Sermon follow-up
1/13/08
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This week's sermon follow-up is a collection of quotations from Christian political philosophers and theologians. Political theology is a very important aspect of the Christian faith, as I hope the last two weeks have demonstrated. Indeed, political theology is internal to the gospel, given that the gospel is summarized by the declaration "Jesus Christ is Lord." I find myself very much in line with the historic Christian view of the state. The quotations gathered here should fill in some gaps from the last two sermons.

From Oliver O'Donovan, whose book *The Desire of Nations* is probably the best work of political theology written since Augustine's *City of God:*

> The more the political character of Israel's hope engages us, the more we need to know how it has actually shaped the government of nations. The more the problem of our own modernity engages us, the more we need to see modernity against its background.
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> I use the 'Christendom' (in keeping with a good deal of current discussion) to refer to a historical idea: that is to say, the idea of a professedly Christian political order, and the history of that idea in practice. Christendom is an *era,* an era in which the truth of Christianity was taken to be a truth of secular politics...
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> Let us say that the era lies between AD 313, the date of the Edict of Milan, 1791, the date of the First Amendment to the US Constitution...In the course of this period the idea of Christendom developed and underwent corrections and elaborations; sometimes it was taken to imply more, sometimes less. Yet the idea id always there, giving a unity to the whole era which entitles it to the name 'Christendom': it is the idea of a confessionally Christian government, at once 'secular' (in the proper sense of that word, confined to the present age) and obedient to Christ, a promise of the age of his unhindered rule.
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> The rulers of the world have bowed before Christ's throne. The core idea of Christendom is therefore intimately bound up with the church's mission. But the relationship between mission and Christian political order should not be misconstrued. It is not, as is often suggested, that Christian political order is a *project* of the church's mission, either as an end in itself or as a means to the further missionary end. The church's one project is to witness to the Kingdom of God. Christendom is a *response* to mission, and as such a sign that God has blessed it. It is constituted not by the church seizing alien power, but by alien power's becoming attentive to the church.

From T. Eliot's excellent work *Christianity and Culture* (yes, it's the poet – who also happened to have a great insight into Christian public philosophy):

My point is that, while there is a considerable measure of agreement that certain things are wrong, the question of how they should be put right is so extremely controversial, that any proposal is immediately countered by a dozen others...I confine myself therefore to the assertion, which I think few will dispute, that a great deal of the machinery of modern life is merely a sanction for un-Christian aims, that it is not only hostile to the pursuit of the Christian life in the world by the few, but to the maintenance of any Christian society *of* the world. We must abandon the notion that the Christian should be content with freedom of cultus [worship], and with suffering no worldly disabilities on account of his faith [e.g., persecution]. However bigoted the announcement may sound, the Christian can be satisfied with nothing less than a Christian organization of society -- which is not the same thing as a society consisting exclusively of devout Christians. It would be a society in which the natural end of man -- virtue anbd well-being in community -- is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end -- beatitude [that, life in communion with God] -- for those who have eyes to see it...

My only caveat here would be that man's "natural" end of virtue and community can ultimately only be realized through the gospel. In other words, after the fall, creation's original goal can only be accomplished via redemption. So I'm not totally pleased with Eliot's language here. But the basic gist of his approach is entirely correct – and leaves ample room for the residual goodness of creation and "common grace" (or "middle grace," to use Peter Leithart's helpful category) to play out in society. Eliot's vision of a Christian society avoids the any kind of coercion and emphasizes that a society structured in a Christian way actually best serves the common good of all peoples.

Eliot continues:

The rulers [in a Christian society], I have said, will *qua* rulers, accept Christianity not simply as their own faith to guide their actions, but as the system under which they are to govern....

But it must be kept in mind that even in a Christian society as well organized as we can conceive possible in this world, the limit would be that our temporal and spiritual life should be harmonized: the temporal and spiritual would never be identified. There would always remain a dual allegiance, to the State and to the Church, to one's countrymen and to one's fellow-Christians everywhere, and the latter would always have primacy. There would be always be a tension; and this tension is essential to the idea of a Christian society, and is a distinguishing mark between a Christian and pagan society.

But before suggesting *how* the Church should interfere with the World, we must try to answer the question: *why* should it interfere with the World?...The Church is not merely for the elect...It therefore must struggle for a condition of society which will give the maximum of opportunity for us to lead wholly Christian lives, and the maximum opportunity for others to become Christians. It maintains the paradox that while we are each responsible for our own souls, we

are all responsible for all other souls, who are, like us, on their way to a future heaven or hell....

Eliot also understood the need for the church to be reasonably unified if society is to be publicly Christianized. A divided church will inevitably lead society into full-scale religious pluralism. Furtger, Eliot recognized that a corporate commitment to the gospel in the public square did not offset the need for individuals to exercise a personal faith towards Christ:

> I am convinced that you cannot have a national Christian society, a religious-social community, a society with a political philosophy founded upon the Christian faith; if it is constituted as a congeries of private and independent sects. The national Faith must have an official recognition by the State, as well as an accepted status in the community and a basis of conviction in the heart of the individual.

Eliot also understood that the public square cannot be neutral and if society is not organized on explicitly Christian terms, an idol will dominate. And that idol, even if disguised by the rhetoric of secularism, is bound to be far less gracious than Jesus Christ.

> If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should prepare to pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin.

