, free to determine her own agency.[245]

Narratives shape moral agents into characters who have developed the vision to recognize the truthfulness of claims made by the narrative.[246] Hauerwas thinks that no independent criteria will show the truthfulness of a narrative. Rather, the truthfulness of

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obtains that distinguishes the church from itself … So the answer to the question 'where is the church?' is to found it 'on the site of the Eucharist…'" The "ritualistic distance" that "obtains" in the Eucharist separates church as sociological or theological construct from church as body of Christ, the body polity whose practices and habits separate it from those of the world. Ibid., 29.

[245] In his early work, Hauerwas tried to reconcile character and agency. That is, he attempted to "qualify" the modernist notion of autonomous agency, which he takes to imply the autonomous, rational self, possessed of a dispassionate, dislocated, objective rationality, as construed in the standard account, with a conception of character. On this earlier view, character was supposed to give shape and direction to the agency without undermining the agent's autonomy: "Accordingly, I maintained, in *Character and the Christian Life*, that character is the qualification of our agency befitting our nature as creatures capable of self-determination. I was trying to have my cake and eat it too. That is, I was trying to find a way to sustain an account of moral continuity while not having our lives 'determined' by our character." Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth,* 94.

Now Hauerwas understands character not as a modification of agency but as the form and source of agency: "Our character is not merely the result of our choices, but rather the form our agency takes through our beliefs and intentions. So understood, the idea of agency helps us see that our character is not a surface manifestation of some deeper reality called 'self.' We are our character" (Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 39). Character is "the source of our agency, that is, our ability to act with integrity" (Ibid.).

[246] "Significant narratives produce significant and various characters necessary for the understanding and richness of the story itself." Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 95. Elsewhere, he writes: "The test of each story is the sort of person it shapes. When examples of diverse types are offered to us for our acceptance, the choices we make display in turn our own grasp of the *humanum* … The criteria for judging among stories, then, will most probably not pass an impartial inspection. For the powers of recognition cannot be divorced from one's own capacity to recognize the good for human kind." Hauerwas and Jones, *Why Narrative?*, 185.

a narrative is disclosed in the kind of life it shapes.[247] Through the transformation of the self, the Christian narrative displays its own truth-value. In the same way, Hauerwas thinks, a significant narrative will form people to be able to bring constructive criticism to bear on the narrative that forms them.[248]

For Hauerwas, then, moral formation happens in and through narrative. It confirms both the truthfulness of the narrative itself and the kind of formation it provides. This view resists an account of truth based on some conception of discursive reason. Hauerwas, it seems to me, follows an insight developed by Wittgenstein in the distinction the latter made between showing and saying.[249] A narrative cannot step outside of itself in order to give an account of itself, since a narrative is the condition of its own intelligibility. The truthfulness of a particular narrative formation cannot be said; it can only be shown – it can only be displayed, disclosed, or, to use one of Hauerwas's terms, performed in lives formed by truthful narratives. Thus, Hauerwas came to a point in his

[247] "…I have tried to maintain that it is impossible to distinguish between 'external' and 'internal' evidence as the character of Christian belief requires the transformation of the self in order rightly to see the actuality of our world without illusion or self-deception." Ibid., 304-305. In a *Community of Character*, Hauerwas makes a similar point: "The truthfulness of Christian convictions, therefore, is not dependent on being able to generate a theory of truth that *a priori* renders all other accounts false, or that promises to demonstrate that underlying the differences between people is a deeper and more profound common morality. Rather the truthfulness of Christian convictions resides in their power to form a people sufficient to acknowledge the divided character of the world and thus necessarily ready to offer hospitality to the stranger … the task of Christians is not, therefore, to demonstrate that all other positions are false, though critical questions may often be appropriate, but to be a witness to the God that they believe embraces the truth." Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 94.

[248] "The truthfulness of a tradition is tested in its ability to form people who are ready to put the tradition into question, or at least recognize when it is being put into question by a rival tradition." Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, 14.

[249] Hauerwas touches on these themes in Wittgenstein in his essay "Connections Created and Contingent: Aquinas, Peller, Wittgenstein, and Hopkins" in Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*, 111-134. I return to Wittgenstein's distinction between showing and saying in the conclusion.

own work when he felt it necessary to stop talking about narrative and simply to try to display the truthfulness of the Christian narrative in and through his work.[250]

Many have criticized Hauerwas on the grounds that his account of "God's story" to which persons are supposed to conform their stories is both too abstract and too homogenous. It is too abstract because it is not clear exactly what story Hauerwas is talking about, except that it has something to do with the stories of Israel and Jesus Christ.[251] Hauerwas's account of God's story is too homogenous because it assumes one story of which all Christians are somehow a part and to which they conform their own stories in the project of discipleship. Thus, Hauerwas's view doesn't adequately recognize the diverse ways in which Christians have experienced being Christian throughout the ages. As such, Hauerwas's approach threatens further to marginalize the experiences of Christians whose stories have already been marginalized in order to promote of a dominant account of *the* Christian story.[252]

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[250] "After *The Peaceable Kingdom*, which I believe is my most complete account of why it is important to recognize the narrative grammar of Christian convictions, I seldom have written directly about narrative qua narrative. Rather, I have thought it more important to do theology in a manner that *displays* the narrative form of the gospel. After all, recognition of the necessity of narration for any account of our lives does not save. God saves." Ibid., 140. Emphasis mine.

[251] James M. Gustafson argues that Hauerwas defines "the Church" "very abstractly," and that the narrative of the Christian life that Hauerwas is talking about is defined "in the end by him." James M. Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University," in *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life : Essays in Theological Ethics*, ed. James M. Gustafson, Theodoor Adriaan Boer, and Paul E. Capetz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 147 and 149.

[252] Elizabeth Bounds, for example, argues that Hauerwas ignores that plurality of Christian narratives that articulate many different Christian traditions: "Second, the Christian story that Hauerwas tells is *one*, not *the* story. For him, the Christian narrative is a simple, homogenous moral marker – a position which nicely avoids encounter with the abundant and ambiguous messiness of Christian history." Citing Michael Dyson, Bounds also points to Hauerwas's problematic separation between church and secular politics, which doesn't resound with the experience of church in African American Christian traditions. Elizabeth M. Bounds, *Coming Together/Coming Apart: Religion, Community, and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 64. Interestingly, Gerard Loughlin writes in a narrativist vein: "But the Church has read its Scriptures as narrating one story, and has little difficulty in determining what that story is. The Church has found the focus or center of the biblical narratives in the story of Jesus Christ, the story of his life, death, and resurrection. It reads the Bible 'around Christ'." Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 44.

I sympathize with these criticisms. Indeed, I present below a version of the criticism about the homogeneous character of God's story in Hauerwas's account. I do think, however, that in his more recent work, Hauerwas has been careful to indicate the ongoing and dynamic character of the story of God disclosed in the church. When Hauerwas, following work the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, writes that "the church is the lively argument, extended over centuries and occasioned by the stories of God's calling of Israel and of the life and death of Jesus Christ, to which we are invited to contribute by learning to live faithful to those stories," he seems to be indicating that the narrative into which Christians shape their lives is neither completely disclosed nor experienced in rigid and uniform ways.[253] The notion of church as "argument" to which Christians "contribute" indicates, rather, that Christians do not find out what God's story looks like until they participate in the practices and life of the Church. And the disclosure of that story is presumably experienced differently and even looks different in its particular contours as it unfolds in different times and places and among particular groups. In short, the narrative that Hauerwas has in mind is one to which Christians have an obligation to conform their own. But exactly how God is revealed in that process is not determined in advance. Any criticism of Hauerwas on these issues will have to be sensitive to these qualifications.

While Hauerwas doesn't expect that the church will be able to articulate its story adequately once and for all, he does expect that the Christian narrative, located in the context of the church, forms persons in a unified moral life – a life formed, that is, in a coherent moral structure. Here Hauerwas follows the work of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre, like Hauerwas, understands human beings to be "story-telling

[253] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 102.

animals." In his seminal work *After Virtue* (1984), MacIntyre argues that in order for a person to lead a unified moral life – one oriented by a coherent set of goods – one must be formed in traditions of moral meaning and practice that belong to moral communities. A tradition for MacIntyre articulates in narrative form a conception of the good life. Traditions are, however, dynamic; they are marked by "continuous arguments and continuities of conflict" about the meaning of the good life.[254] The good life, then, is a coherently ordered set of norms and values, enacted in the practices of a community such as the church, which stands in a particular tradition of moral meaning and practice.

For MacIntyre, an individual life has moral "unity" because it embodies the narratives of a tradition.[255] The process of forming one's own narrative to the standards of a moral tradition is for MacIntyre a "quest," an ongoing project of understanding one's own story in the context of the narrative of a tradition. The virtues, MacIntyre argues, are those "dispositions" that sustain a person in her quest for the good life.[256] Hauerwas, following MacIntyre, thinks that the modern focus on the rational and autonomous individual complicates the notion of moral tradition. The modern frame therefore also renders deeply problematic coherent conceptions of the good life, articulated in the narratives of a tradition, in relationship to which persons form unified moral lives. In the next section below, I explore this critique of modernity in more detail.

Church, World, and Liberal Polity

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[254] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 222.

[255] MacIntyre asks: "In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life." See Chapter 15 of his *After Virtue*, reprinted in: Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition," reprinted in *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 256.

[256] Ibid., 257.

The truthfulness that Hauerwas credits to the Christian narrative sets up a polemic he develops throughout his work. This polemic has to do with the distinction between Christian existence and worldly existence, also framed as the distinction between the church and the world, and the polity of the church and modern liberal polities.

One of Hauerwas's familiar refrains is that the "the first social task of the church is to help the world know that it is the world."[257] For Hauerwas, the world names that part of God's creation that "knows not God" – that has not heard and received the proclamation of salvation, where salvation means "the enacted narrative of God's ongoing care of Israel through the calling of Gentiles into the promised people."[258] The church, on the other hand, is the political body that proclaims salvation to the world.

The story the church proclaims – the narrative of God's abiding presence in the stories of Israel and Jesus Christ – not only provides the context in which Christian identity is formed. It also confers on the world an identity in that it gives the world its story – a story about how the world has not yet heard the Good News of God's forgiveness and call to redemption.[259] Thus, the world comes to know itself when the church is faithful to its narrative.

Part of the problem, Hauerwas thinks, is that the church hasn't been faithful to its own narrative. He makes a number of related criticisms of Christians on this point. But they all revolve around the notion that Christians have continuously failed to witness to God's revelation on God's terms. One kind of argument that Hauerwas makes along

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[257] Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 102.

[258] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 37.

[259] "That is the story Christians believe is not only true but saving. Indeed without that story we believe that the world could not have a story. For there is no world if there is no church." Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 148.

these lines is that the Constantinian turn, which attempted to Christianize the world through the power of the state, denied the church its vocation as witness to God's revelation. Beginning in the medieval period with figures like Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus, Christians attempted to make God knowable in the way that the world is knowable, which effectively collapsed the distinction between God and the world:

> The attempt to make God knowable separate from how God has made himself known through Scripture makes a world without God thinkable. God could not help become another 'thing' amid other metaphysical possibilities. Accordingly, Christians robbed the world of its story.[260]

For Hauerwas, modernity is the historical moment in which the church's witness is compromised.

The world in the modern context, Hauerwas argues, is thus without a story. Modernity, with its focus on the sovereign self, becomes a time in which history and memory are not possible. Modern selves who are "free" to "choose" their own stories (though Hauerwas also thinks this such a conception of freedom is an illusion, as is the notion that selves choose their own stories)[261] are not formed in the context of stories that have a beginning and an end – in short, stories that aren't stories at all. America for Hauerwas typifies this pathology.[262] Thus, notions like modernity and America evoke for Hauerwas a time and a place that claim to be untold by any story.

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[260] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), 39.

[261] Hauerwas writes: "Put more strongly, I want to argue that there is something very misleading and self-deceiving about the description many have accepted that they are or should try to become free from all stories except those they have 'freely' chosen. For I will try to suggest that freedom comes not by choosing our stories, but by being formed by a truthful narrative that helps us appreciate the limits and possibilities of those stories we have not chose but are part and parcel of who we are." Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, 29.

[262] America names for Hauerwas a place without memory: "["The American idea"] is tragic because the conflict between the basic American principles of every person to live, to be free, and to pursue happiness cannot be reconciled with the demand for equality … [Martin] Marty regrets the general tendency in America for historical amnesia, but he fails to see that a loss of memory is at the heart of the American project. Indeed, as I suggested above, Rawlsian strategies for securing justice require just such a

Hauerwas targets liberal democracy for similar reasons. His critique of liberal democracy is expansive and nuanced. I won't address much of it here. I do want to note one point: liberal democratic polities are symptomatic of the larger context of modernity in that they value survival above all else. Liberal democracy is the political system that creates space in which modernity's sovereign self has the (alleged) freedom to create her own story. Such a system is needed in a political context in which there is no shared story and thus no shared conception of the good. Rights effectively protect each person from others, creating space for each to pursue the version of the good life that she thinks is best.[263] Liberalism is not a coherent tradition of moral meaning and practice that forms people to live good lives. It is instead an impoverished, if not an empty, moral tradition.[264]

The liberal political regime does nothing more than ensure the survival of its citizens. As such, liberal political thought manifests a fear of death that is a fundamental concern of modern worldviews in which the autonomous self stands at the center.[265]

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loss of memory. Justice requires the presumption that a genuine break with the past is possible." Hauerwas, *A Better Hope*, 30.

[263] "We have made 'freedom of the individual' an end in itself and have ignored the fact that most of us do not have the slightest idea of what we should do with out freedom." Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 80.

[264] "The great self-deception is in thinking that the tradition of liberalism gives us the means to recognize that is indeed a tradition. Instead it continues to promise new tomorrows of infinite creation. And the more we are convinced we are free, the more determined we become." Ibid., 83.

[265] Hauerwas makes this point in *A Community of Character*: "… most of us live as if we assume our social order is secure and we are safe. We can do this because we assume death happens only to other people. We are sometimes vaguely comforted by reports of others' deaths, as such reports confirm our own presumption that we are protected by a magical invulnerability. Absorption into most societies is training in self-deception as we conspire with one another to keep death at bay" (Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 18). And he reiterates it in *After Christendom*: "I hope we have learned from this foray into Augustinian thought that genuine politics is about the art of dying. That places the church at cross purposes with the politics of liberalism, built as it is on the denial of death and sacrifice." Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, 43.

Hauerwas has argued throughout his career that for Christians, survival is not the *summum bonum*, since death is not an ultimate condition.[266]

Competing Stories and the Christian Story

The problem in a world that doesn't recognize the story-formed quality of moral experience is that the stories that do form us do not contain the resources to address the violent impulses inherent within them. Whether modern selves want to recognize it or not, Hauerwas thinks, a number of narratives come together to condition our experience. Any worldly narrative is unable to account for the limitations of its own account of the world. Hauerwas cites an important story that forms his own identity – the story of being a Texan, one that he did not choose for himself. While being a Texan bears importantly on how Hauerwas understands himself, the story of Texas is full of contradictions, not least the contradiction between a Texan understanding of freedom and Texas's history of racial discrimination and violence. Like the story of Texas, stories of the world are problematic because they ultimately do not contain within themselves the resources to

[266] Already at the beginning of his career, Hauerwas criticized the politics of the world for its preoccupation with survival. In *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, he wrote: "For the politics of the world is perverted because it takes power and violence to be the essence of human and institutional relations. We Christian shave no interest in denying that descriptively this is often true. Rather it is our contention that this need not be the case and thus remind the world that political life must also embody those visions of the good that men and societies should have beyond their need to survive" (134). He goes on to say: "We, thus, serve the poor as if nothing is more important than their and our own survival. But surely that is to pervert the very heart of the Gospel from which we learn that what we have to fear is not death, but dying for the wrong thing. When charity is tied to the ethics of effectiveness, it leads us to the illusion that survival is an interesting value for Christians … In a world where the value of every action is judged by its effectiveness, it becomes an effective action to do what the world understands as useless." Hauerwas, Bondi, and Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics*, 135. More recently, in his volume with Romand Coles, Hauerwas explores further the notion of martyrdom as an alternative model of political commitment. Martyrdom is interesting to Hauerwas precisely because the martyr puts aside fear of death in order to glorify God. See Hauerwas, "A Haunting Possibility: Christianity and Radical Democracy," in Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*.

Charles Taylor makes a similar point about survival. See Charles Taylor, "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

resolve their own internal contradictions. So, Hauerwas claims, worldly narratives can only secure themselves through violence.[267]

The Christian story, on the other hand, forms persons who are able to forgive. It contains resources, in other words, to address the contradictions that exist within worldly narratives: "Unlike the story of Texas, therefore, the story of Jesus provides the skills for us to make our lives our own – in short, to be free from our self-imposed fears … by teaching us what it means to be forgiven, the Christian story gives us the freedom to understand our particular stories as Texans."[268] Genuine freedom for Hauerwas, then, is not freedom that modernity espouses – freedom from stories and freedom to construct our own story – for these inevitably lead to violence. Instead, human beings are genuinely free when they become who God made them to be. We only have this freedom in relationship to a narrative that forms persons capable of forgiveness and reconciliation.

IV. Conclusion

Admittedly, narrative has received less attention from theologians in recent years. Still, Hauerwas's work motivates a dominant approach in theological circles to understanding the relationship between narrative and moral formation. Any treatment of narrative in theological perspective, then, must consider what stories of the self look like in the point of view Hauerwas and others develop.

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[267] He writes: "It is, of course, true that we do not feel this dilemma because our lives are also bound by so many other stories – husband, teacher, liberal. Yet each of these stories, like that of being a Texan, has the same difficulty – they cannot within their own framework account for their own limits and the tragedies that result from that. This becomes especially troublesome as one of them, as it must, takes the form of a central story that gives our life coherence. For such a story becomes indispensable to us, as without it we have no place to be. As a result, such stories must ultimately rely on violence to secure themselves against other competing stories in the world." Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today,* 38.

[268] Ibid., 41.

The personal narratives of Steve and Wanda in the previous chapters, along with the stories of Diane, Amanda, and Carol here, do not, I want to argue, bear a strong resemblance to the Hauerwasian model. They are not stories that reflect a formation emphasizing the uniqueness of the Christian narrative told in and through the context of the church which also generates a critical response to the world. These stories are also not prophetic in the Hauerwasian sense. They are stories in which persons are formed in a dynamic struggle with the world, not over against it. The stories of the persons I have featured so far engage and creatively transform the categories and moral logics of the world in conversation with any number of formations. Moreover, one notices that the Christian formation in these stories is a primary but not an exclusive source of moral formation and reflection.

Interestingly, none of my interview participants report experiencing the modern liberal polity in the way that Hauerwas describes it throughout his critique. None of them, in other words, think that politics is merely about creating protected space in which individuals, abstracted from meaningful connections to communities, pursue their own conceptions of the good life. I'm not saying that the liberalism that Hauerwas critiques doesn't resonate with the way that some people – perhaps many people – experience political life in Western democracies. After all, political theorists like John Rawls, whom I discuss in the next chapter, and who irritate Hauerwas to no end, imagine that liberal democracy is precisely an arrangement that creates spaces of unfettered freedom for the individual pursuit of happiness. But on the ground, at least for persons who spend their lives engaged in various forms of political activism, the experience of democratic

political life is likely much more complicated than Hauerwas's reduction of it to Rawlsian-style liberalism allows.

Part of this complexity resides in the many different experiences of political life that emerge in the stories of my interview participants. These experiences might loosely be called "traditions."[269] Steve, Wanda, Amanda, Diane, and Carol all discuss particular forms or traditions of political experience in which they are shaped as moral agents and to which they, in their own way, all contribute in their life's work. Each of these traditions (grassroots community organizing, electoral politics, coalition politics) contributes meaningfully to each participant's political identity. Of course, these aren't the robust traditions in the sense that Hauerwas and MacIntyre mean tradition, nor do they carry a coherent moral narrative in the way that Hauerwas and MacIntyre think that traditions bear narratives.

Still, there is something like distinctive political traditions in evidence in the personal narratives that my interview participants develop. Wanda's Gamaliel Foundation has a determinate set of moral norms, a distinctive moral language, and a set of political practices. Minimally, the Gamaliel Foundation represents a tradition of political thought and practice in that its politics can be described intelligibly and set apart from other approaches. Similarly, Diane's brand of conservative grassroots politics has, as I explained above, something like a distinctive moral language (which connects American democracy to a Judeo-Christian worldview) and a sense of the proper ends of political life.

[269] Here I don't mean to invoke the notion of tradition as a transhistorical, comprehensive, but still fluid argument about moral experience, as thinkers like MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and Jeffrey Stout have examined it. I'm noting here the much looser, more local, and probably more incoherent way that my interview participants talk about sources of moral meaning.

Personal narrative in all of these examples is the context in which persons work out their relationship to the multiple formations in which their lives are constituted, some of which include political traditions (in the loose sense). Personal narratives then relate these formations to work in political life. Formation in a religious tradition or traditions plays a central role in these stories, but it's certainly not the only relevant source of moral meaning. And as I've argued, often one cannot understand how religious formation is relevant without reference to other sources of moral formation. Moreover, the narrative structures of the relevant Christianities that are in play are divergent. There are many Christian stories, in other words.

Not only are personal narratives formed within and across many contexts and sources of moral meaning, they are also messily constructed. It is not always clear how the goods and values featured in these stories are supposed to cohere with one another. How does Steve's notion of God's presence within square with the Christian tradition? How exactly do freedom, life, and health, in Amanda's telling, all hang together? How does the use of coercive power in political contexts figure into Christian ideas about love and justice in Wanda's and Diane's stories?

Hauerwas, it seems to me, might contemplate these stories with suspicion. They hardly appear to reflect the process of conforming one's own story to God's story, one's experience to a larger, coherent tradition of moral meaning and practice. Perhaps Hauerwas would judge Steve, Wanda, Amanda, Carol, and Diane as having unfaithfully engaged the Christian story as they have crafted their own. If I am right about Hauerwas's suspicions here, then we must, at least for the time being, hold out the possibility that Hauerwas is right – that indeed, these narratives do not reflect a faithful

formation in God's story – and that people like Wanda, Steve, Amanda, Carol, and Diane are therefore not very good Christians.

