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WHY WE NEED THE COMMON GOOD

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Not long after his death in 1973, a friend of J. R. R. Tolkien was going through his library and came across a copy of C. S. Lewis's 1943 pamphlet "Christian Behavior." We know it today as Part 2 of Lewis's apology for the Christian faith, *Mere Christianity*. Tucked inside the book was a carefully folded letter that Tolkien wrote but obviously never sent. It is, perhaps unsurprisingly, stern and frank, expressing alarm at one of Lewis's arguments in the pamphlet. With the benefit of nearly 80 years hindsight, it seems clear that Tolkien was right.

In the pamphlet, Lewis had written about the problem of divorce. Noting that much of Britain was secular and granting that it would be wrong for the nation's Christians to impose their (Christian) definition of marriage onto the country's non-Christian citizens, Lewis had proposed a compromise: State-recognized marriage would be kept strictly separate from church-recognized marriage. A couple could, to be sure, choose to have their marriage recognized by both church and crown. But there was no obligation to do so. By establishing these separate legal entities, Lewis hoped to create one entity that could be governed by the traditional Christian teachings about the nature of marriage while the other could be defined according to the norms of the nation's more secular population. The compromise seems sensible enough, right?

But Tolkien saw the problem. Here is how he explains it in the opening paragraphs of the letter:

[Y]ou observe that you are really committed (with the Christian Church as a whole) to the view that Christian marriage—monogamous, permanent, rigidly "faithful"—is in fact the truth about sexual behavior for all humanity: this is the only road of total health (including sex in its proper place) for all men and women. That it is dissonant with men's present sex-psychology does not disprove this, as you see: "I think it is the instinct that has gone wrong," you say.



ST. GILES IN EDINBURGH

Indeed if this were not so, it would be an intolerable injustice to impose permanent monogamy even on Christians. If Christian marriage were in the last analysis "unnatural" (of the same type as say the prohibition of flesh-meat in certain monastic rules) it could only be imposed on a special "chastity-order" of the Church, not on the universal Church. No item of compulsory Christian morals is valid only for Christians...I do not think you can possibly support your "policy," by this argument, for by it you are giving away the very foundation of Christian marriage. The foundation is that this is

the correct way of “running the human machine.” Your argument reduces it merely to a way of (perhaps?) getting extra mileage out of a few selected machines.¹

If we were to summarize Tolkien’s argument, we might put it this way: Christian morality is not ultimately instruction in how to make oneself a member of the Christian club. It is not a self-help program whose rules are adopted by a small set of people who wish to better themselves. Christian morals, rather, are simply moral teachings that agree with the natural design of the universe. They are instructions in how to live with the grain of creation. That is a carpentry metaphor, of course, but it makes the point well: When we cut against the grain, we can ruin both our saw and the wood. So it is when we behave in ways that run counter to the moral teachings of Scripture and nature. Thus, we cannot easily disentangle the decline of Christian influence in society, manifested both in its broadly shared moral assumptions and in the presence of actual Christians, from the decline of that community’s civil life. The two are interwoven. If we are to understand our historical moment and what it demands of Christians, then we must understand this point.

In the years since 2015, it has become increasingly fashionable to loudly worry about the future of the church in the western world. It was popular amongst many prior to that, of course, but 2015 ratcheted up the urgency. That year saw multiple fights over religious liberty followed by the landmark *Obergefell* Supreme Court decision that redefined marriage in the United States.

In the months and years since, many conservative Christians have written essays and even books outlining how this shift happened and explaining the dire consequences it might have for Christians in the United States. The Catholic journalist Mary Eberstadt wrote *Dangerous to Believe*. *First Things* editor Rusty Reno authored *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*. Providence College professor Anthony Esolen wrote *Out of the Ashes*. Archbishop of Philadelphia Charles Chaput wrote *Strangers in a Strange Land*. Most notably, journalist Rod Dreher’s *The Benedict Option* counseled the church to return to older forms of catechesis and spiritual formation while engaging in a selective and strategic retreat from certain parts of American society.

To the extent that these books identify an emerging secularism hostile to religious faith and argue it will create unique challenges for

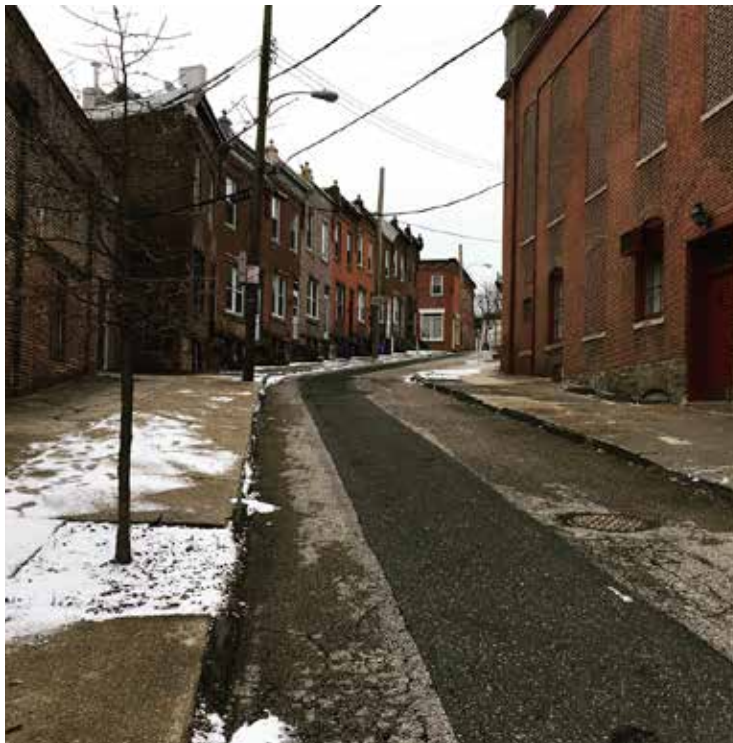
1. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, New York: Mariner Books: 2000, 60.

American Christians, they are not wrong. But the picture they paint is incomplete, and Tolkien’s letter explains why.

We use the phrase “Christian morality.” We should not. It is not the case that there are any number of moral systems to choose from and that the Christian “system” is the one approved arbitrarily by God. Rather, the natural law is simply the law of all of our natures, Christian or not. Whatever alternative to “Christian morality” you propose will, in one way or another, cut against the grain of creation and, therefore, be ultimately unsustainable as a lived morality. To be sure, because of God’s common grace, some societies, even those un-influenced by

the Gospel, will be more successful than others at tapping into the truth of how we ought to live—but all societies know something of this truth.

The problem facing our republic today is not simply that we are a post-Christian society in which certain segments of our population, and especially our nation’s young people, are hostile to Christianity. That is a problem, of course, and especially so in the aftermath of the Trump campaign—many evangelicals made their peace with a thrice-married bully because he would, at least, be *their* bully. But the deeper problem is that the underlying story which organizes our society and shapes our thinking about morality is badly wanting.



PHILADELPHIA, PA

Consider: In a 2006 study, Duke and University of Arizona sociologists found that 1/4 of all Americans reported having no close friends with whom they could discuss their most pressing personal concerns and ambitions.² Indeed, half of all Americans reported having two or fewer such friends. In the 12 years since that study, the problem has grown more pronounced. A 2018 Cigna study found that half of all Americans report feeling lonely and 47% of Americans say they do not have “meaningful” personal interactions with anyone—a partner, friend, coworker... *anyone*—on a daily basis.³ This experience of loneliness is not simply a sad reality facing many Americans; it is also a public health crisis: One study found that the health effects of long-term loneliness are comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.⁴ Other studies have found links between loneliness and diabetes, heart dis-

2. Duke Today Staff, “Americans Have Fewer Friends Outside the Family, Duke Study Shows.” *Duke Today*, June 23, 2006. <https://today.duke.edu/2006/06/socialisolation.html>

3. Polack, Ellie, “New Cigna Study Reveals Loneliness at Epidemic Levels in America.” *Cigna Today*, May 1, 2018. <https://www.cigna.com/newsroom/news-releases/2018/new-cigna-study-reveals-loneliness-at-epidemic-levels-in-america>

4. CBC News Staff, “Why Loneliness Can Be as Unhealthy as Smoking 15 Cigarettes a Day.” *CBC News*, August 16, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/loneliness-public-health-psychologist-1.4249637>

ease, and depression, and have said that loneliness may also be linked to substance abuse and even early death.

It's not just that we are lonely, though: We're also forming families later, having fewer kids, and carrying larger amounts of debt into adulthood, which plays a role in how we approach family formation as young adults. And when we have fewer children around, many other aspects of life suffer as well. In an essay reviewing P. D. James's book *The Children of Men*, Charlie Clark writes, "*The Children of Men* proposes that in the absence of any legacy, many of the ordinary and healthy patterns of human life lose their meaning and appeal. Succeeding generations, whether direct descendants or not, are essential to a meaningful legacy."⁵

What happens when this decadent reality becomes established and even normal? Sociological studies can help us answer that question too: The answer is despair.

Throughout America, three types of deaths are on the rise: deaths from alcoholism, deaths from drug overdoses, and suicides. Suicide increased by 21% from 2006 to 2015 alone. Yet that number pales in comparison to an even more staggering one: Since 1990, the number of deaths by drug overdose in the United States has increased by a stunning 500%. The problem is so acute that sociologists coined a term to describe these three types of deaths: "deaths of despair."

Thus, the problems that Eberstadt, Chaput, Reno, Esolen, and Dreher describe in their books, though real, are in a sense merely the tip of the iceberg. The problem before us is not that we live in an otherwise stable, sustainable society that is becoming more hostile to religious belief. The problem is, rather, that we live in a *fragmenting* society in which certain segments have become deeply hostile to religious faith. Yet if we focus narrowly on the religion problem, we will miss the broader narrative of decline. There is, as Francis Schaeffer said in the 1970s, death in the city.

