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CHAPTER 28

Eschatology

Robert W. Jenson

Eschatology and Politics

"Eschatology" in the title of this chapter refers to Christian discourse about a final outcome and transformation, an "eschaton," of history. The great metaphysical divide is doubtless between those who think a dramatic story can truly be told about reality as a whole and those who think not. Judaism and Christianity present the definitive instance of the first position. Reality, their scriptures promise, is going someplace, and its twists and turns are therefore plotted. If we think that someplace abstractly, we speak of an eschaton; if we think it personally, we speak of God.

It must be said at the beginning that Christianity thus anticipates an event that is so fundamental a transformation of created being that even calling it an "event" stretches language to the breaking point. What sort of "event," after all, has no successor? Unless it be the event of God's own actuality, the event of the triune life?

The scriptures contain many scenarios of the end times; but these are not easily harmonized, are at key points allusive in their diction and in the sequences of their narrative, and are surely best taken – though there is no space to argue that here – as evocations of one single occurrence, that will be at once the conclusion of history and in its own sheer actuality the reality of "eternal life," of "the kingdom of God."

Perhaps, despite first thought, there is much conceptual analysis and material–poetic construction that can be done to specify this event, and much revisionary metaphysics that grow out of specifying it; but again, any general effort on those lines (Jenson 1999: 309–69) would exhaust the space of this chapter. Perhaps one may in almost unintelligible summary speak of an infinite implosion of love, of a created community pressed and agitated into perfect mutuality by the surrounding life of the triune God. For the rest, readers

should take this paragraph and its predecessor as a sort of notice posted, which they should bear in mind through the following.

We are in this chapter to consider how Christian eschatology and political discourse relate under the common rubric "theology." We must begin by noting a fundamental circumstance: that the scriptures' eschatology and the classical eschatology of the Christian church are directly and almost exclusively a discourse about politics, so that no extrapolations are needed to move between eschatology and politics, in either direction. In the promise to Abraham and in the writings of the prophets, the eschaton is the fulfillment of Israel's political structures; in the Gospels it is a "kingdom," which precisely as a kingdom "of heaven" is a political entity also in this age, as the Roman authorities quickly perceived (Wright 1998); elsewhere in the New Testament it is a *polis* (Heb. 13: 14) which, unlike this world's would-be polities, is genuinely a structure of peace and justice; in Augustine's lovely phrase, one of *tranquilitas ordinis*, the lively tranquility enabled by mutually affirmed ordering to one another. Indeed, biblical and classical Christian eschatology can be taken directly as political theory, if we do not allow the modern West's secularized constructs to stand paradigm for what is meant by "theory" (Milbank 1990).

Eschatology is thus the initial form and should be a principal guide for Christian reflection on politics. I will begin with some hasty biblical exegesis, and continue by instancing the relentlessly eschatological classic of Christian political theory, Augustine's *City of God*.

I suspect that every chapter of this work will have its own way of using the word "politics." It will be prudent to lay out this chapter's quite naïve usages at the start.

Notoriously, the word "politics" now has two very different common uses, to which this essay will adhere. In a generally Aristotelian and traditional Christian theological sense, a polity is the arena of a community's moral deliberation, whether this arena is an assembly of all citizens, an absolute ruler's bedchamber, or something in between. "Politics" then consists of the processes of such deliberation: argument and executable decision of such questions as "What shall we teach our children?" or "What would be a just distribution of communal goods?" But the word now carries another and almost opposite sense also: "politics" is precisely what must be kept out of such communal deliberation, lest it lose its moral character. Here "politics" is the manipulation of the community and the struggle to occupy positions from which this may be done, both of which efforts of course suppress politics in the former sense. The relation between these uses poses a rather crude irony: How does it happen that precisely those known as "politicians" regularly exhort each other to "keep politics out of this" when they claim to deal seriously with the community's good, that is, when they claim actually to function as political agents?

We will see that Christian eschatology interprets both phenomena we label "politics," and moreover provides an understanding of the relation between them. We are political creatures in the first sense because righteous discourse in community is the end for which our Creator intends us. That we turn this calling into its own suppression is much of what Christian theology calls "sin," and is what will be judged, that is, put behind us, at the end. And the link between the two is a structure of human being, in Augustine's language, that we *desire*, indeed that we desire eschatologically: we long for a final Good and do so communally.