We've seen that Hauerwas does not deny agency to persons in the process of conforming personal narrative to God's story. He also does not expect that the church's understanding of its narrative is impervious to revision. He agrees with MacIntyre, as do I, that we are at best co-authors in telling our stories.[270] For MacIntyre and Hauerwas, this is a cautionary statement: It is intended to remind us that we are not the sole, and for Hauerwas certainly not the primary, agents in the construction of our own narratives. Hauerwas, as we've seen, affirms MacIntyre's caution because he wants to point to the trajectory of faithful lives from the formation of a story we think is our own to the formation in the story authored by God. I respect MacIntyre's insight as well. In Hauerwas's estimation, we should attend to co-authorship because when we do so, we begin to experience our life in terms of the form of life disclosed in God's story. Hauerwas, in short, expects that our stories become more like God's story – they become part of a unified narrative that the church recognizes as its story.

But I want to dispute Hauerwas and MacIntyre's claim that a good moral formation is in evidence in the unity of an individual life, generated by the coherence of the individual's story with the stories of a coherent moral tradition (*the* Christian tradition, whatever that might be). Oftentimes the stories that persons tell about themselves do not neatly cohere with stories they've told about themselves at other times in their life. Since persons are formed within and across different contexts of meaning, personal stories are messy. They're not entirely coherent, and they don't cohere with any

[270] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 101-102. Alasdair MacIntyre discusses narrative and co-authorship in chapter 15, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition," in his *After Virtue*.

one source of moral meaning. The criterion of unity, I want to argue, simply does not capture the kind of complexity that characterizes personal narratives through which persons make sense of their moral experience.[271] The faithful formation of the Christian self in the context of narrative is not so much a process of conformation as it is self-construction. But it is not self-construction *ex nihilo*. It unfolds in response to different sources of moral meaning and experience.

Of course, no amount of description of actual stories will convince Hauerwas, for he has a deep faith in the transformative power of the Christian narrative. Here I want only to begin an argument I develop later in the dissertation: While the project of conforming our story to God's story entails that persons conform their lives to a set of narratives belonging to a tradition we call "the Christian tradition," this does not mean that persons ever fully uncouple themselves from the world by way of formation in one narrative we call "the Christian narrative."

Rather, the Christian life entails a constant struggle in response to God's call with and within the world. In my view, this means that the way in which persons construct identity in and through narrative will always be messy. To preview, I disagree with Hauerwas on a number of theological issues that have to do with the way God responds to a sinful world, and the implications God's response has for the way we ought to

[271] Elliot Mishler in his study of sexual abuse survivors explores the way in which persons learn to "re-story" themselves to make sense of changing life experience. On that basis, he criticizes MacIntyre and Charles Taylor whom Mishler thinks incorrectly conceive of the relationship between time and narrative as a chronological movement in which a unified narrative identity is supposed to develop coherently over time. He writes: "This relational conception, of a plurality of sub-identities, points to another problem with temporal –order models of progressive change: the tendency to treat identity development as a unitary process, as if each life could be defined by a single plot line…narrative analysts with a clock-time perspective tend to favor a master narrative that gives a unitary, coherent meaning to our lives, and some theorists even argue that such an achievement represents a higher level of personal integrity (MacIntyre 1984, Taylor 1991)." Elliot G. Mishler, "Narrative and Identity: The Double Arrow of Time," in *Discourse and Identity*, ed. Anna De Fina, Deborah Schiffrin, and Michael G. W. Bamberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41-42.

understand political anthropology. But this argument will have to wait for the dissertation's conclusion.

The first three chapters of this dissertation have focused on political identity. The first chapter examined the context of moral meaning in which identity is formed in modern societies. The second chapter critiqued models of the formation of political identity in Christian social ethics. This chapter explored personal narrative as a site of the construction of political identity. Now that the dissertation has treated political identity, the next chapter focuses on the relationship between political identity and agency. This is in keeping with my claim that identity and agency exist in a mutually constitutive relationship.

Chapter 4: A Critique of Discursive Political Agency

So far, I have been exploring political vocation as a context in which to consider the formation of the self in and through political work. I've given the name "political anthropology" to a conception of the self formed in the context of political vocation. I've critically examined a number of representative figures in which are inscribed various normative political anthropologies – that is, portraits of the political self as it ought to be (recall the five representative figures in chapter 2). By way of juxtaposition with several personal narratives, I have tried to show that these normative political anthropologies sit at a distance from the complex ways that persons negotiate political identity and agency. The result is that these normative political anthropologies threaten to norm a state of affairs that doesn't exist.

My argument has not yet constituted a decisive blow against normative political anthropologies. These models are, after all, normative – they aren't intended to describe the world. They only say how it ought to be. The task for the conclusion of this dissertation will be to supply a proposal that constitutes an alternative political anthropology.

Before I turn to that task, however, I wish to trouble the waters of normative political anthropology some more. This chapter moves away from theological models of political anthropology and moves into the realm of political theory, which offers its own normative political anthropologies bearing on the political vocations of persons of faith. Contemporary political theory tends to focus its attention on the norms of political agency. That means that the attendant political anthropologies are typically implicit rather than explicit in these theories. One must work harder, in other words, to discover

in the background of these theoretical discussions the models of the political self who are allegedly capable of the prescribed norms of political agency. Unlike the previous chapters, the work of this chapter, then, moves away from an exclusive focus on political identity and considers the connection between political identity and agency.

The thesis of this chapter is two-fold. First, it argues that the dominant normative framing of political agency in political theory and political theology renders it as public, discursive, and cooperative. I call this conception of political agency “discursive political agency.” Second, since political identity and agency are inextricably linked, as I’ve argued, this dominant normative framing of political agency confers, more or less explicitly, inadequate conceptions of political identity upon Christian citizens. These conceptions of political identity are inadequate because they imply artificial bifurcations of identity, as though some part of a Christian citizen is “Christian” and some part is not. I show that the political identity of Christian citizens is a much more complicated matter.

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Political theorists and Christian theologians alike often imagine that political agency in the context of the secular public sphere takes the form of a maximally public, cooperative, and constructive, though also constructively conflictual, discursive practice. Discursive practice of this sort is known by names like “deliberation,” “discussion,” or “public conversation.” It is as though political practice in democratic polities, when it is functioning properly, is very much like an academic seminar in which participants present and critically respond to ideas. Even though views conflict, participants are supposed to work together to come to some shared understanding about an issue.

Here are some examples of this framing in recent Christian theology. Robin Lovin in his recent book *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (2008), which I discussed in detail in chapter 2, argues that modern societies are marked by a pluralism of institutional "contexts," such as the market, church, and polity, in which human goods are created and maintained. Each context has a particular discursive space, which he calls a "forum." In the context of forums, discussions about goods are conducted in terms of moral logics and languages characteristic to each forum. As God has ordained a plurality of institutional contexts in the ordering of human social life, Lovin argues, so all citizens are called to engage these "discussions" without flattening the moral complexity of contextual pluralism. For Lovin, discussions within and across forums are inevitably conflictual, but conflict marks the integrity of a pluralistic society.[272]

Franklin Gamwell in his book *Politics as a Christian Vocation* (2005) offers another kind of theological rationale for Christian participation in public deliberation. Gamwell argues that Christian faith includes a "humanistic commitment" that demands Christian participation in public argument. Non-Christian conversation partners can engage Christians in public debate, Gamwell writes, because "the God in whom Christians believe is necessarily present to all humans, calling them to love God without reservation. Hence, Christian belief can be assessed through reasons authorized by

[272] See Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities*, 137 ff. Politics for Lovin is the site in which competing moral claims are negotiated through public discourse: "Politics is made up of discussion of goods within contexts and the negotiation and renegotiation of claims between contexts. The differentiation of a variety of interdependent contexts that shape important areas of life makes that inevitable" (139). Negotiation of goods across contexts happens in what Lovin calls the "public forum." The public forum is not a separate entity from particular forums, as though public discussions about goods could abstract from the meanings and logics that different contexts attach to them. Rather, "the public forum is located within each of the forums that contexts create, not in some one place separate and apart from them" (137). See my discussion of Lovin in chapter 1 above.

common experience…"[273] For Gamwell, as for Lovin, public "discourse" must be a "Christian commitment."

Are all forms of political agency discursive in this sense? So far as I can imagine, all forms of political agency have some discursive dimension. Jeffrey Stout writes:

> The democratic practice of giving and asking for reasons, I argue, is where the life of democracy principally resides. Democracy isn't all talk. Now and then there is also a lot of marching involved, for example. But there is no form of ethical life that generates more talk on the part of more people than does modern democracy. It is in democratic discourse that the claims and reasons of marching protestors get expressed. Protestors rarely just march. They also carry signs that say something. They chant slogans that mean something. They sing songs that convey a message. And they march to or from a place where speeches are given.[274]

Indeed, "democracy isn't all talk," as Stout notes, but all democratic practices include a discursive component in which participants in some way communicate a political view and attempt to persuade others of it.

But not all exercises of political agency foreground discursive acts. And not all discursive forms of political agency are deliberative, or, in Stout's phrase, about "giving and asking for reasons." Political agency, in other words, is not always aimed at political cooperation. A complex rendering of the full range of ways in which political agency is exercised is needed to account for the relationship between political identity and agency, as well as the implications this relationship has for political anthropology. This chapter, however, considers political agency in its collaborative, discursive modality first, since

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[273] Franklin I. Gamwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation: Faith and Democracy Today* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 79. Gamwell argues that Christians have a "common Christian vocation" in politics, that is, one "that does not distinguish some Christians from others by commission to specialized responsibilities within the Christian community or to a certain kind of secular work as one's principal occupation" (3).

[274] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6. Mika LaVaque-Manty in his *Arguments and Fists*, which I explore in more detail below, argues that constitutive of the liberal framing of political agency is the claim that political agency necessarily involves communicative acts in which political agents raise claims about the legitimacy of authority. Mika LaVaque-Manty, *Arguments and Fists: Political Agency and Justification in Liberal Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

dominant models of political agency in political theory and theology urge this discursive modality as the normative form of political agency. After I've treated the dominant model, I move on to a discussion of instrumental, non-discursive forms of political agency in the dissertation's conclusion.

Where does the dominant model of political agency come from, and how does it shape the way political theorists treat the contributions of religious citizens in public life? To answer this question, this chapter opens by way of analysis of another representative character, Immanuel Kant's scholar, who appears famously in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1783). Kant's scholar is, I argue, the dominant model of political identity in liberal political thought, and the scholar's deliberative public speech constitutes the dominant conception of political agency in that tradition. The scholar's political agency also informs many contemporary theological responses to the role of Christian citizens in modern democratic polities (as, for example, in the work of Lovin and Gamwell). I consider Kant's scholar in this chapter's first section.

Though Kant's scholar disappears from explicit view in liberal political theory after "What is Enlightenment?", in an important way the scholar lingers, since his public reason continues to inform the dominant model of liberal political agency. The second section charts the legacy of the scholar's public reason in recent political theory, particularly in the work of John Rawls. Rawls, more than any one theorist from the last century, made enduring contributions to liberal political theory and, in the context of his project, advanced the norm of public reason. His work also brought that norm to bear on considerations of the role of religion in democratic public life. I single out Rawls here because academic conversations about religion in the liberal polity all seem, implicitly or

explicitly, to gravitate around Rawls's contributions. The first section situates Rawls's conception of public reason in the context of his work.

It then considers a second representative character, a contemporary descendent of Kant's scholar, the religious citizen, whose political agency bears an important relationship to contemporary framings of public reason. The religious citizen appears in political and legal theory that treats the contribution persons of faith make to democratic political life. This figure tries to adapt herself to the political agency of the scholar. That is, she exercises the scholar's discursive political agency but does so at great risk, almost to the point of paradox. The religious citizen's religious commitments motivate her contributions to public and democratic deliberation. But the metaphysical character of these commitments renders them inaccessible to secular citizens who are the religious citizen's conversation partners in public deliberation. In other words, the *mode* of the religious citizen's political agency –Rawlsian public reason, which is supposed to make fundamental commitments available for public scrutiny – is allegedly in tension with the *content* of the religious citizen's fundamental claims, which, by virtue of being faith claims, resist the scrutiny of public reason.

The figure of the religious citizen represents the liberal anxiety that persons of faith are liable to contribute in inappropriate ways to democratic forums by making explicit faith claims to which secular conversation partners will not be able to engage critically. Theorists therefore attribute to the religious citizen a peculiar kind of discursive political agency. She is supposed to be able to mediate her theological commitments in public contexts by performing certain discursive operations on them. These discursive operations render theological commitments accessible to conversation

partners who do not hold a theological worldview. The religious citizen "translates" theological claims into a secular idiom. Alternatively, she makes publicly accessible claims that the religious citizen's theological commitments also endorse. I call this second operation "reason giving." I critically examine these discursive operations in the second section.

The argument I've advanced throughout this dissertation motivates my claim that to mediate normative claims is also to mediate identity. These two discursive operations (translation and reason giving), in other words, have implications in terms of how the identity of religious citizens is mediated in the context of public debate. Both translation and reason giving imply, I argue, that a residue of the religious citizen's identity – the part that is best articulated in explicitly theological language – is supposed to remain hidden from public view. Exactly this feature of liberalism's religious citizen irritates some theologians.[275] Drawing upon my interviews with Amanda and Diane in the third section, I argue that indeed religious identity is mediated but in complex ways that resist the conclusion that something of one's identity is necessarily concealed. Thus, I find both liberalism's religious citizen and its critics to be wanting in their respective evaluations of religious identity and agency in the context of democratic political life.

This chapter, in short, examines the relevance of a normative argument about the nature of political identity and agency in the liberal polity for citizens who understand their contributions to political life in terms of their religious commitments. This legacy

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[275] Recall Stanley Hauerwas, for example, whom I discussed at length in the last chapter and in chapter 2. Hauerwas argues that the demands that the norm of public reason makes upon Christian citizens – namely, to translate their normative claims into a public idiom that secular conversation partners can understand, amounts to a requirement that Christian citizens sanitize their fundamental commitments. But Christians can't conform to the requirements of public reason and still make authentically Christian claims, Hauerwas thinks. Public reason reflects, for Hauerwas, the moral poverty of liberalism.

begins with Kant's scholar and issues in the religious citizen, a progeny of the scholar. As I said in the introduction, I focus on representative characters because they show something about the relationship, or intended relationship, between identity and agency. I'm asking whether these relationships hold up to scrutiny. I argue here that implicit conception of identity, agency, and the relationship between the two does not, in the case of the religious citizen, hold up to scrutiny.

I re-emphasize a caveat that I've mentioned in preceding chapters, namely, that Kant, Rawls, and other liberal theorists are making normative, not descriptive, claims about political life. The scholar and the religious citizen are models that prescribe how things ought to be, not descriptions of how they are. As before, my argument here draws upon another insight ascribed to Kant: that in moral theory, ought implies can. If persons of faith ought to be like the religious citizen, then it should follow that they can be like the religious citizen. I'm saying that the normative model of political agency and identity advanced in the figure of the religious citizen implies, or at least threatens, a dichotomy of identity, a kind of moral schizophrenia, since they're supposed to be one kind of self in their religious communities and another kind of self in the public sphere. A careful description of the way Christian activists actually experience political life shows moral schizophrenia does not at all resonate with what they're doing. Now, description is not of course enough to negate the "can." Perhaps religious citizens ought to be more like moral schizophrenics. But the great distance between what is possible and what is required calls, I think, the model of the religious citizen into question.

I also want to stress for the sake of clarity that I am not in this chapter evaluating the norms of participation in public debate that liberal theories recommend to determine

whether or not they are good norms. This argument, in other words, is not intended to show that the norm of public reason, which I discuss at length in the sections below, is somehow flawed. I am simply gesturing to the problems with the ways in which the identity of religious citizens is construed in these theories, more or less explicitly, as political agents.

The last section introduces a third argument that pushes the discussion of this chapter beyond deliberative political agency. Following Michael Walzer, I suggest that a theological account of political vocation must attend not only to the cooperative and discursive dimensions of political agency. It must also respond to its instrumental, even aggressive modalities. I take up the implications of this argument for the relationship between identity and agency in the dissertation's conclusion.

I. Liberalism's Scholar

Immanuel Kant in his 1784 essay "What is Enlightenment?" argues that enlightenment is a process of intellectual maturity in which persons learn to think for themselves, without, that is, the "guidance of another." Kant famously writes: "*Enlightenment is man's* [sic] *emergence from the self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity* is the ability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another."[276] Immaturity arises, Kant writes, when persons fail to assert the powers of their own understanding for themselves and instead leave the task of critical thinking to others.

[276] Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54. Italics original. Hereafter cited in-text, and all subsequent emphases are original unless otherwise noted.

Kant asserts that the necessary condition of enlightenment is the freedom "to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters" (55).[277] One uses public reason as a "scholar," or a "man of learning" (*ein Gelehrter*), particularly in the context of the scholar's "writings."[278] The public use of reason is addressed to a "reading public" (*das ganze Publikum der Leserwelt*). The reading public is an audience of persons who are similarly learned, capable of critical thought, and concerned about the ongoing enlightenment of an entire people. In the Kantian picture, the "man of learning" uses reason to address matters of public concern before an audience that is similarly capable.

The private use of reason, by contrast, "is that which a person may make of it in a particular *civil post* or office with which he is entrusted" (Ibid.). Persons use reason privately when they carry out the duties appropriate to the office or social role they occupy, as determined by whatever authority structure is germane to a particular office or social role. Thus, it is incumbent upon a citizen *qua* taxpayer to pay her taxes, using her faculties appropriately to fulfill that duty, just as it is incumbent upon a clergy person to use her rational faculties to espouse the doctrines of the church.

The distinction Kant draws between the public and private uses of reason carefully negotiates the tension between the moral demands placed upon persons by virtue of the social roles they inhabit and the moral duty to advance enlightenment that obligates persons as members of the human race. There is often a conflict of interests here. The taxpayer may want to criticize tax policy, just as a clergy person may want to

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[277] Kant puts it this way: "By the public use of one's own reason, I mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* and addressing the entire *reading public*" (57).

[278] Kant's conception of public reason reflects broader social, political, economic, and cultural transformations that gave rise to the democratic public sphere in the early modern period. See especially Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

criticize doctrines and dogmas of the church. As scholars, that is, as members of the reading public whose duty it is to contribute to public enlightenment, citizens may publicly criticize norms that structure, for example, the system of taxation or the life of the church. But in the capacity of persons who inhabit particular social roles, they are still bound to obey the norms to which they are subject. Kant is suggesting that citizens must both attend to enlightenment but also obey the prevailing norms, even if citizens using public reason as scholars judge norms that bind them in other roles to be faulty. Of public servants, he writes:

> Now in some affairs which affect the interests of the commonwealth, we require a certain mechanism whereby some members of the commonwealth must behave purely passively, so that they may, by an artificial common agreement, be employed by the government for public ends (or least deterred from vitiating them). It is, of course, impermissible to argue in such cases; obedience is imperative. But insofar as this or that individual who acts as part of the machine also considers himself as a member of a complete commonwealth or even of cosmopolitan society, and thence as a man of learning who may through his writings address a public in the truest sense of the word, he may indeed argue without harming the affairs in which he is employed for some of the time in a passive capacity (56).

Kantian public reason reserves the right to examine any truth claim apart from the partisan interests that seek to bolster its truth. But Kant limits the scope and authority of public reason only to a particular context – the audience of scholarly critics. Apart from this "public in the truest sense of the word," public reason has no power to overturn social roles, relationships, and institutional arrangements that may be motivated by faulty truth claims. Kant takes the spirit of the limits he puts on public reason to resonate with a dictum he attributes to Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia: "*Argue* as much as you like about whatever you like, *but obey*!"

The Kantian scholar, then, is a character who reflects a particular ideal of citizenship. The scholar as a political agent is an informed participant in public

discussions that critically evaluate the enlightenment of a people – the extent to which, that is, particular issues promote or undermine the public's "maturity," understood as the ability to dare to think for oneself (Kant cites the Latin *sapere aude*!). But the scholar is not a rebellious figure. He conforms to authority, even if he, in his scholarly maturity, holds authority to be illegitimate.

My intention here is not to evaluate the suitability of Kant's scholar as a political agent but simply to assert that this figure usefully serves as the archetype of liberal political agency. This claim will become more plausible in the sections below. For now, I concentrate on one liberal theorist who has explicitly urged Kant's scholar as the archetypical liberal political agent.

In his book *Arguments and Fists: Political Agency and Justification in Liberal Theory*, Mika LaVaque-Manty argues that liberal theorists have not adequately responded to two caricatures of liberal political agency embodied in two corresponding caricatures of liberal political agents.[279] The first is *homo economicus*, the agent of rational choice, who evaluates courses of action strategically in order to maximize her own benefit. *Homo economicus* therefore threatens to render liberal political agency "unsavory." The second is the impotent parliamentarian, who talks ceaselessly but finally represents a "weak-kneed reformism," incapable of significant, much less revolutionary, action. The parliamentarian therefore threatens to render liberal political agency "theoretically weak." LaVaque-Manty proposes an alternative normative model of liberal political agency, based on the Kantian scholar, that shows the scholar's public reason to be both salutary and efficacious, even when it is motivated by "emotions, rhetoric, and manipulation."

[279] Mika LaVaque-Manty, *Arguments and Fists.* Hereafter cited in-text.

First, LaVaque-Manty clarifies what political agency in a liberal framing means. He argues that liberalism defends two "benchmark" principles:[280] (1) The "fact of pluralism principle," that "conceptions of the good are irreducible," and (2) the "principle of individualism," that "the best social order is one that regards an individual as the *pro tanto* best judge of the good life for that individual." We have already explored what LaVaque-Manty calls the "fact of pluralism" in modern societies in chapter 1. As Kant's scholar already foreshadows, and LaVaque-Manty's principle of individualism formalizes, the individual, not the community, is the locus of moral and political agency in liberal political theory.

In addition to these two benchmarks, LaVaque-Manty identifies a common norm in liberal political theory that indicates how individual political agency "counts" in liberal societies, what he calls (3) the "principle of public reason." The principle of public reason, nascent already in Kant's conception of public reason, requires that "political norms, institutions, or practices" are legitimate only if they result from a process of public deliberation, in which anyone whom such norms, institutions, and practices might affect can participate, or their proxies can participate, and these relevant parties agree to the arrangements in question.[281]

On the basis of these three principles, LaVaque-Manty goes on to argue that what is distinctive about political agency in the framing of liberal political theory is that it requires communicative acts in which political agents question the legitimate authority of

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[280] Benchmarks, in that they are characteristic of liberal positions, but not, LaVaque-Manty is saying, necessary conditions of them.