What is to be done?

In his book *The Sacrifice of Africa*, Notre Dame theologian and ethicist Emmanuel Katongole argues that political life is ultimately an acting out of shared narratives that a wide group of people believe together. Today, we are living through the death of one political narrative. The task of the church, then, is both to reorient ourselves to a properly Christian narrative through catechesis, liturgy, and virtue *and* to commend that narrative to our neighbors, by faithfully preaching the Word and by modeling a way of life animated by communal and manifest Christlike love.

In the remainder of this essay, I want to sketch out the defining characteristics of these two narratives and, in particular, identify three key

places of conflict between the two narratives, conflicts which we see lived out on a daily basis.

The first political narrative is what I call the existentialist narrative. The term comes from a lecture by the mid-century French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre titled "Existentialism is a Humanism." Here is Sartre:

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing—as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.⁶

This might sound more complicated than it is. We can turn to two other places to define the foundational principle here. First, hear the words of the recently retired Justice Anthony Kennedy. This excerpt comes from his majority opinion in the famous *Casey v Planned Parenthood* case, in which the Republican appointee Kennedy unexpectedly ruled with court progressives to preserve legalized abortion in the United States. Here is the key passage in Kennedy's majority opinion:

These matters (the private life of the family), involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.

It might seem strange to argue for shared conviction between a radical French left-wing philosopher and an American jurist appointed to the Supreme Court by Ronald Reagan, yet on this point the two are in agreement: Essential to the idea of man's "freedom" is the idea that man defines himself. For Sartre in particular, we enter the world naked, alone, and isolated, and only our actions define our essence.

This brings us to the third way of defining the existentialist narrative, which comes from the Duke theologian Stanley Hauerwas: "I have no story except the story I chose when I had no story."⁷ The existentialist narrative says that man enters the world alone and without definition and that he creates meaning for himself through action.

6. Sartre, Jean-Paul, "Existentialism is a Humanism," *Existentialism From Dostoevsky To Sartre* (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2016).

7. I heard him use this line in a lecture given at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in November of 2012.

5. Clark, Charlie, "Children of Men by P.D. James." *Mere Orthodoxy*, May 11, 2017. <https://mereorthodoxy.com/children-of-men-pd-james/>

From this narrative, two additional points typically follow: The primary space in which we define ourselves is the free market, because its essentially competitive nature agrees with the individualist nature of man. The home, the neighborhood, and the church are all suspect because they seek to impose an unchosen identity onto individual people. The market, by contrast, maximizes individual control. That is the first piece. Here is the second: The purpose of the government is to protect our right to self-define. This notion undergirds movements supporting the legal right to abortion or the push by progressives to have Medicaid and Medicare cover procedures like gender reassignment surgery. People have a right to self-define, and the government must protect that right and, when necessary, assist citizens in their realization of that right. Thus, in our revolutionary age, politics is understood to be the work of securing the individual's right to narrate his own existence. Politics is ordered entirely toward the preservation of private goods which may, but which need not, turn into a shared collective good as the group of privatized individuals realize their identity through the work of the market. The market creates a sphere in which this work can be done, and the government protects the right of each person to have equal access to that sphere and thus to the means of realizing his identity.

This is the existentialist narrative. What can a Christian account of politics say to such a narrative? A great deal, in fact. We must first say that the revolutionary narrative is a lie because it presupposes that we enter the world as undefined, autonomous, essence-less beings. In imitation of Dr. Johnson, we might simply gesture to a mother holding her child and say, "I refute it thusly." Yet, simple though this rebuttal is, it is the obvious place to begin.

We do not, in fact, enter the world as autonomous beings, whatever French philosophers or powerful men in black robes say. We are, from our arrival in this world, contingent beings, beings whose existence must be wrapped in the love of another in order to thrive. This is quite literal in the womb, of course, and yet it does not stop being true once we are born.

That we are unavoidably social creatures whose lives are contingent upon the lives of others is not a surprise to most Christian political theorists. The great German Reformed jurist Johannes Althusius writes of this compellingly in his *Politica*:

As long as he remains isolated and does not mingle in the society of men, he cannot live at all comfortably and well while lacking so many necessary and useful things. As an aid and remedy for this state of affairs is offered him in symbiotic life, he is led, and

almost impelled, to embrace it if he wants to live comfortably and well, even if he merely wants to live.⁸

For this reason, human beings cannot think of our worldly existence as attempting to realize some nebulous and synthetic identity. Rather, we must attempt to structure our lives such that our necessary communal relationships help to make life mutually delightful for everyone.

Continuing, Althusius writes,

The final cause of politics is the enjoyment of a comfortable, useful, and happy life, and of the common welfare—that we may live with piety and honor a peaceful and quiet life, that while true piety toward God and justice among the citizens may prevail at home, defense against the enemy from abroad may be maintained, and that concord and peace may always and everywhere thrive.⁹

This alternative grounding for our political life together provides an alternative *telos*. Indeed, it may be truer to say that it *provides a telos*, as the revolutionary account doesn't really provide our political life with a goal of its own, but merely sees it as serving a privatized, synthetic one. Indeed, the existential account doesn't provide a basis for political life at all. It offers merely an account of how individuals can use other individuals to realize their authentic identities.



It is not a coincidence, in other words, that the only people for whom our society is working are those with the means to essentially purchase their identity via lifestyle choices. When one rejects the natural sociability of humanity, one rejects much of what makes life pleasant. Once this happens, one must either rely on capital to maintain one's living standards, filling the gaps left open by the dissolution of civil society, or one will suffer. Indeed, there's a real sense in which Althusius, writing in the early 17th century, anticipated the problems of our day with far greater clarity than did any of the people promoting the revolutionary account of political life.

In the preface to his third edition of the *Politica*, Althusius notes that political societies must have a *telos* because otherwise they lack direction. Politics become a real-life version of a monkey with a gun—a lethal force wielded indiscriminately. For Althusius, like many other early Reformed thinkers, including Melancthon, this *telos* is supplied

8. Althusius, Johannes. *Politica*, "The General Elements of Politics," Liberty Fund: 1995, paragraph 4. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/althusius-politica?q=live+at+all+comfortably#Althusius_0002_145

9. Althusius, *Politica*, "The General Elements of Politics," paragraph 30.

by the Decalogue. “[The Ten Commandments] carry a torch before the social life that we seek, and... they prescribe and constitute a way, rule, guiding star, and boundary for human society. If anyone would take them out of politics, he would destroy it; indeed, he would destroy all symbiosis and social life among men.”¹⁰

It’s essential to follow his reasoning on this point. Common goods are goods that must be enjoyed collectively. So advancing the individual goods of society’s members does not, in itself, advance the common good. Individual goods are enjoyed privately. Common goods are enjoyed together, or they cease to exist. Think of the violinist who wishes to play the “Mass in B Minor.” He cannot go off by himself with his violin and enjoy the music. He must play it as part of an orchestra. Such things are common goods. Therefore, the natural, moral law (and, following others, Althusius sees the Decalogue as the distillation of the natural law) is necessary for a true society to exist because the moral law “aims” society, as it were. It tells a people what the common good is that they will share it together and, ideally, extend it to others as well. The moral law, then, inaugurates the polity. Without the moral law, there can be no shared *telos* and thus no true common good.

Writing two hundred years after Althusius, the great Dutch political theorist Gilhaume Groen van Prinsterer explains the consequence of losing these Althusian principles. In his lectures on *Unbelief and Revolution* Groen argues that the fragmenting of the West, which was beginning in his own day, is attributable to what he calls “the revolution,” essentially an act of unbelief.¹¹

By “the revolution,” Groen means the rejection of the polity as a truly natural good shared by a society and the replacement of it with society as an artificial construct built upon the choice of its members. Once this move was made, the sovereignty of man superseded, in theory, the sovereignty of God, and certain outcomes were nearly inevitable:

Tearing themselves loose from the solid ground of unchangeable principles, men began to soar without support in the airy spaces of speculation. The upshot was untold misery. A golden age was expected, an age of iron arrived. Energy wrongly directed is the more disastrous as it is the more powerful.¹²

Why does it work out this way? Once there is no natural order or common good toward which society labors collectively, society can only become a competition with both the people and the magistrate prone to egregious abuses of their rightful place within the polity. You cannot maintain a substantive account of rights when nature is dissolved, for it becomes impossible to coherently account for what a person is rightfully owed by virtue of his humanity.

10. Althusius, *Politica*, Preface.

11. Groen van Prinsterer, Willem. *Unbelief and Revolution*. Grand Rapids: Lexham Classics, 2018.

12. Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution*, 86.

Groen explains:

There simply could be no concord or harmony in the (revolutionary) state since respect for each other’s rights had become impossible: each side in turn systematically overstepped its rights, thereby annulling the rights of others; government and people each aspired to total submission and unrestricted supremacy; the unrest and constant tension rendered collisions unavoidable. The theory could not but antagonize king and subject, the subject seeing in the king a potential tyrant and the king seeing in the subject a potential rebel.¹³

Within a revolutionary order, a Christian attempt to retrieve the common good is its own sort of revolution. Yet unlike the unbeliever’s revolution, which is conditioned only by power, the Christian revolution comes with fixed boundaries that cannot be transgressed. A Christian account of politics recognizes that the *imago Dei* exists and makes demands on our politics. So, too, the polity possesses a certain kind of existence that demands a certain response. We are not “free” to violate the bounds it sets any more than, to return to where we began, Tolkien’s heroes were free to take up the ring of power for themselves.

