[*PT* 7.3 (2006) 299-321] *Political Theology* (print) ISSN 1462-317X
Political Theology (online) ISSN 1473-1719

FROM ONE CITY TO TWO: CHRISTIAN REIMAGINING OF POLITICAL SPACE

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ABSTRACT

The paper questions the basic assumption that the nation-state is one city, within which there is a division of goods and a division of labour, which follow certain well-worn binaries: civil society and state, sacred and secular, eternal and temporal, religion and politics, church and state. It explores some deficiencies of John Courtney Murray's conceptualization of the political space in this way, and turns to Augustine's tale of two cities for a more adequate conceptualization. The paper especially argues that the two cities are not two institutions but two performances, two practices of space and time.

The first chapter of Martin Marty's book *Politics, Religion, and the Common Good* begins with a cautionary tale:

> In the 1940s, what could incite otherwise law-abiding white Christian Americans to treat a group of fellow white Christian citizens like this?
>
> In Nebraska, one member of this group was castrated.
> In Wyoming, another member was tarred and feathered.
> In Maine, six members were reportedly beaten.
> In Illinois, a caravan of group members was attacked.
> In other states, sheriffs looked the other way as people assaulted group members.
> The group's meeting places were also attacked.
> Members of the group were commonly arrested and then imprisoned without being charged.[1]

1. Martin E. Marty, with Jonathan Moore, *Politics, Religion, and the Common Good: Advancing a Distinctly American Conversation About Religion's Role in Our Shared Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 23.

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Marty continues on to reveal that the group in question was the Jehovah's Witnesses whose offence, in the eyes of their fellow citizens, was to circulate pamphlets such as one entitled "Reasons Why a True Follower of Jesus Christ Cannot Salute a Flag." In 1940 the Supreme Court had ruled that all American schoolchildren could be forced to salute the American flag. Marty comments that with war raging in Europe, "The country had to stand together."[2] The Jehovah's Witnesses refused to comply.

So here we have a nation on the brink of war, enforcing reverence to its flag, and violently persecuting a non-violent group of people who believe that flag worship is idolatrous. Surely the lesson Marty will draw from this story will be a warning against the violence of zealous nationalism. Right?

No. Astonishingly, the punch line of the story is a warning about the dangers of religion in public. Within three years the Supreme Court reversed itself. "But," Marty says,

> during the three years before that reversal, it became obvious that religion, which can pose "us" versus "them"—or "them" versus what we think "the state" should be and do—carries risks and can be perceived by others as dangerous. Religion can cause all kinds of trouble in the public arena. The world scene reveals many instances of terror and tragedy created by people acting in the name of religion.[3]

As Marty uses it in this case, the term "religion" refers *not* to extending one's arm in a ritual gesture and reciting a pledge of one's allegiance to a piece of cloth endowed with totemic powers. The term "religion" applies only to the Jehovah's Witnesses' refusal to do so. And yet the violence *against* the Jehovah's Witnesses is exhibit A in Marty's warning against the violent tendencies of religion.

What could cause Marty to put forth such an odd moral to the story? Clearly Marty disapproves of coercing people to salute the flag. Marty's sympathies are not with those ardent nationalists who would do violence to nonconformists. And much of Marty's book is dedicated to showing that allowing religion a voice in public affairs is—as the title of the second chapter indicates—"Worth the Risk." Nevertheless, the core of the problem for Marty remains something odd and alien that "religion" adds to the one public conversation.

Marty has two ways of explaining the problem that at first seem directly opposed to one another. On the one hand, Marty accuses "religion" of being divisive. "Once a particular group considers itself as

2. Ibid., 24.
3. Ibid.

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divinely chosen and draws sharp boundaries between itself and others, the enemy has been clearly identified, and violence can become actual."[4] Marty expands on these ideas in a section entitled "Religion Divides." He writes: "Those called to be religious naturally form separate groups, movements, tribes, or nations."[5] The sacred privilege with which these groups feel endowed leads to negativity toward others. On the other hand, however, the problem with "religion" seems not to be that it breaks up a desirable uniformity, but that it works against a healthy pluralism: "Religion in its intense forms can grasp people who would otherwise have multiple commitments and exact complete and exclusive expressions of their loyalty, 'even unto death.' "[6] Religion demands one overriding commitment, a potentially lethal subordination of the many to the one.

Given this analysis, it is hard to see why the antagonists in the opening scenario end up where Marty puts them. The Jehovah's Witnesses are clearly guilty of "religion" because they have claimed an exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ. They have provoked the violence, even though they suffered rather than committed it. What is not clear is why their persecutors are not also guilty of "religion" for demanding an equally exacting "complete and exclusive expression of their loyalty, 'even unto death.' "

The answer seems to lie in the way Marty divides political space. In Marty's terms, America consists of one nation-state, with one "public square" and one "common good." There are, however, two types of public space within the one nation-state. In one, unity is essential; in the other, pluralism is desirable. Marty wishes to embrace pluralism in religious commitment. And he does so not by simply privatizing religious belief. Marty believes that the solution to the subordination of the many to the one in religion is to encourage religious people to take part in an open and civil conversation about the common good of the nation. As Marty says, "a republic prospers when many voices speak,"[7] and he argues that religion is an important voice for the vitality of the public conversation. Pluralism, however, only works on the level of civil society. Pluralism of religious goods is inevitable and even laudable, but when it comes to the temporal goods of national life, pluralism must give way to consensus about the common good of the nation. At the higher level of the state, there must be a higher unity to keep the nation-

4. Ibid., 27–28.
5. Ibid., 25.
6. Ibid., 29.
7. Ibid., 162.

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state from dissolving. Multiple commitments regarding religious goods at the level of civil society are to be celebrated. It is when multiple commitments at the level of the state are introduced that religion turns dangerous. Marty's solution to the problem of pluralism, then, is a tempering of an individual's particular religious commitment by his or her commitment to the nation-state, a more inclusive reality at the level of the temporal common good.