Lawrence Adams has written a highly readable and useful book entitled *Going Public: Christian Responsibility in a Divided America.* The real strength of Adam's view lies in his ecclesiocentric approach to political issues. A Christian theology of the state grows out of a biblical ecclesiology. The church is indeed political, but not in the way we typically think about politics. Here are some excerpts:

> The church carries on its temporal journey with the firm hope that comes both from its continuation through the rise and fall of cultures and empires and from the promises of the ultimate triumph of Christ and his kingdom. Yet the American church also carries into the new century the immediate legacy of recent history, which was, if Max Stackhouse is correct, "a time of vague, free-floating 'spirituality,' of little importance for the great issues. Modern [American] churches lacked social significance because, contrary to what had been the case in all preceding ages, they lacked a high view of the Church." The twentieth century churches in the West contrast with their ancestors, who knew that "ecclesiology is, indeed, essential to a Christian social philosophy, since the Church is the place where persons are formed theologically and ethically to live responsibly in the wider society." It has also been understanding of Christians in many times and places that the church is a public body that both shapes and serves the building of civilization, and that there is no conflict between spiritual life and public life, as all are to be brought under the will and rule of God in the life of the Christian....

> The church is included in this definition as a public institution, an entity

in which people hold things in common and work towards common ends. It is a public space where things of public significance occur, in this understanding, and is a sector of a larger public life. It is divinely appointed (as are also, some would argue, government, family, and economic arrangements, and all other structures of existence) and is primarily responsible for ordering the right worship of God and the promulgation of divine revelation about salvation and the truth of the Trinity. The church is not merely an association of individuals each pursuing the fruits of personal salvation. It is the public representative of Christ, who is King of all the earth, the visible expression of his lordship and redemption.

Confusion about the church as a public institution can easily follow if this concept is translated into the church becoming an organized political power, an economic association providing jobs, goods, and services, or a health and welfare organization. Rather, worship and proclamation and comissioning are public goods that are the province of the church. This can be very difficult to grasp, perhaps especially for individualistic Westerners in the current age, who have learned to place worship, morality, revelation, and "personal growth" in the bin labeled "private" or "personal." Under these assumptions, to realize the need for a "public church" is to call for a political church that supports candidates, advances policy positions, organizes voters, and sponsors protests. Under a different understanding, a "public church" orders life in a certain way, primarily because it is the willof God and true to created human nature but also because doing so serves the larger common life.

The church then, also serves as a public space in which men and women learn civility and are formed in the virtues that serve in the other arenas of public life. If one's life is rightly ordered at the core that the church shapes, the potential for rightly ordering the rest of life, public and private, is advanced. But the public service of the church is not only in training individuals; it is also in serving its purposes for the entirety of public life. For public life is not just the sum total of individual lives; it is the pattern of community responsibility and commonweal that constitute human existence, according to the creational purposes of the Creator...

The church has faced cultural decline in many times and places. These times of crisis have sometimes been periods of ferment and reflection even as the world around crumbles, such as when Augustine faced the collapse of Rome and the apparent failure of civilization by producing the most profound works of theology and public philosophy. All times have their own forms of power and opposition; all are hostile in some degree to faith and Christian norms. Thus all need to be discerned and faced with the primary resources available to the church.

The greatest lesson of all these experiences is that the church never fully

knows the meaning of its current situation or the shape of the future; it never has full insight into the intentions of the Lord. Nor do we have any magic means of accurately knowing the immediate future. These are times though, in which the practice of faith, holding trust in him who is worthy of trust, is the most important calling. Faith results in faithfulness, faithfulness to the calling of love for the culture and the world. By attentive cultivation of its holy life together, in robust communities of faith where understanding is formed, the church will offer its greatest contribution to the shaping of culture toward right and just order. If American culture continues to resist such prophetic demonstration, or even if it responds with acceptance and repentance, our faith tells us that all is still under the judgment of God and subject to his purposes.

We might ask, in light of all this evidence, what is it that holds the United States together now? Why have these forces not already brought about the fragmentation they indicate? Are we joining the Cassandra chorus that, as in the past, is still wrong about America when we call attention to these indicators? The fact that the United States still holds together somehow perhaps indicates that the capability in American culture to respond to challenges with pragmatic fixes will win even in the new situation of advanced moral and cultural pluralism.

However, the evidence from this study points in a different direction. The measurable residual strength still to be found in the local church emerges as the primary factor in offering the salt of preservation -- even with the weakening effects of the erosion of religion in society. To continue such preservation in an increasingly fragmentary culture, the church will need to remain true to its calling and its faith as it serves its ultimate hope. Such faithfulness will be the crucible both of public virtue and of public leadership.

Robert Louis Wilken is an excellent scholar (see, e.g., his fine book *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*). He comes down in favor of Christendom/Constantinianism, but also points out the inherent temptations that the church in a Christianized society would have to guard against. In this excerpt from his article "In Defense of Constantine" (http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft0104/articles/wilken.html), he focuses on the role of Emperor Constantine and early Christian theologian Lactantius in developing a theocratic philosophy of religious liberty that paved the way for civil liberties we enjoy down to the present:

The ritual pronouncement of anathemas against Constantinianism has become so commonplace that the historical Constantine (a.d. 288?-337) has slipped from our sight. Apparently it is not what Constantine himself wrought that is the object of obloquy, but the work of mischievous kings and perfidious bishops in the centuries after him. When theologians write essays with titles such as "Is Constantinianism the Most Basic Problem for Christian Social Ethics?", Constantine is not the sole villain. What provokes critics' ire is an ordering of Christian society that flourished in medieval and early modern

Europe and still, it is claimed, impedes an authentic Christian witness....

In the years before Constantine took the throne, Christianity was rapidly winning the hearts and minds of millions of Roman citizens, including the most gifted thinkers. The effort of Constantine's immediate predecessors in the purple, most notably Diocletian, to impede the growth of Christianity through empire-wide persecution had failed miserably. At the beginning of the fourth century the Church was too large, its way of life and institutions too well established, its leaders too resourceful, for Christianity to be halted with the sword. The refusal of Christians to venerate the traditional gods, and hence to show honor to the emperor and fealty to the institutions of society, created a dilemma for the emperors. By forcing a choice between Rome and Christianity, the emperors badly misjudged the strength and resiliency of Christianity.