On the one hand, this makes us vulnerable. White light, Tolkien tells us, can be broken. In a certain sense, black is stronger. So it is in our day: It is entirely possible that the church today is called to be broken by the revolution,

to accept its public martyrdom. To acknowledge this, however, is not to retreat from the work of politics. Rather, it is to recognize that politics disassociated from the loves which make martyrdom plausible cannot be just because it cannot even offer an account of what politics is. Here we must let Althusius have the last word: “The final cause of politics is the enjoyment of a comfortable, useful, and happy life, and of the common welfare—that we may live with piety and honor a peaceful and quiet life.”¹⁴

Ultimately such a life gestures toward the world to come, when each will sit under his own vine and fig tree and no one shall make him afraid. Fidelity in our context, however, requires not the repudiation of this vision for a lesser vision of politics, but a commitment to it—even when that commitment is costly.

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13. Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution*, 64–65.

14. Althusius, *Politica*, “The General Elements of Politics,” paragraph 30.

THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN NATION

BRAD LITTLEJOHN

I. INTRODUCTION: THE DISTURBER OF THE PEACE

In 1326, an Italian physician and diplomat named Marsilius of Padua hastily packed his bags and stole away to the south German city of Nuremberg. Things were getting too hot for him in Paris, and he needed to seek protection with the Holy Roman Emperor, Ludwig of Bavaria. Before long, a papal bull arrived in Paris from the court of Pope John XXII excommunicating him for heresy. Indeed, a few years later, another Pope was to write, “We are bold to say that we have almost never read a worse heretic than that Marsilius. For we have extracted from the mandate of Benedict our predecessor on a certain book of his more than 240 heretical articles.”¹

The book in question was the *Defensor Pacis*, or *Defender of the Peace*, perhaps the most remarkable work of political theory to appear in the entire Middle Ages. Dedicated to the theme of peace, and to investigating the causes of tranquility and intransquility in politics, the work takes a suddenly controversial turn at the end of its first main section, “Discourse I.” In Italy, and all of Europe, Marsilius declares, the popes have claimed a “plenitude of power”—supreme dominion over all matters spiritual and temporal—and this is “the singular cause...of intransquility or discord in a city or realm...And since this pernicious

plague, which is so profoundly inimical to all human calm and happiness, could...infect all other realms of Christian faithful in this world, I judge it of the first necessity to repel it.”²

The *Defender of the Peace* was written first and foremost as a defense of what we would now call the rights of sovereignty, the rights of each

political realm to decide how to govern itself and how to form its communal life without external interference. The spirit of the work was not unlike that of today’s global movement which many pundits call “the new nationalism.”³ This movement sees in the pretensions of the EU and the UN an imperialistic, un-representative bureaucracy; its executive, legislative, and judicial powers penetrate into every crevice of national and communal life, wrapped in a halo of high-minded rhetoric, while in fact undermining the freedom of communities to chart their own course and provide for their own defense.

The late medieval papacy, after all, had amassed an astonishing range of powers. If the Pope did not approve of a war or the succession claims of a ruler, he could excommunicate rulers or place entire nations under interdict—refusing the sacraments (and thereby salvation) to an entire populace until the king got in line or the people revolted. Although these most

sweeping powers were rarely invoked (and even more rarely successful), the immense body of the clergy and the monastic orders still



70TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COUNCIL OF TRENT, PAINTING IN THE MUSEO DEL PALAZZO DEL BUONCONSIGLIO

1. Quoted in Annabel Brett, “Introduction” to Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of the Peace*, ed. and trans. Annabel Brett, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xi; Brett is quoting from Carlo Pincin, *Marsilio* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1967), 33.

2. Marsilius, *Defender of the Peace*, 136-36.

3. For an introduction, see my recent essays, “A National Conservative Awakening” at *Mere Orthodoxy* (<https://mereorthodoxy.com/national-conservative-awakening/>), and “A Sloppy Attack on National Conservatism” at *First Things* (<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/08/a-sloppy-attack-on-national-conservatism>)

constituted a vast “state within a state” in each of the realms of Europe. They were ultimately answerable to the Pope rather than to their temporal lords, immensely wealthy yet free from taxation, exempt from military service, and not even subject to civil prosecution when accused of crimes; claiming “the benefit of the clergy,” they could have their cases tried and often readily dismissed by ecclesiastical courts, however gross their crimes.

All of this would have been bad enough if the Church were merely an internationalist bureaucracy like the UN or EU, but what added insult to injury for the lords of Europe was that the Papacy wanted to have its cake and eat it too. While claiming to stand impartially above the ugly fray of earthly politics, popes simultaneously insisted that they had their own patrimony to protect: the much-coveted Papal States of central Italy, a power base sufficient to allow them to jostle for position in the politics of Renaissance Europe. Many popes shamelessly abused their spiritual authority over other European rulers to serve their political aims in the Italian peninsula, excommunicating their adversaries and calling for crusades against them.

Such crusades were to be funded, of course, by indulgences—a brilliant mechanism for collecting income from the citizens of even hostile nations. It was such an indulgence campaign, proclaimed by one claimant to the papal throne to finance a war against his rival, that prompted John Huss, the proto-reformer of Prague, to say “enough is enough.” He paid for his courage at the stake. Others, though, with more powerful protectors, loudly lampooned the absurd corruption of this arrangement. On the eve of the Reformation itself, Erasmus of Rotterdam would write the satirical play *Julius Excluded from Heaven*, a side-splitting account of the Renaissance warrior-pope, Julius II, being refused entry to the gates of Heaven by St. Peter and promising to raise an army from his followers in Hell to storm Heaven by force.⁴

II. THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE REFORMATION

When the storm of pent-up protest finally burst in the 1500s in the Protestant Reformation, Europe experienced a reformation (or revolution) every bit as political as it was religious. Much as we might like to praise “the simple power of the Gospel,” and eulogize the martyrs who became in death more than conquerors for the Protestant faith, the simple fact of the matter is that the Reformation succeeded in large part because it won the support of princes and parliaments. Where the Reformation failed—most prominently in France and Spain—it lacked such support. And this was hardly random; in the years just prior to the Reformation, the rulers of both France and Spain had succeeded in wresting significant national independence from the Papacy, independence which rulers in Germany and Eng-

land were seeking. The post-Reformation Catholic Church would be a much-chastened church, deprived in practice of many of the key powers and prerogatives it had claimed in the late medieval period.

In recent decades, it has become standard to recount all this with a certain chagrin and shame-facedness, and to remember the Reformation as the time when the church became subservient to the state, when short-sighted Protestant Reformers made a devil’s bargain with power-hungry princes and lost the liberty of the Gospel—a liberty which only later pietist and Puritan heroes would recover. But this is the story I want to challenge. I want to argue that the causes of national independence and church reform were not uneasy bedfellows, but intimately linked.

The story—and the two contradictory interpretations of it—are encapsulated in the famous phrase *cuius regio, eius religio*. This phrase summed up the epochal settlement of the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which ended the Papacy’s dream of an undivided church under the see of St. Peter and Emperor Charles V’s dream of a universal Catholic Empire. The Peace of Augsburg declared that “whose the kingdom was, his was the religion”; that is to say, each principality in the Holy Roman Empire could choose whether to enforce Roman Catholicism, Lutheran Protestantism, or even to tolerate some measure of each. It became the blueprint for the early modern vision of national churches and national religious establishments throughout Europe.

To us today, this looks less like a grant of liberty than a blueprint of bondage. After all, we think today of liberty as something that belongs to individuals over against the state; by granting princes the power to determine religion within their territories, the Peace of Augsburg seems to take away such liberty. For us, freedom is a zero-sum game, and the freedom of the sovereign to determine religion is necessarily the end of freedom for his subjects. From this standpoint, the political pretensions of Reformation-era princes seem to be in profound tension with the evangelical goals of the movement.

But that is not how it looked in the early modern period. The alternative, after all, was not freedom of individual conscience, but rather subordination to the papacy. Either the papal church could determine all questions of orthodoxy and demand the universal submission of every Christian conscience, or else different princes could be left free to follow their own consciences in legislating for their principalities. Now, if you were not a prince, your options were still limited, but they were still a bit freer than before; if you were a convinced Catholic in a Lutheran territory, or vice versa, you could always move next door. And indeed, because these patchwork principalities were quite small, some did. This was not much, but it was something. And this something would, in due course, take root and grow into the durable structures of modern freedom.

4. An excerpt of this work is included in Bradford Littlejohn and Jonathan Roberts, eds., *Reformation Theology: A Reader of Primary Sources with Introductions* (The Davenant Press, 2017).

III. FREDERICK THE WISE'S TRADE PROBLEMS

Few people realize that what really kicked off the Reformation was a concern as modern and mundane as trade deficits. I have already mentioned the sometimes-perverse uses to which the Papacy could put indulgences, get-out-of-purgatory-free cards that were anything but free for the impoverished common people to purchase. Few areas had been the site of such frequent indulgence preaching campaigns as northern Germany, and by the eve of the Reformation, the area was something of a “burnt-over district.” Enter Johann Tetzel, traveling salesman extraordinaire.