Israel's Eschatological History

The call to Abraham, which begins the story of Israel,[1] was not to found a new cult or pursue a pattern of piety or become wise, all possibilities well known in the ancient world, but to perform a historical act with political significance: to lead a migration. And the promise in the call was the creation of a new nation with a specific relation to other nations, namely that it would be their "blessing," that is, the possibility of their flourishing. The actual creation of this nation then occurs as a political conflict within history: the "Exodus," the liberation of an oppressed people from imperial domination.

To be sure, all nations in fact begin historically, but in antiquity they did not acknowledge this in their own cases – nor indeed do they now in practice. Rather, a normal ancient nation told the story of its beginning mythically and so apolitically, as the account of an always recurring origin, which is identical with the always recurring origin of the universe. Israel, per contra (Jenson 1997: 63–74), knew that its beginning *followed* the Creation by a significant span of time, and even followed a kind of prenational existence of its own, the period of "the patriarchs," so that there was a time when it was not, so that its origin was itself a temporal, historical event. Indeed, this acknowledgment was an article of its creed: it confessed, "A wandering Aramaean was my father" (Deut. 26: 5), not, for example, "With/from deity I come forth." Israel knew it was *contingent*, that acts of decision were constitutive in its being – what if Abraham had said, "I won't go?" Thus its self-understanding was communally moral, that is, political, from its root.

Scholarship generally agrees that the one Israel of the twelve tribes was first constituted inside Canaan, after the tribes' entries into the land. Much about its initial polity is disputed. Was it for a time an "amphictiony," a cultically united confederation? How much of the story told in the books of Judges and Samuel is historical? For our purposes, one point is knowable and decisive: in the earliest times, legislation and jurisdiction were supposed to belong directly to "the Lord," the specific God of Israel, who spoke through "men of God," "prophets" in the later terminology: persons so taken over by God that their judgments are his judgments. When Israel eventually wanted to have a normal mid-Eastern monarchy, to "be like other nations," the Lord said to the currently judging prophet, "[T]hey have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam. 8: 7–20).

Israel cast a paradigmatic picture of this divine government through prophets in the story of the "40 years" between the Exodus and the entry into Canaan,

under the leadership of *the* prophet, Moses (Deut. 34: 5–12). In the story of the 40 years, the counterpart to legislation and jurisdiction by a prophet is a community on the move, with no "abiding city," a nation that understands itself from the wilderness and from the goal of its trek through that wilderness. For the Word of the Lord is always what it was for Abraham, a summons to "Go . . ." and a promise, "I will . . ." The constitution of this polity was "the covenant," a compact granted by God to Israel, which was based on God's act to make an oppressed populace into a nation, which gave them a fundamental law – in briefest material formulation, "the ten commandments" (Exod. 20) – and which again contained a universal promise, that among the nations, which all belong in one way or another to the Lord, this one should be the "kingdom of priests" for the others (Exod. 19: 5). Israel's polity was thus intrinsically eschatological from the start, in that the good it was communally to cultivate would, if fully accomplished, unify all nations in worship of the Lord – an event which would of course explode the framework of history as we now live it.

A monarchy was indeed established, under David and Solomon a modest empire. Despite its origin in Israel's desire to be a normal nation, this polity too had its Israelite peculiarities. Even David, the dynastic founder, had to be legitimated in the role by being himself a prophet, whose "last words" began with the announcement of a prophetic seizure: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (2 Sam. 23: 1–2). The kings were subject always to harassment by prophets – sometimes from among their own household shamans – who claimed to overrule human counsels with the word of God. Most vitally, the moral content of the covenant with the monarchy was the same as that of the desert covenant: *righteousness*, the condition in which each member of a community uses his or her position for the benefit of each other member, the solidarity requisite for a people on the move.

Nevertheless, after *c.*1000 BCE there was a more or less normal monarchy, with a capital city and the usual economic and military powers. The desert's portable sanctuary tent was replaced with a proper temple of the region and period, after the pyramids the most *fixed* object in the architectural repertoire of humanity; this one, however, lacked that for which such temples were normally built, the boxed-in and thereby itself fixed image of the god. Like the desert community, this polity understood itself as based on covenant, even though this was a covenant with a dynasty and a place.