[281] As LaVaque-Manty puts it: "Political norms, institutions, or practices are legitimate when they emerge out of a deliberative process effectively accessible to all members of a polity, at least in principle, and that the reasons offered in justification of those principles are themselves acceptable to all" (11).

any norm that regulates social arrangements. Such claims, in turn, invite justification, which happens in public forums normed by public reason.

The bulk of LaVaque-Manty's *Arguments and Fists* explores what he calls the "normative psychology" of political action in the liberal model. He proposes a version of the Kant's scholar as the normative model of liberal political agency. The scholar constitutes an alternative both to the feckless parliamentarian and the rapacious *homo economicus*.[282]

I don't want to explore LaVaque-Manty's rich argument here in detail but simply will point out the scholar's primary character traits. The scholar, according to LaVaque-Manty, passionately engages in reasoned deliberation with other scholars who are concerned about the legitimacy of social arrangements. One of the scholar's distinctive features is the community of deliberation to which she belongs and which constitutes her identity as a scholar:

> Most importantly, there is the idea of a community: scholars relate to others as scholars, as members of a particular community. In that community, the norms that guide them are no mere boundary constraints on what they can do – like those pesky rules about insider trading and caveat emptor on the market – but are partly constitutive of the scholars' identities as scholars (9).

Even though liberalism understands the individual to be the locus of moral agency, the scholar also requires a scholarly community in order for her to realize her political agency.

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[282] The scholar, LaVaque-Manty argues, is a *normative* model of political agency because the "metaphor" of the scholar posits a benchmark against which actual exercises of political agency ought to be measured: "The Kantian model for the exercise of agency … that of scholars engaged in reasoned deliberation of arguments on their merits – is not at all irrelevant to this picture, but, rather, informs it as the kind of benchmark against which existing conditions are evaluated. We interpret political actions in the world as if all agents who are committed to this reasoned deliberation among scholars were engaged in it" (166).

LaVaque-Manty contrasts this image of a community of scholars with what he calls "the Jesus model," according to which

> the idealized Jesus is the appropriate exemplar for political action: political action is simply the uncompromising pursuit of one's political principles. It may be very difficult, and that it can involve great sacrifices, but it is theoretically straightforward: the agent's got to do with the agent's got to do, the right thing, even if heavens fall (169).

Unlike the scholar, the "idealized Jesus" is not interested in deliberative engagement with other political agents. The Jesus model instead resembles Weber's "ethic of absolute ends," which we encountered in the introduction to this dissertation: the agent acts on a set of uncompromising moral principles without regard to the effect the exercise of one's political agency may have on others. LaVaque-Manty's Jesus model reflects the worries that liberal political theorists have about religious citizens, which I explore in more detail below.

This section has dwelled on the primary construction of liberalism's political agent and has already begun to explore public reason as the primary modality of the scholar's political agency. The next section takes up the legacy of the scholar and the scholar's public reason in the work of John Rawls. Rawls doesn't take up Kant's scholar explicitly. But his work has most paradigmatically advanced contemporary considerations of the scholar's public reason. Since public reason is the scholar's political agency, the scholar persists as the dominant model of the political agent in liberal political theory, as LaVaque-Manty argues. Rawls's consideration of public reason also importantly informs contemporary considerations of the place of religion in the liberal polity. Thus, my discussion of Rawls on public reason in the next section prepares a careful consideration of the arguments about the religious citizen.

II. The Legacy of Public Reason and the Religious Citizen

The scholar's public reason is rooted in the development of liberal political thought since the Enlightenment. A particular conception of rationality is the *sine qua non* of the Enlightenment view of human agency. Rationality, first, distinguishes human beings as autonomous moral agents. It was also supposed to disclose fundamental metaphysical and moral structures. In the Enlightenment imaginary, citizens, using their reason, can identify the fundamental structures of political life that any rational person who used her reason properly would also be able to identify. Thus, a community of Kantian scholars, exercising their reason cooperatively in public forums, will discover rational courses of collective action.

Of course, Kant's vision of a scholarly community that cooperatively exercises its reason in the context of public forums, thereby identifying norms, values, and policies, is an ideal that does not accurately describe public deliberation as it happens most of the time. It turns out that rational persons can hold perfectly rational (in the sense of logically defensible) but irreconcilable views about these fundamental structures. Thus, moral pluralism has emerged as an irreducible condition of public discourse in modern polities. Pluralism creates a problem for social coordination, since reason alone seems to be unable to generate normative consensus.

All modern political theories address in some way or other the problem of pluralism that emerges from Enlightenment conceptions of reason. Many of them assume with the Enlightenment model that rationality is the distinctive feature of human moral agency. Not all of them understand that persons using their reason together to make decisions about political life – public reason, in short – is central to an

understanding of liberal democracy. Some theorists, such as Isaiah Berlin, argue that liberalism creates a *modus vivendi* that manages competing views of the good life such that all conceptions can co-exist in political association with minimum interference on the part of the state.[283] Other theorists, such as John Rawls, argue that rational persons, operating from different conceptions of the good, will endorse a minimum conception of justice that can be used to structure political association.[284] Still others understand some conception of public reason as the central legitimating feature of modern liberal polities.[285] The question that this last set of theories wants to answer is: What is the proper functioning of public reason, and which principles will ensure that it does properly function?[286]

In the American context, political theorists like Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson theorize what they call "deliberative democracy," a conception of the liberal democratic polity that "asks citizens and officials to justify public policy by giving reasons that can be accepted by those who are bound by it." Gutmann and Thompson, along with other theorists of deliberative democracy, seek to address the problem of moral disagreement without resorting to a conception of politics that amounts either to *modus vivendi* or tyranny of the majority. They think that democratic institutions

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[283] See Berlin's discussion of value pluralism in Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 1-47.

[284] See my discussion of Rawls below.

[285] Gerald Gaus usefully discusses the ways in which different theories of liberalism treat this problem of pluralism. Gerald F. Gaus, *Contemporary Theories of Liberalism: Public Reason as a Post-Enlightenment Project* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2003).

[286] Not all deliberative theories are procedural theories, however. James Bohman, for example, finds procedural models of deliberative democracy to explain insufficiently why deliberation is a democratic process at all. He argues instead from a sociological perspective that public reason is better understood as a dialogical process rather than a procedure that creates a social bond in its very enactment. He thinks that this approach better explains how public deliberation could effectively create political agency. "Rather than procedural, the account developed here is dialogical in that the exchange of public reasons in the give and take of dialogue makes speakers answerable and accountable to one another. In such a process, citizens may have the reasonable expectation that they may affect the outcome of deliberation or revise unacceptable outcomes in the future" (17). James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

constructed and maintained on the basis of ongoing and productive deliberation better negotiate moral disagreement than either procedural or constitutional models of democracy.[287] In the German context, the philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas has constructed a similar model based on his own work in communicative and discourse ethics.[288] Models of deliberative democracy are not without criticism.[289] I am not interested in exploring the promise and problems of deliberative models of democracy here. I only wish to note that these theories, as opposed to other theories of liberalism, treat public reason as a foundational element of a theory of democracy.

Public reason plays a more generic role in many theories of liberal democratic politics, deliberative and otherwise. Most theorists of liberal democratic politics value some notion of an ongoing, public, and in some way disciplined deliberation about shared norms and values as a distinctive feature of political life in vibrant democratic polities. In both deliberative theory, in which public reason plays a central role, and in other theories of liberalism, in which public reason is not central, the scope of public reason – questions regarding the matters to which it ought to apply – is a matter of some debate. Some theorists limit the scope of public reason to deliberations about formal law, particularly constitutional law. Other theorists mean for the scope of public reason to apply to *any*

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[287] Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA Belknap Press, 1996). 52. Gutmann and Thompson argue for a conception of deliberative democracy over against both procedural and constitutional conceptions. The problem with the latter two alternatives, they argue, is that they fail to resolve the tension between majority rule (which procedural theories privilege) and the protection of individual rights (which constitutional theories privilege). These therefore cannot adequately address the problem of genuine moral disagreement, which the deliberative model seeks to remedy. In Gutmann and Thompson's version, deliberative democracy rests on three procedural principles – reciprocity, publicity, and accountability – and three constitutional principles – basic liberty, basic opportunity, and fair opportunity – that, when extended through public institutions, facilitate opportunities for productive deliberation that addresses itself to moral disagreement.

[288] Habermas works out this model via his discourse ethical paradigm in *Between Facts and Norms*. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

[289] See for example Walzer's critique in "Deliberation … and What Else?" discussed below.

formal or informal public discourse about shared norms and values that might affect the development of policies.[290] Public reason in this approach forms the basis of a general political ethic.

In this chapter, I am mostly interested in this more generic conception of public reason, for this seems to be the dominant meaning of public reason in many considerations of religiously informed contributions to public deliberation.

Public Reason in the Work of John Rawls

John Rawls was not a theorist of deliberative democracy, but his formulation of public reason serves as a touchstone in the development of that notion in academic literature, particularly with respect to the problem of religious participation in liberal democratic polities. Rawls's contributions have made public reason the primary category in which discursive political agency is developed. In the remainder of this section, I'll explore Rawls's conception of public reason as an exemplary case of that notion.

Rawls famously argued for a conception of justice that would orient the fundamental institutions of any liberal democracy.[291] According to Rawls, modern societies are irreducibly pluralistic: Citizens in contemporary liberal societies hold a variety of moral, philosophical, and religious views of the world, which Rawls called "comprehensive doctrines." But comprehensive doctrines are often incompatible for the

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[290] Richard Rorty's influential essay "Religion as a Conversation Stopper" (1994) is an example in this regard. Rorty tends to think in terms of conversations about "public policy" in general. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999). 168-174. Rorty revised his position, taking a more reconciliatory tone towards religious citizens, in his later essay "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration." Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31:1 (2003).

[291] Rawls first developed his conception of justice as fairness in his early work a *Theory of Justice*. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

reasons I discussed above. Thus, any conception of justice that could be used to order modern liberal societies cannot appeal to any one of these comprehensive doctrines. Rather, a conception of justice must be construed in such a way that any reasonable person holding a comprehensive doctrine could reasonably endorse it. In other words, any conception of justice for pluralistic societies must achieve what Rawls called "overlapping consensus." Rawls understood his task to define such a conception of justice, which he called "justice as fairness."

In his *Political Liberalism* (1993, 1996), Rawls limits the scope of public reason to particular agents and issues. First, public reason is a process that involves citizens. That is, it is the reason of members of democratic regimes who "[share] the status of equal citizenship." Second, while public reason addresses broadly "the good of the public," Rawls understands the good of the public to have to do with "matters of fundamental justice." Matters of fundamental justice, in turn, are determined particularly with respect to "basic structures of institutions," laid out in the constitution of a political society.[292] Citizens use public reason to consider basic social structures in which a conception of justice is most fundamentally embodied, what Rawls often calls "constitutional essentials." Thus, the "public" for Rawls relates to the whole body of a citizenry whose lives are structured by fundamental institutions and in whose interests it is that these institutions be structured justly. Public reason, then, "is the reason of equal citizens who, as a collective body, exercise final political and coercive power over one another in enacting laws and in amending their constitution."[293]

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[292] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 213.
[293] Ibid., 214.

Since public reason only has to do with matters of "constitutional essentials and basic justice," it isn't operative or relevant in many political debates: "Many if not most political questions do not concern those fundamental matters."[294] On questions about fundamental and ultimately coercive political arrangements, citizens, Rawls argues, must imagine that any rationale offered to endorse any such arrangement must be one that others could also endorse. In other words, public reason is guided by the notion of what Rawls calls "the principle of liberal legitimacy," the notion that "our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason."[295]

Various forms of what Rawls calls "nonpublic reason" are exercised in different institutional contexts, such as academic, religious, and professional communities. All forms of reason, public and nonpublic have "certain common elements": They are social and not private,[296] and they appeal to "the concept of judgment, principles of inference, and rules of evidence."[297] But these common elements look different in different institutional contexts. There are different canons of evidence and different standards for what constitutes acceptable arguments in different contexts. Some forms of nonpublic reason may also appeal to particular and substantive conceptions of the good – a "comprehensive doctrine," in Rawls's language. Public reason, by contrast, does not

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[294] Ibid. He continues: "For example, much tax legislation and many laws regulating property; statutes protecting the environment and controlling pollution; establishing national parks and preserving wilderness areas and animal and plant species; and laying aside funds for museums and the arts. Of course, sometimes these do involve fundamental matters."

[295] Ibid., 137.

[296] Rawls distinguishes between nonpublic and private, asserting that there is no such thing as private reason: The public vs. nonpublic distinction is not the distinction between public and private. This latter I ignore: there is no such thing as private reason." Ibid., 220, n. 7.

[297] Ibid., 220.

appeal to any comprehensive doctrine. Thus, while comprehensive doctrines might have implications for what constitutes acceptable reasoning in nonpublic contexts, they do not apply to questions that require public reasoning.

What exactly, then, is the content of public reason that determines what it is and how it is to function in debate around constitutional essentials? For Rawls, the content of public reason is determined by a "political conception of justice" that is "broadly liberal in character."[298] On his view, this conception of justice implies a set of basic rights, liberties, and opportunities that all citizens enjoy. Citizens are given the means to exercise these rights, and rights are given "special priority" with respect to the general good.[299] To say that such a conception of justice is "political," Rawls argues, is to suggest that it applies "solely to the basic structure of society, its main political, social, and economic institutions as a unified scheme of social cooperation." Thus, a political conception of justice in the liberal tradition, as Rawls understands it, implies both the substantive principles of justice and, when the basic rights of citizens are taken into account, the "guidelines of inquiry" into how such principles may apply to certain problems of justice.[300]

In order for citizens to debate properly matters of fundamental justice and constitutional essentials – i.e., in ways that honor the basic set of rights and liberties all citizens enjoy – they must refrain from reasoning from the comprehensive moral, philosophical and religious doctrines they might hold. If reasons rooted in comprehensive doctrines are introduced into public debate about constitutional essentials, then citizens are implicitly asked to affirm such doctrines. But such a requirement

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[298] Ibid., 223.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid., 224.

contravenes the freedoms of conscience and expression that liberal democratic regimes protect. Instead, citizens must reason in terms that any citizen might reasonably be able to affirm. Rawls thinks that because citizens can affirm his political conception of justice from the perspective of their own comprehensive doctrines, public reason becomes a moral (though not a legal) duty, a "duty of civility," imposed on all citizens, not only legislators and not only in the context of "official forums."[301] Citizens, in other words, are duty-bound to argue on matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials in ways that all citizens can reasonably be expected to affirm.[302] Thus, public reason imposes an "ideal," as Rawls calls it, on citizens when they engage in political activities in the public forum that have to do with fundamental political matters.[303] The "ideal of public reason" holds citizens to the moral duty of civility.

In the second edition of *Political Liberalism*, Rawls amended his position on public reason somewhat, now convinced that it is permissible to introduce comprehensive doctrines into public argument as long as at some point public reasons also be given. He

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[301] Ibid., 217.

[302] Rawls does, even in the first edition of *Political Liberalism*, argue that there are situations – namely, whenever the society is not well-ordered – when it is appropriate for citizens "to present what they regard as the basis of political values rooted in their comprehensive doctrine, provided they do this in ways that strengthen the ideal of public reason itself" (247). For example, Rawls cites Martin Luther King, Jr., as an example of a citizen who argued in terms of his own comprehensive view not to promote that view *per se* but "for the sake of the ideal of public reason itself" – to bolster public reason – in a historical moment in which American society was not well-ordered according to the standards of political liberalism (251). Rawls call a view of public reason that includes this stipulation the "inclusive view."

[303] Ibid., He writes: "[T]he ideal of public reason does hold for citizens when they engage in political advocacy in the public forum, and thus for members of political parties for candidates in their campaigns and for other groups who support them. It holds equally for how citizens are to vote in elections when constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice are at stake. Thus, the ideal of public reason not only governs the public discourse of elections insofar as the issues involve those fundamental questions, but also how citizens are to cast their vote on these questions. Otherwise, public discourse runs the risks of being hypocritical: citizens talk before one another one way and vote another" (215). Compare this view of public reason to Michael J. Perry's argument that neither the "nonestablishment norm" of the First Amendment in particular nor the "morality of liberal democracy" in general prevent elected public officials from relying on "religiously grounded morality" in making political arguments. See chapters two and three in Michael J. Perry, *Under God? Religious Faith and Liberal Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

calls this qualification the "proviso": "I now believe, and hereby I revise [*Political Liberalism*] VI:8, that reasonable such doctrines may be introduced in 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."[304] With the proviso, Rawls is concerned to account for historical situations in which citizens needed to appeal to comprehensive doctrines to make public arguments because basic social structures had broken down.[305] In these special cases, citizens argued from comprehensive doctrines so as to pull political society back towards a conception of justice that is, as Rawls puts it, "in accord with the constitutional values of a liberal regime."[306] When public reason is no longer adequate, and comprehensive doctrines are needed to champion it, then such argument is acceptable in the liberal democratic public sphere.

In a 1997 essay "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," Rawls attends more carefully to the relationship between the proviso and the moral obligations of citizenship. Significant in this exposition of public reason is Rawls's question: "How is it possible – or is it – for those of faith, as well as the nonreligious (secular), to endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrines may not prosper under it, and indeed may decline?"[307] One solution to this problem, he suggests, is that citizens make political arrangements, such as a principle of toleration, that function as a mere *modus vivendi*, a compromise that still leaves open the possibility that if any sectarian

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[304] Ibid., li-lii.

[305] Here Rawls has in mind the arguments of American abolitionists and, later, of civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

[306] Ibid., lii.

[307] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1997]), 589.

group could "gain its way," it would. Another possibility is more robust than *modus vivendi*, in which citizens "accept as political (moral) principles the substantive constitutional clauses that ensure religious, political, and civil liberties" but are so minimally committed to these clauses as moral principles that they are prepared to resist or disobey laws that threaten to undermine the influence of their comprehensive doctrine.[308]

Both of these examples contemplate factions existing within political society, where (in the first example) each faction competes for hegemony, or (in the second example) each tries to ensure lasting influence with minimal commitment to constitutional norms. But neither of these supplies the "right reasons," Rawls argues, for establishing a constitutional regime. He insists that a democratic polity can "fully ensure rights and liberties for all permissible doctrines, and therefore protect our freedom and security" only if it "necessarily requires that, as one equal citizen among others, each of us accept the obligations of legitimate law."[309] Liberal polities need an arrangement, in other words, that is more robust than a *modus vivendi* in order to ensure liberty. Citizens who hold comprehensive doctrines must endorse a constitutional regime that secures similar rights and liberties for all other citizens if they are to feel secure in holding such doctrines themselves. They must, in other words, endorse such arrangements as a matter

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[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid., 590.

of political principle, as the best way to ensure their own liberty.[310] They might also endorse such a regime on a ground that is consistent with a comprehensive doctrine.[311]

With these two rationales in view, one political and the other from the perspective of a comprehensive doctrine, it strikes me that Rawls develops in this later essay a clearer articulation of the moral commitments to the kind of constitutional regime imagined in political liberalism. For Rawls, such a regime is necessary for the peaceful co-existence of citizens who hold mutually incompatible comprehensive doctrines. Already in the preface to the second edition of *Political Liberalism*, Rawls introduced the notion of "civic friendship," which describes the kind of relationship generated between citizens who exercise the criterion of reciprocity by way of public reason on matters relating to constitutional essentials.[312] Civic friendship, in Rawls's view, entails not only the articulation of public arguments such that other citizens can understand them (since, after all, Servetus could understand the reasons why Calvin would want to burn him at the stake even though he could not possibly have agreed to them),[313] but articulation such that other citizens could *possibly* agree. Rawls re-iterates this point in "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited."

But in the later essay, Rawls goes farther to suggest that the introduction of comprehensive doctrines into public deliberation need not be detrimental, given the proviso, and can even be beneficial. For such inclusion can give citizens an idea of

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[310] Rawls writes: "Here the answer lies in the religious or nonreligious doctrine's understanding and accepting that, except by endorsing a reasonable constitutional democracy, there is no other way fairly to ensure the liberty of its adherents consistent with the equal liberties of other reasonable free and equal citizens." John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64:3 (1997), 782.

[311] Rawls offers this religious rationale as a possible example: ""In endorsing a constitutional democratic regime, a religious doctrine may say that such are the limits God sets to our liberty..." (Ibid.).

[312] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, li.

[313] Ibid. Also reiterated in Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 579.

where their conversation partners are coming from, which can serve to advance discussion and strengthen the bonds of civic friendship. He writes:

> Citizens' mutual knowledge of one another's religious and nonreligious doctrines expressed in the wide view of public political culture recognizes that the roots of democratic citizens' allegiance to their political conceptions lie in their respective comprehensive doctrines, both religious and nonreligious … We may think of the reasonable comprehensive doctrines that support society's reasonable political conceptions as those conceptions' vital social basis, giving them enduring strength and vigor. When these doctrines accept the proviso and only then come into political debate, the commitment to constitutional democracy is publicly manifested. Made aware of this commitment, government officials and citizens are more willing to honor the duty of civility, and their following the ideal of public reason helps foster the kind of society that ideal exemplifies.[314]

This latest conception of public reason, then, recognizes a salutary role for the articulation of comprehensive doctrines in public debate as a way of building solidarity and civility.

Rawls's work on public reason is important because it constitutes a paradigmatic articulation of the problem of religion in public life from the perspective of liberal political theory. Many commentators explicitly or implicitly situate Rawls in this exemplary position in their work on this topic. Many of these same thinkers also implicitly expand the restrictions that Rawls places on public reason to include any public speech in any democratic political space that addresses political issues.[315] As we have seen, Rawls limits his analysis to matters of constitutional essentials and fundamental justice, though he himself at times implicitly broadens the scope, particularly when he

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[314] Ibid., 592-593.

[315] Richard Rorty's influential essay "Religion as a Conversation Stopper" (1994) is an example in this regard. Rorty tends to think in terms of conversations about "public policy" in general. See Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 168-174. Writing of Stephen L. Carter's claim that "religion is a source of moral knowledge rather than a source of moral beliefs," Rorty argues that "Knowledge is justified true belief … in the public square of a pluralistic democracy, justification is always up for grabs, and why the term 'source' of moral knowledge will always be out of place" (173). Note how Rorty broadens the context of public discussion (the "public square of a pluralistic democracy") in which religious claims are problematic. Compare this view to Rawls on constitutional essentials.

discusses the duty of civility with respect to citizens. I am only interested in noting this flexibility in the scope of different treatments of public reason. For my purposes, I am happy to accept this broader scope, in which the problem of public reason means the problem that arises in any public discussion of any political issue, when conversation partners whose perspective is informed by any comprehensive doctrine need to articulate their views in a way that could possibly lead to consensus on political arrangements.