Ostensibly ordered to help finance the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, much of the money from Tetzel's 1517 indulgence campaign actually went into the coffers of Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz. Albrecht needed it to repay the Fugger banking family for immense debts he had contracted to buy from the Pope the most powerful church office in Germany at the age of 23. Since the most enthusiastic buyers of indulgences were the uneducated and gullible poor, Tetzel's indulgence campaign constituted an extraordinary redistribution of wealth upward from the poorest to the richest—a social justice theme that, though largely forgotten, echoed loudly through the pages of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* and other sermons from the period.⁵

However, it also constituted an extraordinary redistribution of wealth out of certain German principalities, where Tetzel did most of his preaching, into the principalities of archbishop Albrecht—and indeed on a larger scale out of the Holy Roman Empire into the Papal States. In modern terms, indulgences were the vehicle for perpetuating a large ongoing trade imbalance between Germany and Italy. Tired of having his impoverished subjects pay their last farthing for dubious spiritual benefits that materially benefited his rivals, Frederick the Wise banned Tetzel from preaching in his territory.⁶

Tetzel did what every good gambling tycoon has learned: set up shop right on the borders of the banned territory. So effective was his propaganda that commoners from around Saxony flocked to the border to buy remittance for the penalties of their sins and those of their relatives. Luther, disgusted by the perverse lengths to which Tetzel was willing to go—well beyond what medieval theology sanctioned—took up his pen, and the rest is history, right?

Well, hardly. Luther himself would've been history in short order if it weren't for the intervention of Elector Frederick. Although himself a devout devotee of traditionalist Catholic religion, Frederick was not

about to let some corrupt Pope across the Alps—or even the upstart Hapsburg Emperor in Austria, who was trying to consolidate his control over Germany as part of his universal Christian Empire that stretched from Peru to India—tell him what to do with his prize Wittenberg professor. If the dispute began as a question of trade deficits, it was prolonged by something as modern and mundane as school pride: Frederick had founded the University of Wittenberg, and now that it was just attaining notoriety, he wasn't about to hand over its celebrity teacher without a fair trial. Of course,

this was not mere sentiment, but also good state policy; Frederick had established the University to advance the education of Saxony and improve its standing amongst the principalities of Europe, and he was determined to set a precedent of defending the independence and prerogatives of Saxony.

We are apt now to look back at these considerations and say, “Ah, so you're saying he defended the Reformation merely out of political motives, not religious ones. Looks like the cynics are right.” But why should this be cynicism? Frederick was called “the Wise” for a reason, and although he went at least to his deathbed, and perhaps to his grave, unconvinced of the evangelical faith, his motives for defending the nascent Reformation were genuinely laudable ones. Indulgences impoverished his people, weakened his principality, and strengthened his untrustworthy rivals to the south. The crackdown on Luther from 1518 onward represented a threat to the educational system of Saxony, an attack on academic freedom, an undermining of regional sovereignty, and a disregard for the legal jurisdiction of Saxony. “Luther might be a heretic, but he's *my* heretic” was more or less Frederick's posture during these crucial seven years. Although no apostle of religious liberty in a full-blown modern sense, he did think that genuine conscientious convictions, backed up by good arguments, demanded a



JOHANN TETZEL SELLING INDULGENCES,
BY JOHANN DANIEL LEBRECHT FRANZ WAGNER, MID 1800'S

5. See for instance Theses 43-45, 50-51, 86.

6. For more background, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's 95 Theses with Introduction, Commentary, and Study Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), xix-xxvi, 27-28.

fair hearing, and he was not about to let the great question be settled by some behind-closed-doors inquisition in Italy.

IV. HENRY VIII'S MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

If Frederick was no apostle of religious liberty, that is truer still of Henry VIII, a bold, bombastic, sometimes boorish figure who was hardly someone you'd want for a son-in-law, but who nonetheless scarcely deserves the scorn that is regularly visited on him today. To properly understand the English Reformation—which was after all the crucible in which our modern Anglo-American laws and liberties were forged—we must understand that here too, politics and religion were deeply intertwined, and that does not mean the politics or the religion were all bad.

We often hear that the only reason we had an English Reformation was because Henry VIII couldn't keep his zipper up, and everyone is familiar with Henry's infamous six wives—"off with their heads!" But Henry's big political problem wasn't lust; a lusty king, after all, was generally allowed to carry on a discreet affair or two on the side. No, Henry's problem was that his wife Catherine kept miscarrying, and the only living child she had managed to produce was a girl, Mary. In 1520s England, this constituted something approaching a political crisis. Without a male heir to succeed him on the throne, Henry expected England to be engulfed again by the sort of civil war that had devastated the nation just a few decades earlier, and perhaps to fall prey to the ambitious designs of France and Spain.

To Henry, Catherine's miscarriages suggested divine judgment on his house and his nation. Catherine had originally been his short-lived older brother's wife, and church law, following Leviticus 20:21, stipulated that no one must marry his brother's wife. Although the Pope had been happy to grant a special dispensation for Catherine to remarry Henry, Henry became convinced that the Pope had erred, and that God was cursing him and his kingdom for his illicit marriage—after all, Leviticus 20:21 threatened that violators would be childless. If the new Pope could be convinced to reverse his predecessor's ruling, the marriage to Catherine would be annulled and Henry could try again for an heir with the beautiful young Anne Boleyn. Such annulments were common enough, but there was one small technicality: Catherine's nephew was the aforementioned universal Christian emperor, Charles V, whose armies had just sacked Rome after a quarrel with the Pope. Pope Clement VII reasoned, sensibly enough, that he'd be better off keeping Charles happy than the boisterous king of a little island on the edge of the map.

All through the late 1520s and early 1530s the negotiations for Henry's divorce continued, and into them crept a new element, or rather an old element newly coming to the fore. The kinds of grievances that Marsilius had voiced two decades before—the clergy's corruption and scandalous immunity from criminal prosecution, the vast properties

they held independent from royal authority in allegiance to a foreign ruler, the Pope, the Pope's tendency to throw his weight around for political ends—had resonated deeply with English civil lawyers over the previous decades. The vast and tangled patchwork of medieval canon law was seen as a net of papal and clerical tyranny that interfered with English laws and liberties. Thomas Cromwell, Henry's chief advisor, had Marsilius translated into English for the first time in the 1530s. The Church, Marsilius had argued, consisted not of the clergy, but of the whole body of believers. And thus, the earthly, temporal organization of the church depended not on a Pope in Rome, but on the organization of each body politic or nation.⁷

England, on this theory, was its own Christian nation, free to chart its own course. This idea, championed by Cromwell and the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (both closet Protestants), offered a more radical solution to Henry's problem. If the Church of Rome would not authorize Henry's divorce, perhaps the Church of England could do so on her own. The necessary constitutional changes—argued, as any good English lawyer would, on the basis of neglected historical precedent—were accomplished in a series of acts of Parliament from 1532 onward, the most important of which forbade paying ecclesiastical taxes from England to the Pope (again, the concern with trade deficits!) and appealing judicial proceedings to ecclesiastical courts outside England. The capstone was the 1534 Act of Supremacy, which declared that the "king...shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head of the Church of England."⁸

V. ELIZABETHAN ERASTIANISM?

What are faithful Protestants today to make of a statement like this? When we look back now on the establishment of the Church of England—particularly those of us raised on Puritan and Presbyterian lore—we see "Erastianism," the bondage of the church to the state, the use of religion for cynical political ends. But this is substantially misleading, pitting against one another two things that the Reformers saw to be tightly linked: faithfulness and security, the magistrate's care for religion and for his people. As the great reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli argued, "It cannot be denied that the magistrate's duty includes the defence of the cities and commonwealths that he commands, and to provide that they come to no harm. Since idolatry is the cause of captivity, pestilence, famine and subversions of commonwealths, the magistrate should repress these things and preserve the true and sound religion."⁹

7. For a fuller discussion of these themes, see Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Theology of Law and Authority in the English Reformation*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), ch. 5.

8. J.R. Tanner, ed., *Tudor Constitutional Documents, A.D. 1485-1603, with an Historical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 47.

9. Peter Martyr Vermigli, "Of a Magistrate," in W.J. Torrance Kirby, ed., *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 119.

On this understanding, then, the faithful Christian magistrate—say, Queen Elizabeth I of England—had a God-given responsibility to forbid idolatry in her realm to protect national security. But what if repression of idolatry also undermined national security? This was the conundrum that Elizabeth I faced throughout her reign. Although she did impose Protestant worship when she came to the throne, she studiously avoided any active persecution of Roman Catholics, aiming to win their loyalty while slowly detaching them from the religion of their forefathers. The strategy worked, for when in 1569 some Catholic lords rose in the Northern Rebellion to crown Elizabeth’s Catholic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, they found meager support and were quickly dispersed. However, in one of the great exhibitions of the importance of high-speed communications technology, Pope Pius V, belatedly receiving word of the rising in 1570, decided to bolster it by issuing the bull *Regnans in Excelsis*; in it, he deployed the full excommunicating and deposing powers that Marsilius had critiqued centuries earlier, “absolving” subjects of their obedience to Elizabeth and revoking her claim to the crown.¹⁰

By the time the bull arrived, the rebellion was over, and the result was simply a harsher crackdown on Roman Catholics, who were now seen as potential rebels and traitors (hardly an idle threat, as a string of assassinations and Catholic terrorist plots in England and France over the ensuing decades were to demonstrate). Worse still, the Pope had invited foreign Catholic powers to invade England now that it had no rightful ruler. The Spanish, who had nearly gained control of England right before Elizabeth’s accession in 1558, weighed this invitation very seriously, and finally took it up with the ill-fated attack of the Spanish Armada of 1588.

Early in her reign, Elizabeth had enforced outward conformity to certain theologically trivial trappings of the old Catholic religion, such as the vestments worn by the priests, to convince foreign Catholic powers that her nation was not *too* Protestant after all. Unfortunately, she also succeeded in antagonizing more zealous Protestants at home, whom we now know as the “Puritans.” Although we think of them as early apostles of religious liberty, in fact, one of their greatest protests was that Elizabeth did not more fully purge idolatry from the land, wiping out all traces of Catholic faith and practice. Convinced for three decades that she was inviting divine wrath by this failure, their movement was only blunted when the miraculous defeat of the Span-

ish Armada demonstrated that God must not have been so angry with England after all.