A pseudo-Hegelian argument can perhaps be constructed, to trace Providence's intention with this second covenant. That the Lord made Israel a monarchy – even as a concession – comports with description of his intention for them as "political." For a people directed exclusively by immediate prophetic utterance would, strictly speaking, have no politics in *either* of the usages identified at the beginning of this chapter, there being neither a communal forum of decision nor a way to suppress a decision-making that was directly in the hands of God. Thus references above to a prophetical "polity" stretch the word a bit. To be sure, Israel's picture of the desert covenant was at least in part an ideological retrojection – historically, of course, there must have been some sort of clan jurisdiction and assemblies for special purposes – but the point here is the way Israel *saw* its history. Perhaps we may say that the royal covenant established the eschatological drive of the desert covenant within the history of this age, and so made the community of the Lord and his people be what we more properly may call a polity, something more and less than sheerly "the wandering God-folk."

So we must think of a polity that is placed geographically, trades and makes war, and makes its communal decisions by the usual communal debates and efforts to suppress them, but is legitimated by a word direct from God, knows about its own historical fragility, and is disquieted by at least subliminal feeling that it should always be somehow on the move. While the prophets' interventions had various occasions and matter, they in one way or another always had the performative force explicitly formulated by Isaiah II: "Forget the old things; see, I am about to do something new" (Isa. 43: 18–19). Such a polity will obviously be in permanent unease, torn between the – at least apparent – demands of survival in this world and the demands of eschatological righteousness.

The main event of Israel's history after the establishment of the monarchy was its long-drawn-out undoing, caught as it was between the alternately advancing empires of Mesopotamia and the Nile, and weakened by a tribal split into two states. Babylon finished the process in the early sixth century, punishing Judea's acceptance of Egyptian suzerainty by razing Jerusalem and the temple and deporting the Jewish elites to Babylon. Contrary to what might have been expected, the decades of "the exile" became the occasion of a final radicalizing of prophecy. The "something new" now promised by the exilic and post-exilic prophets is a fulfillment of Israel's mission that is plainly and often explicitly beyond the possibilities of history in its present terms (Jenson 1997: 69–71); in exilic and post-exilic prophecy Israel's political hopes are openly eschatological. "Nation shall not take up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Mic. 4: 3), which demands nothing less than that God "will destroy the shroud that is cast over all peoples . . . , he will swallow up death forever" (Isa. 25: 7). Finally, in the "apocalyptic" schemes cast in the last time of Israel's prophecy, the difference between "this age" and "the age to come" is explicit and indeed ontological. The age to come is nonetheless – or rather, all the more – envisioned as a polity (Jenson 1997: 70–1).

Jesus then came preaching, "The Kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mark 1: 15): so near, indeed, that to follow him was to enter into it and to turn away from him was to balk at the gate (Mark 10: 21–7). With that, the eschaton-polity, the universal polity of peace, appeared as a possibility for present citizenship. And when the God of Israel raised this Jesus from the death to which his radicalism had brought him, following him became a continuing possibility within this world, open to Jews and gentiles, and a mission began to bring all into this citizenship. Thus we arrive at the end of the history we have been following: of the eschatological promise that is about politics, and the history of whose making is itself canonical Israel's political history. And thus we arrive also with Augustine, the founding political theorist of at least the Western church.

Augustine

As Augustine (Jenson 1999: 76–85) read the scriptures, it seemed right to adopt a term of Greek and Roman political discourse for what God eternally intends for his creatures. God's eternal intent is that there shall be a perfect created *civitas*, a perfect polity.[2] That is, continuing in the language of Roman theory, God intends a *res publica*, a "public thing," with sovereignty and citizenship and mutual duties, that is perfect in that it fully achieves – or rather is given – the blessing which a polity is supposed to bring its citizens, the *tranquilitas ordinis*. This polity must coexist with creation, since God's will is always done, but it is eschatological in that protologically its only members are angels, and in that so soon as it has human members it appears as a pilgrim community struggling through this age, implicated with this age's evils, and animated by longing for its own final fulfillment.

Augustine does not so much borrow from Roman political theory as subvert it, to make a weapon against any ultimate claims by a polity of this age. He cites Cicero citing Scipio: a *res publica* in the proper sense is a community united by agreed law, and there can be agreed law only where there is prior community in virtue, that is, prior mutual devotion to a common good. This is exactly right, says Augustine; but no polity of the fallen world can meet this standard, since the only good we could have fully in common is the one God, and the fallen world is constituted precisely by refusal to turn to him. Therefore political arrangements in this age can be called *res publicae* only by generous analogy. They are at best approximations of true polity, united by love of diachronically and synchronically *partial* goods, and are ordained by God to preserve his fallen creatures from the total destruction that would follow a mere war of all against all.