Constantine realized the shortsightedness of trying to purge the society of Christians... His policy, writes Drake, sought to "reconcile the imperial need for religious justification with the refusal of Christians to pay divine honors to any other deity." In granting the Church legitimacy Constantine not only diffused a tense situation, he harnessed Christian energy in service to the state...

The Edict of Milan, however, is not simply a grant of toleration; it is a more radical and far-reaching solution to the problems faced by the emperors. For it grants not only to Christians but also to "all men . . . freedom to follow whatever religion each one wished." By mentioning not only Christianity (the immediate occasion for the decree) but other forms of worship, the decree set forth a policy of religious freedom, not simply the toleration of a troublesome sect. As the emperors put it, each person should be given the freedom "to give his mind to the religion which he felt was most fitting to himself," for the supreme divinity is to be served "with free mind." The Edict of Milan, says Drake, is a "landmark in the evolution of Western thought-not because it gives legal standing to Christianity, which it does, but because it is the first official government document in the Western world to recognize the freedom of belief."

What makes this argument convincing is that it is possible to compare the reasoning of Lactantius, who was active at the court of Constantine, with that of Porphyry, a philosopher at the court of the emperor Diocletian who had initiated the persecution. Porphyry, known to historians of philosophy as the disciple of the great Neoplatonist Plotinus, was the most astute and learned critic of Christianity in the first four centuries of the Church's history. But unlike earlier critics he had the emperor's ear, and provided philosophical and religious legitimation for an aggressive policy against the Christians early in the fourth century. Although Porphyry believed that there were many roads to the divine, and no one could claim to have found

the true way, he thought the Christians were subversive. In his book dealing with Christians he asked: "How can men not be in every way impious who have apostatized from the customs of our fathers, through which every nation and city is sustained? . . . What else are they than fighters against God? What types of pardon will they be worthy of who have turned away from those recognized as gods from the earliest times?" Christians, in his view, should adjust their religious beliefs to traditional Roman practice. If not, they should be punished accordingly.

It is commonly assumed that because polytheism is not exclusive it must be tolerant. But the historical evidence will not bear this interpretation. Porphyry was the exponent of an inclusive religious outlook that held that there were many ways to God; he even attempted to find a way of integrating Christ into the pantheon of Roman gods by honoring him as a sage. But he had few takers among the Christians and he concluded that Christianity, at least in its orthodox form (because of its belief in the divinity of Christ), was harmful to Roman society. Consequently he was unwilling to grant forbearance to the Christians.

Christianity, on the other hand, is exclusive, for it claims not only that one can know the true God but that the way to God has been revealed in Christ. Hence it is often assumed that Christianity is inherently intolerant. But this confuses exclusivism with intolerance. Polytheism is not exclusive, but it can be intolerant as it was at the time of Diocletian's persecution. Christianity is exclusive, but it can be tolerant (though of course it can also be intolerant, as later history will demonstrate). In the early fourth century there is no evidence that traditional pagans found Constantine's religious policy favoring the Christians a threat to their beliefs and practices. Lactantius (and Constantine) believed all men should be granted freedom to follow whatever form of religion each wished. For this reason, Drake argues that the claim that Christianity in itself is intolerant is a modern prejudice: "The coercive Christian as normative is a modern construct-the worst sort of conceptual anachronism, one that has required every ounce of scholarly ingenuity to maintain."

By embracing Christianity, Constantine not only forged a new policy, he acquired a new constituency...

[After the Edict of Milan, we have to understand] the new role of the Church, and in particular her bishops, in the politics of empire. Priests were a familiar feature of life within the Roman Empire, but Christian bishops, the priests of the Church, were something quite new. They were organized, and thought of themselves as leaders of an alternate society, another city if you will, and they had a constituency, and a large one at that. They were not functionaries of the state, and political authorities had no say in the selection of a bishop. Unlike the traditional priests whose role was primarily cultic, the office of the bishop

included oversight (the meaning of *episcopos*) and teaching (e.g., preaching) as well. Furthermore, most bishops were well educated and were expected to provide spiritual leadership and moral example. This all meant that "the emperor had to establish a working relationship with an organization over which he had no formal control whatsoever." The Church had become a force to be reckoned with in imperial life...

Ancient Rome was not a secular state. The empire was a religious institution headed by the emperor. In the years after Constantine's death in 337, the Christian community was growing rapidly, and many who came into the Church with little understanding of their new faith needed direction and guidance. The Church was also riven by a bitter theological controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity that set bishops against bishops and brought the mechanism of imperial power into play to maintain peace. Further, thirty years after Constantine's death, and some fifty years after the peace of the Church, Julian (known in Christian tradition as the Apostate) became emperor and launched an aggressive program to undermine Christianity, purge Christians from the schools ("How can they teach Homer if they do not believe the gods of Homer?" asked Julian), and drive a wedge between Christianity and the cultural life of the empire. By the end of the century, after it had survived the challenge of heresy and the threat of apostasy, the Church was seeking to consolidate its position as the empire's dominant religion....

Constantinianism, as it has been understood by thinkers such as John Howard Yoder, refers to an accommodation between the churches and political authority in which the churches "identify themselves with the power structures of their respective societies instead of seeing their duty as calling these powers to modesty and resisting their recurrent rebellion." The great temptation of Constantinianism is to see the "true meaning of history" in the world and not in the Church. As Yoder describes Constantinianism, it holds that the world is already "by itself" on the way to achieving the "fullness of salvation," and the Church is to be but an instrument to aid it on its way.