More recently, theorists have begun to question a broader conception of public reason that includes any public conversation about social norms, values, and policies. For example, Jeffrey Stout in his *Democracy and Tradition* (2004) defends a theory of democracy that views it as a living tradition distinguished by characteristic normative claims and practices and which, in the U.S. context, has been paradigmatically articulated by thinkers such as Paine, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dewey, Baldwin, and Ellison, among others. Democracy for Stout is not in the first place an institutional political arrangement as it is in Rawls, though democracy does of course have a particular institutional arrangement. Democracy is rather a way of being in the world. As such, it implies a particular formation of persons as citizens in the context of a moral community.

Stout argues that thinkers like Rawls, Rorty, and others offer a view of public reason that is too restrictive of "the role religious reasons play in the public forum."[316] Stout notes in Rawls's notion of the proviso the tendency to think that arguments that appeal to religious language inevitably violate the canons of public reason, as Rawls has defined it. Stout reads Rawls's argument to defend a notion of respect for others who participate in public conversation but who may not defend a religious comprehensive doctrine: "It might be thought that offering religious reasons, without supplementing

[316] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 68.

them by appeal to the social contract, is inherently disrespectful. But why need this be a sign of disrespect at all?"[317] Stout asks us to imagine a person who, wanting to be honest about her rationale for endorsing some policy, cites religious reasons. Such a person might "draw you into a Socratic conversation on the matter, take seriously the objections you raise against my premises, and make a concerted attempt to show you how *your* idiosyncratic premises give *you* reason to accept my conclusions."[318] Stout argues that this form of "immanent criticism," as he calls it, doesn't at all disrespect conversation partners who hold a different comprehensive view. On the contrary, it deals seriously with the terms on which conversation partners make their own arguments.

So far, I have examined public reason as a dominant framing of what I call discursive political agency. I suggested that public reason is the scholar's political agency. With it, the scholar contributes to public debates in which members of a democratic polity deliberate about issues relevant to norms, law, and policy. I have charted the arguments about public reason in recent political thought. These arguments constitute the background against which political theorists and theologians have considered the role and contribution of religious citizens in modern democratic societies. In the next section, I explore these debates in detail.

The Religious Citizen

The religious citizen is a character, or rather a character trope, that emerges in discussions, particularly in political theory, about the place of religion in the secular

[317] Ibid., 72.
[318] Ibid. Emphasis original.

polity.[319] As a character trope, the religious citizen is a wayward progeny of the Kantian scholar. Like the Kantian scholar, the religious citizen's primary mode of political agency is public reason. But the religious citizen has an unusual problem that other citizens don't (allegedly) have: the religious citizen is wont to appeal to fundamental religious or theological commitments to warrant her public arguments, and other citizens are unable to engage these kinds of arguments in the public forum. Therefore, the religious citizen is something of a character-contradiction: she exercises a mode of political agency that is incompatible with the content of her public claims. The religious citizen therefore represents the worry that in the process of democratic deliberation, persons of faith may want to make public arguments that rest on religious justifications – justifications, that is, generated from religious beliefs or systems of religious beliefs.

The argument in the philosophical literature typically takes the following form. First, it is noted, religious citizens are said to rely on religious "reasons," "rationales," or "grounds." The alleged problem here is that citizens who engage in democratic deliberation but who do not subscribe to religious beliefs – let's call them "secular conversation partners" – will not be able to engage in good-faith public deliberation with religious citizens. Secular conversation partners will not endorse the metaphysical foundations on which such religiously grounded arguments are made. In the literature, secular conversation partners are said not to have "access" to religiously grounded

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[319] I don't mean that all authors explicitly develop a character they call "the religious citizen," though sometimes they do. Hence, Robert Audi imagines "the point of view of a morally upright religious citizen who wants to live in a free and democratic society." Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 9. Similarly, Christopher J. Eberle argues that "so long as a religious citizen sincerely and conscientiously attempts to articulate a rational for his favored coercive policies to his compatriots, then he has thereby discharged his obligation to respect them…" Eberle, *Religious Convictions in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

Instead, I mean that the religious citizen is a character trope who represents the way that the participation of persons of faith in the democratic public sphere is typically framed in this literature.

rationales. Without access to religiously grounded rationales, secular conversation partners cannot genuinely scrutinize the claims of their religious interlocutors. But public reason, as we've seen, requires that arguments made in public discursive spaces admit of public scrutiny because all participants in public discourse are to have equal access to them. In effect, then, religiously grounded rationales do not conform to the ground rules on which public deliberation is conducted in democratic polities.

Scholars have staked out a multitude of positions on the question of how religious citizens ought to participate in democratic public life. Some argue that liberal notions of civility and respect obligate religious citizens to offer secular rationales in addition to any religious rationale to justify favored policies and proposals.[320] Others argue that as long as citizens are willing to offer secular equivalents for religiously grounded rationales, then citizens may introduce religiously grounded rationales into public debate.[321] Still others argue that while religious citizens ought to argue so far as possible on the basis of secular rationales, they are not finally obligated to abandon religious justifications.[322] Another position holds that certain "restraints" are placed on religious justifications, but these don't apply to every citizen and in every situation.[323] There is great complexity to

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[320] Rawls's notion of the "proviso" that I discussed above fits into this category, as does Audi's "principle of secular rationale." See Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[321] Jürgen Habermas argues that only secular rationales will finally be authoritative in public deliberation, but religious citizens may introduce religious grounds as long as they "translate" them into equivalent secular rationales or as long as secular conversation partners are willing to assist in this translation process. I return to this notion of translation below. See Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006), 1-25. Stout argues against this position, which he characterizes as a kind of "IOU" (Stout 81). His notion of immanent criticism, however, involves the skill of negotiating secular rationales on their own terms.

[322] Eberle argues that religious citizens should do their best to develop public justifications for coervice laws. But if that effort ultimately fails, religious citizens may rely on religious grounds for their public arguments.

[323] The work of Kent Greenawalt reflects this position. Kent Greenawalt, *Private Consciences and Public Reasons* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Greenawalt, *Religious Convictions and Political Choice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

these positions. For the purposes of this section, I won't analyze them in detail. Again, my purpose here is not to evaluate the viability of these proposals as responses to the problems that religion poses to political life. I'm interested instead in the way political identity and agency are supposed to relate to one another in the figure of the religious citizen these proposals posit.

All of these positions attempt to invest the religious citizen with a particular kind of discursive political agency. The religious citizen, in this literature, is capable of performing certain discursive operations on her religious commitments in order to make them suitable for public discursive consumption. She can, first, "translate" her fundamental religious commitments into claims that her secular conversation partners can both understand and critically engage. Call this first approach "translation."

Alternatively, the religious citizen can bracket her religious commitments, select secular arguments that support her view instead, and argue on the basis of the secular arguments that do not rely upon theological arguments. Call this second approach "reason giving."

I note also a third approach, immanent criticism, which follows Stout's suggestion above: a religious citizen may opt to disclose her religious rationale for a particular view and then attempt to show that an opponent ought to support a similar view based on the opponent's own argumentative grounds. Immanent criticism, in other words, circumnavigates the problem of intelligible public arguments by positing a capacity to enter into another's discursive world in order to show the other a way to shared conclusions. Immanent criticism posits that a citizen has among her agential capacities the ability to imagine herself in the discursive world of another and critically to evaluate

that world. That is to be sure an interesting claim. But since immanent criticism is supposed to work within another's normative world, an examination of it isn't relevant to the present exploration of the religious citizen's own identity and its relationship to her own agency. Thus, I won't consider immanent criticism here.

Note the unusual way in which the religious citizen follows in the legacy of the scholar. The religious citizen's political agency, like the scholar's, is discursive. But the religious citizen is a figure in whom a fundamental and abiding tension is invested, for her fundamental commitments conflict with the norm of public reason. The substance of the religious citizen's political agency, in other words, conflicts with its form. The religious citizen represents the attempt to modify the dominant model of political agency, the scholar's discursive political agency, in order to ease this tension between substance and form.

In the next sections, I analyze the first two accommodations – translation and reason giving – in detail. My interest here is in revealing the implicit picture of political identity that the religious citizen's discursive political agency contemplates. I argue that a citizen capable of translation and reason giving is one for whom a residue of identity – the part associated with her religious commitments – is bracketed, or left behind, in the exercise of political agency.[324] My interviews, however, lend clarity to the way in which political identity is mediated in the kinds of claims religious citizens make in public argument. The interviews complexify this implicit view of the relationship between

[324] Indeed, in liberal political theory, any "comprehensive doctrine," to use Rawls's term, is supposed to be bracketed for the purposes of public debate if that doctrine is epistemically inaccessible to conversation partners who do not hold that doctrine. I'm only interested here in religious commitments and the relationship they bear to identity and agency. My analysis here may hold for other kinds of comprehensive doctrines. However, I suppose different cases would require their own analysis.

political identity and discursive agency that theorists of the religious citizen have not adequately considered.

Translation

Translation is one operation that accommodates the religious citizen's discursive political agency to the norm of public reason. Habermas argues in a 2006 article for what he calls the "institutional translation proviso." He thinks that only secular rationales finally count in the public sphere as a way of justifying public arguments. Thus, says the institutional translation proviso, any citizen who deploys a religiously grounded rationale will need to "translate" these justifications into an idiom secular conversation partners will understand if they want these justifications to have any purchase in public arguments.[325] Habermas urges that both religious citizens and "secular citizens" have to cooperate in the task of translation if the cognitive labor involved in creating dialogue between religious and secular conversation partners is not to be an "asymmetrical burden" for either. Both religious and secular citizens, he argues, should view the requirement of translation as a "cooperative task."[326]

As a dimension of his understanding of communicative rationality, Habermas has always insisted on the possibility of translation between different moral logics and

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[325] Habermas writes: "Given that [religious citizens] may only express themselves in a religious idiom under the condition that they recognize the institutional translation proviso, they can, trusting that their fellow citizens will cooperate for accomplishing a translation, grasp themselves as participants in the legislative process, although only secular reasons count there" (10). Habermas describes persons who aren't able or willing to conform to the institutional translation proviso as "'mono-glot' citizens," a term which, I suppose, would also describe secular citizens who only speak in one public language.

[326] He writes: "Whereas citizens of faith may make public contributions in their own religious language only subject to the proviso that these be translated, the secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content of those presentations and enter into dialogues from which religious reasons then might well emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments" (11). Habermas thinks that religious citizens have important "key resources" to contribute to public life; and the work of translation properly distributed can involve those key resources in public deliberation.

languages in the process of reaching mutual understanding across time and space.[327] In using the language of translation, idiom, "the polyphonic complexity of public voices," and on the like, Habermas seems to be saying that at least in some cases there is something like an equivalent expression of religious grounds for public policy and legal programs that can be articulated in some "generally accessible language."[328]

Reason Giving

Another, more dominant accommodation to public reason is reason giving. In this strategy, religious citizens have at their disposal an arsenal of reasons or rationales that can be used to justify arguments made in public contexts. This arsenal might include religiously grounded reasons. Other reasons might be compatible with secular moral logics and are therefore said to be "publicly accessible." As I noted above, these authors

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[327] For a lucid discussion of Habermas on translation, see Jon P. Gunnemann, "Habermas and Macintyre on Moral Learning," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1994), 83-108.

[328] Habermas commends the religious credentials of the Civil Rights Movement in the American context: "Martin Luther King and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement illustrate the successful struggle for a broader inclusion of minorities and marginal groups in the political process. In this context, the religious roots to the motivations of most social and socialist movements in both the United States and European countries are highly impressive" (15). But if one were to, say, analyze the speeches and sermons of King on the assumption that their contents represent the result of some process of translation, one would, I think, be hard-pressed to identify what exactly constitutes the religious "language" which he translated into what we have as a secular "idiom." On the other hand, Habermas might think that King articulated grounds for political change in terms of a religious language, and, in this case, it was up to secular conversation partners to take on the burden of translation. But in this scenario, it is similarly difficult to imagine what the secular equivalent would look like into which King's public speech would be translated. Against both of these alternatives, I am more inclined to think that what we have in King's speeches and sermons is something much more carefully integrated than translation. Thus, it seems to me that Habermas's notion of translation doesn't accurately account for the kind of discursive operations of which both religious and secular citizens are, or should be, capable. Stout makes a similar point when he notes the way in which the rhetorical work of figures like King works to transform the discursive parameters of public reason:

Moreover, as Richard Lischer has argued, King became less inclined to weave together elements of Christian theological and American political traditions in his sermons and speeches as he developed his prophetic voice. See Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. And the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Jeremy Waldron explores in more detail the problem of the notion of translation in this connection. See Jeremy Waldron, "Religious Contributions in Public Deliberation," *San Diego Law Review* 30:4 (1993), 817-848.

are interested in the problem about when, if ever, it is appropriate to use religiously grounded rationales in public deliberation.

For example, Robert Audi formulates his "principle of secular rationale" in this way: "The principle of secular rationale says that one has a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless one has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reason for this advocacy or support (say for one's vote)."[329] Audi's principle imagines that in public argument, citizens, both secular and religious, select among reasons and then deploy them to support arguments (or votes) for some policy. Notions like the "principle of secular rationale" assume, I think, that religious citizens prefer to offer religious grounds to justify their public arguments, and might even do so if they could get away with it. Religious citizens ideally feel that they ought to exercise restraint so that religion doesn't to become, to use Richard Rorty's phrase, a "conversation-stopper." Discursive political agency here is implicitly imagined to consist in the ability to construct different arsenals of rationales and then, motivated by the discursive virtues of respect and restraint, to use them appropriately.[330] A potential problem with the reason-giving model, I suggest below, is that it threatens to confuse the relationship between religious and secular rationales. For some religious citizens at least, theological concepts illuminate rationales that are acceptable in public speech. Thus, when a religious citizen offers a "secular rationale," she is doing so not *instead of* a religious one but *in light of* it.

I have argued throughout this dissertation that there is a constitutive relationship between identity and agency – that, in other words, to have commitments and to act on

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[329] Audi, 86.
[330] See the discussion of Stout on immanent criticism in section 1 above.

them both presumes and constitutes a certain kind of self. The discursive capacities of translation and reason giving postulate that religious citizens are capable of bracketing these commitments in different ways, either by rendering them in an acceptable moral language (translation) or by offering arguments, also rendered in an acceptable moral language, in support of a proposal that parallel arguments a religious citizen would like to make using an explicitly religious rationale (reason giving).

To bracket commitments might mean that a religious citizen masks or leaves behind a dimension of one's identity – a residue, as I called it above, kept from public view. I don't dispute that activists exercise discursive political agency in ways that abandon explicit appeals to religious or theological language. But I wish to complexify the implicit constructions of identity and agency that the dominant models of the religious citizen imply. The absence of the obvious appearance of theological claims, I want to suggest, does not mean that religious identity has been bracketed so that a residue remains undisclosed. Instead, this absence reflects a complex weaving together of normative commitments, and, concomitantly, of political identity. My interviews with Amanda and Diane point to this.

Amanda Bostwick

Recall that Amanda's political identity has been forged in an agonistic journey that ties together holiness conceptions of sanctification, humanist ideals of freedom, life, and health, and feminist understandings of self and moral agency. That journey began in the shadow of her father's ministry in the Church of Christ, Anderson, IN, in the context of which Amanda developed an appreciation for that tradition's conception of the

Kingdom of God as well as her mother's ability to mediate the moral languages and practices of public health to the church and its ministry. Amanda's journey continued with her struggle to understand herself as a gay person when the church rejected her. In her turn toward "humanism," Amanda realized that the church's normative categories remained an important source of moral meaning. And in her advocacy for persons with HIV/AIDS, Amanda works to interpret many, often competing moral discourses to her clients and to make meaning out of them for herself.

I asked Amanda about CARE's advocacy work, in terms of its current policy interests, strategies and approaches, and about how they do policy work on the ground. Increasingly, Amanda said, CARE has turned its attention to issues around the "efficacy" of HIV/AIDS treatment and care. Amanda already established in the interview that she understands that the complexity of HIV/AIDS advocacy can be addressed in terms of any number of discourses – medical/scientific, theological, social-scientific, etc. One needs to understand, she said, that there are people from all over the state in the Georgia Legislature, and they come with different backgrounds, political views and experience, religious identities, education, and understandings about issues. There are, for example, many legislators with "Baptist" theological sensibilities, she said. For these legislators, as with any other, she said, it is important to establish what she called "affiliation" as much as possible. That is, as far as possible, it is important to find an interpretive framework within which she as an advocate can communicate with legislators. "Debate," she said, doesn't work: legislators don't respond to debate as a form of advocacy.

Amanda told me that when she ventures into the public sphere to advocate in support of public policies relevant to HIV/AIDS care, she doesn't engage in God-talk.

For one thing, she thinks that most of the time God-talk doesn't get her very far. She does, however, talk about freedom, life, and health: "Well, you're going to find that anything that I say publicly, and anything that rolls out of here in terms of policy and legislative advocacy, is going to coalesce around three values, freedom, life, and health." She went on to say that these three values are both "theological concepts and they are theological values," but they are also "socio-political concepts and values."

These three values create a "framework," which orients Amanda's public work around her fundamental theological commitments. This framework, as we saw in chapter 3, facilitates negotiations across different discourses, whether they are political, medical, scientific, etc. Recall for Amanda, there is a connection between, first, her understanding of the Kingdom of God that wells up in a person, and is manifest in the way a person lives her life; second, the values of freedom, life, and health, which a person who bears the Kingdom of God will value and the proper balance of which she will work to achieve; and third, the kinds of policy decisions that promote these values in the lives of persons who live with HIV/AIDS. Amanda is still in the process of clarifying the relationship between the explicitly theological notion of the Kingdom of God and the ideas of freedom, life, and health, the meaning of which she attributes in part to her formation in secular "humanism."

There are limits to the kinds of arguments Amanda is willing to make. Legislative victory is important in the work of any policy advocate. But there are also limits to affiliation, Amanda stressed. One does not want to misrepresent one's affiliation with particular points of view or interpretive frames. Such an approach would verge on the "manipulation" of legislators, she said, a situation with which some

lobbyists are comfortable. One must instead be satisfied when one can appeal to some legislators some of the time, with a view towards building and maintaining relationships. That's because advocacy is a form of "witness" to a set of fundamental commitments involved in an issue. For Amanda, effective advocacy is the "accumulation of witness and testimony over time."

In response to Habermas, we can ask: Is Amanda doing translation when she talks about freedom, life, and health in the context of her public policy advocacy? The metaphor of translation, it seems to me, does not adequately capture what is happening here. Translation suggests that there is a foreign expression, left undisturbed in the act of translation, to which the translated, and here publicly articulated, idiom is a kind of equivalent. But Amanda, recall, is trying to put her Kingdom of God theology into constructive conversation with the "secular humanist" values of freedom, life, and health.

If successful, Amanda is saying, her conception of the Kingdom of God and the values of freedom, life, and health will presumably interpret one another, or, perhaps the theology of the Kingdom will serve as a foundation on which the values of freedom, life, and health rest.[331] In any case, her project aspires to greater complexity than simply equating these ideas. Amanda understands that the relationship between these two constellations of concepts is complex, perhaps even irresolvable in some ways – but in any case, not simply equivalent. Secular conversation partners can be agreeable with Amanda's public discourse about freedom, life, and health, since these are "humanist" values rather than explicitly theological concepts (though for Amanda they have theological meaning as well). That which remains hidden in Amanda's public speech –

[331] Amanda states, however, that freedom, life, and health "are [at] the core way that I have always organized my life and the intersection of my public life and my private life." This troubles the notion that they might be parasitic on some other concept, like the Kingdom of God.

the theological piece about the Kingdom of God – and that which appears – freedom, life, and health – are not, in any case, semantic equivalents, as they would need to be for the translation metaphor to be relevant. In Amanda's quest to make meaning out of her work, her particular conception of the Kingdom of God and the values of freedom, life, and health will be in some kind of mutually illuminating relationship with one another, even if the former concept cannot appear in her public speech.

If, as I've argued, fundamental commitments and political identity are linked, then, I want to suggest, there is another problem with the translation model. The translation model, in the perspective of the argument I've made in this dissertation, would seem to obscure not only a person's fundamental moral commitments articulated in the best way they know how (in an explicitly theological language) but also a dimension of a person's political identity. Translation effectively asks a person to substitute an equivalent moral language for a native, or preferred, one. But this would be to present an alternative identity to public view, which threatens to bifurcate one's identity. It seems to me that Amanda is doing something quite different. It is true that on my logic, the conditions of public discourse in the secular public sphere are such that Amanda is often unable to present her political identity in its most robust form. But the hidden theological dimension of Amanda's "framework" is still very much in operation, since it bears some important contiguous relationship to the way Amanda understands the values of freedom, life, and health. This constellation of concepts motivates, in turn, Amanda's work on specific issues pertaining to policy and law.

I also detect a potential problem with the reason-giving model of the sort that Robert Audi proposes. On the reason-giving model, the exercise of discursive political

agency means that a religious citizen offers reasons in support of some policy proposal that secular conversation partners can engage. These reasons are in some way compatible with theological reasons, which, presumably, the religious citizen might prefer to offer were the discursive context to permit it. To say that freedom, life, and health are compatible with Amanda's conception of the Kingdom of God is not to say enough about them. They are not only compatible with the concept of the Kingdom of God; they are also in some sense fundamentally related to it. If one were to push Amanda about why she thinks freedom, life, and health are important, it seems to me that at some point, she would have to make reference to this particular conception of the Kingdom of God.

To clarify, imagine a scenario based on Audi's framing of public reason. Amanda and a secular conversation partner are arguing about some issue, say, gay marriage. Amanda appeals to freedom, a category that is not ordinarily understood to carry any necessary theological baggage. Amanda argues that to deny gay people the right to marry is to deny their freedom. Presumably, Amanda and her secular conversation partner can roughly agree on the meaning of freedom, and freedom (along with the argument on which it rests) can count as a public reason.

My point is that Amanda has not simply selected freedom as an alternative reason that happens to be compatible with her core theological commitments (which are out of bounds). Instead, freedom is integral to the way she understands her fundamental theological commitments (around the issue of the Kingdom of God) – but she still doesn't need to appeal to these theological commitments. Amanda hasn't hidden anything of her fundamental commitments by virtue of appealing to a compatible alternative. Since commitments and identity are linked (on my argument), Amanda hasn't presented an

alternative identity – she simply hasn't disclosed all of her integrated identity. She is no moral schizophrenic.