VI. PURITAN INTERNATIONALISM AND HOOKERIAN NATIONALISM

But there was one other element of the Puritan protest, and the Established Church’s response, that is apt to turn our categories on their heads. Defenders of the established church are ordinarily labelled “conformists” by historians today, so we may be surprised to find the most famous conformist of all, Richard Hooker, accusing his Puritan adversary, Thomas Cartwright, of being the great conformitarian:

Our opponents harshly charge the church of England with forgetting her duty to model herself on the pattern of those churches that went before her in the work of reformation. For, they say, “just as the churches of Christ should be as dissimilar as possible from the synagogue of Antichrist in their use of indifferent ceremonies, so they ought to be as similar to one another as possible”, and for the preservation of unity, to have as much as possible all of the same ceremonies. Again, ...they say, “As children of one father and servants of one family, so all churches should not only have the same diet (the Word of God) but also the same uniform (by using the same ceremonies).¹¹



THOMAS CARTWRIGHT, BY GUSTAVUS ELLINTHORPE SINTZENICH, LATE 1800'S

The Puritans, like the papists, were staunch internationalists, committed to the idea of a transnational Christian church united in doctrine, practice, and church government. If the Reformation was to take a certain form in Geneva or the Netherlands, well then surely it ought to take the same form in England. It is not a stretch to see Hooker’s whole elaborate defense of the Church of England as a defense of national sovereignty, of the freedom of each particular Christian community to determine the form of its own corporate life, rather than conforming to one unyielding standard. Against Cartwright, he argues:

11. Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity in Modern English*, vol. 1, ed. Bradford Littlejohn, Brian Marr, and Bradley Belschner (Moscow, ID: The Davenant Press, 2019), 267 (IV.13.1)

10. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius05/p5regnans.h>

They have not yet proved that just because foreign churches have done well, it is our duty to follow them, or that we must forsake our own course (otherwise well suited to us) just because it differs from that of other churches... [T]hese churches surely cannot think that they have discovered absolutely the best ceremonies that the wit of man could ever devise; rather, if they recognize that they are naturally partial to their own ceremonies simply because they are their own, it is only fair for them to recognize that we too will be partial to our own. Thus we are released from the burden of being forced either to condemn them or imitate them... This we can do without in any way criticizing our reformed brethren abroad; on the contrary, we approve their practices as well as our own.¹²

In other words, just because one church has a good way of doing things, other churches need not follow suit. The good takes multiple forms, adapted to different cultures, times, places, and necessities. Weekly eucharist might be best for one, and monthly for another; presbyters might be good for a city-state, bishops for a kingdom. And of course, human beings being what they are, each nation will tend to proudly incline toward its own practices as best. That's perfectly fine, Hooker indulgently remarks, just so long as we realize that this is what we're doing, and don't blame others for doing the same in defense of their own national practices. Hooker then appears as something of a defender of a certain level of religious pluralism, and indeed religious liberty—only it is not the liberty of the individual, but the liberty of the Christian community.¹³

VII. SOVEREIGNTY, COMMUNITY, AND DESPOTISM

This is all well and good, but a problem remained. The “Christian community” whose freedom Hooker defends throughout his famous *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is something of an imaginary one. How could a nation of 4 million, divided by geography, dialects, and local customs to a degree that is difficult for us to imagine today, function meaningfully as a “community”? When the nation was torn by religious tensions, was it really plausible for Hooker to represent it as a unity, with a national personality, a national culture, and national traditions that it ought to assert against the insistent Puritan and papist demands for international conformity? Hooker made perhaps some real progress toward meeting this objection by his very strong concept of political representation: “A law is the deed of the whole body politic, and if you consider yourselves any part of it, then the law is even your deed also.”¹⁴ Furthermore, “we do consent to be commanded whenever the society we belong to has previously consented and has not revoked this consent by some universal agreement. Just as any man's past deed belongs to him as long as he lives, so also the act of a public society of men done five hundred years ago continues to belong to it, since societies are immortal. We lived in those who went before us, and they continue to live in those who follow them.”¹⁵ Themes

such as this were to inspire the great Edmund Burke and generations of Anglo-American conservatives. And yet even if this vision was a myth in the best sense of the word, a myth it remained, and one that could readily underwrite tyranny rather than liberty.

The fact was that for all the manifold evils of the late medieval church, it did have the great benefit of helping to maintain what we might call a “complex political space”—societies characterized by multiple overlapping institutions and sets of loyalties, which tended to prevent the easy monopolization of power by any one institution or authority. Indeed, the biggest objection against the Papacy's political claims was less that they succeeded in propping up papal tyranny—which anyone with a decent army could often ignore—but that they created political chaos, a maze of conflicting loyalties and rival jurisdictions that undermined the practice of justice and sapped the strength of civic communities. The Reformers and their princely allies were eager to simplify this maze, rationalize the law codes, and unify political communities around a common good. But the great danger of this unification was a hollowing-out of society under the single sovereign with a monopoly not merely on the legitimate use of violence, but on the people's loves and loyalties. Political theorists like Thomas Hobbes were to promote such a vision in 17th-century England, and this vision was to become a frightening reality in Louis XIV's France. Today, Catholic political theorists and theologians like William Cavanaugh and Patrick Deneen look back upon these Reformation-era changes as the basis of the idolatrous bureaucratic modern nation-state and the source of civil society's shattering into a collection of isolated individuals under a distant authority.¹⁶

For all their insight, Reformers like Vermigli and Hooker will not provide us sufficient resources to counter such claims. Instead, we must look to Luther himself, with his crucial but neglected theology of the “three estates”—family, church, and state—and even more to the great early Protestant political theorist Johannes Althusius, who took up his pen at the same time as Hooker to propose a bottom-up theory of the state as a “community of communities” that would reject papal pretensions, head off the ambitions of absolute rulers and despotic national states, and lay a groundwork for durable individual liberty. No effort toward a “Protestant Christendom” will get airborne without the guiding lights of Hookerian nationalism and Althusian federalism. I hope you will join us as we sketch such a vision in the issues that follow.

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12. Hooker, *Laws*, 267–68 (IV.13.10).

13. For a (much) fuller version of this argument, see my *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

14. Hooker's *Laws in Modern English*, Pref.5.2 (p. 24).

15. Hooker's *Laws in Modern English*, I.10.8 (p. 87).

16. See for instance William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), ch. 1, along with many other essays; Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

RECONCILING DEMOCRACY AND THE NATURAL LAW | ETHAN FOSTER

The American Civil War unearthed a tension between the democratic principle of the consent of the governed and the moral demands that the governed submit to natural law. Echoing the philosophy of John Locke, the principle of consent had contractarian overtones, and southern states recycled such arguments to defend their ownership of slaves and separation from the Union. Unionists fired back that fundamental principles of natural law were at stake in the war over slavery, and the most obvious casualty was the natural law principle that all men are created equal. Thus, southerners and northerners pitted democratic consent against the natural law.

At America's founding, however, it was common to understand the principle of consent and the natural law as complements. The American founder James Wilson counted himself a democrat as well as a natural law thinker. In voicing his support for an unmistakably democratic U.S. Constitution at the Pennsylvania Ratifying Convention, he declared that "the supreme, absolute, and uncontrollable power remains in the people."¹ In terms that forecasted a darker future, he also warned that "[f]or a people wanting to themselves, there is no remedy: from their power, as we have seen, there is no appeal: to their error, there is no superior principle of correction."² Under the democratic view, the people are sovereign, subject to no higher governor. Despite this apparent relativism



THE OFFICIAL PORTRAIT OF SUPREME COURT JUSTICE JAMES WILSON

concerning the foundations of law and government, Wilson gave a series of *Lectures on Law* two years later in which he declared that the "law of nature is immutable," that it is designed by an "all-perfect Being," and that the "law of nature is universal" and "binds" all people "without distinction."³ Under the natural law view, God is sovereign. Was Wilson contradicting himself? If so, to the extent Wilson expressed widespread views about democracy and natural law, was a cognitive dissonance embedded in the early American mind?

For his part, James Wilson thought his beliefs were fully consistent, arguing in his *Lectures on Law* that democracy is founded upon both consent and natural law and that these principal sources of legitimacy are evident in the very nature of law and government.

WILSON'S NATURAL LAW THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

Wilson affirmed that democratic institutions receive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed, but he believed that democracy is the product of human nature, not merely the product of consent. As such, his legal and political philosophy is neither authoritarian nor strictly contractarian. Wilson's *Lectures on Law* oppose claims that superior status or di-

1. James Wilson, *Remarks of James Wilson in the Pennsylvania Convention to Ratify the Constitution of the United States, 1787*, in *Collected Works of James Wilson*, ed. Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 1:191 [hereinafter *Remarks*].