It is noteworthy, however, that during the reign of Constantine and in the "Constantinian settlement" of the following centuries, it was the society that accommodated the Church, socially as well as religiously, not the other way around. The Constantinian revolution created space for Christianity to shape the new society that was being constructed; the distinctive organization of the Church, the "working ecclesiology" if you will, allowed the Christian community to seize this opportunity and manage its success. The bishops were flexible and versatile, at once bearers of continuity from generation to generation as well as signs of unity for a community spread across the empire and beyond. Unlike the older religious institutions of the empire, the Church thought of itself as a single corporate body with a

common identity (exemplified in the extensive correspondence of leading bishops with one another). As the Church struggled to deal with the new realities of power, it put forward a new idea of community within society and the result was a great flowering of Christian expression in art, architecture, poetry, theology, philosophy, and spiritual literature, the first golden age in Christian culture...

It is also evident that the public life of the society was being transformed by the recognition given to Christianity. Constantine introduced laws that made Sunday a day of rest, thereby introducing a new calendar and reordering the life of society to make space for Christian worship. He issued laws that discouraged the exposure of infants by indigent parents and declared that the public fisc should provide food and clothing to rear abandoned children. The emperor built churches, not only in the new Christian city of Constantinople and the old capital Rome, but all across the empire (in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, for example). As these new buildings displaced the temples (built by former emperors) the city plans began to reflect the new faith. The most prominent public building was the church, and to this day one finds a church on the central public square of most European cities.

None of this was imposed. Rather, it followed naturally as the number of Christians mounted across the empire. The transformation that took place within the empire would be replicated again and again as Christianity spread beyond Rome's boundaries into northern Europe, among the Franks and the Germans, the British and the Irish, the Scandinavians and the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Bulgars, the Ukrainians and the Russians, into Asia among the Armenians and Georgians, and into Africa among the Nubians and Ethiopians. For all these peoples conversion to Christianity meant a change of public practice in law, in architecture, in calendar, in marriage customs, in political institutions, in social mores, in burial practices, and much more. Christianity is a culture-forming religion.

There were, to be sure, unholy tradeoffs, and as Christian societies took form, kings and princes sought to manage the affairs of the Church and to use her spiritual authority to serve their ends. But even when the Church and the society were one and the king was considered head of the Christian people, the Church retained its distinctive identity. One of the major themes of medieval history is the effort of bishops and popes to assert the unique vocation of the Church over against that of the temporal powers. The king, unlike the bishop, could not claim apostolic authority. It was the bishops and pope who constituted the Church. At the same time the Christian king had a role, indeed duty, in the new Christian society. The truth is that some form of Constantinianism is an inescapable consequence of the Church's success. Because Christians confess one God who is creator of everything that is, as their numbers increase they will inevitably strive to transform all of life and society. The Church must say yea as well as nay to

the world.

A classic example is Gregory the Great's advice to his missionaries in England early in the seventh century. Gregory was asked what was to be done with the temples to idols when a people converted to Christianity. Some had advocated destroying the temples and building churches at other locations. Gregory advised that the temples be left standing. "Take holy water and sprinkle it on these shrines, build altars and place relics in them." The people, he said, would be more ready to come to places they are familiar with and in them to "worship the true God." In the same way, one should not banish the sacrificing of animals. Better to continue having a feast of roasted meat, not as an offering to idols but as "food to the praise of God."

The true hero of this eventful tale is Lactantius, whose discussion of religion lays bare the spiritual roots of Western notions of religious liberty. For he saw that religious freedom rests on a quite different philosophical foundation than toleration of religion. It is not far-fetched to say that Lactantius' view of religious freedom is echoed in James Madison's defense of the free exercise of religion after the 1771 flogging of Separate Baptists in Madison's home of Orange County, Virginia. A few years later, in 1776, when the leaders of the revolution in Virginia were working on a "Declaration of Rights" for the new commonwealth, Madison quietly replaced the term "toleration" with "the full and free exercise of religion." And in his Memorial and Remonstrance of 1785, written to protest the bill before the Virginia legislature "Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion," he argued that "religion is the duty we owe to our Creator. . . . It is the duty of every man to render the Creator such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to him (the Edict of Milan has, "freedom to follow whatever religion each one wished"). This duty is precedent, both in order of time and degree of obligation, to the claims of civil society. Before any man can be considered as a member of civil society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe." Religion could not be compelled, it had to be voluntary, and its practice free of the dictates of political authorities. Like Lactantius many centuries earlier, James Madison had a religious understanding of religious freedom.

It is unlikely that Madison read Lactantius, though he was theologically well informed, but Lactantius' insight, which is really an insight drawn from biblical religion, is confirmed by other Christian thinkers in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. When Gregory the Great learned that some Jews in Gaul had been baptized against their will, he wrote to the Bishop of Marseilles that people should be brought to baptism only by persuasion, not "by compulsion." And Thomas Aquinas held that faith is by its nature a free act of the will, so that if someone does not come to faith freely and

voluntarily, the act of faith is not genuine.

But to come closer to our own time, it is instructive to read the Declaration on Religious Liberty from Vatican II. There the key passage reads: "One of the chief Catholic teachings, found in the word of God and repeatedly preached by the Fathers of the Church, is that the response of people to God in faith should be voluntary; so no one must be forced to embrace the faith against his own will. Indeed by its very nature the act of faith is a free act. . . . It is therefore completely in accord with the nature of faith that in matters of religion every manner of coercion on the part of men should be excluded." Though the decree's defense of religious liberty is well known, what is seldom recognized is that the language in this passage is drawn almost directly from Lactantius. In the accompanying note that provides references to early Christian and medieval writers the first author to be cited is none other than Lactantius.

Whether Lactantius was the primary influence shaping Constantine's religious policy will be debated by historians of the emperor's reign, and how influential Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* was on the formation of Christian ideas of religious freedom (he was after all a minor figure) is a matter for historians of Christian thought to negotiate. Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that Lactantius saw something that none of his contemporaries discerned, and that he did so as a Christian thinker.