Marty's solution to the problem of pluralism is common in contemporary Christian social ethics. The basic assumption is that the nation-state is one city, within which there is a division of goods and a division of labour, which follow certain well-worn binaries: civil society and state, sacred and secular, eternal and temporal, religion and politics, church and state. In the next section of this essay, I will turn to John Courtney Murray's influential proposal, on which Marty draws,[8] for the division of political space. I will explore some deficiencies in construing political space in this way. As in the example of Marty and the Jehovah's Witnesses, when space is configured this way, the unity of the one city will tend to overtake the multiple commitments of civil society, and the division of goods between eternal and temporal will not hold. The nation-state itself becomes a kind of religion. For a more adequate construal of political space I turn to Augustine, who speaks not of one city but two. For Augustine, there is no division of goods. Both cities use the same finite goods, but use them for different ends. The two cities compete for the same goods; both are practices of binding, alternate practices of *religio*. At the same time that Augustine is more clear-eyed about the opposition of two alternate practices of *religio*, however, Augustine also allows us to avoid simple dichotomies of church versus state. The two cities are not two institutions but two performances, two practices of space and time. For an illustration of this idea, I turn in the final section of this essay to the Strauss opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* as an analogy for a Christian performative imagination of politics.

E Pluribus Unum

John Courtney Murray is the most influential American Catholic theorist on the solution of the problem of the one and the many in the life of the nation. Like Marty, Murray acknowledges a robust pluralism of different religious voices in the public conversation. According to Murray, what distinguishes American liberalism from its Jacobin counterparts on the Continent is a commitment to a limited government that allows

8. Ibid., 16–17.

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pluralism to flourish. "The unity asserted in the American device 'E pluribus unum'…is a unity of limited order."[9] Murray is keenly sensitive to the tendency of the one to overtake the many, so he stresses that the state is not the realization of the common good, but merely the agency that maintains the public order which allows the common good to flourish. The locus of the common good is society, where a vigorous and civil conversation takes place amongst the various "conspiracies," Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and secularist.

> The one civil society contains within its own unity the communities that are divided among themselves; but it does not seek to reduce to its own unity the differences that divide them. In a word, the pluralism remains as real as the unity. Neither may undertake to destroy the other. Each subsists in its own order. And the two orders, the religious and the civil, remain distinct, however much they are, and need to be, related.[10]

The religion clauses of the First Amendment are therefore not articles of faith but articles of peace; they create a religiously neutral civil sphere which imposes only a limited unity on the plurality, to maintain peace among the many.[11]

According to Murray, there are four basic principles that serve to limit the power of the government. Here Murray undertakes the crucial division of goods and division of labours on which the peace of the one city depends. The first is the distinction between sacred and secular, a distinction that follows the above distinction between the religious and the civil. The government "is not man's guide to heaven," and has no stake in judging transcendent truth or serving the church. The second distinction is between society and state. The state is just one limited order in the larger society, though it is that uppermost part of society responsible for the use of coercion. Here, Murray's use of "society" corresponds to the current usage of "civil society." Murray says that this distinction develops out of the medieval distinction between *ecclesia* and *imperium*. The imperial power played the limited role within Christendom that the state now plays. The third principle is the distinction between common good and public order. The state is responsible for the latter, but not the former, although public order creates the conditions under which the common good can flourish. The fourth principle is that of "freedom under law." The law exists only to facilitate freedom,

9. John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1960), 45.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 49.

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not to direct action.[12] The reconciliation of the one and the many is thus accomplished by a series of binary distinctions that divide one space into two "distinct orders"—sacred and secular, society and state, common good and public order, freedom and law—in which the latter term in each binary has a protective, but strictly limited, power over the former.

In theory we have achieved a balance between unity and plurality, where, as Murray says, "[n]either may undertake to destroy the other." The problem, as Murray recognizes, is that there is an inherent instability in the relation of state and civil society. Although neither "may" try to destroy the other, they seem to want to. Pluralism remains a threat. Murray describes the "structure of war that underlies the pluralistic society"; it is a "crisis that is new in history."[13]

> The fact is that among us civility—or civic unity or civic amity, as you will—is a thing of the surface. It is quite easy to break through it. And when you do, you catch a glimpse of the factual reality of the pluralist society. I agree with Prof. Eric Vogelin's thesis that our pluralist society has received its structure through wars and that the wars are still going on beneath a fragile surface of more or less forced urbanity. What Vogelin calls the "genteel picture" will not stand the test of confrontation with fact.[14]

Murray's solution to this problem is to articulate a public consensus that can replace this structure of war with a peaceful pluralism of conspiracies locked in rational argument, not battle. Murray posits the urgent need for an "American consensus" based on natural law thinking that can provide a moral foundation for such a conversation to take place. The American consensus "would be no less sharply pluralistic, but rather more so, since the real pluralisms would be clarified out of their present confusion. And amid the pluralism a unity would be discernible—the unity of an orderly conversation."[15]

Unfortunately, Murray ruefully admits, such a consensus once existed but is now dead. In response to Murray's call for rational debate on the moral limits of warfare, Julian Hartt countered that America is not a community capable of embodying the tradition of reasoned discourse on warfare. Murray responds:

> I am compelled regretfully to agree that he is right. Such is the fact. It may even be that the American community, especially in its "clerks," who are the custodians of the public philosophy, is not the repository of the tradition of

12. John Courtney Murray, *Religious Liberty: Catholic Struggles with Pluralism*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, SJ (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 144–46.

13. Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 24.

14. Ibid., 18–19.

15. Ibid., 24.

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> reason on any moral issue you would like to name. This ancient tradition lives, if you will, within the Catholic community; but this community fails to bring it into vital relation with the problems of foreign policy.[16]

Murray concludes, "It would seem, therefore, that the moral footing has been eroded from beneath the political principle of consent, which has now come to designate nothing more than the technique of majority opinion as the guide of public action—a technique as apt to produce fatuity in policy and tyranny of rule as to produce wisdom and justice."[17] Murray tries to deal with the problem by appealing ever more strongly to a lost tradition of reason and the limited state, but a heavy sense of resignation settles over his work at this point. State and civil society seem locked in a perpetual war over the same space. The many always threaten to overtake the one, but Murray cannot increase the power of the one without doing damage to the ideals of a limited state and a flourishing of pluralism. Pluralism seems to be a tragic reality; pluralism is both the goal and the threat. All Murray can do is appeal to the ideal of a peaceful, rational consensus that seems tragically to have failed.

What actually happens in Murray's America when rational moral consensus fails? Does America disintegrate into warring conspiracies? Do the various groupings of civil society wax stronger and overtake the enfeebled, limited state? Empirical evidence suggests that the answer to the latter two questions is an emphatic "no." While there is plenty of evidence that whatever moral consensus in sexual issues that may have existed in the past has been eroded to an extent that Murray could not foresee, the American nation-state has not disintegrated, and the state itself has grown immensely powerful and omnipresent in civil society. The Department of Homeland Security is but one example. Far from the state withering or being overtaken, it is civil society that has withered, or been absorbed into the state.[18] The associations of civil society —churches, unions, families, and so on—still exist, but have lost much of their independent authority. They now convey identities and meanings within the overriding symbol system managed by the twin realities of state and market. The decline of the intermediate associations of civil society is taken as a given by groups of scholars such as the Council on Civil Society, which includes such diverse figures as Francis

16. Ibid., 291. See Michael J. Baxter's essay "John Courtney Murray," *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 150–64.

17. Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 293.

18. See Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 27–45.

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Fukuyama and Cornel West, William Galston and Mary Ann Glendon.[19] In short, Murray's world of robust conspiracies and limited state has simply not come to pass. The one has largely overtaken the many, just as Wal-Mart has overtaken small family businesses.

The analogy with Wal-Mart is deliberate, for certainly capitalism has had a significant homogenizing effect. While choices have proliferated, there is very little dissent from the ideology of free choice itself. I am primarily interested, however, in the political solution to the "structure of war" underlying pluralism. What Murray does not seem to realize is that the American nation-state has found its solution to the problem of pluralism in devotion to the nation itself. The nation-state is made stronger by the absence of shared ends, and the absence indeed of any rational basis on which to argue about ends. In the absence of shared ends, devotion to the nation-state as the end in itself becomes ever more urgent. The nation-state *needs* the constant crisis of pluralism in order to enact the *unum*. Indeed the constant threat of disorder is crucial to any state that defines its indispensability in terms of the security it offers. Pluralism will always be a crisis for the liberal state, and the solution to the crisis of pluralism is to rally around the nation-state, the locus of a mystical communion that rescues us from the conflicts of civil society. Though the American consensus as a natural law tradition of reasoning is dead, as Murray ruefully admits, another type of American consensus is alive and well. It is the consensus that America is, as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it, "the indispensable nation."[20]

The fundamental incoherence of the nation-state is sublimated by devotion to the nation-state itself, especially in its organization of killing energies. There is thus a necessary connection between the two seemingly contradictory faces of the nation-state that Alasdair MacIntyre identifies. On the one hand, the state is a clearinghouse for goods and services in which decisions are made between competing interests based on power, not rational deliberation about shared ends. MacIntyre goes beyond Murray in saying that the public discourse of the nation-state not only does not but cannot be conducted on the basis of common

19. See Council on Civil Society, *A Call to Civil Society* (Chicago: Institute for American Values, 1998). I cite this work as evidence of the withering of civil society, not because I agree with the solution put forward. I think the authors fail to grasp the extent to which American liberalism itself is destructive of the intermediate associations of civil society. For a more detailed exposition of the way that the modern nation-state is hostile to civil society, see my essay "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004): 243–74.

20. Madeleine Albright, quoted in Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), x.

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norms of rational inquiry in the Aristotelian–Thomist sense, in part because of the sheer size of the modern nation-state. Decisions are based on money and power, not reason, so conflict—especially between classes—is endemic. On the other hand, the nation-state presents itself as a repository of sacred value that requires its citizens to be ready to kill and die on its behalf. Despite Murray's protest that the state is not to be the agent of the common good, the nation-state itself becomes the sham common good. As MacIntyre writes:

> when the nation-state masquerades as the guardian of such a common good, the outcome is bound to be either ludicrous or disastrous or both. For the counterpart to the nation-state thus misconceived as itself a community is a misconception of its citizens as constituting a *Volk*, a type of collectivity whose bonds are simultaneously to extend to the entire body of citizens and yet to be as binding as the ties of kinship and locality. In a modern, large-scale nation-state no such collectivity is possible and the pretense that it is is always an ideological disguise for sinister realities.[21]

The primary sinister reality that must be disguised is violence. Carolyn Marvin argues that "nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States,"[22] and it is a religion that produces unity through blood sacrifice in war. It has been pointed out many times that the country is most unified in times of war; in Randolph Bourne's memorable dictum, "War is the health of the State."[23] According to Marvin, this fact points to the inherently religious nature of American nationalism, for religion as she defines it—following, in different ways, Durkheim and Girard—is bound up with blood sacrifice to defuse crises of group identity. It is crucial, however, that we deny the religious nature of nationalism. Why?