2. Wilson, *Remarks*, in *Collected Works*, 1:192.

3. James Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works of James Wilson*, ed. Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 1:523 [hereinafter *Lectures on Law*].

vine right give lawmakers a prerogative to command obedience.⁴ In particular, Wilson takes aim at the English theory of parliamentary supremacy, which is based on the premise that sovereignty resides in one supreme legal and political body.⁵ Wilson maintains that consent of the governed, rather than the alleged superiority of the governor, forms the basis of government.⁶ But Wilson's philosophy is not based on an abstract "state of nature" theory. Unlike Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wilson claims that society is natural to humans on account of their innate benevolence, that civil society is an organic product of natural society, and that governments develop to perfect and streamline the common sense of the people, making self-government a direct consequence of human nature.⁷

Wilson dedicates an entire lecture to exploring the topic "Of Man, as a Member of Society."⁸ According to commonplace "state of nature" theories, individuals are compelled by self-interest to create governments by making social contracts. Hobbes's theory posits government as the solution to what he regards as man's anti-social tendency toward anarchy and violence.⁹ Locke's theory supposes that government is essential to protect property in a world where humans are ordinarily diffident toward each other.¹⁰ Rousseau argues that government is unnatural and that a social contract is necessary to free people of its evils.¹¹ Contrary to these views, Wilson rejects the notion that self-interest forms the basis of government; he is convinced that people are naturally benevolent and sociable, and that these tendencies explain the formation of government.¹² Human nature, Wilson explains, tends toward society, not away from it: "Society is the powerful magnet, which, by its unceasing though silent operation, attracts and influences our dispositions, our desires, our passions, and our enjoyments."¹³ Wilson continues, "Does self-interest predominate here? No. Our social affection acts here unmixed and

uncontrolled."¹⁴ As evidence, Wilson points out that language itself depends on people being, by nature, sociable.¹⁵

If humans are social, then their moral reasoning develops not from abstract philosophizing but from natural social affections. Humans are naturally sympathetic to one another. This sympathy produces mutual benevolence, and benevolence in turn reveals that society is not a mere façade for the accomplishments of self-interest. Wilson invokes the common moral sense: moral reasoning develops, not in the isolation of a philosopher's armchair, but out of the expression of social affections which are practiced and refined in community where "self-love and social [love] are the same."¹⁶

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Wilson's lecture also distinguishes natural society from civil society, not because civil society is unnatural, but because it represents the stature to which a natural society rises if it forms an orderly community.¹⁷ Civil society is not the same as civil government, according to Wilson.¹⁸ Rather, civil society represents a natural society and institutes a government for its sake. As a corporation is not an association, but a legal entity representing an association, a civil society is an "artificial person" built for the sake of that society.¹⁹ By extension, a government is to civil society what a board of directors might be to a corporation: useful, but ultimately answerable to the natural persons the corporate body represents. In that sense, Wilson exhorts his listeners, "[l]et government—let even the constitution be, as they ought to be, the handmaids; let them not be, for they ought not to be, the mistresses of the state."²⁰ By this subtle shift in perspective, Wilson describes the state as the corporation of the people, not their government: "A state may be described—a complete body of free persons, united together for their common benefit, to enjoy peaceably what is their own, and to do justice to others."²¹ But notice that the people are not mere contractors who exit nature to create a state; the people do not withdraw from nature, nor is the establishment of government their highest achievement. In Wilson's view, government flows from human nature, and human nature is best expressed by democracy.

Since Wilson regards natural society as prior to civil government, he also believes that basic principles of law, such as self-evident

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4. See, e.g., Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:572. See also Ethan Foster, "James Wilson and the Natural Law Case for Individual Sovereignty," *Ad Fontes* no. 3 (Oct. 2018).

5. See, e.g., Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 198–200.

6. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:501.

7. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:621–44.

8. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:621–44.

9. Thomas Hobbes, "Chapter 13: Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery," in *Of man, being the first part of Leviathan* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909), accessible at <https://www.bartleby.com/34/5/13.html>.

10. John Locke, "Second Treatise," in *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 136–37.

11. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D. H. Cole (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1923), accessible at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/rousseau-the-social-contract-and-discourses>.

12. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:621.

13. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:621.

14. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:621.

15. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:621–26.

16. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:627–34. See also Ethan Foster, "James Wilson and the Common Sense Theory of the Common Law," *Ad Fontes* no. 3.5 (Apr. 2019).

17. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:634–35.

18. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:634–35.

19. See Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:634–35.

20. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:635.

21. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:635.

truths, predate institutionalized government.²² That is, “there is... one aspect, in which all men in society, previous to civil government, are equal. With regard to all, there is an equality in rights and in obligations.” In short, morally binding relationships are an essential part of human nature, and the need for peace, order, and happiness exists in all forms of society. Written law proceeds from the natural law. Each member of society, Wilson explains, “forms a part of that great system, whose greatest interest and happiness are intended by all the laws of God and nature.”²³ Civil government merely augments these relationships by reinforcing the social compact that a society forms with itself: “[I]t is from this union of wills and of strength, that the state or body politick results. The only rational and natural method, therefore, of constituting a civil society, is by the convention or consent of the members, who compose it.”²⁴ But notice that such a state can develop by the slow progress of convention or custom. In Wilson’s view, consent proves the natural foundation of democratic order, not an unnatural contract to forsake self-interest. Consent expresses the natural willingness of a people to pursue happiness together.

Wilson’s political philosophy crucially promotes a democratic system that is not only compatible with, but is also the product of, natural law. For the “state of nature” theorists, social contracts are unnatural, each individual depends on government for community relationships, and the contract requires that each participant abdicate some level of moral judgment. By contrast, Wilson’s theory holds that people are naturally engaged in a social compact by virtue of their participation in society, that each individual is embedded in relationships that precede the government, and that participating in a civil society with a government requires the exercise of independent moral judgment. But it is Wilson’s legal theory of natural law, rather than his political theory, that reconciles the tension between individual moral judgment and natural law.

WILSON’S NATURAL LAW JURISPRUDENCE

To understand how Wilson’s democratic philosophy could follow from natural law, it is important to reexamine his theory of obligation. Contractarian theorists generally hold that consent forms the basis of one’s obligation to law. That premise made it easier to reject theories of law that suppose a divine right or superior human authority could compel obedience. But Wilson refuses the contractarian path of reasoning. According to Wilson, the right to command obedience comes from God and is deposited in human nature, not the hands of lawgivers. Where the conscience is compelled

22. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:638.
 23. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:638.
 24. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:365.

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 IT REWARDS.”

by force of moral reasoning, consent follows freely. According to Wilson, “Our conscience, in particular, is the voice of God within us: it teaches, it commands, it punishes, it rewards.”²⁵ And it is this conscience that, combined with consent, reconciles democracy to the natural law.

In Wilson’s theory of natural law, consent provides evidence that people are, on balance, convinced of the rightness of obeying a particular law or act of government authority. As Wilson puts it, “Consent is the sole principle, on which any claim, in consequence of human authority, can be made upon one man by another.”²⁶ Each individual possesses a sense of “that law, which is communicated to us by reason and conscience, the divine monitors within us, and by the sacred oracles, the divine monitors without us.”²⁷ Of course, it is possible to consent to an act without concluding that it is morally justified, but when a sense of moral obligation is felt, consent to that obligation naturally follows.

Wilson maintains that consent, when understood as moral assent, undergirds all kinds of laws—especially those laws produced by democratic institutions which provide clear evidence of consent at every stage. Where elected representatives pass legislation, they do so on the authority of an engaged electorate; where a people exercise self-government

through a jury system, any verdict against a defendant can be said to express self-judgment.²⁸ Likewise, Wilson believes that traditions and customs have the force of law, since they enjoy the consent of a whole legal community over a prolonged period of time.²⁹

Wilson’s moral sense theory forms the heart of his natural law philosophy. In Wilson’s view, everyone has access to natural law which is “promulgated by reason and the moral sense.”³⁰ As this access to natural law is itself natural, Wilson thinks it exists even in the absence of government.³¹ And the moral sense produces two things in society: a refined and shared awareness of the natural law, and its expression through consent. As explained in a previous article in this series, the moral sense is also called the “common sense” by certain philosophers, and it refers to an innate faculty that apprehends self-evident moral truths which, when shared, establish a sense of commonality and come to reflect the common judgments of a community.³²

25. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:518.
 26. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:572.
 27. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:498.
 28. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 2:961 (noting that under the jury system, “the person who would undergo a trial might, with an almost literal propriety, be said to try himself.”).
 29. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:567.
 30. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:567.
 31. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works*, 1:627–28.
 32. Ethan Foster, “James Wilson and the Common Sense Theory of the Common Law,” *Ad Fontes* no. 3.5 (Apr. 2019).

For the Wilsonian moral sense theory, it is crucial that the common moral sense finds its expression through consent. A people's unified moral sense harmonizes the laws to which it consents with the justifications it gives for those laws. But when the moral sense ceases to be common, or when the moral sense fails to support the law, the law is doomed at its source. Under Wilson's theory, an incoherence between the moral sense and law is a threat to natural society: if law is the natural product of society, the government cannot legally realign a fractured moral sense without doing violence to the society. Such was the terrifying situation that President Abraham Lincoln faced decades later in the form of the Civil War.

CODA: PARADOX AT THE CIVIL WAR

James Wilson's expression of the relationship between natural law and consent found its greatest test at the Civil War. In Wilsonian terms, the Civil War threatened to be the ultimate form of legal suicide and the greatest act of self-violence a people could commit. The conscience of the majority of America was at war with the desire of others to govern themselves.



A COTTON PLANTATION ON THE MISSISSIPPI, 1884

On March 4, 1861, the freshly inaugurated Abraham Lincoln addressed a nation on the brink of war. His address acknowledged that a dreadful tension existed between the natural law claim that all men were created equal and the democratic support in southern states for the institution of slavery. Lincoln openly regarded slavery as inconsistent with natural law, but to appease slaveholding states he also stressed that he had “no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists,” as he believed he had “no lawful right to do so.”³³ To some in his audience, this may have seemed like a disingenuous contradiction between two views of the foundations of law and government: either law must conform to fixed moral truths at the expense of the democratic process, or the democratic process is the ultimate basis for law and government. But for Lincoln, the tension between natural law and consent was not evidence of irreconcilable foundations of law but evidence that their ultimate reconciliation was necessary. Like Wilson, Lincoln held that law and government should be based, not on the mere contractarian

33. Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861,” in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 4:263.

consent of the governed, but on the moral assent of the governed which imparted obligatory force to the Union.