Peter Leithart's "The Gospel and the Virtues" (reproduced in its entirety here; see http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-67-the-gospel-and-the-virtues/ for the original article) shows the public role of the gospel in society:

Reading the earliest Christian apologists is like watching a movie in which the hero has the means to demolish his opponents in his grasp but never realizes it. The apologists come across as men not altogether aware of the radical character of the gospel they defend. In response to charges of atheism and sedition, they consistently protested that the Church posed no threat to Rome. Since Christians believed that God would someday judge all their actions, Justin argued, they were "more than all other men" Rome's "helpers and allies in promoting peace" (*First Apology*, 12). Specifically, he pointed out, Christians were more ready to pay taxes than anyone else (*First Apology*, 17). Similarly, Athenagoras told Rome's leaders that Christians "are of all men most piously and righteously disposed towards the deity and towards your government" (*Plea for Christians*, 1).

Now, at one level, this defense was perfectly accurate. The early Christians were not revolutionaries seeking to overthrow the powers that be. Justin pleaded that charges be investigated before sentences were passed and that no one should be condemned simply for accepting the name "Christian," both commonsensical appeals to basic justice. At the same time, it is clear in

retrospect that the Church's uncompromising assault on pagan mythologies, philosophies, and religious practices attacked the foundations of Greco-Roman civilization. In this respect, the Church's enemies such as Celsus were better sociologists than their Christian adversaries. Pagan apologists perceived that widespread success for Christianity meant the end of Rome as they knew it. The Christian gospel is subversive of even the most virtuous and just societies. Dutch New Testament scholar Herman Ridderbos has pointed out that the gospel brings civic righteousness – on which, we are consistently led to believe, orderly society depends for its existence – into radical judgment. According to Ridderbos, Paul insisted that even "the insight of man into the hopelessness of his condition, into his `being worthy of death' (cf. Rom. 1:32), in no respect whatever introduces change into his existence, but rather must be reckoned a part of this dying." Paul did not teach that the gospel is ultimately antinomian; far from it. By insisting that only an alien righteousness makes sinners acceptable to God, however, the apostolic gospel does reveal the ultimate worthlessness of those very virtues that we think must be encouraged in order preserve even a minimum of social stability.

It seems, then, that the Christian must choose either to attack the moral underpinnings of existing social order or to tame the radical force of the gospel. The dilemma is an intensely practical one. If I tell my neighbor that his faithfulness to his wife, his diligent care of his children, and the disciplined pursuit of his career are ultimately nothing but hay and stubble that will be consumed in the judgment, am I not encouraging adultery, negligence, and sloth? Conversely, if I encourage him in his godless virtue, am I not showing him a way to gain the world – or at least to salvage his family and career – while he loses his own soul?

In modern Christianity, the typical response to this dilemma has been to mute or deny the New Testament's exclusive claim that Jesus is the only name "under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." This has often been done with one form or another of universalism. If everyone – perhaps, as Barth suggested, even Judas Iscariot – is already in Christ, the dilemma evaporates. Most forms of universalism, such as the contemporary Roman Catholic variety, are less extreme, suggesting that those who are innocently ignorant of the gospel, but who seek God with a pure conscience, may achieve salvation. In either form, such efforts to resolve the dilemma constitute an unacceptable capitulation to the forces of gnostic modernity. Jacob Neusner has it right: Whatever its merits politically and socially, tolerance is not a theological virtue. Neusner's dictum is, moreover, not an extraneous tenet of an obsolete formulation of Christian faith, but a direct implication of serving a God whose Name is Jealous.

Evangelicals have generally resisted universalism, but often in favor of other methods of domesticating the gospel. Historically, moralism has been the most common substitute the gospel of grace and judgment among evangelical

Protestants. The temptation to reduce the gospel to moral exhortation is especially powerful in situations of cultural disintegration and social chaos, when Christians fear that too radical a gospel will unleash antinomian elements, further fraying the social fabric. According to Anglican bishop C. FitzSimons Allison in his book, *The Rise of Moralism*, Anglican theologians after the Stuart Restoration of 1660 replaced the Reformation insistence that sinners are made acceptable to God by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ with the teaching that sinners make themselves acceptable by a meritorious work of faith or by their own sincere endeavors. This profound modification of the Reformation doctrine of justification arose, Allison argues, because the Caroline theologians feared the social consequences of preaching a gospel of free grace. Moralism also becomes attractive in situations of theological pluralism. During the Reformation and after, contests over the interpretation of the gospel more often than not ended in blood. Given this potential for violence, it seemed only reasonable to mute theological differences and strive for common moral and social goals. Contemporary appeals to generalized "virtue" and "family values" indicate that these dynamics are at work in the midst of our culture wars. The combination of cultural disintegration and theological pluralism in our time thus provides a double pressure on evangelicals to exchange the gospel for moralism. The dilemma, in my judgment, must be resolved in favor of maintaining an undiluted gospel, however socially irresponsible it may appear to those who would defend the existing order of things. In fact, if the New Testament is to be believed, what the gospel subverts are the fortresses raised up against the knowledge of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1-6). What it destroys are the socio-cultural chains and prisons that sinful men construct for themselves and their fellows. What seem to be the virtues that enable humane society to flourish are, in the light of the gospel, the cultural crystallization of human rebellion. Augustine's claim that pagan virtues are, in the final analysis, splendid vices reflects the New Testament's view. The church does not exist to buttress such virtues, but to expose them to the unrelenting light of the Word of God.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the gospel, because it lays bare the rotten foundations of the fallen City of Man, is the only foundation for true and lasting, that is to say, Christian, social order. This may seem an unbearably bigoted conclusion. If, however, the gospel is, as the current Pope continually assures us, the truth about man, his relation to God, and the way of life in this world and beyond; if it is, indeed, the truth about the Truth; and if a truly human society must be founded on Truth – then it is difficult to see how a Christian could say anything else.