An inner contradiction thus destabilizes every polity of this age. The one triune God can only be "enjoyed" and so is immune to exploitation by our love of self; there is nothing we can "use" this God for. But partial goods can indeed be used for our antecedent purposes, in fact they invite such use, and so they can be manipulated by self-love. Therefore the very same partial goods that draw a polity of this age together simultaneously tempt each of its members to aggrandize him- or herself at the others' expense. The self-destructive inner dynamic of every polity of this age is self-love in its political form, the passion to dominate: *libido dominandi*, as Augustine calls it.

In the midst of the polities of this age stands God's polity, in its form for this age. The church is a struggling, tempted, and ambiguous presence of God's polity – we do not even know who finally belongs to it. But it is nothing less than that. Its unity is constituted in worship of the one God, that is, in jointly enacted desire for the one possible common good. Therefore so long as the church does not utterly cease to be church by ceasing to worship the true God, its gravest defections and strifes cannot undo its *tranquilitas*, for God is indeed but one for all – lest this be thought romantic, we should remember that Augustine was a bishop during one of the most strife-filled periods of church history. What must always be in our vision when thinking of Augustine's City of God is the Eucharist, a public space where the one God gives himself to his community, and where in consequence all sorts and conditions of humanity drink from one cup and eat of one loaf, and whose parliament of common and mutual prayer is a perfect participatory democracy.

The loves which unite this world's polities are mere negatives of the love of God which unites the church. If we will not worship the one God, we must worship something that is *not* one, the polytheistic pantheon of usual religion; thus another name for what holds a polity of this age together is idolatry. Yet even so, such loves formally imitate the love of God, and even the imitation can sustain a little shared law for a little while. Indeed, the *libido dominandi* itself can and does harbor real if fragile virtues: in Augustine's eyes, Roman love of glory was itself once glorious. Perhaps, recalling Augustine's neo-Platonism, we can interpret him to say that earthly polities are brought into being and endure for a time by *memory* of what real polity would be.

So the famous maxim: "Two loves make the two polities, love of self (in its political form, the *libido dominandi*) the earthly polity . . . , love of God the heavenly" (Augustine 1972: xiv. 28). The distinction is eschatological. Every created self will pass away; indeed, love of self is the very principle of historical decay: "He that seeks his life will lose it." Love of God will not pass away, for he is what all things pass on to. Thus the gates of hell will sooner or later prevail against every polity of this age. They will not prevail against the church, which will be fulfilled precisely by the judgment that burns away its accommodations to this age.

Modernity

If the purpose of this chapter were historical, we would barely have begun. Since it is not, the enormous leap about to be made is perhaps justifiable. Leaping over most of theological history, and so over persons as vital for eschatological reflection as Thomas Aquinas or Jonathan Edwards, and leaving out counter-examples to the point of caricature, we next note that the church's tendency in modernity has been to depoliticize eschatology and de-eschatologize politics.

The "church father of the nineteenth century" may perhaps serve as a paradigm. According to Friedrich Schleiermacher, although communication of Christ's blessedness takes place in the diachronic community of the church, the salvation which is the content of this relation is an individual experience, which indeed seeks to share itself but is not shaped by the success or failure of the sharing. The great promises of the prophets, with their political and generally communal content, must be regarded as "visionary" speech that cannot "yield knowledge" (Schleiermacher 1976: II, 163). They cannot describe something we may expect actually to happen, since a fundamental transformation of history's ways is impossible (II, 157).

Or we may turn to a "church father" of the twentieth century, to Rudolf Bultmann (Jenson 1969: 158–75). The eschaton for Bultmann is not a future event at all, but what happens in the moment of authentic decision, when the word of the cross calls me out of security in the circumstances of this world. To strip the Bible's message to such fighting trim, it must, said Bultmann, be "demythologized." But what does he mean by "myth?" The common content of his various definitions is that a myth is any story that depicts God as involved in a temporal succession of events. The "word-event" of the speaking and hearing of the word of the cross is an event that stops time, which is why it is the eschaton. We might very well paraphrase "demythologizing the Gospel" as "depoliticizing eschatology."