According to President Lincoln, natural law and the democratic process are necessary corollaries. Lincoln insisted that “[a] majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of public opinion and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people.”³⁴ So what is sovereign? The answer is cyclical: the majority of the people, shaped by just laws; and the laws of the people, shaped by a majority consensus on matters of justice.³⁵ One of the many problems of slavery, then, was that its institutionalization drove a wedge into the very heart of America's legal system, such that the same country respected the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution—a product of

consent—while suppressing the foreign slave trade—a product of the conscience.³⁶ But it was far from coincidental that Lincoln's arguments closely resembled the founding-era jurisprudence of James Wilson. After exposing the incoherence within the American legal regime, Lincoln concluded that “the moral sense of the people imperfectly supports the law itself.”³⁷ That single, chilling understatement gestured at a Wilsonian conviction:

the moral sense is fundamental to consent and the rule of law, and thus it would have to unite the freedoms of self-government with the moral demands of natural law.

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34. Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, in *Collected Works*, 4:268.

35. See Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, in *Collected Works*, 4:268.

36. Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, in *Collected Works*, 4:269.

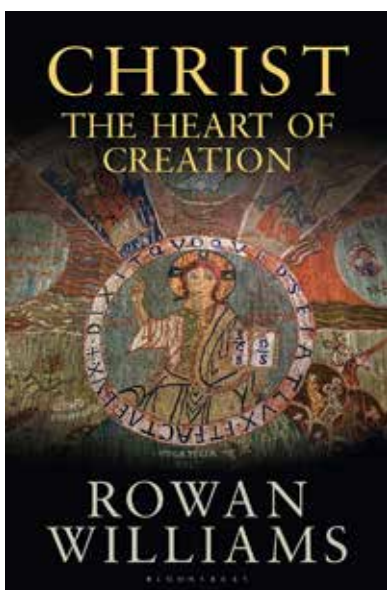
37. Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, in *Collected Works*, 4:269.

RETRIEVING CATHOLIC CHRISTOLOGY

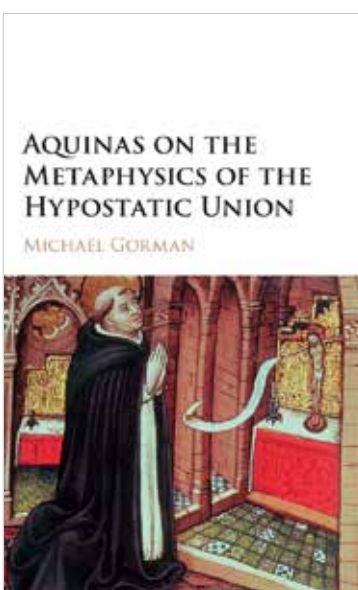
DAVID MOSER

Reformed catholic theology is no stranger to controversy. Against evangelical proponents of the eternal subordination of the Son, it has upheld the Nicene-Constantinopolitan doctrine of the Trinity.¹ Against opponents of divine simplicity, it has maintained the classical doctrine of the divine attributes, as articulated by the church fathers and especially Thomas Aquinas.² In spite of opposition from many modern theologians and philosophers, it has adopted the understanding of the God-world relation promoted by the Reformers, themselves generally following Thomas Aquinas.³

While these advancements have been profitable, Reformed catholic theology has more work to do in Christology.⁴ Rowan Williams' *Christ the Heart of Creation* and Michael Gorman's *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* are able guides to this end. Though they differ thematically, they share many of the same commitments. One is the notion that philosophical categories like "person," "hypostasis," "nature," and so forth help theology explain biblical revelation. They also agree we should be careful when using philosophy in the service of theology. Thomas Aquinas used these terms to make precise distinctions in Christology just as the Fathers had before him, but he believed this task needed to be done "soberly," as Michael Gor-



man tells us.⁵ In other words, Aquinas was not interested in explaining what God has done in Christ philosophically any more than necessary, a concern Reformed theologians share.



Both Williams and Gorman also argue that the Incarnation teaches that the personal existence of this man, Jesus Christ, transcends His humanity. This is not to raise a worry about a *deus absconditus*, a "hidden God" behind the face of Christ, as post-Barthian theology would have it. Rather, these authors assert that this man is not a mere man. He is a full human being, to be sure, but fundamentally, He is the Logos, the second Person of the Trinity. As John's Gospel tells us,

the Word "became" (*egeneto*) flesh and dwelt among us. Thus, it must be the case that this man is the Word, and the Word became this man, so that, as the Council of Chalcedon teaches, they are "one and the same."

How could this be? How could divinity and humanity concur in one personal divine being? And what does Christology tell us about the relationship between finite and infinite more generally? These are the questions Williams, former archbishop of Canterbury and current Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge, attempts to answer. Are divinity and humanity the same kind of thing, such that they compete for space in the Logos? More than any other doctrine, Williams argues, the doctrine of Christ tells us that infinite and finite being relate "non-competitively," so that it cannot be that the more divinity there is in him, the less humanity. Rather, God is so infinite and free that he can assume finite reality to Himself and open up that finite reality to the fullness of human freedom for human action. God and

1. D. Glenn Butner, Jr., *The Son Who Learned Obedience: A Theological Case against the Eternal Subordination of the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), and Michael Bird and Scott Harrower, eds., *Trinity without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019).

2. For two exemplary defenses of divine simplicity, see Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), and James Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

3. For this argument, see Tyler R. Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

4. See especially the work of Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), chaps. 7-9.

5. Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 164.

creation come together in Jesus “non-competitively.” Thus, Williams writes, “Christology is not just one example of a theological theme or topic that is illuminated by a general metaphysical axiom about finite and infinite; it is, I shall argue, the major theological enterprise that itself shapes and clarifies that axiom.”⁶

Williams demonstrates this thesis by patient attention to Scripture, the texts of the councils, and especially the work of theologians ancient and modern. On his view, the Word “becomes” flesh, but in that becoming He does not lose the fullness of divine being—this would contradict what it means to be God as the creator of all that is not-God. God’s being transcends finite being, and thus He cannot “lose” being in becoming incarnate.⁷ Neither does the divine power of the Word swallow up the Son’s humanity such that it loses its distinctly human properties. To argue otherwise is to put God and creatures on the same ontological plane. In fact, Williams claims, God and creatures exist on different planes: finite and infinite “do not add up. God and the world are not *two* of anything, and so likewise, the Word and Jesus are not two of anything. Similarly, the world is not a component part of God, nor God a component part of the world; and Jesus is not a part of the divine life, nor the Word an element in the composition of Jesus.”⁸

The book is divided into two parts. After introducing his argument, Williams traces how Christology reveals the non-competitive relation of infinite and finite in part one. Part one comprises a chapter on how this Christology developed from the New Testament to Augustine and another on how Greek-speaking theologians refined it in the centuries following the Council of Chalcedon. Part two is also divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, Williams surveys the dissolution of patristic Christology during the Middle Ages after Aquinas and its renewal in Calvin’s Christology. The second chapter argues that Barth and Bonhoeffer preserved some of its central insights, and a conclusion argues that it remains essential for Christology today.

Two historical arguments from the first chapter are worth highlighting because they bear out this central argument. First, the New Testament, not philosophical speculation, generated the abstract terminological debates that occurred in the fifth century.⁹ As early Christians sought to give an account of Christ, they could not think of Him as a heavenly intermediary who entered our world from the celestial beyond to impart divine wisdom. This would not explain the divine character of His miracles, His healings, and most of all, His saving death and resurrection. These were things only the God of Israel could do. But, for these reasons, it would also not suffice to describe Christ as a mere human being. Rather, in Christ, God acted to draw the

6. Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 6.
 7. Williams argues this point against 19th-century kenoticist theologians like Gottfried Thomasius. See Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 172-3.
 8. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 36.
 9. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 79.

Church into one body with Christ as its head. Thus, the Church’s earliest liturgy and reflection attested to Christ as the revelation of God Himself. As Williams puts it, “Jesus’ human narrative identity, including his death, is understood as divine action—not a witness to or promise of divine action but *that action itself*; it is *as* human passivity, freely accepted, that his death becomes divine agency.”¹⁰ This quite naturally led to the Council of Chalcedon’s language of the Logos as a single divine “person” who brings about salvation by becoming the subject of human “nature.”

Second, the church fathers had to re-think the relation of finite and infinite being because of the Incarnation. In the 4th century, Arius argued the Word was an intermediary being who occupied the middle ground between divinity and humanity. The Council of Nicaea affirmed, by contrast, the “unequivocal divinity for the Logos that mandates the unequivocal humanity for Jesus.”¹¹ That is to say, Christ is not a middle grade between divinity and humanity; His divinity remains fully intact when He becomes fully human. This means that divinity cannot be a magnified version of finite agency; it is, rather, a “pure” agency that does not compete for space with creation since it infinitely exceeds it. Chalcedon’s claim that Christ must have both human and divine “natures” preserves the integrity of the finite world when God comes to dwell in it: “God’s action works not by displacing but by intensifying from within the capacity of created agency.”¹² Accordingly, Christ lives a fully human life: He has the greatest human freedom for action that could be, since His humanity is personally activated by the divine Logos.