Leithart examines the contemporary "Religious Right" movement and the possibility of religious neutrality in his article "The Very Modern Religious Right" (http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=4449):

Modern politics was born, in a more than chronological sense, in the aftermath of the wars of religion. Wolfhart Pannenberg has pointed out that until the seventeenth century it was assumed that uniformity of belief was a prerequisite

for orderly social life. After decades of bloodshed, violence, and terror in the wars of religion, however, many came to something like the opposite conviction that, in Pannenberg's words, "religious passion destroys social peace." Given a violently divided Christendom, the only sensible solution appeared to be to excise from political life the cause of these horrors-namely, particular theological claims-and to replace them with universally acceptable principles derived from human nature and natural law. Modern politics was thus founded on the principle that religion is a private concern, useful insofar as it inculcates socially approved virtues of toleration and honesty, dangerous if vigorously pressed into the political arena.

Under the circumstances, it is difficult to fault those who arrived at this solution; they were, after all, desperate for peace. Yet, understandable as it may be, the solution is impossible to implement. The notion that politics can function in a religious and theological vacuum is a myth. Politics is concerned with justice; justice is inescapably a moral concept; morality in turn is inescapably religious; and true religion, in the Christian perspective, inescapably includes particular theological commitments. Christianity entails the invariably political announcement that Jesus Christ, not Caesar, is Lord; to concede that political actors may legitimately ignore this highly specific theological claim is nothing less than an abandonment of the Christian position. If the Christian right accomplished nothing else, it should be recognized as an historically significant movement for its frontal assault on the modern myth of value-neutral politics.

Leithart argues eloquently for viewing the church's liturgy in political categories in his article "Politics at Prayer" (http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=2204):

Liturgy and politics don't mix. For two things to mix, they have to be separable; liturgy and politics are not. Participation in the Christian liturgy is always a political act. Worship, far from being a retreat from politics, embodies a new kind of politics, a genuinely Christian politics. Liturgy and politics are not like the salt and pepper that can be added to your scrambled egg; they are more like the scramble and the egg.

Our misguided assumptions about symbols and rituals explain why the political nature of the liturgy is not self-evident to Christians. At least since the Reformation, and especially among Protestants, it has gone without saying that symbols and rituals are marginal to the bread-and-butter concerns of life. Literal language is basic, but when we want to be poetic or persuasive we dress it up with tropes. A blank wall is the norm, but we might want, if we can afford it, to adorn it with pictures. Most days, we just eat, but when there's a special occasion we dress up our meal with special ceremony and ritual. So it is with worship: after we spend the week passing ourselves off as black-and-white Marxists and materialists, we spend the weekend embellishing life with a dash of colorful spirituality….

Pointing out that politics is shot through with symbolism is not the same as proving that Christian worship is a political act. And asserting that liturgy and politics are inseparable is not the same as explaining how. My insistence on the inseparability of liturgy and politics is not an endorsement of trendy efforts to make Christian liturgy "more relevant." Liturgies for the homeless, for AIDS victims, for the oppressed peoples of the earth, for the whales, for an end to Florida's recounts, for whatever are objectionable not only because they are kitschy and not only because they bind worship to a political agenda. More fundamentally, they are objectionable because they assume that the liturgy itself is apolitical and needs to be made political. Those who wish to purify the liturgy of politics and those who want to inject contemporary politics into the liturgy share a common basic outlook: both assume that politics and liturgy are separable zones of life, which can be mixed or not mixed as we please.

For the apostle Paul, the connection of worship and politics was axiomatic, though the political import of his liturgical discussions can be obscure to modern readers. Paul's lengthiest discourse on Christian worship comes, oddly, in the midst of his answers to questions about eating meat sacrificed to idols, which he addresses in his first letter to the Corinthians. Now on our scale of concerns, what to do about meat sacrificed to idols ranks somewhere below decisions about whether to sod or seed the yard, but in Paul's day eating meat was a question about the limits of Christian participation in pagan culture. In a city like Corinth, much of the meat offered at the butcher's shop had been sacrificed to idols. Indeed, in ancient Greek, the same word was used for both "butcher" and "sacrificer," and procedures for butchery were normally religiously prescribed. Had Christians been forbidden to eat meat sacrificed to idols, they would virtually have had to become vegetarians. And their vegetarianism would have been a form of political protest (much as it is today).

Paul did not urge Christians to become vegetarians, as we know. Since there is only one God, idols are nothing; so long as the Christians offered thanksgiving to God for the meat, they could accept it without any qualms of conscience, as a gift from the hand of the One who opens His hand to satisfy the desires of every living thing. Paul later reiterated this principle: "Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience's sake; for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience's sake." Freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols was limited only by the demands of love: "Take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak," lest your eating offend any brothers for whom Christ died.

Later in the same section of 1 Corinthians, however, Paul appears to shift ground and prohibit eating meat sacrificed to idols. Gentiles sacrificed to demons and became communicants with demons in the process, and Paul warned the Corinthians not "to become sharers in demons" (10:21). Well, could they eat or couldn't they? The resolution to this apparent contradiction is to

notice that Paul was addressing two different sets of circumstances. On the one hand, all meat available at the local butcher's was to be accepted gratefully. On the other hand, Paul prohibited Christians from actually participating in the sacrificial rituals of pagan worship. It is possible to receive meat sacrificed to idols and give thanks to God. It is not possible to share a meal dedicated to Luna the Moon Goddess and simultaneously give thanks to God. Participating in the Lord's Supper in the Christian liturgy was incompatible with participating in the feasts of pagan gods.