> Because what is obligatory for group members must be separated, as holy things are, from what is contestable. To concede that nationalism is a religion is to expose it to challenge, to make it just the same as sectarian religion. By explicitly denying that our national symbols and duties are sacred, we shield them from competition with sectarian symbols. In so doing, we embrace the ancient command not to speak the sacred, ineffable name of god. The god is inexpressible, unsayable, unknowable, beyond language. But that god may not be refused when it calls for sacrifice.[24]

21. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1999), 132.

22. Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Revisiting Civil Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 768.

23. Randolph Bourne, "The State," in *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays 1915–1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 71.

24. Marvin and Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice," 770.

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And so we return to Martin Marty's problem at the beginning of this paper. "Religion" in public is dangerous because it tries to impose unity on plurality. At the same time, however, religious and lethal devotion to the unity of the nation-state itself is assumed to be a normal part of one's civic duties. Plurality is desirable only at the level of civil society and only as long as it does not interfere with the sacred duty to "stand together" at the level of the state. There is only one temporal city. The church may jealously guard its sacred space within that city, but it may not demur from the state's monopoly on violence.

From One City to Two

The problem of the one and the many will be insoluble from a theological point of view as long as there is only one city within which the church must contend for space. Murray and his successors were trying to find a way for the church to move beyond an outdated Constantinianism that required the coercive power of the state to be wielded on behalf of the church's interests. In doing so, however, Murray attempts a division of labour between two realms—sacred and secular, infinite and finite, each with their proper goods and proper functions. In separating the sacred and the secular orders, however, Murray left open the possibility that the former would be rendered increasingly "extraterrestrial": "The whole of man's existence is not absorbed in his temporal and terrestrial existence. He also exists for a transcendent end. The power of government does not reach into this higher sacred order of human existence."[25] The visible church is inevitably entangled in terrestrial life, but insofar as it is, the church and the government inhabit the same terrestrial city. The nation-state is simply a given, within which the church and the government must manoeuvre for space.

The Constantinian solution to the problem of church and state is for the church to use the state to rule the city. The "sectarian" solution is for the church to renounce the state and live apart from the city. Murray's and Marty's solution is for the church to locate itself within the city but outside of the state, and for the state to take a strictly limited role in ruling the city. All of these solutions share an imagination of one earthly city within which the political life of a people takes place. There is one *polis* which the church can seek to rule, flee, serve, advise, or transform. The heavenly city refers to different goods than those of temporal politics.

25. Murray, *Religious Liberty*, 144.

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The problem can be seen in considering the difference between Augustine's "Two cities have been formed by two loves"[26] and Pope Gelasius I's famous and influential dictum "Two there are…by which this world is ruled."[27] For Augustine church and coercive government represent two cities, two distinct societies which represent two distinct moments of salvation history. There is not one society in which there is a division of labour. In Gelasius' words half a century later, there is one city with two rulers, "the consecrated authority of priests and the royal power."[28] The eschatological reference is not absent; for Gelasius, the distribution of power between priest and king is a sign that Christ's coming has put a check on human pride. Nevertheless, the element of time has been flattened out into space. The one city is now divided into "spheres," and, as Gelasius says, "each sphere has a specially qualified and trained profession."[29] It is this flattening out that allows Murray to map the modern distinction of state and civil society onto the medieval distinction of *imperium* and *ecclesia*. The centuries following Gelasius would see the two powers often locked in a struggle for dominance over the one city, Christendom. Carolingian and Ottonian emperors would assert their control over ecclesiastical affairs—in Carolingian times it was common to amend Gelasius' dictum such that there were two by which the *church* was ruled—until the Investiture Controversy reasserted clerical control over church affairs. As Oliver O'Donovan comments, "The history of the Christendom idea shows differentiation being sacrificed to equilibrium, the two offices turning into each others' shadows; and it shows us one establishing hegemony over the other as attention falls on the difference between 'temporal' authority and 'spiritual.' "[30]

The current revival of Augustine's political thought (Rowan Williams, John Milbank, Oliver O'Donovan, *et al.*) owes much to the way the two cities concept configures space and time. Augustine has no theory of

26. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), XIV.28.

27. Pope Gelasius I, "Letter to Emperor Anastasius," in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*, eds Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 179.

28. Ibid.

29. Pope Gelasius I, "The Bond of Anathema," in O'Donovan and O'Donovan, eds, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 178–79.

30. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 204. On priest and king as shadows of one another after the Investiture Controversy, see also Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

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church and state, no spatial carving up of one society into spheres of influence. There is no sense that there is a single given public square in which the church must find its place. Augustine complexifies space by arguing that the church itself is a kind of public; indeed it is the most fully public community. The city of God has to do with ordering matters that are considered public because the city of God makes use of the same temporal goods as the earthly city, but in different ways and for different ends.[31] There is no division between earthly goods and heavenly goods, secular and sacred; there is no sphere of activities that are the peculiar responsibility of the earthly city. The city of God, therefore, is not part of a larger whole, but is a public in its own right. Indeed, the city of God is the only true "public thing" according to Augustine, as pagan Roman rule had failed to be a *res publica* by refusing to enact justice and serve God.[32]

It follows that the earthly city is not a neutral, common space, bounded by "articles of peace," where the various "conspiracies" meet, as in Murray's scheme. For Augustine, the earthly city is not religiously neutral, but its members share a common end, "the love of self, even to the contempt of God."[33] As John Milbank comments, for Augustine "the ends sought by the *civitas terrena* are not merely limited, finite goods, they are those finite goods regarded without 'referral' to the infinite good, and, in consequence, they are unconditionally *bad* ends."[34] There is a unity in the earthly city, but it is a false unity, one based on the *libido dominandi*. Augustine is not averse to calling this false unity a *religio*, as he notes that the word *religio* applies not only to the worship of God but to "the observance of social relationships" in general.[35] Love of

31. Augustine, *City of God*, XVIII.54.

32. Ibid., XIX.21–5.

33. Ibid., XIV.28. Robert Markus has famously posited Augustine as the first Christian theorist of the secular, "religiously neutral civil community," a reading that has been rightly rejected by Williams, Milbank, O'Donovan and others. See R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 166–78.

34. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 406.

35. Augustine, *City of God*, X.3. The Dods translation reads "The word 'religion' might seem to express more definitely the worship due to God alone, and therefore Latin translators have used this word to represent θρησκεία; yet, as not only the uneducated, but also the best instructed, use the word religion to express human ties, and relationships, and affinities, it would inevitably produce ambiguity to use this word in discussing the worship of God, unable as we are to say that religion is nothing else than the worship of God, without contradicting the common usage which applies this word to the observance of social relationships."

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self lends itself to a dissipating individualism, but the love of glory and public praise that issue from self-love restrains the centrifugal effects of the *libido dominandi*. Civic unity is also maintained by the pursuit of war, uniting a fractious populace against a common enemy.[36] Augustine sees—as Murray does not—that the "structure of war that underlies the pluralistic society," in Murray's words, has a tendency to be resolved by appeal to unity of the earthly city in war against external enemies. To do so, however, produces not real unity and order, but a false order, a restraint of vice through vice.[37] The earthly city, therefore, is a tragic reality, doomed to dissolution, yet the city of God uses the order the earthly city produces to its benefit as it sojourns through this world.[38] The two cities have this temporary earthly peace in common, but it is not a kind of common political space or state. As O'Donovan says, for Augustine "Only the 'earthly peace'…is common to both communities, not an institution but simply a condition of order. Each community makes, as it were, its own peace out of it."[39]

It is often thought that Augustine does not identify the church with the city of God; this is true in one respect and inaccurate in another. It is true that Augustine does not simply identify the city of God with the visible church on earth, which is so notoriously filled with both the wheat and the chaff. However, Augustine does identify the church with the city of God in at least one place; he refers to Old Testament figures that "are to be referred only to Christ and His church, which is the city of God."[40] Later Augustine says, "the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven," because it contains the righteous within it.[41] As Christ's body, the church is ontologically related to the city of God, but it is the church not as visible institution but as a set of practices. The city of God is not so much a space as a performance. Likewise, the earthly city is a particular tragic performance of the *libido dominandi*. It is true that the city of God and the earthly city are ideal moral communities whose actual performance in time is, for Augustine, the history of Israel and the church on the one hand and the history of the Babylonian and Roman empires on the other.[42] But what we are not

36. Ibid., V.12.

37. Ibid., XIX.25.

38. Ibid., XIX.26.

39. Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19," in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 59.

40. Augustine, *City of God*, XVI.2.

41. Ibid., XX.9.

42. O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19," 56–57.

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given is anything like a theory of church and state, or civil society and state. There is no division of sacred and secular, private and public, no division of labour between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's for, as Dorothy Day once commented, if you give to God what is God's, there is nothing left for Caesar.

Augustine does not map the two cities out in space, but rather projects them across time. The reason that Augustine is compelled to speak of two cities is not because there are some human pursuits that are properly terrestrial and others that pertain to God, but simply because God saves in time. Salvation has a history, whose climax is in the advent of Jesus Christ, but whose definitive closure remains in the future. Christ has triumphed over the principalities and powers, but there remains resistance to Christ's saving action. The two cities are not the sacred and the profane spheres of life. The two cities are the *already* and the *not yet* of the Kingdom of God.

Because of the persistence of sin, Augustine accepts the use of the coercive means of the earthly city by the city of God to restrain evil and provide some order while we await the eschaton. Augustine is misunderstood, however, if sin takes on the status of a given reality that then necessitates the violence of a permanent, natural political sphere—the state. Where this move is made, it is common either to de-historicize the *already* of the Kingdom of God, such that it stands, as for Reinhold Niebuhr "at the edge of history," beckoning us to a better relative justice,[43] or to acknowledge the salience of the *already* in history, but to argue for a proper "balance" or "tension" between the *already* and the *not yet*. For Augustine, however, the *already* is not a transcendent principle but a reality to which the church witnesses in history. And the *already* and the *not yet* are not to be "balanced" any more than the city of God and the earthly city are to keep each other in check. The reality of the *already* and the *not yet* is not a kind of Stoic admonition to seek moderation, a middle course between the contrasting passions of optimism and pessimism. The advent of the Kingdom of God is not balanced by any countervailing principle; Christ has definitively triumphed, and the powers and principalities are passing away. The reason that the

43. Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 62–83. For Niebuhr the underlying problem of social and political life is something like Murray's "structure of war" underlying civil society, and Christ's Kingdom has no immediate relevance: "The ethic of Jesus does not deal at all with the immediate moral problem of every human life—the problem of arranging some kind of armistice between various contending factions and forces. It has nothing to say about the relativities of politics and economics, nor of the necessary balances of power which exist and must exist in even the most intimate social relationships." Ibid., 23.