Neo-Protestantism, which now must include Roman Catholic replayings of it, was modernity's form of Christianity, and we should no more reject it in every aspect than we would generally wish simply to do without the achievements of modernity. But in the present matter, faithfulness to scripture and the tradition surely impose a task, which we may perhaps dub the "repoliticizing of eschatology."

To achieve this, to cast a political eschatology, will require something more than simply going back behind modernity to more traditional eschatology. Augustine may provide a model and an inspiration, but merely affirming him will not quite turn the theological corner. We are required to go back to fundamentals. Indeed, in my judgment, we are required to go all the way back to the doctrine of God. Readers should recall the merely modal difference between speaking of the eschaton and of God the eschatos: between speaking of the final event and of the final person.

The Polity in God

In the scriptures, the eschatological fulfillment of Augustine's "city" is "the kingdom of God." But this political characterization of the eschaton is throughout the theological tradition paired with a characterization that is at first thought quite different: the fulfillment of human existence as "deification" or the "vision of God" (the first term is, of course, dominant in the East, the second in the West). Also, this notion is scripturally supported, since "eternal" life, "perfect" righteousness, "infinite" love and the like – all biblical evocations of the eschaton – can in fact only be *God's* life, righteousness, love, and so forth. If we are to have *eternal* life this can only be if we are to share God's life, for God not only is eternal but is eternity, according to the rule that God is identical with his attributes.

But if both eschatologies are true, then somehow entry into the kingdom of God must be entry into the triune life of God, and vice versa. That is, entry into the kingdom of God must somehow be entry into a polity that God himself is in himself. And that is indeed what is to happen, for classic doctrine of the triune

God displays precisely a perfect polity. The following hardly describes what most religion thinks of as God, but it is indeed the way the doctrine of Trinity identifies the specific *deus christianorum*, the strange God of the Gospel and the church.

There is in the triune God a plurality of *social personae*: Father, Son, and Spirit each genuinely have a different role, both in God himself – the Father begets and is not begotten, the Son is begotten and does not beget, the Spirit frees and is not freed – and in God's works, in the doing of which "All action . . . begins with the Father and is actual through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit" (Gregory Nyssenus 1958: 125). The three are nevertheless not three gods, precisely in that their communal *virtue* or *righteousness* is perfect; for each subsists at all only as complete investment in self-giving to the others. This righteousness is not a silent perfection, but occurs as a *discourse*, for the second identity, in whom God knows what God is, is a *Word*. Moreover, *decision* occurs in this discourse, since God is who and what he is *freely*, and so in his own eternal decision to be who he is (Jenson 1997: 221–3). The divine "nature" that each has with the others so that they are God instead of something else, and which is thus identical with their righteousness, is the *common Good* of the three; for to be God is to be the Good, first of all for God. And finally, in consequence of all the above, the eternal triune life is a space of *moral action*: there are "source, movement, and goal" in God himself and not just as adaptation to his relation with us. God is not eternal because he lacks such poles but because with him "there is no conflict between them" (Barth 1957: 690); because with him they are not steered by the *libido dominandi*.

The created Polity of God can enter this eternal political life of God because Jesus the Son brings the church with him. Drawing one last time on Augustine, it is the risen Jesus *with* his body the church that is the *totus Christus*, the "whole" Christ; there can no more be a person who is "the head" without a body, then there could be a person who was a "body" without a head. Thus as the fact is, whatever might have been, the second person of the Trinity is eschatologically a communal reality that includes a created community. The entry of redeemed humanity into the life of God does not transform God from a Trinity into a multiplicity, because we enter only as those in whom the Son invests himself and with whom he identifies himself. But the investment and identification are real: the Son truly *is not* without his disciples, also not as an identity of God.

How, then, are we to think of the End? We are to think of a human polity whose enabling common good is God, as is now true of the church, but with two differences. Making these differences is the work of the "Last Judgment."

First: The kingdom's members will belong to no other communities; for whatever is to be the final value of the communities of this world will have been gathered into the kingdom. Here we must stop for a fundamental point about eschatology. Eternal life is not resuscitation; the saints do not simply pick up and go on with their lives. With death, "the moving finger" writes indeed a last line; only so does a temporal life make a whole, which can have a meaning. Eternal life is rather the infinite *appropriation* and interpretation of accomplished lives within the discourse of the triune life. Just so, also the accomplished mortal

communities of this world, its polities and its families and its civil societies, their glories and their horrors, will be matter for the communal discourse of the kingdom.