In urging the Corinthians to refrain from idolatrous feasts, Paul was exhorting them to separate not merely from pagan "religion," but also from the pagan social and political system. Unlike cities of the modern West, the Greco-Roman city was as much a religious as a political organization, and citizens were expected to participate in thoroughly religious civic festivals, which included sacrifices to the gods and goddesses who served as protectors of the city, whether Athena in Athens, or Artemis in Ephesus. Refusal to participate in the feasts of idols was thus a refusal of one privilege (and duty) of citizenship. Paul did not require that Christians renounce all rights as citizens-he himself made use of his rights as a Roman to advance the gospel-but the fact that the Corinthians ate at the Lord's table meant they were citizens of the Lord's city to which their citizenship in Corinth had to be subordinate. This was not an apolitical act or a renunciation of politics, but a sign that the Church was a different sort of political order. As such, it was a direct challenge to the claims of the pagan political order.

The Eucharist was a sign of the Church's distinctness from the world, a sign that she constituted a new "city" that had invaded the ancient city, a sign that, contrary to Aristotle, the virtuous life was lived in the Church rather than in the Greek polis. By participating in this ritual, Christians were committing themselves to maintaining a critical distance from the political system. They were committing themselves to what Rowan Williams has called the "fundamental Christian vocation of not belonging." And that commitment, enacted liturgically, is emphatically political.

In another article, ("Typology and the Public Church," http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=3761), Leithart explains how the church has historically derived much of its political philosophy from a typological reading of Scripture, especially OT narratives:

One of the contributions of twentieth-century Catholic "*nouvelle théologie*," and of Henri de Lubac and Jean Danielou in particular, is a rehabilitation of the typological exegesis of the Bible practiced by patristic and medieval theologians. Typological interpretation assumes that events and institutions of the Old Testament present (to use Augustine's terminology) "latent" pictures of Christ, and the Christ to whom the Old Testament testifies is the *totus Christus*: Head and Body, Jesus and his Church. In this, the fathers and medieval

theologians fully agreed with Paul, who wrote that the history of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness were "things written for our instruction." Following the apostolic example, the fathers taught that Israel and "daughter Jerusalem"-and all brides and harlots of Old Testament history-manifest the Church under various guises. The fathers could thus view Old Testament history as the Lord's stormy betrothal with his headstrong bride. Augustine made it a basic interpretive principle that the Psalms are now the words of the Savior, now the words of his people crying for salvation, now, mystically, both together. The Psalms form the songbook of the whole Christ who speaks in it "of us, by us, in us, while we speak in him." At its best, then, typological interpretation is quite different from allegory. While Greek allegorists interpreted myths as embodiments of timeless and abstract principles, the fathers plundered the Old Testament to divine the patterns of history. Because the interpretive path runs from old Israel through Christ to the new Israel, moreover, typology assumes that the New Covenant, like the Old, is concerned with a concrete, historical community…

For all their real differences in approach to the Bible, evangelicals are at one with Protestant modernism in their rejection of typology and, frequently enough, in their belief that Christianity is more or less purely internal, a religion of unmediated individual contact with God. Nor is this tangential to evangelicalism: every student of the movement has noted the distinctive emphasis on "new birth," understood as a private encounter with God.

The political implications of this hermeneutical and theological shift are profound. If Christianity is a purely internal religion, if the trajectory is from Old Testament history to the motions of the individual soul, then, as de Lubac brilliantly argued, the whole field of public life is given over to the rough play of secular and impersonal forces. So Schleiermacher, the preacher of what Barth called "consciousness theology," says that the Old Testament is to be utterly repudiated as part of the Christian Bible and, consistently, also castigates those who drag religion from the "depths of the heart into the civil world," where, presumably, it can only be contaminated.

There is yet another hermeneutical alternative to typology, one beginning at a different point but arriving at a similar destination. This method sees a direct fulfillment of the events and institutions of ancient Israel in contemporary political circumstances. The method has a venerable heritage, from Eusebius' celebration of Constantine as the climax of the Gospel, to Charlemagne's belief that he was a new David, to the Puritan preachers who elaborated parallels between Elizabeth I and David, to American preachers who compared the revolution of 1776 to Israel's Exodus from Egypt. This use of the Bible continues to the present day: President Clinton once imagined himself a new Moses, the deliverer of a "new covenant." (Now, perhaps more modestly, he is only a "repairer of the breach.")

Forging a civil religion, in which the holy community is not the Church but the nation, this viewpoint cedes public life to the state. The Church is demoted to national cheerleader and retreats from public action to pursue a ministry of private consolation. It is no accident that Erastian opponents of the Puritans found this hermeneutic useful in supporting royal claims to supremacy over the Church, thereby supporting a reversion to the monistic polis of antiquity whose destruction by Christianity Rousseau found so lamentable. In their own, often politically centered hermeneutics, contemporary evangelicals are sometimes farther from the ancient fathers than from the Anglican Hobbes, who-simultaneously criticizing Catholics, Presbyterians, and Congregational Separatists-thought the greatest abuse of Scripture is to suggest that the promise of Israel has been fulfilled in the Church rather than in the sovereign state. The typological method-by emphasizing that the Church as a real historical institution and communion was prophesied and typified in the Old Testament-provides theological grounding for the Church's efforts to discipline the state. From a typological viewpoint, it is of the essence of Christianity to occupy public terrain and form a public, albeit "nonpolitical," community. And therefore it is of the essence of Christianity to deny that the public square is dressed in a flag and nothing but a flag. Part of the theological defense of freedom, then, lies in the recovery of typological interpretation, in learning again to repeat, without irony or embarrassment and as a political credo, the words of Paul: "Jerusalem above is free; and she is our mother."