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Kingdom is not yet fully consummated is not that God is holding back, as if God would want the Kingdom to be revealed only partially, in anticipation. As Gerhard Lohfink remarks, "We cannot say such things any more than we can say that God was revealed in Jesus, but only in anticipation, only partially, and certainly not entirely and definitively."[44] The *not yet* results not from God holding back, but from humans holding back. And there is nothing "natural" or fated about human sin. Indeed, the story of the Fall makes clear that human sin is not the way it is meant to be, nor indeed the way that it really is.

For Augustine, the Fall is not simply to issue in a generic pessimism to balance the optimism afforded by the advent of Jesus Christ. The Fall, after all, is not a tragic or pessimistic doctrine. To the contrary, the Fall indicates that sin is not simply a given. Sin is a contingent reality, a falling away from an original goodness.[45] Augustine repeatedly stresses that evil is not a created reality, but is parasitic on good. The enemies of God oppose God by a perverted will, not by nature.[46] Unlike the Babylonian creation myth, the world is not created out of the need to restrain an original violence. The world is created in peace, and goodness, not violence, is the way things really are. Rome, by contrast, was founded in an original act of violence, the murder of Remus by his brother Romulus. Augustine notes "no difference between the foundation of this city and of the earthly city,"[47] for the earthly city is founded in violence that conquers a previous violence, vice that restrains a previous vice. The "sickliness" of the earthly city is therefore "not nature, but vice."[48]

For Augustine, then, coercive government is not natural, but is the result of the Fall. From creation, God "did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation—not man over man, but man over the beasts." It is only sin "which brings man under the dominion of his fellow."[49] For Augustine, coercive government is essentially a tragic reality, not part of God's original intention for creation but a means of

44. Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?: Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 138.

45. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.11.

46. Ibid., XII.3.

47. Ibid., XV.5.

48. Ibid., XV.6.

49. Ibid., XIX.14–15. The interpretation of these passages is not uncontroversial. In an appendix to his book, Markus examines the evidence and shows—conclusively, I think—that Augustine held that government is not natural, but is the result of sin; see Markus, *Saeculum*, 197–210.

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keeping sin in check by sin. There is also no sense in Augustine that the earth is divided up *by nature* into different "earthly cities" or nations, each with its own government. As Augustine reads the story of Babel, the world was divided into separate peoples as a consequence of sin. Christ, in contrast, is the one who gathers the many into himself.[50] The earthly city has no way of solving the problem of the one and the many; pluralism for the earthly city remains tragic. The city of God is the universal reality, while the earthly city is partial and particular. The city of God, "while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages,"[51] thus reversing the effects of the Fall. In doing so, "far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities…it even preserves and adapts them."[52]

For Augustine, government is part of God's providential ordering of history, but as part of the earthly city, "which shall not be everlasting,"[53] civil government is a temporary reality; because Christ has triumphed over sin, the earthly city is passing away, receding into the city of God. As the word implies, the *temporal* is not a space or a sphere of reality, but is a kind of rule that is *temporary*. And it is not merely slated for destruction once God finally gets around to fully installing the Kingdom in some far-off future. The principalities and powers have *already* met their end in the triumph of Christ. This is not to "overemphasize" the *already* at the expense of the *not yet*; there is no question of "realized eschatology," faith in the moral progress of humankind. It is, rather, simply to acknowledge the ontological priority of the *already* over the *not yet*. The *already* is what really is, and violence is not simply one of the given data with which Christian ethics must deal.

This kind of imagination of the political may seem like an irresponsible refusal to take seriously the effects of sin, but this is not the case if we take the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the key to reading history. On the cross, the effects of the *not yet* are made clearly visible on the body of Christ. The public effects of sin and violence are there for all to see. And yet Paul describes the cross as strength and victory (1 Cor. 1:18–25). Though sin persists after the resurrection, death has been robbed of its power (1 Cor. 15:55). The "tension" between the *already* and the *not yet* comes from the drama of suffering—and, as sinful human beings, committing—present evil; the tension is not because we

50. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), IV.11.

51. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.17.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., XV.4.

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do not know which side is going to win out. Paul is quite confident of both present suffering and the fact that God has absorbed that suffering once and for all. Again, there is no question of "realized eschatology." The *not yet* remains clearly visible in the deaths of the martyrs who imitate Christ, but in the light of a larger story their deaths are called "victories" over the demons and powers that conspire against the city of God. Augustine calls the martyrs the means by which the false religion of the earthly city is exposed, and the true religion is made known.[54] The effects of sin are apparent in martyrdom, but the martyr confronts death as if it has lost its sting, as if it no longer ultimately matters. Because the Kingdom is already present, Christ's victory over death is the only reality. The *already* and the *not yet* are not balanced in martyrdom; rather, the violence of the *not yet* is exposed as belonging to a type of rule that is passing away. In their imitation of Christ, the martyrs and not the violent become the key to reading and performing history eschatologically.