Unlike translation, I think reason giving more accurately describes what religious citizens actually do: in political contexts in which discursive requirements demand "secular reasons," religious citizens give secular reasons when they might have also offered theological justification. The reason-giving model threatens (but does not necessarily imply) the confusion that secular rationales are offered *instead of* religious rationales, as if secular reasons were merely an alternative to religious ones. But it would be a mistake to imagine that secular reasons are necessarily an alternative to theological justification that might be offered. Secular reasons might in a religious citizen's conceptual scheme exist in some constitutive relationship to explicitly theological concepts, without which the value of the rationales acceptable in public discourse would be lost to the religious citizen.[332] Amanda might talk about freedom, life, and health in public contexts. She might have preferred, in addition, to talk about the Kingdom of God because her secular rationale – the one that involves talking about freedom, life, and health – makes sense to her *in light of* her understanding of the Kingdom of God. These two constellations of concepts are, for Amanda, in some constitutive relationship, not alternatives, to one another. In other words, she can't say everything that she would want to say about freedom, life, and health in discursive contexts that place limits on public speech, for to do so would involve a recourse to talk about the Kingdom of God.

If reason giving suggests the notion of alternative instead of the notion of supplement, an "instead of" and not an "in addition to," then, on the level of political

[332] Ronald Thiemann, drawing on Donald Davidson's notion of a "web of belief," makes a similar argument in his *Religion and Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 107 ff.

identity, it also threatens to posit moral schizophrenia –the bifurcation of the self into a publically visible self and another self that remains hidden from public view. A religious citizen who publicly articulates moral commitments also presents a self, and a self that presents herself in terms of moral commitments she doesn't prefer really presents a different self. But if a secular rational is in some way contiguous with theological commitments, then the only problem is that the self is not fully disclosed. Amanda's public self is a partial, but not a schizophrenic, disclosure of her political identity.

Diane Lawson

In the context of Diane's political activism, discursive political agency points to some of the same conclusions that I drew in my discussion of Amanda's work. But the discursive universe in the context of which Diane does her work is considerably different from Amanda's.

An instructive place to begin an examination of Diane's interview in this regard is the website of the organization she leads, the Georgia Heritage (GAH). The GAH website says a lot about religion without saying very much specifically about it. When one examines the GAH website, one finds a quote from Charles Finney exhorting Christians to participate in politics since God will bless or curse our nation according to the "course Christians take in politics." Another from George Washington affirms the important role religion plays in maintaining morality. One also finds one or two sparse sentences that articulate a mission for the GAH, to "bring this country back to its Judeo-Christian roots and to the traditional values that made America great."[333]

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[333] Here I rely on the website to which I have given the pseudonym "Georgia Heritage." I cannot provide exact bibliographic information without disclosing Lawson's identity.

Otherwise, there is almost no religious language on the site. Lawson posts "Action Alerts" periodically, especially during the legislative session, which instruct supporters to respond to legislative developments. Almost none of these have any religious language whatsoever. The American heritage rests on "Judeo-Christian values, principles, and morals," and these need to be defended. But it isn't clear in the website exactly what these values, principles, and morals are. It is also not clear exactly what theological rationale warrants the connection between Judeo-Christian values, principles, and morals and the American founding, nor between all of this and particular legislative issues.

One can surmise, judging, for example, by the questionnaires that the GAH circulates to candidates running for office, that the organization favors stances against abortion, gambling, multilingual public accommodations, and illegal immigration. They are for capital punishment, minimum taxation and limits on federal regulation more generally, and increased parental control over their children's education.[334]

When I asked Diane how the GAH knows what issues its constituents think are important, she indicated that the organization periodically surveys its members. She said: "Yeah, and generally speaking, the same issues come up, you know, every time. People wanna be sure the family is protected, you know, marriage is protected. They wanna be

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[334] For a special run-off election for Georgia house district 129 (scheduled December 1, 2009) between candidates Steve Earles and Kip Smith, a Georgia Heritage candidate questionnaire asked the candidates to indicate their support for or opposition to the following issues: "prohibit abortion except in cases of rape, incest or where the life of the mother is endangered; abolish or reduce state income taxes or income tax rates; capital punishment for certain crimes such as first degree murder; adoption of children by homosexuals; universal health coverage paid for by taxpayer dollars; expansion of legalized gambling such as casino/riverboat gambling, and off-track betting; require proof of citizenship to receive any welfare benefits or social services; all signage or printed material, including voter ballots, by state & local governments to be in English language only." Here I cite information from the website to which I have given the pseudonym "Georgia Heritage." I cannot provide exact bibliographic information without disclosing Lawson's identity (accessed December 4, 2009).

sure that life, they wanna make sure we move the ball along as far as protecting life. Taxes is always on there, school choice is always on there, you know." But Diane's framing indicated less a rigorous, systematic ideology and more a set of values that have a broader cultural currency.

One way that one might describe this discursive terrain might be in reference to what some authors have called "culture wars" – the notion that moral argument in the U.S. context is contested by two polarized factions, a liberal, "progressive" faction and conservative, "orthodox" faction, and that this polarization in American "culture" in turn polarizes American political debate.[335] I'm not interested here in exploring the extent to which Diane's work can be appropriately described by this paradigm or others like it. Suffice it to say that Diane's vague yet apparently successful appeal to "Judeo-Christian values" must have some fairly broad cultural purchase – otherwise, such an appeal, without further clarification of its meaning (of which there isn't much on the website), would be unintelligible. Not only does Diane appeal to these values, she also wishes to advance them. She wants them to be normative in American moral and political discourse.

When I asked Diane about how she uses religious language in her political work, she told me that "Reason and logic work – I do not have to wave a Bible in [legislator's] faces which some, not all, expect me to do, and that would turn some away from me. Reason and logic based on principle, which is rooted in a Biblical worldview that doesn't have to be shouted from the rooftops, is how I approach issues [and] people. It is called

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[335] See James Davidson Hunter's paradigmatic statement in his *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, And Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). See also arguments against the culture wars thesis in Morris P. Fiorina et. al., *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Education, 2006). See also Hunter and Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War? A Dialogue on Values in American Life* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

the 'power of persuasion.' I do not have to quote chapter and verse to make my point."[336] Publicly accessible reasons, in other words, generate this "power of persuasion."

Absent thicker description than my work with Diane is able to claim, I can't say exactly what the operation of "reason and logic" look like in her dealings with legislators. I can't say for certain, in other words, whether she makes sustained, rigorous arguments for her position or whether lawmakers simply associate her with particular positions, which they know is backed up by voter support, so that the operation of reason and logic is more about how Diane can persuade them to legislate accordingly. She suggests that it's more like the latter alternative:

> So, I, you know, I believe that everybody that works with me, or everybody I work with down at the capitol, know what I stand for. You know, they know that I am definitively pro-life, you know, pro-family, I want the IRS out of my life and I want families to have more of their money. I mean, they know, on social as well as fiscal issues, where I stand. So, the working relationship that I've developed over the 11 years that I've been doing this job is just really to be treasured. We have an understanding, we don't always agree, they don't always like me at the moment, I don't always like them at the moment, but we circle back around because, ultimately, most of the people down there and I have the same ultimate goal. It's just a matter of how are we gonna get there.[337]

Absent more data, it is also unclear, in arguments about "how are we gonna get there," the extent to which lawmakers are persuaded because they share Diane's "worldview." On Diane's account, it would appear that she's either arguing with lawmakers who share her worldview and, all things being equal, are therefore likely to endorse Diane's positions. Otherwise, Diane is arguing with lawmakers who don't endorse her worldview. But in the latter case, according to her, unsympathetic lawmakers already understand what Diane stands for, such that the conversation is really about what is possible in light of that reputation. In any case, it doesn't sound like Diane has much occasion to recourse to explicit God-talk.

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[336] E-mail communication with Lawson, 11/8/2007.
[337] Interview with Lawson, 8/2/2007.

Diane bears some resemblance to Tocqueville's American Christian. Hers is a quest to make a fairly generic but still squarely partisan conception of moral and political value coincident with a fairly general but not unbounded notion of a "Judeo-Christian worldview." Like Tocqueville's American Christian, Diane understands political values to emanate from a religiously defined moral universe that also constitutes the moral foundation of American political life. Diane's work represents an aspiration to craft a political identity in which religious and political commitments are integrated and to make that integrated identity normative – to be the criterion of what American political discourse means. She wants, in other words, any political argument about family, abortion, small government, etc., to rest on a broadly recognizable framework of values anchored in a religious – the "Judeo-Christian" - tradition. Diane makes arguments about values that do not explicitly invoke God-talk (theological claims), and thus satisfy the norm of reason-giving as a thinker like Audi has defined it. But for Diane, arguments about values that do not explicitly invoke God-talk are still, in a way, religious arguments because they are intelligible in the context of a broadly religious worldview. Thus, the models of translation and reason-giving, if again understood to mean the ability to offer "secular reasons" alternative to but consistent with a separate set of religious or theological rationales, seem inadequate to describe what is going on here.

One gets the sense that Diane, more so than Amanda, is not afraid to appeal to her power base to make arguments that persuade. She tells me:

> I am very fond of saying, when I am out speaking, as I was Sunday night, that I am one person. And, if when I send out an alert or when I put out a phone call or I call one of our elected officials, and say, 'This is Diane Lawson, and we would like, I'd like to know how you're gonna vote on A, B, or C legislation,' they know it's not just me, I am backed up by thousands of people.

She goes on to describe the use of phone networks to engage constituents in the process of "swaying" elected representatives to support the GAH's position: "You know, if there's a particular representative or senator that we want to sway, not only do I talk to them, but we target their district and get phone calls going in from their constituents saying, 'We really would like your vote on this.'"

An important part of what makes Diane's arguments work, I gathered from my conversation with her, is her reputation as a political organizer. Unlike Amanda's notion that effective advocacy is the "accumulation of witness and testimony over time," Diane would be much more inclined to understand effective advocacy as the accumulation of successful policy making over time. Diane doesn't need to articulate her position in explicitly religious terms in part because her arguments are backed up by political power. This is profoundly distasteful to the scholar. But Diane's approach to political communication points to the ways in which reason giving as a practice of public reason is deeply conditioned by instrumentalized political power, even if, strictly speaking, Diane makes arguments that meet all the criteria of public reason. Legislators know what might be coming to them if they don't take Diane's arguments seriously.

IV. Political Agency Beyond Discourse and Cooperation

I've argued in this chapter that the figure of the religious citizen, which appears in recent liberal political thought, posits a normative political anthropology of religious selves. The religious citizen represents a set of anxieties that some theorists of liberalism have about the way that persons of faith participate in political life – about, in other words, the kind of political agency they will exercise. Persons whose fundamental

commitments are shaped by their formation in religious communities, these theorists worry, are liable to marshal theological claims in support of policy proposals. But this poses an obstacle to the proper functioning of the democratic public sphere, since secular conversation partners won't be able to engage theological claims.

The figure of the religious citizen represents an argument about the kind of political agency persons of faith ought to exercise in public life, captured in the notions of translation and reason giving. Based on my argument that political identity and agency are deeply intertwined, I suggested that both translation and reason giving are problematic. The trouble with both of these, I argued, is that they threaten to give false impressions about the complex relationship between political identity and agency. Both of these discursive operations suggest a self that is, at worst, bifurcated and, at best, intentionally hidden from public view. I argued that this picture inadequately describes the relationship between religious commitment, the formation of the self, and political agency.

So far, I have only been talking about the dominant normative model of political agency as cooperative public discourse. The last point I made in the section above, about the instrumentality of Diane's discursive political agency, gestures towards the limits of the dominant framing. The relationship between instrumentality and political agency is one I would like to consider in the remainder of this dissertation. It brings us back into the orbit of Max Weber.

The dominant model argues that the more aggressive, uncooperative, and instrumental modalities of political agency are problematic. There are at least two problems with this argument. The first is that political agency is often exercised in

aggressive and instrumental modalities. Political life entails that, at times, competing parties negotiate with one another or even engage in a zero-sum contest of competing interests, finally decided by a vote. A normative model that only norms one form of political agency is potentially incomplete. Of course, theorists who recommend the discursive norm think that aggressive, uncooperative, and instrumental modalities of political agency depart from the norm. This leads to a second problem: It isn't clear in arguments that promote the discursive norm what is so problematic about aggressive, uncooperative, and instrumental modalities of political agency. Many arguments in favor of the discursive norm suggest that instrumentalized forms of political agency threaten to undermine the dignity of political agents because they treat persons as means to ends. But so often political movements that have contributed to the greater inclusiveness of marginalized persons in political life (an achievement on the part of human dignity, to be sure) have used techniques that do not reflect the deliberative norm.[338]

The problem with a lot of political theory and political theology, I now want to argue, is that this literature often does not adequately consider the complex ways in which persons exercise political agency, and, by extension, does not consider the implications for the formation of political identity. In the last section of this chapter, I gesture towards the complexity of political agency by again turning to the recent work of Michael Walzer, who complicates the dominant model of political agency.

Walzer in his book *Politics and Passion* (2004) critiques the myopic focus of liberal political theories on individual rights. These theories, he argues, do not sufficiently attend to the role of group politics in unsettling social inequalities and establishing individual equality. Against liberal theories that posit formal and procedural

[338] Michael Walzer develops this argument, which I discuss in more detail below.

remedies to inequality, Walzer advances a theory of group politics that highlights its "material strength," which he calls "meat-and-potatoes multiculturalism."[339] Along the way, his argument undoes the reliance on deliberative forms of political participation so favored in liberal political theory.

Walzer argues that deliberative theories of politics haven't adequately accounted for a range of political practices, beyond deliberative communication, which are indispensible in any modern democracy. This is in part, he suggests, because deliberative theories primarily value a particular conception of cooperative reason that aims at consensus. But politics has other "values," too, Walzer writes, and these are "often in tension with" deliberative reason: "passion, commitment, solidarity, courage, and competitiveness (all of which also require qualification)."[340] Several political practices have discursive elements (recall Stout's comment at the beginning of this chapter) but often don't foreground cooperative or public deliberation: political education, organization, mobilization, demonstration, statement, debate, bargaining, lobbying, campaigning, voting, fund-raising, corruption, "scut work," and ruling.[341] All of these practices are marked by "a permanence of conflict" rather than a trajectory toward reasoned consensus by way of discourse. They show that politics includes cooperation but is in large measure about power, conflict, and victory:

> So politics is the endless return to those disagreements and conflicts, the struggle to manage and contain them and, at the same time, to win whatever temporary victories are

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[339] Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), xii, 38. For critiques of *Politics and Passion* by theologians, see issue 7.1 (2006) of *Political Theology*, devoted to that book. I find Harlan Beckley's critique of Walzer's defense of group equality to be especially insightful. See Harlan Beckley, "Empowering Groups and Respect for Individual Dignity: A Review of Michael Walzer's *Politics and Passion* " *Political Theology* 7, no. 1 (2006). See also Walzer's response, in Michael Walzer, "Political Theology: Response to the Six," *Political Theology* 7, no. 1 (2006).

[340] Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism*, 92.

[341] Ibid., 101.

> available. The democratic way to win is to educate, organize, and mobilize more people than the other side does. 'More' is what makes the victory legitimate, and while legitimacy is strengthened if good arguments can be made about the substantive issues at stake, the victory is rarely won by making good arguments."[342]

Thus, for Walzer, "rational agreement" is not a realistic state of affairs to which to aspire in politics. Instead, what is needed is a "*modus vivendi*" to ensure that political conflict is constructive.

Deliberative theories posit that persons are recognized as rational agents in and through deliberation. Walzer proposes that non-deliberative political practices recognize the inherent dignity of persons as rational moral agents as well – "not only as individuals who are rational in exactly the same way as we are but also as members of groups with beliefs and interests that mean as much to them as our beliefs and interests mean to us."[343] Deliberative democratic theory is premised on the notion that citizens are free and equal participants in political life. But "political history," Walzer writes, is largely the history of the establishment of inequalities. To theorize democratic politics in light of the practices of struggle and conflict is to suggest an "amended version of political history: now it is the story of the establishment *and partial disestablishment* of inequality."[344] Democratic theories that include a more capacious conception of political practice, accounting for the fact of social inequality and the ongoing and passionate struggle against it, better acknowledge moral agency than theories that reduce political practice to deliberation.

This chapter has argued that there are problems internal to theoretical considerations of public reason, particularly as it relates to religious citizens. But Walzer points to the rich and morally ambiguous ways in which persons exercise political

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[342] Ibid., 103-104.
[343] Ibid., 104.
[344] Ibid., 105, emphasis original.

agency, of which public reason is only one form. A full accounting of political identity and agency will have to take a complex rendering of political agency into account.

Combining Walzer's insight with the challenges to accounts of political agency and identity already raised brings me to my next and final chapter. There I will consider what my arguments suggest for a fuller account of political identity. Then I explore how we might account theologically for an expanded view of the reciprocal relationship between the complex exercise of political agency and the intricate patterns of identity belonging to it. Finally, I will consider how we might begin to use these understandings of political agency and identity to develop a richer theology of political vocation.

Chapter 5: Cruciform Pilgrims: Concluding Reflections on Political Agency

This final chapter begins where the last one left off, with a question that follows from Walzer's complication of deliberative theories of democracy: What are the theological implications for political anthropology when the exercise of political agency is uncooperative, instrumental, and even aggressive?

This question pulls together the main themes of the dissertation. I've argued throughout that identity and agency are interrelated. The choices selves make both emerge from and affect their formation as selves. In institutionally differentiated and morally pluralistic societies, I argued in chapter 1, selves are always negotiating multiple and often competing sources of moral meaning. In chapter 2, I argued that Christian framings of political identity do not adequately address the complex ways persons relate theological and other kinds of moral commitments. Chapter 3 examined narrative as a context in which these many sources of moral commitments, the very stuff of political identity, are negotiated.

The discussion through the first three chapters explored political identity. The last chapter moved to the relationship between political identity and agency. In the last chapter, I made two main arguments: (1) that the dominant normative conception of political agency in much of contemporary political theory and theology is cooperative, public discourse; and (2) when this norm is applied to the participation of religious citizens in public life, the result is a problematic rendering of the political identity of these citizens. At the end of the chapter, I introduced an additional argument, drawing on the work of Michael Walzer: (3) that this dominant conception of political agency fails to capture its complexity.

What remains is to consider how modern political life as a particular kind of context of moral action shapes the formation of the political self along the anthropological categories I've developed, political identity and agency. This question circles the discussion back to Weber's work on the political vocation. Weber, recall, explored the morally ambiguous character of the political vocation in modern polities. Politics in the modern world, Weber argues, requires that persons at times make hard choices between absolute ends and responsibility for the implications of their actions. These tensions are exacerbated by particularly modern conditions of modern political life – modern configurations of power, money, bureaucratic and party structures, and the like. To move into the question about how modern political life structures the formation of the self, I begin with Walzer's critique of the deliberative norm, since his critique reflects an awareness of the complex conditions of modern politics.

Weber isn't saying that political life is the only context of moral action in which persons have to make hard choices between the moral demands of uncompromising principles and the responsibility that comes with any moral judgment. One can imagine that in the family or economic life, for example, one might need to make a moral judgment that entails a conflict between principle and responsibility. What sets political judgment apart as a form of moral agency, Weber argues, is that it is exercised within a particular social context, the "state" is Weber's category (and here we might understand political contexts more broadly to include more or less formal political organizations), in which persons vie for access to legitimate means of domination backed up by coercive force. They vie for political power, in other words. Thus, political judgment is particular in that it *makes* others do whatever is decided (it "dominates" others, to use Weber's

term). Domination in this sense is not a normal implication of moral judgment in other contexts of social life. Modern constellations of money and political organization further complicate political judgment in modern polities.

Weber's concern about political vocation as it exists in modern polities, then, is to address the moral ambiguity associated with it. I suggested briefly at the beginning of the last chapter that the moral ambiguity of the political vocation is often lost in much of the contemporary theological discussion about political agency. Christian theologians who think that Christian citizens ought to be actively engaged in public life tend to follow political theorists in affirming the dominant normative conception of political agency as cooperative, public discourse. This, I recognize again, is a *norm* of political agency. It functions as an ideal that governs the exercise of political agency in the public sphere. That is, as a norm, public discourse is not intended simply to affirm the way persons actually exercise political agency.

Michael Walzer, we saw in the last chapter, challenges that norm, arguing that it doesn't resonate with the many ways in which persons exercise political agency that are neither deliberative nor cooperative. Walzer also argues that deliberation need not constitute the only norm in terms of which persons respect one another as political agents in the public sphere. Political agents also respect one another as political agents in the passionate, if at times instrumental, exercise of political agency. Walzer's work represents one normative model that takes seriously the insights about political responsibility that Weber explores.

Walzer seeks to vindicate the moral status of the more competitive, instrumental modalities of political agency, particularly when marginalized groups use them to achieve

equal political standing in society. While I find Walzer's account persuasive on this point, I'm not interested here in his larger argument about political passion and the achievement of equality. I want instead to focus on the relationship between Walzer's insight about the complexity of political agency, and Weber's insistence upon the morally ambiguous character of decision-making that the political vocation requires and the kind of self it produces.

As we saw in the introduction, Weber urges persons who wish to pursue a political vocation in modern polities to consider whether or not they are comfortable with the kind of self they might become in and through such work. That modern political self must live with the moral ambiguity resulting from the abiding, irresolvable tension between the moral demands of responsibility and absolute ends, complicated in modern societies by novel and morally ambiguous constellations of power, money, and bureaucratic organization.

Specifically, recall, Weber argues that modern polities greatly multiply political structures, roles, constituencies, and ends. The political media of money and power are not new, but the pressures that these media exert upon political processes are novel. These complexities, in turn, obscure and strain the moral task of political responsibility. Just as the modern context of political responsibility is marked by vast complexities, so legitimate physical force, the political means that distinguishes the modern state, amplifies the stakes of responsible choice. In this situation, political responsibility inevitably conflicts with the unconditioned ideals that guide it. These irreducible conflicts generate moments in which politicians must, like Martin Luther, simply take a stand and live with and within abiding tensions and consequences the stand generates.