Scripture does not permit us to keep Christology solely within the ambit of Christ’s personal being. It also requires us to describe the church’s relation to Him. Christ’s divine being and human freedom enable Him to establish His own community, His Body, which He continually animates as its Head. And this act, in turn, opens up the members of his Body for solidarity with the whole world in its struggles.¹³ During His earthly life, Jesus built a community around Himself, and He promised to be with it until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20). That He stays with us demonstrates His limitless power to relate to other human beings through time. Those who trust Him are incorporated into what Augustine called the *totus Christus* (“whole Christ”), His Mystical Body, a much-neglected teaching of Christ’s relation to the Church.¹⁴ This doctrine arises from Paul’s teaching that Christ is the Head of His Body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:12-13, *inter alia*).

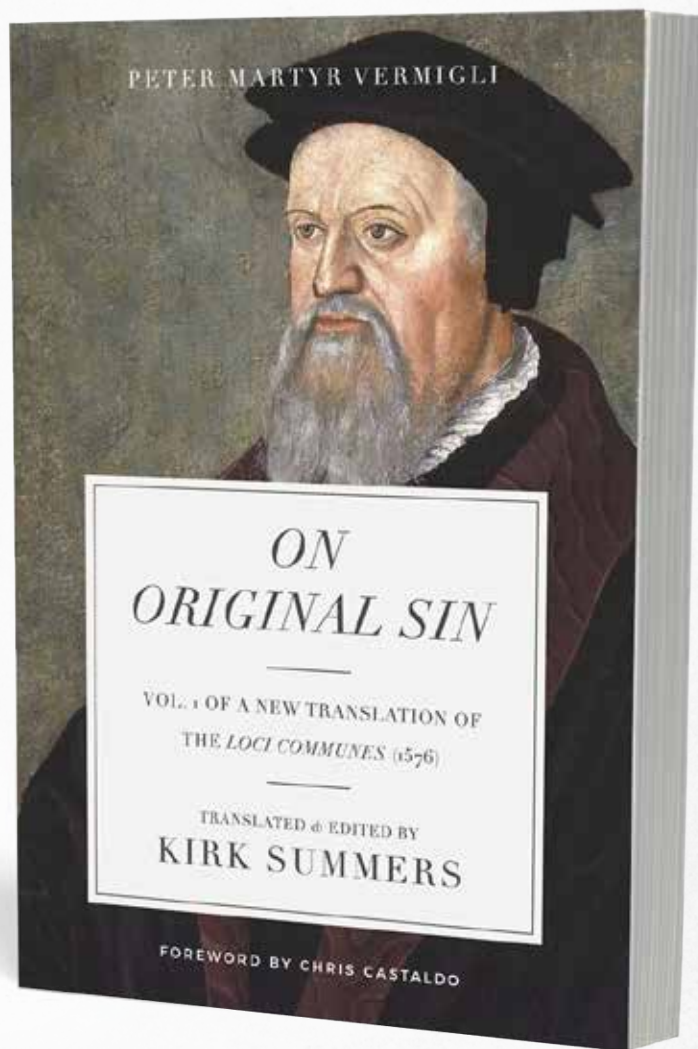
John Webster and other Reformed theologians have criticized this doctrine for its tendency to elide the distinction between Christol-

10. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 55.
 11. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 63.
 12. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 70.
 13. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 203.
 14. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 38-40.

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ogy and ecclesiology.¹⁵ Williams acknowledges Webster's objection and agrees that *totus Christus* should be rejected if it does this. The Church is dependent on Christ, not the other way around. But for Williams, the Church will exalt Christ instead of itself by "turning and returning to the foundational and sustaining act of Christ."¹⁶ Curiously, Williams' pneumatology in his theology of the *totus Christus* is less developed than Augustine's. For Augustine, the Holy Spirit imparts grace in our hearts, knitting us to one another as one body with Christ (cf. Rom. 5:5).¹⁷ Christ remains in heaven, but the indwelling Holy Spirit whom He sends instills His presence in and among us.¹⁸ For this reason, Williams's account of the *totus Christus* lacks a sufficiently developed pneumatology, especially compared to Augustine's. Like Williams, we would do well to re-examine this doctrine, especially since some of the great Reformed divines believed that the church is Christ's mystical body and that Christ communes with His members even now through the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ What they affirmed is very much what Augustine intended by speaking of the *totus Christus*.²⁰

Williams describes the teaching of other ancients who had much to say in answer to these Christological problems in part two. Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, Part III represents an "extraordinary synthesis" of the Christology of the patristic era.²¹ But Williams' narrative does not end with Aquinas. Interestingly, John Calvin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer turn out to be unexpected heroes in his argument. Calvin patiently attended to Scripture and developed a Christology in the *Institutes* that is "thoroughly familiar" to those acquainted with patristic tradition. For example, Calvin's insistence that Christ's merit was not for Himself, but for others mirrors Aquinas's claim that nothing can be added to the person of the Word.²² And Bonhoeffer offers a vision for how Christ opens up the church to act justly toward the world as it grounds its confidence in Christ its Head.²³ Significant Protestant thinkers like Calvin and Bonhoeffer,

CALVIN PATIENTLY
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on Williams' view, are sources of theological renewal for contemporary Christology.

While Williams' book covers some of the metaphysical and semantic issues in Christology, these are limited to what is necessary for his arguments. For that reason, someone interested in the metaphysics of Christology more broadly will need to go elsewhere. With Williams, I contend that Thomas Aquinas is the best synthesizer of patristic Christology. For a first rate explanation of the metaphysics of Aquinas' Christology, look no further than Michael Gorman's book, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*.

In the first chapter, Gorman, Ordinary Professor of Philosophy at the Catholic University of America, walks us through the meaning of "person" and "nature" in Aquinas' Christology. On his view, these are "pre-theological" terms, and Aquinas adapted them for use in Christology. Following Boethius, Aquinas says that a person is an "individual substance of rational nature." For Aquinas, a substance is an individual that subsists in and through itself and is unified.²⁴ Natures, by contrast, ground substances as the kinds of things that they are.²⁵ For example, a woman is an individual substance, and she belongs to the "nature" of humanity. Human "nature" includes rationality as one

of the properties a substance must have to belong to it and thus to be grounded by it. Accidents actualize certain potencies in substances. Thus, a woman has brown hair, but that hair is inessential to her nature as a human being. In chapter two, Gorman shows how these terms apply to Christology. Christ is one divine and human person. He is the subject of two "natures" or kinds, divinity and humanity. That means He has all the properties that go with being divine and all that go with being human, including a soul and a body. Christ is therefore a "composite person," a divine person who has the ability to suffer and die as a human being. Gorman explains very clearly that this union of two natures is a union in person. That is to say, two things are united to make up one person.²⁶

The rest of the book is devoted to refuting objections to Aquinas's Christology. Chapter three asks how the Incarnation is compatible with divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. This chapter is excellent. He claims that divine simplicity does not rule out substantial composition (when one thing is composed of two different substances). This is a kind of composition that only a divine person could have, on Aquinas's view, and it constitutes a point of convergence for Gorman and Williams. On Gorman's reading of Aquinas, divine simplicity means that the divine nature does not *require* non-essential constituting parts. But God is still *able* to assume or attach human

15. John Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God" in *The Community of the Word: Towards an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 75-95. See also Michael Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 155-68, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 152.

16. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 76.

17. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30[2].3, CCSL 38:191-3.

18. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.3, CCSL 39:657.

19. Girolamo Zanchi, *De religione christiana fides*, ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 236-39; John Owen, "Christologia" in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 130; Owen, "Pneumatologia," in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 3, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh/New Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 25. For a helpful analysis of mystical union language in John Owen's theology, see T. Robert Baylor, "One with Him in Spirit": Mystical Union and the Humanity of Christ in the Theology of John Owen" in *"In Christ" in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Michael J. Thate et al. (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2014), 427-452.

20. I argue for this in "Totus Christus: A Proposal for Protestant Christology and Ecclesiology" in *Pro Ecclesia*, forthcoming.

21. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 7.

22. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 152-3; Calvin *Inst.* III.17.6.

23. Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 200.

24. Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, 16.

25. Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, 23.

26. Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, 46-7.

nature, a non-essential constituent, to Himself so that the integrity of the divine nature is not violated.²⁷ God is infinite, and so He is able to attach finite being to himself without contradiction.

Chapter four is more complex than what precedes it. It argues that Christ's human nature does not ground its own distinct human person. The person in the man Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. For Aquinas, then, Christ's humanity is activated or instantiated by the Logos on which it depends for its being (*esse*). Chapter five treats the problem of Christ's existence (*esse*) in more detail, and chapter six argues that we can affirm contradictory predicates of Christ, like "impassible" and "passible," since he is the subject of two distinct natures. While we normally cannot use contradictory predicates of the same subject, Christ presents an exceptional case, since only He is the subject of two numerically distinct natures.²⁸ These chapters are rewarding reading for someone who has familiarized herself with Aquinas's arguments in questions 16 and 17 of the third part of the *Summa* in particular.

27. Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, 54-5.

28. Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, 155ff.

The success of the Reformed catholic project depends on getting Christology right. It is not enough to proclaim our assent to the Chalcedonian definition. The work of each generation of theologians is, in part, to retrieve the exegetical and theological justification for the ancient Trinitarian and Christological doctrines. These two books further that end. They remind us that the union of divinity and humanity in Christ is not an "adding up" of two things in the normal sense of addition; only imperfect analogies are appropriate for the union of finite and infinite being in the Incarnation. The Word's humanity is united to Him in person, but His humanity retains a fully human intellect and will. In this humanity, Christ wills our salvation in freedom, rendering intelligible His work as our mediator and high priest, the fulfiller of the covenant and our sure hope. A divine agent acts, but He does so humanly. This is good news, and a miracle unending in its depth.

David Moser is a PhD candidate in theology at Southern Methodist University. He is writing his dissertation under Dr. Bruce D. Marshall on the Christology of Thomas Aquinas.

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