Performing the City of God

It is not my present intention to critique Augustine's comments on the use that the city of God makes of the coercive powers of the earthly city. We must at least agree, I think, with Karl Barth's judgment that the state exercise of violence is an abnormality, an *opus alienum* and not an *opus proprium*.[55] What is important for my present purpose is the way that Augustine's image of the two cities breaks the modern monolithic conception of a single public space, bounded by the nation-state, in which the church must somehow find a place. For Augustine, neither city is a space with clearly defined boundaries, but both are sets of practices or dramatic performances, one tragic, the other comic, broadly speaking. The task of the church is to interrupt the violent tragedy of the earthly city with the comedy of redemption, to build the city of God, beside which the earthly city appears to be not a city at all.

Let me illustrate this idea with Richard Strauss' opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The action is set in the house of the richest man in Vienna, who is busy throwing a feast for numerous guests. The host is a man of indiscriminate taste. He has scheduled dinner to be followed by two performances, one a tragic opera seria based on the Ariadne legend, and the other a comedy featuring harlequins, nymphs, and buffoons. The pompous composer of the opera is outraged when he discovers that his

54. Ibid., VIII.27.

55. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 456.

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masterwork is to be followed by such a frivolous offering. The situation becomes much worse for the composer and his Prima Donna when the Major Domo—on orders from his Lordship, the master of the house—announces that, in order to leave time for the fireworks display, both the tragedy and the comedy will have to be performed simultaneously, on the same stage.[56]

The composer objects to the other actors infiltrating his tragedy, as Ariadne on Naxos "is the symbol of Mankind in Solitude." The Major Domo, however, explains that his Lordship has watched the rehearsals and "has been greatly displeased that in a mansion so magnificently equipped as his, a scene so poverty-struck as a Desert Island should be set before him."[57] He wants to enliven the tragedy with characters from the comedy. And so Zerbinetta and her troupe of comedians prepare to bring light to the Ariadne story. Zerbinetta, says the Dancing Master, is "a past mistress of improvisation. As she always plays herself, you see, she is always at home in scenes of every kind."[58]

As the curtain rises on the second act of Strauss' opera, Ariadne is at the grotto grieving her abandonment by her lover Theseus. Ariadne resolves to await Hermes, the messenger of death, to take her away to the underworld, the realm of death, for in death is peace and the cessation of suffering and corruption. However, Zerbinetta and her troupe of comedians interrupt Ariadne's tragedy and alter the direction of the opera. Zerbinetta tries to convince Ariadne that she wants not death, but a new lover. On the scene comes the rakish young god Bacchus, whom Ariadne at first mistakes for the messenger of death. Eventually, however, she is won by his wooing, and she embraces life instead of death, as he carries her off to the heavens. Bacchus has the last word, proclaiming "By thy great sorrow rich am I made… And sooner shall perish the stars in their places, than Death shall tear thee from my arms."[59]

In some Christian political imaginings, the one stage is the one earthly city, the nation-state, on which the church is urged to play a supporting role. For Augustine, however, the stage is the world on which the one drama of salvation history is being enacted. The earthly city and the city of God are two intermingled performances, one a tragedy, the other a

56. Richard Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, trans. Alfred Kalisch (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1943), 3–15. I am grateful to Doug Asbury, a student at Seabury-Western Seminary, for calling my attention to this opera during a class discussion of my book *Torture and Eucharist*.

57. Ibid., 15–16.

58. Ibid., 18.

59. Ibid., 25–48.

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comedy. There are not two sets of props, no division of goods between spiritual and temporal, infinite and finite. Both cities are concerned with the same questions: What is the purpose of human life? How should human life be ordered to achieve that purpose? The difference is that the city of God tells the story that we believe to be true, that God in Christ through the Spirit has saved us from the tragedy of inevitable violence. Like Zerbinetta and her troupe, the church interrupts the tragedy of the earthly city by enacting the comedy of redemption in Christ. The church does not allow the earthly city to define one public space, but constantly redefines what is truly public. The church is not a separate institution enacting a wholly separate drama, but works with other actors to try to divert tragedy into the drama of redemption.

Samuel Wells' book *Improvisation* is a wonderful reflection on the drama of Christian ethics. Wells points out that drama as it has been used in Christian ethics is too limited a concept if it means following out a pre-written script. Christian life is better likened to dramatic improvisation, where actors are formed in certain habits—virtues—and then allowed to take the action in not wholly anticipated directions. Wells argues that this type of improvisation imitates the ways of God with creation. God neither simply accepts nor rejects ("blocks") the sinfulness of the world, as if it were a given, but rather "overaccepts" the sin of the world in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. "Overaccepting" is a theatrical term that indicates an improvised reframing of the action of a drama in light of a larger story one wants to tell. Wells cites the example of the concert pianist interrupted by a child banging on the keyboard. Rather than simply allowing the noise to continue or having the child removed, the pianist put his hands on either side of the child's and began weaving a beautiful improvised melody which incorporated the child's discordant notes.[60] Overaccepting is not always so immediately beautiful. Martyrdom exhibits all the desperate ugliness of violence and death. And yet martyrdom transfigures death by placing it into the larger story of what Christ has done with death.

Christian political ethics is often distorted by treating certain contingent realities as givens. Sin and violence are the way things are, at least for now; the *not yet* is detemporalized into a constant feature of life on earth. There is one city, protected from dissolution by the state, a natural institution meant to safeguard those penultimate political goods that

60. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 59–70, 131–32. Wells stresses that improvisation is not about being original or clever, but about doing the obvious. Being trained well and thinking in terms of the larger story means that the actor should have a good instinct about what comes next. Ibid., 12.