In another place, Leithart shows that baptism is intrinsically political ("The Politics of Baptism," http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=3962):

> In the second chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul recounts how on a visit to Antioch he publicly rebuked Peter's "hypocrisy" in withdrawing, under pressure from a delegation of the Jerusalem church, from table fellowship with Gentile believers. The New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn contends that for Paul this event resulted in a decisive break with the church that had sponsored his original missionary journey. Significantly too, it was in this context—as an answer to the social problem of relations between the circumcised and the uncircumcised in the church and not as a solution to individual guilt and fear of judgment—that Paul first wrote the formula, "justification by faith and not by the works of the law" (Galatians 2:16). Dunn concludes, "The Antioch incident was probably one of the most significant events in the development of earliest Christianity. It shaped the future of Paul's missionary work, it sparked off a crucial insight which became one of the central emphases in Paul's subsequent teaching, and consequently it determined the whole character and future of that young movement which we now call Christianity."

> It is a large claim, but Dunn actually *underestimates* how widely Paul's stinging rebuke reverberated, for its echoes produced an earthquake that finally left the ancient world in ruins. Toward the end of *Economy and Society*, Max Weber

cites Galatians 2 and Peter's participation in ritual meals with Gentiles to highlight the differences between the antique and the medieval cities. Ancient cities, Weber notes, were socially structured by a separation between those who made a claim of descent from the founding clans (patricians) and those who could make no such claim (plebeians), a separation often spatially represented by the isolation of plebeians either at the foot of the sacred hill of the polis or in ghettos clustered at the walls.

This dualism of the ancient city had a definite religious coloring, since the distinction of patricians and plebeians was equivalent to that between those who had access to the *sancta* and those who did not. As Henri Fustel de Coulange has shown, the polis was a religious as much as a political entity; rights came by participation in the city's rites. Weber observes, "The cities of Antiquity were religiously exclusive not only toward the outside, but also internally against everyone who did not belong to one of the constituted sibs—that is, against the plebeians, and for this reason they remained compartmentalized into initially very exclusive associations"….

The medieval city, for all its real inequities and flaws, was a partial realization of a social order ritually imagined in Christian baptism. Baptism, as the church fathers, early medieval theologians, and scholastics consistently noted, confers a participation in the priesthood of *the* Priest, Jesus Christ. In contrast with the Old Testament priesthood, which was confined to the descendants of Aaron, the Christian priesthood encompasses the whole people of God. All the marks of induction into the Aaronic priesthood—anointing, investiture, participation in the sacrificial meal—were included in Christian initiation. Certainly no one denied the necessity of an ordained ministry in the church, but at the same time liturgists insisted that the *dignitas* of priesthood was conferred by baptism and its accompaniments.

While theologians normally elaborated the priesthood of the faithful by typological contrast with the priesthood of the Mosaic order, baptism held similarly revolutionary implications for the order of the Greek and Roman world. Fustel de Coulanges notes, "What manifestly separated the plebeian from patrician was that the plebeian had no part in the religion of the city. It was impossible for him to fill the priestly office." Christian baptism as baptism into priesthood ended all that. Baptismal water was the universal solvent not only of traditional religious distinctions within Judaism but also of the foundation stones on which the ancient city rested; for the church, it was the *sole* initiation and was not confined to a single family, clan, race, or social class. Everyone within the watery walls of *this* city participates in the rites and shares in the *sancta*; holy things are for holy people, but *all* the baptized are saints. Politically, the democratic implications of eliminating ancient religious exclusions are obvious; less evident but no less spectacular were the economic consequences. Instead of subordinating artisans and entrepreneurs to the

founding aristocracy, as the ancient city had done, the medieval city was ruled by a combination of grand bourgeoisie and small capitalists…

It was in Protestantism that the radical implications of Christian baptism were most dramatically worked out in opposition to a late medieval system that had hardened the division of priesthood and laity. Catholic apologist Joannis Moldonati, polemicizing against the Lutherans, actually defended the distinction between priest and laity by appealing to analogies with ancient Rome's patricians and plebeians, perpetuating in ecclesial guise the structures of antiquity. Meanwhile, Luther was blanketing Europe with tracts announcing, with an oddly traditional recklessness or reckless traditionalism, that every baptized Christian was priest and cleric, thereby sparking liberation from a captivity that began, almost literally, in Babylon…

Paul's insistence that Jew and Greek share a common table was the symbolic founding of the Western city. Over the modern megapolis, over its indifferent financial districts and bustling marketplaces, flutters a banner so defaced as to be all but illegible and so ignored as to be all but forgotten, but once inscribed with another stirring passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:27-28): "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Finally, while not agreeing with Ernst Troelsch's overall thought, he captures the essence of Calvin's ecclseiolocentric social philosophy in this quotation:

To Calvin, the Church is not only a *Heilsanstalt* [a salvation institution] for the provision of the objective means of salvation;...it must at the same time be a *Heiligungsanstalt* [a sanctification institution], to busy itself with the Christianization of the whole life of the community, and to bring the whole range of life under the sway of Christian principles and purposes....Here then, for the first time in the history of Christian ethics, we have a conscious and, so far as the circumstances allowed, an all-inclusive Christian and ecclesiastical arrangement of society. Calvinism was Christian Socialism in the sense of a corporate configuration of the whole life of State and society, in the family and in the sphere of economics, in public and in private relations, to accord with Christian standards. It took thought that each individual should receive his appropriate share of the community's natural and spiritual possessions, and at the same time it sought to ensure that the whole of this Christian society should, in actual practice and in every detail, be an expression of the kingly rule of Christ.

Hopefully these quotations further fill in the kind of Christian politics I have been gesturing towards in the sermons the last couple of weeks.