For Weber, the stand results in the creation of a certain kind of self, one who is inevitably broken. Perhaps, like Steve, she has secured some relative good but has done so at the expense of other goods. Or perhaps she has violated some meaningful principle, or committed a sin of omission, failing to do all of what a principle requires. Maybe she has compromised. Or perhaps her opponents triumphed, and she lost the day entirely. Weber's account is compelling, in my view, because he is aware that political life is always about the play of power and trade-off, and this reality has profound implications for self-making.

In the terms I've developed in this dissertation, I want to say that Weber is, in part, pushing his audience to consider a question about the relationship between political identity and agency. I defined political identity as the interrelated understanding of self and moral commitment grounded in, and relevant to, membership in a political community or communities. It includes the sources of one's moral formation (e.g., church community, political culture, ethnic heritage, gender identities, etc.), the fundamental moral commitments generated as a result of such formations, and, in light of these, a sense of what one ought to contribute to political communities, how one ought to do it, and what kind of life one will live as a result. Political agency means the capacities, skill sets, and practices (e.g., debating, compromising, mobilizing resources, etc.) efficacious in particular political contexts (a state legislature, a city street, a public hearing, etc.) in which agents engage in forms of political work (policy activism, community organizing, legislating, campaigning, protesting, etc.).

Throughout this dissertation, I have viewed the moral formation of persons engaged in political work (which I've called "political anthropology") in the setting of

political vocation. I have argued that an adequate rendering of political anthropology in this perspective must attend to political identity and agency and the relationship between them. I claimed at the outset of the dissertation that these dynamics are mutually constitutive: political identity renders the exercise of political agency intelligible, and political agency, in turn, realizes political identity.

The complex picture of modern political life Weber and Walzer advance urge us to consider what its implications are for the formation of persons who pursue a political vocation, since, as I've argued, moral action and moral formation are inextricably linked. The complexity of the modern political vocation lies in the moral ambiguity of political agency. Weber and Walzer both tell us that the modern political vocation means that political agents will inevitably use power instrumentally to advance their interests, and, in doing so, they will do violence against the goods that others hold – goods that they might even in other situations want to affirm themselves. In political life, one can't both be responsible and faithful to absolute ends all of the time. And that irreducible conflict has implications also for the moral formation of persons – for the formation of political identity, as I've called it, in the context of political vocation.

There is a lot also in the background of self-construction to which we must be attentive if we are to understand political identity and political judgment aright. I attempted to describe the complex background of self-construction in chapter 1, in which I discussed the relationship between moral pluralism and the formation of the self in modern societies. All of that complexity comes into play as persons negotiate the moral demands of political life and thereby form themselves as political agents, in part through the judgments they make.

As Weber tells us, the moral demands that political vocation places upon political agency and identity are never completely addressed, its moral ambiguities never completely resolved. Thus, Steve Mackey had to make sense of the difficult compromise he made with the segregationist politics of Paducah's "City Fathers" in order to advance his work on low-income housing. Diane Lawson must sometimes work against rivals in the Georgia legislature without "making it personal." Wanda Foley has to confront the tension between her aspiration to build a maximally inclusive community of citizens and the reality that her method of organizing trades, at times, in strategies of instrumental power that advance interests finally by force rather than relationship building. Personal narrative, I argued in chapter 3, is an important medium in which persons address and attempt to work through these moral conflicts.

One dynamic that emerged in chapters 1, 3 and 4 is the way in which persons negotiate and order many, often competing, sources of moral meaning on the way to constructing political identities, an always unfinished project. This negotiating and ordering is relevant to different political communities to which political agents understand themselves to belong and to bear moral obligations. Some of these political communities belong to this world – they are communities, for example, like Gamaliel, CARE, or Georgia Heritage.

But what of moral commitments that point beyond the political communities of this world? The City of God is a theological category that describes the ultimate political commitments that Christians hold by virtue of their belief that creation culminates in a final, eschatological communion with God. One of the features of this theological category is that it intertwines ultimate moral commitments with a conception of political

membership. The City of God is a political community marked by peace and harmony. Christian commitments to peace and harmony are transcendent because of their eschatological status (they reside in and emanate from this ultimate eschatological situation). They are also supposed to structure the commitments that persons hold with respect to the worldly political communities to which they belong.

The category of the City of God is not a framing that the persons I interviewed necessarily invoked. I use it here as an analytical category to explore in theological perspective the tensions between the responsibilities that persons bear to the worldly political communities to which they belong and "absolute ends," in Weber's term – the obligations that transcend worldly political interests and, in the context of political vocation, often conflict with them. In this conclusion, I develop a theology of political vocation that responds to the complex process of self-making that political vocation entails.

My Reformed sensibilities induce me to think that the conflicts between commitments to different political communities do not disclose the existence of multiple sources of ultimate value. The City of God is an important concept for Christians in part because it describes the ultimate source of value for our moral and political commitments. Peace, unity, and love of neighbor, in other words, are ultimate values, and worldly articulations of value have, in some sense, their ultimate foundations in these. The problem, in my view, is that our distorted perspective on this ultimate source of value leaves us with multiple and often conflicting articulations of value, embodied in the many political communities to which we belong. Political conflict, in other words, exists because sin exists, and it exists in combination with human finitude.

To conclude the dissertation, the question that this chapter addresses is: What theological meaning might we assign to the fact that political conflict, and all of the negotiations of moral meaning that go into it, shapes political selves?

In the first section, I examine another representative figure, the Augustinian pilgrim, who appears in two recent Augustinian political theologies. An Augustinian conception of the eschaton, of creation's final resolution in the end time, orients the politics of the Augustinian pilgrim. Kristen Deede Johnson and Charles Mathewes both develop political theologies that feature the Augustinian pilgrim. The problem with the Augustinian pilgrim, I argue, is that this figure doesn't sufficiently acknowledge the complex character of political agency as I've described it throughout this dissertation, and particularly in the last chapter. Both Johnson and Mathewes rely on the discursive paradigm of political agency. But it is all too easy to accommodate an eschatological political ethic to the discursive model, I argue. It is unclear how the eschatological ethic works in the context of a broader conception of political agency that includes its more instrumental and aggressive modalities, as Walzer describes it. It is also unclear what it would mean for Christian citizens to limit their political participation to the moments in which it only involves cooperative, public discourse.

In the second section, I examine an alternative version of the pilgrim, which I find in Calvin's moral theology, principally in book III of his *Institutes*. Calvin's pilgrim is deeply influenced by the work of Augustine. But unlike the Augustinian approaches of Johnson and Mathewes, I argue that Calvin's pilgrim is intimately engaged in the world even as she, paradoxically, moves away from it and towards God. The cruciform pilgrim, as I call Calvin's figure, is intimately involved with the world in that she, like Christ,

bears the cross of the world on the pilgrim's journey of sanctification. For Calvin, the world is indeed a penultimate moment that finally gives way to eschatological resolution. But in Christ, the world has its own creaturely integrity worthy of God's redemption on, as it were, its own terms – brokenness in sin combined with limitation in finitude.

One problem with any constructive appeal to Calvin is that he inhabited an essentially pre-modern world, even though he was perhaps modernity's most important harbinger. I discuss this problem in more detail in the second section below. We can't really appropriate directly from Calvin a Calvinist political anthropology relevant to contemporary political life because Calvin did not experience political life the way we do. For that reason, I turn in the third section to the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's discussion of responsibility and politics in his *Ethics*. Like Calvin, Bonhoeffer attends profoundly to God's response to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. And like Calvin, Bonhoeffer recognizes that God redeems the world in part by being present to it in the person of Jesus Christ. But in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer is more keenly aware of the demands of the moral life in the modern world and therefore offers a more useful examination of God's presence in that context.

It is important, however, to keep Calvin and Bonhoeffer in conversation with one another. At least in his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer does not view the City of God as a fundamental orientation of the worldly political vocation in the way that Mathewes and Johnson do.[345] That is not to say that Bonhoeffer was unaware of the moral demands that a distinctively Christian political ethic requires of the political vocation. Far from it. Bonhoeffer was one of the most important martyrs of the last century precisely because

[345] In his defense, Bonhoeffer alludes to but did not complete a planned section on political ethics. See Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 244 ff.

he both understood and was prepared to accept the moral demands of the Christian life. Still, the eschaton doesn't figure as prominently in Bonhoeffer as it does in Calvin or in the Augustinian political theologies I discuss in the next section. To fully understand the moral ambiguity that marks the political vocation for Christian citizens, I argue, one must keep the City of God in view.

I argue that the political vocation has a cruciform shape. To bear the cross in the context of the political vocation is to stand in between two cities, the earthly city and the City of God, and to belong paradoxically to both. That task requires an ongoing and always imperfect negotiation of the demands both make upon the self and agency in the context of political vocation. Concretely, that task requires that one elevate the moral demands of the City of God with the recognition that, in the political life of the earthly city, often the only way to do so is to compromise them. One must thereby also accept that in living out the political vocation, one becomes the kind of self who dwells in the liminal space between the two polities to which one belongs.

The insights of Calvin and Bonhoeffer suggest a theological framing in which to explore political vocation, but they don't help us to understand what makes the political vocation political. To answer that question, I have turned throughout this dissertation to figures like Weber, Walzer, and Isaiah Berlin, along with Steve, Wanda, Diane, and the other Christian activists I interviewed. This strategy would likely irritate theologians like Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank, and probably also Johnson and Mathewes, whom I discuss below. These theologians insist that any adequate understanding of the political has to be grounded in the tradition of Christian thought and practice.

Calvin and Bonhoeffer, however, do provide justification for *why* we might turn to Weber, Walzer, and others for an understanding of the political. These theologians recognize in the brokenness of the fallen world the texture of creation redeemed in Christ. This last point is the focus of this conclusion. Descriptions of worldly politics that trade on its norms are, in the hands of theologians like Hauerwas, Milbank, and others, the beginning of a damning indictment of figures like Weber and Walzer. But from the point of view that Calvin and Bonhoeffer offer, these descriptions are not only appropriate but also necessary if we're to see what redeemed creation looks like. Redemption, as Bonhoeffer helps us to see, is brokenness transfigured.

This final chapter departs from the descriptive work I've done throughout this dissertation. It moves into theological reflection, which I take to be informed by the Christian activists whom I've introduced. By "informed," I don't mean that I am borrowing their theological insights in the work I do here. Rather, the interview participants inform this conclusion in the sense that their lives indicate the shape of lives lived in service to political vocation. That is the subject of the theological work in this concluding chapter.

I. Augustinian Pilgrims

Johnson's Theology of Public Conversation

Kristen Deede Johnson, in her recent book *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (2007), contends that Augustine's political ontology frames a response to pluralism that constitutes a better alternative than either

liberal conceptions of toleration or agonistic engagement with difference.[346] Liberal theories of tolerance, Johnson argues, amount to a strategy of avoidance with respect to difference. Agonistic theories of democracy, by contrast, value critical engagement because, these theories hold, to be fully human is to be constituted in constructive relationships with difference. Agonistic theories, in other words, proceed on the basis of ontological concerns about the nature of human being. Johnson argues that the problem with agonistic theories is that they lack a sufficient normative basis on which to evaluate the negotiation of difference, precisely because they insist upon the fundamentally contingent character of all identity configurations.

Johnson argues that Augustine's political thought both complements liberal tolerance and completes the ontological turn that agonistic theories begin. First, because of the persistence of human sinfulness, Augustine argues that earthly political institutions must be configured to create and maintain peace. With liberal conceptions of toleration, then, Augustinian political theology recognizes the need for a worldly polity that creates and maintains space, however imperfectly, for persons to explore their own conception of the good life.

Second, Johnson asserts that Augustine's political ontology constitutes a more adequate basis on which to ground constructive engagements with difference. Augustinian eschatology posits a familiar distinction between earthly and heavenly cities. The earthly city is marked by the permanence of conflict and violence that results from congenitally disordered love. The Heavenly City, by contrast, finally resolves the fall. It is the ultimate destiny of creation reconciled to God, marked by the "harmony, order,

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[346] Kristen Deede Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

peace, kinship, and love" that "are at the heart of God's design for the created, and redeemed, world."[347] The Heavenly City is not a delayed reality that unfolds at the end of time. For the elect, the Heavenly City reaches into the world and orients the world's politics to the proleptic politics of the eschaton.

On Johnson's Augustinian view, Christians are pilgrims who merely sojourn in this world. Christian political identity is determined by citizenship in the Heavenly City, which also orients worldly moral commitments and priorities: "… Augustine always places the Christian identity of those whom he is addressing or discussing at the forefront. A pilgrim, for example, who is called to be a judge is to approach being a judge *as*, rather than separate from his identity as, a Christian."[348]

Like agonistic theories, an Augustinian political ontology requires sustained engagement with difference, "beyond toleration," as a condition of human flourishing. Unlike agonistic theories, however, difference in Johnson's Augustinian view has an ontological basis in eschatological unity. Difference is not simply the cacophonous interaction of contingent ways of being in the world. Rather, difference can be meaningfully engaged in the context of "public conversation" precisely because the harmony that reigns in the City of God grounds both its existence and its destiny. This culminating harmony, Johnson argues, makes possible constructive relationships between persons who have different identities, norms, and ways of being in the world.

Thus, encounter with difference is ontologically significant, and difference generates political conflict. But conflict is itself not finally ontologically significant. Conflict is only possible in the fallen world because human beings do not adequately

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[347] Ibid., 176.
[348] Ibid., 229. Emphasis original.

understand how difference is ultimately situated in an eschatological unity. Indeed, that congenital ignorance necessitates the continual and constructive engagement with difference in the context of public conversation.

An eschatological politics of the sort that Johnson recommends makes difference accessible by relativizing it. What is really real, this position holds, isn't difference, but the unity and peace that marks the City of God. This unity and peace also make constructive engagement with difference possible. In relativizing difference, this Augustinian frame also relativizes the sting of political conflict. Any political conflict that the Augustinian pilgrim must negotiate loses its sting because it is ultimately epiphenomenal. The sting of conflict is dulled even more because it happens in the context of conversation. In conversation, one merely risks misunderstanding and disagreement, perhaps even intractable disagreement.

But politics is finally about action, and action can cut deeper than intractable disagreement. When constructive conversation has run its course, conversation partners may decide that their sense of the good is correct after all, and other views are inadequate. At that point, public conversation gives way to a political process that may include organizing, cajoling, rallying, lobbying, protesting, and other instrumental forms of political agency. Such a process may ultimately issue in policies or laws that deliver some goods at the expense of others. In this case, the significance of conflict in public conversation is heightened. If a pilgrim happens to be a judge, to use Johnson's example, then she will likely make decisions between competing goods that have tragic consequences for relevant constituencies and more than an ephemeral impact on the ways people experience the world.

In other words, politics is not only about appreciating difference. Sometimes, as Walzer helps us to understand, politics entails a contest of competing goods in which differences are sorted out. Were it not for the morally complex practices and political emotions that motivate politics as contest, we wouldn't be able to make sense of the incremental political gains that historically marginalized groups have made. These gains and losses aren't just ephemera decorating the pilgrim's progress through a penultimate world. They are integral to the way people experience the world and their own moral agency in it. In short, by relativizing difference under the orbit of the eschaton, I fear this Augustinian view threatens to depreciate the moral complexity of political life.

Mathewes' Theology of Public Life

Charles Mathewes develops a theology of public life that in many respects resembles Johnson's theology of public conversation.[349] With Johnson, Mathewes affirms that public life has meaning and value only in relationship to the eschaton, at which point all creation is brought to its ordained end. All created things, Mathewes writes, are "eccentric" because their "center of gravity," the locus of their being and end, is located outside of themselves, in God. Thus, the work Christians do in public life during the penultimate age known as "the world" ought to affirm that all creaturely being is grounded in God.[350]

Following Augustine, Mathewes understands public life "during the world" to be a penultimate context in which human beings live together in ways that anticipate the

[349] Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[350] Mathewes uses the phrase "during the world" to indicate that the world, the *saeculum*, in the original Latin construction and early Christian theological understanding, denotes a time, not a place, that is the penultimate moment before final eschatological resolution.

eschatological culmination of creation. The world in eschatological perspective is not without value, but it is also not of ultimate value. The world is "something we fundamentally must endure – not an absolute and unquestioned 'given,' but rather a contingent configuration of reality that will one day pass away."[351] Public life is merely one context of the pilgrim's ascetic endurance of an intermediate time that anticipates final reconciliation with God: "To imagine our life in the world as a matter of endurance is to see this life as a pilgrimmage; it is to see oneself as a voyager, a *viator* in the world, in history."[352] In its most genuine form, Mathewes argues, public life is the proleptic performance of the eschaton during the world. At its best, public life affirms God's sovereignty over creation and challenges the sinful assertion of human power.[353] Such a performance means that human beings are always engaged in interrogating and re-ordering their loves to better approximate the proper ordering of love to God.

Under the conditions of sin, however, human beings can never adequately complete this task. The result is political conflict. Mathewes argues that agonistic theorists misunderstand the nature of political conflict because they "naturalize" it – they imagine that conflict is an irreducible feature of social life. But political conflict in Augustinian perspective is epiphenomenal. It is an expression of disordered love, and the struggle in the context of public life to order love rightly, rather than a token of

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[351] Ibid., 17.

[352] Ibid., 12.

[353] "We properly participate in the political realm, not by recognizing the sovereignty of God as communicated through political structures in which we find ourselves, but rather by recognizing the sovereignty of God indirectly and obliquely, through our resistance to those structures' implicitly imperialistic tendencies. It is an eschatological, not apocalyptic, mode of civic engagement: we properly participate in public life by resisting the 'closure' of what passes for politics today, that is, by resisting the inevitable gravitational tug of any political order towards claiming final sovereignty over every other possible locus of human attachment, including especially the church, the neighbor, and the stranger." Ibid., 160.

fundamental estrangement or alienation.[354] "Love itself," Mathewes concludes, "is the ultimate form of struggle, and struggle is unintelligible apart from love."[355] Agonistic political theories therefore wrongly "naturalize" conflict. In recognizing love as the proper form of political conflict, Mathewes asserts, an Augustinian account of public life is "more thoroughly agonistic" than agonistic political theories.[356] Augustinians understand that "interlocutors" ought to be open to the possibility that their loves are disordered, and that constructive, if conflictual, engagement with others can be a context in which better orderings are discovered. Politics is therefore best viewed as a mode of conversion.

Playfulness, Mathewes argues, is as a primary mode of engagement in a politics in which conversion is always a possibility.[357] In play, "partners" offer their "beliefs" to one another for critical feedback in order to reach mutual understanding. Play therefore necessarily involves "risk," since play proceeds on the assumption that beliefs could be inadequate and in need of revision: "…'riskiness' means us being willing to put one's beliefs 'into play' – that is, to offer them to the other as a means of shared understanding – a way for the two (or more) of you to understand the conversation."[358] A "playful politics" is receptive to the "dialogical character of public life."[359] Play not only recognizes "the inescapable facts of compromise, bargaining, negotiation, etc., in public

[354] For Christians, Mathewes argues, conflict is not the most basic fact about human society; conflict is merely the symbol (and the symptom) of the reality of our disordered loves. The struggle of politics can be a struggle for the conversion, conversion of one's loves and the loves of one's interlocutor. This interpretation of political conflict re-imagines it as a conflict about our loves" (Ibid., 276). See also Charles T. Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony: Christian Political Participation Beyond Liberalism," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 21, no. (2001), 141. The argument against agonistic political theory in "Faith, Hope, and Agony" is an earlier version of the argument in *A Theology of Public Life*.

[355] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 276.

[356] Ibid., 266.

[357] Compare Mathewes's notion of "relaxed playfulness" in Ibid.,140.

[358] Ibid., 280.

[359] Ibid., 297.

affairs," it is also a fundamentally welcoming form of political agency. Playful politics always welcomes the contributions of others who wish to expose their views to the "riskiness" inherent in play.[360]

Like Johnson, Mathewes relativizes the politics of the world in the frame of an Augustinian eschatology and thereby transforms the scholar's political agency. Politics permits play because the moral commitments at stake in political relationships between pilgrims are always, at best, approximations of the ultimate order. Thus, moral commitments always admit of revision, which play facilitates. And like Johnson's "public conversation," the political agency of the pilgrim in Mathewes' account is "dialogue," the site in which immanently revisable "beliefs" are critiqued and revised.

Note Mathewes' easy association of play with "compromise, bargaining, and negotiation." One can ask two questions here. First, are these activities, like Mathewes' "dialogue," about the "risky" but constructive exchange of "beliefs" to produce "shared understanding"? Compromise, bargaining, and negotiation are instrumental practices. They facilitate exchange of ideas to be sure, but for particular ends. When parties compromise, bargain, or negotiate, each side cares about what the others value to the extent that such regard helps to produce at least some of what is wanted. Much of the time, these practices do not have a genuinely "dialogical character." Second, are these practices playful in the way that Mathewes means play? That is, do they facilitate constructive communication with the levity that comes with an awareness about the finally contingent status of our self-understanding? To frame these practices as play in this way degrades, I fear, the stakes often involved in compromise, bargaining, and

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[360] Ibid.

negotiation. These practices inevitably involve the partial loss of goods. But even partial loss can have dire consequences for some.

The pilgrim's political agency – her "public conversation" and her "dialogue" – like the figure of the pilgrim herself, reflects the penultimate, ephemeral status that these Augustinian positions confer upon the world. But it becomes difficult for these framings to take other forms of political agency seriously.

II. Calvin's Cruciform Pilgrim

Any appeal to John Calvin to frame a theological response to political agency has a number of problems. The first and most obvious of these has to do with the relationship between Calvin, Calvinisms, and modernity. Calvin and Calvinisms are deeply implicated in the conditions that make the modern world possible. One suspects that any political theology that draws on his work will simply reiterate problems associated with modern politics. A whole body of scholarship,[361] typified by Max Weber's essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and advanced in no small measure by Walzer's early work,[362] attributes to Calvin and Calvinisms the momentum towards

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[361] A number of authors have argued for Calvin's distinctive impact on modern thought and politics. See for example John T. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," *Church History* 18, no. 3 (1949); Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); Rémi Tessier du Cros, *Jean Calvin, De La Réforme À La Revolution* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). William Stevenson argues that Calvin has something to teach modernity about freedom. He writes that Calvin's conception of freedom "exposes by comparison the shallow and seemingly truncated ideas found in the major modern thinkers" in William R. Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

[362] Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). As Walzer notes in that book: "Virtually all the modern world has been read into Calvinism: liberal politics and voluntary association; capitalism and the social discipline upon which it rests; bureaucracy and its systematic procedures and its putatively diligent and devoted officials; and finally all the routine forms of repression, joylessness, and unrelaxed aspiration" (300). For a recent Calvinist critique of Walzer's account, see Timothy A. Beach-Verhey, "Calvinist

modern institutional life and moral experience. It is a challenge, then, to imagine any theological response to political agency drawing on Calvin that constructively addresses the very world that Calvin helped to create.