Thus citizens of the community of the kingdom will not be divided in their mutual righteousness by membership in other communities. It is of course poesy when Christians speak of longing to check a point of philosophy with Socrates, or to hear the angels play Mozart, but it is a poesy that speaks truth; and the point for our present concern is that the saints will not need to turn to any other intersecting community, to find all created beauty and truth. Continuing with eschatological poesy, to delight in "jasper . . . , sapphire . . . , agate . . . , emerald . . . , onyx, carnelian . . . , chrysolites" and the like, they will not need to look away from one another to a separate community of commerce or art, but simply to "the foundations of the walls" of their own city (Rev. 21: 19–20).

Second: The animation and shaping of the created polity's life by that of the divine polity will be immediate. In this age, the church is the body of Christ only in that Christ is present bodily within it as an other; an other, moreover, that is apparent only to faith. Neither Christ's word as spoken in the church, nor his body and blood as present on the eucharistic table, nor any other of the church's mysteries, look or sound like what they are; the presence of Christ in and to the church. Christ's presence in the church in this age is indeed – to use another piece of Augustine's language – the "sign" of the church's true being, which is Christ's presence for the world. But this sign, Christ's presence in the church, itself requires to be signed by audible and visible signs if it is to be apprehended at all, and is as much hidden by these signs' native visibility as seen in it. In the kingdom enveloped in the triune life, the bread and cup, the water, the audible preaching, and all such mediations will not be needed: we will know ourselves as Christ's body as directly as we now know the signs of bread and cup.

> I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. . . . People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it. (Rev. 21: 22–7)

Penultimates

Readers concerned for this world's politics may well be rather impatient by now. What has all this metaphysical speculation and poetry to do with anything? It has everything to do with everything, if we just turn it around.

The mere existence of the church in the world relativizes all polities of this age, and must do so in their own eyes. "How many divisions has the Pope?" the tyrant notoriously asked. But he is gone and so is his empire, while the church remains and will remain, until the end.

No polity that now is, except the church, will prevail against the gates of death. Knowing that, however dimly, is the one thing needful for polities of this age if they are to be healthy, even within the limits set by their inherent fragility. The not merely conflicted but murderously insane polities of late modernity are deranged precisely by the supposition that they can be an eschaton: National Socialism plotted a "millennial empire;" Marxism dreamed that when the dictatorship of the proletariat was achieved, no other dominating class could supersede it; and ideologies of globalization reproduce the Marxist delusion in obverse.

Nor is the relativizing of the world's kingdoms by the presence of the church something that only the church's members can perceive. If anything like Augustine's analysis is true, the kingdoms themselves must feel it, however they may try not to. For the loves by which this age's polities are constituted have their true and enabling object in that Good which only the church openly acknowledges and seeks. When this world's polities see the church,[3] they cannot but be unsettled by perception of their own need and failure to be what the church is. Why, after all, have the totalitarian states of modernity devoted such energy to crushing the church, and the church's even more disquieting sibling, Judaism – or, failing that, to co-opting it?

The first political calling of the church, its first way to be a blessing for the polities of this age, is simply to be itself, to be a sign of the eschaton. We may even say that the first political calling of the church is to celebrate the Eucharist (Cavanaugh 1998). The church is a perfectly visible diachronic community within this age, with its own modes of government, its own sort of patriotism, and its own inner culture, that is visibly loyal to the one Good the polities of this world cannot manipulate, and moreover goes about recruiting to that loyalty. The church is gathered by a common Good that its leaders' and factions' worst efforts cannot make uncommon. The church has a hierarchy that, however unwillingly, is compelled by its own establishing documents to acknowledge that it is to serve, not dominate.

The church is a polity visible in this age that visibly offers a gate through which the nations must pass and will not, into the only future there is. The Roman authorities of the church's first centuries were – despite civil strife and perverse emperors – a uniquely able governing elite, and so accurately perceived the challenge. So now, though far less accurately, do the liberal states, which know they must for their own pretensions relegate the church to a "private" realm; the religious totalitarianisms, which persecute it straightforwardly; and post-civilized China, which may be the first of many such nations. The church's first task is always to return.

The church is the gateway to the eschatological polity, and so relativizes all polities of this world. We must, to end this essay, consider that this is not a merely negative effect. To relativize something is to relate it to something else; in this case to relativize the kingdoms of this world is to relate them to the kingdom of God.