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require protection by coercion. Our task is to manage history by bringing some order to a more basic chaos. In his reading of Genesis, by contrast, Augustine shows how original goodness is more basic than sin. Augustine shows how God opens up a second city, a new type of imagination that does not treat sin as a given. As Wells indicates, God is the only true given and the only true giver. Christian ethics is not about managing history, but about overaccepting the apparent givens of human life and turning them into gifts in the light of God's grace. "Thus is fate (a given) transformed into destiny (a gift) by placing it within a larger story."[61] In Augustine's terms, the city of God is the story enacted in history of the way that God has taken the tragedy of human sin and incorporated it into the drama of redemption.

Envisioning the two cities as performances helps us to avoid some serious problems with the way the church is imagined. The church as God sees it—as the Body of Christ—is not a human institution with well-defined boundaries, clearly distinguishable from the secular body politic. The church is not a *polis*, but a set of practices or performances that participate in the history of salvation that God is unfolding on earth. The earthly city likewise is not simply identified with the state as institution; the idea of Christian mail carriers is by no means contradictory! In Augustine's metaphor, both cities are groups of people united by the things they love and by the way they imagine and use them, not primarily by the things we associate with institutions: buildings, equipment, bylaws, etc. The church is not a separate enclave, but—as in the *Ariadne auf Naxos* metaphor—it joins with others to perform the city of God. There is no sense that the church's social presence is for the sake of the church, nor must all other kinds of social bodies be shunned as impure. Not only does the church find itself involved with other troupes, but the improvisation that goes on to try to prevent death from having the final word often leaves the boundaries between what is church and what is not church permeable and even ambiguous. As Nicholas Healy writes, "The church is sinful and 'worldly,' and the Spirit acts throughout creation; so 'church' and 'world' may often be more prescriptive than descriptive categories within a theodramatic horizon."[62]

Although for Augustine the history of the city of God is primarily the history of the church, there is no question that the empirical church is full of sin, and the history of the church must be told in a penitential key. The church is not an ideal community to be celebrated for its

61. Ibid., 124–26 (quote on 126).

62. Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 170.

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moral superiority over the state and other types of association. The ontological *participation* of the church in Christ does not mean a full and simple identification of the church with Christ on earth. The church must acknowledge its sin and always tell the story of salvation penitentially, as the history of the forgiveness of sin, *our* sin. To tell this story faithfully, nevertheless, the acknowledgment of our sin must never become an apologia for further Christian complicity in sin. The church's confession of sin can become a kind of resignation to the inevitability of sin, the constancy of the "not yet," which requires, with a fated and regretful sigh, that we take up the sword again to restrain sin with sin. When the acknowledgement of our sin circles back to a tragic view of the world, our humility becomes demonic. A true understanding of eschatology requires neither tragic resignation to sin nor a triumphal declaration that the church is the realized eschaton. It requires a fully penitential "overaccepting" of human finitude and sinfulness by receiving the healing Kingdom that God, through Christ and the Spirit, has planted right in the midst of our bloodstained history. The recognition of our sinfulness becomes not recognition of our tragic fate, but a humble acknowledgement that we are not in charge of making history come out right by violent means. Our fate has been transformed into our destiny, which is to receive the Kingdom of God in humility and thankfulness. The city of God is not the shape of our triumph, but of our repentance.

Conclusion

I will conclude with two brief examples to illustrate what the movement from one city to two might look like in contemporary politics. Both examples have to do with Iraq. The vision of one city can be seen in the arguments by several prominent American Catholic commentators in 2003 that the church was welcome to give its opinion on the impending war, but judgment of this matter belonged to the President.[63] The assumption was that the church is one of many contributors to the one public debate on the war; when the nation makes up its mind, the church in America should loyally support the war effort. In fact, most American Christians before the war were content to support President Bush's determination to invade Iraq, despite the emphatic and repeated opposition to the war by the Pope and the governing bodies of virtually

63. George Weigel, "The Just War Case for the War," *America* 188, no. 11 (March 31, 2003): 7–10 and Michael Novak, "War to Topple Saddam is a Moral Obligation," *The Times* (London), February 12, 2003.

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every major Christian denomination. When the church is viewed as particular—as one of many in civil society—and the nation-state is viewed as universal—as the larger unifying reality—then it is inevitable that the one will absorb the many, in the putative interests of harmony and peace. Indeed, war becomes a means of furthering the integration of the many into the one; we must all stand together when faced with an enemy.

The enactment of another city would begin with the church striving to create another public performance, a more universal public than America. The church's public role would be to improvise a different drama, one of reconciliation not war. The efforts of Voices in the Wilderness, a group of both Christians and non-Christians, were exemplary in this regard. During the decade of lethal sanctions against Iraq, Voices in the Wilderness brought medicine, toys, and food into the country, in violation of US law. Such efforts enact a different drama by dismissing national borders as ultimately unreal. In the case of the current war, another city takes shape when the church alongside others refuses to accept an advisory role to the President, and makes its own judgment on the justice of the war. This means not only speaking out against an unjust war, but refusing to fight it. This would of course require a significant shift away from the common American Christian imagination of church and state as two parts of a whole. But repentance for our complicity in violence must take the form of fostering an eschatological sense that the earthly city is passing away, and that the church is called to witness in its own public life to a new order of peace and reconciliation.

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