A second problem is that the conditions that structure moral experience in the modern world were simply not part of Calvin's world. The modern world is plausibly described as morally pluriform, with different institutional settings, each of which with a distinctive moral logic and language.[363] For Calvin, the moral life is a journey of restoration, in which the image of God, congenitally distorted by original sin, is repaired in the elect as they move toward eternal enjoyment of God's glory. God ordains the journey of the moral life, the Holy Spirit initiates and sustains it, the cross of Christ becomes its form, and the resurrection of the body is its final end. The problem of the moral life for Calvin is not in navigating competing moral demands. The good life is unitary, and precisely this unity discloses the radiant glory of God. The problem for Calvin is one of obedience and will. The moral life for the elect, Calvin argues, is a quest that involves continual training, testing, and hardship, which God intentionally imposes.[364]

Resources for Contemporary Political Life: A Critique of Michael Walzer's *Revolution of the Saints*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (2009).

[363] For example, Steven Tipton, following Ralph Potter, analyzes four "styles of ethical evaluation" – authoritative, regular, consequential, and expressive – that are dominant in modern societies. Each of style has its own orientation, mode of knowledge, discursive form, understanding of right, and conception of virtue. Each has characteristic institutional locations, organizational structure, social roles and relations, occupational and educational class locations, and degrees of prescriptivity. See Steven M. Tipton, "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism," in *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*, ed. Richard Madsen et al.(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15-40. Tipton's four ethical styles roughly correspond to the four "strands" of moral tradition that shape moral discourse in the U.S. context, according to Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart.*

[364] For example, Calvin writes in the *Institutes*: "For whomever the Lord has adopted and deemed worthy of his fellowship ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with many and various kinds of evil. It is the Heavenly Father's will thus to exercise them so as to put his own children to a definite test" (Calvin, *Institutes*, III.8.1, 702). He also writes: "[God] can best restrain this arrogance when he proves to us by experience not only the great incapacity but also the frailty under which

Neither, thirdly, did Calvin entertain a modern conception of politics. The civil government was to work concertedly with the church to promote and facilitate godliness.[365] Calvin did not understand secular political life to include many different, more and less formal contexts of political activity (Lovin's "forums"), in which citizens exercise political agency in different modes to do different kinds of political work, as I've discussed in this dissertation. He therefore did not regard conflict to be a normal condition of political life.[366]

A fourth and final problem is that Calvin, following the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, tended to separate "temporal" from "spiritual" jurisdictions. Calvin offers a political anthropology, according to which he sees a "twofold government in man," a political jurisdiction, which has to do with the "concerns of the present life" – food, clothing, political association, etc., and a spiritual "government," which "pertains to the life of the soul."[367] These distinctions correspond to the varying needs of body and soul,

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we labor. Therefore, he afflicts us either with disgrace or poverty, or bereavement, or disease, or other calamities. Utterly unequal to bearing these, in so far as they touch us, we soon succumb to them. Thus humbled, we learn to call upon his power, which alone makes us stand fast under the weight of afflictions" (Ibid., III.8.2, 703). Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I provide book, chapter, and section references as well as page numbers that refer to this text.

[365] The role of the civil government in this task is, as Calvin famously writes, "to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us to one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility." Ibid., IV.10.2, 1487.

[366] Calvin has been an important figure, however, in the development of modern notions of revolution. See Walzer's *Revolution of the Saints* and his essay "Puritanism and Revolutionary Ideology," in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 125-146. See also Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics, an Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 133-161. The Marxist theologian Roland Boer has recently explored the "revolutionary potential" of Calvin's thought in Roland Boer, *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

[367] Calvin reads the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms into the very constitution of human beings: "Therefore, in order that none of us may stumble on that stone, let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the 'spiritual' and the 'temporal' jurisdiction (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life—not only with food and clothing

and also pattern the distinct jurisdictions of ecclesial and civil authorities. On the anthropological level, as well as on the social-institutional level, these jurisdictions should not interfere with one another: "But whoever knows how to distinguish between body and soul, between this present fleeting life and that future eternal life, will without difficulty know that Christ's spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct."[368] It is, Calvin writes, "a Jewish vanity to seek and enclose Christ's Kingdom within the elements of this world."[369] The role of the civil government is to aid in the earthly pilgrimmage: "If it is God's will that we go as pilgrims upon the earth while we aspire to the true fatherland, and if the pilgrimmage requires such helps [which the civil authority provides], those who take these from man deprive him of his very humanity."[370] Beyond providing these "helps," the civil government is to respect the sovereignty of the ecclesiastical authorities in spiritual matters.

These caveats burden any appropriation of Calvin's thought for constructive political theology. Despite these tensions, many theorists have examined the relevance of Calvin's social and political thought for contemporary problems.[371] Here I turn instead to Calvin's moral theology, particularly his discussion of the moral life in Book III of the

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but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority." Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.19.15, 827. For the relationship of this argument to Luther's two kingdoms doctrine, see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 39-80.

[368] Ibid., IV.20.1, 1486.

[369] Ibid.

[370] Ibid., IV.20.2, 1487.

[371] See e.g. André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, 2006). See also Beach-Verhey, "Calvinist Resources for Contemporary Political Life" and André Biéler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964). See also Douglas F. Ottati, "What Reformed Theology in a Calvinist Key Brings to Conversations About Justice," *Political Theology* 10, no. 3 (2009).

Institutes, to structure my response to the Kantian scholar, the liberal religious citizen, and the Augustinian pilgrim and martyr. Though Calvin insists upon the institutional separation and relative sovereignty of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, I argue here that his reflections on the cruciform character of the earthly pilgrimmage suggests a framing of political vocation that captures the moral complexity of modern political agency.

In Calvin's account, the moral life is a long and arduous journey with Christ towards final communion with God. It begins with an awakening to God's redeeming work from within, when human beings are joined with Christ by way of the Holy Spirit, "the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."[372] The journey continues with regeneration in Christ. It includes encounters with suffering and toil that marks existence in this world and mirrors Christ's own journey through it. And it ends with the resurrection of the body, for which Christ's resurrection on the "Last Day" is the "prototype."[373]

Earthly existence has an indispensable role in the greater movement towards salvation. With Augustine, Calvin views earthly existence as a penultimate stage, a pilgrimage, that finally gives way to the culmination of creation in the life to come.[374] In comparison with the "life to come," the "present life," Calvin writes, must be "utterly despised." The "earth" is but a "place of exile."[375] But however comparatively loathsome earthly exile is, Calvin is careful to say, earthly life ought still to be considered

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[372] Ibid., III.1.1, 538.

[373] Ibid., III.25.3, 991.

[374] Calvin continuously refers to earthly existence as a pilgrimmage. See e.g. II.16.14, 523; III.1.3, 540; III.7.3, 693 (also n. 7); III.10.1, 719; III.16.2, 799, among other examples.

[375] Ibid., III.9.4, 716.

as a gift from God.[376] Thus, the stages of a pilgrim's progress towards final reconciliation with God are not equally valuable in an absolute sense. Earthly exile is an impermanent condition that ultimately gives way to the fulfillment of creaturely being in the final resurrection. But each stage of the pilgrimage discloses, by way of "lesser proofs," the shape of creation ultimately fulfilled, "the inheritance of eternal glory."[377] This point is crucial for understanding the status of the earthly pilgrimage as an intermediate movement that is also necessary and valuable in its own way.

The moral life unfolds in the time between the awakening in the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of the body on the Last Day. It amounts to the gradual restoration of the image of God in which human beings are made, and which has been obscured by sin. Calvin calls this process "regeneration."[378] He suggests that regenerate life must "correspond with the righteousness of God" – it has to be a life, that is, marked by obedience to God's law as laid down in Scripture. As such, the regenerated life is a life of repentance, an ongoing process of turning away from the self and turning towards God, both "in the soul itself" and also in "outward works."[379]

Repentance has two parts: mortification and vivification. The former, mortification, is a fearful recognition of divine judgment, in which persons are "violently

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[376] "Indeed, this life, however crammed with infinite miseries it may be, is still rightly to be counted among those blessings of God which are not to be spurned." Ibid., III.9.3, 714. Calvin also councils against an unnecessarily ascetical relationship to earthly goods: "Let this then be our principles: that the use of God's gifts is not wrongly directed when it is refereed to that end to which the Author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good, not for our ruin." Ibid., III.10.2, 720.

[377] Ibid., III.9.3, 715.

[378] Calvin succinctly describes the movement of regeneration in his 1539 response to Cardinal Jacopo Sadoleto: "…Christ regenerates to a blessed life those whom He justifies, and after rescuing them from the dominion of sin, hands them over to the dominion of righteousness, transforms them into the image of God, and so trains them by His Spirit into obedience to His will…" john Calvin and Jacopo Sadoleto, *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976), 68.

[379] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.3.6, 598.

slain by the sword of the Spirit and brought to nought" and which induces them to "reflect upon another mode of life whereby [they] may be able to stand firm in [God's] judgment."[380] Mortification results in a rejection of "the flesh," a life led in willful disobedience to God.

Calvin is famously terse on vivification.[381] It is the process whereby the image of God, "disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression," is restored in the regenerate person. The mind of the regenerate "[puts] on an inclination to righteousness, judgment, and mercy."[382] But Calvin warns that regeneration in the Spirit doesn't mean that the stain of original sin is completely washed away. Regenerate persons are still capable of evil.[383] Thus, the moral life is always caught between inexorable progress towards God and inevitable compromise by sin. Precisely in this tension is the cruciform shape of Christian existence disclosed.

The regenerate life is marked by denial of self and takes the form of the cross. For Calvin, self-denial, the "sum of the Christian life," is a notion that betokens the disciplines by which human beings learn to acknowledge their belongingness to God and

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[380] Ibid., III.3.7, 599-600.

[381] Karl Barth criticizes Calvin for his preoccupation with mortification and insufficient attention to vivification. Barth, responding to Calvin, writes: "It is in view of the Yes pronounced to man in the omnipotence of the divine mercy that there arises the falling-out with ourselves and we hear the inexorable No to our being in the flesh. But this aspect is not given its proper place, and does not clearly emerge, in the presentation of Calvin. The impression is left that the *interitus* of the old man is what really matters in this happening, and in contrast to this the *vivificatio* is introduced only as a pale and feeble hope." Barth goes on to argue that the notion of *mortificatio* is finally incoherent without the ensuing *vivificatio*. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.2*, trans., G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 576. Interestingly, the argument can be made that Barth places so much emphasis on divine agency in the process of sanctification that any human agency in the process is obscured, an issue that is less problematic for Calvin. See Bo Karen Lee, "The Holy Spirit and Human Agency in Barth's Doctrine of Sanctification," *Koinonia* XII, no. 2 (2000).

[382] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.3.8, 600.

[383] Calvin writes: "In this matter all writers of sounder judgment agree that there remains in a regenerate man a smoldering cinder of evil, from which desires continually leap forth to allure and spur him to commit sin." Ibid., III.3.10, 602.

neighbor in all things.[384] Denial of self means "seeking not the things that are ours but those which are of the Lord's will and will serve to advance his glory." Self-denial is evidenced in near self-forgetfulness and zealous devotion to God that "uproots all ambition and craving for human glory and other more secret plagues."[385]

Self-renunciation is also the precondition for genuine love of and service to neighbor. "Show me a man, if you can" Calvin writes, "who, unless he had according to the commandment of the Lord renounced himself, would freely exercise goodness among men."[386] Just as denial of self betokens the process of regeneration whereby the *imago Dei* is restored, so also will those who have properly renounced themselves "honor and love" the "image of God in all men." In the stranger, the regenerate person recognizes the image of God as familiar, beautiful, worthy of gratitude, self-giving, respect, and forgiveness.[387]

Denial of self requires "bearing of the cross." Under the weight of the cross, life is "hard, toilsome, and unquiet." It is "crammed with very many and various kinds of evil."[388] Bearing the cross is a discipline of hardship that disabuses persons of self-love and arrogance in order to teach obedience and attention to God's grace. But more fundamentally, it is a "condition" that moves the saints toward "the end that they be conformed to Christ." As Christ "passed through a labyrinth of all evils into heavenly

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[384] Ibid., III.7.1, 690.

[385] Ibid., III.7.2, 691.

[386] Ibid.

[387] Calvin writes: "Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, 'He is a stranger': but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you by virtue of the fact that he forbids you to despise your own flesh. Say, 'He is contemptible and worthless'; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has designed to give the beauty of his image," and etc. Ibid., III.7.6, 696.

[388] Ibid., III.7.1, 702.

glory," so too must his disciples, conformed to him, "be led through various tribulations to the same glory."[389]

Calvin thinks that God intentionally afflicts hardship as a training in patience and obedience and as forms of "medicine" to heal "the wanton impulse of the flesh," "chastisement," to correct wickedness, and testimony to righteousness at the hands of "offenses of hatred of the world." While Calvin's own habits of mind were shaped profoundly by Stoic philosophy, he rejects the Stoic contention that whatever suffering is involved with bearing the cross is to be endured stoically.[390]

The discipline of bearing the cross teaches the elect that existence in this world is only a penultimate stage that, "by continual proof of its miseries," bears witness to "the future life."[391] But however miserable the world is, Calvin insists that worldly goods are gifts from God that assist progress in the moral life and are to be appreciated in appropriate ways.[392] Among these gifts is vocation, the particular station in life to which a Christian is called to attend. The notion of vocation for Calvin is rooted in his doctrine of election, the final calling, the divinely determined ordering of all creation to final redemption from sin and reconciliation with God.[393]

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[389] Ibid., III.8.1.

[390] Ibid., III.8.8, 709.

[391] Ibid., III.9.1, 712-713.

[392] Ibid., III.10.

[393] Ibid., III.24.6, 971. See also Calvin's exegesis of Rom. 11:29 [*Sine poenitentia enim sunt dona et vocatio Dei* ("For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.")]: [St. Paul] has mentioned gifts and calling; which are to be understood, according to the figure of grammar, as meaning the gift of calling: and this is not to be taken for any sort of calling but of that, by which God has adopted the posterity of Abraham into covenant; since this is especially the subject here, as he has previously, by the word, election, designated the secret purpose of God, by which he formerly made a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans., Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 440-441. Cf. Calvin's commentary on 2 Timothy 1:9 in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans., Rev. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979 [1948]), 194.

Calvin argues that human beings, left to their own devices, are inclined to wander aimlessly through life, getting themselves into trouble along the way. God brings order out of disorder by way of the calling:

> For [God] knows what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither. Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living 'callings.'[394]

The demands of the moral life become concrete by virtue of the stations in life where people are positioned "as a sort of sentry post" – a place of work over which persons have ownership, defined "duties," and by virtue of duties, "limits." Limits alleviate the overwhelming weight of absolute moral obligation. Bakers can't be responsible for all the duties of the teacher. Magistrates can't be responsible for all of the duties of the pastor. Vocation, in other words, marks out an ordered sphere of responsibility so that persons aren't required to attend to every moral problem. Everyone has a cross to bear, just as Christ bore the cross in the world. But the burden looks different in different vocational contexts. A calling, by structuring the moral life, gives it intelligibility.

Calvin's conception of vocation, because it is rooted in his doctrine of election, removes success as a necessary condition of good work. No amount of good work will earn a person eternal life. People are free, Calvin argues, to pursue their vocations courageously, just as a brave soldier charges into a battle without regard for his prospects

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[394] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.6, 724. William J. Bouwsma in his biography of Calvin makes much of Calvin's existential anxiety and its relationship to Calvin's preoccupation with order and disorder. See William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For Bouwsma's understanding of the larger intellectual tensions around issues of order and disorder that are addressed in Renaissance thought, see Bouwsma, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 19-73. A number of other scholars have challenged Bouwsma's psychological portrait of Calvin in this regard. See for example Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 79-98.

of winning.[395] Vocation therefore invites spirited and intimate engagement with the world.

Vocation is a fundamental category in Calvin's moral theology because it ties the eschatological destiny of creation to a cruciform ontology. Standing fast in a vocational context, pilgrims negotiate, always imperfectly, the demands of sanctification in terms of the world fallen around and within them. But that negotiation is itself transfigured into the cross-bearing likeness of Christ as cruciform pilgrims are conformed to Christ in their journey with him through the world.

Critical Response

The political ontology that Augustinian pilgrims inhabit so relativizes the world that it threatens to obscure human and divine engagement with it. For Johnson, an ultimate unity is the necessary condition of worldly difference. Eschatological unity is the proleptic condition that makes possible a worldly politics in which difference is genuinely engaged by way of "public conversation." For Mathewes, worldly politics is ontologically playful because it is situated in a penultimate position relative to creation's eschatological resolution. A normative conception of political agency that emphasizes its deliberative modality is most consonant with these perspectives, since such a conception imagines public life to be a context in which citizens explore the relative status of their

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[395] Calvin writes: "For the purpose of encouraging him to fight such a fight courageously, he calls it *good*; that is successful, and therefore not to be shunned; for if earthly soldiers do not hesitate to fight, when the result is doubtful, and when there is a risk of being killed, how much more bravely ought we to do battle under the guidance and banner of Christ, when we are certain of victory?" He continues: "Because men would run at random, and to no purpose, if they had not God as the director of their course, for the purpose of promoting their cheerful activity, [St. Paul] mentions also the *calling*; for there is nothing that ought to animate us with greater courage than to learn that we have been 'called' by God; for we conclude from this, that our labor, which God directs, and in which he stretches out his hand to us, will not be fruitless." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 162-163, emphasis original.

own identities and moral commitments. In other words, the kind of ontological play that authors like Johnson and Mathewes are after – the exchange of ideas that exposes the finally contingent character identities and moral commitments – remains playful as long as persons are just talking with one another. But it is not clear how playful play is when political agency means competition, struggle, and victory, as Walzer has described it.

Moreover, it is hard to imagine how Christian citizens might participate in public life in ways that limit their participation to its dialogical, deliberative moments. Walzer helps us to understand that politics isn't deliberative much of the time. Even when it is, cooperation and instrumentality bleed together. Hauerwas's Augustinian martyr, whom we met in chapter 2, is perpetually wary of worldly politics precisely because the moments in secular political life which actually accommodate a politics of patient and humble witness to the "alternative political ethic" that is the City of God are rare indeed. By contrast, Calvin's moral theology suggests a political ontology that turns both to the world and to the eschaton. A Calvinist political ontology takes seriously the vicissitudes of secular political life because it understands both the world and its culmination in the eschaton to be irreducible features of God's redemptive response to fallen creation. Unlike the Augustinian view as it is articulated by Mathewes, Johnson, and Hauerwas, Calvin is reluctant to locate God's redeeming work solely in the eschaton, the final resolution of fallen creation. This bears some explanation.

Calvin, like Augustine and others before him, affirms the penultimate status of creation.[396] For Calvin, all created things are destined for a final, material resurrection, in a transformative, eschatological moment. But Calvin also emphasizes that God redeems

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[396] David Steinmetz addresses Calvin's indebtedness to Augustine. See Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 141-156.

creation during the time that is the world – on its own terms, as it were. In the cross-bearing person of Jesus Christ, God does not relieve but transfigures the brokenness and hardship that mark human experience in the world into the form of the cross, the very medium in which human beings are restored in relationship to God during the world.

There is a dark side to Calvin's discussion of the world, and I don't subscribe to all of it. For Calvin, moral experience in this world is mostly miserable, though he stops short of characterizing it as entirely bad.[397] For example, material things, inasmuch as they enable sanctification, are goods not to be despised.[398] Still, Calvin's view is that only some part of creation is finally worthy of redemption, and the rest of it is left to pass away. Human beings suffer because some part of creation is unredeemable. It pulls all things, including the elect, downward into sin.

With Karl Barth and others in the Reformed tradition, I hold that God's redemptive work in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ restores all of creation in relationship with God. In the time before the eschaton, God doesn't redeem the world by radically altering the conditions under which God created it. God doesn't, for example, redeem the world by eliminating human freedom or expanding human powers. I also don't think that God redeems the world by causing suffering that is necessary, transformative, or redemptive, though Calvin holds that it is. I'm saying that the best part of Calvin's insight is that God's response to suffering, which often has (and increasingly has, in my view) human causes, is, in part, to stand with human beings who suffer. In the

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[397] "Indeed, this life, however crammed with infinite miseries it may be, is still rightly to be counted among those blessings of God which are not to be spurned." Ibid., III.9.3, 714.

[398] Arguing that the Christian's freedom enables him to use the things of this world without undue worry about their corrupting effects, Calvin writes: "To sum up, we see whither this freedom tends: namely, that we should use God's gifts for the purpose for which he gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind. With such confidence our minds will be at peace with him, and will recognize his liberality toward us." Ibid., III.19.8, 840.

person of Jesus Christ, God is broken alongside of human beings who are broken. In this redeeming presence that moves towards God (though always under the weight of the cross), God shows that there is something more than the fallen world in the offing. God's presence-in-brokenness is thus the grounds for hope that inspires the careful negotiation of the world in light of the moral life's orientation to the eschaton, where unity and peace reside.[399] Redemption is therefore both otherworldly and inner-worldly, both transformative and transfiguring. What are the implications of this view of the moral life for the political vocation in modern polities?

The cruciform shape of the political vocation unfolds in the unresolved tension that its dual orientation to the world and the eschaton creates. During the world, pilgrims called to the political vocation are required to serve the just purposes of God. The ideals that orient Christian commitments in political life reside in the City of God. But sin and human finitude condition political life in the fallen world and inevitably constrain the pursuit of heavenly ideals in the context of the political life.

Sir Isaiah Berlin, the late political theorist and historian of ideas, memorably affirmed the irreducible "crookedness" of all human endeavor, especially the human attempt to understand the good:

> The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable – that is a truism – but conceptually incoherent; I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.[400]

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[399] Here I follow Serene Jones's discussion of Calvin's understanding of sin, hope, and grace in her *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), 94-125.