There is a deceptively obvious maxim: What will be can be. If a created community of *tranquilitas ordinis*, of righteousness and love, will be at the End, then righteousness and love are not impossible for created communities. In this age,

they are always fragile and indeed at some depth perverted, but they can happen. Those who know the kingdom is coming know also of this possibility. A polity perverted by manipulation and competition to possess manipulation's levers can be cured a little, and a relatively just and mutual polity can be made yet more just and even loving. Those who await the kingdom are the very ones who know that this is so.

The very fact that God will by his own absolute and personal act establish his kingdom means that history is not determined by irresistible mere forces, that our human action need not be futile. The evil of abortion on demand, now established in American and some other law, and the at once dim-witted and wicked justifications provided by court decisions, were put in place by human error. Just so, they can be replaced by human truth, by decision and action faithful to the kingdom and so sustained by God's Providence – if, of course, the scourge is not itself a divine judgment aimed at the nations' undoing. Or again, the choice between homogenization and tribalism, seemingly posed by economic globalization, is a choice construed by human thought; with God's blessing, human thought can cast other possibilities.

The approximation for this age of the kingdom's mutuality is the Eucharist. Therefore it provides the true ideal of political striving. The body of Christ that gathers the church is the same reality as the body of mutual love that is the church (1 Cor. 10: 17–34). Thus we see that the good of a polity is not instrumental – to, say, the national product – but is identical with the mutual service of citizens. Of course, since the good around which a polity of this world gathers is not the one God, but some partial good, its mutuality will be given its actual dynamics by the character of that good, and will be infected by the *libido dominandi*. But much can be accomplished by reminding ourselves and others that finally the good to be gotten from being a citizen is the privilege of acting as a citizen – which is, one must quickly observe, something very different from being the obedient servant of a state or other political collective.

All classes and races drink from the one cup and eat the one bread, and so share equally in the good that gathers the church. The cry for "social justice" has sometimes been used as a cover for dubiously faithful purposes, but its origin is deep in the life of the church. Unless a polity is fallen so deeply that its common good is in fact a poison – in which case nothing but revolution and resistance unto death will serve – a chief goal of political striving must always be equal sharing of that good.

The discourse of the Eucharist is paradigmatically common prayer. In this discourse, all speak and all are heard. No doubt merely representative democracies are relatively good polities, but one thing cannot happen within their mechanisms: I do not myself appear in the forum where decision is argued and made, so that my interests cannot be transformed by the discourse there. My representative can do much for me, but he or she cannot repent for me. In polities where it is even conceivable, it should be a goal to create and nurture many empowered forums where the future of the community is debated by all – subpolities, if one will.

Finally, the Eucharist does know a hierarchy, of celebrant and people and of various ministries to both. Since the one God is the Good of this gathering, the hierarchy within it does not impede the mutuality of the discourse, or establish an oligarchy or even a merely representative democracy. The citizens of the eucharistic polity know that differences of gifts, even differences of more and less, are not in themselves evil, and are to be cherished in polities of this world also. And they know that the anarchistic impetus internal to all Western politics since the French Revolution is to be resisted.

Because their faith is eschatological, Christians are uniquely placed in the polities of this world. When everyone is on the hustings or in the streets, they will be there if the cause is in any analogy to what they know in the Eucharist; but they will also be in their own eucharistic and other gatherings, praying. For they know that the polities of this age cannot be perfected, and that even penultimate structures will fall unless the Lord builds the house. And when everyone else has given up and gone home, they will be still working and demanding, because they know that justice and peace are, despite all appearances, possible. They know these things because they know of the eschaton.

Notes

1 I will for the most part relate this story as Israel finally did, indulging in "historical–critical" reconstruction of it only for specific purpose. And I will presume readers' general acquaintance with this story.

2 Augustine's word is *civitas*, which it is of course customary to translate "city." But since Augustine's Latin stands in for the Greek *polis*, and since the entity of this age with which he is concerned is indiscriminately the City of Rome and the Roman Empire, "polity" is surely the far better translation.

3 It will, of course, be obvious that the divisions of the church call all such claims into question. But that is only to say that the divisions of the church call the church's very existence into question. Can there *be* such a thing as a divided church? It is a genuine question, but one that can hardly be answered here (Radner 1998).

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