[400] Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 13. For an analysis of Berlin's "value pluralism," see John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Unlike Berlin, and with Mathewes and Johnson, I hold that there is, ultimately, a real, coherent moral order, but that human beings can never know that order perfectly. The congenital failure of moral understanding is the source of the moral pluralism Berlin describes. This failure effectively means that, in Berlin's words, "some among the Great Goods cannot live together." It also means that politically relevant disagreement is inevitable. Still, politics is the context in which "we are doomed to choose." Political choice happens often in uncooperative and instrumental ways. It leads to pain, anguish, and "irreparable loss." It forces some people to live with some among the Great Goods that they didn't choose for themselves. Thus, Christians who find themselves in political vocations will likely need to do violence to the goods that others hold – goods that they themselves might want to affirm in other contexts.

The cooperative, relational, dialogical politics of the sort that the Augustinian pilgrim values ought to be the Christian's first priority. But to take Walzer's critique of deliberative politics seriously is to recognize that Christian citizens will sometimes need to exercise political agency in ways that are neither cooperative, relational, nor dialogical. A vocation in political life will at times require Christian citizens to mobilize political resources in order to win a contest of competing interests. To be sure, Christian citizens must always be alert to the possibility that instrumental, aggressive forms of political agency are not glorifying God at all. That possibility, however, doesn't mitigate the necessity of political agency exercised in this way.

Calvin would not have understood the vocation of politics to involve the negotiation of moral disorder beyond problems of obedience and will. Still, his cruciform view of the moral life recognizes that the world is broken and messy, affirms

that God values it intrinsically anyway, and understands that God expects human beings to do the same to the best of their abilities in whatever vocational setting to which they are called. Christians called to the vocation of politics must serve the just purposes of God even when that entails a movement beyond cooperation to instrumentality and competition. With Johnson and Mathewes, I am aware that the instrumental treatment of others as a means to an end falls short of God's purposes for creation. A Calvinist view of political vocation, however, affirms that in the person of Jesus Christ, who bears the weight of the world on the cross, God redeems the world just when it is most disordered.

God is present even in, and especially in, the most broken moments of political life, when politics becomes, as Diane says, a "battlefield." God's cruciform presence in the world does not erase disordered human relationships. God does not, in other words, simply appear as a *deus ex machina*, showing that apparent evil is good after all. Instead, God transfigures disorder in political life into the occasion of God's presence in the world as the One who suffers disorder on the cross. God is present in Steve's best efforts to serve the poor in Paducah, even though this work may have also reinforced the pernicious politics of segregation. God is also present whenever Gamaliel has to suspend the politics of relationship building, consensus, and cooperation and appeal instead the partisan politics of group interest.

Augustinians like Johnson and Mathewes may regard the engagement with worldly politics defended here as a rejection of an alternative politics that reflects creation's ultimate destiny and a question-begging accommodation to the disfigured politics of the world. But in the framing of a Calvinist political ontology, the vagaries of worldly politics delineate both the world's disfigurement and the texture of its

redemption. Pilgrims who bear the cross of the political vocation take the cruciform shape of the One who took on the brokenness of the world in order to save it. Like the Augustinian figures, Calvin's cruciform pilgrim is possible in the context of a political ontology shaped in part by its relationship to the eschaton. But unlike these figures, the cruciform pilgrim bears witness to creation reconciled to God in both its penultimate and ultimate moments.

So far, in this discussion of Calvin, I've developed a theological response to the exercise of political agency. I haven't yet clearly connected that to the formation of political identity. A theological understanding of the relationship between these agency and identity, I've said all along, is required for a complete theological framing of political vocation. To make the connection, I turn to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Missing from the theological resources that Calvin makes available to us is an awareness of what vocation looks like in the modern world, particularly with respect to the political life of the modern world. Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* attends to this problem in ways that, I think, complement Calvin's main insights about the moral life.

IV. Bonhoeffer on Responsibility and Political Action

Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is an unfinished work. It contains many loosely related and, in some instances, preliminary examinations of various themes of the moral life in a particular Christian theological perspective. I don't wish to name and try to connect all of these themes here, or even relate them to the larger corpus of his work. I want only to identify some of the main foci of the moral life as Bonhoeffer articulates them in the

Ethics and situate in particular his discussion of responsibility and what he calls "political action."

Ethics is, as Bonhoeffer says, "formation." To be human in the most genuine sense, he argues, is to be "conformed" or "transfigured into the form of the risen one" Jesus Christ.[401] Human beings take on the form of Jesus Christ in three ways: They are "accepted, judged, and awakened to new life by God" (92). To be accepted, firstly, is to be "the object of the love of God." Being loved by God means that creatures are "allowed" to be in relationship with the Creator. It issues in creaturely freedom because creatures become who they were made to be. To be judged, secondly, is a "death sentence" that God imposes upon human beings because of sin, a sentence that human beings confront every day: "Human beings die the daily death of sinners. They bear humbly the scars and the wounds that sin inflicts on body and soul" (95). But judgment unto death prepares the third movement of formation: awakening to new life: "To be conformed to the risen one – that means to be a new human being before God" (Ibid.). The new life that creatures enjoy by virtue of being conformed to God in Christ is a life of love and community in the context of the church. The church as the body of Christ, Bonhoeffer argues, is "the very form of Jesus Christ that takes form" (97). It is "the starting point of Christian ethics" (Ibid.) as it is "the place where Jesus Christ's taking form is proclaimed and where it happens" (102).

Ethics as formation marks the entry of God's grace into the world. The entry of grace transfigures the world, though paradoxically without changing it outwardly. In the reception of grace, which Bonhoeffer calls "the ultimate," the world becomes the site of redemption and is meaningfully demarcated from what came before grace, the

[401] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 94-95. All in-text citations hereafter refer to *Ethics*.

"penultimate." The ultimate is present in the penultimate, just as the City of God, in the Augustinian framings I discussed above, is not only a future state but also an immanent eschatological reality. The ultimate is an utterly different perspective upon and experience of the world transformed by grace:

> There is nothing greater than a life that is justified before God. Because it involves a complete break with everything penultimate, with all that has gone before: because it is never the natural or necessary end of a way already pursued but rather the complete condemnation and devaluation of that way; because it is God's own free word that can never be forced from God by anything whatsoever; therefore it is the irreversibly ultimate word, the ultimate reality (149).

The ultimate for Bonhoeffer just is "justification of the sinner by grace alone," and the penultimate is "all that precedes the ultimate." The penultimate is also "everything that follows the ultimate." That is because there is no penultimate "as such," as though it were a time, or place, or both, which immediately precedes the ultimate. The ultimate constitutes the penultimate; the penultimate "becomes what it is only through the ultimate, that is, in the moment when it has already lost its own self-sufficiency." The penultimate therefore is "never something present but always something past." The ultimate constitutes the penultimate as a "judgment."

That the penultimate is constituted in relationship to the ultimate does not imply for Bonhoeffer that the former has no value. On the contrary, the penultimate must be cared for: "Arbitrary destruction of the penultimate seriously harms the ultimate" (160). Bonhoeffer likens carelessness with penultimate things to slaves who are so degraded by slavery that they are incapable of experiencing freedom. Similarly, the penultimate must be "cared for" in order to "prepare the way" for the word which ushers grace into the world.

The penultimate, then, requires preparatory care. This logic of preparatory care motivates Bonhoeffer's profound sense of God's abiding presence in the world in the

person of Jesus Christ: “Christ has died for the world, and Christ is Christ only in the midst of the world. It is nothing but unbelief to give the world … less than Christ. It means not taking seriously the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the bodily resurrection. It means denying the body of Christ” (67). God cares for the world “in the midst of the world” in part by mandating its institutional life.

The “divine mandates,” as Bonhoeffer calls them, are, in *Ethics*, work, marriage, government, and the church (68). I discussed Bonhoeffer’s conception of the mandates in chapter 1. Briefly, these differentiated institutional contexts, in Bonhoeffer’s view, all serve, when they are following the command of God, to direct the world toward Christ, to prepare, in other words, the world for grace. While human societies are institutionally differentiated into the mandates, this differentiation does not have implications for the moral formation of selves. For Bonhoeffer, selves are unified:

> The divine mandates in the world are not there to wear people down through endless conflicts. Rather, they aim at the whole human being who stands in reality before God. The human person is not the place where the divine mandates show that they cannot be unified. Rather, nowhere else but in the human person, in concrete human life and action, is the unity created of that which ‘in itself,’ that is, theoretically, cannot be unified. This happens, to be sure, in no other way than when people allow themselves to be placed through Jesus Christ before the complicated reality of God’s becoming human, the reality of the world that was reconciled to God in the manger, the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ (73).

I challenged this view in chapter 1. Modern selves, I argued, are divided, and these divisions reflect the moral formation that persons receive in structurally differentiated and morally pluralistic societies. I return to this point again below but leave it aside for now.

God brings the divine mandates into existence to support lives lived in response to Christ – lives the form of which take the shape of Christ. Responsibility (*Verantwortung*) is a central category in Bonhoeffer’s ethics. Responsibility for Bonhoeffer is the totality

of a life lived in response to Jesus Christ, "the complete wholeness and unity of the answer to the reality that is given to us in Jesus Christ" (254). Responsibility means the response to God in the form that a life conformed to Christ takes. It also entails responsibility for others that persons have by virtue of the social roles they occupy. Thus, fathers are responsible for children and statesmen for citizens.

Responsibility in the sense of acting on behalf of others is what Bonhoeffer calls "vicarious representative action." Vicarious representative action is rooted in Christ, "the one who in himself has taken on and bears the selves of all human beings" (258). Christ reconciles the world to God, and in Christ, the world becomes what it was intended to be. Christ, in other words, is the form the world takes when it is reconciled to God. Thus, responsibility as vicarious representative action, "action in accordance with Christ," is the correct form of ethical action because it is itself "in accord with reality" (264). Vicarious representative action in accordance with reality is the "bond" that unites human beings and God.

The problem is that the social roles persons occupy within and across different mandates make different demands on the responsibilities persons have to their neighbors and to God. These different demands on responsibility often confound moral judgment. Regard for God and neighbor are the broad "limits" that demarcate the responsible from the irresponsible (269). But it is often not clear what responsibility to God and neighbor looks like in particular situations. Bonhoeffer argues that an "intrinsic law" governs all "subject matter," whether it has to do with material things or human beings and their relationships. "The task in each case," Bonhoeffer writes, "is to discover the respective intrinsic law by which an entity subsists" (271). It isn't too difficult to discover the

intrinsic laws that govern material things, which can be mastered by "techniques." It is relatively easy to identify a technique to mass-produce radios. But when it comes to human relationships, such as statecraft, technical expertise won't do: "[The] closer the particular entity in question is related to human existence, the more it becomes obvious that the intrinsic law cannot be exhausted by a formal technique" (Ibid.).

In human relationships, including political life, the waters of responsibility become murky:

> Responsible action takes place in the sphere of relativity … responsible action must decide not simply between right and wrong, good and evil, but between right and right, wrong and wrong … this very fact defines responsible action as a free venture, not justified by any law; rather, those who act responsibly relinquish any effectual self-justification; indeed, in so doing, they relinquish an ultimately dependable knowledge of good and evil (284).

Responsibility entails, Bonhoeffer argues, a choice between "right and right, wrong and wrong," and therefore a "willingness to become guilty," just as Jesus became guilty for the sins of the world: "For the sake of God and human beings Jesus Christ became a breaker of the law: he broke the law of the Sabbath" (278). For the sake of God and the neighbor, responsible persons must at times be willing to compromise their own sense of autonomy (which Bonhoeffer associates with conscience), taking on guilt. But as responsible action that takes on guilt is the very form of reality constituted by Christ, it encounters genuine freedom. Responsible action is "free action." And free action, Bonhoeffer says, is ultimately "God's action" (284), God working in the world.

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer's discussion of vocation, and its relationship to political life, is cut short. Vocation is "the place of responsibility." It is "the place at which one responds to the call of Christ and thus lives responsibly" (291). As a particular field of work, vocation places limits on responsibility, though, in an absolute sense, Bonhoeffer writes, "my responsibility to the call of Jesus Christ knows no bounds" (291). He goes

on to begin to discuss the relationship between political action and responsibility, noting that political action "cannot happen without power." But he left this section unfinished (244-245).

Even though Bonhoeffer didn't in his *Ethics* fully explore the political vocation, the trajectory of his thinking is fairly clear. Political life is a "sphere of relativity" requiring hard choices between goods that offer no "ultimately dependable knowledge of good and evil." This situation of moral ambiguity does not in any way free human beings of moral culpability. In making difficult choices, political agents take on both responsibility and guilt and thus, paradoxically, become instruments of God's action in the world. Bonhoeffer's reflections on vocation resonate more clearly in the context of the modern world than Calvin's. But both Calvin and Bonhoeffer see that the pattern the self takes in moral experience is cruciform.

V. Cruciform Pilgrims and Political Vocation

To craft a self in any vocational context of the moral life is to be a pilgrim of a certain sort, what I want to call the cruciform pilgrim. The cruciform pilgrim is not one whose orientation to the eschaton dismisses one's situation in the world, a result, I think, that the views of Mathewes, Johnson, and Hauerwas tend to produce. Rather, the cruciform pilgrim remains caught between the world and the eschaton, between membership in the polities of the world and the Heavenly City. Human beings are cruciform pilgrims because they bear the cross of conflicting formations of the self that condition our worldly experience. These multiple formations reflect different renderings of human value, which are also at the same time imperfect renderings of the ultimate

source of value. We try, for example, to value both freedom and utility, both community and individual, both individual moral agency and preference for the marginalized. The negotiations of self and agency that unfold in the context of the moral life always happen in the relativizing shadow of the ultimate polity. But the City of God is just one context of our redemption; our failure to reach it is another. God redeems us both by ushering us towards the City of God and by transfiguring the inevitable failure to do so through the cruciform presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Calvin's moral theology is important for viewing political vocation in theological perspective because it shows the trajectory of the good life, which, through sanctification, moves towards the heavenly kingdom. But it also shows the abiding tension between earthly existence and that heavenward movement. That tension exists because God doesn't abandon the world in the movement towards redemption. Instead, God comes into the world and is present in the midst of its vagaries in the cross-bearing person of Jesus Christ. That cross-bearing pattern is that shape to which human beings conform their own lives in the movement of sanctification.

With Bonhoeffer, we get a clearer picture of what this Christ-formation looks like in the modern world, particularly in the context of the modern political vocation. Bonhoeffer captures the moral ambiguity of the modern world in his doctrine of responsibility. Vocation sometimes requires the choice between, in Bonhoeffer's words, "right and right, wrong and wrong" – "some among the great goods cannot live together," in Berlin's words. Those choices generate guilt that responsible persons must bear. But responsibility as vicarious representative action in the context of vocation *just is* what it

means to take the form of Christ in the world. It is finally what makes human beings genuinely free, and it is the way that God works in the world.

I have quibbled with Bonhoeffer on the issue of moral formation here and in chapter 1. It seems to me more consistent to view the world's brokenness that Christ redeems to condition not only moral and political judgment but to extend all the way down into the formation of selves (an argument I made in chapter 1). Human beings, as I've argued, are formed within an across institutional contexts and in terms a wide variety of different life experiences that do not easily cohere. There is no unity of the self; there is only constant negotiation and partial reconstruction of the self, which, I've argued in chapter 3, persons do in important but always unfinished ways in the context of personal narrative. If there are at times only choices between right and right, and between wrong and wrong, then the sources of those choices inform the very ways in which we construct our identity. Thus, the cross that we bear in the world, in the political vocation and in others, weighs both upon the work that we do and the selves that we become both before and after we do it.

For the cruciform pilgrim who undertakes the political vocation, the moral life takes a characteristic shape. Political life, and thus the political vocation, is a particular "sphere of relativity," to use Bonhoeffer's term. The "relativity" of political life has a particular character, and I've appealed to Weber, Walzer, Berlin, as well as my interview participants, to describe it. Political agents have membership in and loyalties to multiple political communities, all of which advance distinctive but imperfect renderings of the ultimate polity, the ultimate source of value. Political agents ,must choose between goods their membership in various polities prescribe in view of some construal of the

ultimate polity. Steve's commitment to the ultimate polity resides in his understanding of conscience, which complicates political calculus and counters the seductions of political life. For Diane, it is God's call that keeps her coming back to the fight year after year and sustains her even when she has to use power in uncooperative ways. For Amanda, it is the Kingdom of God within that grounds her sense of the inherent worth of persons. For Wanda, it is hearing and following the voice of God, which encourages her not to give up on the poor and the marginalized.

All vocations of the moral life involve, in some sense, the struggle to negotiate competing renderings of the ultimate source of value – this is not unique to political life. All vocations, moreover, entail moral judgment on the basis of these negotiations. No matter where we stand, in other words, we deliberate, and we act. What is distinctive about this process in the context of political life is that negotiations of competing moral meanings issue in judgments, enforced finally by coercion, that bear upon the creation and ongoing maintenance of political communities bound together by interests, goods, and loyalties. The exercise of political agency, as we saw in the last chapter, does not always generate consensus. Sometimes political agency – the acting upon moral judgments in the context of political life – takes the form of negotiation or compromise, in which one's sense of what ought to be done is only partially and therefore unsatisfactorily realized. Other times political agency is exercised in plain, zero-sum competition, in which one might get what one wants, but in so doing, does violence to the goods of others.

I have argued all along, beginning with my discussions of Max Weber and Charles Taylor, that political identity and agency are related. We're formed by sources of

moral meaning, we negotiate them as we make sense of our identities, and our actions reinforce these negotiations. When we must act in morally ambiguous ways, a reality that is always in the offing in political life, we are forced to make sense of ourselves in light of these actions. Weber and Bonhoeffer understood this last point well. Weber perhaps exaggerates the relationship between physical violence and political judgment. Still, his point about the stand holds: the stand is not only a moment of decisive moral judgment, it is a moment both of self-making and of self-breaking, since it likely involves decision in the midst of tragic conflict.

For cruciform pilgrims, it is precisely in these moments, when political agents simply cannot make the Great Goods live together, that God is most present as the One who is present in brokenness. God's presence in these moments does not, as Bonhoeffer tells us, absolve guilt. But that God is present even in these "genuinely human and profoundly moving" moments, as Weber calls them, shows that God redeems them and the broken selves they create, both in this world and in the world to come.

Appendix A: Qualitative Research Methodology and Interview Schedule

Between 2007 and 2009, I conducted interviews with ten Atlanta-based Christians who work in different contexts of professional political activism. The interviews were in no way intended to generate data that would suggest generalizable empirical conclusions about the main categories of this dissertation, i.e., political vocation, identity, and agency. Instead, the primary purpose of the interviews was to provide examples that would help me, as I thought about these categories, to complexify the many representative figures that I discuss throughout the dissertation. In other words, the portraits I create from the interviews are effectively counter-figures, which, by way of juxtaposition, highlight the limitations of normative political anthropologies.

I made contacts with interview participants mostly through intermediary relationships. For example, Heidi Tauscher, an Emory colleague, connected me with Steve Mackey and Amanda Bostwick. Dr. Steven Tipton, one of my teachers, introduced me to Diane Lawson. I got to know Carol Hughes through another Candler School of Theology faculty member, Dr. Luther Smith. I met Wanda Foley through my own work with Gamaliel. As in the case of these and other interview participants who do not appear in the dissertation, I interviewed folks who work in a variety of different political contexts (elected office, community organizing, policy activism, etc.) and represent different political views, some more liberal and others more conservative.

I have done my best to represent my interview participants as they represented themselves to me. I want to be clear that these profiles are not biographies. A biography gives a complex rendering of a life, usually drawing on external data to complicate the biographical subject's own self-understanding. Instead, I am interested in reproducing

the participants' self-representations because I want to know how these persons make sense of their work in political life. I then use these vignettes to inform my own normative reflection.

I would not want a reader to think that the profiles I offer here are adequate biographical representations of these participants. A good way, it seems to me, to guard against this misunderstanding is to disguise the identities of the participants. I therefore use pseudonyms and disguise other identifying data so as not to give the impression that my profiles constitute sophisticated biographies of the participants' lives. Admittedly, since all of these figures are public figures, it is very difficult to disguise their identities reliably. My participants understand this.

My interview format was informed by an approach Steven Tipton calls "moral biography."[402] Moral biography aims to identify fundamental moral commitments and sense of the good life in terms of the participant's narration of their life story. This semi-structured interview format pays particular attention to the categories and framings my participants thought were important. It also attempts to illuminate the genealogy of these categories in terms of the biographical account.

As much as possible, I let participants tell their moral biography however they wanted, invoking whatever categories and framings they thought were important. I asked follow-up questions whenever I thought categories or ideas participants invoked needed

[402] A moral biography is a semi-structured interview in which the interviewer situates the participant's normative point of view in terms of their moral formation. The moral biography seeks both to capture the terms in which a participant understands her own normative framing and also to push on places where the framing seems to be inadequate. In doing this, the interview seeks to reveal the complexity of normative viewpoints. See Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), preface and appendices III and IV.

clarification. Interviews typically lasted an hour and a half to two hours. I did one follow-up interview with most of the participants.

There were a number of key issues that interested me and informed the way I structured my response to the interview. To the extent that participants introduced these or related themes, I intervened with questions aimed at further exploring their views on these topics. I typically did not name these issues for the participant at the beginning of the interview, or did so very briefly, because I didn't want the personal narrative necessarily to be framed in these terms.

Key issues included:

1. *Meaning assigned to political work*: How does the person describe their work in political life? Why do they do it? What does it hope to achieve? When does the participant know that he or she has done a good job? When the work is successful? When it is principled? Both or neither? Why?
2. *Fundamental moral commitments and their sources*: How does the participant describe the fundamental moral commitments that guide his or her work in political life? In other words, what commitments motivate the participant's political work? How does the biography account for the way the participant came to hold these commitments? And how does the biography illuminate the precise meaning of these commitments for the participant?
3. *Boundaries and limits to political activism*: How, if at all, does the person place limits upon what they are willing to do to advance political ends? What accounts for these limits? (Why these instead of others?) Under what conditions, if any,

are participants willing to compromise their fundamental commitments, to what extent, and why?

4. *Political power and competition*: How does the participant make sense of the use of political power, particularly in modalities that are uncooperative, instrumental, and aggressive? How does the participant understand political competition? What accounts for the participant's evaluation of power and competition?

5. *The use of theological discourse in public conversation*: In what occasions, if any, does a participant use explicit theological discourse in public conversation? Why do they do it – is it expedient, faithful, or both? Or why not? I was especially interested to know whether this issue seemed important to the participant.

6. *Theologies of public life*: What explicit theological sense, if any, did a participant make out of his or her work in political life? What is the genealogy of these categories in terms of the person's biographical account?

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